

**LETTER TO THE EDITOR**

**Submitted to The Australian**

**Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> January 2013**

In recent days this newspaper has shown how as a community we are failing children who come into contact with the criminal justice system ('Funding crisis for Juvenile Justice'). Through our work, Jesuit Social Services sees the complex problems that many children involved in the criminal justice system must overcome. This includes mental illness, substance abuse, homelessness, family relationship breakdown, and disengagement with education.

Police, courts and youth justice services do their best to promote community safety while also providing opportunities for children who offend to move forward with their lives. However, The Australian's coverage has shown how these opportunities are limited because of inconsistent and inadequate resourcing and the entrenched nature of the disadvantage experienced by many children who offend.

Intensive support focusing on addressing the needs of children in the criminal justice system can help them to turn their lives around. This support is most effective where it starts early, is ongoing, builds positive relationships, and helps children to realise their aspirations and become productive members of society.

Clearly, funding is required to make this a reality and also to ease the strain on youth justice systems. However, there is also a pressing need for more effective use of existing resources, better coordination between services, and enhancing community involvement in initiatives to ensure that we stop these children from falling into lives of crime.

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