

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – MAY 23, 2019

Plans for new ‘supermax’ unit symptomatic of youth justice troubles: Jesuit Social Services

News of a new ‘supermax’ unit within Victoria’s youth detention system highlights a range of systemic issues that need to be urgently addressed, says Jesuit Social Services.

“It is clear that the current conditions in our youth detention facilities are not supporting the successful rehabilitation of young people involved with the justice system,” says Julie Edwards, CEO of Jesuit Social Services.

“A recent review of youth detention showed we need more effective and tailored responses to the various groups of young people in the justice system. These responses need to be therapeutic and focused on addressing the root causes of offending behaviour.

“But we must also ensure we are reducing stress on the system and giving children the best chance possible of getting their lives back on track by keeping them out of detention in the first place and making sure that policies are based on evidence and best practice,” says Ms Edwards.

“We also continue to advocate for the age of criminal responsibility to be raised from 10 to 14 years, and for the dual track system to be extended to 24 year olds to ensure vulnerable young people are treated in an age-appropriate manner – both of these reforms would have a hugely positive impact.”

A recent report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare showed that the number of young people in detention in Victoria has increased by 36 per cent over the past five years despite the number of young people committing offences having dropped for five consecutive years.

“There is a clear disconnect between the number of young people being locked up and what the crime statistics show. Inside the system this manifests itself in overcrowded facilities and inexperienced detention staff not adequately trained, resourced or supported to work with young people with complex needs,” says Ms Edwards.

“In many cases, young people are leaving the youth detention system worse off than when they entered. This ultimately the young people themselves, their families and the broader community”.

Leaders from Jesuit Social Services recently explored youth justice facilities in New Zealand as part of a #JusticeSolutions study tour, following a similar visit to parts of Europe and the US in 2017.

“We found that effective youth justice systems around the world share an emphasis on attracting and retaining staff members who have the experience and attributes to work with young people who have significant barriers to social inclusion. There is also a focus on making sure detention is only ever used as a last resort and that wherever possible, young people are supported in the community to address their problems and connect with school, family and the community.



MEDIA RELEASE

“We need to focus on keeping young people out of detention and reforming the system based on international best practice.”

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