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## **Victorian State Budget investment into vulnerable young people welcome: Jesuit Social Services**

Investments in housing for people who have experienced family violence, a \$32 million expansion of the Drug Court, an expansion of the successful Youth Diversion Pilot Program and \$27.5 million dedicated to suicide prevention programs are welcome inclusions in the 2016-17 Victorian State Budget, says Jesuit Social Services.

“With this budget, the Victorian Government has emphasised the importance of working with individuals and communities to steer people towards positive pathways to social and economic inclusion. Initiatives such as the Drug Court, which will now be expanded to the Melbourne Magistrates’ Court, are proven to reduce recidivism and ultimately create safer communities,” says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

“We are also pleased that the Government has recognised the need to prevent young people from being involved in the criminal justice system by funding an expansion of the Youth Diversion Pilot Program.”

Since last year Jesuit Social Services, in partnership with YSAS (Youth Support and Advocacy Service) and Centacare Ballarat, has operated the pilot program in six Children’s Courts. Young people appearing for a first or second time for a low-level offence can be referred to the program. If an individualised Diversion Plan is completed the young person will not receive a criminal conviction.

“The program makes sense because it improves community safety and allows young people to avoid the long-term harm associated with involvement in the youth justice system, while helping them form stronger links to family, school and the community,” says Ms Edwards.

To date, more than 90 per cent of more than 270 participants have successfully completed the program.

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 successful evaluation of the pilot.

Jesuit Social Services has also welcomed additional funding in this Budget to expand legal assistance, develop innovative justice approaches and expand men’s behaviour change programs in line with the Government’s holistic commitment to addressing family violence following the recent Royal Commission.

“This Budget contains many positive investments to help some of the most vulnerable members of our society, and we encourage the Victorian Government to continue to invest into community programs and services that work to prevent crime before it occurs.”

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

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