



# Jesuit Social Services

Submission to the 2020/21  
Victorian State Budget

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# Contents

- Jesuit Social Services: Who we are and what we do .....3
- Introduction .....4
- Key Themes .....5
- Summary of Recommendations .....5
  - Strengthening communities to stop problems before they start .....5
  - Supporting those with complex or multiple needs .....6
  - Helping people get back on track.....7
- Strengthening communities to stop problems before they start .....8
  - Embedding Place-Based Approaches .....8
  - Ecological Justice .....9
  - Increasing Social and Affordable Housing .....10
  - Supporting Education .....12
  - Facilitating Healthy Attitudes to Gender and Culture .....13
  - Improving Pathways to Employment.....17
    - Jobs initiatives .....17
- Supporting those with complex or multiple needs.....19
  - Improving Mental Health.....19
    - Housing .....20
    - Young People .....21
    - Postvention Support .....22
    - Short-Term Residential Care for Those Who Have Attempted Suicide or are Suicidal.....23
    - New service response for those with Borderline Personality Disorder .....24
- Helping people get back on track .....24
  - Improving the Youth Justice System .....24
    - Raise the Age of Criminal Responsibility to At Least 14 Years .....26
    - Targets .....28
    - Youth Justice Workforce .....28
    - Through-Care .....29
    - Group Conferencing .....30
    - RESTORE .....31
    - Restorative Justice and Out-of-Home Care Services.....32
    - Bail and Supported Accommodation .....32
    - Transitional Support .....33
    - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young People .....35
  - Improving the Adult Justice System .....37
    - Supported Accommodation .....38
    - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Over-Representation .....39
- Appendix A.....41
- End Notes.....42

## Jesuit Social Services: Who we are and what we do

Jesuit Social Services has been working for more than 40 years delivering practical support and advocating for improved policies to achieve strong, cohesive and vibrant communities where every individual can play their role and flourish.

We are a social change organisation working with some of the most marginalised individuals and communities, often experiencing multiple and complex challenges. Jesuit Social Services works where the need is greatest and where we have the capacity, experience and skills to make the most difference.

Our services span Victoria, New South Wales and the Northern Territory and we support more than 57,000 individuals and families annually.

Our service delivery and advocacy focus on the following key areas:

**Justice and crime prevention** – people involved with the justice system or at risk of becoming involved.

**Mental health and wellbeing** – people with complex and multiple needs, including mental illness, trauma, homelessness and complex bereavement.

**Settlement and community building** – recently arrived immigrants and refugees, and disadvantaged communities.

**Education, training and employment** – people with barriers to sustainable employment.

**Gender and culture** – providing leadership on the reduction of violence and other harmful behaviours prevalent among boys and men, and building new approaches to improve their wellbeing and keep families and communities safe.

**Ecological justice** – inviting discussion on what practices, policies and actions can be taken by governments, individuals, organisations and the community services sector within Australia to build an ecologically just society.

The promotion of education, lifelong learning and capacity building is fundamental to all our activity. We believe this is the most effective means of helping people to reach their potential and exercise their full citizenship. This, in turn, strengthens the broader community.

Research, advocacy and policy are coordinated across all programs and major interest areas of Jesuit Social Services. Our advocacy is grounded in the knowledge, expertise and experiences of program staff and participants, as well as academic research and evidence. We seek to influence policies, practices, legislation and budget investment to positively influence people's lives and improve approaches to addressing long-term social challenges. We do this by working collaboratively with the community to build coalitions and alliances around key issues, and by building strong relationships with business and government.

Our Learning and Practice Development Unit builds the capacity of our services through staff development, training and evaluation, as well as articulating and disseminating information on best-practice approaches to working with participants and communities across our programs.

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of all the lands on which Jesuit Social Services operates and pay respect to their Elders past and present. We express our gratitude for their love and care of people, community, land and all life.

## Introduction

Many Victorians and Victorian communities experience significant and persistent disadvantage that manifests in high rates of disengagement from school, as well as joblessness, homelessness, drug and alcohol misuse, family violence, child maltreatment, offending, mental illness, and pain and trauma. These are complex challenges, especially because they intersect, interact, and are often inter-generational. Not surprisingly, evidence increasingly shows that simplistic siloed solutions do not work to turn around entrenched disadvantage and create resilient and safe communities.

The Victorian Government is to be commended for its public commitments to reform in critical areas of social policy – including family violence, mental health, and jobs creation for vulnerable jobseekers.

However, there are still significant gaps and inconsistencies in approach. For example, notwithstanding the Department of Justice and Community Safety's recently developed *Statement of Direction 2019-2023*<sup>i</sup>, there has been a longstanding lack of vision for youth and adult justice systems that:

- strengthen local communities;
- positively address complex vulnerabilities to prevent crime before it happens;
- intervene early to change trajectories before people become entrenched in the criminal justice system; and
- properly support rehabilitation and reintegration into the community so that offenders can transform their lives.

As a result, many of Victoria's most vulnerable young people and adults find themselves on increasingly negative trajectories that too often include involvement in the youth and criminal justice systems. This squanders human potential, creates more victims of crime, continues to overcrowd our prisons, and fails to improve community safety.

Jesuit Social Services thus welcomes the opportunity contribute to the development of the Victorian Government's 2020-21 State Budget, and offers a suite of positive solutions so that everyone in the community has the best chance to thrive. We are cognisant of the significant ongoing growth of Victoria's population, especially in the greater Melbourne area, and the pressure this represents for services. Without intervention now to address existing service deficits, the significant disadvantage experienced by particular communities and cohorts will compound, as will pressure on the public purse to address the negative consequences. Increasing pressure on services due to population growth increase is arguably the biggest challenge facing Victoria's public and community services sectors.

## Key Themes

Jesuit Social Services' vision for building a just society is reflected in all that we do. Indeed, we work with some of the most marginalised individuals and communities in Victoria with complex and multiple needs.

In this context, the key message of our submission to the Victorian Government for the 2020-21 State Budget is the need to support establishment, re-establishment and/or continuity of strong family, community and cultural relationships that effectively assist individuals to work towards achieving their full potential.

Meeting this goal requires adequate and sustained investment in a holistic whole-of-government approach, which simultaneously focuses on preventative, early intervention and rehabilitative policies and programs in an integrated and targeted manner. To this end, our specific budgetary requests are organised in terms of three key inter-connected policy and program themes:

- **Strengthening communities to stop problems before they start**
- **Supporting those with complex or multiple needs**
- **Helping people get back on track.**

## Summary of Recommendations

### Strengthening communities to stop problems before they start

**Recommendation 1:** That the Victorian Government commit to long-term investment in a whole-of-government place-based approach to addressing entrenched local disadvantage across multiple domains, targeting the most disadvantaged postcodes in Victoria. The web of disadvantage can be broken effectively by a multi-layered, cooperative and coordinated strategy that is owned and driven by the community.

**Recommendation 2:** That the Victorian Government build on and support the implementation of Victoria's Climate Change Framework<sup>ii</sup> by:

- increasing funding and resources for organisations and communities seeking to trial, test and implement climate change adaptation, mitigation and transformation activities;
- increasing access to and translation of latest research and evidence-based practice relevant to the community services sector; and
- supporting actions to increase awareness within the community services sector of ecological justice and how to minimise environmental injustice and inequity, with a focus on organisational culture and program delivery.

**Recommendation 3:** That the Victorian Government prioritise increased investment in new public and community housing stock and access to supported housing. This should include:

- funding the building of at least 3,800 new public and community housing properties each year over the next four years – as recommended by Victoria's peak housing organisation;

- expanding the diversity of housing options for different cohorts of people with complex or multiple needs, including specific housing initiatives for single people, young people, women, people with experience of trauma, people with mental ill-health, and people exiting the justice system; and
- supporting and resourcing cross-sector initiatives (housing-employment services) to create a better integrated response for people in crisis.

**Recommendation 4:** That the Victorian Government further expand the statewide *Navigator* program by lowering the age of eligibility from 12 years to 10 years.

**Recommendation 5:** That the Victorian Government invest \$450,000 for Jesuit Social Services to extend a *Before it Starts* pilot across five primary schools throughout Victoria as an early intervention strategy to respond to boys aged 8 to 12 years from diverse communities to strengthen relationship skills and school engagement and curb violent behaviour.

**Recommendation 6:** That the Victorian Government pilot *Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE)* as a gender equality and prevention of violence against women initiative with 50 community services organisations, including sports clubs and organisations that predominantly work with men and boys, at a cost of \$400,000 .

**Recommendation 7:** That the Victorian Government implement long-term whole-of-government place-based approaches targeted to the most disadvantaged postcodes in Victoria that work with the community, industry and employers to create real jobs and pathways to employment.

**Recommendation 8:** That the Victorian Government provide ongoing funding over the long-term for employment services initiatives, including *JVEN*, that are particularly targeted to Victorians who experience significant barriers to employment.

## Supporting those with complex or multiple needs

**Recommendation 9:** That the Victorian Government increase investment in mental health services for young people through establishing:

- comprehensive facility-based mental health services, which provide thorough assessment and ensure appropriate follow-up interventions and services, for all young people in custody;
- a statewide service network that provides secondary consultation and support for community mental health outreach services that manage young people with offending behaviours (predominantly referred via the Youth Justice Mental Health Clinician initiative); and
- comprehensive training and supervision for community services to enable them to assess and manage mental illness-related violence and offending (including family violence).

**Recommendation 10:** That the Victorian Government provide secure, long-term funding for statewide postvention services for suicide bereavement, including the *Support After Suicide* service provided by Jesuit Social Services, and provide increased access to suicide bereavement services for people in regional and rural areas.

**Recommendation 11:** That the Victorian Government provide funding to develop an evidence base on the impact of suicide and the effectiveness of postvention services.

**Recommendation 12:** That the Victorian Government invest in short-term residential care for people who have attempted suicide or who are suicidal.

**Recommendation 13:** Develop a new service response for individuals with Borderline Personality Disorder, including provisions for care within a secure facility when required.

## Helping people get back on track

**Recommendation 14:** That the Victorian Government implement all the recommendations made in the Victorian Ombudsman's 2019 report on practices related to solitary confinement of children and young people.

**Recommendation 15:** That the Victorian Government:

- raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 years to at least 14 years; and
- fund programs that take a restorative and therapeutic approach to anti-social behaviour in children under the age of 14.

**Recommendation 16:** That the Victorian Government set public targets to reduce youth offending, recidivism, incarceration, and the number of young people on remand, and corresponding targets specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

**Recommendation 17:** That the Victorian Government strengthen the youth justice workforce, including detention officers and other staff in youth detention centres, by implementing a requirement for a minimum relevant professional qualification, which includes theoretical and fieldwork practice components.

