

MEDIA RELEASE – MAY 11, 2017

Supreme Court win a victory for human rights: Jesuit Social Services

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the Supreme Court verdict handed down today that the detention of children and young people in the maximum security adult Barwon Prison is unlawful.

“We are pleased that the Supreme Court has reiterated what we and others have said for months: that there is no place for children in adult prisons,” says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

“We have been horrified to learn of some of the conditions these children and young people have been subject to since being moved to Barwon Prison late last year, including serious incidents of assault, the use of capsicum spray and lockdown for up to 23 hours a day.

“There is simply no justification for detaining children in an adult prison. This ill-advised move by the Victorian Government, which has now been deemed unlawful by the Supreme Court on two separate occasions, has severely jeopardised the chances of rehabilitation for these young people - which ultimately does not make our community safer.”

Ms Edwards says the Human Rights Law Centre has worked closely with young people in Barwon Prison to have their voices heard, and hopes the verdict is a catalyst for a more humane youth justice system in Victoria.

“We look forward to the Government following the Court’s direction and ensuring young people are held in age-appropriate facilities staffed by skilled workers to facilitate their rehabilitation.”

Jesuit Social Services says that while today’s Supreme Court verdict may ensure young people are no longer detained in the adult prison system, the Government needs to consult with experts and the community sector as it plans a new 224-bed youth detention facility in Cherry Creek.

“A supermax facility like the one proposed for Cherry Creek is in stark contrast to international best practice in youth detention, which is moving towards small and non-institutional settings where young people are supported and challenged to address their problematic behaviour, take responsibility for daily living tasks, and gain education, employment and life skills to help them transition back into the community.

“An effective youth detention system must be matched by efforts to prevent crime from occurring in the first place by supporting vulnerable young people to address the underlying issues behind crime: such as disengagement from education, mental illness and drug and alcohol use.

Ms Edwards and senior Jesuit Social Services personnel will next month tour youth justice facilities in the USA, Germany and Norway and will share knowledge with Government on their return.

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