

**Neighbourhood Justice Centre  
10 Year Anniversary**

Monday, 6 March 2017

Rob Hulls, Director, Centre for Innovative Justice

Before I begin I'd like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and pay my respects to their Elders, past and present.

I remember very clearly the day ten years ago when we stood on this spot and declared the NJC open. It had taken persuasion and careful planning - planning which started some years before, when I had the privilege of visiting the Red Hook Justice Centre and sitting alongside Judge Calabrese on the bench.

Having returned to Victoria determined to harness the lessons from Red Hook in Victoria, we worked closely with the local community to build a sense of ownership. We worked hard within Cabinet, too, to convince them to take what was, in Australia at the time, an untested approach – one which certainly attracted suspicion from some political quarters, one member of the Opposition at the time labelling it 'apartheid justice'!

Ten years on, however, the results are in, recidivism is down, and the NJC continues to be the site of ongoing innovation in myriad ways, with other jurisdictions looking to it as an example of what the future of justice might be.

Yet the naysayers persist - critics who, as evidenced by a series of pieces in the Murdoch press recently, continue to mistake therapeutic approaches as being 'soft on crime'.

Sure, it's tempting to take the lazy option and insist on a lock 'em up and throw away the key approach. In fact, the toughest option is to be smart – to address those issues which are causing offending and reoffending, to find multidisciplinary ways of responding to the plethora of factors which bring people into contact with the law.

This means that it's all very well for us to congratulate ourselves on the success of this fantastic initiative but, take it from me, it was only ever supposed to be an inception.

Victorians need to hear that therapeutic, community-based approaches work; that addressing the causes of crime is crucial if we want to make the community safe. We need to find new ways of demonstrating the value of therapeutic approaches, and we have to find new opportunities to ensure that these approaches are deployed.

In fact, it is more crucial than ever that we seize these opportunities, as some pockets of policy making march further and further to the punitive side. I can only imagine what it is like, for example, for Judge Calabrese and his colleagues to be administering justice against the political backdrop in the US at the moment. At the same time, of course, some of the most conservative jurisdictions are contributing to an evidence base around the benefits of justice reinvestment. Perhaps out of adversity comes creativity, with communities finding ways to address the challenges that they face.

My challenge for everyone here today, therefore, is to look to the next ten years – to ask, what could we achieve if we were to take the community justice approach to scale?

What could we achieve, perhaps most crucially, if we applied this approach to the next generation, if communities were invested in the response to youth justice issues in their local neighbourhood, instead of simply fearing what they don't understand?

There are so many possibilities and, whatever we do, we shouldn't rest on our laurels. We've got the runs on the board now, so I look forward to watching what lessons we can draw from them, and what new opportunities for community-based justice lie ahead.