**Recommendation 18:** That the Victorian Government provide sufficient resourcing for the *Youth Justice Community Support Service (YJCSS)* so that all young people exiting custody and their families have access to the supports they need.

**Recommendation 19:** That the Victorian Government expand and promote access to *Youth Justice Group Conferencing* by legislating for this to be 'opt-out', rather than 'opt-in', and invest in targeted intensive case management support for young people following participation in a *Youth Justice Group Conference*.

**Recommendation 20:** That the Victorian Government prioritise investment in restorative approaches to prevent and address violence in young boys and men, including extending funding for Jesuit Social Services' *RESTORE* pilot.

**Recommendation 21:** That the Victorian Government expand restorative justice conferencing to include children and young people in out-of-home care placements, especially in residential care units, in the child protection system.

**Recommendation 22:** That the Victorian Government establish small transitional houses staffed 24/7, to provide safe accommodation for 3-4 young people on bail for up to 12 months at a time. These houses would facilitate access to tailored life skills, education and work readiness programs, and coordinate a transition to sustainable long-term independent living options.

**Recommendation 23:** That the Victorian Government provide recurrent funding for:

- the *Link Youth Justice Housing Program* and to expand it statewide; and

- a housing model similar to Jesuit Social Services' *Next Steps* for young women transitioning from prison back into the community and to make it available statewide.

**Recommendation 24:** That the Victorian Government provide funding to:

- expand the *Barreng Moorop* model throughout Victoria to provide a whole-of-family approach to children in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities who are involved with the youth justice system; and
- build the capacity of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to implement the other recommendations made by Jesuit Social Services in our submission to *Our youth, our way: Systemic Inquiry into the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in Victoria's youth justice system*.

**Recommendation 25:** That the Victorian Government invest in restorative justice group conferencing for adults involved in the justice system.

**Recommendation 26:** That the Victorian Government invest in more intensive transition support services for highly vulnerable people leaving prison by:

- expanding the Judy Lazarus Transition Centre to enable a greater proportion of the prisoner population to access intensive transitional support;
- creating an equivalent transitional support facility for women prisoners, especially those with complex and multiple needs, including mental health issues, intellectual disability or cognitive impairment; and
- expanding the range and quantity of supported housing options for people exiting prison.

**Recommendation 27:** That the Victorian Government provide ongoing funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness training for all adult justice prison staff and service deliverers, as well as for more positions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander case managers to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners in Victoria's prisons.

## Strengthening communities to stop problems before they start

Adequate and sustained investment in a range of interventions underpinned by a whole-of-government approach is required to strengthen vulnerable communities and avoid negative life trajectories and outcomes for individuals and families. In this context, Jesuit Social Services advocates several specific programs and initiatives, discussed below in terms of place-based approaches, housing, education, and gender and culture.

### Embedding Place-Based Approaches

In our *Submission to the 2019-20 Victorian State Budget*,<sup>iii</sup> Jesuit Social Services argued the need for sustained, collaborative, long-term commitment across the government, community and business sectors to break the inter-generational web of disadvantage impacting the three per cent most disadvantaged postcodes in Victoria. This recommendation is grounded in evidence that demonstrates the effectiveness of place-based approaches in addressing entrenched local disadvantage.<sup>iv</sup>



We commend the Victorian Government's specific recognition of place-based approaches for some time as effective in strengthening family and community functioning and avoiding involvement with and penetration into the child protection and justice systems.

The Victorian Government's recognition of the effectiveness of place-based approaches is also embodied in its 'Partnerships Addressing Disadvantage' (PAD) initiative<sup>v</sup>, which was announced in October 2018 as "a brand new approach to working with local communities to make life better for vulnerable children and their families".<sup>vi</sup> This initiative was to provide almost \$20 million of new investment over four years, building on the Government's Roadmap for Reform of the Victorian child protection system. Nevertheless, the future of the PAD initiative is unclear, given it was not specifically funded in the Victorian Government's 2019-20 Budget.

Meanwhile, Jesuit Social Services acknowledges the Victorian Government's 2019-20 Budget allocation of \$82.9 million for regional development priorities – including the revitalisation of Sebastopol and \$3.5 million for suburban revitalisation projects, the continuation of the Broadmeadows Town Centre and Frankston Station revitalisation projects, as well as other community-led projects designed to support local communities and address "social disadvantage through youth and family engagement programs, and facilitating new economic development opportunities"<sup>vii</sup>.

### **Recommendation 1:**

That the Victorian Government commit to long-term investment in a whole-of-government place-based approach to addressing entrenched local disadvantage across multiple domains, targeting the most disadvantaged postcodes in Victoria. The web of disadvantage can be broken effectively by a multi-layered, cooperative and coordinated strategy that is owned and driven by the community.

## **Ecological Justice**

In an increasingly complex era of climate crisis, environmental degradation and rising social inequity, new challenges towards building a just society are appearing. The most marginalised and vulnerable populations are often the least responsible for ecological risks and threats but are the most affected by their emergence.

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the *Inquiry into Tackling Climate Change in Victorian Communities*, which offers a timely consideration of how the Victorian Government can support communities in addressing climate change.

Recognising that environmental challenges pose particular risks to the communities with whom we work, Jesuit Social Services has sought to bring an ecological perspective to all operations. The interconnection between environmental and social justice has influenced our practice, policy, advocacy and organisational identity. It has shaped our strategy to ensure we are equipped to address justice issues of the future, and to lead peer organisations around issues of ecological justice. Specific actions include:

- the establishment of the Ecological Justice Hub in Brunswick, Victoria, that provides a range of community education and advocacy activities; skills, training and employment support into green economy jobs for people experiencing barriers to employment; and green living demonstration projects for the wider community that support climate change reduction and environmental recovery;
- an ongoing series of cross-sector symposia focused on climate justice;
- delivering a suite of training for the community services sector, designed in collaboration with VCOSS and RMIT Climate Change Exchange on ecological literacy and justice, with a focus upon organisational change and climate change adaptation;
- the incorporation of indicators of environmental risks and threats into our nation-wide research on place-based disadvantage, *Dropping of the Edge (DOTE)*; and
- increasing our focus on how to minimise the unfairness inherent in climate change by exploring the concept of a 'just transition' – that is, how to move from current untenable economic and social systems to an ecologically sustainable, zero greenhouse gas emissions world in a way that ensures those least able to cope with climate change receive the help they need to successfully adapt.<sup>viii</sup>

### Recommendation 2:

That the Victorian Government build on and support the implementation of Victoria's Climate Change Framework by:

- increasing funding and resources for organisations and communities seeking to trial, test and implement climate change adaptation, mitigation and transformation activities;
- increasing access to and translation of latest research and evidence-based practice relevant to the community services sector; and
- supporting actions to increase awareness within the community services sector of ecological justice and how to minimise environmental injustice and inequity, with a focus on organisational culture and program delivery.

## Increasing Social and Affordable Housing

Adequate housing is a fundamental human right: "Access to safe and secure housing is one of the most basic human rights... Every person has the right to an adequate standard of living, which includes the right to adequate housing (ICESCR, article 11)".<sup>ix</sup> Relatedly, it is widely acknowledged that secure long-term housing helps set a firm foundation for personal wellbeing and agency:

*Access to safe, adequate and affordable housing is a crucial foundation for enabling a person's physical and mental health and wellbeing. Without access to appropriate housing, people are unable to focus on other aspects of their lives (such as health, education and employment) and are unable to contribute productively to society.*

From a broader societal perspective, the provision of adequate housing helps build more productive, cohesive and safer communities. The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) has made a compelling business case for social housing – that is, housing provided below private rental rates (including public housing and community housing) – to be considered as public infrastructure.<sup>xi</sup> Infrastructure Australia concurs that social housing is “an important piece of social infrastructure in Australia that serves both a social and economic purpose and contributes to the effective functioning of society”.<sup>xii</sup>

Jesuit Social Services works with many people experiencing vulnerability who rely on public or community housing to meet their accommodation needs. We see many people – especially those with mental health and substance misuse issues, newly-arrived refugees and migrants, those exiting prison, and those leaving out-of-home care services – who have experienced homelessness, housing instability and stress, as well as other forms of disadvantage in their lives.

Numerous recent research reports indicate that the state of social housing in Victoria – indeed, in Australia – is in need of urgent attention.<sup>xiii</sup> Jesuit Social Services has long called for more innovative responses to improving Victoria's social housing system.

We acknowledge the Victorian Government's funding allocation of \$209 million in its 2019-20 Budget as part of its commitment to build 1,000 new social housing properties over three years “to fight homelessness”. Unfortunately, this does not provide enough new public housing stock to close the existing gap in supply for those in urgent need of public and community housing in Victoria, let alone address the projected increasing gap in future years. For this reason, Jesuit Social Services strongly supports the national *Everybody's Home* campaign.<sup>xiv</sup> In this context, we call for a significant increase in access to social housing, including public housing.

### **Recommendation 3:**

That the Victorian Government prioritise increased investment in new public and community housing stock and access to supported housing. This should include:

- funding the building of at least 3,800 new public and community housing properties each year over the next four years – as recommended by Victoria's peak housing organisations;
- expanding the diversity of housing options for different cohorts of people with complex or multiple needs, including specific housing initiatives for single people, young people, women, people with experience of trauma, people with mental ill-health, and people exiting the justice system; and
- supporting and resourcing cross-sector initiatives (housing-employment services) to create a better integrated response for people in crisis.

## Supporting Education

It is widely recognised that disengagement from school is often the first sign that a young person has started on a trajectory of anti-social behaviour and involvement with the youth justice system. This is exemplified by a recent snapshot of 166 young people involved in youth justice, 68 per cent of whom had been previously suspended or expelled from school.<sup>xv</sup>

### Navigator

Jesuit Social Services delivers casework and support to disadvantaged young learners as part of the Victorian Government's *Navigator* initiative. We welcomed the statewide expansion of the program through the 2018-19 Victorian Budget.<sup>xvi</sup>

In our experience delivering *Navigator*, we have found that young people would also benefit from better coordination between the various services they interact with.

#### Case study: Steven

When Steven (not his real name), a young Aboriginal boy, engaged with Jesuit Social Services' Navigator program in late 2016 he was experiencing significant challenges with his education. Steven had long-standing issues with attendance, had a diagnosed learning disability and was not receiving any extra assistance in the classroom. Steven only attended three days of school in 2017 and although his mother tried several times to seek extra support for him in the classroom, he was never provided with an Individual Learning Plan. He was also struggling with family conflict, low confidence and a lack of understanding around his own complex needs.

