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Youth justice reforms would improve outcomes for children who have experienced trauma

A new report by the Sentencing Advisory Council explores the impact of trauma in childhood offending and canvasses possible reforms that would lead to better outcomes for children, their families and the broader community, says Jesuit Social Services.

It also adds to the evidence that supports raising of the age of legal responsibility from 10 to 14 years.

“The sad trajectory of many children who have contact with the youth justice system is well documented – we know that many have been the victims of abuse, neglect and trauma, and this is often a significant factor in why they get in trouble,” says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

“The Sentencing Advisory Council’s previous *Crossover Kids* reports puts in sharp focus the links between child protection involvement and contact with the youth justice system, including the fact that the younger children are when they are first sentenced in the youth justice system, the more likely they are to be known to child protection.

“These are some of the most vulnerable children in our community and as a society, we have failed them and denied them the opportunity to flourish like other children their age.”

The third *Crossover Kids* report highlights the particular vulnerability of children aged 10 to 13 years who have contact with the youth justice system. Ms Edwards says this vulnerability support ongoing calls to raise the age of legal responsibility from 10 to 14 years across Australian states and territories.

“Jailing children does not help them and it does not help the broader community - it does not help children heal, it does not reduce crime and it does not prevent further victims. Jailing primary school aged children as young as 10 years old is completely out of step with human rights standards and medical science on child development.

“We will continue to advocate for states and territories to raise the age of legal responsibility to 14 as we await recommendations from Australia’s Governments later this year on this topic. All children are worth a second chance and keeping primary school aged children in the classroom, not in prison, should be a cornerstone of any effective youth justice system.”

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