

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – SEPTEMBER 27, 2019

## **Youth detention reform will help young people get their lives back on track: Jesuit Social Services**

The Victorian Government's decision to retain the Parkville Youth Justice Centre for young women and the youngest boys is an important step in the right direction, says Jesuit Social Services.

"We know that large-scale detention facilities do not serve the purpose of rehabilitating and re-socialising young people ahead of their return to the community, and this has been proven in jurisdictions around the world," says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

"Best practice in youth detention is to ensure young people are kept in facilities that are small, home-like and close to their families and communities. It is also vital that there is an emphasis on education and skill development, and that facilities are staffed by experienced, skilled people who can develop positive relationships with young people to reform behavior."

Retaining the Parkville site was a key recommendation of the 2017 Youth Justice Review by Professor James Ogloff and Penny Armytage.

Ms Edwards says the site's central location and close proximity to the \$60 million youth mental health facility opened in Parkville this year means it gives young people a better chance to turn their lives around. The re-purposing of the new Cherry Creek detention facility promises to be an improvement in how the Youth Justice system had previously been tracking.

"In our view a new youth detention facility at Cherry Creek is not needed, however we acknowledge that re-purposing this facility to house boys between the ages of 15 and 18 is a better solution than the new facility being a default option for all children and young people.

"We are also pleased to note that the re-purposed Cherry Creek facility will include dedicated mental health beds, a specialised health care unit and intensive drug and alcohol treatment.

"According to the most recent report by the Youth Parole Board, more than half [53 per cent] of the young people who presented to youth justice had mental health issues and 22 per cent had a history of self-harm or suicidal ideation. It is crucial that young people in the justice system have access to effective, age appropriate services to support them to address the underlying problems behind their behaviour," says Ms Edwards.

Earlier this year, senior leaders from Jesuit Social Services embarked on a study trip to New Zealand to learn more about their approaches to dealing with young people and adults who have contact with the criminal justice system. Findings and observations were recently published in the discussion paper [#JusticeSolutions – New Zealand tour](#).

"What struck us in New Zealand was the strong political leadership and will for change, the strong connection to culture and the commitment to a restorative justice approach to offending. These



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successes in the youth justice area are 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,” says Ms Edwards.

“Victoria has an opportunity to return to its previous position as leading the way on humane, effective approaches to young people in trouble across the country. Today’s announcements is one step in the right direction”

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