Steven's Navigator case worker was able to gain a deep understanding of his personal challenges, build a sense of trust with him and link him in to culturally-specific services, including counselling and group activities. Navigator helped Steven re-engage with education and, two years later, he attends approximately 80 per cent of his school timetable. His confidence has grown to the point that he has applied for casual work, which his mother identifies as a major success in his life, and is engaged with work experience through his school.

Steven's story demonstrates the importance of long-term case management with a focus on a young person's health and wellbeing, and the need for a culturally sensitive and respectful framework.

Through our work with young people we have observed that those with a history of out-of-home care have often been disengaged from education for some time. Beginning with the school, coordination should be extending to youth justice, family violence services and child protection. Lowering the age of eligibility for the program from 12 years to 10 years would enable *Navigator* to intervene earlier with these at-risk young people to disrupt their potential pathway into the youth justice system.

#### Recommendation 4:

That the Victorian Government further expand the statewide Navigator program by lowering the age of eligibility from 12 years to 10 years.

### Facilitating Healthy Attitudes to Gender and Culture

Most boys grow up to be productive, healthy and responsible members of society. However, some boys drop out of school early, have dysfunctional family relationships, live on the margins of society, and get into trouble. Manifested in high rates of substance misuse, mental health issues, radicalisation and violence, these boys and young men cycle in and out of crisis services and the justice system at immense social and financial cost.

The impact on women, children, families, communities and society as a whole is profound. Recently, Australian governments have begun to acknowledge and address violence against women. The focus has been, as it should, on supporting the victims of violence.

But there is a need to do much more. Around 95 per cent of victims of violence experience violence from a male perpetrator<sup>xvii</sup>; 93 per cent of all prisoners in Victoria are male<sup>xviii</sup>; and, on average, 6 men suicide each day – three times the rate of women<sup>xix</sup>. There is a compelling need to address the root causes of violence by supporting boys to live respectful, accountable and fulfilling lives, enabling them to develop loving relationships free from violence and contribute to safe and equal communities.

There are already some important programs that work with boys and men, particularly in responding to violence. For more than 40 years, Jesuit Social Services has been a prominent provider of such programs. Still, we recognise that the spread of such programs is uneven; that they are disparate in nature; and, while some are successful, that they generally deal with single-issue behaviours of individual men and boys.

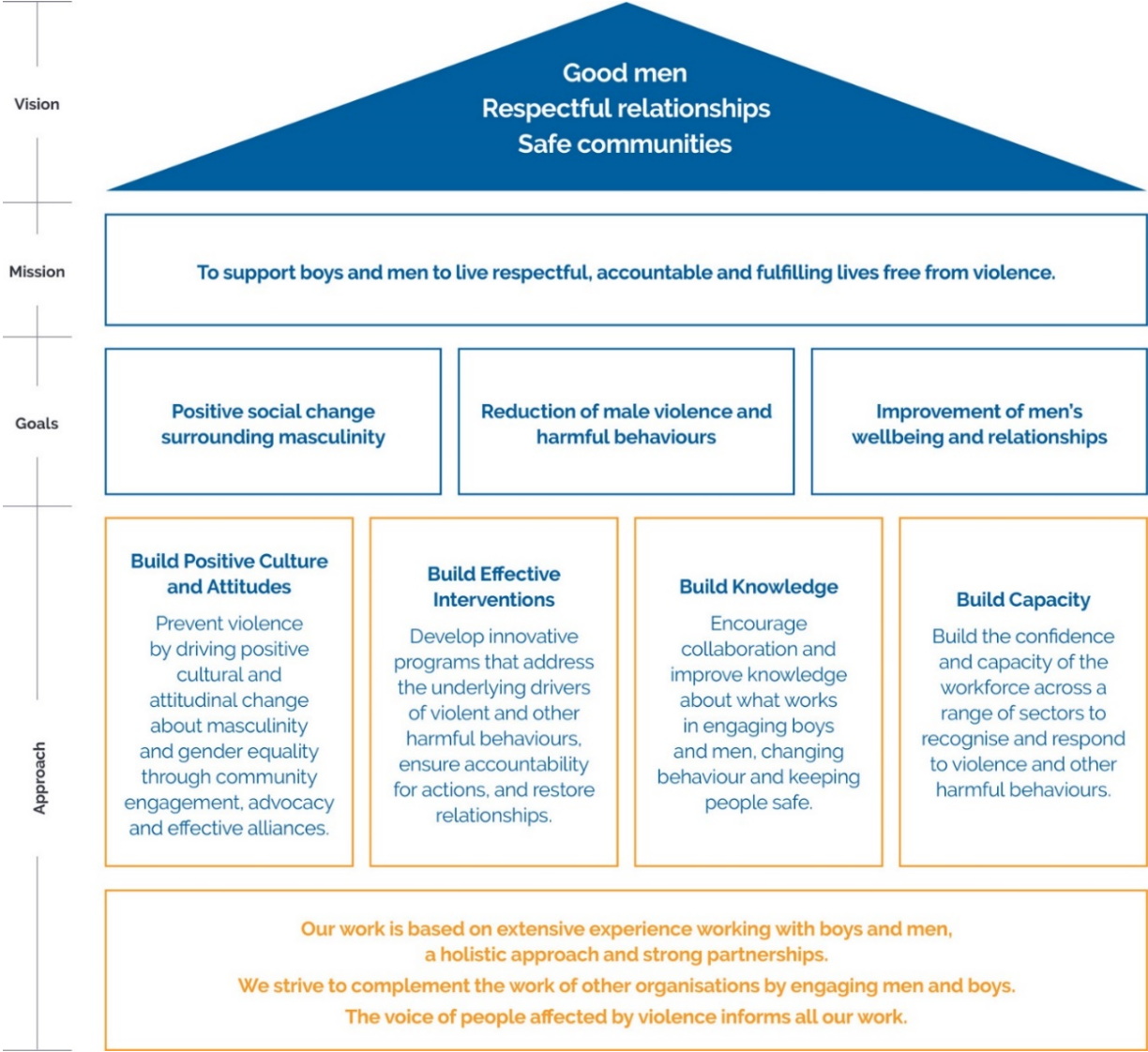
Jesuit Social Services thus advocates a new approach – a big picture approach – that addresses the root causes of violence and harmful behaviour by boys and men. To this end, in 2017, we established The Men's Project to provide leadership; to develop new approaches aimed at reducing violence and other harmful behaviours prevalent among boys and men; to build new approaches to improve their well-being; and to keep families and communities safe. Figure 1 provides an overview of our vision, goals and approach taken through The Men's Project.

The Men's Project incorporates a range of initiatives across four key approaches, namely to:

1. Promote cultural and attitudinal change around issues of masculinity and gender to support primary prevention efforts.
2. Develop, deliver and evaluate interventions that address violence and other harmful behaviour.
3. Share knowledge across sectors about what works to engage boys and men and change their behaviour.

- 4. Build capacity across services to recognise and respond to violence and other harmful behaviours in boys and men.

**Figure 1:** The Men's Project



Collectively, these initiatives seek to promote positive social change surrounding masculinity, reduce male violence and harmful behaviours, and improve men's wellbeing and relationships. Unfortunately, however, responses to young boys heading down a path of trouble often come too late, once they have already disengaged from school. Thus, there is a need for programs specifically targeting boys who are at risk of disengagement from school.

We commend the Victorian Government for its recognition of this need in the 2019-20 State Budget. There is, however, a need for sustained investment in this area, including investment in developing new ways to identify boys at risk between the ages of 8 and 12 and support them to remain in school and out of trouble, and in individual and community-level interventions for men who use violence.

Jesuit Social Services acknowledges the Victorian Government's *Respectful Relationships* program being delivered through Victorian schools and early childhood settings to promote and model respect, positive attitudes and behaviour.<sup>xx</sup> *Respectful Relationships* makes an important contribution to modelling and teaching healthy attitudes and behaviour to students in relation to gender equality.

### **'Before it Starts' (Early Intervention)**

Jesuit Social Services has developed a new program, *Before It Starts*, with funding raised from philanthropic and donor sources. *Before It Starts* is based on the successful *Navigator* model discussed earlier and adapted for a younger cohort. We are currently in the final stages of preparation to pilot the program in two primary schools located in regional and outer metropolitan Melbourne areas.

The program works with boys aged 8 to 12 who are using violence or demonstrating anti-social behaviours at school. Using a combination of socio-emotional group work and tailored one-on-one work, the program seeks to raise awareness and challenge stereotypical masculine norms – a primary driver of violence. The program also works with parents and school staff to promote an understanding of healthy masculinities and build capacity in the application of restorative practice.

Designed for sustained capacity building in schools while delivered as a practical program with a current Grade 5-6 cohort, *Before It Starts* is building an evidence-based scalable model for adaptation broadly by schools. The initial pilot has been developed in Victoria by Jesuit Social Services in partnership with the Department of Education, schools, community service agencies and parents of disengaged students. The pilot will be introduced in February 2020, and will provide lead indicators of impact and process evaluation to guide a larger trial. A pilot of five schools will provide a strong foundation to establish tools and resources for scaling up.

#### **Recommendation 5:**

That the Victorian Government invest \$450,000 for Jesuit Social Services to extend a *Before it Starts* pilot across five primary schools throughout Victoria as an early intervention strategy to respond to boys aged 8 to 12 years from diverse communities to strengthen relationship skills and school engagement and curb violent behaviour.

### ***Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE) (Prevention)***

Research on individual and community-level interventions for men who use violence has produced mixed results on the effectiveness of men's behaviour change programs in effectively combating the use of violence in the long-term. These programs tend to locate the need for change solely within the perpetrator, deflecting attention away from the need for wider social and cultural change in relation to ideals of masculinity and what it means to be a man.

The pressure to 'be a real man' looks different in different communities. Masculinity intersects with other social factors, such as age, cultural background and disadvantage. Clearly, place-based approaches are required to deal with entrenched and harmful

gender-based assumptions, taking into account the realities of particular communities and the lives of individuals within them.

*Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE)* was developed and is delivered by The Men's Project to support people who work with men and boys. *MoRE* promotes social change across the community by fostering peer leadership and thus addressing the culture that underpins gender inequities and the associated harms experienced by both women and men, working to create healthy, respectful and thriving boys and men. The three-month *MoRE* program helps build awareness, knowledge, skills and confidence to model and promote respect and equality. It includes a 2-day intensive training workshop and a subsequent period of supported project work with a community of practice, which equip participants to challenge harmful stereotypes and promote healthier attitudes and behaviours amongst the boys and men they work with. Each *MoRE* program costs approximately \$35,000 – \$45,000 to run, depending upon location and the contribution that partners make to the various tasks within the program.

Living up to the pressures of being a 'real man' causes harm to young men and those around them, particularly women. The Man Box research<sup>xxi</sup> shows that young men who most strongly agree with the Man Box rules are more likely to report committing acts of violence, online bullying and sexual harassment, involvement in car accidents, poorer levels of mental health, and engaging in risky drinking.

