

Media Release

12 December 2011

CRIME RATES IN VICTORIA SET TO RISE AMID AXING OF EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

Jesuit Social Services has warned the State Government that crime rates in Victoria are at risk of dramatically increasing, following their decision to axe up to 30 youth mentor programs by the end of the year.

From December 31, the Mentoring Capacity Building initiative, which has benefitted around 7,000 youths and is credited with steering troubled youths away from crime, will no longer run.

Jesuit Social Services' Chief Executive Officer, Julie Edwards said the State Government's decision to cut a series of youth mentor programs across the State showed a serious lack of understanding about what is needed to achieve community safety.

"It is deeply concerning that the State Government is making decisions which leave thousands of vulnerable youths without access to adequate support services.

"Early intervention programs are crucial in turning youths away from a life of crime.

"We have seen this with the Jesuit Social Services-run Community Group Conferencing Program, which brings offenders face-to-face with their victim, family and community members. This is a proven alternative to prison with more than 80 per cent of participants having not reoffended within two years.

"Although the State Government may initially save money by making these cuts, in the long term, they are risking a budget blow out if more people become involved in the prison system.

"For instance, a three-month period in custody in a youth justice facility costs \$48,221 per individual, while researchers at Melbourne and Deakin Universities have estimate that investment in a targeted mentoring program would return 8 times its cost in savings by diverting young people away from crime and jail.

"We urge the State Government to reconsider its decision to cut these programs and take a moment to consider the serious repercussions on the 7,000 at-risk youths who access these services," Ms Edwards said. "Building a safe community means investing in young people like these early in life when we can make the biggest difference".

Jesuit Social Services works to build a just society where all people can live to their full potential - by partnering with community to support those most in need and working to change policies, practices, ideas and values that perpetuate inequality, prejudice and exclusion. Jesuit Social Services works in the following areas: Justice and Crime Prevention; Settlement and Community Building; Mental Health Support and Wellbeing; Education, Training and Employment since 1977. For more information, please visit www.jss.org.au

Jesuit Social Services CEO, Julie Edwards is available for comment.

For all media enquiries, please contact Stephanie De Campo (Media) on 0432 828 004