

MEDIA RELEASE

10th August 2012

Victoria the best when it comes to keeping kids out of jail

New research has made it clear that Victoria's youth justice system, with its focus on diversion, is effective at keeping young people out of prison.

Responding to the release of Juvenile Justice in Australia 2010-11 by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards said, "Victoria has the lowest youth detention rate in Australia. This shows how effective we are at diverting all but the most serious young offenders from custody. The Victorian government has the opportunity to strengthen this approach further through its current consultation on youth diversion."

Ms Edwards noted that nationally over two thirds of young people under supervision had been under supervision previously. "This shows that involvement in the criminal justice system becomes a way of life for many young people. Flexibility in the justice system is imperative so that young people can be effectively diverted and rehabilitated. Initiatives such as minimum mandatory sentencing must be avoided as they have the potential to entrench young people in the justice system."

"A major area of focus in Victoria is how we work to rehabilitate the small number of serious offenders who end up in detention. This is a challenge, as these young people often have a range of multiple and complex needs. As a community, we must provide support and opportunities for these young people and their families to deal with the issues that led to their offending and to become more active and productive members of the community. This will require investments in time, goodwill and resources from government and the community."

Other areas of concern in the AIHW report were the overrepresentation of young Aboriginal people and young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds in the justice system. Ms Edwards said, "The fact that Aboriginal young people are more likely to enter the justice system at a younger age and are 24 times more likely to end up in detention than nonAboriginal young people is unacceptable. We must all work together to ensure that Aboriginal communities have the resources and capacity to support their young people to participate fully in education, training and employment.

"Of equal concern is the fact that young people from low socioeconomic areas are 5.8 times more likely to end up in detention. We are pleased that the Victorian Government is moving towards area based services in line with the recommendations of the Victorian Government's Protecting Vulnerable Children Inquiry Report. Our hope is that targetted services will assist in making a difference and lower the rates of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in the justice system."

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 ENQUIRIES

Catherine Neville 0407 318 832

MEDIA COMMENTS

Julie Edwards, CEO

Key Facts from AIHW Juvenile justice in Australia 2010-11

Victoria:

- .16 young people per 1000 in detention on an average day which is the lowest rate in the country.
- Young people are 12 times more likely to be under community based supervision as in detention.
- Only 4% of young people under supervision were under the age of 13.
- Amongst 10-17 year olds in Victoria in detention, 51% were on remand.
- 20% on supervised or conditional bail in the community.

Nationally:

- 7.265 young people under juvenile justice supervision in Australia, 14% in detention. 0.4 per 1000 young people in detention on an average day.
- 48% of young people in detention in Australia are indigenous. Young indigenous people are 24 times as likely as non indigenous young people to be in detention. This is down from 28 times in 2007-08.
- Indigenous young people tend to enter the system at a younger age, 35% entered supervision when aged 10-13.
- 50% of all young people in detention were unsentenced.
- Young people from remote areas and very remote areas are 4 & 7 times as likely to be under supervision as those from cities.
- Young people from areas of lowest socioeconomic status were almost 5 times as likely to be under supervision. On an average day there were 5.8 young people from lowest socioeconomic areas under supervisions compared with 1.3 from areas of highest socioeconomic status.
- Overall trends steady, slight increase in rate of community based supervision.