**LETTER TO THE EDITOR   
18th January 2013**

Recent research by Jesuit Social Services fully supports the issues raised in The Australian today about how the justice *and* welfare systems fail young Aboriginal offenders (‘Broken system fails the offenders’ Amos Aikman, Natasha Robinson, 18/1/2013). Our soon to be published research examined the incidence and experience of remand for children under 18 years of age in Victoria. It confirmed findings of national research, consistent with the picture in the Northern Territory depicted by The Australian, that Aboriginal children are over –represented and are first sentenced at younger age in the youth justice system than non-Aboriginal children. As concluded by Jesuit Social Services’ research, “The over-representation of young Aboriginal people in the justice system has persisted despite this issue being the focus of policy and funded program initiatives at both a state and federal level over many years”. Our previous research findings (*Dropping Off The Edge*) confirm that this is a national issue, as true in the heart of our industrialised capital cities as in remote outback communities. For all this, the greater the underlying disadvantage in a community, the greater the problem. Clear associations have been found between the most disadvantaged communities and the incidence of prison admissions and rates of remand. Experiences of psychological, social and physical trauma in Aboriginal communities, historically and currently, exacerbate impacts of disadvantage. Our research calls for multi-layered responses commensurate with the scale of the problems to be overcome: early intervention to better support children’s development before problems arise; intensive case management in the community linked to education and employment pathways; and an increased emphasis on therapeutic custodial models - all are required to attack the problems across multiple spheres.