

Call for state to raise criminal age limit

Border Mail, Albury-Wodonga by None

27 Feb 2013

General News - page 10 - 280 words - ID 183384162 - Photo: No - Type: News Item - Size: 97.76cm²

COMPASSION, not incarceration, is the only way to tackle youth crime, according to a report urging Victoria to lift the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 12.

Jesuit Social Services wants a raft of changes to youth justice, after its research showed the number of children on remand increased by twothirds between 2007 and 2010.

Young criminals are among the community's most vulnerable people and the politically populist, fear-driven approach of locking them up only entrenches them in a life of crime, the organisation's chief executive Julie Edwards says.

"There is no evidence that says when you lock children up early, you end up producing model citizens," she said.

"We need to stand up to the rubbish claims about how you reduce crime."

Early intervention in children's lives, with digni- fi ed support and treatment to ensure their safety and equal opportunities, can help keep them out of the system, Ms Edwards said.

The group's report found the majority of young offenders came from broken homes and had been expelled or dropped out of school.

The report calls for the minimum age a child can be charged with a criminal offence to be raised from 10 to 12, in line with United Nations recommendations, and stronger coordination between child protection and the youth justice system.

It also says support services should be expanded outside of business hours, which is when 80 per cent of youth arrests occur.

Judge Paul Grant, president of the Children's Court of Victoria, says the report's arguments for reform are compelling.

More empathy and support is needed for youths in the system, he says, because they come from disadvantaged backgrounds of neglect and abuse that many people couldn't understand.