



MEDIA RELEASE – FEBRUARY 16, 2023

Victoria’s move to #RaiseTheAge will support children, families and the broader community: Jesuit Social Services

Premier Daniel Andrews’ commitment that Victoria will take steps to raise the age of criminal responsibility – either as part of a national approach or on its own – in coming weeks is a significant development and will make a tangible difference to the lives of children, families and the broader community, says Jesuit Social Services.

“We are thrilled that the Premier has committed to raising the age of criminal responsibility – meaning children as young as 10 years can no longer be held in detention which we know causes such significant harm and only increases the likelihood of them having further contact with the justice system as they get older,” says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

“Jesuit Social Services and our colleagues in the community services and legal fraternity have advocated for this for many years. The evidence has been clear for a long time that Australia is out of step with human rights standards and medical science regarding child development by continuing to incarcerate primary school aged children as young as 10.

“Victoria prides itself on being a progressive state and it is fantastic to see strong and decisive leadership on this issue, following the lead of other jurisdictions including the Northern Territory, Tasmania and the ACT that have all taken steps to ensure that primary school aged children remain in the classroom, not in prison.”

Ms Edwards says that while details of Victoria’s move to raise the age are currently unclear, it is imperative that the age be raised from 10 to a minimum of 14 years, with no exceptions.

“We know that children in detention are some of the most marginalised children in our community. The Youth Parole Board’s most recent Annual Report shows that more than 50 per cent of children in detention have been subject to a current or previous child protection order, half have experienced family violence and more than 70 per cent have been victims of abuse, trauma or neglect.

“It is estimated that children who are arrested before they turn 14 are three times more likely to re-offend as adults than children arrested after they turn 14. Today’s announcement is an opportunity to ensure that Victoria raises the age of criminal responsibility to at least 14, giving more children the opportunity to reach their potential and lead healthy and fulfilling lives in the community.”

In 2019, Jesuit Social Services released a discussion paper, [Raising the age of criminal responsibility: There is a better way](#), which outlined a range of practical ways in which children could be held accountable for their actions in ways that prevent further anti-social behaviour and better protect the entire community.

This includes an increased emphasis on restorative justice approaches for children who engage in anti-social behaviour. These approaches support children to make amends for their behaviour, putting them on a more positive pathway.

“Keeping children in the community, where they belong, is a vital step in ensuring they have the best chance to reach their potential. We look forward to working with the Victorian Government over coming months and years towards better outcomes for children, their families and the broader community.”

Media enquiries: Kathryn Kernohan, 0409 901 248 or kathryn.kernohan@jss.org.au