



Submission to *What matters to young people in Victoria?*
Youth Strategy Discussion Paper

January 2021



Executive Summary

The Victorian Youth Strategy aims to make the state the best place for young people.

Supporting young people to reach their potential has been a key goal of Jesuit Social Services for more than 40 years.

We work with children and young people, many of whom are vulnerable and experience complex forms of disadvantage.

We know the importance of social connection, economic participation including access to employment, health and self-determination to a young person's life.

We also know that when young people do get into trouble, such as having contact with the justice system, that evidence-based approaches are crucial in supporting them to turn their lives around.

All of these factors are vital in allowing young people to not only be healthy and safe – but to flourish and thrive.

Our submission to the Victorian Youth Strategy consultation draws on our extensive experience working with young people to highlight a key number of areas of focus and recommendations towards the goal of giving all Victorian young people the opportunity to be their best selves.

WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation working to build a just society where all people can live to their full potential. For over 40 years we have been working with some of the most disadvantaged and marginalised members of our communities, who often experience multiple and complex challenges.

We work where the need is greatest and where we have the capacity, experience and skills to make the most difference. We deliver services across Victoria as well as in Western Sydney and the Northern Territory.

Our practical support and advocacy covers five main areas:

- Justice and crime prevention for people involved with the youth and adult justice systems.
- Mental health and wellbeing for people with multiple and complex needs and those affected by trauma, suicide, and complex bereavement.
- Settlement and community building for disadvantaged communities, and recently arrived migrants, and refugees, and people seeking asylum.
- Education, training and employment for 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.

As well as providing direct services, we also seek to influence policies, practices, legislation and budget investment to positively influence people's lives and to improve approaches to addressing long-term social challenges.

Our advocacy work is grounded in the knowledge, expertise and experiences of program staff and participants, as well as academic research and evidence.

A YOUTH STRATEGY THAT WORKS FOR ALL

Jesuit Social Services works with young people who experience disadvantage and marginalisation – including young people who have contact with the criminal justice system, young people experiencing mental illness and substance abuse problems and young people who face barriers to education, training and employment.

We believe all young people in Victoria should have access to opportunities that will enable them to flourish. The Victorian Government's Youth Strategy Discussion Paper notes the need for equality of access to support and opportunities for young Victorians. However, equitable access to opportunities and support alone will not be sufficient to address the challenges faced by many young people at greatest risk of marginalisation and disadvantage. This includes those who have a history of trauma, abuse or neglect; experience mental health, drug or alcohol issues; cognitive disability; are from Aboriginal or culturally diverse backgrounds, including newly arrived migrant or refugees; or who have had involvement with the child protection/out-of-home care and/or justice systems. Without specific, targeted support for those most in need, we will not see equality of outcomes for young Victorians.

There is not a single program, initiative or policy that needs to be changed or implemented to ensure the best outcomes for young Victorians – rather, we need a holistic, whole-of-Government approach to address the root causes and structural inequity that expose young people to heightened risks of marginalisation and disadvantage.

This approach must be supported by adequate and sustained investment to promote positive pathways and outlooks for all young Victorians – and to ensure that nobody is left behind.

Victoria's new Youth Strategy must contain clear actions, measures and targets setting out what the best place for children and young people looks like in practice; maintain clear levels of accountability; and nominate lead agencies responsible for achievement of equitable outcomes for all young Victorians.

The Strategy should be underpinned by a human rights framework, especially articles of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)*, to which Australia is a signatory.

REDEFINING THE AGE RANGE FOR A YOUNG PERSON

The Victorian Government's Youth Strategy Discussion Paper refers to young people as those aged 12 to 25, and invites discussion on whether this definition is the right one.

Jesuit Social Services believes the age range for a young person should encompass, but not be limited to, 10 to 25 years.

This is in recognition of the fact that, at present, children as young as 10 years can be held in youth detention. We have long advocated for the minimum age of legal responsibility across all Australian states and territories to be raised from 10 to 14 years.

Supporting vulnerable children to engage or re-engage in education and positive activities also needs to commence before secondary school age.

Additionally, our position on a flexible upper age for young people is consistent with scientific evidence in relation to brain development that indicates most young people do not reach full maturity until the age of at least 25.

KEY THEMES:

KEEPING YOUNG PEOPLE ON THE RIGHT TRACK

Too many children and young people face significant, often ongoing, hardships and challenges in their lives.

This includes violence (such as family violence, child abuse or neglect); poverty; poor or inadequate access to education and health services; and engagement with the child protection and out-of-home care system and the youth justice system.

A Youth Strategy that addresses the trauma children and young people may experience, as well as structural barriers and inequities, will work to ensure young people stay on positive pathways and ultimately prevent them from getting into trouble.

Our key recommendations for this theme include:

- LOWER the age of eligibility of the Victorian Government’s Navigator initiative to 10 years
- INCREASE and commit to long-term funding for pre-accredited training programs to further support often highly vulnerable people to enter or re-enter education and training
- INCLUDE young people who are experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness as a priority cohort in Victoria’s Big Housing Build initiative
- ENSURE full and effective implementation of the prevention and early intervention supports funded in the Victorian Budget 2020/21 to enable young people to remain in their current living arrangements with their kinship or foster carer, or to transition to supported independent living arrangements, as needed until they turn 21
- INTRODUCE an initiative specifically for young people turning 18 in residential care for an ongoing independent supported housing option
- INVEST in research, workforce capacity building, and the development, piloting and evaluation of early interventions to positively shift cultures and attitudes to address the underlying drivers of violence and other harmful behaviours by boys and men
- INVEST in comprehensive facility-based mental health services for young people involved in the justice system
- FURTHER embed soft entry points for young people requiring mental health support

ADDRESSING BARRIERS TO TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Tailored training and educational pathways are an important means to address the needs of at-risk young people – particularly given the rising rates of unemployment and underemployment in Victoria due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Young people who experience barriers to employment for a range of reasons including homelessness, mental health problems, substance abuse problems or contact with the criminal justice system, need additional and targeted support to become productive members of the community.

Our key recommendations for this theme include:

- INCREASE and commit to long-term funding for pre-accredited training programs to further support often highly vulnerable people to enter or re-enter education and training
- INCREASE investment in initiatives that provide training and educational opportunities for young people engaged in the justice system
- STRENGTHEN targets for employment of young people experiencing significant barriers to employment in Victoria's Social Procurement Framework
- INCREASE opportunities for employment of young people from local disadvantaged communities in Victoria's major infrastructure projects
- INTRODUCE a *Young People Working For Victoria's Future* program to provide jobs and skills development positions in local government and the community sector so as to make an impact on the lives and life trajectories of a significant number of young people in the State

PROMOTING CONNECTION WITH CULTURE AND COMMUNITY

Jesuit Social Services is encouraged by recent Budget funding allocations for Aboriginal community-led responses to establish and expand programs and supports to help reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the youth justice system, and in the child protection and out-of-home care systems.

In addition to our work supporting young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through a range of programs and services, we also work with newly-arrived communities through a lens of welcome integration rather than assimilation.

Our key recommendations for this theme include:

- EMBED a First Nations informed and First Nations led approach into ecological practices and recognition of the heart of social and economic justice
- ADVOCATE to the Federal Government for the implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart
- INVEST in community-led initiatives to address the over-representation of young people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities in the criminal justice system
- CONTINUE to implement Burra Lotjpa Dunguludja (Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement).
- STRENGTHEN initiatives enabling pathways to social and economic participation for newly arrived young people and their families.
- INVEST to address locational disadvantage.

A YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEM THAT WORKS

Jesuit Social Services believes that prison should always be a last resort. The mental and physical health of young people when they exit the prison system has often deteriorated significantly, while they also experience significant barriers to reintegration in the community.

Crucially, imprisonment increases the likelihood of reoffending behaviour and can have a particularly negative impact on younger lower-risk people.

Our justice system can – and must – do much better in transforming the behaviour and potential of these young adults. This should include an emphasis on restorative approaches to help young people take accountability for their actions in the community wherever possible.

Our key recommendations for this theme include:

- RAISE the age of legal responsibility from 10 to 14 years to ensure primary school aged children remain in the classroom, not in prison
- DEVELOP a range of sentencing options, including the use of education as an alternative to detention for young people
- EXPAND and improve access to restorative justice programs and initiatives, including the use of restorative justice conferencing to young people in out-of-home care placements
- FURTHER invest in post-release and transitional support for young people exiting the justice system.
- FURTHER reduce the prison population size within Cherry Creek Prison and ensure diversionary, rehabilitative, holistic alternatives
- ENHANCE staff capacity in the youth justice system and ban use of punitive isolation

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Responses to Discussion Questions

Summarised below are Jesuit Social Services' responses to the eight key discussion questions relating to Victoria's Youth Strategy, as outlined in the *Youth Strategy Discussion Paper*. The rationale for our response to each question is based on our detailed consideration of the six key Outcomes documented in the respective Appendices, as referred to in the Recommendations section above.

1. We are committed to creating a Victoria where all young people are healthy and safe, and empowered to contribute to the issues that affect them. We want every single young person to have equitable access to opportunities and support to participate fully in the social, economic and civic life of our state. Does this statement capture your vision and aspirations for young Victorians? Why or why not?

The commitment to ensuring young people are healthy and safe, and empowered and able to contribute to issues that affect them is commendable, as is the desire for equitable access to opportunities and support.

This statement could be strengthened by reference to the following elements:

- Modifications in the framing of the statement to strengthen the language and aim for a higher standard to be achieved beyond young people being 'healthy and safe' to include 'flourishing' and 'thriving'.
- A commitment beyond young people being empowered to 'contribute' to the issues that affect them, to a youth-led/youth-centred approach to decision-making, core concepts and policies to achieve the strategy.
- As well as the need for equitable 'access' to opportunities and support, include a focus on the achievement of equitable 'outcomes' for all young Victorians. Our submission outlines the particular barriers faced by young people at greatest risk of marginalisation and disadvantage, including those who have a history of trauma, abuse or neglect; a mental health, drug or alcohol issue; cognitive disability; Aboriginal or culturally diverse background, including from newly arrived migrant or refugee backgrounds; or who have had involvement with the child protection/out-of-home care and/or justice systems. Equitable access to opportunities and support alone will not be sufficient to address the challenges faced by many young people from these backgrounds.
- An emphasis on the need for partnerships and collaboration between key stakeholders, including young people, their families and communities, and across government, business, the community sector and other service providers all working towards the same goal.
- In addition to references to 'social, economic and civic life', the inclusion of a reference to a 'sustainable and ecologically just life' in accordance with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

2. Do you think the discussion paper captures the key challenges facing young Victorians and the priorities and issues of most importance to them? Is there anything missing or that needs to be changed?

The *Youth Strategy Discussion Paper* is comprehensive and captures the majority of the key challenges facing young Victorians. Jesuit Social Services believes the following issues should also be addressed:

- The need for the Youth Strategy to be underpinned by a rights-based approach and, in the absence of a constitutionally- or legislatively-enshrined national charter of human rights, enshrinement of relevant obligations outlined within the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* in legislation. As a signatory to the Convention, Australia has obligations to protect the best interests of the child as a primary consideration (Article 3); and to protect, respect and fulfil the rights to non-discrimination (Article 2), education (Article 28), a safe place to live (Article 27), the highest attainable standard of health (Article 24), protection from violence, abuse and being neglected (Article 19), life, survival and development (Article 6), and participation in all decisions that affect them (Article 12). This right-based framing and a commitment to legislative protection of these rights is currently absent from the *Youth Strategy Discussion Paper*.
- Greater recognition that the actions required to achieve the outcomes outlined in the Youth Strategy are interconnected and that any action will need to address fragmentation and coordination gaps between services and stakeholders through a holistic and comprehensive approach.
- The need for clear indicators, a governance framework, and clear lines of accountability to ensure outcomes are achieved, with progress measured through the establishment and annual reporting to Parliament against clear targets.
- Explicit recognition that there is a need to focus on those children and young people with the greatest vulnerabilities and needs, particularly groups of young people at risk of or, indeed, experiencing marginalisation and/or disadvantage – including Aboriginal children, children and young people from newly arrived migrant and refugee backgrounds, and children with out-of-home care experiences and involvement with the justice system. The Discussion Paper discusses the need for equality of access to support and opportunities however, without targeted support for those in need, we will not achieve equality of outcomes. This requires explicit identification and addressing of structural inequalities, including poverty, systemic racism and all types of discrimination.
- Linking the Youth Strategy to relevant existing strategies, including Victoria’s Free from Violence Strategy, Roadmap to Reform, Victoria’s relevant commitments to the National Closing the Gap Agreement, Crime Prevention Strategy, Youth Justice Strategy, Education State, early years reform, Victoria’s Homeless Strategy, and the recently announced Anti-Racism strategy.

3. What needs to change for all young people to be empowered in every aspects of Victorian life – civic, political, social and economic?

In addition to the recommendations outlined throughout this submission, for all young people to be empowered in every aspect of Victorian life there needs to be:

- A whole-of-government, approach to ensure the outcomes sought are achieved. Improving child and youth wellbeing requires coordination across a multitude of portfolio areas, including health, welfare, justice and education.
- A clear outcomes framework that contains measurable targets and indicators to track progress, including clear lines of accountability and annual reporting to Parliament on progress towards the six outcomes.
- Embedding of the rights of the child within legislation.

- Long-term investment, funding and resource allocation to address child poverty, family violence, inadequate housing, education, improving early years, learning support and mental wellbeing for children, young people and their families in order to ensure the outcomes are obtained.

4. Government, community organisations, businesses, education and service providers all have an important role to play in working with and for young people. How can we work together to better meet the needs of young people?

As indicated above, there is a clear need for a whole-of-government, outcomes framework delineating clearly measurable targets and indicators to enable progress to be tracked, and to unify key stakeholders across government, community organisations, business, education and service providers to work towards common goal and reduce fragmentation and siloing in service delivery.

5. If you could change one program, initiative or policy in Victoria, what would you change?

A key point evident from our submission is that there is not *one* program, initiative or policy that needs to be changed to ensure the best outcomes for young Victorians. A holistic, intersectional approach is required, in particular to address the root causes and structural inequality that exposes particular young people to heightened risks of marginalisation and disadvantage.