As well as impacting on women and families, The Man Box research shows that highly regulated masculinity causes men and boys to suffer. In light of these findings, investment is needed in new and innovative ways that work with men and boys to address the negative impacts of dominant masculinity on men's and boys' use of violence and their health and wellbeing. Prevention based interventions are needed that work with men and boys at all ages and stages of their lives.

The Men's Project's *Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE)* provides individuals and organisations who work with men and boys with tools to address these attitudes and shift conversations. Within schools, sports clubs, workplaces and communities, *MoRE* empowers individuals to promote healthier ideas of what it means to be a man amongst their peers, as well as the men and boys they are working with. Through training workshops and ongoing engagement over a period of six months, participants in *MoRE* are supported to build deeper understanding of key issues, develop greater self-awareness, learn how to model and promote positive change, recognise and challenge problematic attitudes and behaviours, and actively influence and make an impact in their community.

*MoRE* is already in high demand, with five Local Governments, the Victorian Department of Education and Edmund Rice Education Australia investing in this program to drive change in their communities. With a focus on targeted local actions post-workshop, communities are building active advocates to reduce gender inequality. *MoRE* requires a lead community partner (e.g. Local Government) to work with Jesuit Social Services to guide its implementation at the local level for effective change.



### Recommendation 6:

That the Victorian Government pilot Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE) as a gender equality and prevention of violence against women initiative with 50 community services organisations, including sports clubs and organisations that predominantly work with men and boys, at a cost of \$400,000.

## Improving Pathways to Employment

Education, training and employment play a key role in addressing many of the overlapping issues facing disengaged and highly vulnerable people in our community. As recognised in the recent Statement on *The Future of Adult Community Education in Victoria 2020-25* by the Victorian Government's Minister for Education<sup>xxii</sup>:

*Engaging in adult community education and obtaining these skills changes people's lives. It builds confidence and aspiration. It develops skills for life and opens the way to greater social engagement. It breaks cycles of disadvantage. And it is a crucial step towards further training, securing meaningful employment, and to full economic and social participation.*

The promotion of education, lifelong learning and capacity building is fundamental to the work of Jesuit Social Services.

People facing barriers to employment often need assistance to upgrade their skills and their readiness for work. For example, individuals who have lost work at an older age and have been unable to secure new employment; who have left school early or arrived as refugees; who experience poor mental health; who are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; or who have been involved in the justice system, may experience significant barriers to securing employment.

### Jobs initiatives

Current employment services initiatives under Jobs Victoria have enabled Jesuit Social Services to work closely with individuals to address issues affecting their inability to secure employment – their skills, their work readiness, their understanding of Australian workplace cultures – and to maintain employment once a job is secured. The *Jobs Victoria Employment Network (JVEN)* is an example of an employment services scheme implemented at the local level that is working well. The program is specifically targeted at assisting people facing significant barriers to employment and enables specialists such as Jesuit Social Services to invest the time and resources needed by each individual, to develop and enhance their vocational skills and work readiness, and to secure a suitable position with an employer.

### Case Study: Fletcher

Struggling to find work while scraping by on Newstart Allowance, Fletcher found himself in a tough place.

"Being unemployed sort of does that to you," he says.

"I am usually a confident person but after being unemployed for a while it was weighing down on me... I was stuck in that system of trying to find jobs but nothing was really working."

Fletcher got in touch with Jesuit Social Services' Jobs Victorian Employment Network (JVEN) program and his outlook on life soon brightened.

"Having that contact with the employment program really showed me what I'm capable of doing," he says.

Jesuit Social Services staff worked closely with Fletcher to understand his strengths and aspirations, and find a pathway to meaningful and stable employment. This included coaching to follow up on jobs that he applied for (which helped him gain confidence in speaking to employers and also gave him useful updates on the progress of each position), liaising with potential employers and helping prepare for interviews.

This support was critical to Fletcher securing a job as a station assistant with Metro Trains – a role that he continues to enjoy.

"Once I had a full-time job on a contract and very secure employment it meant that I could no longer worry about the financial side of things and I was able to focus on doing volunteer activities and doing a great job at work so it's been a huge confidence boost to me," he says.

"The job I've gotten with Metro is huge in terms of employment opportunities in the future."

We welcome the Victorian Parliament's Inquiry into Sustainable Employment for Disadvantaged Jobseekers. Our submission to the Inquiry<sup>xxiii</sup> discusses the significant opportunity to address entrenched locational disadvantage through the Government's Social Procurement Framework in conjunction with place-based approaches in the recruitment processes for some of the major infrastructure projects currently being planned and implemented in Victoria. We reiterate key recommendations from that submission.

### Recommendation 7:

That the Victorian Government implement long-term whole-of-government place-based approaches targeted to the most disadvantaged postcodes in Victoria that work with the community, industry and employers to create real jobs and pathways to employment.

In this context, we commend the announcement in September 2019 of \$300,000 in funding to support the establishment, delivery and evaluation of a pilot initiative, *Out for Good*, designed to help at-risk young people with previous involvement in the justice system find work on major transport and infrastructure projects.<sup>xxiv</sup>

However, we also highlight that the current funding cycle for Jobs Victoria ends in June 2020. Funding of \$8.8 million was allocated in the 2019-20 Victorian Budget “to expand Jobs Victoria, including the *Jobs Victoria Employment Network [JVEN]*”<sup>xxv</sup>, but no forward funding has been indicated.

Jesuit Social Services believes that investment in jobs pathways is needed on an ongoing basis and over the long-term.

### **Recommendation 8:**

That the Victorian Government provide ongoing funding over the long-term for employment services initiatives, including JVEN, that are particularly targeted to Victorians who experience significant barriers to employment.

## **Supporting those with complex or multiple needs**

Jesuit Social Services supports a holistic, person-centred approach to supporting people that takes account of the key drivers of vulnerability. These drivers include, but are not limited to, poverty and disadvantage, discrimination, family dysfunction, and histories of trauma. Vulnerable and marginalised people are at significantly elevated risk of experiencing poor health, wellbeing and life trajectory, and especially of experiencing poor mental health, drug and alcohol misuse, homelessness, and involvement in the justice system. These factors, particularly when experienced in conjunction, are often now described as ‘complex’ or ‘multiple’ needs<sup>xxvi</sup>:

*there are some consensus now about a social ‘group’ whose circumstances are explained by links between homelessness and other health and social care needs, which include mental and physical health, substance misuse and additional problems such as for offending ... Its constellation of social and personal problems is presently defined as multiple or ‘complex needs’ ... an intensifying and increasing problem*

There is also consensus that institutional and legislative responses are often inconsistent and inadequate in meeting individual needs.<sup>xxvii</sup>

## **Improving Mental Health**

Jesuit Social Services has welcomed the Victorian Government’s Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System. Likewise, we have also welcomed the Victorian Government’s substantial investment in mental health facilities and programs in the 2019-20 State Budget, and its public commitment to implement all the recommendations from the Royal Commission.<sup>xxviii</sup>

## Housing

The draft report on mental health recently released by the Australian Government's Productivity Commission finds that housing and mental health are closely linked. Consistent with the view of Jesuit Social Services and other service providers, the Productivity Commission notes that there is "no one-size-fits-all housing solution" for people with mental ill-health.<sup>xxix</sup> The draft report concludes that:

- housing is a fundamental contributor to preventing poor mental health and facilitating the recovery of people with mental illness;
- many people with mental illness reside in unsuitable housing situations that adversely affect their lives or restrict their opportunity for recovery or management of their mental illness;
- some people with mental illness need support both to find and maintain stable housing in the community; and
- in some areas, there is a chronic shortage of both short- and long-term housing for people with moderate and severe mental illness.

In this context, Jesuit Social Services supports the roadmap for matching housing supports for people experiencing mental illness to housing risk, as recommended by the Productivity Commission and reproduced in Figure 2.<sup>xxx</sup>

While pertaining specifically to people with mental ill-health, the Productivity Commission's findings reinforce the need to increase the public and community housing stock in Victoria, including for the diversity of housing options for people with complex and multiple needs, as recommendation in this submission (see Recommendation 3).

**Figure 2:** Roadmap: housing supports according to housing risk

Section 15.2 <i>Lower risk</i>	Section 15.3 <i>Higher risk</i>	Section 15.4 <i>Homeless</i>
Preventing people from losing their housing, by improving: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• tenancy support</li><li>• training for housing workers</li><li>• laws and policies</li></ul>	Support for people with severe mental illness to find and maintain housing through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• integrated supported housing</li><li>• transition out of institutional care (such as hospital or prison)</li><li>• long-term supported accommodation with 24/7 support</li></ul>	Support for people with mental illness who are homeless to find and maintain housing through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• homelessness services</li><li>• 'housing first'</li></ul>

## Young People

We know that poor mental health – as well as alcohol and drug issues – is often a contributing factor to involvement in the criminal justice system. Strategies are required to address the drivers of poor mental health, as well as to provide service responses that better assist people experiencing poor mental health, including youth-specific responses.

The Victorian Government's commitment to improving the state's mental health system recognises that people with multiple needs too often fall through service gaps. Many people do not recognise their experience as a mental health problem or, due to stigma, may be reluctant to define their issue in terms of mental illness. Accessing help can feel daunting and services are often limited. These problems are often more acute for people experiencing disadvantage, including vulnerable young people who lack the supportive peer relationships which are often crucial to seeking further help.

Furthermore, as outlined in our *Worth A Second Chance* campaign<sup>xxxi</sup>, youth justice custodial environments need to provide cultural safety, health and mental health services, alcohol and drug services, disability support, and responses to young people's experience of trauma. We must ensure that young people's needs are thoroughly assessed so that interventions are targeted and effective. This means from the moment a young person enters youth detention, they should receive intensive multidisciplinary assessment by educators, doctors, dentists, psychiatrists, and alcohol and drug specialists, as well as individualised plans tailored to their offending behaviour, that ensure they can re-integrate with family and community at the end of their sentence.

There is also a need in Victoria for ongoing, sustainable and comprehensive forensic mental health services for young people in the community, as well as in custodial environments.

### **Recommendation 9:**

That the Victorian Government increase investment in mental health services for young people through establishing:

- comprehensive facility-based mental health services, which provide thorough assessment and ensure appropriate follow-up interventions and services, for all young people in custody;
- a statewide service network that provides secondary consultation and support for community mental health outreach services that manage young people with offending behaviours (predominantly referred via the Youth Justice Mental Health Clinician initiative); and
- comprehensive training and supervision for community services to enable them to assess and manage mental illness-related violence and offending (including family violence).

