



JESUIT SOCIAL SERVICES' RESPONSE:  
Victorian Government's *What's Important to*  
*YOUth?* discussion paper

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Jesuit Social Services welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Victorian Government's *What's Important to YOUTH?* discussion paper. We commend the development of a whole-of-government youth policy that focuses on the needs of all young people, but particularly those that are disadvantaged and disengaged.

## Our expertise

Jesuit Social Services has been a longstanding advocate for disadvantaged young people. For over 37 years, we have accompanied young people who are disengaged from education, training and work. By working in solidarity with young people in need, Jesuit Social Services strives to build a just society where the dignity of all people is respected and the common good is pursued.

Our service delivery and advocacy focuses on the following key areas:

- **Justice and crime prevention** - for people involved with the criminal justice system
- **Education, training and employment** - for people with barriers to sustainable employment
- **Mental health and wellbeing** - for people with multiple and complex needs and those affected by trauma, suicide, and complex bereavement
- **Settlement and community building** - for recently arrived immigrants, refugees, displaced people and disadvantaged communities.

Jesuit Social Services, through our Brosnan services, delivers a range of programs to young people who intersect with the criminal justice system, including the Youth Justice Community Support Service (YJCSS), residential services, and therapeutic and diversionary programs. Our youth services recognise that young people in the justice system present with a range of complex and varied needs that require an individualised service response. Our youth programs include:

- **Youth Justice Community Support Services** – provides intensive case management for young people aged 10-21 engaged with the justice system.
- **Youth Justice Group Conferencing** – provides a sentencing option, based on restorative justice principles, for young people aged 10 to 17 (at the time of offending).
- **Next Steps** – aims to prevent homelessness for highly vulnerable young people aged 16-24 who intersect with the youth justice or adult justice systems.
- **Jesuit Community College** – assists people facing significant barriers to learning and provides real skills for life, learning and work.
- **Connexions** – counsels young people with a 'dual diagnosis' of mental illness and substance misuse, whose diagnosis can be formal or self-reported.
- **The Artful Dodgers Studios** – provides innovative and creative spaces for young people
- **The Outdoor Experience** – offers an alternative treatment service through a range of outdoor intervention programs for young people aged 15-25 years, who have or have had problems with alcohol and/or other drugs.
- **L2P** – supports young people to access supervised driving practice, to assist them to complete the required 120 hours of driving practice prior to taking their Probationary License test.

Further description of our youth programs is provided at Appendix 1.

### **This submission responds to the following questions:**

- Q. What do you think should be done to improve educational opportunities for young people?
- Q. What do you think should be done to improve training opportunities for young people?
- Q. What do you think should be done to increase employment opportunities for young people?
- Q. What do you think should be done to improve the mental health of young people?
- Q. What do you think should be done to improve housing for young people?
- Q. What else do you think should be done to improve the lives of young people in Victoria?

## **Our response**

### **Q. What do you think should be done to improve educational opportunities for young people?**

While most young Victorians do well in education and on average Victorian school students compare favourably with students in other jurisdictions, this is not the case for young people who grow up in families or communities that are disadvantaged.

Educational outcomes and social disadvantage are persistently linked in Victoria. This link clearly indicates that our education system is failing to adequately contribute to social and economic mobility.

The consequence is a significant cohort of young people who lack the literacy, numeracy and problem solving skills necessary to successfully engage in the modern economy; a problem that is worsening as the Victorian economy shifts away from sectors, such as manufacturing, that traditionally created opportunities for low skilled workers.

Addressing this inequality is perhaps the most fundamental change that would alter the life opportunities of disadvantaged young people, and should be a priority objective of government. Adjusting funding models to direct additional resources to schools with high numbers of disadvantaged students is one way to contribute to this objective. Investing in the educational needs of these young people makes sound economic sense if we are to prevent a range of negative social outcomes, not only for young people and their families, but for the community more broadly.

However, while a critical component, additional resources are not the only reform necessary to improve disadvantaged young people's educational opportunities.

Strategies are also needed to ensure that:

- Schools provide learning environments that meet a diversity of young people's needs; including by providing broader curriculum choices, and more diverse classroom structures and teaching styles.