6. What is working well that the Victorian Government could build on to improve outcomes for young people? Consider initiatives in other states, territories or internationally.

As outlined in the Smart Justice for Young People Submission to the consultation on the Victorian *Youth Strategy Discussion Paper* to which Jesuit Social Services is a signatory, the New Zealand Government's The Child & Youth Wellbeing Strategy Framework¹ provides an example of an outcomes framework approach with guiding principles that incorporate and acknowledge a rights-based approach, reference Maori culture and customs, advocate holistic and comprehensive approaches, and emphasise the importance of family and community and that the best solutions involve community-led design and delivery. There is recognition that the outcomes sought are interconnected, and note the social and broader economic and environmental factors that need to improve to ensure the overall wellbeing of children and young people. The New Zealand framework includes governance mechanisms, targets and indicators, reporting mechanisms and accountability to ensure the outcomes are being achieved.

7. What role can you or your organisation play to improve the lives of young Victorians?

As an organisation, we work with young people to influence, by creating and build communities of justice, to foster and regenerate the web of relationships that sustain us all – across people, place and planet. Utilising a participant-centred approach to our program delivery and evidence-based research, we seek to change policies, practices, ideas and values that perpetuate inequality, prejudice and exclusion and seek to ensure that Government delivers the most effective and humane policies.

¹ Government of New Zealand (2019). Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy Framework (2019). Available from: <https://childyouthwellbeing.govt.nz/resources/child-and-youth-wellbeing-strategy-html#section-3>.

8. Do you have anything else you would like to add to inform the youth strategy?

Please refer to Appendices I–VI for more detailed information underpinning our responses to these Discussion Questions.

Appendix I: Victorian young people are healthy and well, mentally and physically (Outcome 1)

a) Background

Jesuit Social Services supports a strategy that encourages Victorian young people to flourish physically and mentally.

Jesuit Social Services provides a range of mental health and wellbeing programs aimed at engaging young people who are experiencing mental health and substance abuse challenges, or are impacted by the suicide of a loved one. Our mental health and wellbeing work includes counselling, outreach support, group work, assistance with education and training, and therapeutic outdoor activities. Supported by Jesuit Social Services' *Our Way of Working* practice framework, our program delivery recognises the intersectionality between mental health and all other facets of a young person's life, including housing, justice systems, education and training; employment; community and family; and living skills. Our programs and practice framework acknowledges that mental health improvement is best achieved through multiple means, multi-disciplinary approaches, and flexible perspectives. This includes, for example, working with young people where they are located in the community rather than in appointment-based clinical settings; and the capacity to work with them over time, underpinned by the importance of building rapport and trusting relationships.

The provision of appropriate support and services to young people experiencing mental health problems with multiple needs has proven precarious, with too many young people falling through service gaps. Some may 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 young people who lack the supportive relationships that are often crucial to seeking further help.

Jesuit Social Services welcomed the establishment of the Victorian Government's Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System and provided a submission to the Royal Commission.² We are encouraged by the Victorian Government's public commitment to implementing all the recommendations from the Royal Commission, due to be handed down in February 2021. We have been encouraged by the substantial investment in mental health facilities and programs under the *Victorian Budget 2020/21*.

We recommend that a number of gaps in support also be addressed to ensure the mental health and wellbeing of Victorian youth.

² https://jss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Jesuit-Social-Services_-Submission_-Royal-Commission-into-Victorias-Mental-Health-System_FINAL-revised-004.pdf

- i. Need for greater recognition of the intersectionality between mental health, alcohol and other drug issues, and involvement in the justice system

We know that poor mental health – compounded by 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, and to provide service responses that better assist people experiencing poor mental health, including youth-specific responses.

As highlighted by our **Worth A Second Chance campaign**,³ prison must always be used as a last resort and, if it is used, youth justice custodial environments must provide cultural safety, physical and mental health services, alcohol and drug services, disability support, and appropriate 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 currently no forensic mental health facility for children and young people. Jesuit Social Services believes there should be a specific service that caters to young people with mental health issues – this would involve smaller facilities to support those experiencing mental health, drug or alcohol issues, and cognitive disabilities. Relatedly, as we have long argued, there is a need for re-integration facilities specifically catering to the needs of young people, given how difficult the transition from custody to community can be. This highlights the need for prevention and early intervention services in the mental health system. Jesuit Social Services believes there is a lack of programs for young people to access support who may go on to develop more serious problems without adequate early intervention.

At Jesuit Social Services, we run a number of integrated program models and practices that recognise the intersectionality between mental health, alcohol and drug issues and justice, and avoid driving silos. These include **Connexions**, our counselling and outreach program developed in response to the identified needs of marginalised young people aged 16-28 years experiencing high and complex needs, particularly individuals struggling with concurrent mental health and substance misuse.

CASE STUDY: Bec

Bec lives with Multiple Personality Disorder. Bec says:

I have attended other services, but I don't think it's worth sitting there getting to know someone for 10 visits to have them turn around and say 'That's it, we're at the end of 10 sessions, I can't help you any more' when I have just told my whole life story to you, I need help, and we have barely scratched the surface.

When we came to Connexions and found out all the support I could access it blew my mind. If Connexions wasn't there I would be struggling – majorly. The program has helped me discover a lot about myself that I didn't know I had in me, to go into depth to sort it all out.

And my case worker has gone above and beyond to support me. It's very rare to have that support, where staff are going out of their way to see if you are okay. She will just text me even if I haven't seen her for a while and say 'Hey, I'm out there if you need me.' You don't see that in other services.

³ Worth a Second Chance Campaign (2020) run by Jesuit Social Services. Available here: <https://worthasecondchance.com.au/about/>

Our **ReConnect** program, delivered across Melbourne’s north and western regions, as part of the Corrections Victoria Reintegration Pathway, supports high risk and high profile adult men and women, which includes young people aged 18 years and above, to transition from prison to community by providing case management support across critical domains: housing, mental health, alcohol and drug, education and training, employment, community and family, and living skills. Our transitional and supported housing programs also assist young people with a range of presenting needs who are involved with, or exiting, the justice system. **Perry House** provides a residential-based living skills program for justice system-involved young people with an intellectual disability who are at risk of, or are experiencing, homelessness and require support. **Next Steps**, which was recognised by the 2017 Victorian Homelessness Achievement Awards, is a supported housing program for 16–24 year-olds who are involved with the justice system and are experiencing, or are at risk of, homelessness. **Link Youth Justice Housing Program (Link)** is an innovative pilot program, launched in 2018, that supports young people (aged 16–22 years) exiting the justice system who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, through securing and sustaining access to stable living arrangements by head leasing through partner agency VincentCare.

ii. **The importance of building programs with embedded soft entry points.**

Jesuit Social Services runs a number of programs as part of our mental health and wellbeing work that provide a soft entry point for young people and mental health support. For example, the **Artful Dodgers Studios**, our fully equipped art and music studios, offer a flexible and welcoming space for young people to work, in order to increase social connectedness, self-esteem and employability skills. Programs like the Artful Dodgers Studio promote a person-centred approach to addressing mental health, provide a community and drop-in space which offers flexibility for individuals who may be avoidant of clinical mental health services, and provide a holistic approach to address the needs of the whole person.

CASE STUDY: Kris, Emerging Artist and Artful Dodgers Studio Participant

“It was a very welcoming, colourful space. It seemed like there was always something bubbling in the background – somewhere anything was possible...”

It’s about the arts, but if there’s anything else going on, you’re open to talk about it and try to work through it. It’s really free-form. When I’ve been in a rough patch, I’ve been able to just go in and they’re there to talk to...

I’ve moved house a lot, and changed TAFE courses and friend groups a lot and [Artful Dodgers] has been a constant through all of that. It’s been great to know I have something to rely on. It’s definitely a backbone.”

* Source: Jesuit Social Services (2020). Artful Dodgers Studios is a place of possibility. <https://jss.org.au/artful-dodgers-studios-is-a-place-of-possibility/>

iii. The need for secure long term funding for postvention services for suicide bereavement

Suicide is a significant cause of premature death in Australia. It represents a high proportion of deaths among younger people, accounting for over one-third of deaths (38.4 per cent) among those aged 15-24 years.⁴

A recent report, released by Jesuit Social Services in September 2020,⁵ presented the findings from data collected from 142 family members whose loved ones died by suicide between the previous three months and five years. The research found that around half (47 per cent) of people who took their lives were known to have attempted suicide in the past, that almost three quarters (70 per cent) of people who died had previously sought help from the mental health system, and that 79 per cent of family members said they felt there were barriers to them accessing information or help in caring for their loved one. Jesuit Social Services recognises that high risk behaviours and attempted suicides, often through substance misuse, are common to the cohorts of young people targeted across the range of programs we provide.

Support After Suicide is a suicide bereavement counselling service established in 2004 and run by Jesuit Social Services. It currently works with about 1,000 people each year. We provide counselling, group and home visits, art therapy and online resources to people left behind after the suicide of a loved one.

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.

FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS: Support After Suicide*

"Support After Suicide and Victoria Police were my saviours. Thanks to VicPol for the SAS referral."

"If I had not received counselling support, I would probably be dead now or at least not functioning."

* Source: Jesuit Social Services (2020). Support After Suicide: "We were fighting the system as well as the illness: Family perceptions of how Victoria responds to people at risk of suicide and their loved ones". Available from: <https://jss.org.au/report-highlights-areas-for-reform-in-mental-health-system-to-prevent-suicides/>.

b) Recommendations

The Victorian Government's recent commitment to increased investment in mental health services for young people is highly encouraging. In this context, several initiatives funded in the *Victorian Budget 2020/21* are

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020). Causes of Death, Australia, 23/10/2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/causes-death/causes-death-australia/latest-release#intentional-self-harm-suicides-key-characteristics>.

⁵ Flynn, L. (2020). "We were fighting the system as well as the illness": Family perceptions of how Victoria responds to people at risk of suicide and their loved ones. Melbourne: Jesuit Social Services. Available from: https://jss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/JSS2003_SASReport_web4.pdf.

noteworthy. A further \$14.3 million was allocated in the *Victorian Budget 2020/21* to expand several existing wellbeing and mental health supports for school students – including Navigator, which we warmly welcome.⁶ We also acknowledge the commencement, in November 2020, of construction of a new \$11.9 million 20-bed Youth Prevention and Recovery Care in Melbourne’s north west for young people with mental illness⁷; and, in October 2020, the launch of the Living Learning Program that provides education and support for young people aged 15 to 21 who are disengaged from employment, education and training and who have a mental health condition.⁸ Notwithstanding these valuable initiatives, our experience working with young people has highlighted the need for additional targeted investments.

We recommend the establishment of:

- comprehensive facility-based mental health services that provide thorough assessment and ensure appropriate follow-up interventions and services for all young people in custody, and embedding mental health care professionals in transition programs from 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).

We also emphasise the importance of balancing investment in existing larger clinically-based services with other programs, such as Connexions, that work across the range of needs that young people present with and the system domains with which they are involved.

We recommend, in addition to establishing the new Child and Youth Hospital Outreach Post-suicidal Engagement (HOPE) program, that the Victorian Government:

- provide further secure long-term funding for existing 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, and
- invest in supporting the workforce to understand and engage with boys (and men) regarding the links between rigid adherence to stereotypical ideas about what it means to be a man (e.g. related to help seeking) and poor mental health outcomes, substance use and other risk taking behaviours. This will be discussed further in relation to Outcome 5.

⁶ Victorian Government (2020). Service Delivery, Budget Paper No. 3, Victorian Budget 2020/21: Putting People First, p. 36. Retrieved from: <https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/budgetfiles202021.budget.vic.gov.au/2020-21+State+Budget+-+Service+Delivery.pdf>.

⁷ Premier Daniel Andrews (2020, November 18). ‘Delivering more mental health support for young Victorians’ [Media release]. Retrieved from: <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/delivering-more-mental-health-support-young-victorians>.

⁸ Premier Daniel Andrews (2020, October 26). ‘Innovative program helping young people finish school’ [Media release]. Retrieved from: <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/innovative-program-helping-young-people-finish-school>.

Appendix II: Victorian young people actively participate in learning, education and training (Outcome 2)

a) Background

Many people face significant barriers to social and economic inclusion. In this context, the creation of, and support for, tailored training and educational pathways is a particularly important means to address the needs of at-risk youth, which have been compounded by rising rates of unemployment and underemployment in Victoria due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In Victoria, providing long-term funding support for effective education and training programs will be a crucial aspect of supporting disadvantaged young people through the COVID-19 crisis and beyond. This includes support for key foundational learning pathways, including pre-accredited training⁹ and accredited foundation skills training; programs to assist vulnerable and disengaged learners; and training and educational opportunities for young people engaged in the out-of-home care and youth justice systems.

i. Greater recognition, value and resources for pre-accredited training in Victoria

People facing barriers to employment often need assistance to upgrade their skills and their readiness for work. We know from our experience delivering pre-accredited training in Victoria that it provides an important stepping-stone for people with low-level educational attainment, people who have been out of the workplace or education for some time, and people who experience poor mental health or who may be involved in the justice system.

Jesuit Social Services runs a number of education, training and employment programs to help young people who have had limited access to learning, training and job opportunities. **Jesuit Community College** is a Registered Training Organisation which provides both accredited and pre-accredited training to people who face barriers to mainstream education each year. We offer nationally recognised qualifications in general education for adults ('accredited training') and short courses that help people get ready to work ('pre-accredited training'). Without a pre-accredited training pathway, we would not have been able to assist scores of participants to increase their skills, confidence and engagement with workplace training and, ultimately, to support their transition into work. Through the pre-accredited training provided by Jesuit Social Services, participants gain the essential foundational learning and personal skills they need to make a successful transition to formal accredited training and employment. For some people, this is their first such opportunity in many years.

⁹ 'Pre-accredited training' refers to "short vocational courses which create pathways into employment or further education and training." Source: Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee (2020). *Inquiry into sustainable employment for disadvantaged jobseekers*. Parliament of Victoria, pp. 78, 266. Retrieved from: https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/eic-LA/Disadvantaged_Jobseekers/Report/LAEIC_59-01_Sustainable_employment_disadvantaged_jobseekers.pdf.

