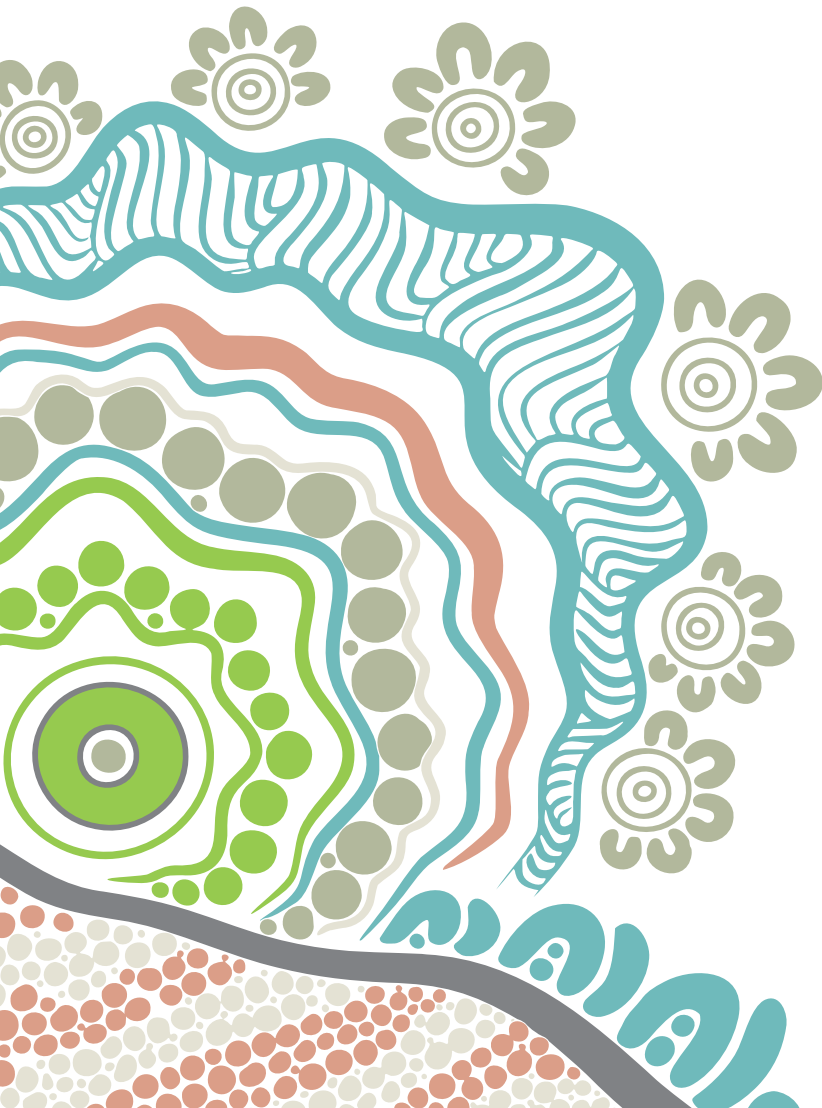


EASY READ



Watch-houses

Cairns and Murgon watch-houses: Focus on children 2024 inspection



Inspector of
Detention Services

What we did



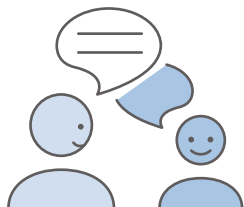
We **inspected** Murgon watch-house in November 2023, and Cairns watch-house in January 2024.

Inspected means we looked at what happens at the watch-houses.

We wanted to find out if the watch-houses are good places for children.



We looked at the watch-houses and took photographs.



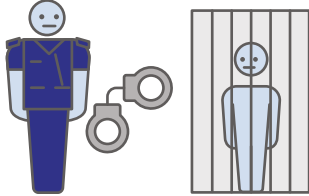
We talked to:

- staff at the watch-houses
- children at the watch-houses
- people who work in the community
- people who work for the government.



We looked at reports about the watch-houses.

About the watch-houses



Watch-houses are:

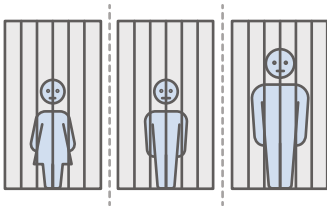
- places where people are held after they are arrested
- run by police officers
- meant to hold people for a short time.



People are held at a watch-house while they wait:

- for **bail**
- to be sent to a prison or youth detention centre.

Bail is a written promise to be in court at the right time.



Watch-houses are built for adults.

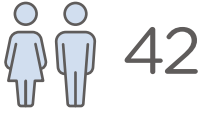
But children are held in watch-houses too.

