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One year anniversary of Royal Commission report a chance to reset: Jesuit Social Services

The one year anniversary of the final report of the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory is an opportunity to take stock and re-commit ourselves to a youth justice system that strengthens, rather than harms, children, families and the community, says Jesuit Social Services.

“All the evidence to the Royal Commission told us we need to do things differently,” says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

“The Government has promised generational reform – we urge our political leaders to follow the evidence on what works for children in trouble.”

Ms Edwards says recent unrest at Darwin’s Don Dale facility shows that punitive approaches damage children, harms their prospects of rehabilitation and ultimately fails the community.

“One of the Royal Commission’s key recommendations was to close the Don Dale and Alice Springs youth detention facilities and replace them with fit-for-purpose facilities focused on education and rehabilitation.

“We urgently need new facilities and a new approach so that more young people don’t exit the system worse off than when they entered.”

Last year, Ms Edwards and other leaders from Jesuit Social Services visited effective youth justice systems abroad, in parts of the US as well as Spain, Germany and Norway.

“The effective models we saw all shared a focus on relationships, not punishment, and this means young people are less likely to re-offend, resulting in less crime and fewer victims.

“Effective youth detention models overseas have well-trained, resourced and experienced staff who act as positive role models for children and young people.

“It is vital that we work in a therapeutic, age appropriate and culturally-strengthening way with children and young people, and engage them in structured and supportive environments with a focus on education and the chance to build skills for life.”

Ms Edwards says that the Northern Territory Government must remain bold in its approach to reform, and move forward in partnership with Aboriginal organisations and communities.

“The Federal Government also must come to the table and financially support the Northern Territory Government to continue to implement the Royal Commission’s recommendations – allowing us to realise the vision of children and young people safe and thriving in their families and communities.”

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