As a school principal, recently retired, of an on arrival educational and settlement program for adolescents from immigrant and refugee backgrounds, my observation based on nearly 40 years’ experience is that both on shore and offshore detention is bad for young people with long term negative impacts on their mental health and well being affecting their future settlement.

In both contexts, young people and in some cases their families, though my experience is with significant numbers of unaccompanied minors, are dehumanised by:
- Being referred to by number e.g. of their boat
- Being constantly told they are not welcome in this country
- Being moved without warning or information as to why to other facilities or interstate
- Not being allowed to ask questions

While noting some improvements in the management of BITA in more recent times compared with Port Hedland or Woomera or other detention centres 14 years ago, the deprivation of freedom and the exposure to the agony of others have the same soul destroying impact.

Symptoms that impact on student well being, mental health and capacity to learn present in the same ways:
- Sleep disorders
- Anger
- Flashbacks
- Psychosomatic pain of head, stomach, back and teeth
- Poor memory
- Panic attacks

However, the more recent placements in offshore detention facilities on Christmas Island and Manus are so much worse in terms of cruelty than anything I reported on in the earlier HEREOC enquiry.

- Disruption to schooling and no schooling or very limited access to schooling
- Far greater exposure to self harm resulting in self harming
- Witnessing on a daily basis people attempting to escape and run into the ocean
- Hang themselves
- Sew their lips
- Hunger strike
- Violence involving knives
- Sexual assault
- Frequent skirmishes
- Slow response time from guards

For young people who are in this situation to escape from violence, there is a constant re-traumatisation and constant worry about their own safety. The violence is exacerbated by the confined space and the physical conditions especially the heat and mosquitoes on Manus.

What we have observed and heard from young people about over medication and lack of information about their health is very concerning viz:
- Overuse of sleeping pills
- Injections e.g. up to 12 on Christmas Island and another 17 on Manus Island
- Incomprehensible bits of paper with the immunisation records issued then taken back
- Being sprayed with chemicals

Very terrifying physical conditions for young people made worse by psychological fear and intimidation by:
- Removals of people in the middle of the night
- Multiple transfers
- Bush camps where security guards outnumber detainees e.g. 60:15
- Reports of bashings
- Transit hotels where they are confined to one room
- No information

Also the lack of play and the lack of schooling in addition to the lack of safety make the young children with families very angry with their parents for bringing them.

Deprivation of HOPE and deprivation of a FUTURE are hallmarks of the new regime of offshore processing with very limited processing. Young people report that they are told:
- Before their feet touch the ground that they will be sent back
- They will not be settled in Australia EVER even if they have parts of families in Australia
- They can never travel anywhere or visit their families because they will NEVER get travel documents
- They will NEVER be re-united with family, this from a student in Brisbane with family on both Christmas Island and Manus Island
- They will have NO rights

In conclusion, I would say that some aspects of on shore detention centres in urban settings have some improvements on isolated centres in desert places but overall, asylum seekers are experiencing new and unsurpassed levels of cruelty and systematic destruction of hope.

The changes to the Family Reunion program are causing a lot of agony. Unaccompanied minors who now have permanent visas are being told that they are the lowest priority for Family Reunion and that they can expect to be unsuccessful even if their mothers are Women at Risk.

No child should have his/her basic Human Rights denied.
No child should be in detention on shore.
No child should be exposed to the dangers, physical and psychological, in offshore detention centres.