INDIGENOUS YOUTH AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF YOUTH JUSTICE IN VICTORIA, AUSTRALIA

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The Victorian State Government declares that the state "has one of the most successful and effective youth justice systems in Australia,"[1] which may hold true in comparison to other territories and states, but from a bird's eye view, it is difficult to sustain. By focusing on Victoria's contemporary youth justice facilities, Parkville Youth Justice Precinct (Parkville) and Cherry Creek Youth Justice Center (Cherry Creek), I argue that evolution in the design, location, and administration of Victoria's youth justice facilities does not reflect linear progression from punishment to rehabilitation. Instead, reforms, perceived as progressive, consistently reconfigure the mechanisms through which the state governs young people, fluctuating from welfare intervention and institutional classification to restorative justice, community supervision, and securitized rehabilitation, while preserving the disproportionate regulation of Indigenous youth. From Turana Youth Training Centre to the present-day youth custodial settings, rather than the intended goal of diverting youth and reducing criminalization, the transformation of rhetoric, architecture, legislation, and administration has ultimately altered the avenues through which supervision, control, and governing bodies are employed. What remains continual is that the Allan Labor Government's responses are largely reactive rather than proactive, contributing to the persistent disproportionate overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth while positioning youth resistance as primary catalysts for institutional change.

This paper demonstrates how Indigenous youth have been a consistently governed population since the origins of Victoria's penal system. By examining Turana Youth Training Center, I will show how welfare and punishment became intertwined, before showing how architecture and locality evolved to function as a technology of governance within Cherry Creek and Parkville.

[1] Department of Justice and Community Safety Victoria, "Community Supervision," 2023, https://www.justice.vic.gov.au/justice-system/youth-justice/community-supervision

Beyond the walls of youth justice, governance shifts from punishment-centered to supervision-centered. Within the walls of youth justice, as physical upgrades are made, rhetoric like "state-of-the-art" facilities expands the carceral eclipse. Across these periods, the dominant mechanisms of governance shift from welfare-based institutionalization at Turana, to restorative justice frameworks such as Koori Court and dual-track system, and community supervision evolving throughout Parkville's timeline, and finally to high security and spatial isolation at Cherry Creek.

Foundational to my thesis is that Melbourne's first jail originated on Batman's Hill in 1837, encircled by a 2.4-meter fence. A year later, Tullamareena, a Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Elder, escaped the institution beside two others, after torching the hut that subjected the individuals to harsh living conditions and criminalization for harvesting potatoes.[2] Melbourne's first gaol was not only an outcome of Tullamareena's actions, but a catalyst and justification for prison-building development across Victoria. The escapees demonstrated the necessity of physically secure structures adequate to contain people who committed crimes.



Figure 1. W.F.E Liardet, An escape from the first gaol, 1875, painting, State Library of Victoria's Pictures Collection.

[2] State Library Victoria/Ergo, "Melbourne's First Gaols," https://ergo.slv.vic.gov.au/explore-history/rebels-outlaws/law-enforcement/melbournes-first-gaols

More notably, Tullamareena's escape demonstrates a disruption of Victoria's penal system by way of Aboriginal resistance since its establishment, prompting institutional expansion. The colonial state's counter of justifying expansion and institutionalization of confinement infrastructure depicts that while Indigenous youth and elders perpetually reject state logic through political means, Victoria's government remains committed to investing in heightened surveillance, securitization, and the management of those deemed disorderly or threatening.

TABLE 1
BOUNDARY PROPERTIES IN THEORY

	Bright Boundaries	Blurry Boundaries	No Boundaries
How widely is boundary:			
Recognized	Widely	Not widely	Not recognized
Institutionalized	Widely	Not widely	Not institutionalized
How important is boundary for:			
Degree of social closure	Very significant	Less significant	Not significant
Social distance	Very significant	Less significant	Not significant
Boundary crossing	Difficult	Easy	NA

NOTE.—Boundary properties can also vary across space and time.

Figure 2. Boundary properties in theories of racial classification, illustrating variation in the permeability and salience of racial boundaries. *Source:* Fox and Guglielmo, "Defining America's Racial Boundaries."

I frame Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth within a defined racial boundary that remains structurally unchanged, operating simultaneously as a bright institutional boundary and a blurred political boundary (fig. 2).[3] Institutionally, their overrepresentation is highly visible through statistical reporting. As of June 2021, Indigenous people in Australia constituted only 1.2% of Victoria's residential population,[4] yet they are incarcerated at 9.4 times the rate of non-Indigenous youth in Victoria,[5] with First Nations youth comprising more than half of youth detention populations across Australia.[6] Politically, however,

[3] Cybelle Fox and Thomas A. Guglielmo, "Defining America's Racial Boundaries: Blacks, Mexicans, and European Immigrants, 1890–1945," *American Journal of Sociology* 118, no. 2 (2012), https://doi.org/10.1086/666383.

