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BUILDING MORE PRISONS NOT THE ANSWER TO REDUCING CRIME RATES

The introduction of minimum mandatory sentencing, the abolition of home detention and suspended sentences are all set to worsen an overcrowded prison system and tighten the screws on young people who are crying out for help, said Julie Edwards, Chief Executive Officer of Jesuit Social Services, an organisation which helps more than 500 young people per year to break the cycle of reoffending.

Ms Edwards said building more prisons is not the answer to reducing crime rates.

“We know we can reduce crime rates through methods that divert young people from prison and focus on reducing the likelihood they will reoffend. If you treat the symptom only, you will not fix the problem.

“Jesuit Social Services is calling on the Baillieu Government to halt the introduction of minimum mandatory sentencing for young offenders and fund community based programs which are a proven alternative to prison.

“Some may argue that diverting young offenders away from prison is throwing good money after bad people, but with 35 years of experience in this field we know that locking them up is throwing good money after bad policy – it doesn’t lower crime rate and it doesn’t lower the imprisonment rate.

“Every person kept out of custody for a year saves the tax payer \$88,000.

“The Baillieu Government seems set to turn back the clock and embark on policies that go against all the research that shows the best way to reduce crime rates in the long-term is through early intervention and support.

“These programs can be the difference between keeping a young person out of trouble and steering them towards education and work, and the start of a lifetime of re-offending and institutionalisation.

“Research shows that there is a strong link between disadvantage and offending and once someone is put in jail, two out of three young people will reoffend.

“Whereas diversionary programs such as the Community Group Conferencing Program works, with more than 80 per cent of young people involved in the program not reoffending within 2 years.

“The Government should be focussing its attention on the causes of crime – poverty, homelessness, mental health and addiction problems – rather than throwing billions of dollars locking more people up,” she said.

The Youth Group Conferencing Program brings young offenders, victims and other community members together to talk about a crime and its impacts. It encourages young offenders to take responsibility for their actions and gives those affected a chance to be heard and be involved in developing a plan to make amends.

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