This is particularly important to maximise the opportunities of students with delayed development to fulfil their potential. The importance of flexibility, support and relevant

coursework was recently highlighted as a critical driver of disengagement from learning by YACVic in interviews conducted with young people who had disengaged from education:<sup>1</sup>

*When it comes to education, like one size doesn't fit all – it's like a shoe, you know; everyone learns differently and you can't make someone learn how you want them to learn if that's not how they learn. It's like, [this school] understands that and they adapt things so that you can learn your way.*  
– Cassy

- Schools provide environments in which young people feel safe and welcome, and where they are free from discrimination or bullying
- Young people have access to the basic tools for education, such as uniforms, computers, internet access, books, space to study, and resources to participate in school activities such as camps and excursions
- Young people are supported to manage challenges that affect their engagement in learning, such as family violence, homelessness, and their own or family member's mental illness, or drug and alcohol problems.
- Young people who disengage from school are swiftly and systematically followed up and supported to reengage in learning programs that meet their needs.

Creating a universal education and youth services system that is able to respond holistically to young people in this way will involve developing partnerships that extend beyond the school gate. While, the current model of child and youth area partnerships has the capacity to develop local approaches for learning and support that would better meet young people's needs, it is difficult to ascertain whether these approaches will continue to realise this potential.<sup>2</sup>

## Recommendations

1. Make breaking the nexus between social disadvantage and educational outcomes a priority objective of Victoria's education system.
2. Fund direct support to families to meet the costs of engaging in education, including the costs of technology.
3. Invest in sustained local partnerships between education providers, health and welfare services and local industry to ensure local communities have resources and programs to provide:
  - a diversity of curriculum and learning programs and safe school environments to meet the diversity of young people's needs
  - holistic support to young people struggling with issues such as family violence, homelessness, mental illness or drug and alcohol abuse
  - swift and systematic follow up with young people who disengage from education
  - flexible learning packages for young people who can't immediately reengage in mainstream school.

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<sup>1</sup> Randall L, Morstyn L & Walsh K, Two way street: Young people informing improvements to schools and youth services, YACVic, 2013

<sup>2</sup> Note this section draws on the content in Colvin, K, 2015 'The Edge of the Edge', *Young People at the Margins, Under the Pump! The pressures on young Australians*, John Cain Foundation, Port Melbourne, <http://johncainfoundation.com.au/>

## Q. What do you think should be done to improve training opportunities for young people?

Reforms to the vocational training sector in Victoria, including significant cuts to TAFE and VET in schools, have resulted in a loss of many programs that provided higher needs young learners with learning pathways within, or beyond, mainstream schools.

These reforms have also contributed to rapid growth in providers delivering poor quality learning programs.

The consequence is that young people who have had poor experiences in school, and who lack the skills or motivation to independently engage in VET programs, have very limited opportunities to be engaged in training.

Programs in the ACFE sector that are specifically tailored to re-engaging high needs learners are too scarce and too poorly funded to offer a comprehensive systematic response. Nonetheless, these programs provide insight into the flexibility and holistic support needed to successfully reengage highly marginalised learners.

Research clearly indicates that the critical characteristics of programs that effectively engage high needs learners include:

- Intensive and sustained engagement
- Support for wider needs of learners
- Flexible learning environments
- Pathways into further learning and work

Programs delivered by Jesuit Community College that include these characteristics have been shown to be successful in achieving both learning and employment outcomes, and significant improvements in participants' health and wellbeing.

A more systematic and better resourced approach to learning programs tailored for high needs learners would address what is currently a serious gap in the education system. Programs should be: tailored to student needs; offer holistic support; support students' transitions and career pathways; be accessible and affordable to students; and invest in students' engagement and retention.

### Recommendations

4. Create flexible funding packages for high quality education and training programs to work holistically with high needs learners. These packages should be delivered to organisations with a proven record of success across a range of educational and wellbeing outcomes.
5. Direct packages of support to hard-to-reach learners in areas of concentrated disadvantage, as part of a whole-of-community response, which invests in education programs alongside other support services such as mental health, domestic violence and homelessness services.