[4] Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians," 2023, https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/estimates-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-australians/30-june-2021

[5] Sentencing Advisory Council, "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young People in Detention," 2026, https://www.sentencingcouncil.vic.gov.au/sentencing-statistics/indigenous-young-people-in-detention

[6] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, "Youth Detention Population in Australia 2025," December 2025, https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/youth-justice/youth-detention-population-in-australia-2025/contents/first-nations-young-people

boundary crossing facilitates the blurring of political boundaries where tensions emerge between the systematization of Indigenous youth within carceral institutions and the public portrayals projected by Victorian governance. Headlines that read, "Welcome to Victoria, the Progressive State,"[7] "Less Talk, More Action: why Victoria is the progress state,"[8] and "How Victoria Became the Progressive Jewel in the National Crown"[9] aren't merely media slogans. These are mirrors of its public progressive jurisdiction through its representation of over 140 cultures,[10] social liberalism policies, and numerically lower detention rates than the Northern Territory, for instance (fig. 3).[11] Yet, this progressive identity exists alongside continued

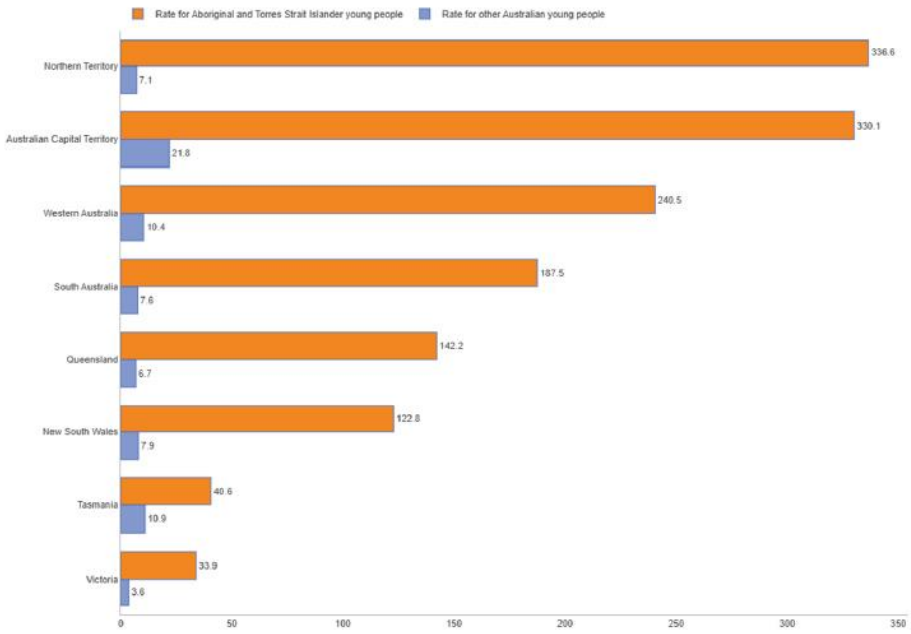

Figure 1. Sentencing Advisory Council. Rates per 10,000 young people aged 10 to 17 in youth detention for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and other Australian young people. 2025. Bar graph. https://www.sentencingcouncil.vic.gov.au/sen

[7] Gay Alcorn, "Welcome to Victoria, the Progressive State," *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 9, 2013, https://www.smh.com.au/opinion/welcome-to-victoria-the-progressive-state-20130509-2jak0.htm

[8] Gay Alcorn, "Less Talk, More Action: Why Victoria Is the Progress State," *The Guardian*, October 28, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/oct/29/less-talk-more-action-why-victoria-is-the-progress-state

[9] Mark Sawyer, "Don't Tell Mr Menzies: How Victoria Became the Progressive Jewel in the National Crown," *Michael West Media*, March 25, 2022, https://michaelwest.com.au/how-victoria-became-the-progressive-jewel-in-the-national-crown/

[10] City of Melbourne, "Multicultural Communities," 2024, https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/multicultural-communities.

[11] Sentencing Advisory Council, 2026, "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young People in Detention," https://www.sentencingcouncil.vic.gov.au/sentencing-statistics/indigenous-young-people-in-detention.

over-criminalization of not only Indigenous youth, but many African-Australian communities across Victoria.[12]

Victoria's governance of Indigenous youth can be conceptualized as a "carceral eclipse," in which a vindicative penal structure remains intact but is periodically rendered less discernible through the Victorian state's production of progressive self-representation. In this configuration, the 'sun' represents the vivid realities of First Nations overrepresentation within carceral systems, and the 'moon' represents the media, state narratives, and legislation that circulate ideas of progressiveness. The eclipse itself becomes a state of being and a condition in which progressive visibility partially blocks perception of structural harm, without altering the system. The state is not only officiating Indigenous inequalities but managing its visibility. The Victorian state is uniquely positioned to revamp what is seen as explicit, permitting a consistent reconfiguration of the methods through which youth are governed. With that being said, First Nations youth are left in a state of limbo, experiencing the first-hand enduring effects of colonialization persisting through law, over-policing, child removal, and carceral intervention, while the Victorian government increasingly adopts the language of reform.

[12] Noel Zihabamwe, "African Australians Over-Represented in Victorian Prisons," *African Australian Advocacy Centre*, November 28, 2022, https://www.africanaustralianadvocacy.org.au/african-australians-over-represented-in-victorian-prisons/



Figure 2 Kindergarten building at Turana Youth Training Centre. Source: "Turana," *Find & Connect,* last modified August 23, 2024

The origins of welfare transformation can be traced through the Turana Youth Training Centre to contemporary facilities, as 900 Park Street, Parkville, Victoria 3052, becomes an invariably administered site (see fig. 4 & 5). Prior to 1954, charitable and religious organizations assumed the role of the primary caretaker for youth removed from parental care. The Royal Park Receiving Depot for Girls and Boys, later renamed Turana Youth Training Center, and redeveloped as the Melbourne Youth Justice Centre (MYJC), housed state wards, youth under protective custody orders, and youth who offended within the same institution.[13]

Victorian Chief Secretary Mr. Rylah described the institution as carrying the "bright and stimulating title," Turana, an Aboriginal word for rainbow.[14] The symbolic adoption of Aboriginal language is significant because the Indigenous word is associated with brightness, optimism, and infused in an image of care. Such a contradiction suggests that Aboriginal identity was not absent from welfare or youth justice and was selectively incorporated in ways that softened public perception of confinement. Turana's name reflects a prototype of the 'carceral

[13] Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, *The Response of Turana, Winlaton and Baltara, and the Victoria Police and the Department of Health and Human Services Victoria to Allegations of Child Sexual Abuse: Report of Case Study No. 30* (2016), https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/file-list/Case%20Study%2030%20-%20Findings%20Report%20-%20Youth%20detention%20centres%2C%20Victoria.pdf.

