

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – MAY 14, 2019

## **Watch House Files highlight urgent need for National Youth Justice Strategy: Jesuit Social Services**

Jesuit Social Services has called for national leadership to reform youth justice systems across Australia in light of last night's *Four Corners* episode aired on ABC TV.

The implementation of a National Youth Justice Strategy and immediately raising the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14 years, as highlighted in Jesuit Social Services' Federal Election platform, will prevent more vulnerable children and young people from having contact with the justice system.

"We were horrified to see children, including primary school aged children, being treated in such an inhumane manner. Children being kept in isolation for days on end, children being denied access to prescribed medications and children being detained with alleged sex offenders," says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

"Have we learned nothing from the horrors of Don Dale which sparked a Royal Commission in the Northern Territory? This shameful treatment of vulnerable children and young people is a national disgrace and must lead to immediate reform to ensure it never happens again."

In Jesuit Social Services' Federal Election Platform [A more compassionate Australia](#), the organisation called for the incoming Federal Government to commit to and implement a National Youth Justice Strategy that recognises the links between poverty, disadvantage and crime, and holds young people to account while diverting them away from the justice system at every possible opportunity.

"Queensland is not the only state that is dealing with significant problems in the youth justice system. It is well documented that Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory are all dealing with systemic issues including high numbers of children on remand and inadequate infrastructure, including poor support and training for staff who often don't have the necessary skills and experience to do this challenging job", says Ms Edwards.

"Enough is enough - it is time for national leadership around this issue.

"Effective youth justice systems around the world emphasise keeping young people away from detention at every opportunity, and invest in vital community services. If young people are detained, they must be supported in an age-appropriate fashion, in small home-like facilities close to home, with the focus on rehabilitation."

Jesuit Social Services participant Charles, who has had contact with the detention system, says:

"I think prisons are like a breeding ground because kids will pick up stuff from other kids or meet up when they get out."



## MEDIA RELEASE

Jesuit Social Services also reiterates its urgent call for the age of criminal responsibility to be raised from 10 to 14 years old across all states and territories.

“We know that when children between the ages of 10 to 14 are detained, they are more likely to have sustained and frequent justice involvement throughout their lives.

“International research also shows that young children have not developed the social, emotional and intellectual maturity necessary for criminal responsibility,” says Ms Edwards.

“We have the blueprint on how to prevent another Don Dale or Brisbane Watch House disaster – now it’s up to our political leaders to reform our troubled youth justice systems to better support our children and young people to lead fulfilling lives free from crime.”

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