

# Mid West Gascoyne Youth Justice Services

*Working with the community to address the causes of youth offending*

## Youth bail service fact sheet



The State Government has introduced a number of new justice services in Geraldton, targeting young people at risk of entering the justice system, as well as those already in the system.

The Mid West Gascoyne Youth Justice Services include a range of mostly outreach programs to support these young people and their families and help them break the offending cycle.

The following services are now available in Geraldton under the new Mid West Gascoyne Youth Justice Services. Where applicable, they will be rolled-out to other centres in the region:

- **The Youth and Family Support Service** – an after-hours outreach service for young people who are at risk of coming to the attention of police, providing practical support to them and their families to help tackle problems before they become serious;
- **The Youth Bail Service** – an after-hours seven-day-a-week bail service to help police identify responsible adults to provide bail for young people. The Youth Bail Service also provides limited short-term bail accommodation as a last resort for young people who are granted bail but do not have anywhere suitable to stay before their court appearance.
- **An expanded Juvenile Justice Team** – a dedicated team, including juvenile justice officers and a police officer, to target young people in the early stages of offending and steer them away from the formal justice system.
- **The Intensive Supervision Program (ISP)** – an internationally-renowned program which is producing outstanding results with some of the State's most difficult young offenders and their families.

This fact sheet explains how the new Youth Bail Service works.

### What is bail?

When a young person is arrested by the police for allegedly committing an offence, they are taken to the police station to be formally charged. The police officer then decides whether the young person can remain in the community while they await their court appearance or, if the offence is serious, whether they must be held in custody.

Holding a young person in custody is only considered as a last resort and, in most cases, the young person will be granted bail to remain in the community while awaiting their court appearance.

However, to be released into the community on bail, a young person must have a responsible adult (usually a parent or carer) to sign their bail papers and make sure they turn up at court when they are supposed to.

When a young person appears in court, the magistrate may decide to remand them on bail or in custody, depending on the severity of the charge.

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### Why has the new Youth Bail Service been introduced?

Sometimes a responsible parent or carer is not available to provide bail for a young person who has been arrested by the police or remanded on bail by the court. Prior to the introduction of the Youth Bail Service in Geraldton, the young person would have been held at the police lock-up or sent to the former Rangeview Juvenile Remand Centre in Perth until a responsible adult could be contacted. This was the case even though the police or the court had decided the young person was suitable to remain in the community on bail. So in effect, a significant number of young people from regional WA would be held in custody or sent to a facility in Perth because of their family circumstances, not because the police or the court said they needed to be.

The new Youth Bail Service will provide support to local police at the lock-up to locate a responsible carer for the young person to enable them to be on bail in the community.

### What does this new bail service offer?

The new Youth Bail Service staff work with the local police to try to keep these young people out of custody. A Youth Bail Service justice officer is available to assist police seven-days-a-week to identify and locate responsible adults to post bail for young people being held at the lock-up.

### How does the new bail service work?

By working with the local community and establishing contacts with local families and organisations, Youth Bail Service justice officer make contact with suitable family members who may be able to provide bail for the young person.



### What if a responsible adult can not be found?

If all efforts to locate a responsible adult to provide bail are fruitless, the Department of Corrective Services has contracted a local organisation to offer short-term bail accommodation in Geraldton. However this accommodation is only available to a young person who has been granted bail and whose placement has been approved by the Department.

To do this, the Youth Bail Service caseworker signs the bail papers, takes the young person to the bail accommodation, and continues to search for a suitable family member to provide bail and appropriate accommodation.

### Is the short-term bail accommodation like a jail?

It is important to remember that any young person released on bail by police or the court is considered suitable to be in the community, not locked up in jail.

The short-term bail accommodation isn't like a jail, it is a normal house. There is a house parent who lives at the premises seven-days-a-week and young people who are placed in the accommodation are supervised around the clock. Those who are at school or working, continue to attend school or vocational activities while staying at the house. All young people are assessed by the Department of Corrective Services as to their suitability before being placed in the house. No drugs or alcohol are allowed on the premises.

What are the long-term benefits of this service for the community?

The long-term benefits of this service include:

- a reduction in the number of young people from the region who are eligible to remain in the community, but are instead held at the local lock-up or sent to a facility in Perth
- freeing-up police at the lock-up, enabling them to return to frontline duties to work on other community issues
- empowering families to take responsibility for their children in the youth justice system.

### Recent research backs local approach

A 2007 report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare states there is a clear link between age and repeat appearances. This shows that the younger someone enters the criminal justice system, the more likely they are to end up back in it. The report found over 40% of young people who began their first ever supervision when they were aged 12 had completed at least four supervision periods by the time they were 18, compared with less than 10% for those whose initial supervision didn't begin until they were 15.

### Benefits of early intervention and diversion programs

- Research strongly indicates early intervention programs that steer young people away from a cycle of offending and detention offer greater long-term benefits to the community.
- There are significant flow-on benefits for families of young offenders in involving parents, and sometimes brothers and sisters, in early intervention and diversion programs, which are proven to help break the offending cycle.
- There is growing evidence that early intervention is a far more cost-effective strategy than conventional approaches to reducing youth offending.

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## CASE EXAMPLE – John (12 years old)

(This is an example of how the proposed new youth bail service could work in Geraldton).

### Example 1

#### Saturday night

John is picked up in town by police at 9pm after he was seen throwing a rock at the windscreen of a parked car. The police officer arrests John and takes him to the police station.

John is charged and granted bail subject to a responsible adult coming to the police station, signing the bail papers and making sure John shows up at court next week.

While John waits at the police station, the police officer tries to contact John's mum to bail him, but no-one answers the phone at home or the mobile. The police officer contacts the Department of Corrective Services' Youth Bail Service in Geraldton and asks the on-duty Youth Bail Service justice officer to help contact John's mum or a close relative to bail him.

The justice officer tries to find John's mum but no-one knows where she is, so he checks the service registry of family contacts and discovers John's Aunt Mary lives locally. The justice officer telephones Aunt Mary and she agrees to come and provide bail for John and put him up until his mum can be contacted.

#### A few days later

The Youth Bail Service justice officer follows-up with John's mum to offer support and if required, make referrals to other services for help.

If the justice officer was unable to contact any other family member in the example above, the process would be different, as outlined in the example below.

### Example 2

#### Saturday night

The Youth Bail Service justice officer has been unable to contact John's mother or another relative to bail him and put him up for the night. John is not allowed to leave the police station until his bail papers have been signed by a responsible adult. It is now 10.30pm and the justice officer needs to find a suitable place for John to spend the night until contact with his family can be made.

The justice officer reviews all available options, including local Department of Child Protection crisis accommodation and youth hostels. As these are all full and as a last resort, the justice officer liaises with Banksia Hill Detention Centre to make arrangements for John to stay in short-term bail accommodation in Geraldton. As an authorised officer, the Youth Bail Service justice officer is eligible to sign John's bail papers and take him to the accommodation.

#### Sunday morning

The Youth Bail Service justice officer visits John's house and finds his mum at home. She is very embarrassed that she couldn't be contacted the previous night and didn't realise John wasn't home in bed until that morning.

The justice officer takes John's mum to pick up John from the bail accommodation house and they all go to the police station. The responsibility for bail is transferred to John's mum so he can be released into her care. The justice officer arranges to visit John and his mum at home later in the week to offer support and, if required, make referrals to other services for help, including the Department for Child Protection.