## Q. What do you think should be done to increase employment opportunities for young people?

The job market for young people has changed dramatically in the last decade. Not only is there record high youth unemployment (upwards of 20 per cent in some areas), but long-term unemployment for young people has more than tripled since 2008, and underemployment is also growing.<sup>3</sup> The number of traditional entry-level jobs for young people has shrunk at a time when the job market has become more competitive with the growing demand for qualified, skilled and experienced workers. Disadvantaged young people are the most likely to suffer the brunt of these changes.

We know that certain locations and communities are linked to lower levels of labour force participation, lower levels of educational attainment and higher youth unemployment rates. Youth unemployment is significant and notably worse in regional and remote communities and in the urban growth corridors. The *Dropping Off the Edge* (DOTE) report by Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia (2015) found that the most vulnerable 4 per cent of localities in Victoria showed high rates of unemployment, criminal convictions, disability, child maltreatment, family violence and psychiatric admissions alongside low levels of education.<sup>4</sup>

Through our research and advocacy, Jesuit Social Services has consistently identified recurring systemic barriers to employment for the most disadvantaged young people in our community. These systemic barriers include:

- Limitations in the range of support offered to young people who are clients of jobactive or mainstream training institutions.
- The focus on compliance and meeting prescribed outcomes, which fails to address the needs of disadvantaged young people.
- The lack of explicit pathways from training and learning programs into employment and participation.
- Insufficient support for work experience programs (whether that be through Work for the Dole, volunteering or other work experience) including in providing pathways to employment.
- Insufficient recognition of the significant time and effort it takes to engage with and build trusting relationships with disadvantaged young people as a platform for engagement in education, training and future employment.

Increasing employment opportunities for disadvantaged young people requires addressing the barriers they face. We believe this requires an approach that is place-based, that supports job readiness, increases opportunities for work experience, provides support on-the-job, and works with employers to create work opportunities for disadvantaged young people.

Vulnerable and highly disadvantaged young people can face multiple barriers to employment. Mainstream employment programs often do not provide the intensive support they need. In our experience, disadvantaged young people need a range of wrap-around supports that can help to address their broader needs and the non-vocational barriers they face. In addition, support must be relationship-based, and take a tailored, flexible approach to address the needs of each individual.

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<sup>3</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2014, *Labour force April 2014*, Cat. no. 6202.0, ABS, Canberra.

<sup>4</sup> Vinson T & Rawsthorne M, 2015, *Dropping Off the Edge*, Persistent Communal Disadvantage in Australia, Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia, [http://www.dote.org.au/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/0001\\_dote\\_2015.pdf](http://www.dote.org.au/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/0001_dote_2015.pdf)

Many disadvantaged young people do not have the confidence or knowledge to access large educational or training institutions, and do not feel prepared to access mainstream employment programs. This lack of confidence and knowledge acts as a barrier to employment. This is why 'soft entry' points for disadvantaged youth are critical. Soft entry points are local, welcoming, youth specific environments that engage young people in a range of educational and employment-related activities. This approach creates opportunities for building relationships, and providing pathways to engagement, education and eventual employment. This can involve working with young people in various formats – for example, through an art and music program.

Another barrier that disadvantaged young people face is the limited opportunities for work experience. Work experience can act as a critical stepping stone to employment for young people. Research shows that employers are reluctant to interview people without relevant experience, and yet there are few available opportunities particularly for disadvantaged young people to acquire that experience.<sup>5</sup> Work experience is a critical avenue for disadvantaged young people to build connections to the workplace, build their confidence and develop workplace skills and readiness.

On-the-job support is another crucial element that is missing in many of the current programs. On-the-job support is vital in the early weeks and months of employment, including in volunteer and work experience roles. However, in most instances there is no post-placement support provided by mainstream job assistance programs (such as jobactive).

One of the other key gaps in the current response to addressing disadvantage in employment is the underdevelopment of demand-led approaches to employment programs. Demand-led approaches involve partnerships between community agencies and business to create employment opportunities for disadvantaged young people. Over many years, Jesuit Social Services has developed an understanding of what it takes to engage with employers to create work opportunities for highly disadvantaged people. This includes linking jobs to training through Jesuit Community College, and to work experience placements through our Workforce Inclusion Program.

