

Thursday 26th April 2012

Jesuit Social Services supports launch of Justice Reinvestment Campaign

Jesuit Social Services fully supports the launch of The Justice Reinvestment for Aboriginal Young People campaign. The campaign calls for millions of dollars to be diverted from the juvenile justice system each year into prevention to stem the "shameful" high rate of jailed young Aborigines in NSW (SMH, *Bold steps needed to keep Aborigines out of jail*, 2/5/12). The campaign organisers should be congratulated on gaining the support of high-profile leaders including the NSW Governor, Marie Bashir, former High Court judge Michael Kirby, former state attorney-general Bob Debus, and Aboriginal rights campaigners such as Mick Gooda, from the Australian Human Rights Commission.

Through experience managing Brosnan Youth Services in Victoria, especially the Konnect Koori Support program, it is clear that juvenile justice systems throughout the country are locking indigenous youths into lives of crime rather than providing alternative pathways. More resources are desperately needed to fund diversionary programs like Youth Justice Group Conferencing to divert young people from incarceration, and then providing more post-release support to prevent recidivism such as through the Konnect Koori Support program.

"The vast over-representation of Aboriginal young people in the justice system is an Australian wide disgrace" said acting Jesuit Social Services CEO, Sally Parnell. "What really concerns us at Jesuit Social Services is that we know who many of these young people are from a young age. We must be able to prevent their escalation within the justice system – and more importantly stop their coming to the attention of police and courts in the first place".

Ms Parnell pointed to recent data produced by Jesuit Social Services that showed the high proportions of young people in custodial settings who had been first supervised by youth justice authorities or first detained at 14 years of age or younger. "This data was extrapolated from a 2009-10 AIHW publication" said Ms Parnell. "It shows that while at any time 21% of all young people in detention cross Australia are 14 years of age or younger, 48% were first supervised and 41% were first detained at this young age. For Aboriginal children, the rates are even higher – 27% of Indigenous young people in youth custodial setting were 14 years of age or younger, with a very high 68% first supervised and 54% first detained at this age."

Ms Parnell pointed out that data was not available for Western Australia and Northern Territory. "In many ways, this adds to the enormity of these figures as we are mainly talking about the Eastern States. We can't be deluded that this is an outback problem. It is a nationwide problem.

I remember the wide media coverage and political intervention last year when a 14 year old Australian 'Bali Boy' found himself detained in Indonesia. We need to show the same level of concern for any child of this age caught within the criminal justice system, and most particularly for Aboriginal young people, given their over-representation and the degree of hardship, disadvantage and trauma so often at the root of their offending," said Ms Parnell. "Prisons are not the answer. We all need to add our voices to the call by The Justice Reinvestment for Aboriginal Young People campaign to redirect funding to the development of preventative actions not more imprisonments."

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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