

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> February 2013**

**New research urges rethink to children in remand**

Research released today by Jesuit Social Services reveals how vulnerable and disadvantaged Victorian children are being unnecessarily remanded. The research calls for reforms to halt this alarming practice including raising the age of criminal responsibility to 12.

Speaking at the launch of *Thinking Outside: Alternatives to Remand for Children*, Jesuit Social Services CEO, Julie Edwards said, 'This research confirms the fact that vulnerable children from disadvantaged communities are ending up in the criminal justice system. Too many of these children spend their teenage years cycling in and out of custody. Reform is needed to address the root causes of crime and to keep these children out of custody and at home with their families.'

The research revealed that children who offended at younger ages were amongst the most vulnerable in our community. Ms Edwards said, 'Our analysis showed that children who were 14 or younger when first involved in the justice system were more likely to come from communities with higher numbers of vulnerable children. Detention is no place for primary school children and we must raise the age of criminal responsibility to 12 in order to keep them out.'

Ms Edwards also noted the unnecessary use of remand for children, 'Too many children are being arrested and remanded overnight or weekend only to be released the next day at court. We know that about 40% of children who are remanded on the weekend are released within 1 to 3 days. More services are needed outside of business hours, when 80% of arrests of children take place.'

The research also showed that 12.6% of the youth justice population was Aboriginal, despite making up only 1% of the population of young people. Ms Edwards said, 'What is particularly concerning is the young age at which so many Aboriginal children come into contact with the justice system. More needs to be done to break the cycle of disadvantage and support the development of these children.'

***Thinking Outside* is a 12 month research project into the experiences of children on remand in Victoria. It includes analysis of data provided by the Department of Human Services and Victoria Police as well as observations of court hearings and interviews with children. The report was launched by President of the Children's Court, Judge Paul Grant at the Brosnan Centre in Brunswick.**

**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.**

## **MEDIA ENQUIRIES**

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### **Background:**

- Victoria's youth justice system has a strong track record of diversion compared with other states and territories. However, there was a 67% increase in remand numbers in Victoria between 2007 and 2010.

### **Key Findings:**

- In 2010, 25% of children with youth justice orders in Victoria came from 2.6% of postcodes.
- 27 children in the youth justice population in 2010 were remanded between the ages of 10 and 12. All of these children were known to child protection (more than half of them before the age of 3 years).
- Strong correlations between areas with high levels of youth justice involvement and high levels of socio-economic disadvantage.
- Children who were 14 or under at their first youth justice order were more likely to come from areas with higher numbers of vulnerable children on a range of measures.
- 80% of arrests take place outside of the hours 9-5pm Monday to Friday.
- 25% of remands lasted between 1 and 3 days, this number increased to 40% of remands on weekends.
- 30% of the children with youth justice orders in 2010 who experienced remand over the period of their involvement with youth justice had more than 3 remand admissions. Twenty three children had between 10 and 24 remand admissions during their involvement with youth justice.
- 46 children were remanded for more than 43 days in 2010 only to be released on bail.
- Just over 1% of Victoria's population aged 10-19 are Aboriginal yet they make up 12.6% of the youth justice population.
- 41% of Aboriginal with youth justice orders in 2010 received their first order at 14 years of age or younger compared with 22% of non-Aboriginal children

### **Key recommendations**

- All government child and family policy should include a focus on the needs of children in the youth justice system
- Increase the age of criminal responsibility to 12, strengthen legislative protections and coordination between child protection and youth justice systems.
- Expand support services so that they are available when children need them most. This is most often outside of business hours.
- Pilot an intensive community support service for vulnerable younger children and reforms to offer an appropriate level of care and therapeutic support to children who end up in custody
- Action to break the cycle of Aboriginal disadvantage and to make the youth justice system more culturally competent