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## **NT investment into diversion will result in less crime and safer communities: Jesuit Social Services**

The Northern Territory Government's \$5 million investment into an innovative model that will support children and young people to get back on track will result in less crime, fewer victims and safer communities, says Jesuit Social Services.

"We commend the Northern Territory Government on its commitment to positive reform of the youth justice system after the recommendations of the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory," says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

"The final report of the Royal Commission highlighted the importance of a youth justice system where detention is only used as a last resort – a system where young people who get into trouble are supported to take responsibility for their actions, make amends and work towards becoming productive members of society."

The \$5 million Back on Track program will be developed in the Darwin, Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Nhulunby and Katherine regions and provide alternatives to detention for at-risk children and young people aged eight to 17 years.

"It is positive to see that this program will work with young people in different parts of the Territory, and particularly with children as young as eight who may have disengaged with education," says Ms Edwards.

"We know that many children who have contact with the youth justice system at a young age have further contact later on in life. We welcome the fact that Back on Track will work with primary school aged children, and their families, to steer them towards connecting with family, community and school."

Ms Edwards says that the program must work in a culturally-specific way with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, who remain shockingly over-represented in the Territory's detention system. In June 2018, all 38 children in detention in the Northern Territory were Aboriginal.

"We also note that the program will have strong links to the business community to support young people into work opportunities. The importance of education, training and employment pathways cannot be understated and we know this will lead to positive outcomes.

"A youth justice system that is focused on supporting young people to reach their potential is one that benefits the entire community."

**Media enquiries** – Kathryn Kernohan, 0409 901 248 or [kathryn.kernohan@jss.org.au](mailto:kathryn.kernohan@jss.org.au)