## Postvention Support

There is an elevated risk of suicide amongst those who are bereaved by suicide.<sup>xxxii</sup> In recognition of this critical vulnerability, since 2004 Jesuit Social Services has been delivering a postvention service, *Support After Suicide*, throughout Melbourne and regional Victoria. Postvention refers specifically to intervention after suicide, largely in the form of support for the bereaved – including family, friends, peers, and professionals. *Support After Suicide* works to reduce the risk of suicide amongst those who are bereaved by suicide by working closely with them.

*Support After Suicide* provides counselling, support groups and online resources, and delivers training to health, welfare and education professionals. The program's reach is even more extensive through its engagement with individuals online and through phone counselling. In 2018-19, *Support After Suicide* directly assisted 1,100 children, young people and adults bereaved by suicide.

However, the program receives no funding from the Victorian Government, and there is a lack of certainty regarding continuity of funding. This places Victorians at risk of missing out on timely service, including those referred by Victoria Police. It also restricts capacity to provide a robust service in regional areas (e.g. in the Macedon Ranges and Geelong), especially in the face of increasing demand.

### Recommendation 10:

That the Victorian Government provide secure, long-term funding for statewide postvention services for suicide bereavement, including the Support After Suicide service provided by Jesuit Social Services, and provide increased access to suicide bereavement services for people in regional and rural areas.

There is also a funding gap for research on postvention services. The development of an evidence base in relation to the impact of suicide on others, and the effectiveness of postvention services on reducing the risk of suicide, is critical to informing future program and funding decisions in relation to mental health services provision.

### Recommendation 11:

That the Victorian Government provide funding to develop an evidence base on the impact of suicide and the effectiveness of postvention services.

## Short-Term Residential Care for Those Who Have Attempted Suicide or are Suicidal

Jesuit Social Services believes that clinical mental health services should deliver holistic responses for people who have complex and multiple needs, with a particular focus on:

- the centrality of relationships as the cornerstone of engagement;
- use of a strengths-based approach for therapeutic support;
- a whole-of-person approach that addresses holistic needs;
- a “no wrong door” model of access to health and social services that enables people to access multiple supports, irrespective of where they first seek support; and
- a flexible approach to service delivery that can be tailored to an individual.

We also recognise that it is critical to provide support to individuals in crisis in the period immediately after a suicide attempt.<sup>xxxiii,xxxiv</sup> In this context, the Victorian Government's *Hospital Outreach Post-suicidal Engagement (HOPE)* initiative provides support and follow up for people leaving hospital after a suicide attempt, thus responding to their significant vulnerability following discharge, which includes elevated risk of suicide and challenges reintegrating back into society. Jesuit Social Services applauds the *HOPE* model of assertive outreach, which works with families, friends and carers of people who have attempted suicide. We know that suicide can occur in clusters, meaning support for the networks around people after suicide is all the more important.<sup>xxxv</sup>

In addition to *HOPE* services, we call for the provision of short-term residential care following suicide attempts, beyond a clinical environment. We look to the UK for examples of such a model: for example, the Maytree Respite Centre offers a free stay in a non-medical setting, filling a gap for service provision for individuals experiencing suicidal crisis.<sup>xxxvi</sup> The Maytree Respite Centre provides for a stay of up to 5 days. However, Jesuit Social Services believes that a longer-term program of up to 6 weeks would be more effective in delivering holistic support.

Jesuit Social Services supports a short-term residential care model that is therapeutic and offers relationship-based support and counselling, and connection to peer support. A residential option would help fill a service gap, especially for the most vulnerable people who have limited family and community support.<sup>xxxvii</sup> As much as possible, programs need to include the families and close friends of individuals who have attempted suicide and provide education on responding to suicide and suicide attempts. Tapping into and engaging the family and community networks around individuals and ensuring they are well-informed provides individuals at risk of suicide with much needed support.

### **Recommendation 12:**

That the Victorian Government invest in short-term residential care for people who have attempted suicide or who are suicidal.

## New service response for those with Borderline Personality Disorder

A significant issue noted by Jesuit Social Services is that those with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) are sometimes not attended to in clinical services as their issues do not always strictly fit within a medical model. These people often fall through the gaps of service delivery and do not receive adequate service responses. Diagnosis of BPD is complex, as individuals may have co-occurring conditions that make it challenging to identify.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Additionally, reactions to treatment may vary – individuals with BPD may respond negatively to intervention, and mainstream health and mental health services can be ill-equipped to work with people showing complex and challenging behaviour.<sup>xxxix</sup>

Our experience working with people with BPD tells us that intensive, therapeutic supervision is required. We welcome the Victorian Government's commitment of \$10 million for the Personality Disorder Initiative (which is now being delivered at six Victorian health services). Building on this we call for the development of a new service response for this cohort that provides care within a secure facility when a person is experiencing an acute episode.

### Recommendation 13:

Develop a new service response for individuals with Borderline Personality Disorder, including provisions for care within a secure facility when required.

## Helping people get back on track

Effective social policy frameworks create conditions that strengthen local communities; positively address complex vulnerabilities to prevent crime before it happens; intervene early to change trajectories before people become entrenched in the criminal justice system; and properly support rehabilitation and reintegration into the community, so that offenders can transform their lives.

### Improving the Youth Justice System

Currently, funding allocations are disproportionate, reflecting the overall lack of vision for Victoria's youth justice system. The 2019-20 Victorian Budget allocated \$29.9 million to youth justice programs to reduce offending: "to support early intervention and diversion of young people from offending, as well as reduce recidivism among young offenders... [and] to further improve Youth Justice precincts through increased security and intelligence capability."<sup>xl</sup> However, funding for these initiatives was dwarfed by allocations in the same Budget of \$67 million for Youth Justice Community-Based Services (down \$5.8 million from 2018-19) and \$168.1 million for Youth Justice Custodial Services (up \$23 million from 2018-19).

Jesuit Social Services' vision for the youth justice system is to enable young people who offend (or are at risk of offending) to lead healthy, productive and crime-free lives. To achieve this, our overarching purpose must be rehabilitation, not institutionalisation.

Good youth justice systems focus on early intervention and diversion, preventing young people from further contact with the justice system, using child-specific approaches and



engaging families and communities. They have thorough assessment and planning processes that are supported by strong social infrastructure and well-resourced community alternatives to locking young people up in institutions.

When prison is necessary, the focus in effective youth justice systems is strongly on education, addressing problem behaviour and underlying needs, and building social and practical skills through programs that prepare young people for reintegration into their community. Where there is use of facilities, they are small and close to the homes of detainees, with positive cultures and well-qualified staff who are trained to build relationships of trust, rather than punish.<sup>xli</sup> Isolation/solitary confinement and lockdown are not used as behaviour management strategies (i.e. punishments) because they are understood as having significantly harmful impacts on young people's mental health and behaviour. This is recognised by the Victorian Ombudsman in relation to both youth and adult detention, which has recommended establishing "legislative prohibition on 'solitary confinement', being the physical isolation of individuals for '22 or more hours a day without meaningful human contact.'"<sup>xlii</sup>

Please refer below to images from a small, community-based detention setting in Missouri, USA, which we discussed in *#JusticeSolutions Tour: Expanding the conversation*<sup>xliii</sup>. The Missouri Model was very inspiring, and we believe there is opportunity to apply many of its elements into youth justice systems in Victoria. The Missouri Model demonstrates what a humane and effective youth detention system could look like: a system with an emphasis on holding young people accountable but also supporting them to develop their social skills and engage with their education so they can have a brighter future, and where the whole community sees benefit.



*Images – Volleyball court and outside, Missouri moderate care facility, South East Region, Missouri, USA*

All of this is underlined by a deep commitment to take the time to hear the voices of young people, and the voices of their families, to truly understand what is driving their behaviour and ensure that those issues and needs are addressed. Please see **Appendix A** for a representation of our vision for Victoria's youth justice system.

If we imagine the youth justice system as a maze that entraps vulnerable young people – all too easy to enter but very difficult to escape – we must redesign the maze so that the pathways in are narrowed and the pathways out are widened.

To build effective youth justice systems, there must be collaborative knowledge sharing on what works across states and jurisdictions.<sup>xliv</sup> To stand firm against political and populist pressures, programs and practices must be evidence-based.

Many elements make up an effective youth justice strategy. These include, for example, raising the age of criminal responsibility; setting targets for desired changes in key parts of the youth justice system, including specific targets for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people; strengthening the youth justice workforce; and resourcing a range of programs that take a holistic, family-based, restorative approach, working to improve relationships between children and young people and their family members and community networks.

#### **Recommendation 14:**

That the Victorian Government implement all the recommendations made in the Victorian Ombudsman's 2019 report on practices related to solitary confinement of children and young people.<sup>45</sup>

### **Raise the Age of Criminal Responsibility to At Least 14 Years**

As Jesuit Social Services has argued in our [Raising the Age of Criminal Responsibility: There is a better way](#) paper<sup>xlv</sup>, children belong in school, not prison. A small number of vulnerable children enter the criminal justice system at a very young age. In Victoria, throughout 2017-18, on average just 2.3 per cent of those under youth justice supervision were children under 14 years of age, and only 14 children in this age group were detained.<sup>xlvi</sup> We know this cohort is among the most vulnerable in our community, and that children first detained between the ages of 10 and 14 years are more likely, compared to those first supervised at older ages, to have sustained and frequent contact with the criminal justice system throughout their lives.<sup>xlvii</sup>

Younger children generally do not develop the social, emotional and intellectual maturity necessary for criminal responsibility before the age of 14 years and so lack the capacity to properly engage in the justice system. Consequently, procedural fairness cannot be assured, and criminal justice proceedings fail to guarantee a just response to children's behaviour. The most effective approach to prevent these children's trajectories deeper into the justice system is to address the issues driving their vulnerability, such as family dysfunction, trauma, abuse and neglect. This point is well made by the Youth Parole Board:<sup>xlviii</sup>

*The truly telling statistic in the characteristics of children and young people sentenced to detention or on remand is that 67 per cent have been victims of abuse, trauma and neglect. It goes on. Sixty-eight per cent have previously been suspended or expelled from school. Twenty-seven per cent have a history of self harm or suicidal ideation. Thirty-eight per cent present with cognitive difficulties that affect their daily functioning. Fifty-four per cent have a history of both alcohol and drug misuse.*

The age of criminal responsibility has a more pronounced impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Statistics on the over-representation of Aboriginal children in Victoria highlight the disproportionate impact of the current age of criminal responsibility:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders first have contact with the criminal justice system five years earlier than non-Indigenous offenders, at an average age of 14, whereas for non-Indigenous offenders the average age is 19 years of age.<sup>xlix</sup>
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are 12 times more likely to be in detention than non-Indigenous young people.<sup>l</sup>

In line with standards enacted in many overseas jurisdictions<sup>li</sup>, Jesuit Social Services calls for the age of criminal responsibility in Victoria to be raised from the current age of 10 years to a minimum of 14 years.<sup>lii</sup> We note that this reform is currently being considered federally, following criticism by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child for the low minimum age in Australia.<sup>liii</sup>

According to an international study of 90 countries, 68 per cent had a minimum age of criminal responsibility of 12 years or older, with the most common minimum age being 14 years.<sup>liv</sup> Refer to Table 1 for a comparison of Australia's minimum age of criminal responsibility compared with several other countries.

