



8 August 2016

Media Release

Extend the scope of the Northern Territory inquiry into youth detention

Dylan Voller has written a letter of thanks to the people who have supported him and to 'the whole Australian community'. It's a reminder that Dylan and his fellow inmates at Don Dale are no different to the rest of us: they are people with sensitivities of thought and feeling; capable of gratitude, hurt, contrition, concern for family others, and optimism.

There were earlier media accounts of abuse at Don Dale, but none had visual impact or triggered outrage like the ABC television reportage and the widely circulated screen cap of Mr Voller in a hood and restraint chair. The images and the responses to them are a reminder of the desensitizing effects of abusive institutions on the people who work in them, and of the public's readiness to ignore abuse.

The gassing, stripping, restraint, blinding and beating of these boys by detention centre staff may have been sanctioned by management, if not by decision-makers further up in the Northern Territory executive. Or maybe they turned a blind eye.

Lack of public response to reports or even personal observations of abuse is not new. A 2006 Australian survey on child abuse, for example, established that almost half of people who personally witness child abuse do not refer their concerns to authorities.

How much easier is it, then, to look away from abuse when it happens behind the closed doors of institutions, when staff are emboldened by their moral position as protectors of the public, and the detainees are offenders, delinquents, refugees or people with disabilities who have been marginalized and ignored for so long anyway?

The horrifying incidents at Don Dale are not an isolated aberration. Dylan's story is like that of many other disempowered Australians in detention. The abuse of Queensland prisoners and forensic detainees who have cognitive or psychiatric disabilities is ignored. QAI calls upon Prime Minister Turnbull to extend the scope of the Northern Territory Inquiry. The inquiry must investigate abuse of people with disability in institutions throughout the country.

Media contact: Michelle O'Flynn 0481 381 528