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Ten-fold overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children under youth supervision an indictment on the nation

A ten-fold overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth on community orders and in youth detention means these children are at risk of becoming a new Stolen Generation unless significant action is taken, says Jesuit Social Services.

In the lead up to National Sorry Day, the organisation has analysed data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) which shows that while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders represent just six per cent of the general 10-14 year old population, the same age group accounts for 60 per cent of young people under youth justice supervision across Australia.

“It is an indictment on our nation that the gap continues to widen between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children under youth supervision, despite overall decreases in the rate of youth supervision and the number of young people offending,” says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

On an average day in 2014-15, there were 698 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged between 10-14 years under supervision compared with just 438 non-Aboriginal children.

“This is clear evidence that the system is failing to identify children at risk of becoming involved in the youth justice system and to intervene early to help them strengthen relationships to their culture and the community.

“Young Aboriginal children who have their first contact with the criminal justice system when aged 14 years or younger are at a higher risk of subsequent involvement in the criminal justice system – so the best way to create safer communities is by steering them away from the criminal justice system in the first place.”

Jesuit Social Services recently received a further three years funding from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet to continue its Barreng Moorop program. The program works with Aboriginal children aged 10-14 and their families living in the north and west metropolitan regions of Melbourne, who have current or recent involvement with the criminal justice system. Since its inception, Barreng Moorop has worked with 26 children and their families to help re-engage them with education, community and culture.

“We welcome this funding commitment, and feedback on the program has been very positive so far. This program is just one example of how culturally-specific services can be devised to work with vulnerable young people and help them on positive pathways rather than further involvement in the criminal justice system.”

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