

Thursday 5th January 2012

Dear Sir

I write in regard to your front page article today (Tag Teen Thugs, 5th Jan 2012) to express my grave concern and disappointment at your reporting.

Throughout this article, gross misrepresentations have been made in relation to teenagers in contact with the justice system, particularly the misuse of statistics.

Jesuit Social Services has been working with young people in the youth justice sector for 35 years. Our experience, along with the evidence, shows that preventing offending in the first place along with diverting young people away from the justice system are both crucial in keeping crime rates low and the community safe.

Community safety is not improved by locking more people up – dealing with the causes of crime and getting young people in the justice system to get their lives back on track does improve community safety.

Victoria is internationally renowned for its enlightened approach to law and order, and helping to keep young people out of the justice system is a key part of reducing and preventing crime. It is disappointing that your paper is advocating for a 'winding back of the clock' approach to law and order - an approach that we know does not work.

Further, if your paper is to use statistics, it should do so responsibly.

As Smart Justice reminds us - there are a number of different sources of statistics on crime, with two key sources being police crime statistics and crime victimisation surveys. Neither of these sources alone can provide comprehensive information about crime.

Police crime statistics measure crimes reported to police and recorded by police. Their accuracy can be affected by factors like the public's confidence in reporting crimes to police and the police's accuracy in recording particular crimes. These statistics cannot be relied upon solely.

Jesuit Social Services has previously called for an independent agency to compile, analyse and publish crime statistics, as is the case in other states such as NSW, WA and SA.

Let's have a look at what the evidence does show us:

- two out of every three young people who have been in custody re-offend within two years;
- over 80 per cent of young people involved in a group conferencing program have **not** reoffended two years later; and
- Victoria, relative to other jurisdictions, has one of the best records for low crime rates, low recidivism, and low incarceration rates - these facts are connected.

Let's preserve and improve what we've got, not start to dismantle it.

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