

Drop in youth crime rates not reflected in Aboriginal arrests

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YOUTH crime in South Australia has dropped by almost a third over the past five years, with police figures revealing a significant group of offenders are responsible for more than a third of all offending.

A core group of 191 recidivists were apprehended and charged with 11 or more offences each last year, while another 240 were charged with committing between six and 10 offences each.

Alarming, while offending by non-Aboriginal youths has declined dramatically between 2011 and 2016, the number of Aboriginal offenders apprehended has declined only slightly.

The figures, compiled by the Attorney-General's Department using SAPOL data, show that in 2016 police apprehended 3404 non-Aboriginal youths compared with 5988 in 2011. In 2016 police apprehended 1979 Aboriginal youths, compared with 2270 in 2011.

Respected Aboriginal justice advocate Tauto Sansbury on Tuesday said the figures indicated "little has changed" over the past five years and that more needed to be done to address the problem of youth offending.

"Nothing seems to have improved in the apprehension of aboriginal people," he said.

"I have been alarmed and concerned for many years, I have worked in this area for a good 30 years now and I have never seen any vast improvements we can talk about or promote in our community. We are concerned this is going on and we are concerned the behaviours are getting worse."

Mr Sansbury said he felt many initiatives introduced to reduce youth offending, such as family conferences, did not work for Aboriginal youths and some felt they were unfairly targeted by police.

"I also find it very hard to find good rehabilitative programs within the system. The State Government seems to want to spend more money on incarceration than rehabilitation," he said.

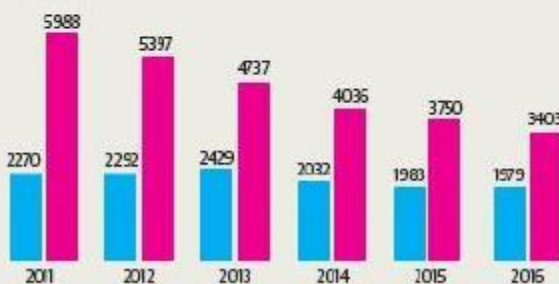
Apprehension reports and young individuals apprehended in SA 2016 by offence



Police apprehension reports and young individuals apprehended in SA 2016 by LGAs



Apprehension reports in SA involving young people by Indigenous status



Percentage of young individuals apprehended in 2016 by Indigenous status

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

Non-Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander



Attorney-General John Rau said while the overall reduction in youth offending was encouraging, he conceded the number of Aboriginal youths being apprehended was “still too high”.

“Clearly we have to keep looking at ways of changing the behaviour of those young people so they do not wind up in these statistics,” he said.

He said a core group of young offenders “doing dangerous things” that were readily captured on new technology — such as dashcams and mobile phones — and broadcast instantly had helped contribute to a misconception that youth crime was rampant.

“It is unfortunate that tends to obscure the figures which are telling a different story,” he said.

He said there was an overlap between youth offenders and those involved “within the child protection space.”

“I am optimistic the measures we are rolling out in that area with early intervention will have, over time, a positive influence in this area as well,” he said.

Senior police said the figures were pleasing and the majority of young offenders only ever committed one crime and were then not encountered by police again.

The figures reveal last year 7.3 per cent of apprehended youths had committed 11 or more offences, 9.1 per cent had committed between six and 10 offences and 20.3 per cent between three and five offences.

The majority of youth offenders apprehended — 43.7 per cent — committed just one offence.

The figures reveal police apprehended 46 youths aged just 10 years, 79 aged 11 years and 124 aged 12 years. The majority were aged between 15 and 17 years.

Inspector Greg Forrest, officer in charge of the Eastern Adelaide prosecution unit, said police aimed to keep children out of court where possible “if we can”.

“The majority of offences that come through, we can generally divert at some stage either by informal caution, formal caution or family conference,” he said.

“And even when they go to court sometimes the court will divert them. That plays a significant role.”

He said in many cases a teenager will commit a crime, become involved with police and not reoffend because of that encounter.

“The repeat offenders we get are probably more hard core offenders,” he said.

“It is a problem. With these offenders we assess the evidence and they will generally be referred to court because we have exhausted our options in terms of the diversion process.”

The figures reveal that 40.6 per cent of Aboriginal youths apprehended last year faced court, compared with 28.6 per cent on non-Aboriginal youths. Just over 35 per cent of non-Aboriginal youths were given a formal caution, while 20.4 per cent of Aboriginal youths were formally cautioned.