

MEDIA RELEASE

17 January 2014

QLD risk community safety with knee-jerk youth justice reforms

The Queensland Government's plan to 'toughen' its approach to youth justice flies in the face of Victoria's success responding effectively to youth crime and building a safer community, says Jesuit Social Services' CEO, Julie Edwards.

Responding to the announcement of reforms to the Queensland Youth Justice Act, Ms Edwards said, "The evidence is clear that these reforms take a completely wrong approach to dealing with young people who offend. From our 36 years experience working with these young people we know that providing the right diversion options and supports to get young people back on track actually works to reduce repeat offending.

"Conversely, prison – and particularly adult prison – often sends young people down a path of no return. In the end this only threatens the wider safety of our community."

Successive Victorian Governments have made wise investments providing diversion options for young offenders and improving community support – and as a consequence have achieved a 75 per cent decline in the rate of young people in prison since 1981. At the same time the number of children who offend has also declined (13 per cent between 2001 and 2011). Victoria has the second lowest youth offending rate in the country.

Providing meaningful justice processes such as Youth Justice Group Conferencing is an important and successful Victorian approach. An evaluation by KPMG found that. Group Conferencing holds offenders to account, gives victims a say, and importantly reduces reoffending significantly compared with incarceration. "We urge all Australian governments to respond to offending by building on solutions that are proven to work.

"Despite its progress to date, even now there are gaps in the availability of diversion and intensive support opportunities for young people in Victoria. These should be addressed to further strengthen our approach. This is particularly the case for young people in rural and regional areas."

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: Andrew Yule 0448 380 455, andrew.yule@jss.org.au