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Landmark review a new beginning for youth justice in Victoria

A landmark review into the Victorian youth justice system can help create a renewed focus and vision resulting in positive outcomes for young people and the community says Jesuit Social Services.

The *Youth Justice Review and Strategy: Meeting needs and reducing offending* review, conducted by Professor James Ogloff and Penny Armytage, identifies key factors behind recent tensions in Victoria's youth detention facilities and calls for the articulation of a clear statement of the purpose, role and principles of youth justice.

"We congratulate the Victorian Government on commissioning this review and accepting all 126 recommendations, and look forward to investments in prevention to keep young people away from detention, as well as improving the standards of youth detention facilities," says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

"This report clearly articulates that Victoria needs a clear vision for the purpose of its youth justice system. This is something that has been lost along the way, as our political leaders have engaged in 'tough on crime' rhetoric and punitive responses towards young people."

Ms Edwards notes that the report highlights the need for more focus and coordination around supporting young people involved in child protection and youth justice, as well as the importance of evidence-based restorative justice programs such as those delivered by Jesuit Social Services.

"Youth detention plays an important role in any effective youth justice system however we must do everything we can to prevent children and young people from reaching this point. Diversion and restorative justice programs such as Youth Justice Group Conferencing are proven to reduce re-offending and play a crucial role in creating safer communities.

"Despite the many recommendations that aim to strengthen our response to young people who have contact with the justice system, it is disappointing to see one recommendation support the use of OC spray, batons and restraint belts in certain situations.

"Colleagues from Jesuit Social Services and I recently returned from a Justice Solutions tour of Europe and the US, where a clear focus on strong, respectful and consistent relationships between staff and young people means incidents of violence towards staff and the use of restraint and lockdown are rare. Successful systems are focus on relationship, rehabilitation and re-education."

Ms Edwards says that, after taking in all recommendations from the report, the Government should reconsider its decision to build a new 224-bed youth detention facility.

"An effective youth justice system focuses on keeping young people out of the system – if Victoria does this well, funds for a new facility can be diverted towards prevention and rehabilitation."

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