



Our vision for New South Wales

2023 Election Platform



Jesuit
Social Services
Building a Just Society

Jesuit Social Services: Who we are and what we do

Jesuit Social Services has been working for over 45 years, delivering support services and advocating for improved policies, legislation and resources to help achieve strong, cohesive and vibrant communities where every individual can play a role, participate and flourish.

We are a social change organisation working with some of the most marginalised individuals, families and communities, many of which are experiencing multiple and complex challenges. Jesuit Social Services works where the need is greatest and where we have the capacity, experience and skills to make the most difference. Our services span New South Wales, Victoria and the Northern Territory.

Our service delivery and advocacy focuses on these areas:

- **Justice and crime prevention** – people involved with the justice system
- **Mental health and wellbeing** – people with multiple and complex needs including mental illness, trauma, homelessness and bereavement
- **Settlement and community building** – recently arrived immigrants and refugees, and disadvantaged communities
- **Education, training and employment** – people with barriers to education and sustainable employment
- **Gender Justice** – leadership on the reduction of violence and other harmful behaviours prevalent among boys and men, including new approaches to improving their wellbeing and keeping families and communities safe
- **Ecological justice** – advocacy and research around the systemic changes needed to achieve a ‘just transition’ towards a sustainable future, and supporting community members to lead more sustainable lives.

Our research, advocacy and policy are coordinated across all program and interest areas of Jesuit Social Services. Advocacy is grounded in the knowledge, expertise and experiences of program staff and participants, as well as academic research and evidence. We seek to influence policies, practices, legislation and budget investment to positively influence people’s lives and improve approaches to address long-term social challenges.

We do this by working collaboratively with governments, businesses, the community sector, and communities themselves, to build coalitions and alliances, and to form strong relationships that help to create a more powerful, coordinated voice around key social issues.

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

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Introduction

Jesuit Social Services believes that every person should have access to the opportunities in life that will enable them to flourish – to complete their education, to get a job, to access safe and affordable housing, to raise their children in supportive communities and to see the next generation thrive.

In New South Wales, disadvantage and marginalisation is disproportionately felt by a small number of communities. Particular postcodes experience poorer outcomes across health, education, and employment, and experience disproportionate contact with the justice system. For some communities, there is limited or compromised access to basic necessities like transport and early childhood care and education. This disadvantage is concentrated and entrenched, impacting communities across generations.¹

In the face of these challenges, it is critical to acknowledge the ongoing strength and tenacity that also exists within these communities. Jesuit Social Services delivers a range of initiatives in Western Sydney, accompanying communities to break out of cycles of disadvantage by building on community strengths and developing local answers to local problems.²

Across NSW, we also deliver Support After Suicide – providing critical supports to people after a death of a loved one to suicide, through specialist counselling, group programs and online support. Our experience shows us that accompaniment, place-based approaches and long-term government investments are key to tackling complex social challenges.

At this Election, we call on the future NSW Government to foster thriving and resilient communities, including through further investment in: place-based approaches, essential infrastructure such as housing, transport and digital solutions, child and family wellbeing, education, training and employment, and suicide prevention and postvention support.

Our recommendations for the incoming NSW Government

Recommendation 1: Identify locations of complex disadvantage and resource long-term, place-based approaches to centre community decision-making and address the factors that lead to inequity and disadvantage.

Recommendation 2: Develop a framework for place-based approaches in NSW in order to provide greater support to place-based initiatives as well as a common language for this way of working. This must be informed by research into what works for place-based approaches in NSW.

Recommendation 3: Continue to build broader community resilience to climate change by resourcing place-based, cross-sector resilience coalitions working in partnership with local governments and the community sector to inform adaptation planning and policies.

Recommendation 4: Deliver 5,000 new social housing dwellings each year for the next 10 years, including supported housing for individuals with multiple and complex needs, and retrofit existing social housing that is over 10 years old with energy efficient upgrades.

Recommendation 5: Increase bus service levels to communities in Western Sydney, including school bus routes, and incentivise employer-provided shuttle services to these same communities.

Recommendation 6: Subsidise affordable access to home internet, data and associated technology for low-income households.

¹ Tanton, R., Dare, L., Miranti, R., Vidyattama, Y., Yule, A. and McCabe, M. (2021), *Dropping Off the Edge 2021: Persistent and multilayered disadvantage in Australia*, Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne.

² For further details, please see here: <https://jss.org.au/programs/western-sydney-program/>

Recommendation 7: Invest in community-led, environmentally sustainable food security initiatives such as Jesuit Social Services' Ignite Food Store and Currawong Community Kitchens to strengthen access to healthy and affordable food in communities experiencing disadvantage.

Recommendation 8: Provide a system of high-quality, universally accessible and affordable early learning by investing in sustainable infrastructure and appropriately skilled and qualified educators.

Recommendation 9: Increase funding for the Targeted Early Intervention Program by 25 per cent, prioritising Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (as recommended by NCOSS).

Recommendation 10: Implement the *Family is Culture* blueprint through genuine partnership and shared decision making with Aboriginal leaders, Community Controlled Organisations and communities

Recommendation 11: Raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14 years and partner with key stakeholders to develop therapeutic, restorative responses for this age group.

Recommendation 12: Partner with sector representatives and victim/survivors to develop and implement a plan for the primary prevention of sexual, domestic, and family violence in NSW.

Recommendation 13: Invest in scaling up workforce capacity-building training for role models working with men and boys in a range of settings such as schools, youth justice facilities, prisons and community health services to prevent the use of violence.

Recommendation 14: Scale up the Adolescent Man Box survey to inform the respectful relationships curriculum with longitudinal data on underlying attitudes related to stereotypical masculine norms and associated behaviours such as the use of violence.