Demand-led partnership models can be based on identified vacancies or work experience opportunities, in which a young person is provided with job readiness assistance and on-the-job support. Once the positions have been identified, the community partner: i) works to identify and meet training needs in matched employment candidates; and ii) ensures adequate support to transition the young person to sustained employment. This model also has the advantage that employers get to know disadvantaged young people, thereby counteracting any negative perceptions they may have. It also allows employers to mitigate what they might perceive as risk in recruiting a young person with minimal work history. However, in order to realise these partnership approaches for the most disadvantaged young people, these initiatives require further investment and support.

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<sup>5</sup> Department of Employment 2013, *Regional reports of employers' recruitment experiences* <<https://employment.gov.au/regionalreport>>.

## Recommendations

6. Trial whole-of-community approaches in the most highly disadvantaged communities to address youth unemployment in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage.
7. Design training and employment program that are tailored to the young person's needs, are accessible and affordable, and which invest in the engagement and retention of disadvantaged groups.
8. Fund engagement activities and soft entry approaches in local areas for hard-to-reach young people.
9. Fund 'wrap around' support packages to assist young people to overcome non-vocational barriers to social and economic inclusion.
10. Fund work experience as an embedded element of the pathway to employment in all training and employment programs.
11. Fund post-job placement support as a core component of all employment programs for disadvantaged young people.
12. Foster business and community partnerships, and support existing partnerships to deliver pathways to youth employment, including ongoing post-placement support.

## Q. What do you think should be done to improve the mental health of young people?

A number of significant issues contribute to poor mental health among young people, including discrimination and bullying, family dysfunction and abuse and neglect, sexual assault and homelessness. Young people with histories of trauma often have multiple co-occurring issues, such as homelessness, substance misuse and mental illness, which reinforce each other and make recovery harder to achieve.

Strategies are needed to address these drivers of poor mental health at their cause, and to provide the service responses that can assist young people experiencing poor mental health.

Given the particular issues and needs of young people with mental illness – including reluctance to identify mental health symptoms as mental illness, and rejection of services perceived to be programs or places for adults – it is critical that services are specifically designed to provide 'soft entry' and a 'safe place' for young people. Soft entry environments in the context of youth mental health responses can be defined as welcoming, inclusive, youth orientated environments that do not have an explicit focus on mental illness, but rather seek to engage and build a relationship with young people as an avenue to further support.

The case of Minoo\* highlights the importance of both providing a 'soft entry' to services, and also not requiring a young person to identify as mentally ill.

Minoo\* is South Sudanese and 21 years old. She began coming into the Artful Dodgers Studio in March 2015 to make rap music, and developed a rapport with the Connexions case worker based at the Studio. This worker visited her at home and encouraged Minoo to participate in counselling at the Studio.

Minoo was presenting with symptoms of depression, PTSD and alcohol dependence but did not identify with having any mental health problems. In fact, Mino had no knowledge of what mental health was, or the need for any support services.

During her initial contacts, Minoo attended alcohol-impaired, had regular involvement with the police and outstanding legal matters, and was not receptive to further referral to services.

In July, Minoo completed a seven day detox and has now been sober for 2 ½ weeks, which is the first time she has not consumed alcohol for more than a few days this year. She has attended all of her court dates and, supported by the Connexions worker, has submitted a family court application to gain legal custody of her son, who was last year taken interstate by his grandfather.

She is also continuing to work on her songwriting and music.

Many young people find an entry to mental health services through Headspace. Headspace has been an important and welcome addition to the mental health care landscape over recent years. However, Headspace provides a predominantly clinical response that is not geared to work with young people with more complex needs. For this reason, many young people are referred by Headspace to our Connexions and Artful Dodgers programs in recognition that they need a more flexible, intensive response with outreach capacity. In addition, some of our Connexions counsellors are collocated at two Headspace locations to assist young people with complex behaviours to access counselling services in a more flexible response than Headspace are able to do in a clinical environment.

The case of Helen highlights the importance of specialist services working alongside Headspace.

Helen\* is a 24 year old woman who suffers from significant anxiety, panic and depression. She has fortnightly support from a Neami worker, who made the referral to Connexions so she could receive counselling in her home. Helen has previously engaged with Headspace and Area Mental Health, but disengaged with them due to her anxiety and panic. Helen was then discharged from their service for not making scheduled appointments.

