

MEDIA RELEASE – 13 December 2013

Juvenile justice system failing children detained in adult prison

Jesuit Social Services supports recommendations by the Victoria Ombudsman to remove the option to detain children in adult prisons as it is inhumane, in conflict of human rights and may expose young people to violent and sexualised behavior.

Acting CEO, Sally Parnell, said the report is a sobering snapshot of a system under increasing pressure and buckling under the weight of a misguided and often ineffective 'tough on crime' stance.

"When children are moved from the youth justice system to the adult system, they don't learn to be good, productive citizens – they learn to be criminals," said Ms Parnell.

In his report, the Ombudsman warned the youth justice system was currently ill-equipped to deal with increasingly violent young people while findings show those transferred to the adult system are often kept in solitary confinement 23 hours a day over a period of months.

"Government needs to ensure we have both effective and humane services to address youth crime," said Ms Parnell.

"Ultimately, we should be doing all we can to keep kids out of detention through addressing crime at its root causes including poverty, abuse and neglect.

"For those in the system, we need options including community orders and youth justice group conferencing which have proven more effective than prison in cutting rates of re-offending.

"And for those committing more serious offences, we need time and resources to address long standing mental health and substance abuse issues in an appropriate environment.

"If we are really committed to community safety, we will look to treat the issues that lead to offending rather than exposing young people to more hardened criminals."

Jesuit Social Services is a not-for-profit organisation which works to build a just society by advocating for social change and promoting the health and wellbeing of disadvantaged young people, families and communities.

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