

Thursday 9 February 2012

## **Mixed blessings for young offenders in the Northern Territory**

Julie Edwards, CEO of Jesuit Social Services, said that new data released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare today highlights that the Northern Territory is at a real turning point between the bleak past and a potentially more promising future for young offenders.

"While Northern Territory continues to have the highest rate of youth detention in Australia, at approximately 5 times the national rate, the actual number of young people detained in the Northern Territory *decreased* by 40% from the June quarter 2007 to the June quarter 2011, compared to our situation here in Victoria where we saw a 35% increase in number of young people detained over the same period.

"Despite a small increase again in the Northern Territory in the last year, this trend is really promising in that it encourages the Northern Territory government to continue with the series of reforms corresponding with the release of the Review of the Northern Territory Youth Justice System in October last year (2011). Importantly, recommendations of this review conform with best evidence", said Ms Edwards. This includes recommendations to increase investment in police diversion, including increased eligibility for diversion, and expand diversion programs, along with improved evaluation, data collection and increased workforce capacity.

"Reforms like these along with increased investment are essential if real change is to occur", Ms Edwards said. "We were particularly pleased to see the wide ranging nature of the proposed reforms, extending from police to the youth justice systems to family support. Early intervention is critical if we are to break the cycle of disadvantage and inequity" said Ms Edwards. "Research proves that those at greatest risk of graduating from youth offending to adult detention are male, indigenous and those first detained at young ages - our 10, 11, and 12 year old children.

"This is not just a remote community problem" said Ms Edwards, "The AIHW data shows that on an average night in the June quarter 2011, an Indigenous young person aged 10–17 was 20 times as likely to be in unsentenced detention and 26 times as likely to be in sentenced detention as a non-Indigenous young person across Australia. We must all take responsibility for improving the futures of our Aboriginal young people, wherever we live in Australia".

**Jesuit Social Services engages with young people in the youth justice and adult corrections systems – most of whom have had, or currently have, involvement with the child protection system. Jesuit Social Services works closely with these youths through the Jesuit Community College.**

### **MEDIA ENQUIRIES**

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