

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – JUNE 20, 2019

Crime statistics show decrease in young offenders, at odds with rising detention numbers: Jesuit Social Services

New data released by the Crime Statistics Agency today shows that both the number of young people committing offences and the number of alleged incidents recorded against young people have decreased over the past 12 months. This is at odds with Victoria's rising youth detention population, and the figures should be the catalyst for new approaches to ensure detention is only ever used as the last resort, says Jesuit Social Services.

"It is welcome news that fewer young people committed offences over the past year than at any other time over the previous five years. This demonstrates that we are doing some things right in the community to keep young people connected with family and education, and intervene early to prevent crime from occurring in the first place," says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

"However, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) released a report last month that showed the number of young people in detention in Victoria has increased by 36 per cent over the past five years. More recently, there were 124 young people in detention on an average day in 2016/17 but this jumped to an average of 202 young people per day in 2017/18.

"When we have fewer young people committing offences, we should not be locking up more young people, given that the majority of young people exit detention worse off than when they entered."

According to the recent AIHW report, 38 per cent of young people in detention on an average day in 2017/18 were on remand, meaning they were yet to be convicted of a crime.

"We are pleased to note that this percentage decreased in the past 12 months, however, it is still a large number of young people on remand which has in part created the pressure-cooker environment in our detention system. This has resulted in an unsafe working environment for staff and is not conducive to the rehabilitation of young people to give them the best opportunities to get their lives back on track.

"It is vital that the Victorian Government works to reduce the number of young people on remand and ensure that wherever possible, young people are supported in the community and steered away from contact with the detention system. This is particularly pertinent when we note that time on remand has been shown to increase the likelihood of a young person reoffending in the community," says Ms Edwards.

The Crime Statistics Agency also captures data on the number of alleged incidents committed by 10 to 14 year old children. Jesuit Social Services continues to advocate for the age of criminal responsibility to be raised from 10 to 14 years across the country, including Victoria.

"We aspire to a community where no primary school aged child has contact with the justice system – they should be in school, not in prison. Supporting children and young people in the community will result in better outcomes for all."

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