

# No need to treat youths as criminals

The debate on whether a youth curfew should be imposed is taking attention away from the important discussion on how we can best make communities safer places. There is little evidence youth curfews have ever been successful in reducing crime rates.

What we do know, is that this type of measure would take up valuable police resources that could be directed at more effective measures, as well as stigmatising young people in our community by treating them as criminals.

We need to do more to prevent children and young people from engaging in anti-social behaviour and crime. In doing so, we should build on knowledge and experience of what works. In Australia and many other countries there are programs that focus on giving at-risk young people organised leisure activities

to both divert them from offending, and engage them in positive interests.

Already, youth outreach workers and youth services in Alice Springs provide some similar opportunities to these, but there is room for this work to be expanded. More intensive responses are needed for children and young people who are at risk of, or already engaged in anti-social or criminal activities.

These responses need to focus on the issues that these young people face, including problems at home, drug and alcohol issues and mental illness. Such supports need to be available to break the cycles of repeat offending that are making our communities less safe places.

**Sally Parnell**  
**Acting Chief Executive**  
**Jesuit Social Services**