[14] "Turana," *Find & Connect*, last modified August 23, 2024, https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/turana-2/

eclipse,' where symbolic gestures of inclusion partially obscure punitive realities due to the performativity of reconciliation through Indigenous language.



Figure 3. Reception building at Turana Youth Training Centre, displaying the "Turana Enquiries" entrance. Source: "Turana," *Find & Connect,* last modified August 23, 2024.

Nevertheless, the occurring realities within Turana were far removed from the meaning of its name; even Victorian police officers referred to the institution as "the rat bins."[15] Post-1954 Turana revealed the alarming verity in which welfare, criminal justice, homelessness, and child protection became interwoven under one institution. Rather than operating separately from punishment, youth are exposed to deeper forms of criminalization and institutionalization. Youth who entered the system due to neglect, homelessness, state wardship, or protection concerns were placed beside youth who offended and subjected to the same systems of punishment, leading to earlier exposure to the welfare-to-prison pipeline.[16] The mixing of populations did not simply produce overpopulation, and poor placement, but also expanded punitive governance onto welfare populations who had not committed criminal offences, growing the state's ability to draw vulnerable youth into the system.[17]

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[15] "Turana," *Find & Connect*, last modified August 23, 2024, https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/turana-2/; Public Record Office Victoria, "Turana Youth Training Centre," 2025, https://prov.vic.gov.au/archive/VA971.

[16] Sentencing Advisory Council, "Children Who Enter the Youth Justice System Early Are More Likely to Reoffend," October 2, 2019, https://www.sentencingcouncil.vic.gov.au/news-media/media-releases/children-who-enter-youth-justice-system-early-are-more-likely-reoffend.

[17] Diana Georgeff, *Delinquent Angel* (North Sydney, NSW: Random House Australia, 2007), quoted in "Turana," *Find & Connect*, last modified August 23, 2024, https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/entity/turana-2/.

The Children's Welfare Act 1954 (No. 5817) extended state authority by replacing terminology like 'neglected child' with 'child in need of care and protection.' Status offences, incorporated into the legislation, proved to be especially harmful as they attracted children who otherwise may have never come into contact with the system.[18] Subsequently, the legislation contributed to a hazy category of 'children in need of care and protection,' encompassing youth who offend, youth on protective orders, and youth in desolate settings as vulnerable. The legislation ultimately added more youth to Turana's already overcrowded and indistinguishable boundaries, operating under the mutually reinforcing singular system of punishment and welfare.

Moreover, Turana, the main institution for boys and men, and Winlaton, the primary institution for women and girls, were responsible for housing youth, but operated as bureaucratic systems that classified youth according to state-defined ideas of danger, morality, and gender. Architecturally, the Turana Reception Centre operated as a processing center, classification system, and surveillance institution up until its closure in 1968. From its establishment, Turana was inundated with overcrowding, accommodating approximately 3,000 youth annually, ranging from babies to adolescents aged eighteen and nineteen.[19] Shortly thereafter, Turana developed a variety of divisions that sorted youth according to perceived levels of risk, vulnerability, and behavioral classification.

Turana's internal divisions leaked the institution as a bureaucratic system of social sorting rather than a welfare-oriented institution of rehabilitation. At the most restrictive end was Poplar House, operating as a maximum-security unit for twenty-eight youth criminalized boys who

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[18] Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, *Response of Turana, Winlaton and Baltara*, 22; Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, "Children's Welfare Act 1954," accessed June 8, 2026, https://aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/catalogue_resources/53553.pdf.

[19] Public Record Office Victoria, "Turana Youth Training Centre."

were sentenced, deemed to have emotional dysregulation, or observed to be a grave risk to the community. The medium-security units, like Quamby and Coolibah, held wards and trainees and were under strict supervision. Boys in Quamby, whether they had committed "terrible" crimes or not, "were considered to be at risk in other parts of Turana. There was no wisdom in the decision to put them all in together, but there was no alternative." Conversely, Gables and Sunnyside, the low-security units, were open sections to assist young boys' transition back into the community. Youth on remand were placed in "the dungeon," located in the basement, illustrating the institution reaching maximum capacity, while only accommodating youth to a certain extent.[20]

Locked divisions, metal barriers, fortified doors, "medieval keys,"[21] wired fencing, and graded security frameworks transformed architecture itself into a daily instrument employed by the state. Regulation of movement through repetitive acts by staff described as "unlock, pass through, lock,"[22] captured the reduction of youth into regulated bodies moving through a system of constant restriction, as youth were controlled through physical structure.

