



*Jesuit Social Services' Housing
Programs Manager, Kane.*

Housing support helps self-belief grow

The strong links between homelessness and contact with the criminal justice system are well documented. Twenty-five per cent of people entering prison experience homelessness in the four weeks before entering prison and more than half of those who are incarcerated, leave prison in Victoria are homeless upon release.

The statistics are far from surprising to Kane, Manager of Housing Programs at Jesuit Social Services.

"I'd say 100 per cent of our program participants have either experienced homelessness or are at risk of homelessness and it contributes to leading them into offending behaviours. Prison environments are not conducive to rehabilitation, so we focus on providing safe and secure housing for participants so they can use it as a platform to address the other aspects of their lives," he says.

Jesuit Social Services' housing programs include Dillon House and Perry House – both of which provide supported accommodation for young people experiencing homelessness upon leaving the criminal justice system. Perry House specifically focuses on supporting young people with intellectual disabilities.

The Link Youth Justice Housing Program facilitates access to stable housing for young people aged 16 to 22 years who are exiting the justice system and also provides a crucial after-hours support service to engage participants during the highest risk time for reoffending.

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Working with one foot raised

As we draw closer to the end of the Ignatian Year on 31st July, and as Jesuit Social Services celebrates its 45th anniversary, it is an opportune time to reflect on how our work is grounded in the Ignatian tradition.

By working with one foot raised as Ignatius urged, always ready to respond to new and emerging challenges, we continue to be at the ready to go wherever the need is greatest. This is evident in some of the innovative initiatives we have established in recent years, including the Ignatius Learning Centre, a school for teenage boys in contact with the justice system; the Centre for Just Places, a centre of research, learning and practice to deliver more effective place-based responses; and The Men's Project, which works to help boys and men develop respectful relationships free from violence.

Our day-to-day work ranges from building the capacity of people, families and communities in some of the most disadvantaged locations in Australia, through to providing fundamental support such as a safe and secure roof over the heads of people exiting the prison system.

We remain as committed to our big vision of building a just society as ever, and the work of our staff and programs on the ground continue to directly inform our advocacy to Governments, decision makers and the broader community to help us achieve this goal.

In this issue, you will read about some of our programs - spanning housing, employment, and community capacity building work across Victoria and Western Sydney. These programs support diverse groups of people and share a mission to help people overcome the structural barriers that get in the way of leading healthy and productive lives, and stop people reaching their potential.

As always, your generous support is critical in allowing us to help people and communities every day. I thank you for your support.

Julie Edwards

CEO, Jesuit Social Services

Housing support helps self-belief grow

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As Kane explains, the work of the programs goes well beyond providing a safe and secure roof over the participants' heads.

"Generally speaking, young people who come into Perry or Dillon House haven't felt as if they've been validated in the community. There's an unfamiliarity of being in an environment where they're valued as people," he says.

"We work through that psychological and emotional barrier first and foremost, getting participants to recognise that the support we provide is not transactional, and that the stability we provide gives them an opportunity to move forward in life."

Another focus of the programs is to support participants to develop their independent living skills.

"When you've got a young person coming out of custody, you ask them if they've ever had a bank card before. Some of them might not even know what a bank card is. Some of them don't know how to go to a bank or use online services to create a bank account.

"It comes down to building those really trusting and respectful relationships where you can unpack those things. Participants can present with a sense of hopelessness and helplessness because they've always been pushed to the side.

"Our role as practitioners is to let them know that 'we believe in you and believe you can attain whatever it is you're wanting to in the future'.

"Over time you start to see the self-belief within participants grow as they see there's an organisation that believes in them and wants to make a difference and give them opportunities for a better life."



Perry House.

Trust and relationships at the heart of the Hub

Jesuit Social Services' *Dropping off the Edge* research into locational disadvantage, conducted over more than 20 years, finds that many communities in Western Sydney deal with multiple and complex forms of disadvantage.

We have worked in Western Sydney for more than a decade and understand its inherent strengths and robust sense of community. Through our ongoing work at the Willmot Community Hub, we continue to foster support and connection to help people and families reach their potential.

Western Sydney Projects Coordinator with Jesuit Social Services, Delander, says the team's work is flexible and responsive to the needs of community. "If families need a resource, we will try to make it happen, in whatever way we can."

The Hub continues to provide meal hampers to people who are isolating with COVID-19 and struggling to afford groceries under the rising cost of living. "We'll get calls from people who are at home with their kids and can't access anything. We will bridge that gap... And then we see some of those families come into the Hub and join our other programs."

Alongside responding to the impact of crises such as COVID-19, Jesuit Social Services runs a range of programs in Western Sydney including community breakfasts, playgroups, after school and holiday programs for children, parenting classes, and a girls empowerment program.

Community breakfasts are a good example of the way the Hub works: building relationships and trust so that when people are having a tough time they know the Hub is there to help. "A lot of the time, community breakfasts are how we find out if someone's in need," Delander says.

