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**NT Government must invest in prevention, not detention:  
Jesuit Social Services**

The Northern Territory Government’s planned expansion of the Don Dale youth detention facility is a tacit admission it is turning its back on the recommendations of the Royal Commission into the Protection and Detention of Children in the Northern Territory which was established, in no small part, in response to the conditions at the very facility now being expanded.

“We are deeply disappointed that the Territory Government is spending millions on a facility that less than five years ago, a Royal Commission found was unfit for the detention let alone the rehabilitation of children,” says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

“The Royal Commission gave us a blueprint for a youth justice system that would better prevent crime from occurring and support children who did have contact with the youth justice system to turn their lives around. In recent months, the Territory Government has moved further away from these recommendations in favour of measures that won’t improve outcomes for anybody.”

The Territory Government recently implemented several legislative changes including changes to the Bail Act that will result in more vulnerable children being locked up.

“The impact of these regressive changes is already being felt. Last week there were more children in detention in the Territory than at any other point over the past 12 months. It is unacceptable that more vulnerable children will be exposed to the youth detention system, which means they are more likely to re-offend than children supported in the community, when all of the evidence including that highlighted by the Royal Commission shows us that children need to be supported to address the root causes of their behaviour and to connect with family, education and culture.

“It is also clear that these legislative changes – as well as the expansion of Don Dale - will have a disproportionate impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who make up the vast majority of children who have contact with the Territory’s youth justice system.”

Ms Edwards says the Territory Government should repeal its recent legislative changes and improve outcomes for vulnerable children, including raising the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14.

“Instead of investing in detention, our political leaders should be investing more in programs and services that help young people stay out of trouble and keep them engaged with family, education and culture. We must ensure our youth justice system only uses detention as a last resort, and that community-based responses including restorative justice approaches are available to help children take responsibility for their actions and steer them towards positive pathways,” she says.

Jesuit Social Services, in partnership with the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA), will present the 5<sup>th</sup> National Justice Symposium on July 28 in Alice Springs. The Symposium will centre the voices and stories of First Nations young people and their communities to explore the ingredients for change from the grassroots to the system level. For more information, visit [www.jss.org.au/national-justice-symposium](http://www.jss.org.au/national-justice-symposium)

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