CASE STUDY: Sarah

After completing school in 2013, Sarah began applying for jobs anywhere she could find, including the fast food, customer service and hospitality industries.

I was never getting call backs and the only time I would get emails would be to tell me I didn't get the job. I didn't know what I was doing wrong and it made me feel like every door was closed to me.

Sarah experienced depression and anxiety and says the struggle looking for employment exacerbated these issues. Her life changed when her stepmother referred her to Jesuit Community College. Sarah enrolled in a month-long Ready Set Work course, which helps students prepare to work in a cafe – learning everything from performing in job interviews to customer service and barista skills. Each morning, Sarah would leave home in Frankston at 5.30 am to catch a train and a tram to the College, arriving before the doors had opened to avoid being late to class. At the end of the course, staff at Jesuit Community College helped Sarah to secure an interview with a Starbucks store in Melbourne's CBD.

I thought my hands would be shaking but because the College had helped me prepare so well, it didn't feel as daunting. When they called me a few days later to let me know I had the job, it was amazing.

Sarah commenced work at Starbucks in late 2016 and says the job has developed her skills and her confidence. In 2017, Sarah was awarded \$1,000 from the Rotary Club of Camberwell in acknowledgement of the adversity she has overcome to thrive.

I don't know where I would be without Jesuit Community College, but I certainly wouldn't be here.

Data provided by the Department of Education and Training indicates that, of the 29 per cent of pre-accredited learners who transition into accredited training, 64 per cent directly attain a qualification and a further 14 per cent indirectly do so. In comparison, the average Victorian Vocational and Education Training (VET) completion rate is 47.3 per cent. These figures are even more notable given that 90 per cent of pre-accredited learners are experiencing disadvantage¹⁰, all of which is highlighted in the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee's report from its recent *Inquiry into sustainable employment for disadvantaged jobseekers*.¹¹ Recommendations from that Inquiry call for the expansion of pre-accredited training courses in employment skills, including digital literacy, through Learn Local providers, which it found to be an important soft entry point into training for jobseekers who face disadvantage. The Inquiry also called for increased efforts to raise awareness of such courses in the community to enhance the work readiness of jobseekers, particularly individuals experiencing disadvantage.¹²

¹⁰ Department of Education and Training (2018, August). Future Opportunities for Adult Learners in Victoria. Retrieved from: <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/adult-learners-paper.PDF>.

¹¹ Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee (2020). *Inquiry into sustainable employment for disadvantaged jobseekers*. Parliament of Victoria. *Op. cit.*

¹² See Recommendations 15 – 18 in the report from the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee (2020). *Inquiry into sustainable employment for disadvantaged jobseekers*. Parliament of Victoria. *Op. cit.*

ii. Expansion of eligibility for training programs for disengaged young learners

Disengagement from education can often be the first sign that a young person has started on a trajectory into antisocial behaviour. Jesuit Social Services delivers casework and support to disadvantaged young learners as part of the Victorian Government's **Navigator** initiative.

Navigator works with disengaged learners aged between 12 and 17 to engage with them and their support networks to return them to education or training. Re-engaging vulnerable young people in educational, learning and employment pathways gives them the foundational skills and opportunities they need to flourish. The program's work includes the development of individualised learning and cultural plans, and restorative practice including therapeutic and practical support. In Jesuit Social Services' experience delivering Navigator, 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 extended to the youth justice system, family violence services and the child protection system.

We are heartened by the recent *Victorian Budget 2020/21* announcement of youth mental health support funding that will expand existing supports for the wellbeing and mental health of students, including the **Navigator** program.¹³ Jesuit Social Services believes that lowering the age of eligibility for Navigator from 12 years to 10 years would enable the program to intervene earlier so that the critical transition period from Primary to Secondary school is covered.

CASE STUDY: Steven*

[* Not his real name]

When Steven, a young Aboriginal boy, engaged with Jesuit Social Services' Navigator program he was experiencing significant challenges with his education. Steven had a long-standing pattern of not attending school. He has a diagnosed learning disability and was not receiving any extra assistance in the classroom. In the year before he engaged with Navigator, Steven only attended three days of school. 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 because of family conflict, low confidence, and those around him not understanding his 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. Steven was also supported to enrol in a flexible learning centre where his individual needs were better supported, and where he could benefit from an Individual Learning Plan. Two years later (in June 2019), Steven was attending approximately 80 per cent of his school timetable. His confidence had grown to the point that he had applied for casual work, which his mother identified as a major success in his life, and he was 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 culturally sensitive and respectful work.

¹³ Victorian Government (2020). Service Delivery, Budget Paper No. 3, Victorian Budget 2020/21: Putting People First. *Op. cit.*, pp. 28, 36.

iii. Training and educational opportunities for young people engaged in the youth justice system

Providing opportunities to occupy and engage young people in education and training is crucial for those involved in the justice system. For young people in custody, there should be programs that build independent living skills and support job readiness, along with the standard educational programs (i.e. a mix of education and skills-based training).

Opening in Term 1, 2021, the **Ignatius Learning Centre** is a Catholic Specialist Secondary School. The Ignatius Learning Centre will be based at one of the existing Jesuit Social Services offices in Richmond. It will take referrals from the Children's Court and enrol approximately 20 boys aged 15-17 years. A VCAL curriculum will be provided alongside a wide range of pro-social activities, including art, music, sport, and plentiful access to the natural environment for healing and development.

CASE STUDY: Charles

Five years ago, when Charles was 15, he was asked to leave home.

I had a pretty bad home life and my parents asked me to move out because I was a bad influence on my little brother.

As a result, Charles moved to a residential unit in the out-of-home care system. Life was tough and Charles got into trouble which led him to have contact with the police and courts.

I was getting drunk and doing property damage and shoplifting when I was drunk... when I had to go to court it was the worst experience of my life.

Charles ended up spending time in youth detention when he was 17 and was unable to get the support he needed to deal with his alcohol abuse. Now, Charles' future is looking much better. After leaving detention, he was supported into private accommodation by Jesuit Social Services, where staff assist him to develop independent living skills.

I have my own kitchen, I cook two or three nights a week because I have staff there showing me how to do it.

Charles has been able to work towards his goal of completing Year 12, studying land management and getting a job with an organisation like Parks Victoria. Charles says the opportunity for a second chance has helped him get his life back on track.

b) Recommendations

- Increase and commit to long-term funding for pre-accredited training programs to further support often highly vulnerable young people to enter or re-enter education and training as a pathway to employment.
- Lower the age of eligibility of the Victorian Government's Navigator program to students aged 10 years.
- Further invest in initiatives that provide training and educational opportunities for young people engaged in the justice system.
- Further invest in practical training in independent living skills and job readiness for young people.

Appendix III: Victorian young people are economically active and contribute to the economy (Outcome 3)

a) Background

For Victorian young people to be economically active and contribute to the economy, employment and support systems need to broaden their focus beyond the narrow aim of securing short-term employment outcomes and, instead, support people on a journey to social inclusion that can be measured against a wider range of social markers. We hold that the worth of a person is not limited to their employment status and that civic participation can and should be measured in more nuanced ways.

The barriers to employment can be multidimensional and entrenched, including housing stress and homelessness, mental health problems, family violence, racism, substance dependence and the existence of a criminal record.¹⁴ Young people are particularly at risk of unemployment and underemployment, with young Victorians hit hardest by the pandemic due to the deadly second wave of COVID-19. Data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) for November 2020 shows that the national youth unemployment rate increased to 15.6 per cent, compared to the average unemployment rate for Victoria of 7.1 per cent.¹⁵

In conjunction with our education and training programs, Jesuit Social Services' employment programs assist people who have had limited learning or job opportunities and face a range of barriers to inclusion.

i. Increased support for employment services programs that assist disadvantaged young people

For people looking to enter or re-enter the workforce, and who face significant barriers to doing so, intensive, flexible and individualised training and support may be needed to support the individual, as well as prospective employers. Current initiatives under the Jobs Victoria banner have enabled organisations such as Jesuit Social Services to work closely with individuals to address issues affecting their ability to secure employment and to maintain that employment. This cohort includes people involved with the criminal justice system who already face barriers, such as lower educational attainment and higher levels of mental ill-health.

The **Jobs Victoria Employment Network (JVEN)** is an example of an employment services scheme, implemented at the local level, that is working well.

The **Skills First Reconnect** initiative is another program that has been working very well. Skills First Reconnect delivers a critical support to people who have left school early, enabling them to re-enter education and training and begin improving and enhancing their vocational skills. Jesuit Social Services' experience is that we cannot rush the process with our participants who have high needs and present with complex barriers. The Skills First Reconnect program allows us to provide the intensive wrap around support that other programs cannot always provide. Working collaboratively with other programs and agencies is very important in helping to achieve positive outcomes for participants.

¹⁴ Legislative Assembly, Economy and Infrastructure Committee (2020). Inquiry into sustainable employment for disadvantaged jobseekers. Retrieved from: https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/eic-LA/Disadvantaged_Jobseekers/Report/LAEIC_59-01_Sustainable_employment_disadvantaged_jobseekers.pdf.

¹⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020, December 17). Labour Force, Australia. Retrieved from: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/latest-release#states-and-territories>.

The Government's recent introduction of **the Working For Victoria initiative** and its success in quickly responding to the crisis of unemployment experienced by people thrown out of work due to the impact of COVID-19, is an excellent example of how the Government can harness the community and local government sectors to create socially valuable jobs, when it provides these organisations with the additional funding needed to support these additional positions. This initiative provides a model of how we as a community can effectively support young people gain their first stepping stone into employment.

CASE STUDY: Fletcher

On first meeting, Fletcher exudes a sense of energy and self-confidence that is both disarming and infectious. However Fletcher says that until meeting the team from our Jobs Victoria Employment Network (JVEN) program, he had found his self-confidence eroding away after a period of unstable employment.

Before I got in touch with Jesuit Social Services, I wasn't personally in a great place. Being unemployed sort of does that to you, so once I got a job and I was speaking to the people from the employment program, it showed me what I was capable of. Since then, I've started a university degree and am very involved in emergency services as a volunteer. Having that contact with the employment program has really shown me what I'm capable of doing and it's given me a much more positive outlook on my future and where I'm going to be in the next couple of years.

After finding the right supports through JVEN, Fletcher began a traineeship with Metro Trains and, since September 2019, has been working as a Leading Station Assistant at Flinders Street Station. Fletcher says being in stable employment has had a huge impact on his self-esteem and outlook for the future.

I'm usually a confident person but after being unemployed for a while, it was weighing down on me a lot. 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 for myself, and I was able to focus on doing volunteering activities and doing a great job at work, so it's been a huge confidence boost to me.

ii. Focus on procurement contract frameworks to assist disadvantaged young people

For disadvantaged jobseekers, social procurement frameworks that embed considerations of social objectives in the Government's procurement processes provide a positive starting point. However, there is a need for clearer targets that encourage, support and resource employment initiatives for young people experiencing high levels of social disadvantage.

As an example of this program, Jesuit Social Services is a partner in the Victorian Government's **Out for Good** pilot program which targeted young people who have been engaged in the justice system. In its first year, it worked with 50 young people, 26 of whom had been in prison, a youth justice centre or otherwise involved in the justice system, and helped them obtain a sustainable job.

There is a significant opportunity for the major infrastructure projects currently being planned or underway in Victoria to achieve positive social outcomes, including job opportunities for people facing barriers to employment and for those in regions experiencing significant social and economic disadvantage.

iii. Building social inclusion through corporate diversity partnerships

Jesuit Social Services conducts a number of workplace inclusion programs in corporate, community and small business settings. Through our valued Workplace Partners, we match people facing barriers to employment with employers.

Newly arrived people and those from CALD communities often face barriers to employment which can limit their sense of integration into the Australian community. The importance of meaningful work for newly arrived people is significant. Employment fosters broader participation in society, provides a sense of purpose, and creates opportunities for migrants to become contributing members of the community.

Jesuit Social Services believes that the role of business as an enabler of social inclusion should be more actively explored and promoted. This requires moving away from a transactional relationship between business and marginalised people to one grounded in an understanding of the capacity of business to work with organisations and the community.

Jesuit Social Services has a history of investing in programs to support people to transition into jobs.

A key example is our **African Australian Inclusion Program (AAIP)**, formed in partnership with the National Australia Bank (NAB), which offers six-month paid work placements, including mentoring and career coaching, to qualified African-Australians. By the end of 2020, over 500 participants had graduated from AAIP across Melbourne and Sydney since its inception in 2009, with 86% of participants gaining ongoing employment with NAB or in similar jobs in other organisations.

Building on this experience Jesuit Social Services has created partnerships with a number of key corporations including John Holland, Melbourne Water, CBUS and others to not only increase employment opportunities for people experiencing significant barriers to employment, but also supporting these employers to introduce and extend sustainable diversity recruitment and inclusion practices within their organisations.

The Corporate Diversity Programs established by Jesuit Social Services not only perform a social good in broadening the employment prospects of people who are disadvantaged, but also provide significant benefits to the private sector in opening up an untapped labour market of talented workers and shifting perceptions in a positive way.

b) Recommendations

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the \$151.3 million in funding for the Jobs for Victoria initiative in the *Victorian Budget 2020/21*, and the doubling of this commitment (\$309.1 million) for the 2021-22 financial year.

We recommend that the Victorian Government expand investment in supporting Victorians experiencing significant barriers to employment through long-term recurrent funding to programs such as Skills First Reconnect.

Jesuit Social Services also welcomes the Victorian Government's commitment to increasing access to jobs for people experiencing significant barriers to employment through the use of the Government Procurement agenda outlined in the *Victorian Budget 2020/21*, and that the Government build on its success in the Working For Victoria initiative to target a similar initiative to young people experiencing difficulty making a successful transition into employment.

We recommend that:

- The Government introduce a *Young People Working For Victoria's Future* program to provide jobs and skills development positions in local government and the community sector so as to make an impact on the lives and life trajectories of a significant number of young people in the State;
- Strengthened targets for employment of young people experiencing significant barriers to employment, for example young people who have been engaged in the justice system, in Victoria's Social Procurement Framework, and those targets incorporate support, retention and development of the young people employed. The aim of this is to ensure young people be given the time they need to settle in and adapt to the rigors of ongoing full-time employment and to ensure that the achievement of the employment targets by employers creates supportive and inclusive environments for young people.
- Increased opportunities for employment of young people from local disadvantaged communities in Victoria's major infrastructure projects be made available across the range of industries, as well as the construction industry.

