



The importance of relationships at Dillon House

Next Steps is a flexible, responsive early intervention program which aims to address both homelessness and the criminal offending of young people. The program works intensively, both in a residential setting and in an outreach case management capacity, to provide access to secure, sustainable housing and simultaneously reduce a young persons' risk of re-offending.

A key component of the Next Steps program is the provision of transitional accommodation at Dillon House. In addition to case management services offered by the Next Steps program, the young people who call Dillon House home are also supported in developing independent living skills, which includes cooking, meal planning, shopping, budgeting and banking.

Giovanna Nicolìa, Coordinator of the Next Steps team, says Dillon House is vital for young people at risk of becoming homeless, or those already experiencing homelessness. "It's unique in being able to support young people who transition out of detention because the options [for housing] are very, very limited," she says.

Many of the young people who come to live at Dillon House have experienced a traumatic childhood and can have difficulty connecting with other people. The staff at Dillon House provide a supportive environment where they can learn the 'soft skills' of developing and maintaining relationships.

Giovanna recognises the critical importance of staff building solid relationships with young people. "Our work is very relational where we offer support, mentoring and guidance. We establish appropriate relationships with good boundaries to support young people who might have issues around emotional regulation, sharing with other people and problem solving," she says.

The building of these relationships is also extremely fulfilling for the team at Dillon House. "Our biggest rewards are successfully building trust with young people, seeing young people learn to have more positive relationships, build capacities to resolve conflict, better manage stressors and build both healthy personal and community connections," says Giovanna.



Giovanna Nicolìa, Next Steps Program Coordinator

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Keeping young people on the right track

Supporting children and young people who have contact, or are at risk of having contact, with the criminal justice system was at the core of Jesuit Social Services' work when the organisation was founded in 1977.

Almost 45 years later, it is still critical.

We work with children and young people at all points of the system – to help prevent anti-social behaviour from occurring and to support the often difficult transition from detention back to the community. We connect young people with family, education and employment, and we support them to address some of the underlying factors behind their behaviour.

A key expression of this work is our new Ignatius Learning Centre – a Catholic Specialist Secondary School for 15 to 17 year old boys involved with the youth justice system. We opened the school this year for boys who are at serious risk of spending time in detention to instead be actively and intensively engaged with education and training. The school provides an inclusive and therapeutic educational environment where we accompany young people to learn their true value and flourish.

This year, 2021, we celebrate the anniversary of the incident that led Ignatius of Loyola to change the path of his own life. Ignatius was injured in battle and during his recovery spent many long days and nights reflecting on his life. He emerged from the process a changed man and dedicated himself to care for those at the margins of society. This work led to the establishments of the Jesuits.

Five hundred years later, Jesuit Social Services continues this tradition of going to the margins and working with those who need our support. Thank you for being with us on that journey.

Julie Edwards

CEO, Jesuit Social Services

Support when it's needed

Young people who have had contact with the justice system and are now trying to get their lives back on track need support at the time they need it – not just between 9am and 5pm.

Jesuit Social Services' Youth Justice Community Support Service (YJCSS) After Hours program recognises this and provides intensive support and case management beyond standard work hours. It's an extension of a successful program that has been supporting young people and their families for more than 10 years.

"Our staff provide a combination of practical support and mentoring, to try to reduce the time when young people could be out with negative peers at nights and on weekends," explains Nicole Salter, the After Hours Coordinator.

The program has doubled in size in recent years and currently supports more than 80 young people and their families.

"The support we provide can range from helping young people find accommodation, supporting them to develop independent living skills and taking them to the gym. Staff also undertake activities to help young people reconnect with family – such as preparing a family meal, attending a sporting game with siblings or a parent, visiting the zoo as a family or going fishing with their fathers."

The diverse team includes staff from a range of culturally diverse backgrounds.

"Connection, or reconnection, with culture is really important and our workers can engage young people with culture, art, music and food," says Nicole.

Participant Chris (not his real name), says the program has helped him to explore his interests and discover new hobbies.

"The program is accommodating, allowing you to select the right sort of help you need. I feel supported with my emotional needs, allowing me to trust and open up to my worker about issues or things that may be hard to discuss," he says.



Members of the YJCSS After Hours team

Helping marginalised young jobseekers get back on track

As a young man, Rocky Dawson had contact with the prison system. Through his role as a Wellbeing Support Officer as part of Jesuit Social Services' employment programs, he is now using his lived experience to help other young people in a similar position to get back on their feet and find meaningful work.

"There was none of this stuff back in my day, and I can tell you it is brilliant. There are people here to help and support young people who are facing challenges, as we want to see people thrive."

Rocky provides direct support to young people, mainly those who have had contact with the justice system and who have faced challenging circumstances that mean they aren't ready for work.

"It doesn't do a person any good to be given an employment opportunity that they're only going to lose because they are not ready for the job. Our support allows them the space and time to address the barriers they face prior to commencing employment," explains Rob Auger – Manager Employment Services at Jesuit Social Services.

