

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-11-20/jcp-youth-meets-with-tasmania-education-camp-workers-balaclavas/106021476>

## Department meets with JCP Youth over social media posts showing camp workers in balaclavas

By [Alexandra Humphries](#)

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**JCP Youth works with boys aged between 11 and 17 with the aim of diverting them from Tasmania's youth justice system.(Supplied)**

### In short:

A taxpayer-funded mentoring program for at-risk Tasmanian youths posted footage on social media showing workers at a camp dressed in black clothes and balaclavas.

An academic says the clothing "reinforces the wrong kind of message, the wrong kind of masculinities", but JCP Youth chief executive Will Smith says the face coverings were worn by some workers for warmth and safety in cold conditions and no military-style clothing was worn.

### What's next?

Mr Smith says the social media posts have been deleted as they lacked the "appropriate context" and the program has met with the education department to discuss tightening social media practices.

Tasmania's education department has met with a taxpayer-funded outreach organisation for at-risk youth after social media photos showed workers at a recent camp dressed in balaclavas.

JCP Youth works with boys aged between 11 and 17 with the aim of diverting them from Tasmania's youth justice system, by offering mentorship, around-the-clock support and high-impact experiences.

It recently offered the "blackout program", a multi-day camp challenge that participants in JCP Youth's broader "beast program" could opt in to.

Now-deleted photos and videos on JCP Youth's social media accounts from the camp show team members dressed in black outfits and balaclavas.



**A screen capture of JCP Youth leader Will Smith's social media post.(Supplied)**

In one screenshot obtained by the ABC, two young people wearing balaclavas flank a young boy who is walking in the dark, carrying what appears to be a weight.

The footage was posted publicly on social media by both the JCP Youth account and the account of the organisation's chief executive, Will Smith.

The ABC has chosen to blur the boy's face.



**A JCP Youth program participant. Posted on social media by Will Smith and JCP Youth. Face pixelation added by the ABC.(Supplied)**

In another post, Mr Smith, who is a former police officer and Tasmanian Young Australian of the Year, thanks staff for helping stage the camp, while standing in front of four others whose faces are obscured.



**Tasmanian authorities are looking at new programs to help divert children from the youth justice system.**

JCP Youth was promised \$3.7 million in state funding for its best program during Tasmania's 2024 election campaign, with the first tranche of funding paid in February this year.

Patrick Burton, a criminologist working with the Justice Reform Initiative in Tasmania, said he felt the use of balaclavas in the outreach program was "pretty horrific".

"I think probably that could reinforce the kids' resentment of anyone in authority," he said.

**"To work with kids and to dress like that ... it's totally against all principles of a therapeutic approach."**

Rob White, an emeritus distinguished professor at the University of Tasmania, similarly believed the face coverings were appalling.

"I have to say, when I look at those images there is nothing in those images that is trauma-informed or trauma-responsive," he said.

"In fact, it is completely the opposite of everything we're trying to do in the area of juvenile justice and rehabilitation and restorative justice.

**"It just reinforces the wrong kind of message, the wrong kind of masculinities."**



**Rob White said "clothing in the photos may have been misinterpreted".(ABC News)**

Tasmania's Minister for Children, Jo Palmer, told state parliament last week that the education department secretary had sought a meeting with JCP Youth leader Mr Smith and the board after becoming aware of the images.

Ms Palmer also asked the department to assess the appropriateness of the Blackout Program for participants referred to JCP Youth by the department.

According to JCP Youth, a meeting between the secretary and JCP occurred last Tuesday, and focused on improving social media practices, ways to improve the department's oversight of JCP Youth's camp programs, data management processes, and sharing positive youth outcomes with the minister.

The ABC has separately asked the department for details about the outcome of the meeting.

**Deleted image didn't have 'appropriate context', Smith says**

Mr Smith said clothing used by facilitators was designed for cold weather conditions, and face coverings were used for warmth and safety.



**JCP Youth director Will Smith. (ABC News: Morgan Timms)**

"JCP Youth acknowledges that public perception of certain images shared from the recent Blackout Program may have varied without appropriate context," he said.

"We understand that some clothing in the photos may have been misinterpreted as resembling pseudo-military attire and that the use of face coverings can raise questions when viewed online without context; however, no military-style clothing was worn on the program.

"Clothing and outerwear used by facilitators were appropriate to the environmental conditions, consistent with outdoor operations across the north-west region of Tasmania during the cold period.

**"The attire consisted of standard cold-weather apparel such as jackets, cargo pants, gloves, and face coverings used for warmth and safety during physically demanding and overnight activities."**

He said some young people who helped run the program did not want their faces shared and asked to wear face coverings for pictures, and wore them intermittently throughout the program.

Mr Smith said JCP Youth removed images from social media after receiving feedback from a community member, and subsequently issued an internal directive to strengthen approval processes for publishing images.

Mr Smith acknowledged a photograph of team members taken before participants arrived at the camp may have created a perception that was inconsistent with the intent of the program.

### **Concerns over exposure of 'vulnerable children'**

According to Mr Burton, there was little evidence boot camp-style treatment of at-risk young people was effective.

"These kids, hardly without exception are terribly traumatised. A lot of them have been abused and neglected, sexually abused, physically abused," he said.

Tasmanian independent upper house parliamentarian Meg Webb described the images as disturbing and highly inappropriate.

"I really feel concerned that we've got images that look quite intimidating, quite military in relation to vulnerable children being put into the public domain," she said.

**"It's just quite astonishing to see that sort of imagery in relation to such a highly sensitive area of youth justice."**



**Meg Webb expressed concern about the images. (ABC News: Maren Preuss)**

Last year, the then-children's minister, Roger Jaensch, told parliament that JCP facilitators were not clinically trained, and the beast program had not been independently evaluated.

An initial evaluation is due to be completed by the end of next year.

Ms Palmer last week told parliament that JCP's beast program was "unlike any other service currently offered by other providers in Tasmania," and evidence of its success was based on "feedback, reports, testimonials, anecdotal evidence and observation from expert practitioners".

Some participants were referred to the program through Tasmania's Department for Education, Children and Young People.

Ms Webb also raised concerns about the allocation of \$3.7 million to JCP Youth's beast program as an election promise.

She believes there should have been a competitive tender process to ensure other evidence-based, therapeutic services could apply.

**"It's just not appropriate to have an election announcement be the way we decide who is best placed to support and serve highly vulnerable children in this state,"**

**she said.**

"Election announcements are designed to win votes, they're designed to look good on social media, they're designed to be eye-catching. Those are not the criteria we should be using to allocate public money into highly vulnerable service delivery.

"I feel like now we're trying to play catch up to ensure there's the right oversight and accountability around a program that should have been vetted properly in the first place."

According to the education department, at the time the election commitment was made, JCP Youth was deemed to be the only organisation with the capacity and an established diversion program of this type to deliver the level of intensive support needed for this cohort of young boys.