Appendix IV: Victorian young people are connected to culture, community and civic life (Outcome 4)

a) Background

i. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination and culture

Jesuit Social Services is committed to the implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart¹⁶, including a Voice to Parliament, a Treaty and Truth-telling about the Aboriginal side of Australian history, and to bring awareness about the impact of colonisation and dispossession to create a path for reconciliation.

We support the right of young Aboriginal Victorians to self-determination, and note that in accordance with the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People*, by virtue of that right they freely determine their economic, social and cultural development.

As noted in the Preamble of the Victorian *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, human rights have a special importance for the Aboriginal people of Victoria, as descendants of Australia's first people, with their diverse spiritual, social, cultural and economic relationship with their traditional lands and waters.

The recent Budget funding allocations for Aboriginal community-led responses to establish and expand programs and supports to help reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in the youth justice system, and in the child protection and out-of-home care systems, is highly encouraging. Also encouraging is the investment to close the gap in economic and social outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, and funding for a Treaty for Victoria and the continued operations of the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, to continue working in partnership with the State to establish the elements necessary to support Treaty negotiations.¹⁷ It is important that this investment translates into tangible outcomes required to fulfil Victoria's obligations in relation to Closing the Gap.¹⁸

ii. Multiculturalism and diversity

With more than a quarter of Australians born overseas, diversity and multiculturalism is a central pillar of our society. Jesuit Social Services is committed to ensuring that the rights and safety of CALD communities are upheld in Australian society. We are dedicated to achieving this by adopting programs and supporting networks that welcome integration and by creating job opportunities to ensure economic security – such as

¹⁶ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander delegates, 2017 National Constitutional Convention (2017). Uluru Statement from the Heart. Retrieved from: <https://fromtheheart.com.au/explore-the-uluru-statement/>.

¹⁷ Victorian Government (2020). Service Delivery, Budget Paper No. 3, Victorian Budget 2020/21: Putting People First. Retrieved from: <https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/budgetfiles202021.budget.vic.gov.au/2020-21+State+Budget+-+Service+Delivery.pdf>.

¹⁸ Australian Government, Closing the Gap, Retrieved from: <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/>

delivered through our Settlement Program¹⁹, Corporate Diversity Partnerships²⁰ and Victoria Police Diversity Recruitment Program²¹,

We believe that the role of business as an enabler of social inclusion should be more actively explored and promoted. This requires moving from a transactional to a transformational relationship between business and marginalised people – an approach grounded in an understanding of the capacity of business to work with organisations and the community – with positive outcomes for all involved.

The Victorian Culturally and Linguistically Diverse 2019 Action Plan aims to build a culturally diverse and inclusive work environment, and ensure policy advice is inclusive of diverse perspectives to achieve good public policy and service delivery outcomes for Victorians.²²

A key example of Jesuit Social Services' commitment to expanding employment opportunities for CALD communities by integration, not assimilation, is our **African Australian Inclusion Program (AAIP)**, which Jesuit Social Services runs in partnership with NAB. Building on this success, we developed the Corporate Diversity Partnerships program to help companies connect with a diverse talent pool of qualified people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. This includes collaborations with John Holland – one of Australia's leading engineering, contracting and service providers, the Australian Taxation Office, and Yarra Valley Water.

These sort of programs perform a social good by broadening employment prospects with great benefit to those employed, plus their families and communities. They also provide significant benefits to the private sector by opening up an untapped labour market of talented workers.

iii. Environment and climate change

The increasingly severe impacts of climate change and environmental degradation have focused attention on the need for societies to transition to a sustainable and low-carbon future. This task has been made significantly more complex due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The convergence of climate change, environmental degradation and the pandemic has exposed major weaknesses in Australia's institutions and social and private infrastructure, which directly affect both the response to the health crisis and the longer-term transition.

Jesuit Social Services believes that an urgent response is required to address environmental crises and climate change to protect the future for young Victorians, and this must be grounded in principles of justice and equity to address the current state of ecological privilege. Health and climate shocks have a disproportionate impact on the most marginalised and disadvantaged people in society, despite them being the least responsible for ecological risks and threats.

To gain the essential broad-based support for action, the recovery from the pandemic and the transition to an ecologically sustainable zero greenhouse gas emissions society must be inclusive and fair. While just outcomes are not guaranteed, they can be achieved. Scientific evidence, technology, and the massive economic stimulus needed to counter the pandemic-induced recession provide an unprecedented

¹⁹ For details of Jesuit Social Services' Settlement Program, see: <https://jss.org.au/what-we-do/settlement-and-community-building/settlement-program/>.

²⁰ For details of Jesuit Social Services' Corporate Diversity Partnerships, see: <https://jss.org.au/what-we-do/education-training-and-employment/corporate-diversity-partnerships/>.

²¹ For details of Jesuit Social Services' Victoria Police Diversity Recruitment Program, see: <https://jss.org.au/victoriapolicediversity/>.

²² Department of Premier and Cabinet, Victorian Government (2019, February 7). DPC's Cultural Diversity Inclusion Strategy. Retrieved from: <https://www.vic.gov.au/dpcs-cultural-diversity-inclusion-strategy>.

opportunity to create new sustainable economic opportunities, restore the environment, and reduce inequality.

A just recovery from the pandemic and a just transition to a sustainable low emissions world require policies and practices that:

- are equitable and inclusive
- build community resilience
- support localised social and economic responses
- foster collaboration across sectors and communities, and
- ensure any unavoidable costs are shared fairly by all.

An important part of both a just recovery and a just transition is distributive justice – the fair allocation of income, wealth and resources. But the growing scale and impact of environmental damage and climate change means that distributive justice alone is not sufficient. Many in the academic, public and civil society sectors have realised that a broader, more comprehensive approach is needed. This has given rise to the concept of ecological justice, which embraces both human and environmental equity.

Ecological justice includes a wide range of social and environmental concerns such as unequal access to clean energy; land, air, and water pollution; climate and weather vulnerability; food insecurity; and access to green space. The challenge for civil society organisations is to determine how they can contribute best to achieving ecological justice during both the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and in the longer-term transition. Jesuit Social Services' commitment to social justice and our long experience working with some of the most marginalised and vulnerable people and communities in Australia means we are well placed to contribute to this critical task.

We highlight that worsening climate change and environmental degradation coupled with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic provides opportunity, as well as risk, for government together with the community to work toward a just transition. Stimulus packages for various sectors of the Victorian economy provide the opportunity for spending on clean energy and other mitigation and adaptation strategies to accelerate a just transition to a sustainable future, which is vital to ensuring all aspects of the health and wellbeing of Victoria's young people into the future.

In this context, Jesuit Social Services commends the Government's recognition of the significant impacts of climate change and environmental degradation on Victorian communities, and we welcome the significant funding allocations in the *Victorian Budget 2020/21* for a range of initiatives that are designed to respond to these challenges. The allocations include, for example, funding for continuation of a whole-of-government response to the 2019-20 Victorian bushfires; for ongoing climate change community action (\$10 million); for improving the health of Victoria's waterways and catchments (\$53.9 million) and safeguarding marine and coastal environments (\$6 million for 2021-22) in the face of climate change; for building a sustainable water supply and flood resilience (\$12.7 million); for accelerating adoption of zero emissions vehicles (\$5.9 million); for the development of new energy projects that will deliver cheaper and cleaner energy to drive economic recovery (\$205.6 million); and for a package of initiatives to deliver the Government's *Biodiversity 2037* commitment and partner with traditional owners (\$31 million).

iv. Locational Disadvantage

We highlight the complex and entrenched disadvantage that continues to be experienced by a small but persistent number of locations in each state and territory across Australia, as demonstrated by Jesuit Social Services' research into locational disadvantage over the past 20 years. Our *Dropping off the Edge 2015* report found that, in Victoria, only 27 postcodes (4 per cent of total) account for 28.2 per cent of the highest ranked positions across 22 indicators of social, economic, health and educational disadvantage.²³

b) Recommendations

- Implement the recommendations of the Uluru Statement from the Heart (2017).
- Embed a First Nations-informed and First Nations-led approach into ecological practices and recognition of the heart of social and economic justice.
- Strengthen initiatives enabling pathways to social and economic participation for newly arrived young people and their families.
- Implement a Just Transition to a zero-carbon economy.
- Adoption of a whole-of-government approach to embedding community resilience within communities and ecosystems that prioritises community participation and engagement in ecological justice.
- Long-term investment to address locational disadvantage.

²³ Dropping Off The Edge (DOTE) (2015). Available at: <https://dote.org.au/findings/victoria/>.

Appendix V: Victorian young people are safe, experience equality of opportunity and are treated fairly (Outcome 5)

a) Background

i. Gender equality

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. 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. Ninety-two per cent of all prisoners are male.²⁴ Based on the 2016 Personal Safety Survey Australia, people who experienced partner violence were more likely to have experienced it from a male partner than from a female partner. Seventy-five per cent of victims of violence from a current or previous cohabiting partner reported the partner as male.^{25, 26, 27}

There is a compelling need to address the root causes of violence by supporting boys and young men to live respectful, accountable and fulfilling lives, enabling them to develop loving relationships free from violence and contribute to safe and equal communities.

Jesuit Social Services thus advocates an 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 Project²⁸ 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 wellbeing; and to keep families and communities safe.

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

1. Positively shift cultures and attitudes about what it means to be a man in the 21st century to decrease rigid adherence to masculine norms, including through workforce capacity building.
2. Research to understand the attitudes of men and boys, including how these attitudes impact behaviours.

²⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020). Prisoners in Australia. Retrieved from:

<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/prisoners-australia/latest-release>.

²⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020, January 28). Partner Violence – In Focus: Crime and Justice Statistics. Retrieved from: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/focus-crime-and-justice-statistics/latest-release>.

²⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2018). Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia, 2018. Retrieved from <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/d1a8d479-a39a-48c1-bbe2-4b27c7a321e0/aihw-fdv-02.pdf.aspx?inline=true>.

²⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019). Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia: continuing the national story, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/b0037b2d-a651-4abf-9f7b-00a85e3de528/aihw-fdv3-FDSV-in-Australia-2019.pdf.aspx?inline=true>.

²⁸ See Jesuit Social Services' research on the attitudes to manhood and behaviours of young Australian men here: <https://jss.org.au/what-we-do/the-mens-project/the-man-box/>.

3. Develop, pilot and evaluate early interventions that address the underlying drivers of violence and other harmful behaviours.

Research

Our research shows that gender inequality and narrow, rigid gender stereotypes are bad for all of us, keeping women and men from living safe and healthy lives and contributing to violence and other harmful behaviours. Our Man Box study on being a young man in Australia was the first comprehensive study that focused on the attitudes to manhood and the behaviours of young Australian men aged 18 to 30. The findings shed a new light on the social pressures that young Australian men experience to be a 'real man' and the impact this can have on their wellbeing, behaviours and the safety of our wider community.²⁹ The initial Man Box report found that young Australian men who believe in outdated masculine stereotypes were themselves at higher risk of using violence, online bullying and sexual harassment, engaging in risky drinking and reporting poorer levels of mental health.

A further report building on these initial findings – **Unpacking the Man Box** – found that young Australian men's belief in rigid masculine stereotypes has a stronger impact on whether they will use violence, sexually harass women, or experience mental ill-health themselves than other factors, including their education levels, where they live, or their cultural heritage.³⁰

In late 2018, The Men's Project and Edmund Rice Education Australia partnered to develop and deliver the **Adolescent Man Box** study. This involved the completion of a survey and focus groups with 1,170 adolescent boys (451 boys in years 7-8; 719 boys in years 9-12) from a Victorian Secondary School. The Adolescent Man Box was the first study that focused on the attitudes to manhood and the association between these attitudes and the mental health, wellbeing, risk behaviours, and sexist attitudes and behaviours of Australian adolescent boys aged 11 to 18. One of the key aims of this study was to measure the level of societal messages regarding the Adolescent Man Box rules, as well as the extent to which adolescent boys accept or endorse the rules of the Adolescent Man Box. In partnership with the Islamic Council of Victoria, we are expanding this work to a second school and will release aggregated results across all schools once our sample is better representative of Australian adolescents.

We need to promote positive change around gender norms and stereotypes and what it means to be a healthy and respectful man, while also focusing on contributing factors to male violence like mental health problems, substance abuse, and social isolation.

As well as impacting on women and families, **The Man Box** research shows that rigid adherence to stereotypical masculinities 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.

²⁹ Irvine, H., Livingstone, M., Flood, M., Armytage, J., & Bunn, A., (2018). The Man Box: A study on being a young man in Australia. Jesuit Social Services. Available from: <https://jss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/The-Man-Box-A-study-on-being-a-young-man-in-Australia.pdf>.

³⁰ Tyler, M., McCabe, M., Flood, M., Busija, L., Tatangelo, G., Armytage, J., & Bunn, A. (2020). Unpacking the Man Box: What is the impact of the Man Box attitudes on young Australian men's behaviours and well-being? Jesuit Social Services. Available from: <https://jss.org.au/what-we-do/the-mens-project/unpacking-the-man-box/>.

Workforce capacity building

We believe that role models – both male and female – in the places where boys and men live, work, and meet are crucial. We want to support role models who interact with boys and men on a regular basis so they can challenge limiting and harmful stereotypes and promote respect and equality.

Every day and across a variety of settings in our community, professionals and volunteers in a diverse range of roles have opportunities to positively influence our boys and men. From social workers to correctional staff, as well as sports coaches – with the right knowledge, skills and confidence, these people are well-positioned to promote positive attitudinal and behavioural change.

Drawing on our track record promoting positive cultural change about what it means to be a man, Jesuit Social Services has proposed a workforce capacity building project to build workforce awareness and knowledge of Man Box attitudes and their associations with a range of harmful behaviours; to identify the tools and resources that would be most helpful for staff to embed insights from the Man Box research and our **Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE)** program into their practice; to support leadership teams to put processes in place that ensure the work and associated positive cultural change is sustained; to equip the workforce with the skills and confidence that allow the creation of environments where men and boys are able to challenge traditional gender stereotypes; and to reduce adherence to stereotypical masculine norms amongst the men and boys that the workforce engages with.

