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Ombudsman investigation can result in systemic reform of damaging practices: Jesuit Social Services

A report tabled today by the Victorian Ombudsman, about the damaging use of solitary confinement of young adults in the Victorian criminal justice system, should drive systemic reform of these practices, says Jesuit Social Services.

“We commend the Victorian Ombudsman on this vital investigation, that clearly documents the alarming use of and the irreversible physical and mental impact of solitary confinement,” says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

The Ombudsman found an alarming number of instances of prolonged solitary confinement of young adults in Port Phillip Prison, and that there were about 13,000 lockdowns during a 12 month period at Malmsbury Youth Justice Precinct.

Last year, Jesuit Social Services published the report [*All alone: Young adults in the Victorian justice system*](#) which highlighted a number of concerns regarding the welfare and treatment of young adults aged 18 to 24 in the Victorian prison system.

“We spoke to participants of our programs who told us that they had spent up to 22 hours a day in a cell, on their own, with little to no access to programs and activities that can help them turn their lives around in prison and support them to make a meaningful contribution to the community when they exit,” says Ms Edwards.

The Jesuit Social Services report contained several stories about the impact of solitary confinement on young adults, such as the story of James (not his real name).

James was transferred from a youth justice centre to an adult prison at age 16. In the adult prison, he was subject to 22 hours isolated in a cell and two hours out of a cell with a small group of prisoners each day.

When he exited prison, he replicated his solitary confinement environment in his bathroom, living, eating and sleeping in this small space. Shortly afterwards, he re-offended and returned to prison.

“The Victorian Ombudsman reports that the use of isolation, separation and solitary confinement leads to the damaging, not rehabilitation, of young people in the criminal justice system.

“We see through our own work that the use of these inhumane practices is counter-productive to the goals of rehabilitating people in prison, reducing re-offending and supporting safer communities. It is our hope that this investigation results in systemic reform to avoid more tragic stories like James’.”

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