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New Darwin youth justice facility must be fast-tracked

Another incident at Darwin’s Don Dale centre overnight is further evidence that the new youth detention facilities, announced as a result of the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory, must be fast-tracked says Jesuit Social Services.

“In its final report last year, the Royal Commission found that facilities in Darwin and Alice Springs are not fit for purpose and not conducive to helping young people get their lives back on track,” says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

“Detaining young people in facilities like this is failing them, their families and the broader Territory community. We call on the Northern Territory Government to fast track the closure of Don Dale and the construction of the new facility, which is not expected to be open until mid-2020, as well as the new Alice Springs facility.

“If we allow our children and young people to spend another 18 months in a facility as unsuitable as Don Dale, we run the risk of more incidents like the one we saw overnight and leaving young people to exit the detention system worse off than when they entered,” says Ms Edwards.

One of the key recommendations of the Royal Commission was to close Don Dale and Alice Springs and replace them with fit for purpose facilities focused on education and rehabilitation. In February, the NT Government announced it would replace Don Dale with a new centre in Darwin that would accommodate 30 young people in small, home-like facilities.

Ms Edwards says this model is in line with international best practice in youth detention.

“Last year, I, together with other leaders from Jesuit Social Services visited innovative and effective youth detention models abroad. We saw that successful models are ones that treat children and young people in a manner consistent with their age, they promote education and skill development, and ensure that genuine, deep relationships are developed.

“Well-trained, resourced and experienced staff members are also a hallmark of these facilities. In Norway, for example, corrections staff have a minimum of two years training in areas including social work, psychology and human rights. Unsurprisingly these facilities do not see the types of incidents we have seen at Don Dale– and young people are less likely to re-offend, meaning less crime and fewer victims.

“We have previously commended the NT Government on their commitment to reform of the territory’s youth justice system – now, they must fast-track the new Darwin facility as a priority.

“This is more than bricks and mortar. We must make sure our young people are engaged in meaningful activities and skill development, programs that keep kids connected to culture and community, are housed in age-appropriate and suitable facilities close to family and community and have better opportunities to get their lives back on track. We also need to look beyond the fence and focus on support for children, families and communities in order to keep kids out of detention in the first place.”



MEDIA RELEASE

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