

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – DECEMBER 6, 2018

Ombudsman investigation will shine a light on inhumane practice of solitary confinement: Jesuit Social Services

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the Victorian Ombudsman's impending investigation of the use of solitary confinement of young people in the Victorian prison system.

"Through our work with young people and adults in the prison system, we regularly see the irreversible physical and mental harm that can be caused by the use of solitary confinement," says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

"We witness young people spending up to 22 hours a day in a cell, with little meaningful human contact and little to no access to programs or activities.

"The impact this has on their personal relationships, such as with family members, is profound. An experience of isolation also sets young people up to fail when they exit the system - undermining their ability to rehabilitate and lead productive lives."

Earlier this year Jesuit Social Services published the report [All alone: Young adults in the Victorian justice system](#), which raises a number of concerns regarding the welfare and treatment of young adults aged 18 to 24 in Victorian prisons.

The report contained several stories of young people Jesuit Social Services has worked with, and the devastating impact of solitary confinement. This includes the story of a young Aboriginal man who, after years in confinement, struggled to live in the community after release from prison. Reflecting the impact of isolation on his mental health, he replicated his isolation environment in his bathroom, living, eating and sleeping in this small space. Sadly, shortly after his release he re-offended and returned to prison.

"We have called on the Victorian Government to legislate for a presumption against the use of solitary confinement, ensuring it is only used in exceptional cases where safety is threatened, and then for the shortest possible time. We must avoid more tragic stories like this," says Ms Edwards.

"An effective prison system is one that works to reduce offending and support people to address their underlying issues to work towards safer and more cohesive communities. It is clear that the use of solitary confinement is at drastic odds with these aims - and it comes at a severe cost to us all.

"A recent report in NSW showed that the use of solitary confinement of young people in prison remains widespread. We must note that this is an issue in many other jurisdictions, not just Victoria.

"We hope that the Victorian Ombudsman's investigation can shine a light on an inhumane and counter-productive practice, and lead to serious systemic reform."

Media enquiries – Kathryn Kernohan, 0409 901 248 or kathryn.kernohan@jss.org.au