Age (years)	Country
10	Australia, New Zealand, England, Wales
12	Belgium, Canada, Israel, Netherlands, Scotland
14	Austria, Germany, Italy, Japan, Spain
15	Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Greece
16	Portugal

**Table 1:** Countries by minimum age of responsibility

Source: Australian Institute of Health & Welfare (2019a). *Youth Justice in Australia 2017-18*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, p. 40.

Other approaches must be put in place to support vulnerable children below 14 years of age and hold them to account, such as restorative justice and family-centred approaches, as well as preventative measures that target the social and economic factors which lead to anti-social behaviour, as discussed earlier in this submission.

**Recommendation 15:**

That the Victorian Government:

- raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 years to at least 14 years;
- fund programs that take a restorative and therapeutic approach to anti-social behaviour in children under the age of 14

## Targets

Jesuit Social Services strongly believes that Victoria must not accept a growing youth prison population. We thus welcome the Victorian Government's announcement to reduce the capacity of the new youth detention facility that it is building near Cherry Creek from more than 200 beds to 140 beds. While we believe it unnecessary to build the Cherry Creek facility at all, this amendment is a step in the right direction for Victoria's youth justice system.

We reiterate the need to reduce the number of young people in detention, especially those on remand, and to invest instead in diversionary, rehabilitative, holistic alternatives for young offenders. Remand is both ethically problematic and ineffective as a crime reduction strategy and even appears to be inherently criminogenic.<sup>lv</sup> Building and operating detention facilities for young people is financially expensive and unsustainable<sup>lvi</sup>; counter-productive to reducing recidivism<sup>lvii</sup>; and runs counter to the principles and numerous rights embodied in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, which Australian governments are bound to uphold.

For these reasons, Jesuit Social Services makes the following recommendation, as part of our overall vision for the youth justice system:

### Recommendation 16:

That the Victorian Government set public targets to reduce youth offending, recidivism, incarceration, and the number of young people on remand, and corresponding targets specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

## Youth Justice Workforce

Jesuit Social Services believes numerous incidents that have occurred at Victoria's youth detention facilities during the past five years highlight the significant risks associated with using an under-skilled, under-resourced and casualised workforce to address the complex and multiple needs of a highly vulnerable group of children and young people.

International jurisdictions provide examples of best practice in youth justice workforce capability. For example, in the Netherlands, staff are required to have a minimum three-year bachelor degree to work in youth prisons<sup>lviii</sup>; and in Spain's youth detention 'Re-education Centres' run by non-profit organisation Diagrama, front-line staff (called 'educators') are expected to have a professional qualification.<sup>lix</sup>

During Jesuit Social Services' *#JusticeSolutions* Tour, we witnessed a particularly promising model of staff training and capacity building. In Norway, the training undertaken by correctional staff is currently a minimum of two years, with plans currently in progress to extend this to a 3-year bachelor degree. The course involves both academic and on-the-job (i.e. within prison) components. Prison officer training includes equipping new staff with capacity to focus on engagement and building relationships with people. Entrants are screened for life experience and positive, humanistic attitudes. Course participants are paid to undertake the training – they are the only paid students in the Norway system. This

provides an incentive for people to embark on this career path, which is sought after. Entry to the course is competitive and the profession is well-respected in the community.

Jesuit Social Services envisions a Victorian youth justice workforce that is highly qualified; grounded in principles that place the interests, developmental needs and rehabilitation of children and young people at the forefront; and skilful in the use of trauma-informed practices.

### **Recommendation 17:**

That the Victorian Government strengthen the youth justice workforce, including detention officers and other staff in youth detention centres, by implementing a requirement for a minimum relevant professional qualification, which includes theoretical and fieldwork practice components.

### **Through-Care**

There is a need for greater resourcing of a through-care model as identified in the *Youth Justice Review and Strategy* completed by Armytage and Ogloff in 2017.<sup>lx</sup> Jesuit Social Services believes that ongoing, coordinated and youth-focused practice can produce better outcomes.

The Victorian *Youth Justice Community Support Service (YJCSS)* delivered by Jesuit Social Services provides a positive example of such a youth-specific approach. *YJCSS* helps prevent re-offending by focusing on a young person's development, preparing them for adulthood, and re-connecting them with the community.

Jesuit Social Services' practice framework, *Our Way of Working*,<sup>lxi</sup> focuses on broad aspects of a young person's life, such as social connection, economic participation, well-being and resilience, gender and identity, health, and self-determination. Through our holistic casework with young people involved in the justice system, they thus develop:

- pro-social connections to family, community, education, training and employment;
- skills and knowledge to make informed choices about their future;
- independence and resilience; and
- the means to participate more fully in their community.

A 2013 evaluation of the *YJCSS* program found that it delivered an effective form of support and had improved outcomes for young people in the system.<sup>lxii</sup> In addition, an internal analysis of relevant cases from Jesuit Social Services' *YJCSS* Closure Reports<sup>lxiii</sup> shows the following:

- 70 per cent involved the young person completing statutory orders;
- 97 per cent resulted in improved engagement with family;
- 93 per cent resulted in improved mental health;
- 80 per cent resulted in improved participation in education;
- 76 per cent resulted in improved engagement with employment;
- 66 per cent resulted in improved engagement in training;

- 96 per cent resulted in improved stability of accommodation; and
- 88 per cent resulted in a reduction in substance use.

Jesuit Social Services believes that being able to work holistically with a young person, their family, their community, and Youth Justice is critical to ensuring that the young person is held in a net of support. Accordingly, investment in YJCSS needs to provide for this level of engagement. YJCSS needs to be further resourced so that it can provide effective support to **every** young person exiting youth detention. This was recognised in the *Youth Justice Review and Strategy* and reflected in two of its recommendations: 7.8, "Enhance the Youth Justice Community Support Service to deliver extended activities and community programs" <sup>lxiv</sup>; and 7.13, "Expand the role of Youth Justice Community Support Services in responding to the most high-risk and complex cases" <sup>lxv</sup>.

### Recommendation 18:

That the Victorian Government provide sufficient resourcing for the Youth Justice Community Support Service (YJCSS) so that all young people exiting custody and their families have access to the supports they need.

### Group Conferencing

To promote better uptake of *Youth Justice Group Conferencing* in Victoria, Jesuit Social Services recommends that the Victorian Government legislate for a model of Group Conferencing that is 'opt-out', rather than 'opt-in'. For example, since 1989, New Zealand has been using Family Group Conferencing – which involves the young person, their family, representatives from the community and the victim – as the primary justice response for young people aged 14 years and over. It is the standard mechanism for processing serious cases where a young person admits to their offending, meaning in practice that Family Group Conferencing is 'opt-out', rather than 'opt-in'. As part of the Family Group Conferencing, a plan is developed that is monitored by the Youth Court. If a young person fails to comply with the plan, they are referred back to the court for formal sanctioning.<sup>lxvi</sup>

We believe more can be done in Victoria with young people who commit serious offences. In addition to proven programs like *Youth Justice Group Conferencing*, we believe many of these young people and their families would benefit from targeted time-limited intensive case management support post-group conference, with strong inbuilt targets and outcome measures. The focus of this work would hold young people and their families accountable for their commitments made at the group conference. This support would complement statutory work and focus on engaging the young person and reintegrating them back into purposeful activity, including education, training and employment pathways.

Again, considering New Zealand<sup>lxvii</sup>, over the past 30 years the justice system in that country has undergone a fundamental shift in its approach to working with people who offend, and New Zealand has emerged as a world leader in restorative justice. Specifically, in the last 10 years, New Zealand has made significant improvements to its youth justice system which have yielded massive reductions in the numbers of children aged 10-16 years offending, and a significant decrease in the rate of Youth Court appearances. A

restorative, relational approach is not limited to formal group conferencing processes – there is a strong focus on culture and person-centred practices across all justice processes. For example, judges speak to the young people appearing in Youth Court in ways that emphasise the need for them to rebuild relationships with family, community, and their sense of self.

### **Recommendation 19:**

That the Victorian Government expand and promote access to Youth Justice Group Conferencing by legislating for this to be 'opt-out', rather than 'opt-in', and invest in targeted intensive case management support for young people following participation in a Youth Justice Group Conference.

## **RESTORE**

When men use violence, support to change their behaviour must be grounded in the reality of their lives and the interconnected relationships of their families and communities. Restorative justice approaches hold young men and boys to account for the harm they have caused, while engaging with communities, families and loved ones.

Jesuit Social Services uses its experience delivering *Youth Justice Group Conferencing* to work with adolescent boys who perpetrate violence in the home. Since early 2018, Jesuit Social Services and The Men's Project have partnered with The Children's Court of Victoria to deliver the *RESTORE* program. This pilot is currently in the process of being evaluated by experts at the University of Melbourne. While it is anticipated that the preliminary results will be available during the course of 2020, anecdotal feedback indicates that *RESTORE* is meeting an identified gap in service delivery to young people and their families.

The *RESTORE* program was developed in response to an identified absence of interventions for adolescent perpetrators in the Family Division of The Children's Court. *RESTORE* delivers an effective intervention which applies restorative practice principles and offers a Family Group Conference process for civil cases involving young people who are using family violence. It assists the family member victims and adolescent perpetrators to address the harm caused by family violence and prevent further harm being caused.

The pilot provides a Family Group Conference process to:

- support adolescent perpetrators of family violence understand the impact of their violence;
- address the harm that has been caused to those affected;
- put strategies in place to mitigate the risk of further violent behaviours and/or the escalation of violence in the family home; and
- increase the safety of all family members.

By offering an additional intervention option in the Family Division of the Children's Court, *RESTORE* aims to prevent the risks associated with a young person entering the Criminal Division of the Children's Court. It is an innovative response both in terms of adolescent family violence and also in expanding the use of restorative interventions. Jesuit Social Services is funding the direct delivery of the pilot from its own resources and through

philanthropy. Additional funding is now required to ensure that the program continues beyond the pilot period.

#### **Recommendation 20:**

That the Victorian Government prioritise investment in restorative approaches to prevent and address violence in young boys and men, including extending funding for Jesuit Social Services' RESTORE pilot.

