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Enhanced training for youth justice staff will result in better outcomes: Jesuit Social Services

Enhanced training for new youth justice officers, and a commitment to annual refresher training for staff who work with the Territory's most vulnerable young people, will result in better outcomes for staff, young people and the broader community, says Jesuit Social Services.

"We all want people who have contact with the youth justice system – young people and staff – to be safe, and for the environment to be geared to young people getting their lives back on track ahead of returning to the community," says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

"One of the key ways of achieving this is to ensure that youth justice officers who work directly with young people have the necessary attributes, skills, experience and training to mentor and support young people, many of whom have complex needs."

The Northern Territory Government this week announced that 28 new youth justice officers who will work at Don Dale Youth Detention Centre and Alice Springs Youth Detention Centre had completed a redeveloped induction course focusing on trauma-informed and restorative practices.

In its Statement of Commitments to reform the youth justice system, also released this week, the Territory Government pledged to introduce mandatory annual refresher training for all youth justice officers by the end of January 2020. The annual training will cover topics including mental health first aid and cultural awareness and engagement.

Ms Edwards says that the focus on equipping staff with the skills they need to work effectively with young people is in line with international best practice in youth detention.

Leaders from Jesuit Social Services recently returned from a #JusticeSolutions study tour of New Zealand, visiting facilities and meeting with justice staff, following a similar tour of parts of Europe and the US in 2017.

"We saw again that the most successful youth justice systems and facilities share an emphasis on attracting and retaining staff members with the personal attributes, skills and experience in trauma-informed practice and working with young people who face barriers to inclusion. For example, equivalent staff in Norway have a minimum of two years paid training and applicants are screened for positive, humane attitudes.

"These announcements by the Territory Government are a step in the right direction and will ultimately mean safer working environments for staff and young people getting the best possible chance to get their lives on a positive pathway."

Ms Edwards says Jesuit Social Services welcomes other new commitments including the ability for representatives of young people who are in detention to access documents around support plans, case management and education to ensure stronger transparency.

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