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Youth crime prevention grants a piecemeal solution compared to youth justice infrastructure spend

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the \$7.6 million investment into Youth Crime Prevention Grants to help local communities tackle youth crime, announced by the Victorian Government today. However, the funds are a piecemeal solution at a time of unprecedented spending on youth justice infrastructure, says the organisation.

“The \$7.6 million announced today is equivalent to just 2 per cent of the money allocated in this year’s Victorian Budget to youth detention facilities – which included an enormous \$346 million spend towards a new youth justice facility and fortification of current facilities,” says Jesuit Social Services Acting CEO Sally Parnell.

Ms Parnell says that while efforts to provide mentoring, employment and education opportunities to vulnerable young people in communities including Frankston, Geelong and Dandenong flag a step in the right direction to help prevent offending and re-offending, the funding is offered short-term and pales into comparison to that allocated to a new youth justice facility in Wyndham.

“This is a welcome approach but if the Government was truly committed to steering young people away from the system, it would be investing heavily in initiatives like this that will reduce recidivism over time, rather than wasting investment on a new ‘supermax’ facility. There is no evidence that a 224-bed facility is needed, and in fact a facility like this will only lead to more vulnerable young people being locked up instead of supported in the community.”

Ms Parnell and senior colleagues from Jesuit Social Services recently completed a Justice Solutions study trip, in which they explored innovative and effective youth and adult justice facilities and programs across Europe and parts of the US.

“What we found across vastly different jurisdictions were similar philosophies: that the most effective youth justice facilities are small, home-like, close to family and community and with an overarching emphasis on education and re-socialisation,” says Ms Parnell.

“These philosophies are largely at odds with the race to the bottom around youth justice that we have seen from both Government and Opposition in Victoria, where increasingly punitive policies are failing to improve community safety or support young people to reach their full potential.”

Ms Parnell says that the youth justice models explored overseas also had strong focuses on preventing young people from coming into contact with the youth justice system.

“These grants seek to achieve this however to truly create better outcomes for young people requires strong and sustained investments into vital community services including drug and alcohol and mental health, as well as genuine pathways to education and employment opportunities.”

Media enquiries – Kathryn Kernohan, 0409 901 248 or kathryn.kernohan@jss.org.au