The state makes strategically deliberate choices to house youth in a particular manner; signifying government practices deeply contrast with restorative approaches that implement trauma-informed procedures. The placement of remand youth in the lowest level of the center, despite some awaiting trial rather than serving sentences, demonstrates that the architecture allows the punitive nature of operations upon innocent-until-proven-guilty youth. Windows "latticed with metal," bathrooms with "metal troughs," heavy metal-framed doors, and "sections divided by a metal meshing and bars"[23] mirrors the spatial and punitive carceral conditions

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[20] "Turana," *Find & Connect*.
[21] Georgeff, *Delinquent Angel*, quoted in "Turana," *Find & Connect*.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.

commonly experienced in adult prisons, as opposed to welfare institutions intended for care and protection.

Parkville Youth Justice Precinct remains a central site through which one can observe the transformation of Victorian youth justice from punitive detention to evidenced reform. As I detail the progression in design, rhetoric, and justice approaches of MYJC into today's Parkville Precinct, I position Parkville as produced through the institutional reconfiguration of legislation, architecture, and language, operating on the same site Turana was formed. The development should not be understood as "progress" but a restructuring of the state's ability to control and redistribute risk.

The establishment of the MYJC in 1993 signified the reorganization of Victoria's youth justice system. Whereas Turana blurred welfare and punishment within a singular institution, MYJC formally divided welfare-oriented residential care and centralized detention centers, opening its doors to young males aged fifteen to seventeen on remand or sentenced by the Children's Court, alongside seventeen to twenty-one-year-old youths under Victoria's dual-track system.[24] What remained was that the division reorganized the pathways through which intervention occurred.

Under the dual-track system, older youth males are provided an opportunity to serve their sentence in a youth justice facility rather than an adult prison or by community order,[25] with recognition to "behavioral and emotional characteristics of children [that] require different

[24] "Melbourne Juvenile Justice Centre (1993–2007)," *Vic.gov.au*, June 17, 2025, https://www.vic.gov.au/melbourne-juvenile-justice-centre.

[25] Victoria State Government, *Youth Parole Board Annual Report 2024–25* (2025), 15, https://files.justice.vic.gov.au/2025-10/Youth%20Parole%20Board%20Annual%20Report%202024-25.pdf

approaches from custodial services to those applied to adults."[26] On one hand, the state acknowledges the importance of rehabilitation in youth settings as a necessary response to transgression at the developmentally vulnerable stage in youths' lives, protecting youth from adult prisons. On the other hand, it expands the age range over which youth justice systems can exercise authority. In this sense, reconfiguration through Victoria's embrace of restorative justice and state supervision work collectively, posing one of the clearest examples of reform with participation and accountability at the center.

Victoria is frequently described as a leader in diversion and restorative justice. Parkville departs from Turana's chaotically consolidated welfare-punishment model and emphasis on the categorization of youth by risk. Through a justice approach aiming to balance the rights of youth who offend with accountability to recognize harm caused to the community,[27] Parkville enters in a new paradigm with restorative justice morals at the foundation, encouraging reflection, participation, and repair to harm. As youth are framed as deserving of recuperation, the state undertakes a relational role without putting it to practice, and restoration develops as a new mechanism for regulating behavioral change. Restorative justice continues to exist interwoven with state control, where the responsibility of youth to repair damage emerges within structured supervision.

The rebranding of MYJC into Parkville Youth Justice Precinct, an outcome of key provisions established in legislative frameworks that underscore youth rights, reinforces this balancing act. The *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* designated the terminological shift

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[26] George E. Brouwer, *Investigation into Children Transferred from the Youth Justice System to the Adult Prison System* (Melbourne: Victorian Ombudsman, 2013).

[27] Sentencing Advisory Council, *Sentencing Children and Young People in Victoria* (2012), 23, https://www.sentencingcouncil.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-08/Sentencing_Children_and_Young_People_in_Victoria_0.pdf

from “juvenile justice” to “youth justice,” signifying rehabilitation and holistic support. Repealing the *Children and Young Persons Act 1989,* children previously classified as a “ward of state” or “trainee” became “children in need of protection” and “clients.”[28]

Language performs political work by softening the visibility of coercive intervention while preserving the state’s authority to intervene. A carceral eclipse emerges through the state’s language of protection, reiterating how state intervention appears less punitive without becoming less present. Although transformation in terminology may reduce stigma, it does not necessarily indicate a transfiguration in institutional practice.

However, this is not to suggest that the government’s reforms have been purely symbolic. The addition of a third division, the Koori Court, within the Children’s Court in 2004 represents one of the most significant restorative justice approaches, bestowing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth who offend with as much influence over outcomes as the court has over sentencing, but with their support systems by their side. The Koori Court allows Indigenous youth aged ten to eighteen who have offended, pleaded guilty, or been found guilty of a non-sexual offense to receive a culturally effective outcome.[29] By sitting at the “bar table,” Elders and Respected Persons, family members, and the young person are transformed as active legal decision-making participants. A great departure from exclusionary legal traditions that historically removed Koori youth from family, Country, and community networks should not be overlooked.

Unlike many reforms that merely reframe existing practices, the Koori Court demonstrates the possibilities of inclusive administrative integration, while performing its limits

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[28] “Melbourne Juvenile Justice Centre (1993–2007).”
[29] Magistrates’ Court of Victoria, “Koori Court,” 2019, https://www.mcv.vic.gov.au/about/koori-court

of expanding Indigenous participation within the youth justice system rather than in a self-determined community. Even so, this is a clear example of Victoria's government matching rhetoric with action. Yet, the existence of reforms such as the Koori Court does not diminish the wider pattern of governance expanding beyond custodial walls. Contemporary youth justice steadily rules through supervision scattered throughout the community.

