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## **Parkville tensions demonstrate the need for skilled and experienced youth justice staff: Jesuit Social Services**

Victoria's youth justice system must prioritise keeping children out of detention and intervening early to reconnect young people with school and employment to avoid the sort of incident that occurred at Parkville overnight, says Jesuit Social Services.

"An effective youth justice system is one that supports children in the community, only uses detention as a last resort and ensures detention facilities have helping children and young people get back on track as their primary focus," says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

"It is clear that the current conditions in our youth detention facilities are not conducive to a suitable environment for anyone. We must do everything we can to ensure the safety of everybody, young people and staff, who have contact with the system."

Ms Edwards says that there are close to 200 young people in detention on an average day in Victoria and that almost half – 47 per cent – are on remand, meaning they are yet to be convicted of a crime.

"We know there has been an increased rate of absenteeism among staff, which results in staff shortages and lockdowns, and leads to a challenging environment for all. Staff members are working in challenging roles with complex young people, and we want to focus on finding solutions to improve outcomes for everyone."

Ms Edwards says that Victoria must look at effective youth justice systems abroad and model the state's system on international best practice with a focus on high-quality staff, small home-like facilities, education and skill development.

"In 2017, leaders from our organisation visited innovative youth justice systems in parts of Europe and the US and we found that they all shared an emphasis on attracting and retaining staff members who have the personal attributes, skills and experience in trauma-informed practice and working with young people who face significant barriers to inclusion.

"For example, equivalent staff in Norway have a minimum of two years paid training and applicants are screened for positive and humane attitudes. The outcome of this is that their system experiences very few, if any, incidents like the one we saw yesterday.

"The Victorian Government must prioritise proven crime prevention interventions, diverting young people away from the criminal justice system, ensuring prison is used only as a last resort, and strengthening the capability of the state's youth justice workforce to address the complex needs of young offenders – to ensure the system helps young people get their lives back on track."

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