After regular appointments in her home, where she spends the majority of her time as a consequence of her anxiety, panic and agoraphobia, Connexions encouraged Helen to move some sessions out into the community - in the park near her home.

Together, they are working towards engaging with Artful Dodgers, as Helen is musically and artistically interested and talented.

The importance of a youth-specific approach was disregarded in the previous government's recommissioning of community-based mental health services, and as a result a number of

specialist youth services were defunded in favour of mainstream services. In addition, changes to service access mean that people are required to have a recent mental health diagnosis to access services, and a centralised phone-based intake service requires young people to identify as having a mental illness, and describe their mental health symptoms to a stranger over the phone as a precondition to receive support. These barriers have proved prohibitive for young people, resulting in many young people no longer having access to critical supports.

Research and practice evidence highlights the importance of the following elements in working with young people who have multiple and complex needs: the centrality of relationships, use of a strengths-based approach, a whole of needs approach, a 'no wrong door' model of access to health and social services, a flexible approach to service delivery, and service user empowerment.<sup>6,7</sup>

Jesuit Social Services has recommended the phone-based intake model be dismantled and be replaced by a 'no wrong door' approach that builds capacity for initial intake and assessment into the services that young people are already accessing. Jesuit Social Services has significant experience working with young people in contact with the justice system who have complex needs, including histories of trauma. Many of these young people also have experiences of being excluded from mainstream mental health or community services because they fail to meet service expectations around attending appointments, or have challenging behaviours.

Jesuit Social Services has also highlighted the importance of refunding specialist programs, such as the Artful Dodgers/ Connexions program for young people with coexistent mental health and drug and alcohol programs. These programs provide young people with opportunities for meaningful activity that supports their social inclusion and formation of positive self-identity, with a 'soft entry' to more formal counselling and case management support. In addition for young people with mental health issues we know that:

- They commonly have relatively chaotic lives and do not successfully engage with appointment-based supports.
- The development of relationships is an essential precursor to more formal therapeutic engagement.
- Young people's drug abuse, family relationships, housing and other issues need to be addressed alongside mental health issues.
- Young people's mental health is significantly enhanced by support that improves their social inclusion and engages them in meaningful activity.
- Young Aboriginal people and young people from CALD backgrounds need support that is culturally safe and sensitive to their cultural context.

## Recommendations

13. Support soft entry approaches and youth-specific programs such as art and music programs, with provision for outreach as a way to address the barriers to accessing counselling and case management support for young people with complex needs.
14. Support a 'no wrong door' approach that builds the initial intake and assessment capacity into existing services that young people with complex needs already currently access.

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<sup>6</sup> Rankin, Jennifer & Raegan, Sue (2004). *Meeting Complex Needs; the future of social care.*

<sup>7</sup> Parker, R 2009, 'Helping families with complex needs: Integration of the Strength to Strength and Resources for Adolescents and Parents programs', *Family Relationships Quarterly*, No. 14.

15. While mainstream services need to become more sensitive to the needs of young people with mental health issues, it is important that specialist services are also supported, including those with demonstrated skill in working with young people with complex needs.

## Q. What do you think should be done to improve housing for young people?

Homelessness for young people is a significant issue with far-reaching social and economic consequences. In 2012-13 in Victoria, 19,766 people aged 15 to 24 years old sought help from homelessness services; 21% of all people assisted.<sup>8</sup> A far higher number undoubtedly experienced homelessness without interacting with homelessness services.

Young people who are leaving out-of-home care are particularly vulnerable to homelessness, with between one half and one third experiencing homelessness in the first two years after leaving care. These young people are also most at risk of long-term homelessness and contact with the youth justice system.

Homelessness makes it far harder for young people to make a successful transition to adulthood; they commonly lose contact with education or employment, and their physical and mental health suffers. Often homelessness precedes or exacerbates problematic substance use among young people and engagement in criminal activity. Young people who are homeless are also extremely vulnerable to violence and sexual exploitation; experiencing such trauma further compounds mental health and substance use problems.

These experiences are devastating for the young people involved, and also represent significant, often lifetime costs to government that far exceed the costs of providing housing and support to young people who become homeless.