### **Restorative Justice and Out-of-Home Care Services**

It is well established in Australian, and other English-speaking, jurisdictions that there are clear links between young people's involvement in the child protection and out-of-home care systems and subsequent involvement in the youth justice system.<sup>lxviii</sup>

Jesuit Social Services believes there is an opportunity to work in a better way with young people who find themselves in challenging situations in out-of-home care settings, especially residential care units. Immediate steps must be taken to prevent the criminalisation of young people in out-of-home care settings. Currently these young people have limited access to therapeutic, diversionary, restorative-based processes to work through the issues they face and, too often, the criminal justice system ends up being the default response. Restorative approaches to diversion at the point of initial contact with the justice system are critical. A restorative approach, including the use of Group Conferencing, is an effective means of addressing conflict and repairing the harms experienced by children in residential care units. These approaches must also include specific responses for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, a cohort significantly over-represented in each of the child protection, out-of-home care and youth justice systems.

Additional investment would complement the principles outlined in the Victorian Government's *Roadmap for Reform: strong families, safe children*<sup>lxix</sup> by providing an effective therapeutic and restorative intervention at the pre-court/pre-sentence stage to address issues that contribute to young people's challenging behaviour within residential care units and therefore divert them from possible criminal charges.

#### **Recommendation 21:**

That the Victorian Government expand restorative justice conferencing to include children and young people in out-of-home care placements, especially in residential care units, in the child protection system.

### **Bail and Supported Accommodation**

Too many young people are being held in detention unsentenced. The proportion of young people held in detention unsentenced more than doubled from 23 per cent in 2012-13 to 47 per cent in 2016-17.<sup>lxx</sup> The increase was initially driven by changes to the Bail Act (introduced in December 2013) that imposed the same conditions and restrictions on children as are applied to adults. While these amendments were reversed in 2016 by the



current Government, the number of children on remand remains unnecessarily and unacceptably high. This has also been, in part, the result of recent changes to sentencing practices and an increasingly "risk averse" youth justice system.<sup>lxxi</sup>

Our experience is that bail restrictions fall more heavily on young people experiencing disadvantage and homelessness who find it harder to argue for and access bail, particularly given the need to have stable accommodation. The link between disadvantage and the likelihood of not receiving bail is clear. As the Victorian Law Reform Commission highlights:<sup>lxxii</sup>

*Although bail law appears to apply to everyone, it doesn't operate that way in practice. Indigenous Australians, immigrants, children, young people, people with mental illnesses and women are all disadvantaged by the operation of the current bail law.*

Many support services are not available to young people on remand. Time on remand has been shown to increase the likelihood of a young person reoffending in the community.<sup>lxxiii</sup> Furthermore, most children and young people who are remanded do not go on to receive a custodial sentence. On average, since 2012-13, only around 20 per cent of those remanded were sentenced to a custodial sentence.<sup>lxxiv</sup> In a very small number of cases, placing a young person on remand may be necessary when they pose a real risk to the community. But in most instances, this is not the case. Young people continue to be unfairly locked up on remand simply because alternative accommodation cannot be found for them.<sup>lxxv</sup>

There is room for more investment to reduce the number of young people on remand. We must focus on after-hours and supported housing by establishing small transitional homes for young people on bail. This should be coupled with work by both the Victorian and federal governments to address the lack of social and affordable housing that is contributing to the soaring rates of youth homelessness in Victoria.

### **Recommendation 22:**

That the Victorian Government establish small transitional houses staffed 24/7, to provide safe accommodation for 3-4 young people on bail for up to 12 months at a time. These houses would facilitate access to tailored life skills, education and work readiness programs, and coordinate a transition to sustainable long-term independent living options.

### **Transitional Support**

Many people exit the youth justice system into homelessness. The Youth Parole Board found that, of a snapshot of young people involved in the youth justice system, 13 per cent were homeless with no fixed address or were living in insecure housing before being taken into custody.<sup>lxxvi</sup> Young people leaving the justice system need access to appropriate transitional step-down housing, and often require tailored supports. In the latest (2018-19) Youth Parole Board Annual Report, the Chairperson highlights that a lack of appropriate accommodation after release from custody can compromise a young person's ability to re-engage with the community and desist from offending behaviours:<sup>lxxvii</sup>

*Given emphasis upon transition out of custody and through parole, there needs to be adequate supports. It is disappointing that there is a continuing failure in important aspects of this. A good example is provision of appropriate, well supported accommodation. It seems obvious to me that this is a fundamental requirement. In last year's report and other earlier reports, I raised the lack of it. There has been no improvement. I also raised, as I had with the Department, the particular need for closely supervised transitional housing in the early part of parole. There is an inexplicable, unjustifiable lack of this.*

The *Link Youth Justice Housing Program* supports young people aged 15-22 years exiting the justice system who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The program involves a unique integrated model, which works to secure and sustain appropriate and stable housing and provides essential after-hours support. It engages young people at high-risk times, namely outside of business hours and on the weekend, when young people exiting the youth justice system are most likely to reoffend and when tenancies and relationships break down in the community.

The ultimate goal of *Link* is to support young people from residential services to private rental, assisting them to develop independent living skills. Jesuit Social Services delivers the program in partnership with VincentCare to a small cohort of young people at risk of homelessness after justice supervision. Currently the program operates across North West Metropolitan Melbourne. The program provides exit planning and case management and comprises an important component of the housing support continuum. A specific strength of the program is that young people work closely with their support workers to identify a suitable property and are directly involved in procuring their home. Learning these skills is an important element of maintaining housing in the longer-term.

In particular, many young women leaving prison do not receive effective transitional support that caters to their unique needs. The result is that young women are at high risk, not only of reoffending, but also of post-release death. An Australian study found that young females aged under 25 had 20 times greater risk of death than their counterparts in the community, which was higher than for any other cohort of post-release prisoners, including young men.<sup>lxxviii</sup>

To address the need for suitable housing for young people leaving prison, Jesuit Social Services developed the *Next Steps* project, a model of supported accommodation for people aged 16-24 years who have been involved in the criminal justice system and are at risk of, or are experiencing, homelessness.

*Next Steps* aims to prevent homelessness and reduce recidivism rates. Its key features include long-term intensive case management support, small caseloads, stable and appropriate housing, and outreach to young people and their families. Given the particular vulnerabilities of young women leaving prison, Jesuits Social Services has identified the need for a dedicated program for young women based on the *Next Steps* model already used for young people.

### **Recommendation 23:**

That the Victorian Government provide recurrent funding:

- for the Link Youth Justice Housing Program and to expand it statewide; and
- for a housing model similar to Jesuit Social Services' Next Steps for young women transitioning from prison back into the community and to make it available statewide.

### ***Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Young People***

The announcement of Phase 4 of the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement<sup>lxxix</sup> demonstrates continued commitment to working alongside Aboriginal communities of Victoria to address the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the justice system, with self-determination as the core policy approach. There is, however, still more to be done to divert Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people away from the youth justice system.

For example, it was recommended in the *Youth Justice Review and Strategy* that a *Youth Justice Community Support Service (YJCSS)*, similar to the one run by Jesuit Social Services, be established and delivered by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to assist in reducing Aboriginal over-representation in the youth justice system. The Victorian YJCSS delivered by Jesuit Social Services helps prevent re-offending by focusing on a young person's development, preparing them for adulthood, and re-connecting them with their community.

We must recognise the role that intergenerational trauma and disadvantage play in children and young people's behaviour, and respond in culturally appropriate ways involving communities, Elders and families in our approach to supporting young people.

Recognising the need to divert vulnerable young people away from the youth justice system, Jesuit Social Services delivered the *Barreng Moorop* program in partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) and the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA).

*Barreng Moorop* works with 10 – 14-year-old children and their siblings, families and communities, where appropriate, residing in the North and West metropolitan regions of Melbourne who are involved in the youth justice system. The program provides a culturally responsive and trauma-informed service to divert young Aboriginal people away from the criminal justice system.

## Case Study: Barreng Moorop

Rachel\* was 13 years old and on a Permanent Care Order in the care of an extended family member. In the first two years of the family's involvement with Barreng Moorop, the program's work with the family included:

- Supporting Rachel's extended family member to access and move into a transitional housing property and relocating Rachel to live with her extended family member.
- Completing and submitting a public housing application.
- Linking Rachel's extended family member with a doctor to address his health needs.
- Working in collaboration with Rachel's school to improve her self-esteem and sense of self.
- Providing support to transition Rachel from primary to secondary school and assisting with accessing financial aid to purchase school supplies.
- Providing transport so that Rachel could continue to access counselling.
- Working with the school, counsellor and Rachel's extended family member to develop behaviour management strategies to support Rachel to manage her behaviour and interaction with others.
- Providing education about bullying and cyber safety.
- Organising care team meetings with all services involved with the family.

As a result of Barreng Moorop's work with the family, key outcomes include:

- Rachel not having had further involvement with the police.
- Rachel's involvement in incidents at school decreased from a couple a day to a couple a week when she moved in with her extended family member.
- Rachel smoothly transitioned to secondary school and engaged in schooling.
- Rachel and her extended family member were residing in transitional housing together and her extended family member was offered a public housing property.
- Rachel's health management improved, including sexual health awareness, and she continued engagement with counselling.
- Rachel engaged in pro-social activities which improved her physical health, as well as her self-esteem.
- Rachel attended holiday camps and met other children her age outside of school.
- Contact with extended family improved.
- Rachel's extended family member was receiving Centrelink benefits and Family payments, and his health management improved.

\* Not his/her real name

### Recommendation 24:

That the Victorian Government provide funding to:

- expand the Barreng Moorop model throughout Victoria to provide a whole-of-family approach to children in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities who are involved with the youth justice system; and
- build the capacity of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to implement the other recommendations made by Jesuit Social Services in our submission to *Our youth, our way: Systemic Inquiry into the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in Victoria's youth justice system*.

## Improving the Adult Justice System

Victoria's soaring prison population continues to be of great concern to Jesuit Social Services, as does the approach to building more prisons rather than investing in alternatives that are proven to be effective in reducing reoffending. As discussed previously, building more prisons is unsustainable; does not create community safety; and does not address the complex and multiple needs and disadvantage that drive much offending behaviour in the first place.

We therefore call on the Victorian Government to commit to reducing our ballooning prison population.

Critical strategies for achieving this goal would include:

- introducing specific targets to reduce offending, which should be coupled with sustained place-based community capacity building to strengthen crime prevention in disadvantaged communities;
- committing to reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the justice system, and investing in community capacity building projects in Aboriginal communities; and
- investing more in alternatives to imprisonment, such as supported housing and step-down models like those discussed in the Youth Justice section above.