"During the COVID-19 restrictions, there were a whole host of reasons why somebody might decide to disengage. We wanted to see if we could address some of the issues that were stopping them from accessing services and perhaps point them in the right direction towards other supports, all the while keeping them linked in with us."

Rob says it is a "very positive outcome" that more than 50 per cent of the participants Rocky has worked with have either re-engaged with employment services or have accessed other support services that set them on the pathway to participate in employment programs when they're ready.

Many of the participants Rocky works with are experiencing mental health or substance abuse problems, financial problems or language barriers.

"And other things that come along out of the blue," says Rocky. "Once they've settled and they've overcome the issues that would disturb their employment, I'll refer them back to the employment coaches and tell them they're ready for work.

"That will lead to further training and education which will often lead to a job opportunity."



Rocky uses his experience of the justice system to help him support young people stay on track and engaged in employment

Better approaches to supporting young people in the Northern Territory

In May, the Northern Territory Government introduced a number of legislative changes to the youth justice system that will see more children separated from family and community, and funnelled into detention. These deeply concerning measures include increasing grounds to refuse or revoke bail; reducing access to diversion; and more powers to place electronic monitoring devices on young people in contact with the justice system.

Jesuit Social Services has made clear its opposition to the changes, which spurn the recommendations of the 2017 Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the NT and will not lead to improved community safety. The measures will also disproportionately impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, who make up most of the young people in custody in the NT. Thirty years since the landmark report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, which called for legislation to ensure imprisonment be used only as a last resort, these punitive, costly and ineffective policies will only cause more harm.

Grassroots-led action in the NT continues to demonstrate a better way to support young people and make communities safer for all. In Palmerston, an Aboriginal-led pilot program is working to improve employment opportunities for at-risk young people, including those who have been involved in the youth justice system. Initiated by local elder Serena Dalton, the Grassroots Youth Engagement Pilot Program has partnered with a local construction business to employ young people in a supported environment, with access to mentoring and cultural support. An evaluation prepared by Jesuit Social Services found the pilot has supported significant positive change in the lives of the young people engaged in it.

Jesuit Social Services also continues to deliver the pre-sentence Youth Justice Group Conferencing program in several locations across the NT, with positive results.

Facilitated by an independent convenor, group conferencing is a process that safely engages parties affected by a crime to understand what happened and how people have been affected, identify ways to repair the harm and make a plan to improve things for the future. We have found that the vast majority of young people who participate in a group conference successfully complete their outcome plan and show improved connections to family and significant others.

Group conferencing at the pre-sentence stage in the NT has provided a much needed court referred diversion option that can help young people avoid detention. Community-based support options have also been instituted through the Back on Track program, which focuses on diverting young people away from the justice system and stands in contrast to the government's recent regressive justice proposals. Jesuit Social Services provides restorative responses to support young people in Katherine, including linking young people with role models and cultural mentors who can support them to reach their goals.

We need to support young people who are getting into trouble by keeping them connected to family, school and community. Our 5th National Justice Symposium, to be held in Mparntwe/Alice Springs on 28 July 2021 in partnership with the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA), will take up the vital issue of youth justice. Centring the voices and stories of First Nations young people and communities, the Symposium will explore the ingredients for change from the grassroots to the system level, with keynotes and panel discussions, conversations with young people and with Elders, case studies of good practice, and a focus on the power of storytelling and community action.

You can find out more information, including details about our in person and live streaming registration options here:

<https://events.humanitix.com/njs>

Pilot program preventing homelessness after prison

One of the key challenges experienced by people exiting the prison system is a lack of safe and secure housing. Nearly half of people who exit prison in Victoria do so into homelessness, and a 2019 snapshot of participants in Jesuit Social Services' justice and crime prevention, and housing and complex needs programs found that 29 per cent of people were homeless.

Early on in the COVID-19 pandemic, Jesuit Social Services partnered with the Department of Justice and Community Safety to pilot an innovative temporary community residential facility in Melbourne, to prevent people from exiting prison into homelessness.

Initially established to stop the spread of COVID-19 in the community, the program – which provides wrap-around support as well as short-term housing – has made a big difference to the lives of vulnerable people.

"Pre-release, when we first meet with people, they've got big plans about the things they want to do differently this time. But when they are released, it can be very overwhelming. They are often going into crisis accommodation, or they are going into unsafe or unaffordable, unstable accommodation," says Suzette James-Nevell, Manager – Adult Justice Programs at Jesuit Social Services.

"This pilot has been a really different experience for them, in that they have stability here. They have three meals a day, they have a roof over their head. They have an opportunity to save money, they've got our support on site where really experienced case managers can support participants to achieve their goals."

The residential facility can house up to 44 people including people on parole and people who have recently exited prison.

Suzette says that access to housing – as well as support to secure longer-term housing and employment – has made a tangible, positive difference for participants.

"We are seeing excitement from people, [as] a few of these men have done the cycle of prison, to the community and back to prison for years. They're really excited about doing something different and having a different outcome.