There are a variety of sentencing options for young people between twelve and twenty-one.[30] During 2023-2024, Victoria reported 82% of youth were supervised in the community, as opposed to 18% who served their sentence in detention.[31] On the surface, this appears as a progressive shift away from incarceration, but community supervision represents the relocation of governance beyond institutional walls.

Moreover, Victoria's model relies statistically less on confinement and more on supervision within the community. For Indigenous youth, the reality dwells disproportionately. While youth aged ten to seventeen make up 2.1% of the First Nation Victorian population, 17% were under community-based supervision, 18% were under youth justice supervision, and 19% were in detention on the average day in 2023-2024.[32] As Victoria's youth justice system increasingly promotes diversion and community-based supervision as alternatives, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth continue to experience disproportionate levels of intervention at every stage of the continuum. The system cannot only point to detention, but also the net of governance that is expanding through community-based alternatives. Even when custody

[30] Children's Court of Victoria, "Sentencing," https://www.childrenscourt.vic.gov.au/criminal-division/criminal-cases/sentencing.
[31] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Youth Justice in Australia 2023–24: Victoria* (Canberra: AIHW, 2025).
[32] Ibid.

declines, they remain substantially more likely to be dispersed across multiple forms of state management than non-Indigenous youth.

Parkville Youth Justice Precinct thus represents both authentic reform and continuity. It diverges from Turana through rights language, youth-centered terminology, Koori Court initiatives, and rehabilitation discourse. But while the power remains in the state's hands, the mechanism of governing youth alters from primarily risk classification to youth justice supervision, while integrating a restorative Indigenous legal process. Although the varying instruments of governance have altered in these ways, the reigning relationship between state and Indigenous youth is preserved.

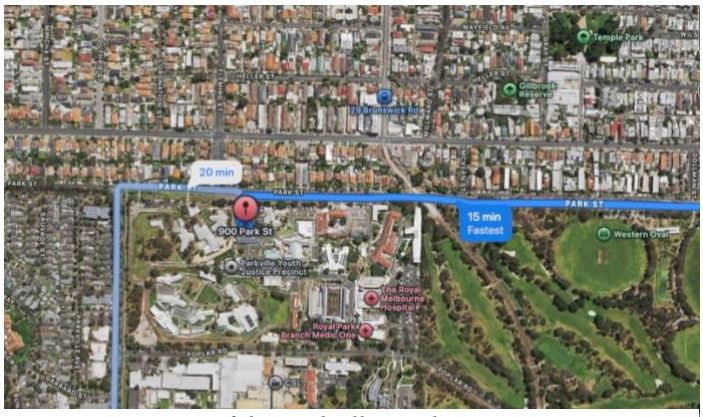

Figure 4. Location of the Parkville Youth Justice Precinct, Parkville, Victoria. Source: Google Maps, accessed June 2026.

While Parkville demonstrates governance redistributed through restorative language and community supervision, comparing it to Cherry Creek reveals how geography functioned as a governing mechanism itself. As a locally sited facility, the current Parkville Precinct remains distinct from Cherry Creek because it provides the opportunity for youth to maintain connections to family, culture, education, and support services (fig. 6). Various aspects of Indigenous Aboriginal culture highlight the importance of kinship networks, Elders, ancestors, engaging in cultural practices, and growing with Country.[33] Although many elements are constrained within custodial settings, Parkville's location reassures stronger ties and

[33] State Government of Victoria, "Aboriginal Cohorts under Justice Supervision," June 27, 2022, https://www.aboriginaljustice.vic.gov.au/the-agreement/aboriginal-over-representation-in-the-justice-system/aboriginal-cohorts-under-justice

more opportunities for culturally responsive rehabilitation between Indigenous youth who offend and their communities, than Cherry Creek's remote setting.

Parkville is situated within Melbourne's metropolitan hub, surrounded by major institutions and accessible by tram.[34] Conversely, Cherry Creek is positioned enclosed by quarries, near rural Little River, and physically removed from population centers and community resources (fig. 7).[35] The facilities stand in direct contrast with one another spatially, employed to show how geography is a government apparatus. As important as self-determination and culturally secure support systems are to this village,[36] Cherry Creek's locality violently harms values significant to Indigenous people. With 0.6% of Indigenous people in Victoria residing in Little River,[37] its isolation promotes exclusion from public life.

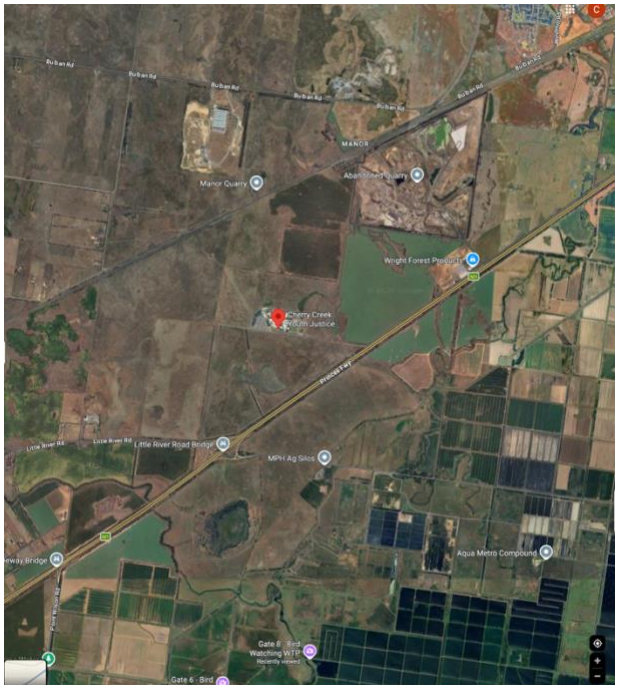

Figure 5. Location of Cherry Creek Youth Justice Precinct, Little River, Victoria. Source: Google Maps, accessed June 2026.

