

Thursday 1st March 2012

Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry welcomed by Jesuit Social Services CEO

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the release of the 'Protecting Victoria's Vulnerable Children Inquiry' report. Jesuit Social Services CEO, Julie Edwards, acknowledged the work of the panel in achieving such a comprehensive report following many months of consultation.

"We strongly endorse the majority of the Inquiry's recommendations, in particular the emphasis on early intervention" Ms Edwards said. "We welcome the recognition of the need for both a broader framework encompassing preventative and targeted intervention to tackle the enduring nature of vulnerability, and particularly the needs of disadvantaged areas".

Jesuit Social Services' own research has demonstrated that disadvantage is highly concentrated in particular neighbourhoods, with high levels of child maltreatment interlocked with other areas of outstanding social disadvantage - a local population's limited education and limited computer access, low individual and family income, limited work credentials, poor health and disabilities and engagement in crime.

Ms Edwards said, "It was for these reasons that our submission to the Inquiry strongly contended that location- based services targeting disadvantage need to be key to any response. The Inquiry has reiterated this, finding strong correlation between higher rates of child protection reports, children commencing school identified as vulnerable and areas of high socioeconomic disadvantage.

"These findings demonstrate how children's life chances in disadvantaged areas are adversely impacted before they even get to school" Ms Edwards said. "The Inquiry's recommendations for enhanced early years services, starting before birth and including playgroups and kindergartens are essential" Ms Edwards contended. "We really need to concentrate on the pockets of deep disadvantage in our metro areas, as well as the regional areas and Aboriginal communities, highlighted by the Inquiry as over-represented in child protection reports.

"I urge the Government to consider the wider implications of some of its findings. We know from our research that risk factors are interconnected and we ask the Government to help build the strength of communities so that social inclusion, education and employment opportunities are maximised. This necessarily involves the State Government engaging with their Federal counterparts on Federal issues such as income support and taxation", Ms Edwards said.

"We need a strong community sector that can work flexibly and creatively in relationship with families, with trust in their communities to best support the most vulnerable ", Ms Edwards said. "This requires courage and humanity, alongside appropriate accountabilities and, of course, adequate resourcing. This balance is our challenge going forward."

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 COMMENTS: Julie Edwards, CEO, 0418 163 539