

**MEDIA RELEASE – APRIL 26, 2016**

## **Youth diversion helps young people avoid lifetime involvement with the justice system: Jesuit Social Services**

Jesuit Social Services has welcomed the Victorian Government's \$5.6 million budget investment to expand the current Youth Diversion Pilot Program which steers vulnerable young people away from future involvement in the justice system and works to reduce reoffending.

"Youth diversion programs are crucial in allowing young people to address the causes behind their offending while still holding them accountable for their actions. They make sense because they are proven to reduce crime, while young people can develop stronger links to family, school and the community," says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

Ms Edwards says the organisation has called for a legislative framework to mandate the availability of diversion across the state.

"Victoria has very few legislative protections to ensure children are diverted away from the criminal justice system, and diversion programs are often limited in eligibility or catchment. Making diversion accessible to all young people will ultimately improve community safety."

In partnership with YSAS (Youth Support and Advocacy Service) and Centacare Ballarat, Jesuit Social Services last year commenced the 12-month pilot program in the Dandenong, Broadmeadows, Werribee, Ballarat, Ararat and Stawell Children's Courts. Young people appearing for a first or second time for a low-level offence can be referred to the program, and if an individualised Diversion Plan is completed the young person will not receive a criminal conviction.

To date more than 90 per cent of more than 270 participants have successfully completed the program, and positive impacts in engagement with education and specialist services have been demonstrated.

One of the recommendations in the recent Royal Commission into Family Violence report was that the Victorian Government establish a statutory youth diversion scheme, subject to a successful evaluation of the pilot.

"We are pleased that the Royal Commission acknowledged that this program could prevent family violence through addressing the use of violence in the home and preventing future violent behaviour."

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**Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation working to build a just society where all people can live to their full potential**

**Media Enquiries:** Kathryn Kernohan, 0409 901 248 or [kathryn.kernohan@jss.org.au](mailto:kathryn.kernohan@jss.org.au)