

Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> April 2012

**Jesuit Social Services response to announcement of parliamentary inquiry into handling of abuse**

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the state government's announcement of a parliamentary inquiry into the handling of alleged criminal abuse of children by religious and other organisations but remains concerned about the capacity of the parliamentary inquiry to provide justice for victims.

Responding to the Premier's announcement of the inquiry, Julie Edwards, CEO of Jesuit Social Services said, "Sexual abuse of young and vulnerable people is utterly deplorable. Through our various programs we know about the enduring and damaging legacy of abuse. In our Support After Suicide program we work with a number of people who are grieving the suicide of a loved one whose life had been impacted by abuse, including abuse by clergy. We sympathise with victims and are deeply concerned that their pain and anguish has been deepened by failures to act in their best interests when dealing with allegations of abuse."

"We welcome any opportunity for scrutiny of the response of religious and community organisations into acts of abuse and how they have been dealt with. However, we are concerned that the current inquiry will lack the resources, expertise and distance from government to meet the needs of victims."

"In order to demonstrate remorse for past wrongs it is vital for religious and community organisations to open policies, procedures and practices in relation to abuse to external scrutiny. Our concern is that the lack of time and resources available to this inquiry will mean that the full level of scrutiny that is required is not met. The inquiry by Justice Cummins into Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children demonstrated the depth of investigation, sensitivity to victims and impartiality needed to deal with the issue of neglected children. We believe that previous victims of sexual abuse deserve the same standard of inquiry."

Reflecting on the inquiry's significance for Jesuit Social Services, Ms Edwards said, "Protecting and promoting the welfare of vulnerable children and adults lies at the heart of Jesuit Social Services' work and the work of the community sector throughout Victoria. We welcome any opportunity to render a public account of how we preserve and protect the welfare of those that we serve."

"While this inquiry is welcomed, we believe that religious and community organisations will not be able to move forward with public confidence until they have been adequately held to account."

Jesuit Social Services is a not-for-profit organisation which works to build a just society by advocating for social change and promoting the health and wellbeing of disadvantaged young people, families and communities.

**MEDIA ENQUIRIES**

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**MEDIA COMMENTS**

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