In designing programs to address youth homelessness, it is critical to specifically address the youth-specific needs of young people including:

- Supporting them to make a successful transition to adulthood, including building positive and pro-social identity, linking to education and/or employment, and supporting improved mental and physical health.
- Supporting reconnection, where possible, with family and other positive community connections.
- Supporting development of independent living skills.

A variety of programs are needed to respond to the different pathways that young people take into homelessness, and the diversity of need within the young homeless cohort.

For example:

- Young people with positive connections to families or carers, but who need a safe independent living space, benefit from a model like the Kids Under Cover studios, which reduces conflict from being 'under the same roof' and supports young people to remain engaged in education.
- Young people unable to live with families or carers, but who can manage the responsibilities and relative independence of Youth Foyers, benefit from the focus on education and living skills of that approach.

In addition to supporting the housing needs of homeless young people generally, it is important to recognise the small subset of young people with highly complex needs –

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<sup>8</sup> <http://chp.org.au/homelessness/youth-homelessness/>

including combinations of intellectual impairment or acquired brain injury, histories of trauma, substance abuse, and mental illness – who demonstrate persistent problem behaviour. Currently, mainstream and generic service systems struggle to adequately or effectively respond to this group.

The challenging behaviours of this group, including displays of anger, use of violence, self-harming, inappropriate sexual behaviour and drug use, among others, result in these young people being excluded from services. As a consequence, they often 'bounce around' Victoria's emergency departments, acute mental health services, homelessness services and justice programs at significant cost to government, but without perceptible positive outcomes.

In addition to the costs of social care – often hundreds of thousands of dollars annually – these young people also utilise considerable police and broader justice system resources.

Addressing the housing and support needs of this very vulnerable group is a critical gap in the youth service system in Victoria. Jesuit Social Services proposes that the government build on programs such as Next Steps and Perry House programs to provide safe housing and intensive therapeutic support for highly complex young people. Such an approach needs to:

- Stabilise housing and build independent living skills.
- Re-establish connections with family and other positive connections within the community.
- Provide intensive trauma-informed support through assertive outreach case management that is long-term and episodic.
- Provide a tailored therapeutic intervention that responds to participants' histories of complex trauma and addresses a pattern of violence and/or offending.
- Encourage participation in pro-social and meaningful activities (such as education or art/music practice as a means to establish positive self-identity and to strengthen self-worth) through coaching, mentoring and practical assistance.
- Develop and support tailored pathways to employment or other meaningful participation in community life.

## **Recommendations**

Broader reforms are needed to improve outcomes for young homeless people in Victoria, including:

14. Investing in a 'housing guarantee' to offer all young people leaving care a package of housing and support services up to the age of 25.
15. Investing in a range of long term housing options with appropriate support suitable for the diversity of young people who become homeless.
16. Changing the access and eligibility arrangements for social and community housing options for young people to increase their access to these options.
17. Investing in models that link safe and supported housing with intensive therapeutic support for highly complex young people.

## Q. What else do you think should be done to improve the lives of young people in Victoria?

Jesuit Social Services works with young people involved in the criminal justice system including in our Youth Justice Community Support Service (YJCSS). These young people are often disengaged from education at an early age, have lower-level cognitive functioning, have lived a transient lifestyle and are often institutionalised. This is further compounded by homelessness or living in home environments where there is ongoing family violence or a history of inter-generational unemployment.

Although, in general, Victoria has a robust youth justice system, there are critical gaps and inconsistencies in the current system that are negatively impacting on our young people and drawing them further into the criminal justice system, rather than diverting them away from the system. In 2014-15 the recidivism rate for prisoners in Victoria under 25 years of age was 52.7%. This is more than 8% higher than the rate of 44.1% for the general population.<sup>9</sup> We know that a significant number of young people in the justice system are faced with considerable difficulties and that without assistance will be more likely to reoffend. We believe there is a critical need to reform aspects of the current system so that disadvantaged young people are not drawn further into the criminal justice system.

