

MEDIA RELEASE

13 September 2012

Young offenders need our help

The on the ground experience of Jesuit Social Services sadly affirms the unfortunate circumstances of many young offenders as described in the Age today ('Youth histories shocking') by County Court judge Michael Bourke, who chairs the youth parole and residential boards.

"Many of the young people with whom we work in our youth justice programs have had childhood experiences that are truly shocking," said Acting CEO of Jesuit Social Services, Sally Parnell. "It is not unusual for young people to not know a single adult who has held a regular job, or for crime, homelessness and poverty to be the everyday experience in some family networks.

"The essence to helping young people is to develop a relationship based on trust as the foundational pathway to a better future. This is extremely difficult when the childhood of many of these young people is characterised by abuse, neglect and abandonment, as described by Judge Bourke," Ms Parnell said.

Ms Parnell further said that government plans to introduce mandatory minimum sentences for 16-17 year olds will only further compound the difficulties experienced by these young people. "Research after research shows that locking young people up does not turn their lives around or make the community safer," said Ms Parnell. "We need dedicated, intensive programs that can provide young people with the time and attention they have not experienced in their younger years".

Analysis by Jesuit Social Services reveals that high proportions of young people currently charged by the police with offences or detained in youth justice settings first came to the attention of authorities at a younger age. "Our research shows that the same local government areas with high numbers of young offenders are the same local government areas where infants miss regular maternal and child health checks and where there are higher rates of developmental vulnerability in children as they start school.

"Punitive and blaming responses to young people with such disrupted and traumatised childhood histories will get us nowhere," Ms Parnell said. "Humane responses, supported by evidence about the types of interventions most likely to make a difference, must be the number one priority."

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

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