Leon is a Community Development Officer. He says he learnt how to be a barista so he can serve coffees when the Hub runs events and programs, providing him with an opportunity to have conversations with community members. "It's about listening to people, getting to know people's stories and building upon their visions and dreams."

Leon is grateful for the trust placed in him by community members. "Quite often people will reach out to you because you've been part of the community for such a long time.

"It takes a lot of courage for someone to come up and say, 'Can you help me?' and it's an honour for us to help meet that need. We may not be able to give everything that they ask for, but we do our best to give them what we can."



Western Sydney program team members Monique and Delander.

Leaving prison for good: The critical role of safe and secure housing

Access to safe and secure housing is a fundamental human right. It provides a solid foundation for a person's health, wellbeing and agency, and helps build more productive and cohesive communities. Across Australia, however, it is estimated that approximately one in seven people who have been in prison need assistance from a specialist homelessness service when they re-enter the community.

When people who leave prison don't have a safe and secure place to live, it's significantly more challenging for them to gain employment, attend appointments and stay away from drugs and alcohol – all important influences that can reduce reoffending. Housing can be the difference between whether a person will return to prison or get their life back on track. Australian research has confirmed this, with one study finding that when people had unstable accommodation upon leaving prison, they were three times more likely to return to prison within just nine months.

Australia's prison population has risen significantly over the past decade, notwithstanding a slight decline in numbers due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In June 2020, there were 40,000 people in prison with nearly 60 per cent having been in prison before.

Prisons are expensive, costing Australian taxpayers \$120,450 per person in prison each year. But the greatest cost of imprisonment is on the lives of individuals and families who are directly affected. Prisons are often traumatic environments that separate people from homes, families, and communities, compounding pre-existing disadvantage and increasing the need for support. Jesuit Social Services believes that prison should only ever be used as a last resort.

The critical role of a safe and secure home in supporting people to reconnect with the community and address the factors influencing their offending was recognised in the recently released final report of the Inquiry into Victoria's Criminal Justice System. Drawing on our extensive experience working with justice-involved people, Jesuit Social Services gave evidence at a public hearing and made a submission to the Inquiry.

In June 2020, Jesuit Social Services partnered with the Victorian Government to launch the Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility to provide accommodation and critical wrap-around supports for men exiting prison. As of April 2022, only nine per cent of men who had been accommodated at the facility had returned to prison (11 out of 124 men).

The facility was initially opened to stop the transmission of COVID-19 in the community, however, its success alongside advocacy undertaken by Jesuit Social Services has seen the program continue. In this year's Victorian budget, the program's funding was extended for a fourth time.

Initiatives such as the Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility demonstrate how providing a secure place for someone to live can enable them to access health services and learning and pathways to learning and employment, providing both short and long-term benefits.

Jesuit Social Services has long called on governments to prevent people from coming into contact with the criminal justice system in the first place. This includes ensuring people with multiple and complex needs have access to social housing – that is, subsidised and supported housing as an alternative to the private rental market.

We also continue to call on all Australian governments to invest more in transitional and long-term housing options to give people exiting the justice system the best chance to get their lives back on track and to build safer, more just communities.

Maribyrnong success shows potential of rehabilitative justice

'Without your help, I'd be back in jail by now.' It's a comment staff at our unique 'step-down' post-prison accommodation have heard multiple times over the past two years.

The Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility, in Melbourne's west, provides temporary accommodation and wraparound support to men leaving prison who would otherwise be homeless – a circumstance experienced by half of Victoria's prison population, and a factor that can see people return to custody shortly after release.

"It's been so successful in supporting people to complete parole, become stabilised, and get into employment, it makes sense to keep it going," said Suzi, who manages Jesuit Social Services' adult justice programs.

"Housing has always been a gap in the system. This facility has always been needed."

As important as it is to put a roof over someone's head, the facility's significance is also in the stable base it provides to help people address health issues, repair family relationships, and engage with the support needed to begin a new life in the community.

Suzi says that people often fall through the cracks if they aren't supported to advocate for things they need.

"One participant had a court report from 2018 that said he was legally blind from cataracts. Nothing had happened to help him for four years. How do you navigate the system or live independently?"

"Once he was in secure housing we were able to get him on the waitlist for surgery and he's had one operation already. That's changing his life."

Jesuit Social Services staff at the facility support residents to apply for NDIS packages, get a driver's license and construction tickets, connect with private rental housing and work opportunities, understand the conditions of intervention orders, and start visits with family members.

They also support residents to build the skills needed to live independently after the end of their time in the facility, which can range from three to 12 months, often following lengthy periods of incarceration.

Staff say the facility has significantly reduced reoffending rates for residents and has seen more people in work and long-term housing.

That success is due to the strength of the relationship with the Department of Justice and Community Safety, said Suzi, and shows the untapped potential of a justice system with rehabilitation as its primary goal.

