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NT’s investment into alternatives to detention will benefit entire community: Jesuit Social Services

The Northern Territory Government’s 2019-20 Budget investments into alternatives to detention, as well as services and programs to keep children and young people on track, will ultimately benefit the entire community, according to Jesuit Social Services.

“We welcome the Northern Territory Government’s funding commitments to new and re-purposed facilities to support youth diversion programs and to provide alternatives to detention in regional areas of the NT,” says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

“Detention should only ever be used as a last resort and, wherever possible, children and young people should be supported to connect with family, education and culture in their communities.

“The Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory laid bare that detention was failing children and young people, their families and the entire Territory.

“It provided a framework for a system based on best practice and what is proven to work in keeping children and young people out of trouble in the first place and to ensure that if they do have contact with the criminal justice system, the focus is on education, skill development and re-socialisation to give them the best opportunity to turn their lives around.

Leaders from Jesuit Social Services recently completed a #JusticeSolutions study tour of New Zealand’s adult and youth detention facilities, as well as Maori and Pasifika courts. New Zealand faces similar challenges to Australia in terms of a rising adult prison population and over-representation of indigenous people, but the country’s restorative justice work with a strong focus on culture is having a positive impact. The tour followed a similar trip in 2017 where leaders from the organisation explored youth justice facilities and approaches in parts of Europe and the US.

“The successful, effective justice systems we have seen around the world have a shared focus on supporting young people to get their lives back on track – and providing them with programs and services to help them do so,” says Ms Edwards.

“There is also an emphasis on attracting and retaining experienced, skilled staff members capable of developing positive relationships with young people to reform behaviour. Across the board these approaches result in better outcomes for all – including young people, their families and staff.”

Ms Edwards says that the NT Government’s Budget commitments are a positive step towards the much needed reform of the Territory’s youth justice system.

“Programs that keep young people out of prison, being engaged in meaningful activities, and opportunities to access training and education services are all vital in creating change. We look forward to supporting further actions by the NT Government that put into practice their commitment to reform and working towards safer Territory communities for everyone.”

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