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MEDIA RELEASE

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SHERRIN SAYS NO TO DUNGEONS, RACKS, THUMBSCREWS, AND LIES

Family Services Minister Craig Sherrin today reacted angrily to claims that the John Oxley Youth Centre at Wacol was a "holiday camp" for young criminals.

The claims were made by people identified as staff and ex-staff in a newspaper report on the juvenile detention facility where a group of youths menaced staff and caused thousands of dollars of damage on Wednesday night after breaking out of their rooms.

Mr Sherrin said the informants had attempted to portray the centre as a place where hardened criminals lived in unrestrained luxury, and where there had been severe lapses in security, and gross abuse of taxpayers money.

"These people clearly resent the passing of the age of dungeons, racks, and thumbscrews," the Minister said.

"They have no role to play in this age, where our priorities are very different, and if existing staff who hold these views cannot work happily under our guidelines they should let management know and we'll try and find them something more suitable.

"John Oxley is not a jail and should not be compared with one.

"It is a secure detention facility to house boys from the ages of 10 to 15, and girls to the age of 18, who have been before the courts.

"I would hope that most people in this day and age would accept that it is inappropriate to label children or teenagers criminals without first making a major effort on their behalf, to turn them away from a life of crime.

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"She had decided there was nothing left for her in life, and she felt great remorse for the crime of passion in which she had killed her boyfriend.

"Security arrangements for the dinner were well thought through and the results have been heartening.

"The girl is no longer suicidal, has taken an interest in education, and recognises that there is a life ahead of her.

"Her family was extremely grateful.

"I praise the compassion of those staff."

A her allegation concerned a claim that taxpayers paid for a girls air ticket from Cairns to Brisbane for the birthday party of her sister, an Ipswich arsonist, who was in John Oxley.

Mr Sherrin said the reality was that a bus fare had been offered to a woman who lived in Childers to visit her sister at John Oxley. The offer was refused.

"The newspaper identified the woman concerned as an Ipswich arsonist, which makes the rest clear," Mr Sherrin said.

"The bus fare was offered to the woman not to attend a party, but because staff were attempting to re-establish family links for the girl in the centre, who was about to be released.

"Once again, the compassionate effort here is to be praised."

Mr Sherrin said the most serious charge in the article was one of rape.

It was alleged that a 15-year old female inmate was raped during a short excursion by three 14-year old fellow inmates.

"The reality is that there was a sexual incident involving two boys and a girl during an excursion when, for a matter of minutes only, they were not under the immediate supervision of staff.

"As a result of our concern, all staff and all the children on the excursion were questioned.

"The girl did not allege rape.

"The girl's mother was spoken to, and encouraged by centre management to talk with her daughter, and to consider whether charges were appropriate.

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"Neither the mother nor the girl believed charges were appropriate.

"If intercourse took place, the charge would necessarily, because of the age of the girl, have been statutory rape.

"No such charge was ever laid and therefore the allegation of such a serious crime is mischievous - and dangerous."

Mr Sherrin also refuted an allegation that Wednesday night's rampage was "the tip of the iceberg" and that an entire wing of the centre was recently closed because of destruction.

A wing was closed for a period in December last year, but not because of destruction.

Some locks were considered unsatisfactory, and the manager closed that wing while they were replaced," Mr Sherrin said.

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