"It's giving their families an opportunity to see that they've made a change or that they're stable."

Participant Christian (not his real name) says the support of staff at the facility has been crucial in helping him to turn his life around.

"They have not only provided me the environment to recover, but also enabled me to accelerate my ability and hope to return to a normal life and a career."



The Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility supports men who are exiting prison to find stable housing and employment prior to reentering the community

Help us to give young people a second chance

Our #WorthASecondChance campaign was launched in July 2018 as a way to engage the public in joining with us to call for the youth justice system our community deserves.

At the time, youth justice in Victoria was at a crossroad.

Victoria had once been a leader in its approach to youth justice but after years of neglect, run down facilities and an underinvestment in staff by both major political parties, the system was showing significant cracks. The Government and Opposition were promoting 'tough on crime' policies that were proven by local and international evidence to be ineffective or harmful. Something needed to change.

Worth a Second Chance engages the community through the voices of the young people at the centre of this issue and by encouraging peer-to-peer discussion. Simultaneously, Jesuit Social Services continues to advocate for the implementation of proven programs for vulnerable children who are at risk of entering the youth justice system and restorative justice for those already within the system.

One major change both Worth a Second Chance and Jesuit Social Services are advocating for, is to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 years old to at least 14.

Right now, in every state and territory in Australia, a child aged 10 can be charged and sent to prison. This flies in the face of evidence that demonstrates a child aged 10 years old cannot form criminal intent, and advice from the UN that the age of criminal responsibility should be 14 years of age at the very youngest.

Jesuit Social Services has been campaigning for over a decade to place this on the national agenda and we were encouraged that a process was underway at the nationally convened Council of Attorneys-General to address the issue.

However, we were disappointed to hear the Federal Government's recent decision to step back from a coordinated national approach to this important issue and to instead refer responsibility for further action back to the states and territories. The failure to include raising the age as a national agenda item will delay progress on this issue and condemn more vulnerable children to unnecessary detention.

"We are deeply disappointed that, despite a wealth of evidence from Australia and abroad showing that children under 14 years do not possess the neurological maturity to form criminal intent, the Council of Attorneys-General has ultimately handballed responsibility for this issue back to State and Territory Governments," says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

There are some signs of hope around the country. The Northern Territory has previously committed to accept the recommendation of the 2017 Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children and raise the age of criminal responsibility to 12 years old with no child under 14 years old to be held in prison, while the ACT government has also committed to a process that will see the age raised to 14. We will continue to work with State and Territory Governments to see that this important legislative change is made.

If you would like to find out more about #WorthASecondChance, head to www.worthasecondchance.com.au or find us on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram to sign up and lend your voice to this important campaign.



Staff Profile – John Andrew, Principal – Ignatius Learning Centre

When John Andrew left his job teaching in a mainstream secondary school to join the team at Parkville College – which provides education to young people incarcerated in Victoria's youth justice system – some of his colleagues "thought I was crazy to go and teach in a prison".

But for John, now Principal at Jesuit Social Services' Ignatius Learning Centre, it was a natural progression.

"When I was young I had a lot of cousins who were involved in the youth justice system and being quite close to them I wondered 'how did this happen?' but I never judged them and I always saw the best in them," he says.

"As a teacher I was always able to connect with disengaged students, I guess I could understand what they were going through. Working with disengaged and marginalised students, you learn different approaches to teaching and trauma-informed, therapeutic approaches to education."

The Ignatius Learning Centre, based at Jesuit Social Services' Central office in Richmond, is a Catholic Specialist Secondary School that supports boys aged 15 to 17 who are disengaged or at risk of disengaging with school and who have had contact with the youth justice system.

The school opened its doors in February this year and currently has 15 students, with John hoping the number will increase to 30 in coming months.

Students work towards completing the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) and have the opportunity to engage with Jesuit Social Services' suite of programs including Artful Dodgers Studios and the Ecological Justice Hub.

John says that, in addition to the classroom learning, students benefit from the supportive environment, ability to maintain routines and social interaction.

"That's one of the most encouraging things so far. Some of our kids have been with the school since we opened and missed less than a handful of days along the way. Initially they said, 'we might come a couple of days a week' and now they're here every day. It is very encouraging," he says.

"We often reflect at the end of class, and at the end of the week we do a reflection on the school week. Recently, I said to one student that he has attended all five days that week and I wanted to acknowledge it, after not attending school [at all] last year.

"At that point he said, 'it's because you guys are engaging, and you have high expectations of me' which we were blown away by. You can see the trust within the school, the staff and the students and the positive culture we are creating."



John Andrew is Principal of our new Ignatius Learning Centre

5th National Justice Symposium

Jesuit Social Services, in partnership with the National Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA), will be holding the biennial event on 28 July 2021 in Mparntwe/Alice Springs and online.

For more information, including registration options, visit <https://events.humanitix.com/njs>



Please make a donation today to give young people like Tom something everyone deserves – a second chance to find a better future.

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