CASE STUDY: Vas

When I arrived at the Brosnan Centre for the two-day Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE) training run by The Men's Project, I felt nervous and excited. We were about to scrutinise messages about masculinity that affect the lives of boys and young men, and I was deeply aware of being part of that demographic.

I quickly relaxed in the company of the other smiling participants, both men and women, who represented a broad swathe of society. The program was led by Michael from Jesuit Social Services together with Paul and Kesh from Nirodah, kicking off the workshop and unpacking the Man-Box study which revealed the harmful impact of masculine stereotypes on boys and young men. I found the evidence both compelling and validating as it resonated with my own discomfort with toxic messages and my coexistent uncertainty about what exactly healthy masculinity might look like today.

The two-day workshop and subsequent meet-ups in the weeks and months following gave me an arena in which to explore my questions and insecurities with the support of other men and women who were also committed to challenging their personal biases and growing in their own ways.

Opportunities like the MoRE program are few and far between and I feel hard-pressed to think of anyone whom I would not encourage to attend, and indeed I have and will continue to recommend it to friends and professional peers alike.

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 MoRE program helps build awareness, knowledge, skills and confidence to model and promote respect and equality, and 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 three to 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.

Specific interventions

Collectively, the initiatives outlined below provide example of programs seeking to promote positive social change surrounding masculinity, reduce male violence and harmful behaviours, and improve men's wellbeing and relationships.

Unfortunately, responses to young boys heading down a path of trouble often come too late, once they have already disengaged from school. 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. Before it Starts was developed 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. The program works with boys aged 8 to 12 who are using violence or demonstrating antisocial 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.

In collaboration with the University of Melbourne, Jesuit Social Services is currently engaged in a research project, **Worried About Sex And Porn Project (WASAPP)**, for young people worried about their sexual thoughts or behaviours. Funded by a Learning System Grant, through the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, the research is seeking to understand the developmental trajectories of children and young people to inform the contents of an effective online help tool. The next stage is to secure funding to build and trial a *WASAPP* online help tool.

WASAPP is addressing two key research questions: What is known about intervening early in harmful sexual behaviour for children and young people? What are the components of an online/helpline tool for children and young people worried about their sexual thoughts and behaviours? The research method involves a workshop and interviews with relevant professionals and international experts addressing the trajectories of, and help-seeking by, young people with harmful sexual behaviours; and interviews, in collaboration with relevant behaviour treatment services, with children and young people who have harmed (on hold due to COVID-19).

Jesuit Social Services recommends the building and trial of a *WASAPP* online help tool, which requires additional investment in order to proceed.

Jack's Hut is a pilot program proposed by Jesuit Social Services to work with young men in community or specialist settings who have highly complex needs and are disengaging with their learning at school, to deliver a multi-faceted program that improves their social and emotional literacy, family/significant relationships, and enhances their connectedness with community. Program content can be adapted to single sex, mixed sex, and universal cohorts. Jack's Hut takes a 'Groupwork' approach focussed on social and emotional literacy and is transferable and adaptable to different sites. Evidence shows multiple program components that reflect the young person's social context is the most effective approach – Jack's Hut integrates young people's individual agency and participation with group/peer social and emotional learning, family therapeutic responses, and supported opportunities to connect with community through vocational, recreational, and creative activities. Jack's Hut focuses on providing young people with diverse activities, settings, and interactions with positive peer and adult community members to practice and reinforce their social and emotional learning.

The program components of the Jack's Hut pilot include groupwork, family therapy and community-based activities. The pilot involves an advisory committee and evaluation by a university partner, and is seeking to understand whether the program components can achieve the desired outcomes for young men, both in the short-term (i.e. improved social and emotional literacy, awareness of the impact of gender norms, greater perspective taking and empathy, improved relationships with family members and significant others, and improved community connectedness) and longer-term (i.e. increased engagement in their learning, improved mental health, reduced challenging or aggressive behaviours, and reduced contact with the youth justice system).

Our **Adolescent Man Box in Schools** approach combines our **Adolescent Man Box Survey**, as discussed under the 'Research' section above, with our practice work in schools. This delivers professional development to teachers, interactive sessions for students across a range of ages, and more intensive whole-of-school capacity building work across several school terms. Our approach has four phases: (1) Baseline Adolescent Man Box Survey and focus groups; (2) Map current initiatives at the school and co-design new approaches; (3) Program delivery; and (4) Assess and measure impact. This work would require sustained investment in seeking to achieve the following outcomes: provide each school with an understanding of the attitudes of their students relating to masculinity; increase understanding among students and school staff of the influence of gender norms; reduce adherence to stereotypical masculine norms amongst the student cohort and change attitudes and behaviours attached to the four pillars of the Adolescent Man Box; and support schools in fostering positive change to improve social, emotional, health and wellbeing outcomes for boys and the people in their lives.

CASE STUDY: Islamic Council of Victoria (ICV)

Since early 2020, The Men's Project has been working in partnership with the ICV and a range of stakeholders across the education and family violence sectors to support young people to go beyond gender stereotypes and prevent men's violence against women. This work encompasses two projects: one that is expanding on our Adolescent Man Box research with Roxburgh College students looking at attitudes to masculinity; and the second working with community leaders and Imams on issues of family violence and masculinity.

Co-design and delivery are central to the partnership and, to this end, working groups have been established for both projects. Good progress has been made on each project, despite 2020 having been an extremely challenging year.

Roxburgh College: After meeting and presenting to the leadership and all school staff at the College, more in-depth conversations were held with the Year Level Coordinators before administering the Adolescent Man Box Survey online to all 1,273 students in Years 7 to 12. The data was then analysed and presented to the Reference Advisory Group that oversees the two projects. (See [here](#) for feedback from Aynur, one of the key stakeholders.) Additional analysis will be completed, as well as mapping of existing initiatives at Roxburgh College, and focus groups will be held, all of which will guide the programmatic work that we intend to deliver in Term 2, 2021.

Community leaders and Imams: Four focus groups were held: two all-female and two all-male, with participants selected by working group members (Imam or community leader/influencer). The content addressed understanding what constitutes family violence, and family violence and other behaviours as they relate to masculinity; seeking input on how vulnerability and emotional intelligence is currently modelled in the community; seeking knowledge of existing resources and referral pathways/support seeking that community members currently use/engage with; exploring the tools and resources that would be most helpful to the community for future development; seeking to understand who is best placed in the community to lead conversations on the topics of family violence and healthy masculinities; gaining an understanding of what would be helpful to increase confidence of leaders/influencers when having conversations related to gender equality and gendered violence; and sharing any learnings from the COVID-19 experience and capturing findings related to family violence and mental health. The findings from these focus groups will be presented to the Reference Advisory Group in early February 2021, and then further work will be undertaken to identify relevant resources and training required.

ii. Family Violence

Unfortunately, rates of family violence have increased since the onset of COVID-19 related restrictions, with the number of family violence incidents in June 2020 being 15 per cent higher than in June 2019.³¹

Relevant statistics indicate that family violence is one of the most prevalent types of crime in Australia³² and that family violence is “a gendered crime, with women much more likely than men to be the victims of violence ... and to experience a range of associated harms such as homelessness, assault-related injury and death”.³³

A recent review of relevant Australian research published by the Australian Institute of Criminology examined 39 quantitative studies, which addressed various types of violence but tended to focus on physical violence.³⁴ The study found that “The research consistently demonstrated that the majority of domestic violence perpetrators were men. Across 21 studies of known domestic violence offenders and protection order respondents, men accounted for between 75 and 94 percent (median=83%) of all offenders. Overall, men accounted for around five in six domestic violence offenders recorded by police.”³⁵

There appears to be a continued lack of recognition and service provision for young people who are victims *and* perpetrators of family violence. The Crime Statistics Agency report from February 2020, *Adolescent Family Violence in Victoria*, found that 52.5 per cent of primary aggressors were recorded by Victoria Police as a witness or victim-survivor of a family violence incident, or as a protected person on a family violence safety notice or intervention order.³⁶ This supports existing literature linking exposure to family violence with later offending behaviour, but it also reveals that the justice system has direct contact with roughly half of adolescent primary aggressors before their behaviour escalates to a police reported family violence incident, representing an opportunity for early intervention.

Jesuit Social Services commends the Victorian Government’s continuing priority on the prevention of family violence since the Royal Commission into Family Violence published its recommendations in 2016. We are also encouraged by the recent investment in Family Violence Prevention in the *Victorian Budget 2020/21*,

Jesuit Social Services is concerned that some recommendations from the Royal Commission have been marked as having been implemented yet require stronger implementation, and that there is a lack of progress in relation to other recommendations. Specifically, we are concerned that insufficient progress has been made in relation to Recommendation 123, which extends the Adolescent Family Violence Program across Victoria, subject to evaluation; and Recommendation 124, which calls for additional accommodation options

³¹ Crime Statistics Agency (2020, September). Police-recorded crime trends in Victoria during the COVID-19 pandemic. *In Brief*, No. 10. Retrieved from: <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2020-09/apo-nid308473.pdf>.

³² Australian Institute of Criminology (2020). Responding to adolescent family violence: Findings from an impact evaluation. *Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice*. No. 601, September 2020. Retrieved from: https://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-09/ti601_responding_to_adolescent_family_violence.pdf.

³³ Boxall, H., Dowling, C., & Morgan, A. (2020). ‘Female perpetrated domestic violence: Prevalence of self-defensive and retaliatory violence.’ *Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice*, No. 584, January 2020, p. 1. Retrieved from: <https://aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi584>.

³⁴ Hulme, S., Morgan, A., & Boxall, H. (2019). ‘Domestic violence offenders, prior offending and reoffending in Australia.’ *Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice*, No. 580, September 2019. Retrieved from: https://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-05/ti580_domestic_violence_offenders_prior_offending.pdf.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 5.

³⁶ Phillips, B., & McGuinness, C. (2020). Data Snapshot: Police Reported Adolescent Family Violence in Victoria. Family Violence Database, Crime Statistics Agency, p. 25. Retrieved from https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/embridge_cache/emshare/original/public/2020/07/4e/93bbfe49a/Crime%20Statistics%20Agency%20-%20Data%20Snapshot%201%20-%20Adolescent%20Family%20Violence.pdf.

for adolescents who use violence at home. Jesuit Social Services is disappointed by the slow progress regarding the establishment of family violence applicant and respondent worker positions in the Melbourne Children’s Court, as per Recommendation 126. We suggest that further steps need to be taken to fully integrate the two positions into the broader service system response to ensure that Recommendation 126 is effectively implemented. Jesuit Social Services believes implementation of Recommendation 128, regarding the trial of a new model to link Youth Justice Group Conferencing with an Adolescent Family Violence Program, requires further strengthening. Work to date in this area has been impacted by problems with coordination and management, which impeded the efficacy of the trial and the ability to test the benefits associated with this type of approach. In addition, there is a need for further progress on the Recommendations relating to Aboriginal Victoria, CALD communities, and people with disabilities

In 2018, Jesuit Social Services commenced **RESTORE**, as one of two new pilot projects trialling restorative approaches to working with young people who perpetrate family violence. RESTORE is based in the Melbourne’s Children’s Court. Developed in response to an identified absence of interventions for adolescent perpetrators in the Family Division of the Children’s Court, the RESTORE program offers a Family Group Conference to help the young person and their family develop practical solutions that will keep people safe and prevent further violence occurring at home. RESTORE intervenes at a later point in the cycle of violence – that is, after an intervention order (IVO) has been lodged in the Family Division of the Children’s Court. By engaging the family in a restorative conferencing intervention at this point, RESTORE aims to reduce the risk of the young person being criminalised for breaching their IVO. The program seeks to address the ensuing harm caused by the violence and prevent future harm from occurring. The University of Melbourne is currently conducting an evaluation of the RESTORE program, which will be completed in 2022. RESTORE has been paused due to COVID-19, but the pilot saw early promising results and has implications for broader application in Youth Justice.

iii. Youth Justice and Safety

Prison as a last resort

The number of children and young people committing crimes is low and declining. Less than one percent of 10 to 17-year-olds in Victoria are sentenced for criminal offences.³⁷ Over the last 10 years, the number of young people aged 10 to 19 committing offences has steadily decreased.³⁸ However, the increasing number of young adults in Victoria’s adult prisons is of great concern.³⁹ The mental and physical health of these young people when they emerge from incarceration has often deteriorated significantly, while the barriers to reintegrating with the community are high. There are a small number of young people committing repeated and violent offences that make up most of the young people in the criminal justice system and for whom the system is not working.⁴⁰ This has resulted in too many young people reoffending and returning to prison.⁴¹

³⁷ Australia Institute of Health and Welfare (2020). Youth detention population in Australia. Bulletin 148, February 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/c3ba6d29-7488-4050-adae-12d96588bc37/aihw-juv-131.pdf.aspx?inline=true>.

³⁸ Sentencing Advisory Council (2016). Reoffending by Children and Young People in Victoria. Sentencing Advisory Council, Melbourne, December 2016.

³⁹ Jesuit Social Services (2018). All Alone: Young adults in the Victorian justice system. Available from: <https://jss.org.au/all-alone-young-adults-in-the-victorian-justice-system/>.

⁴⁰ Grover, C. (2017). *Op. cit.*

⁴¹ Jesuit Social Services (2018). All Alone: Young adults in the Victorian justice system. *Op. cit.*

Reliance on detention in criminal justice policy is both ineffective and costly. In fact, several studies have found that imprisonment increases the likelihood of reoffending behaviour and has the potential to negatively affect prisoners, particularly younger lower-risk offenders.^{42, 43}

Jesuit Social Services believes that prison should always be a last resort. We acknowledge that sometimes prison is necessary, particularly in cases of violent crime. But when a State takes the serious step of removing a person's liberty, certain standards must be met to ensure the human rights of those incarcerated, to rehabilitate detainees, and to reduce re-offending.

