

MEDIA RELEASE – NOVEMBER 20, 2020

World Children’s Day highlights need to #RaiseTheAge: Jesuit Social Services

World Children’s Day (November 20) is a timely reminder of the vulnerabilities of children and the need to ensure primary school aged children are in the playground – not in prison.

Jesuit Social Services’ Worth A Second Chance campaign has just launched [a new animated short](#) illustrated by Melbourne artist Ben Jelfs and narrated by Aboriginal author and activist Marlee Silva, highlighting the importance of keeping children connected with school, family and the community and the long-lasting damage that can be caused by contact with the justice system.

The animation supports the national push to raise the age of legal responsibility from the current 10 years to 14, which would ensure that primary school aged children could no longer be locked up.

The project is supported by a broad cross-section of community services and legal groups including Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service, WEstjustice, Human Rights Law Centre, the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, Youthlaw, the Federation of Community Legal Centres and the Victoria Council of Social Service.

“There is a wealth of evidence from Australia and abroad showing that children under 14 years do not possess the neurological maturity to form criminal intent, but despite this, Australian states and territories continue to lock up primary school aged children as young as 10. This means that we lag behind countries including Canada, Japan, Scotland and Germany – none of whom imprison children as young as 10” says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

“Many children who have contact with the justice system are victims of trauma, abuse and mental illness. Locking them up creates more harm – we need to be supporting them in the community, connecting them with family and school and helping them to get their lives back on track.”

The ACT’s Legislative Assembly recently voted to raise the age of legal responsibility from 10 to 14 years. This followed the Northern Territory Government’s commitment to raise the age from 10 to 12.

“These are positive steps, and now we need other states and territories to take action. It is time our political leaders commit to helping, not harming, vulnerable children.”

In 2019, Jesuit Social Services released the paper [Raising the age of criminal responsibility: There is a better way](#). The paper outlines practical ways in which children can be held accountable for their actions in ways that prevent further anti-social behaviour and better protect the entire community.

“We know that keeping children safe, supported and connected with school, family and the community is the best way to prevent them being dragged into the youth justice system. World Children’s Day reminds us that all children are worth a second chance – and now our political leaders need to show us that by committing to raise the age of legal responsibility.”

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