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**Overseas learnings can help reform troubled youth justice system**

Victoria’s political leaders must articulate a clear vision for the state’s youth justice system based on prevention, diversion and rehabilitation, says Jesuit Social Services.

The organisation, which has 40 years’ experience working with young people who have contact with the criminal justice system, will today release a report highlighting findings from a recent international study trip exploring innovative and effective youth justice practices in Germany, Norway, Spain, the US and UK.

“Our #JusticeSolutions study tour was an opportunity to explore how some successful youth justice systems operate, and consider how elements from these systems could be adapted effectively in a local context,” says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

“A system that effectively holds young people to account while addressing the underlying drivers behind crime, and rehabilitating young people who have contact with it would result in less crime. If we build prisons we will fill prisons – but we know this is expensive and ineffective. We should not accept a growing youth prison population as a given.”

Ms Edwards says effective youth justice systems explored overseas shared clearly defined visions.

“Successful youth justice systems we looked at in some parts of Europe and also in the US had well-articulated purposes around rehabilitation, re-socialisation and re-integration. Children were ‘children’ and not offenders, positive relationships were crucial in reforming behaviour and where youth detention was necessary, facilities were small, home-like and close to family and community.

“In Norway, the age of criminal responsibility is 15, compared with 10 across Australia. Young people under 15 who commit offences are dealt with by child welfare, and there is an extremely small number of young people over 15 in detention. The country’s strong social infrastructure has helped Norway achieve a low incarceration rate and just one in five people who exit prison have further contact with the system in the next two years.”

Ms Edwards says the organisation’s findings, outlined in [#*JusticeSolutions: Expanding the conversation*](https://jss.org.au/?p=4900), show a way forward that balances holding young people to account, supporting young people and their families and improving community safety.

“We urge our political leaders to work collaboratively and constructively with experts– service providers, academics, the judiciary, police, community members and most importantly young people and their families – to develop a united vision for our youth justice system.

“We call on the Victorian Government to set targets to reduce youth offending, recidivism and incarceration and to look at the evidence of what works around the world in creating safer communities.”

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