Other scholars may argue that youth are "sometimes remanded because services and programs exist for young people in custody that are not available in the community."[38] Such an alarming conclusion indicates custody is increasingly functioning as a substitute for inadequate community services. Rather than reducing

[34] Google Maps, "900 Park Street, Parkville, VIC 3052," accessed June 2026.
[35] Google Maps, "201 Kangaroo Dr, Little River, VIC 3211," accessed June 2026.
[36] State Government of Victoria, *Wungurilwil Gapgapduir Aboriginal Children and Families Agreement* (2018), 13.
[37] Australian Bureau of Statistics, "2016 Little River (Vic.), Census All Persons QuickStats," 2016.
[38] Kelly Richards and Lauren Renshaw, *Bail and Remand for Young People in Australia: A National Research Project*, Public Policy Series No. 125 (Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology, 2013), 99.

intervention, by dispersing community-accessible resources in rural areas, justice systems expand their reach by becoming a portal for accessing welfare, mental health, and educational resources. Youth should not need to enter detention to receive support absent from the community.

Locality, then, molds youths' experiences of rehabilitation and participation in the carceral system. Accordingly, Indigenous youth who are accommodated at Parkville are better positioned to maintain relationships, cultural connections, and access resources to assist reintegration, whereas Cherry Creek risks reinforcing separation from the very communities that youth justice claims to strengthen.

Across platforms, Victorian youth justice facilities and/or security upgrades are often described as "state-of-the-art."[39] The builder of Cherry Creek, John Holland, notes that "human-centered solutions for the long, long term," assists with the government's "commitment to improving community safety and modernizing Victoria's youth justice system."[40] These repeated calls of modernization significantly frame infrastructural expansion as evidence of progress.

Moreover, the physical setting of a custodial facility and the enclosure of architecture, structures, surroundings, furniture, and atmosphere all influence youths' ordeals during confinement.[41] Parkville and Cherry Creek each provide diverse amenities to the fifteen to seventeen-year-old youth males sentenced, accommodated within quartered units, with a separate

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[39] "Cherry Creek Youth Justice," *Rondo Australia*, 2019, https://www.rondo.com.au/about/media/blogs/rondo-engineered-solutions-for-complex-designs-at-high-security-facility/; "I Took Nine News behind the Scenes at Victoria's State-of-the-Art Cherry Creek Youth Justice Centre," Facebook post, 2019.

[40] John Holland, "Cherry Creek Youth Justice Redevelopment Project," 2020, https://johnholland.com.au/what-we-do/our-projects-and-specialisations/cherry-creek-youth-justice-redevelopment-project

[41] Sanne Oostermeijer and Matthew Dwyer, "Keeping Kids Close," in *The Routledge Handbook on the Influence of Built Environments on Diverse Childhoods*, ed. Kate Bishop and Katina Dimoulias (Routledge, 2024), 354, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003284406-29.

unit for youth on remand.[42] Cherry Creek underwent redevelopment for nearly four years and opened in 2023 to accept young males (fig. 8). While rurally located, the facility includes mental health and substance treatment units and programs, education and vocational spaces, spiritual spaces, recreation facilities, and "independent living" kitchens.[43] These amenities are fabricated as rehabilitative, continuing a long-standing objective of preparing youth for reintegration into society since Turana, but the bigger question lies in the effectiveness of these amenities. More importantly, rehabilitation becomes embedded in the architecture and understood as a solution to social problems.



Figure 6. Cherry Creek Youth Justice Redevelopment Project. Source: John Holland, "Cherry Creek Youth Justice Redevelopment Project," 2020.

Whereas HDR, RONDO, and Esco Industries present the "state-of-the-art"[44] Cherry Creek's design as informed by "a range of youth justice experts and stakeholders,"[45] as "status-neutral,"[46] with concepts aligning impeccably with practicality, Victorian Ministers describe it as a "world-class, high security, rehabilitative facility,"[47] ingrained in a

[42] "Melbourne Juvenile Justice Centre (1993–2007).
[43] Victoria State Government, "Working at Custodial Precincts," 2018, https://www.justice.vic.gov.au/careers/youth-justice-careers/custodial-youth-justice/working-at-custodial-precincts#cherry-creek-youth-justice-precinct.
[44] "Cherry Creek Youth Justice," *Rondo Australia*.
[45] Premier of Victoria, "Expert Team to Design Youth Justice Centre," 2017.
[46] Esco Industries, "Project Summary: Cherry Creek Youth Justice Centre," 2022, https://escoindustries.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/VIC_Cherry-Creek-Youth-Justice-Centre_PROJECT.pdf.
[47] "HDR to Design the New Youth Justice Centre," *Star Weekly*, September 8, 2017, https://wyndham.starweekly.com.au/news/hdr-to-design-the-new-youth-justice-centre/.

"multidisciplinary…graduated approach."[48] Together, these claims unveil how justice facilities are legitimized through professional and political rhetoric as therapeutic language is embedded within infrastructural values. However, when paired with spatial operatives of control, rhetoric acts to validate expanded custodial control by presenting confinement as therapeutic, rehabilitative, and necessary for community safety. Thus, the language of innovation develops as a prime mechanism of the carceral eclipse.



