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Youth Justice Strategy an important step towards a system that works for all

The Victorian Government's Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2020-2030, launched today, is an important step towards a strong, effective and humane youth justice system that gives vulnerable children and young people the best opportunity to get their lives back on track, says Jesuit Social Services.

The strategy sets out the underpinning philosophies of Victoria's youth justice system over the next decade. It prioritises diversion options to ensure detention is only used as a last resort, aims to reduce offending and provides culturally-specific support.

"We commend the Victorian Government on its vision for a youth justice system that works for everyone. This includes young people who have contact with, or are at risk of contact with, the justice system as well as youth justice staff, victims of crime and the broader community," says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

Ms Edwards says a crucial part of the strategy is the commitment to an end-to-end youth justice workforce plan, which will emphasise proactive recruitment and retention, strengthen training and skill development for staff and ultimately ensure youth detention facilities are safe places for staff and young people alike.

"Over the past three years, leaders from Jesuit Social Services have visited youth justice systems in parts of the US, Europe and New Zealand, to explore what best practice looks like.

"What we found is that they share an emphasis on attracting and retaining staff members with the personal attributes, skills and experience in working with vulnerable young people who face barriers to inclusion. This leads to better opportunities for young people to turn their lives around, and safer workplaces for staff, which we all want to see.

"The key actions outlined in the strategy around promoting and supporting an experienced, well-resourced workforce in Victoria's youth justice system will have tangible benefits for young people and those who work with them."

Ms Edwards says education and employment pathways are crucial in supporting young people towards more positive futures, and welcomes the commitment to expand vocational learning opportunities for young people in detention, and increased delivery of employment services.

"A key theme of our [#JusticeSolutions tours](#) has been the importance of providing real-world skills and learning opportunities to young people in the justice system to ensure that when they exit the system, they do so into positive pathways to work or study."

Jesuit Social Services will continue to advocate across Australia for the age of legal responsibility to be raised from 10 to 14 years, ahead of recommendations by the Council of Attorneys-General later this year.

"Keeping primary school aged children in the classroom, not in prison, should be a cornerstone of any effective youth justice system."

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