Our report, [All Alone: Young adults in the Victorian justice system](#), raises a number of concerns regarding the welfare and treatment of young adults in Victorian prisons, and questions whether these standards are being met. It has been well established that young adults are especially vulnerable to the effects of detention. At the same time, young adults are more amenable to rehabilitation than older adults. Our key recommendations from the report are the need for greater investment in staff training; increasing the level of staffing; a legislative presumption against the use of isolation; if isolation is required, then it should be kept to an absolute minimum and reviewed daily by a qualified mental health professional; and greater transparency and accountability in relation to the treatment of prisoners.⁴⁴

Our justice system can – and must – do much better in transforming the behaviour and potential of these young adults. Prisons have a purpose and present an opportunity: rehabilitation must be their focus, a chance to work towards a safer community.

Raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14

Jesuit Social Services has long advocated for an effective and humane youth justice system. Currently, a key aim is to raise the age of criminal responsibility in Australia from 10 to 14 years⁴⁵, which is outlined in our [Raising the Age of Criminal Responsibility: There is a better way](#) (2019) paper.

This argument is supported by the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* and enacted in many overseas jurisdictions, and the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child calls for raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility to at least 14.⁴⁶ Despite Victoria's *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*, that recognises children being entitled to special protection due to vulnerability because of their age, the age of legal responsibility in Victoria still sits at 10 years old.^{47, 48} Neglecting to recognise the harm from keeping legal responsibility at 10-years-old in Victoria conflicts with the global norm. In a recent study of 90 countries, 68 per cent had a minimum criminal age of 12 years or higher, with the most common age being 14 years.⁴⁹

⁴² Grover, C. (2017). *Op. cit.*

⁴³ Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (2014). Recidivism rates and the impact of treatment programs. Government of Western Australia. Retrieved from: [https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/publications/tailedpapers.nsf/displaypaper/3912295a35b28230ed9c541e48257d730008d551/\\$file/2295.pdf](https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/publications/tailedpapers.nsf/displaypaper/3912295a35b28230ed9c541e48257d730008d551/$file/2295.pdf).

⁴⁴ Jesuit Social Services (2018). *All Alone: Young adults in the Victorian justice system. Op. cit.*

⁴⁵ Smart Justice for Young People (2020). Retrieved from: https://www.fclc.org.au/smart_justice_for_young_people.

⁴⁶ Storer, D. (2020). '#RaiseTheAge, No child should ever be sent to prison' [Guest Blog]. UN Youth Australia, 25 July 2020. Retrieved from: <https://unyouth.org.au/raisetheage-no-child-should-ever-be-sent-to-prison/>.

⁴⁷ Parliament of Victoria (2006). *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006. Op. cit.*

⁴⁸ Jesuit Social Services (2015). Too much too young: Raise the age of criminal responsibility to 12. Richmond: Jesuit Social Services. Available from: http://jss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Too_much_too_young_-_Raise_the_age_of_criminal_responsibility_to_12.pdf.

⁴⁹ Hazel, N. (2008). 'Cross-national comparison of youth justice.' Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, United Kingdom. Retrieved from: <http://usir.salford.ac.uk/id/eprint/50528/>.

A key rationale for raising the age is that experts maintain children between 10 and 14 years are not developmentally mature enough to be fairly tried in the criminal justice system. Leading medical bodies, including the Australian Medical Association, the Royal Australasian College of Physicians and the Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association, are calling to raise the age. They argue that extensive research into brain development consistently shows young people lack the ability to make comprehensive judgements.⁵⁰

The current age of criminal responsibility has a more pronounced impact on young people from vulnerable backgrounds, further entrenching disadvantage. On an average day in 2017-18, 29 per cent of the children aged 10-13 under justice supervision were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.⁵¹ Furthermore, of the 438 children aged 10 to 13 who were first sentenced or diverted in the Children's Court in 2016-17, half had been the subject of a report to child protection.⁵²

Raise the age of dual track to 25 years

There is significant research into brain development that indicates brain function and cognitive development continues to mature well past the age of 20, depending on the individual's sex, genes and environment.^{53, 54,}
⁵⁵ The parts of the brain that are still developing include the prefrontal cortex that helps to control impulsivity, judgement, planning for the future, foresight of consequences, and other characteristics that form moral culpability. Recent research indicates that the development and maturation of the prefrontal cortex occurs primarily during adolescence and is roughly accomplished at the age of 25 years, which is very important to complex behavioural performance.⁵⁶ This research is important in formulating a justice policy that deals appropriately with young adults in prison, and which works to ensure that, where possible, impulse crime does not develop into a lifetime pattern.⁵⁷

In recognition of the brain development and maturation processes of young adults, Victoria had, until recently, a unique and strong 'dual track' system for the sentencing of young offenders that allowed mainstream adult courts to sentence those under 21 to a youth justice centre rather than an adult prison. The court had to be convinced that the young person has reasonable prospects of rehabilitation, or that he

⁵⁰ Cauffman, E., & Steinberg, L. (2000). '(Im)maturity of judgment in adolescence: why adolescents may be less culpable than adults.' *Behavioral Sciences and the Law*, 18 (6).

⁵¹ Jesuit Social Services (2019). Submission to *Our youth, our way – Systemic inquiry into the over-representation of Aboriginal children and young people in Victoria's youth justice system*, November 2019. Available from: <https://jss.org.au/submission-to-inquiry-into-the-over-representation-of-aboriginal-children-and-young-people-in-victorias-youth-justice-system/>.

⁵² Sentencing Advisory Council (2019). *'Crossover Kids': Vulnerable Children in the Youth Justice System, Report 1: Children Who Are Known to Child Protection among Sentenced and Diverted Children in the Victorian Children's Court*. Retrieved from: https://www.sentencingcouncil.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-08/Crossover_Kids_Report_1.pdf.

⁵³ Johnson, S., Blum., R., & Giedd, J. (2009). 'Adolescent Maturity and the Brain: The Promise and Pitfalls of Neuroscience Research in Adolescent Health policy.' *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 45(3): 216-221. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2892678/>.

⁵⁴ Lebel., C., & Beaulieu, C. (2011). 'Longitudinal Development of Human Brain Wiring Continues from Childhood into Adulthood.' *Journal of Neuroscience*, 31(30): 10937-10947. Retrieved from: <https://www.jneurosci.org/content/31/30/10937.abstract?sid=ae77b0f6-9169-41d5-8249-ea62ab00b665>.

⁵⁵ Cédric, P., Koolschijn, M., & Crone, E. (2013). 'Sex differences and structural brain maturation from early childhood to early adulthood.' *Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience*, 5: 106-118. Retrieved from: <https://reader.elsevier.com/reader/sd/pii/S187892931300008X?token=3D46A14F5EC0144E9327DC3300E1B0A1B903E09048DB426D09011E278FA19161FEE75E876F93DBFA469BDD039E0F106C>.

⁵⁶ Arain, M., Hague, M., Johal, L., Mathur, P., Nel, W., Rais, A., Sandhu, R., & Sharma, S. (2013). 'Maturation of the adolescent brain.' *Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment*, 9: 449-461. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3621648/#:~:text=The%20development%20and%20maturation%20of%20the%20prefrontal%20cortex%20occurs%20primarily,helps%20accomplish%20executive%20brain%20functions>.

⁵⁷ Johnson, S., Blum., R., & Giedd, J. (2009). *Op. cit.*

or she was particularly impressionable, immature, or likely to be subjected to undesirable influences in an adult prison. This innovative approach prevented the most vulnerable young people from entering the adult system at an early age.⁵⁸

While the dual track system continues, the passing of the Victorian Government's *Children and Justice Legislation (Youth Justice Reform) Act 2017* contains functions that significantly erode it. The legislation provides for the presumption that young people aged between 18 and 20 convicted of particular offences will be sentenced to adult prison unless exceptional circumstances apply. This is despite the evidence that young people who spend time in adult prison are more likely to re-offend on their return to the community than young people exiting youth detention.⁵⁹

All statutory minimum prison sentences will be substantially tightened, so that impairment due to alcohol or drugs can no longer be used as an excuse, psychosocial immaturity will be removed as a special reason, and the court must give significantly less weight to the life circumstances of the offender.⁶⁰

Jesuit Social Services believes that these erosions are counter-productive and will have negative long-term effects on community safety. As stated in our [All Alone: Young adults in the Victorian justice system](#) report, we believe the Victorian Government should reverse recent legislative erosions to the dual track system.

Dual track should be extended to the age of 25, based on the research highlighted above regarding brain development and specific needs of young people.

Expand and better facilitate access to restorative justice

In its *Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2020–2030*, the Victorian Government has recognised a legitimate community concern about crimes committed by a small portion of young people. The strategy emphasised that there is a need to explore options to expand the availability of restorative approaches and group conferencing to provide more avenues for young people to take responsibility for their behaviours.⁶¹

Evidence shows that restorative practices are more effective in reducing re-offending and making our communities safer.^{62, 63} Jesuit Social Services coordinates group conferences and works with young people in the justice system in Victoria and the Northern Territory, using a problem-solving approach to offending that is based on principles of restorative justice.⁶⁴ Expanding the use of restorative justice programs to address

⁵⁸ Victorian Ombudsman (2015). Investigation into the Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Prisoners in Victoria. Retrieved from <https://www.ombudsman.vic.gov.au/getattachment/5188692a-35b6-411f-907e-3e7704f45e17>.

⁵⁹ Schiraldi, V., & Zeidenberg, J. (1997). The Risks Juveniles Face When They Are Incarcerated With Adults, Youth Justice Policy Institute. Retrieved from http://www.justicepolicy.org/images/upload/97-02_rep_riskjuvenilesface_jj.pdf; and Sullivan, J.M. (2014). From Monkey Bars to Behind Bars: Problems Associated with Placing Youth's in Adult Prisons. Law School Student.

⁶⁰ Justice Legislation Miscellaneous Amendment Bill 2018; New Laws To Crack Down On Emergency Worker Attacks (2018). Retrieved from <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/new-laws-crack-down-emergency-worker-attacks>; and Bryan-Hancock, C. & Casey, S. (2011). Young People and the Justice System: Consideration of Maturity in Criminal Responsibility. *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law* 18:1. Retrieved from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13218711003739086>.

⁶¹ Victorian Government (2020). Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2020-2030. Retrieved from: <https://www.justice.vic.gov.au/youth-justice-strategy>.

⁶² Jesuit Social Services (2019). #JusticeSolutions New Zealand Tour. Available from: <https://jss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/JusticeSolutions-New-Zealand-Tour.pdf>.

⁶³ Larsen, J. (2014). Restorative justice in the Australian criminal justice system. AIC Reports: Research and Public Policy Series 127, Australian Institute of Criminology, Australian Government. Retrieved from: <https://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-05/rpp127.pdf>.

⁶⁴ For details of Jesuit Social Services' Youth Justice Group Conferencing program, see: <https://jss.org.au/what-we-do/justice-and-crime-prevention/youth-justice-group-conferencing/>.

the needs of young people who have committed more serious crimes could potentially lower offending rates, thereby further protecting young people and the community.⁶⁵

Furthermore, to further strengthen Youth Justice Group Conferencing in Victoria, we recommend that the Victorian Government legislate for a model of Group Conferencing that is ‘opt-out’ rather than ‘opt-in’ to promote better uptake of the program and self-determination. This would also help to increase and promote access to restorative justice at all points of the system, including legislative.⁶⁶As outlined in our #JusticeSolutions New Zealand Tour report, in contrast to Victoria, Group Conferencing in New Zealand is the default response for youth offending.⁶⁷ Family Group Conferencing is used in New Zealand as the primary justice response for young people aged 14 and over. However, a restorative, relational approach is not limited to formal group conferencing processes – we saw a strong focus on culture and person-centred practices across justice processes:

QUOTE: Daniel Clements, General Manager – Justice Programs, Jesuit Social Services

In Youth Justice Centres, management looks to provide “champion status” to staff who embrace and apply restorative principles in their work with young people.

Increasingly, there’s a recognition that the Youth Justice Centres need to be more flexible in their approach and that rigid ‘programmatic’ structures can “shatter the cohesiveness of relationships” within a custodial setting, they said.

Source: (2019) #JusticeSolutions New Zealand Tour – Victoria University of Wellington
<https://jss.org.au/justicesolutions-new-zealand-tour-victoria-university-of-wellington/>



Photo of the door to staffroom at a youth detention facility. Source: Jesuit Social Services (2019). #JusticeSolutions New Zealand Tour. Available from: <https://jss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/JusticeSolutions-New-Zealand-Tour.pdf>.

⁶⁵ Armytage, P., & Ogloff, J. (2017). *Youth justice review and strategy: Meeting needs and reducing offending*. Retrieved from: <https://www.justice.vic.gov.au/justice-system/youth-justice/youth-justice-review-and-strategy-meeting-needs-and-reducing-offending>.

⁶⁶ Jesuit Social Services (2019). #JusticeSolutions New Zealand Tour. *Op. cit.*

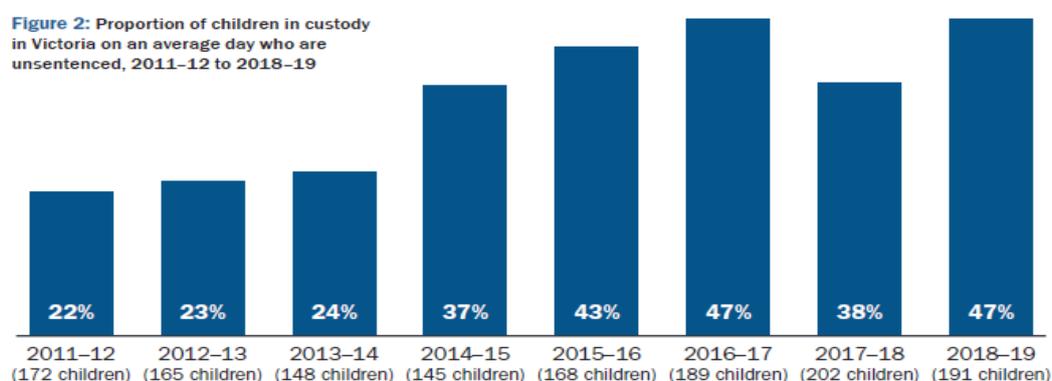
⁶⁷ Jesuit Social Services (2019). #JusticeSolutions New Zealand Tour. *Op. cit.*

In addition to proven effective programs like Youth Justice Group Conferencing, we believe many of these young people and their families would benefit from targeted but time-limited intensive case management support post-group conference to ensure the young person is supported.⁶⁸

Enhance staff capacity

The rate of youth offending incidents in Victoria has fallen almost 35 per cent since the year ending March 2010. Despite this reduction, there remains on average around 718 children and young people in Youth Justice on an average day. Although most of these young people are supervised in the community, there is still concern about overcrowding in youth detention facilities.⁶⁹

While in 2011–12, 22% of children in custody on an average day were unsentenced (37 of 172 children), that proportion had more than doubled to 47% (90 of 191 children).⁷⁰



Source: Sentencing Advisory Council (2020). *Children Held on Remand in Victoria: A Report on Sentencing Outcomes*, pp. 1-2: <https://www.sentencingcouncil.vic.gov.au/publications/children-held-on-remand-in-victoria>

Overcrowding in youth detention facilities has resulted in inadequate staffing levels that have had a significant impact on both prisoner treatment and rehabilitation, and staff safety.⁷¹ The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture noted that low staff-to-prisoner numbers presents a potentially dangerous situation for vulnerable prisoners, as well as dangers for staff, whose position can be compromised by their inability to exert proper control over, and develop a constructive dialogue with, prisoners.⁷² Overstretched

⁶⁸ Jesuit Social Services (2019). Submission to the 2019/20 Victorian State Budget. Available from: <http://jss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/SUB-190124-Jesuit-Social-Services-2019-20-Victoria-State-Budget-Submission-FINAL.pdf>.

