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Post-release housing project will help more people get back on track: Jesuit Social Services

The Victorian Government's funding extension for a community residential facility in Maribyrnong that provides short term accommodation to men who would otherwise exit the prison system into homelessness will help more vulnerable people to get their lives back on track, and reduce the chances of re-offending, says Jesuit Social Services.

"We commend the Victorian Government on their commitment to ensuring this innovative initiative can continue for another 12 months. This pilot began in June 2020, and we are pleased it has been recognised as a crucial part of the post-release service mix with this funding commitment," says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

"Almost one third of people who exit the criminal justice system do so into homelessness – yet the limited support available to them in the community means they often cycle through the system, which is shown in Victoria's current recidivism rate of 43 per cent. This means close to half of all people who leave prison return within two years.

"The links between homelessness and contact with the criminal justice system are also seen in Jesuit Social Services' justice and crime prevention and housing and complex needs programs, where a 2019 snapshot found that 29 per cent of participants were experiencing homelessness."

Jesuit Social Services partners with the Department of Justice and Community Safety to deliver the Maribyrnong program, which in addition to secure accommodation, provides residents with wrap-around support such as learning and employment pathways, assistance to engage with health services and support to secure longer-term housing.

"People exiting prison will not have the opportunities they need to turn their lives around if they don't have a safe roof over the heads. This program provides that and also links people in with experienced case managers to help them identify and achieve goals, and ensure their transition to the community is as successful as possible," says Ms Edwards.

Feedback from participants during the first 12 months of the program's operation has been extremely positive. 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," he says.

Ms Edwards says the funding extension will support more people to turn their lives around.

"This is a simple yet effective program model that makes a tangible, positive difference not only to the lives of vulnerable people, but also to the broader community."

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