

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

29<sup>th</sup> June 2012

In the 1980s and 1990s, Jesuit Social Services worked with unaccompanied minors (people under 18 years) fleeing the aftermath of the war in Vietnam.

In more recent years, we have been working with unaccompanied minors and people over 18 years fleeing wars and other unrest in places like Iran, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka.

From these years of experience working with hundreds of people we know:

- These people have, by definition, lived through what most of us would call 'living hell';
- They have been displaced from family, community, language, culture;
- They have many experiences in common – but each individual person's story is unique;
- They have personal attributes, talents and strengths that we can benefit from – individually and as a community; and
- They are human beings just like you and me – there is much more that unites us than separates us.

The political game playing that continues while lives are lost and other lives are kept in limbo in Detention Centres is a cause of deep shame for Australia.

The situation in Canberra this week hit an all time low with the major parties scrambling in a race to the bottom. We saw our country's leaders debating options which no-one could realistically call humane or sensitive, with a primary focus of pushing people away from our shores.

These people have risked their lives to escape terrifying circumstances, the scale of which most of us could never imagine. Yet they have been let down, once again, by the leaders of one of the most fortunate countries in the world.

Leaders take note – we have had enough.

**Julie Edwards**  
**Chief Executive Officer**