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Learnings from New Zealand can inform Australian justice systems: Jesuit Social Services

Senior leaders from Jesuit Social Services will next week embark on a study trip to New Zealand to learn more about innovative approaches to dealing with adults and young people who have contact with the criminal justice system. The organisation's findings and observations will be shared with policy makers and the wider community on their return.

"We are heartened by the New Zealand Government's commitment to reduce the prison population by 30 per cent over 15 years, which shows true leadership," says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

"It is true that New Zealand faces many of the same challenges we do here in Australia, like a rising adult prison population, over-representation of indigenous populations and ageing prison infrastructure. That said, we also know that the country is doing some excellent work in reducing the number of young people who have contact with the system and ensuring that prison is always the last option.

"This is shown in the fact that over the past 10 years, the number of children and young people in court has dropped by 64 per cent. New Zealand also boasts innovative responses to offending. The country's Maori and Pasifika courts are world-leading examples of how to provide culturally-specific responses to young people who find themselves in trouble."

The study trip will include visits to adult and youth detention facilities, Maori and Pasifika courts and meetings with youth and adult justice experts and advocacy groups in Wellington, Auckland, Rotorua and Tauranga.

It follows a similar study trip in 2017 where leaders from the organisations explored effective youth justice facilities and approaches in parts of Europe and the US. Findings were published in the report [*#JusticeSolutions: Expanding the conversation*](#).

"The successful systems we saw shared a positive emphasis on rehabilitation, re-socialisation and skill development to ensure young people who have contact with the system have the best opportunities to get their lives back on track," says Ms Edwards.

"Also crucial was the fact that staff members who worked with young people were experienced and skilled in trauma-informed practice and developing positive relationships with young people to reform behaviour.

"Across the board this resulted in safer facilities, less crime, fewer victims and safer communities. We look forward to exploring what is working in New Zealand, particularly in terms of supporting young people, and sharing these findings with decision makers and the community on our return."

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