⁶⁹ Jesuit Social Services (2018). *All Alone: Young adults in the Victorian justice system*. *Op. cit.*

⁷⁰ Sentencing Advisory Council (2020). *Children Held on Remand in Victoria: A Report on Sentencing Outcomes*, pp. 1-2: <https://www.sentencingcouncil.vic.gov.au/publications/children-held-on-remand-in-victoria>

⁷¹ Jesuit Social Services (2019). Submission to the 2019/20 Victorian State Budget. *Op. cit.*

⁷² Council of Europe (2016). *Yearbook of the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*.

staff risk stress-related health conditions and burnout, while mistreatment of prisoners also becomes more likely.⁷³

It is critical to secure well-qualified and experienced staff. For example, as outlined in our [#Justice Solutions Tour: Expanding the Conversation Report](#), in Norway, correctional staff were required to undertake a minimum of two years training. Entrants were screened for life experience and positive, humanistic attitudes and paid to undertake the training, with a major focus of the prison officer training described as equipping new staff with capacity to focus on engagement and building relationships with people. In Missouri, staff are youth specialists (not corrections officers) and there was a high ratio of staff to young people, with experienced group leaders supervising teams.⁷⁴

QUOTE: Julie Edwards - Chief Executive Officer, Jesuit Social Services

Half the staff are social workers, half prison officers – and the latter are well qualified with two years training in areas including ethics, human rights, multicultural competence, psychology, sociology, criminology, law, social work, moral philosophy, re-integration, security.

Another principle is ‘importing’ staff from the broader community to deliver as many functions as possible such as teaching and health.

This reinforces the notion that prisoners are citizens with the same rights as others in the community, and therefore the same institutions that deliver education and health services in the community come to the prison to deliver those services there.

Source: (2017) Justice Solutions tour blog – Ullersmo Youth Unit, Norway.
<https://jss.org.au/justice-solutions-tour-blog-ullersmo-youth-unit-norway/>

Ban punitive isolation

One response to dealing with safety and stress issues arising from overcrowding has been the use of isolation.⁷⁵ Jesuit Social Services has previously called for punitive isolation to be banned in the youth justice system, as there is sufficient evidence around the harmful impacts of solitary confinement on physical and

⁷³ [Ibid.](#)

⁷⁴ Jesuit Social Services (2017). #Justice Solutions Tour Expanding the Conversation. Available from: <https://jss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/SUB-170623-Solutions-Tour-Long-Report-v.15.pdf>

⁷⁵ Jesuit Social Services. (2018). Submission to the National Children’s Commissioner on Australia’s implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Available from <http://jss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/SUB180418-National-Childrens-Commissioner-Australias-progress-implementing-UNCRC-FINAL.pdf>.

mental health, and a body of international human rights commentary condemning the practice.^{76, 77, 78} We endorse increased staffing with a greater investment in staff training as an interim measure, while efforts in prevention and diversion reduce the pathways into prison. Overstretching staff without adequate training not only damages the health of prison workers, but can also give rise to the mistreatment of prisoners.⁷⁹

Cherry Creek Prison

Jesuit Social Services strongly believes that Victoria must not accept a growing youth prison population. We have consistently advocated that it is unnecessary to build the Cherry Creek facility. While we believe it unnecessary to build the Cherry Creek facility at all, we welcome the Victorian Government's announcement to reduce the capacity of the new youth detention facility in Cherry Creek from more than 200 beds to 140 beds.

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 ineffective as a crime reduction strategy. Building and operating detention facilities for young people is financially expensive and unsustainable, counter-productive to reducing recidivism, 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.⁸⁰

The need for transitional supports: Expand through-care

Post-release and transitional support can help young adults transition more effectively into the community. Several programs already exist, but do not meet the demand in supporting young adults as they exit custody.

Ongoing, coordinated and youth-focused practice can produce better outcomes for the young people. This includes for those at the beginning when they first enter prison, during prison time, and continuing until they are living a safe, fulfilling and trouble-free life back out in the community.⁸¹

Many prisoners have multiple and complex needs, including cognitive disability, mental illness, socio-economic disadvantage, and a history of trauma. Detainees released to the community often experience

⁷⁶ Strong, J., Reiter, K., Gonzalez, G., et al. (2020). 'The body in isolation: The physical health impacts of incarceration in solitary confinement.' *PLOS ONE*, 9 October 2020. Retrieved from:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7546459/>.

⁷⁷ Jesuit Social Services (2018). All Alone: Young adults in the Victorian justice system. *Op. cit.*

⁷⁸ Smith, P. (2006). 'The Effects of Solitary Confinement on Prison Inmates: A Brief History and Review of the Literature.' *Crime and Justice*, **34**(1): 441-528. Retrieved from:

https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/500626?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents.

⁷⁹ Jesuit Social Services (2018). All Alone: Young adults in the Victorian justice system. *Op. cit.*

⁸⁰ Jesuit Social Services (2019). Submission to the 2020/21 Victorian State Budget, p. 28: <https://jss.org.au/submission-to-the-2020-21-victorian-state-budget/>

⁸¹ Jesuit Social Services (2018). All Alone: Young adults in the Victorian justice system. *Op. cit.*

homelessness, poor mental health, and high rates of illicit drug use^{82, 83, 84}, thus recidivism and premature death are significant risks in the months following release from prison.^{85, 86}

Expanding through-care aims to enable offenders' successful reintegration into the community, thereby reducing recidivism and its costs.⁸⁷ A number of health needs should be addressed in such programs, including physical health, mental health, social disadvantage (e.g. programs that assist young adults to access accommodation, employment and social services), and substance use.⁸⁸ For these programs to be most effective, they should commence before release and continue post-release.⁸⁹

The new statewide Post Release Support Program (PRSP), which will target un-sentenced prisoners and prisoners with short sentences of three months or less, will go part of the way in providing reintegration support for those leaving prison in Victoria.⁹⁰ While we welcome this initiative, we note PRSP will offer support for a limited cohort. It is essential that youth-focused intensive support and transition programs are more widely available to address the key difficulties facing young adults, including providing pathways to education, employment, housing, and reconnection to family and community; addressing criminogenic behaviour; and helping young adults to recognise the impact of their offending on individuals, family and community.⁹¹

The Victorian *Youth Justice Community Support Service (YJCSS)* provides a positive example of this approach. YJCSS needs to be further resourced so that it can provide support to every young person exiting youth detention. Jesuit Social Services believes that being able to work holistically with a young person, their family, their community, and the youth justice system is critical to ensure that the young person is held in a net of support. Accordingly, investment in YJCSS needs to provide for this level of engagement.

Overrepresentation of CALD and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

As outlined in the Victorian Government *Youth Justice Strategic Plan 2020–2030*, a disproportionate number of children involved in the youth justice system are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians and/or those from CALD communities – mainly Maori, Pacific Islander and South Sudanese Victorians. On an average day in Youth Justice, 18 per cent of young people identify as Aboriginal, and 39 per cent identify as CALD Australians.

A recent report by the Sentencing Advisory Council of Victoria (2020) on the number of children held on remand in Victoria mirrors these findings. The number of children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

⁸² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2018). The health of Australia's prisoners. Retrieved from:

<https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/2e92f007-453d-48a1-9c6b-4c9531cf0371/aihw-phe-246.pdf.aspx?inline=true>.

⁸³ Victorian Ombudsman (2015). Investigation into the Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Prisoners in Victoria. *Op. cit.*

⁸⁴ Jesuit Social Services (2018). All Alone: Young adults in the Victorian justice system. *Op. cit.*

⁸⁵ Hobbs, M., Krazlan, K., Ridout, S., Mai, Q., Knuiman, M., & Chapman, R., (2006). 'Mortality and morbidity in prisoners after release from prison in Western Australia 1995-2003.' *Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice*, No. 320. Retrieved from: <https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/tandi/tandi320>.

⁸⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2018). The health of Australia's prisoners. *Op. cit.*

⁸⁷ Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (2014). Recidivism rates and the impact of treatment programs. *Op. cit.*

⁸⁸ Van Dooran, K., Richards, A., Lennox, N., & Kinner, S.A. (2013). Complex Health-related Needs Among Young, Soon-to-be-released Prisoners. *Health and Justice*, 1(1), p. 4. Retrieved from <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/2194-7899-1-1>.

⁸⁹ Van Dooran, K., Kinner, S.A. & Forsyth, S. (2013). Risk of death for young ex-prisoners in the year following release from adult prison. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*. Retrieved from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1753-6405.12087/full>.

⁹⁰ Corrections Victoria (2020). After-prison support: <https://www.corrections.vic.gov.au/release/after-prison-support>.

⁹¹ Jesuit Social Services (2018). All Alone: Young adults in the Victorian justice system. *Op. cit.*

communities on remand is 15 per cent, a staggering figure when considered that only one per cent of the broader Victorian population identify as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.⁹² This over-representation extends to those from Sudanese communities (12 per cent), and those from New Zealand, Māori and Pasifika communities (12 per cent).⁹³

This over-representation has been reflected in the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the lockdowns in Victoria, people from Aboriginal and CALD communities were overrepresented among those fined for COVID-19 related breaches by Victoria Police. Crime Statistics Agency data for April to September 2020 indicate that South Sudanese-born Australians received 65 (or 0.79 per cent) of the 8,161 fines, while they constitute only 0.14 per cent of the Victorian population, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were issued 89 (or 1.09 per cent) of the 8,161 fines, despite constituting only 0.8 per cent of the population.⁹⁴

There are many factors leading to the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CALD communities in the justice system – including dispossession, discrimination, racism, acculturation, intergenerational trauma, cultural differences and displacement.^{95, 96, 97, 98, 99}

In order to address this over-representation, there are a number of interventions that must be implemented that are designed and led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CALD Communities. This includes community involvement incorporating extended family and traditional knowledge to develop a sense of community ownership and control, thus contributing to empowerment and self-determination; recruiting police and youth justice staff from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CALD communities to strengthen positive relationships between community and the police and deliver a coordinated response to incidents; establishing cultural programs and cultural safety within the justice system; embedding restorative justice practices (e.g. youth conferencing schemes), community-based sanctions, and treatment and rehabilitation interventions and creating training, education and employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CALD young people.

⁹² Sentencing Advisory Council (2020). *Children Held on Remand in Victoria: A Report on Sentencing Outcomes*. Retrieved from: https://www.sentencingcouncil.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-09/Children_Held_on_Remand_in_Victoria.pdf.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Crime Statistics Agency (2020, December 17). 'Police-recorded crime trends in Victoria during the COVID-19 pandemic: update to end of September.' Retrieved from: <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/research-and-evaluation/publications/police-recorded-crime-trends-in-victoria-during-the-covid-19-0>.

⁹⁵ Shepherd, S., & Masuka, G. (2020). 'Working With At-Risk Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Young People in Australia: Risk Factors, Programming, and Service Delivery.' *Criminal Justice Policy Review*. Retrieved from: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0887403420929416>.

⁹⁶ Wylie, L., Van Meyel, R., Harder, H., & Sukhera, J. (2018). 'Assessing trauma in a transcultural context: Challenges in mental health care with immigrants and refugees.' *Public Health Reviews*, **39**(1). Retrieved from: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327161768_Assessing_trauma_in_a_transcultural_context_Challenges_in_mental_health_care_with_immigrants_and_refugees.

⁹⁷ Commission for Children and Young People (2017). *Annual report 2016-17*. Retrieved from: https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/file_uploads/Commission_for_Children_and_Young_People_Annual_Report_2016-17_QRj67yww.pdf.

⁹⁸ Gilbert, R., & Wilson, A. (2009). Staying strong on the outside: improving the post-release experience of Indigenous young adults. Retrieved from: <https://www.indigenousjustice.gov.au/publications/staying-strong-on-the-outside-improving-the-post-release-experience-of-indigenous-young-adults/>.

⁹⁹ Shepherd, S., & Masuka, G. (2020). *Op. cit.*

b) Recommendations

- Invest in research, workforce capacity building, and the development, piloting and evaluation of early interventions to positively shift cultures and attitudes to address the underlying drivers of violence and other harmful behaviours by boys and men.
- Embed the human rights provisions enshrined in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)*.
- Use prison only as a last resort.
- Raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 14 years of age.
- Extend the age of dual track to 25 years.
- Expand and improve access to restorative justice.
- Enhance staff capacity in the youth justice system
- Ban the use of punitive isolation.
- Further reduce the prison population size within Cherry Creek Prison and ensure diversionary, rehabilitative, holistic alternatives.
- Further invest in post-release and transitional support for young people exiting the justice system.
- Invest in community-led responses to address the over-representation of young people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities in the justice system.