Jesuit Social Services believes that restorative justice would be an effective component of a response for addressing offending behaviour for adults who offend. Research has shown that compared to non-restorative retributive approaches, restorative justice is more successful at achieving three main objectives: improving victim and/or offender satisfaction; getting the offender to comply with restitution; and decreasing offender recidivism.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

An evaluation of Jesuit Social Services' *Youth Justice Group Conferencing Program* found that more than 80 per cent of participants had not reoffended two years later – this compared to 57 per cent for the comparison group.<sup>lxxxii</sup> In the ACT, a recent analysis of 10

years of the Territory's Restorative Justice Scheme found 98 per cent of victims and participants in restorative justice conferencing between 2005 and 2016 were satisfied with the process. Young people were less likely to reoffend, or to reoffend as often, compared to young people who had not gone through the process.<sup>lxxxiii</sup> The ACT has taken a number of steps to expand access to restorative justice, including making restorative conferencing available in cases of family violence and sex offences, and increasing access for young people who may wish to plead not guilty.<sup>lxxxiv</sup>

Despite the success of various restorative justice programs, and unlike in other Australian states and territories, there are currently no restorative justice programs available for adult offenders in Victoria.<sup>lxxxv</sup> According to the Australian Institute of Criminology, during the last decade or so, restorative justice "practices have become mainstream in Australian juvenile justice and have been extended for use with adult offenders."<sup>lxxxvi</sup> For example, NSW and the ACT employ adult conferencing, as well as youth conferencing; and all states and territories, except for Victoria and the ACT, employ victim-offender mediation.

Jesuit Social Services calls for the Victorian Government to implement restorative approaches to community reintegration, including group conferencing for adults in prison at the pre-release stage. We would welcome the opportunity to work collaboratively with the Government in developing and delivering this initiative.

#### **Recommendation 25:**

That the Victorian Government invest in restorative justice group conferencing for adults involved in the justice system.

### ***Supported Accommodation***

Almost one-third of people exit the adult justice system into homelessness.<sup>lxxxvii</sup> People exiting prison are some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of our community, yet the limited support available to them means they often cycle through the justice system again and again.

The provision of support for people leaving prison is critical to reducing reoffending and building safe communities. However, the Victorian Ombudsman's *Investigation into the Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Prisoners in Victoria*<sup>lxxxviii</sup> reported that only 700 of the approximately 6,600 people who leave prison each year are provided with transitional support, and most of this group (of 700) receive between 3 and 22 contact hours of support. The limited nature of support means people exiting prison do not get to adequately address the problems they face and this, in turn, exacerbates their likelihood of reoffending.

A small number of male prisoners can access 25 beds at the Judy Lazarus Transition Centre, which has been found to reduce recidivism and better prepare people for transition back into the community. This model provides a staged release, which has been shown to help people develop the skills and confidence to live in the community. The recidivism rate for those who exit via the intensive support program at the Judy Lazarus

Transition Centre is 10.4 per cent compared to 44.1 per cent for the overall prison population.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

The women's imprisonment rate has climbed by 138 per cent over the past decade.<sup>xc</sup> The Victorian Ombudsman has recommended that the Department of Justice and Community Safety investigate options to ensure that the specific needs of women are recognised.<sup>xcj</sup> To this end, we note that the 2019-20 Victorian Budget allocated \$4.8 million to reducing incarceration of women, including "for a range of diversion and rehabilitation programs for women in prison including: mental health services for women with complex needs including intellectual disability or cognitive impairment."<sup>xcii</sup>

However, there is currently no comparable service to the Judy Lazarus Transition Centre for male prisoners available to women, and there is very limited tailored flexible transition support available to women. While Jesuit Social Services delivers effective transition support to high risk and high-profile men and women leaving prison through our *ReConnect* program, this is not commensurate with the overall need. Our *ReConnect* program provides targeted (up to 4 weeks) and intensive (up to 12 months) reintegration outreach for serious violent or sex offenders, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders, women prisoners, and prisoners with high transitional needs. We deliver *ReConnect* across Melbourne's North and Western regions, as part of the Corrections Victoria Reintegration Pathway.

### **Recommendation 26:**

That the Victorian Government invest in more intensive transition support services for highly vulnerable people leaving prison by:

- expanding the Judy Lazarus Transition Centre to enable a greater proportion of the prisoner population to access intensive transitional support;
- establishing an equivalent transitional support facility for women prisoners, especially those with complex and multiple needs, including mental health issues, intellectual disability or cognitive impairment; and
- expanding the range and quantity of supported housing options for people exiting prison.

### ***Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Over-Representation***

There is significant ongoing over-representation of Aboriginal offenders and prisoners in Victoria's criminal justice system. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are 12 times more likely to be imprisoned than non-Indigenous people in Victoria.<sup>xciii</sup>

Responding to the long-standing over-incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the justice system requires a long-term whole-of-government approach that is built on strong and trusting relationships with Aboriginal organisations. Phase 4 of the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement is a strong basis for this and must be met with increased investment in community and divestment from prison expansion and deinstitutionalisation.

A community capacity building approach provides an effective framework to bring together Government, community organisations, ACCOs and Aboriginal communities. Through this partnership, knowledge and capacity can be built to respond more effectively, addressing underlying issues and strengthening connections to culture and community.

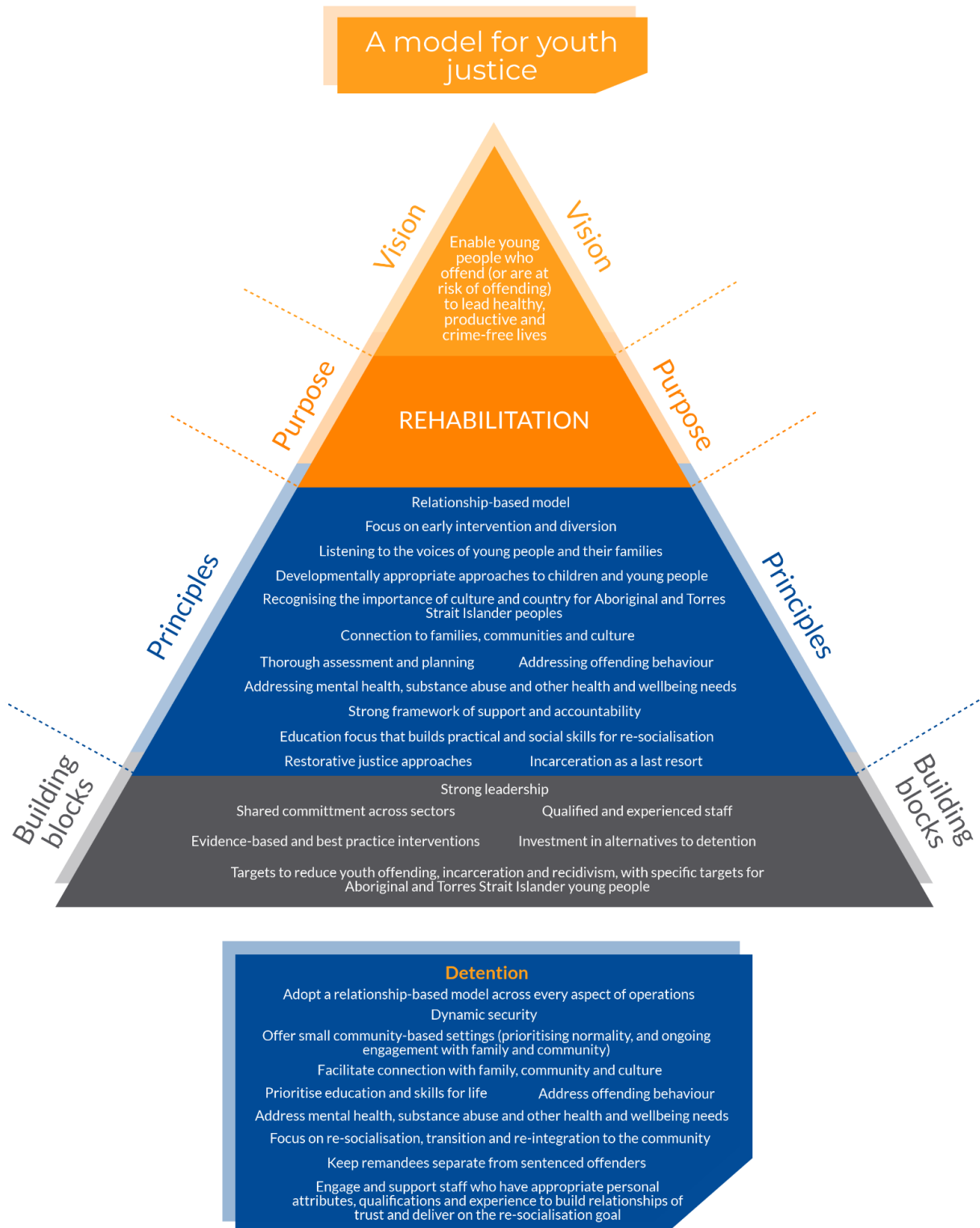
Jesuit Social Services thus calls on the Victorian Government to commit to reducing the significant over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the justice system by adequately resourcing ACCOs to strengthen their capacity to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people involved in the criminal justice system. Such work will necessarily involve a range of initiatives, from capacity building projects in Aboriginal communities to providing a continuum of supports for Aboriginal prisoners from pre-release to post-release. These supports must be built on trusted, consistent, culturally appropriate approaches and incorporate therapeutic whole-of-family ways of working. There also needs to be an increase in the availability of programs specifically targeted at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women involved in the justice system.

**Recommendation 27:**

That the Victorian Government provide ongoing funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness training for all adult justice prison staff and service deliverers, as well as for more positions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander case managers to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners in Victoria's prisons.



# Appendix A



## End Notes

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- <sup>iii</sup> Jesuit Social Services (2019a). *Jesuit Social Services Submission to the 2019/20 Victorian State Budget, April 2019*. Richmond: Jesuit Social Services.
- <sup>iv</sup> Jesuit Social Services (2017a). *Flourishing Communities: Taking lessons from place-based approaches, justice reinvestment and social cohesion*. Richmond: Jesuit Social Services; and Victorian Council of Social Service (2016). *Communities Taking Power: Using Place-Based Approaches to Deliver Local Solutions to Poverty and Disadvantage*. Melbourne: Victorian Council of Social Service.
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- <sup>vii</sup> Department of Treasury & Finance, Victorian Government (2019). *Delivering for All Victorians: Victorian Budget 19/20, Service Delivery, Budget Paper No. 3*. Melbourne: Department of Treasury & Finance, p. 73.
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- <sup>xi</sup> Denham, T., Dodson, J., & Lawson, J. (2019). *The business case for social housing as infrastructure*. Melbourne: Australian Housing & Urban Research Institute.
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