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## **Youth detention reports emphasise need for skilled, supported workforce: Jesuit Social Services**

Reports of safety concerns for young people and staff alike at Malmsbury Youth Justice Centre have highlighted the need for the youth detention workforce to be well skilled, trained and supported to ensure the system can meet its primary goal of rehabilitation, says Jesuit Social Services.

“We are concerned and disappointed by recent media reports about assaults and other violent incidents within a facility that is tasked with the care of some of the state’s most troubled children, many of whom have experienced significant disadvantage including trauma and neglect, mental health or substance abuse problems,” says Jesuit Social Services Acting CEO Sally Parnell.

“Detention harms children and must only ever be used as a last resort. A strong youth justice system must emphasise keeping children supported to connect with family and school in the community wherever possible. A strong, effective youth justice system prioritises restorative justice approaches, to hold children and young people accountable for their actions and enable them to make amends without unnecessary contact with detention.

“For the very small number of young people for whom detention is a suitable response, staff perform critical roles in supporting them to turn their lives around and ensuring they exit the system better off than when they entered. Of course, youth detention staff deserve a safe workplace like everybody else, so reports that more than 600 assaults have been recorded at Malmsbury since 2016 point to systemic issues that are failing staff, young people and the broader community alike.”

In Jesuit Social Services’ recent submission to the *Cultural Review of Adult Custodial Corrections System*, the organisation advocates for the recruitment of adult corrections staff from culturally and linguistically diverse and Aboriginal communities to strengthen cultural safety within prisons, and for staff to receive ongoing training and development based on best practice approaches to working with people in prison, which should be funded from existing prison budgets.

“We want to see fundamental changes across both the adult and youth justice systems in terms of the way staff are recruited, trained and retained. For example, we must strengthen the capability of the workforce to deliver trauma-informed practices to address the complex needs of young offenders who face significant barriers to inclusion,” says Ms Parnell.

“On our #JusticeSolutions tours of parts of Europe, the US and New Zealand, we observed the importance of experienced and well-resourced staff in helping to build relationships with young people which facilitate positive pathways and reduce the chances of re-offending, and that the most effective systems are the ones where young people are supported to address their individual and often complex needs. A safe youth detention system that focuses on setting children and young people up for success when they return to the community means safer workplaces, less crime and more cohesive communities.”

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