“RACISM” AT HEART OF ISSUE.

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by Neda Vanovac

Racism is at the heart of mistreatment of indigenous youth in detention in Darwin, and the NT government is “entirely dismissive” of their rights, a human rights lawyer says.

Responding to last night's ABC Four Corners program, Professor George Newhouse, principal solicitor at the National Justice Project, yesterday called for a total overhaul of the youth justice system.

A report by the NT children's commissioner found that several boys had been kept in isolation for almost 24 hours a day for prolonged periods in hot cells with no running water or access to school materials.

“The government needs to address the social, health, educational and other disadvantages that these young people suffer and divert them from youth detention … these are children and they deserve a future,” Prof Newhouse said.

“If you were seeing non-indigenous children being treated this way, there would be a swift response from the community and the government to the problem, but when it's mostly indigenous … the government seems to be entirely dismissive of them.”

Since 2014, the government has moved juvenile detainees into the former maximum security wing of the old adult prison. The NT has the highest rate of youth detention in Australia, and 95 per cent of detainees are Aboriginal.