

MEDIA RELEASE – OCTOBER 1, 2020

## **Reducing use of remand can stop revolving door of youth justice system: Jesuit Social Services**

A new report by the Sentencing Advisory Council, which tracks the cases of all children held on remand in Victoria over 2017-18, highlights the urgent need for stronger community supports to stop children being stuck in the revolving door of the youth justice system says Jesuit Social Services.

The full resourcing of a statewide 24-hour bail system to best facilitate children being bailed, rather than remanded, where possible and the establishment of small transitional houses, staffed around the clock, to provide safe accommodation and access to life skills and programs for children on bail should be funded to help children turn their lives around in the community.

The report, *Children Held on Remand in Victoria: A report on sentencing outcomes*, finds that the 442 children whose cases were tracked spent almost 29,000 days on remand, meaning they were being held in custody pending the finalisation of court proceedings for alleged offences. Nearly 11,000 of these days were experienced by children who did not end up receiving a custodial sentence.

“This important report highlights that two-thirds of children tracked did not receive a custodial sentence when they faced a judge. This means that far too many vulnerable children have been exposed to a detention setting which can result in disengagement from school, family and community, and an increased likelihood of further contact with the youth justice system,” says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

“Instead of remand being used in many circumstances where a young person is in trouble, we should be ensuring that all children have access to specialised diversion programs that keep them in the community and help them to take responsibility and make amends for their actions.”

The report also shows that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were over-represented in the remand system, comprising 15 per cent of remanded children compared to less than one per cent of Victoria’s population.

“Sadly, these statistics are consistent with our 2013 research *Thinking Outside: Alternatives to remand for children*, which found that 38 per cent of children under supervision on an average day were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. It is important that we continue to invest in and expand culturally specific programs and services to keep children safe, supported and connected in the community, to ultimately prevent anti-social behaviour and help children to reach their potential,” says Ms Edwards.

“The report also identifies children under 14 as a key group at risk. Raising the age of legal responsibility from 10 to 14 years, to ensure primary school aged children stay in the classroom and not detention, is an immediate way we can keep children safe and supported.”

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