Appendix VI: Government, community services and the youth sector are accessible, appropriate and coordinated, and respond to young people’s evolving needs (Outcome 6)

a) Background

i. Homelessness and housing

Adequate, safe, and secure housing and appropriate support helps provide a solid foundation for personal health, well-being and agency, and helps build more productive, cohesive and safer communities. Social and affordable housing plays a vital role in achieving these outcomes.

Jesuit Social Services commends the Victorian Government on its \$5.3b investment, the Big Housing Build initiative.¹⁰⁰

The Big Housing Build provides a solid start to addressing the long-standing shortfall of social housing in Victoria, which has the lowest proportion of social housing dwellings of any Australian jurisdiction – 3.2 per cent of all households, compared to the national average of between 4.2 per cent¹⁰¹ and 4.5 per cent¹⁰². It is expected that the Big Housing Build will increase the proportion of social housing dwellings in Victoria to 3.5 per cent of total residential dwellings, which is still well short of both the national average and the OECD average (6 per cent).¹⁰³

Currently, there are more than 48,000 households, representing over 100,00 people, on the waiting list for social housing in Victoria¹⁰⁴ – this includes over 25,000 children. It has been estimated that to meet the current social housing shortfall, Victoria would need to build 6,000 new social housing homes annually over 10 years.¹⁰⁵ There is a clear need for not only significant but sustained investment in social housing in Victoria into the longer-term. We are thus disappointed that the Commonwealth Government missed the opportunity in the recent federal Budget to co-invest in Victoria’s social and affordable housing stock, which would amplify the State Government’s Big Housing Build initiative. It is imperative that advocacy continue with a view to achieving the partnership with Federal Government that is required to effectively redress the long-standing under-supply of social and affordable housing in Victoria, as is being led by the national Everybody’s Home campaign for a \$7.2 billion federal investment.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, new research indicates that additional housing stimulus measures will be vital in driving economic recovery into 2021 and beyond: “large-scale funding of social housing infrastructure is essential from a range of economic and social measures.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁰ Jesuit Social Services (2020, November 16). ‘Victorian Government’s social housing spend a step towards a stronger state’. Available at: <https://jss.org.au/victorian-governments-social-housing-spend-a-step-towards-a-stronger-state/>.

¹⁰¹ Raynor, K. (2020, November 18). ‘Victoria’s \$5.4bn Big Housing Build: it is big, but the social housing challenge is even bigger.’ *The Conversation*. Retrieved from: [The Conversation](https://www.theconversation.com/victoria-big-housing-build-it-is-big-but-the-social-housing-challenge-is-even-bigger/).

¹⁰² Housing Peaks Alliance (2020). Make social housing work: A framework for Victoria’s public and community housing 2020-2030. Retrieved from: <https://chp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Make-Social-Housing-Work.pdf>.

¹⁰³ Raynor, K. (2020, November 18). *Op. cit.*

¹⁰⁴ Topsfield, J., & Millar, R. (2020, November 15). ‘This will change lives’: \$5.3 billion social-housing construction blitz.’ *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved from: <https://www.smh.com.au/national/victoria/this-will-change-lives-5-3-billion-social-housing-construction-blitz-20201114-p56em5.html>.

¹⁰⁵ Housing Peaks Alliance (2020). *Op. cit.*

¹⁰⁶ Everybody’s Home (2020). Retrieved from: <https://everybodyshome.com.au/end-homelessness-2020/>.

¹⁰⁷ Rowley, S. et al. (2020, October 21). ‘Why more housing stimulus will be needed to sustain recovery.’ *The Conversation*. Retrieved from: [The Conversation](https://www.theconversation.com/why-more-housing-stimulus-will-be-needed-to-sustain-recovery/).

Nevertheless, young people should be one of the priority cohorts addressed by the Big Housing Build. The cohorts currently identified as priorities in the Big Housing Build are people living with a mental illness (2,000), victim-survivors of family violence (1,000), and Aboriginal Victorians (10 per cent of all new builds).¹⁰⁸ Yet, a significant number of young Victorians also experience, and are at risk of experiencing, homelessness. For example, during 2018-19, the most recent year for which data is available, nearly 13,800 young people (aged 15-24 years) presented alone to specialist homelessness services in Victoria, representing 32 per cent of all young people who presented to such services.¹⁰⁹ Children and young people are rightly identified as a priority cohort in the National Housing and Homeless Agreement, which came into effect on 1 July 2018.¹¹⁰ This suggests that the Victorian Government's unprecedented investment in social housing through the Big Housing Build should also prioritise young people in greatest need, notwithstanding that the needs of many in this cohort may be met through the extension of out-of-home care to the age of 21 years (discussed in the next section).

Jesuit Social Services welcomed the Victorian Government's action in temporarily accommodating thousands of people – young people and adults alike – experiencing homelessness from the beginning of the COVID-19 public health crisis. We also welcomed the Government's subsequent commitment to extend this emergency accommodation for some 2,000 people until April 2021, and to support them into permanent, safe and supported housing options.¹¹¹ We are, however, concerned that these initiatives are time-limited. We emphasise the need to ensure sustainable housing solutions for the future for all those who need them, including vulnerable young people.

For example, Jesuit Social Services delivers several transitional and supported housing programs to assist vulnerable young people involved with, or exiting, the justice systems – such as *Perry House*, *Next Steps*, and *Link Youth Justice Housing Program*, as described earlier in this submission. However, we continue to call for more investment in such programs, as the number and design of existing programs is not commensurate with the scale and diversity of overall need (e.g. limited options for females).

¹⁰⁸ Homes Victoria (2020). *Op. cit.*

¹⁰⁹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2019). Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2018-19. Retrieved from: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/shs-annual-report-18-19/contents/summary>.

¹¹⁰ Department of Social Services (2020). National Housing and Homelessness Agreement. Australian Government. Retrieved from: <https://www.dss.gov.au/housing-support-programs-services-homelessness/national-housing-and-homelessness-agreement>, and https://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/other/other/NHHA_VIC_BILAT.pdf.

¹¹¹ Jesuit Social Services (2020). 'New funding a step towards goal of every Victorian having access to safe and secure housing.' Available at: <https://jss.org.au/new-funding-a-step-towards-goal-of-every-victorian-having-access-to-safe-and-secure-housing/>.

CASE STUDY: Sar

In 2019, Sar was 20 years old. Sar is Aboriginal and proud of his heritage. Sar says:

I grew up with my mum and my siblings, my dad wasn't really around. He's in jail, it sucks he's not around as much as I want him to be. My mum kicked me out when I was 16. I was homeless for four years. When you're homeless you don't have money for housing or food so you're forced to steal probably 10 days out of your fortnight. The longer you live like that, you become more dependent on alcohol, on drugs.

I pleaded guilty at Koori court, and the elders came and sat at a table with me with the judge. You feel like a let down to the elders and that was not a great feeling. They are quite harsh on you, if the elders don't see change in you, they'll smack you with a harder punishment than what was already set to be. I felt ashamed to ask for help and reach out for services. I wasn't really that optimistic about changing how I was living.

I got connected with the Link housing program, which helped me out with accommodation. I'm grateful to have a place to stay and to know I can buy food, put it in the fridge or freezer, and become more responsible. It's really a life changer. I've been reaching out for mental health treatment, trying to pull myself in line.

I really want to do hospitality, it would definitely be a dream to own my own restaurant.

ii. Child protection and out-of-home care

The Victorian Government has rightly prioritised one of the most vulnerable cohorts of young Victorians – young people leaving care – through its commitment to extend care arrangements to every young person in the out-of-home care system up to the age of 21 from 18 years

Nevertheless, Jesuit Social Services remains concerned that a small, but arguably the most vulnerable, cohort of young people in the out-of-home care system may still miss out on the extended allowance and support offered through the new extended care program. These are the young people who reside in residential care facilities, rather than foster or kinship care placements, where they have generally been placed because of challenging behaviours associated with their high and complex needs that have not been met in family based placements. Indeed, these young people have too often experienced not only the trauma of child maltreatment but subsequently also systems-abuse through multiple failed foster care placements, “essentially ‘failing’ their way into residential care”.¹¹² Many of the referrals Jesuit Social Services receives for our supported housing and Individual Support (ISP) programs are for young people turning 18 in residential care who have complex and multiple needs and are exiting the out-of-home care system with no appropriate exit options, particularly in regard to housing.

¹¹² Bath, H. (2008b). ‘Residential care in Australia, Part I: Service trends, the young people in care, and needs-based responses. *Children Australia*, **33**(2): 6-17.

It is well established that there are strong links between young people’s involvement in the child protection and out-of-care systems and homelessness¹¹³, and between young people’s involvement in the child protection and out-of-care systems and involvement in the justice system. These relationships are clearly demonstrated through the findings of the Commission for Children and Young People’s inquiry into services for young people transitioning from out-of-home care (i.e. 32 per cent of young people leaving care in Victoria between 2013 and 2015 were identified as homeless in 2015-16 housing data; young people whose final placement is residential care are most likely to experience homelessness; and 24 per cent of young people leaving care between 2006 and 2015 were involved in the justice system, with half those whose final placement was residential care justice-involved)¹¹⁴; the Youth Parole Board’s snapshot of justice-involved young people, which found that nearly 40 per cent also had contact with child protection at some time¹¹⁵; and the Sentencing Advisory Council’s recent series of ‘Crossover Kids’ reports.¹¹⁶

In a report recently published by AHURI, it was anticipated that the Victorian Government’s previous partial Home Stretch policy (from mid-2019) would have a favourable impact on rates of youth homelessness in Victoria, and that “a full and effective implementation of the Home Stretch agenda would have a significant effect on the number of young people becoming homeless.”¹¹⁷ In combination with the Big Housing Build’s focus on assisting women and children experiencing family violence, people with mental illness, and Aboriginal Victorians, the extension of support for young people in out-of-home care will help many more Victorians avoid the increased risk and experience of homelessness that currently exists. We concur with the view of the Housing Peaks Alliance that “The waste of resources used in this cycle of poor housing outcomes should instead be spent on improved prevention and early intervention services.”¹¹⁸ This would, in turn, reduce the number of children and young people entering Victoria’s child protection and out-of-home care systems in the first place.

While Jesuit Social Services applauds the early intervention and prevention approach (eg targeted care packages and family preservation and restoration programs) initiatives outlined in the *Victorian Budget 2020/21*, as outlined above, we call for further investment, including an initiative specifically for young people turning 18 in residential care for an ongoing independent supported housing option – similar to our *Next Steps* supported housing program for 16–24 year-olds who are involved with the justice system and are experiencing, or are at risk of, homelessness. Such an initiative would complement the principles outlined in the *Roadmap for Reform* and the initiatives outlined in the *Victorian Budget 2020/21*, and is also in line with the recommendations, especially Recommendation 12, of the Commission for Children and Young People’s *Keep caring (2020)* report for increased investment in post-care housing.

We also recommend the expansion of restorative justice conferencing to young people in out-of-home care placements. Jesuit Social Services delivers restorative justice group conferencing programs to young people involved with Victoria’s Justice System through the *Youth Justice Group Conferencing (YJGC)* and *RESTORE*

¹¹³ MacKenzie, D. et al. (2020). *Redesign of a homeless service system for young people*. Australian Housing & Urban Research Institute, p. 4. Retrieved from: https://www.ahuri.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/60631/AHURI-Final-Report-327-Redesign-of-a-homelessness-service-system-for-young-people.pdf.

¹¹⁴ Commission for Children and Young People (2020). *Keep caring: Systemic inquiry into services for young people transitioning from out-of-home care*. Retrieved from: <https://ccyp.vic.gov.au/assets/Uploads/CCYP-Keep-caring.pdf>.

¹¹⁵ Youth Parole Board. (2018). *Youth Parole Board Annual Report 2017-18*. Melbourne: Victorian Government, Department of Justice and Regulation.

¹¹⁶ Sentencing Advisory Council (2020). Available from:

<https://www.sentencingcouncil.vic.gov.au/publications/publications-a-to-z/c>.

¹¹⁷ MacKenzie, D. et al. (2020). *Redesign of a homeless service system for young people*, Australian Housing & Urban Research Institute, p. 5. Retrieved from: https://www.ahuri.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/60631/AHURI-Final-Report-327-Redesign-of-a-homelessness-service-system-for-young-people.pdf.

¹¹⁸ Housing Peaks Alliance (2020). *Making social housing work*, p. 4. Retrieved from: <https://apo.org.au/node/303828>.

programs. YJGC is delivered throughout Melbourne. It is a restorative justice program that enables dialogue between young persons aged 10-17 years who have offended, their victims and the wider community, and brings together those involved or affected to discuss how the young person can make amends for the harm done

RESTORE is a pilot program based in the Melbourne's Children's Court. It is trialling restorative approaches to working with young people who perpetrate family violence by offering a Family Group Conference to help the young person and their family develop practical solutions that will keep people safe and prevent further violence occurring at home after an intervention order (IVO) has been lodged. The program is currently being evaluated by the University of Melbourne and shows promising early results. The expansion of restorative justice conferencing to young people in out-of-home care placements would both broaden and strengthen the range of early intervention and prevention programs available to the child protection and youth justice systems.

b) Recommendations

- Ensure sustainable housing solutions for the future for all vulnerable young people who need them by:
 - including young people who are experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness as a priority cohort in Victoria's Big Housing Build initiative.
 - increasing investment in transitional and supported housing programs commensurate with the scale and diversity of overall need.
 - ensuring full and effective implementation of the prevention and early intervention supports funded in the *Victorian Budget 2020/21* to enable young people to remain in their current living arrangements with their kinship or foster carer, or to transition to supported independent living arrangements, as needed until they turn 21.
 - introducing an initiative specifically for young people turning 18 in residential care for an ongoing independent supported housing option – similar to Jesuit Social Services' *Next Steps* supported housing program for 16–24 year-olds who are involved with the justice system and are experiencing, or are at risk of, homelessness
- Expand restorative justice conferencing to young people in out-of-home care placements.

Appendix VII: Links to key relevant Jesuit Social Services resources

- [Worth A Second Chance](#) Campaign
- [Jesuit Social Services \(2017\) #Justice Solutions Tour Expanding the Conversation](#) Report
- [Jesuit Social Services \(2019\) #JusticeSolutions New Zealand Tour](#) Report