

MEDIA RELEASE – OCTOBER 27, 2020

Spent conviction reform will support civic participation: Jesuit Social Services

The Victorian Government's introduction of the Spent Convictions Bill 2020 into Victorian Parliament today will ultimately support people to reconnect with the community and reach their full potential, says Jesuit Social Services.

"Victoria has been the only jurisdiction in Australia without a spent conviction scheme, so we welcome the introduction of this Bill which will remove the unfair barriers faced by Victorians who have previously committed an offence, giving them more opportunities to secure employment and housing," says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

If the Bill is passed, an individual's historic criminal record will no longer show up in a police check after 10 years for adults or five years for a juvenile conviction – as long the person does not reoffend in that time.

Ms Edwards says that Jesuit Social Services has worked with adults and young people who have contact with the criminal justice for 43 years, and every day sees the negative impact a criminal record can have on somebody's ability to move forward with their life.

"Secure housing and employment are two fundamentals that every person needs access to in order to lead a productive life. Through our work with men, women and young people who have contact with the justice system, we see the impact that barriers to employment and work can and do have on the positive pathways they aspire to. These barriers also result in a detrimental impact on a person's mental and physical health," says Ms Edwards.

Jesuit Social Services' program participant James, who secured work through the Jobs Victoria Employment Network (JVEN), said that he had encountered barriers and negative attitudes when looking for work due to his criminal conviction, before his engagement with the program.

"There's a lot of jobs that I was restricted from that I was aiming for in my teen years, all it takes is someone to tell their boss that he's an ex-criminal and it's a put off," he says.

Securing work meant that James could provide for his family and be a positive role model to his son.

"My son has a roof over his head, he has clothes on his back and food in his belly, which is the main thing for me. I can hopefully give my kids things that I never had in my childhood. That's what [a job] means to me."

Ms Edwards says that the introduction of the scheme mean more people like James can support themselves and loved ones.

"The introduction of this scheme will allow people stronger access to social and economic participation instead of further entrenching disadvantage. We hope to see the Bill pass through Parliament and be implemented quickly, to support people to better futures."

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