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Design of new Darwin youth detention facility critical in supporting safer communities: Jesuit Social Services

The design of the new Darwin youth detention facility must be informed by international best practice, to give young people the best chances to get their lives back on track, says Jesuit Social Services.

“We welcome the news that a new youth detention facility will be built close to Darwin and Palmerston, in line with the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory’s recommendation that the Don Dale facility be closed down,” says Jesuit Social Services General Manager – Northern Territory John Adams.

“It is clear that Don Dale is not conducive to the rehabilitation of some of the Territory’s most vulnerable young people – and that the aim of any youth justice system should be to ensure that young people have the opportunity to turn their lives around and become productive members of the community when they exit the system.”

The Northern Territory Government has announced that Holtze, situated between Darwin and Palmerston, will be the location of the new detention facility.

Mr Adams says it is crucial that the new facility is designed in line with international best practice in youth detention, and that facilities themselves should be small and home-like, with an emphasis on education and skill development.

“Fit-for-purpose and age-appropriate facilities are a vital piece of the puzzle, and we also must make sure that our young people are engaged in meaningful activities and skill development as well as programs that keep them connected to culture and community,” he says.

Leaders from Jesuit Social Services have explored effective youth justice systems across parts of the US, Europe and, earlier this year, New Zealand.

“We found that successful youth justice systems emphasised education and skill development, and that staff were focused on developing positive relationships with young people,” says Mr Adams.

“All of the effective systems abroad also had well-trained, resourced and experienced staff members– for example in Norway, corrections staff have a minimum of two years training in areas including social work, psychology and human rights.

“This means that young people are less likely to re-offend, resulting in less crime, fewer victims and better outcomes for everybody.”

“There is much that the Territory, and other jurisdictions across Australia, can learn from effective approaches abroad to ensure that any contemporary youth justice system supports young people to get their lives back on track and work towards positive futures.”

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