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LONDON RIOTS A LESSON ABOUT THE VALUE OF FUNDING EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

The riots in England are a reminder of the need to fund programs that help young people address the underlying problems that lead to crime, Jesuit Social Services said today.

Jesuit Social Services Chief Executive Officer, Julie Edwards said what was happening on the streets of London was appalling but highlighted the reality of what can happen when disadvantage is not addressed in a consistent and ongoing way.

“Community safety comes out of a cohesive community and we know that the key to achieving this and reducing crimes rates in the long-term is through early intervention and support.

“Research shows there is a direct correlation between inadequate education and training, poverty, homelessness, mental health, addiction problems and offending.

According to Jesuit Social Services’ research, conducted by Professor Tony Vinson, the most disadvantaged three per cent of Australian localities have double the rate of unemployment, more than 2.5 times the rate of long term unemployment, almost double the rate of disability support and psychiatric admissions, more than double the rate of criminal convictions and almost three times the rate of imprisonment.

“We need to work with young people from these severely disadvantaged neighbourhoods and equip them with the skills and proper education they need to address their underlying problems and help them achieve social inclusion and community participation.

“Valuable tax payer dollars should not be wasted on locking up young people when the money could be better spent funding community based alternatives which are a proven way to move young people away from a life of offending.

“Jesuit Social Services’ Community Group Conferencing Program gets results, with more than 80 per cent of young people involved in the program not reoffending within two years.

“We also run a number of programs such as Jesuit Community College which provides people with real skills for life, learning and work and The Outdoor Experience program which uses outdoor activities to help young people who have problems with drugs and alcohol and helps them build self-esteem and healthy relationships with others.

“We should be looking at what is happening in Britain and move away from a ‘lock ‘em up’ approach, and provide further funding for community based alternatives which have a proven track record in rehabilitating young people and keeping them out of the justice system,” Ms Edwards said.

Jesuit Social Services works with over 500 young people a year, the majority of whom are high risk young people with complex and multiple problems and needs; such complex needs include mental health problems, disability (including intellectual disability), drug and alcohol misuse, homelessness, and health problems.

Jesuit Social Services CEO, Julie Edwards is available for comment.

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