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Royal Commission interim report reveals failings of NT's youth justice system: Jesuit Social Services

The interim report of the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory has shown how the Territory's youth detention system has further entrenched the issues behind youth crime, says Jesuit Social Services.

The report tabled last week reveals the failings of the system, in particular Don Dale, after an ABC TV report last year highlighted the abuse and neglect of children in detention.

"Every effective youth justice system must have rehabilitation at its heart, to support the reintegration of young people back into the community and allow them to flourish," says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

"This interim report shows that the system intended to do this has failed its duty of care to young people, many of whom are victims of abuse, violence and trauma and most of whom have disengaged with education, and that these detention facilities are not fit for the purpose of rehabilitation.

"The report is difficult to read because of the bleak picture it paints, however this is a report is a landmark day for youth justice in Australia. We commend the Royal Commissioners for promoting the need for a more just and humane way forward, which Jesuit Social Services supports."

Jesuit Social Services' submission to the Royal Commission contained a range of recommendations to help prevent vulnerable children and young people from being detained in the first place, and to safeguard against inappropriate treatment in detention facilities.

Recommendations include the establishment of a dedicated Northern Territory Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People to promote safety and wellbeing.

Jared Sharp, Jesuit Social Services' General Manager – Northern Territory says the current Northern Territory Government has announced some positive initiatives that will steer vulnerable young people away from the justice system and promote the rights of victims.

"The funding of a Youth Justice Group Conferencing pilot program, based on a successful Victorian model, will support young people to take responsibility and make amends for their actions while also allowing victims to have their voices heard. Additional funding for a suite of diversion programs will help young people turn their lives around and give them an opportunity to flourish," says Mr Sharp.

"This report, ahead of the Commission's full report due in August, is a call to arms to ensure vulnerable children and young people in detention are treated in a just and humane fashion to promote rehabilitation and ultimately create safer communities."

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