

06 NEWS

'We could fix Ashley right now'

Groups say no reason for delay

David Killick

The long delay to closing Ashley Youth Detention Centre is hard to understand given how quickly better alternatives could be set up, community groups say.

It is 1000 days since the government promised Ashley would close. It has been plagued by complaints of abuse, was excoriated by the Commission of Inquiry and is at the centre of a class action from former residents expected to cost taxpayers millions.

Colony 47 chief executive Dianne Underwood said the reason young people ended up in Ashley was because they had not received the support they needed – particularly with housing.

"It's 26 kids. I can't see why you can't do it tomorrow, but I am a little less patient than most," she said.

"A lot of the young people that are in Ashley are actually on remand.

"The reason they're there is because there was no safe place for them to be released on bail.

"People get caught up on the community safety and wanting to go tough on youth crime scenario. The reality is with 100 per cent recidivism, you're actually making the problem worse."

She said one suggestion Colony 47 had made to the government was to use the old Fountainside Hotel in Hobart to house young people on remand and provide them with the supports they needed.

Legislative Councillor Meg Webb said court delays were contributing to the number of young people in Ashley awaiting their cases to be finalised.

"We're not providing any appropriate facilities for them to go to," she said. "If we're going to basically take responsibility for these children ... then we should be putting them in an



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appropriate facility that provides for their needs to do it. There's no excuse, we can do it now.

"The community services sector has been telling the minister, telling the government for at least eight months that they can make it happen virtually immediately, to put these kids into appropriate environments that are where they won't be at risk in the way that they are now at Ashley and the government is choosing not to do it."

TasCOSS CEO Adrienne Picone said the government has promised action.

"Despite these promises, it seems we are still no closer to a closure date for Ashley and waiting any longer for change is unacceptable," she said.

"TasCOSS along with the Commissioner for Children and Young People have long been calling on the government to establish an urgent taskforce to reduce the number of children at Ashley and have offered to work with the government to identify and address the needs of all children currently incarcerated at Ashley and plan for their transition to community-based care.

"Tasmanians cannot wait any longer.

"The government must also follow through commitments to prioritise reform to reduce the number of children in Ashley and the criminal justice system."

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