Currently there are a number of shortcomings in the system which we believe need to be addressed, such as:

- The uneven availability of diversion programs around Victoria, meaning many young people miss out on being diverted away from the criminal justice system.
- The absence of a legislative framework for diversion and consequent inconsistent access to pre-Court and pre-plea diversion opportunities.
- Changes to the Bail Act involving the application of provisions in the Act to children and young people, which have resulted in significant increases in the numbers of children and young people on remand.
- The anomaly by which highly vulnerable young people 18-21 can be sentenced to youth detention but are remanded in adult prisons and supervised on community corrections orders under the adult system.
- The restriction of the 'dual track' sentencing option to young people under 21, resulting in highly vulnerable young people 21-25 being detained in adult prisons.

In addition, we are concerned that young people on remand and in detention, and those on community correction orders, are not gaining the support they need so that they can participate in training and education and employment opportunities. Providing support to these young people is critical so that they:

- Can rebuild their lives, and reduce the risk of reoffending.
- Develop their independence, resilience and positive connections to family and community.
- Improve their capacity to participate in educational and economic opportunities.
- Adopt a restorative justice approach to build accountability in the young person.
- Promote and develop a stable, pro-social identity capable of resisting peer influence.

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<sup>9</sup> Victorian Ombudsman, *Victorian Ombudsman's Investigation into the rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners in Victoria* September 2015, <https://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/getattachment/5188692a-35b6-411f-907e-3e7704f45e17/publications/parliamentary-reports/investigation-into-the-rehabilitation-and-reintegr.aspx>

- Develop self-sufficiency and independence and build skills to manage emotions and impulses.

## Recommendations

Accordingly, we have identified a series of major reform initiatives that are required to ensure that disadvantaged young people are not drawn further into the criminal justice system:

17. Strengthen legal protection for children by:
  - amending the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* to provide a child and youth specific bail process, and
  - amending the Bail Act 1977 to exclude its application to children.
18. Implement the recommendations of the Victorian Law Reform Commission Review of the Bail Act 1997.
19. Develop a clear, published policy for Victoria Police detailing the criteria used to determine whether to proceed against children by caution, arrest or summons.
20. Amend the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* to include a legislative framework for diversion that imposes a presumption in favour of diversion and provides a flexible range of diversion options for police and courts.
21. Expand the Koori Children's Courts to each region with an adult Koori court.
22. Reduce the over-representation of children in out of home care in remand by:
  - providing a restorative model, such as Youth Justice Group Conferencing, as an alternative approach to addressing problem behaviours
  - revising residential care protocols around involving police to manage anti-social behaviour of children, and
  - strengthening coordination between youth justice and child protection where children are involved in both systems.

Provide better access to education, training and employment for young people in the justice system including to:

23. Build stronger relationships between education and employment providers in custodial settings to prepare young people for training and/or employment on their release.
24. Enhance work training support from custody to the community, including better use of targeted training opportunities in custody.
25. Provide flexible funding for YJCSS programs so that they can assist young people to engage in training, education and employment opportunities.
26. Provide flexible employment opportunities for participants to 'transition' into work.
27. Develop partnerships with sympathetic employers who have capacity to support a planned and flexible transition to a working environment.
28. Provide targeted opportunities for this cohort to access apprenticeships.

## **Appendix 1 – Jesuit Social Services youth programs**

### **Youth Justice Community Support Services**

The Youth Justice Community Support Program provides intensive case management for young people aged 10-21 engaged with the justice system. Our approach brings together agencies currently supporting Youth Justice clients to work alongside statutory Youth Justice Case Managers to:

- achieve a reduction in the rate, severity and frequency of re-offending
- enable young people to make an effective transition to adulthood, and
- develop young people's capacity for economic, social and cultural participation

### **Youth Justice Group Conferencing**

Youth Justice Group Conferencing is a sentencing option based on restorative justice principles that aims to balance the needs of young people, victims and the community by encouraging dialogue in a controlled and structured way between individuals who have offended, their victims and the wider community. Young people who can be referred to Youth Justice Group Conferencing include young people aged 10 to 17 (at the time of offending) who have:

- pleaded guilty or have been found guilty of offence(s) that do not include homicide, manslaughter, sex offences; and
- appeared in court on a previous occasion and have committed offence(s) serious enough to warrant a supervisory order (primarily a probation order) to be considered by the court; or
- have committed offence(s) serious enough to warrant a supervisory order on their first appearance; and
- consented to participate; and
- been assessed as suitable by a DHHS Youth Justice Officer.