Children in watch-houses are kept away from adults. Boys are kept away from girls.

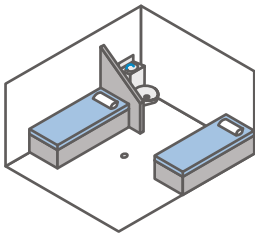


Cairns watch-house

Cairns watch-house is in Cairns in far-north Queensland.



Cairns watch-house can hold 42 people.



Most cells have 2 beds. Each cell has a toilet and running water.



Cairns watch-house has an outdoor exercise yard.

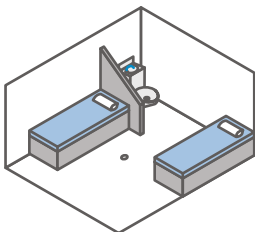


Murgon watch-house

Murgon watch-house is 2 hours drive inland from the Sunshine Coast.



Murgon watch-house can hold 9 people.

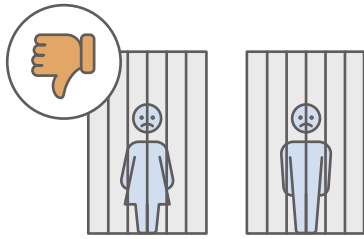


Most cells have 2 beds. Each cell has a toilet and running water.



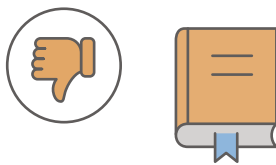
Murgon watch-house does not have an outdoor exercise yard.

What we found

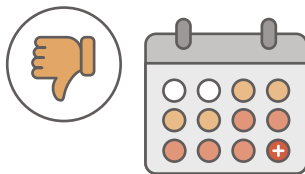


Children are held in watch-houses.

Watch-houses are not good places for children. They are not designed for children.

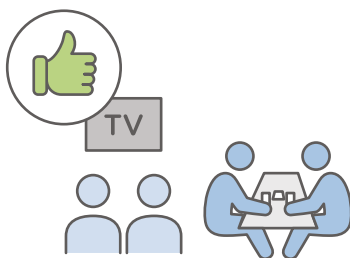


Watch-houses do not have good rules about how to look after children.



Most children stay at the watch-house for 1 or 2 days. Sometimes children stay at the watch-house for 2 or 3 weeks.

Sometimes children stay at the watch-house because the youth detention centre is full.



During the day staff can let children to go to a bigger room to watch TV and play with other children.



Children in watch-houses are sometimes locked in their cells all day and night.



Nearly all the children in watch-houses are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

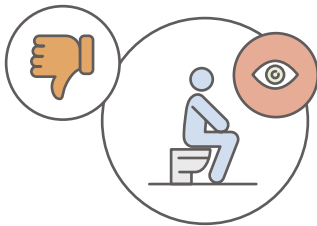
The children do not get good cultural support.



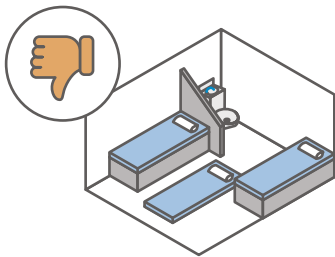
The watch-houses are clean and tidy.

The children have clean beds.

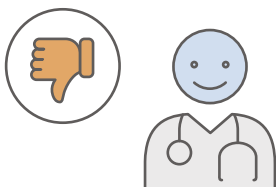
The children can have a shower every day.



Children in watch-houses cannot use the toilet in private.



Sometimes the watch-houses have too many people. When this happens, a child might sleep on a mattress on the floor.



Children in watch-houses do not get enough medical care. They do not always see a health worker at the right time.



Police officers interview children at the front desk when they arrive at the watch-house.

Children cannot talk in private. Other people can hear what they say.



Police officers do not get taught how to ask children about their health and wellbeing.



Children in watch-houses get enough food.

At Cairns watch-house, they get 3 fresh meals every day.

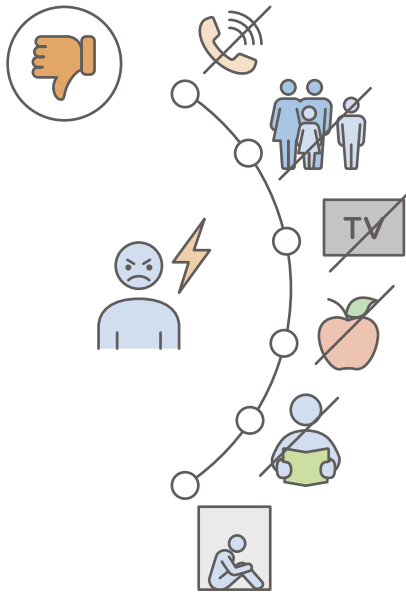
At Murgon watch-house, the children get ready-made meals.



