

## MEDIA RELEASE

8<sup>th</sup> October 2012

### **Better diversion of young offenders can prevent lives of crime**

The Victorian State Government must seize the opportunity to improve the State's approach to divert young Victorians away from involvement in the criminal justice system.

Commenting on the release of [Jesuit Social Services' submission](#) to the Victorian Government discussion paper on youth justice diversion, Sally Parnell, acting CEO of Jesuit Social Services said, "Through diversion we can hold young offenders to account, whilst at the same time limiting their exposure to the criminal justice system. Research shows that diversion produces better outcomes for young people and reduces involvement in the criminal justice system. In the long run the community benefits through reduced reoffending, a safer community and lower costs of youth justice and custodial services."

Ms Parnell stressed the need for comprehensive diversion options attuned to the different circumstances of young offenders, "Through our experience and research we know that most young offenders commit one or two crimes during their adolescent years only. Our greatest concern is with chronic young offenders, often with troubled families and chaotic lives, who start offending at a young age and continue to offend through their teenage years and into adulthood.

"This very small group of young people is responsible for a significant amount of crime committed in our community. Diversion processes *plus* intensive supports are required to prevent these young people escalating into lives of crime."

Jesuit Social Services' submission noted several specific areas of concern for diversion in Victoria, including a decrease in cautioning and summons and a rise in arrests over the past decade. The submission also highlighted the concerning fact that a significant number of young Victorians were being held in custodial remand for short periods of time only, including over weekends. Recommendations for reforms to legislation, policy and practice to address these issues were made. This included calls for legislative reform to encourage police to caution young people where appropriate and the development of alternative solutions to the use of overnight remand.

Outlining some key areas where improvement is needed, Ms Parnell said, "We need a greater level of coordination and consistency across the youth justice system, as well as better information systems and sharing of our knowledge of what works."

"At the heart of our approach, we must build relationships and demonstrate inherent respect for young people. Through this we will be able to turn lives around and help young people to realise their potential."

Jesuit Social Services' submission can be read by clicking [here](#).

**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.**