### **Next steps**

Next Steps is a Homelessness Innovation Action Project that aims to prevent homelessness for highly vulnerable young people 16-24 who intersect with the youth justice or adult justice systems. Next Steps delivers intensive, multi component case management support that addresses the issues of homelessness and offending, incorporating therapeutic elements and links to training, vocational and employment services.

Based in Carlton, Dillon House is the supported accommodation component of Next Steps. Dillon House provides temporary, short- term or transitional 24 hour supported accommodation for young people involved in corrections or the youth justice system.

### **Connexions**

Connexions was established in January 1995 as a response to young people experiencing co-existing mental health and drug and alcohol issues. Connexions is a counselling programs for young people with a 'dual diagnosis' of mental illness and substance misuse. Diagnosis can be formal or self-reported.

### **The Artful Dodgers Studios**

The Artful Dodgers Studios provide innovative and creative spaces for young people to work in fully equipped art and music studios with experienced artists and musicians. Young people explore and develop their creative skills and get involved in projects, exhibitions and public outcome events.

Based in Collingwood, the program offers a flexible and welcoming space for young people to work in order to increase social connectedness, self-esteem, foundation and employability skills and re-engage positively in the learning process. Young people can choose whether to engage in a short course, one on one mentoring, drop in to the open access studios to work on individual or collaborative projects or a combination of these based on readiness.

## **Jesuit Community College**

Jesuit Community College is a Registered Training Organisation and Learn Local organisation. We assist people facing significant barriers to learning, providing real skills for life, learning and work. The College also provides opportunities for personal development, a solid foundation for further education and training and connection to a community of learning. For a broader group of learners, we offer a wider range of accredited and non-accredited vocational education and training and pathways to further study and work. The College also brokers opportunities for learners to access training offered by other training organisations in ways that suit their needs and circumstances.

We offer nationally recognised qualifications in general education for adults, short courses in visual arts and pre-vocational programs. Jesuit Community College is funded by the Victorian and Federal Government for eligible student enrolments in pre accredited and accredited training. People with a disability are encouraged to apply under the Victorian Training Guarantee and Learn Local ACFE programs.

## **The Outdoor Experience**

The Outdoor Experience (TOE) offers an alternative treatment service through a range of outdoor intervention programs for young people aged 15-25 years who have or have had problems with alcohol and/or other drugs.

During the program, participants: set personal goals for the program; learn teamwork; gain an understanding of many aspects of 'safety'; take up the challenges of outdoor adventure; acquire living skills; enjoy a sense of health and wellbeing; and are encouraged to take control and make decisions about the programming. Young people are supported to deal with and reflect upon the difficult life circumstances that may have brought them to TOE. These programs assist young people to recognise their own strengths and to make changes that are valuable in everyday life.

## **Social enterprises – Ignite Cafés**

Our Ignite Cafes located in Hawthorn and Camberwell are 'living classrooms' where people gain on-the-job, real work experiences and certified training. Through our cafes participants can gain experience in both back-of-house and front-of-house hospitality services while completing accredited courses through Jesuit Community College.

## **L2P**

The L2P program managed by Jesuit Social Services, Brosnan Youth Services was created for young people involved with Southern Melbourne Metropolitan Region Youth Justice and Child Protection programs. Jesuit Social Services, Brosnan Youth Services has funding from VicRoads through the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to support 25 young people to access supervised driving practice to assist them to complete the required 120 hours of driving practice prior to taking their Probationary License test. DHHS has funded the purchase of the 5 star ANCAP rated vehicle to be used for this initiative. The vehicle is housed at the City of Greater Dandenong.

The volunteer drivers are covered for liability through Jesuit Social Services by becoming registered volunteers with the organisation. Volunteers are to undergo a selection process including an interview, a Police Check, Working with Children Check, VicRoads Driver History Report and reference checks to assess their suitability to be in a vehicle with young learner drivers. Volunteer drivers are to undertake training designed by VicRoads to assist them with the management of the learner driver and to give them a better understanding of the aims of the program and requirements of a supervising driver on the road. Separate training is run by Jesuit Social Services, Brosnan Youth Services and covers how to work with high risk young people, how to engage them and how to put boundaries in place.