Children in watch-houses get bored.

They cannot:

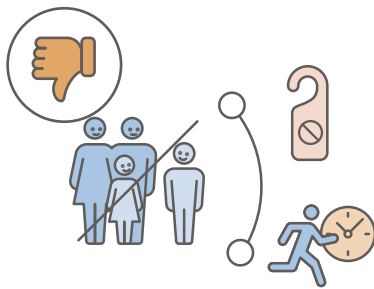
- go to school
- get enough exercise
- do things that interest them.



Children in watch-houses sometimes get punished for doing the wrong thing.

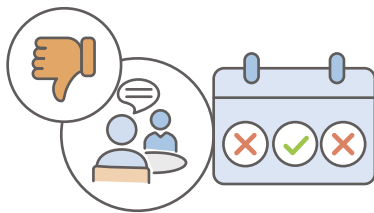
Sometimes the punishments mean the children:

- cannot make phone calls
- cannot have visits
- cannot watch television
- cannot have snacks between meals
- cannot have books
- get locked in their cell.

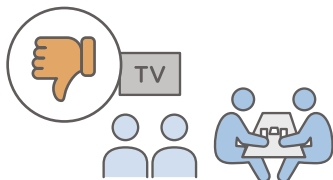


Sometimes staff do not let children have visits from their family.

This happens if the interview rooms are full or if the staff are busy.



Children in watch-houses might not see a support worker every day.



At Cairns watch-house, some children cannot go to a bigger room with a television.

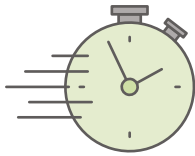


At Murgon watch-house, children cannot go outside to play games or exercise.



Children are not told how to complain if staff do not treat them the right way.

What we think should happen



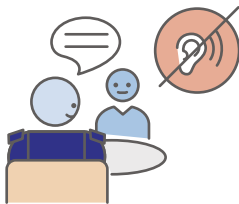
Children should leave the watch-house as soon as possible.



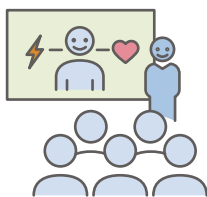
Watch-houses need clear rules about how to care for children.



Children should be able to use the toilet and shower in private.



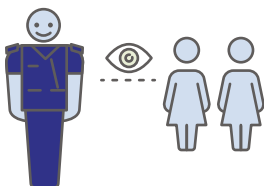
Children should be interviewed in private when they arrive at the watch-house.



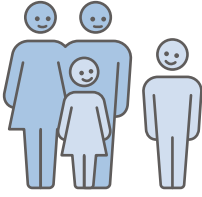
Police officers should learn how to work with children.



Children should be checked by a health worker when they arrive at a watch-house.



Children in watch-houses should be checked often to make sure they are safe.



Watch-house staff should make sure children can get visits from their family.



Children in watch-houses need regular visits from support workers.



Children in watch-houses need cultural support.

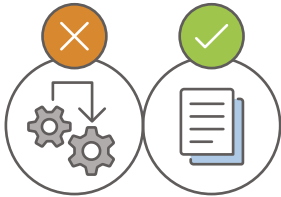


Children and their families need information about how to complain.

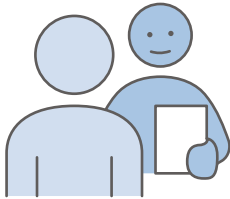
What happens next



We wrote a report about what we saw at Cairns and Murgon watch-houses. This is a summary of the report.



We cannot make changes at the watch-houses. But our report is about the things that should change.



We gave our report to Queensland Police Service and the Queensland Parliament.

They will use our report to decide whether to change things in the watch-houses.



We have put the report on our website.

You can ask for a copy of the report.

Who we are



We are a team of people who inspect detention services in Queensland.



We want watch-houses to be **humane** places.

Humane means people are treated the right way.



You can read more about us.

Ask for a copy of our *Easy Read Inspector of Detention Services – What we do*.

It is on our website.

How to contact us

We are a special team of the Queensland Ombudsman.



Phone

07 3005 7000



Mail

GPO Box 3314
Brisbane
Queensland 4001



Interpreter

131 450



Speak & Listen

1300 555 727



Website

www.ombudsman.qld.gov.au



Email

ombudsman@ombudsman.qld.gov.au

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land throughout Queensland and their continuing connection to land, culture and community. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

This Easy Read document is a cut down version of the full report, *Cairns and Murgon watch-houses inspection report: Focus on detention of children*. It does not tell everything that we do. It is a way to help more people find out about what we do. Our website tells you more.