"The partnership is so valuable; they really speak to us. Relationships with Department staff are respectful and open where we readily advocate for residents. It's an opportunity to deliver a truly rehabilitative response, not a punitive response."



Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility staff (from left to right) Ellie, John, Suzi, Emily, Colin and Emily.



The Maribyrnong Community Residential Facility supports men who are exiting prison to find stable housing and employment prior to reentering the community.

Engaging the social justice leaders of tomorrow

Jesuit Social Services' Schools and Community Engagement program encourages high school students to become more aware and active in social justice through volunteering.

Beginning in 2014 and continuing throughout COVID-19 lockdown, St Ignatius' College Riverview, St Aloysius' College Milsons Point and Catholic schools across Sydney have organised food drives for Jesuit Social Services' Ignite Food Store – which relies on food donations to provide high-quality, low-cost groceries to residents in Emerton, one of New South Wales' most disadvantaged areas.

Schools in the program are also invited to volunteer on-site – sorting or stacking groceries at the Store, digging and weeding at the community garden, or participating in basketball workshops with the local primary school students, either for a day, three days, or a week.

The program helps students and staff to strengthen and deepen their understanding of Western Sydney and the experiences and struggles that many of the communities grapple with every day. Jesuit Social Services' Western Sydney team says the experience affects both staff and students. One school staff member who volunteered in the program told us: "Volunteering at the site today has granted me a deeper insight into the struggles of people who are marginalised, and I will aim to be more respectful and caring".

A student volunteer said, "I am grateful for this service experience because it has taught me about the trauma that some children and young people have experienced and yet still pull through".

A central feature of the program is that students and staff are invited to reflect: to be still and contemplate why they come to the site and why there is a need for a food store in Western Sydney. Then they get to work and begin to see and hear the life and community experiences of Emerton residents.

At the end of their time, students are invited to reflect on what they will do differently following time spent with staff, volunteers and community members. Here are a few more reflections from students and staff:

'This week of service has helped me to feel that I have grown as a young man.' – Year 12 student

'The experience has taught me many qualities that I feel will help me to shape a better future for my life.' – Year 10 student

'I definitely would like to take part in similar acts of service in the future.' – Year 11 student

Our work with schools includes Victorian Catholic and Jesuit Schools. Most recently, more than 200 Year 9 students from Xavier College were invited to spend a day learning about Jesuit Social Services' history and our broad range of work.

Across two locations, students heard from a range of Jesuit Social Services' program areas including The Men's Project, Navigator, Artful Dodgers Studios and the Ecological Justice Hub.

Students also learned about our specific approach to advocacy informed by our Jesuit heritage, the importance of providing a platform for people with lived experience to share their stories and our campaign work-Worth A Second Chance – a campaign to deliver an effective youth justice system that helps children and young people get their lives back on track after contact with the criminal justice system.

If you would like to find out more about our school and community engagement opportunities, please contact Claire Thomas at Claire.Thomas@jss.org.au.



St Luke's Catholic College Marsden Park and Jesuit Social Services staff member, Aaron, during a food drive earlier this year.

Reflecting on the Ignatian Year

31st July marks the Feast Day of St Ignatius of Loyola and the end of the Ignatian Year. Jesuit Social Services' work is grounded in the Ignatian tradition, which calls on us to keep one foot raised, ready to go where the need is. We continue this tradition in the present day by responding to disadvantaged and marginalised communities who experience barriers to having their basic needs fulfilled, such as finding a safe and stable home and putting food on the table for their families, as well as their more complex needs that affect mental health, ability to find sustainable employment and more.

The Ignatian Year began on the anniversary of Ignatius' wounding in battle and his reluctant convalescence. This led him into a lifetime of reflection on the movements of his own spirit, his conversion to a deep religious faith, and years of journeying to find God's way for him and his companions who formed the Society of Jesus.

One of Ignatius' early companions said that a Jesuit's home was the journey. They were always going out to meet people in their need and to help them reflect on what mattered. When later most Jesuits lived and worked in institutions, this restlessness reflected itself in their exploring faith, attending to the situations and cultural currents that affected the people with whom they worked, and helping them to focus on what mattered.


This is the founding spirit of Jesuit Social Services, with the rich variety of cultures, religions and philosophies of our staff and the people we work with. We are called to accompany people who are hungry for justice, opportunity and meaning. This demands of us an inner journey to enter the lives of people whom we serve and make their greatest struggles the focus of our programs and advocacy.



Andy Hamilton S.J.

For many of the participants we support, a safe and secure home is a luxury they have never known. Our Housing Programs team provide much more than just a roof and four walls for these young people.

Our highly skilled practitioners work 24 hours a day, seven days a week providing counselling and support to help participants build the crucial living skills they never had the opportunity to learn earlier in life, and work towards achieving their goals and ambitions.



**Help us to provide young people with
a safe home, and the opportunity to
reach their full potential.**

Want to help Jesuit Social Services?

Together we can build a just society by advocating for social change and promoting the wellbeing of disadvantaged people, family and communities.

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