Figure 7. Security walls surrounding the Parkville Youth Justice Precinct. Source: Josie Taylor and Shannon Schubert, "Documents Reveal Violence, Self-Harm and Chaos inside Melbourne Youth Justice Centre," ABC News, March 9, 2022.

Increases in punitivity over time are shown through the reactive transformation of security models, driven by escalating incidents involving staff and detained youth. In May 2010, six youths in Parkville escaped the facility, taking hostage a guard,[49] leading to perimeter security ventures around all custodial facilities in 2011 (see fig.9)[50] Although escapees were recaptured, the 2013 Ombudsman report concluded the youth justice system is "limited in its capacity to deal with a small, but increasing, cohort of young people exhibiting violent behaviors."[51] Even four years

[48] Parliament of Victoria, "Cherry Creek Youth Justice Centre – 29 August," *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, 2021, https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/parliamentary-activity/hansard/hansard-details/HANSARD-974425065-23256.

[49] Wayne Flower and Ruth Lamperd, "All Escapees from Juvenile Justice Centre Caught," *Herald Sun*, May 20, 2010, https://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/all-escapees-from-juvenile-justice-centre-caught/news-story/82515c47e3d9934d7de790af0c14a611.

[50] Neil Comrie, *Review of the Parkville Youth Justice Precinct (Stage One)*, 2017, https://files.justice.vic.gov.au/2021-06/executive_summary_review_of_the_parkville_youth_justice_precinct.pdf.

[51] Brouwer, *Investigation into Children Transferred from the Youth Justice System to the Adult Prison System*.

later, this pattern persisted, with thirteen "riots" occurring in 2016 and extensive destruction of over $2 million worth of amenities and infrastructure.[52]

The overlooked emerging problems of gang affiliations, increase of youth on remand (80%), detainees in custody for terrorism related offenses, and the overrepresentation of youth of color and youth with mental health, trauma, or intellectual disabilities, have made the system incapable of determining solutions effectively. [53] As Sharad Chari highlights, "prisons are partial geographical solutions to the political economic crises, organized by the estate, which is itself in crisis,"[54] reinforcing the temporary, reactive, and spatial government responses, rather than addressing the structural underlying injustices.

In other words, "Parkville Precinct is not adequate for its intended purpose,"[55] also owing to unsuitable infrastructure and ill-equipped staff. These recurring crises, including insufficient training and equipment, resulting in staff shortages,[56] injuries, fear of assault, and a lack of confidence in intervening in incidents,[57] indicate that youth justice is being governed through reactive risk management rather than relational security. Staff are not merely security personnel; they take the role of caretakers, educators, and emotional support systems for vulnerable youth, making a strong staff-youth relationship essential to reducing negative mental health.[58] Failure to

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[52] Deborah Glass, *Report on Youth Justice Facilities at the Grevillea Unit of Barwon Prison, Malmsbury and Parkville* (Melbourne: Victorian Ombudsman, 2017), 13.
[53] Comrie, *Review of the Parkville Youth Justice Precinct (Stage One)*.
[54] Sharad Chari, "Critical Geographies of Racial and Spatial Control," *Geography Compass* 2, no. 6 (2008): 1907–21, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-8198.2008.00169.x
[55] Comrie, *Review of the Parkville Youth Justice Precinct (Stage One)*.
[56] Glass, *Report on Youth Justice Facilities*, 39.
[57] Josie Taylor and Shannon Schubert, "Documents Reveal Violence, Self-Harm and Chaos inside Melbourne Youth Justice Centre," *ABC News*, March 9, 2022, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-03-10/documents-reveal-grim-picture-parkville-youth-justice/100877926
[58] Oostermeijer and Dwyer, "Keeping Kids Close."

invest in these relationships undermines rehabilitation, allowing custodial settings to revert to hostility.

Although Parkville College educators also take on a relational responsibility, providing vocational pathways and daily educational classes, attendance averages at a rate of 17.6% due to staffing shortages and operational constraints.[59] Former Principal Brendan Murray disclosed that youth justice frequently failed to "adhere to minimum standards of protection, care, custody or treatment."[60] Education is not effective reform, with the majority of youth idle, and therefore, only functions as a symbolic provision. Consequently, the government invests more in infrastructure than in key cooperation between youth and staff.

Moreover, the Justice Department consistently displayed unpreparedness in responding to crises. The damage left at the Parkville scene progressed to forty youth who were sentenced, transferred to the "newly gazetted youth justice unit"[61] at Barwon Prison, named the Grevillea Youth Justice Centre in November of 2016. Despite that, the "youth justice center" was essentially a cover to hold youth in the maximum-security adult prison. Following legal action by the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, the Supreme Court found that the holding of Aboriginal youth within this prison was illegal because it stood in contradiction with their human rights and best interest, which the government responded they had no choice but to do. The Supreme Court, moreover, referred to the Ministers, Secretaries, and Departments as "flying blind" and "providing lip service" for legal responsibility in management of the youth centers,[62]

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[59] Parkville College, *2024 Annual Report to the School Community* (2024), https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5977deef8419c27557b25893/t/6822765459ef05223f50a35e/1751238784328/Annual+Report_2024.pdf.

[60] Brendan Murray, "Opening Statement: Parliamentary Inquiry into Youth Justice" (2017).https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/495f40/contentassets/0929c0b04ee14f84a03c0ee8b1aaa9e6/opening_statement_by_brendan_murray.pdf.

[61] Glass, *Report on Youth Justice Facilities*, 14.

[62] Murray, "Opening Statement."

which is accompanied by an increase in transfers of youth to adult custody.[63] The Barwon transfer revealed the limits of Victoria's rehabilitative rhetoric. When confronted with an institutional crisis, the state temporarily abandons youth-specific principles and easily accepts adult carceral infrastructure, displaying that rehabilitation resides subordinate to security imperatives when they come into conflict.

The unveiling effect of the riots left disengaged youth "punished alongside their peers, to the obvious detriment of their rehabilitation."[64] But the unrest also exposed the conditional nature of youth justice, with youth being quickly recategorized as threats when institutional order is challenged. Riots have proven to be a symptom of the pre-existing systemic failures that the government gives a cold shoulder to. The state's response illustrates that intervention does not occur until crises are visibly apparent. Riots and escapes are immediately visible, while enduring overrepresentation, racism, trauma, and social exclusion are less explicit, continuing to shape youth justice beneath the surface.

A main takeaway from unrest, transfers to Barwon, and youth injustice exposes institutional change as dependent on youth resistance, violence, or public anxiety. Youth who offend and those on remand are therefore catalysts of change, representing a punctuated equilibrium.[65] Substantial institutional change occurs through crises, unrest, and public scrutiny that temporarily disrupts the existing organization. But the resulting reforms rarely revolutionize underlying power structures, instead establishing a new equilibrium that preserves state authority through disparate mechanisms. While the shifts emphasize a need for policy change, Aboriginal

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[63] Victoria State Government, *Youth Parole Board Annual Report 2024–25*, 5.
[64] Glass, *Report on Youth Justice Facilities*, 41.
[65] Bryan Baumgartner and Jones, *An Introduction to Punctuated Equilibrium: A Model for Understanding Stability and Dramatic Change in Public Policies,* 2018, https://www.ncchpp.ca/docs/2018_ProcessPP_Intro_PunctuatedEquilibrium_EN.pdf.

organizations are the chief responders to Ombudsman investigations through which youth's experiences of detention are rendered publicly visible through complaints, testimonies, health concerns, emotional impacts, and lockdown experiences. Youth voices often remain absent from media narratives and policy framing. However, Ombudsman reports allow youth voices to shape policy change.

With this, though, comes setbacks within the equilibrium seen through the introduction of new bail reform laws and *Adult Time for Violent Crime,* that pose as reducing offending, yet only continue to house unsentenced youth without considering criminogenic risks. The newly legislative restrictiveness creates a net-widening effect, reinforced by net-strengthening, where youth are brought under a wider network of restraint, escalating the engagement of youth who offend within criminal justice.[66] Public anxiety surrounding the perceived youth crime wave increasingly adds pressure for governments to appear decisive, supporting punitive responses to prioritize visibility.[67]

Table 1: National agreement on Closing the Gap: safety and justice-related targets

Target measure	Baseline	Latest available measurement	Target
Outcome 10: Reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults held in incarceration by at least 15 per cent	1,906.1 per 100,000 (2019)	2,304.4 per 100,000 (2024)	1,620.2 per 100,000 (2031)
Outcome 11: Reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (10–17 years) in detention by at least 30 per cent	28.3 per 10,000 (2018–19)	26.1 per 10,000 (2023–24)	19.8 per 10,000 (2031)
Outcome 12: Reduce the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45 per cent	47.3 per 1,000 (2019)	50.3 per 1,000 (2024)	26.0 per 1,000 (2031)
Outcome 13: The rate of all forms of family violence and abuse against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is reduced by at least 50%, as progress towards zero	8.4% (2018–19)	No data since 2018–19	4.2% (2031)

Figure 8. National Agreement on Closing the Gap: safety and justice-related targets. Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, "Indigenous Community Safety," Table 1, National Agreement on Closing the Gap: Safety and Justice-Related Targets.

Ultimately, this paper has shown that First Nation youth remain the primary population subjected to youth justice intervention across Victoria and Australia, an unwavering reality

[66] Richards and Renshaw, *Bail and Remand for Young People in Australia*.
[67] Parliament of Victoria, "Youth Crime – 29 October," *Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, October 29, 2021.

despite decades of reform. Although the Victorian Government acknowledges Aboriginal overrepresentation, funds cultural programs, commits to Closing the Gap targets (fig. 10), and has recently signed its first ever treaty with Aboriginal peoples,[68] legislation put forth simultaneously expands remand, increases police powers, reopens detention facilities, transfers youth to adult prisons, and supports punitive bail reforms, all of which directly harm and target Indigenous youth. The carceral eclipse of progressiveness sustained this contradiction, where the language of reform, inclusion, rehabilitation, and modernization obscures the ongoing governance of Indigenous youth.

The mechanisms of governance are continually evolving through welfare intervention, institutional classification, architectural regulation, restorative justice programs, community supervision, dual-track sentencing systems, geographic isolation, therapeutic design, security measures, and increasingly punitive legislative responses. While the instruments alter, Indigenous overrepresentation trails steadily. Therefore, many reforms present themselves as performative because reactive government responses, rather than proactive solutions, turn rehabilitation secondary to security concerns, and governance continues to eclipse justice.

[68] Kate Ashton, "Australia's First Treaty with Aboriginal People Signed in Victoria," *ABC News*, November 12, 2025, https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-11-13/australia-first-treaty-agreement-signed-law-victoria/106002730

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