Recommendation 15: Resource research and program design to better understand concerning sexual behaviours among children, and the sexual abuse of children, such as through Jesuit Social Services' pilot project in collaboration with the University of Melbourne, the Worried About Sex and Pornography.

Recommendation 16: Commit to recurrent funding for adolescent family violence programs aligned with restorative principles in collaboration with the Children's Courts and Police, including Jesuit Social Services' RESTORE and Starting Over programs.

Recommendation 17: Develop a NSW Youth Employment Strategy to ensure all young people in NSW are able to engage in education and training and have opportunities to pursue further education and employment.

Recommendation 18: Partner with the Federal Government to implement a Youth Job Guarantee that would ensure all young people are supported into secure employment, education or training that is aligned with their interests and goals, within four months of leaving formal education.

Recommendation 19: Increase funding for the NSW Adult and Community Education program, and re-allocate Smart and Skilled funding from private for-profit providers to not-for-profit community providers in areas of disadvantage such as Western Sydney.

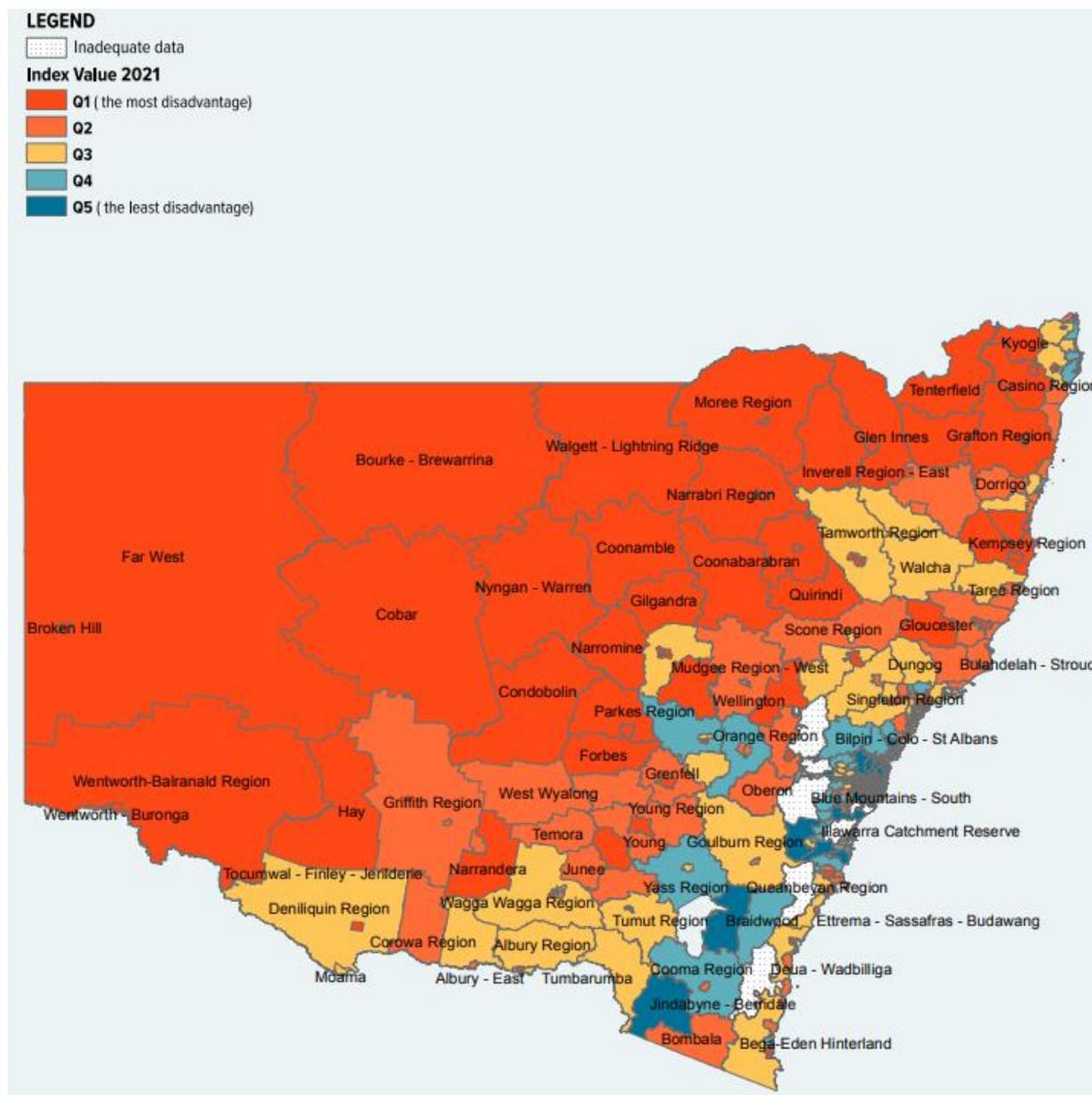
Recommendation 20: Implement a whole-of-government Social Procurement Framework to: create employment opportunities for people experiencing disadvantage; address cultural issues related to the safety of women and other minority groups; and leverage infrastructure projects to create jobs in areas experiencing disadvantage.

Recommendation 21: Provide long-term funding for a comprehensive and evidence-based model of specialist suicide postvention support such as Support After Suicide.

The challenge: Persistent locational disadvantage

Jesuit Social Services has researched disadvantage at the community level over the past 23 years. The most recent report, *Dropping off the Edge 2021*,³ measured outcomes against 37 indicators of disadvantage including social, economic, health, crime and for the first time, environmental related disadvantage.⁴ *Dropping off the Edge 2021* showed clearly that disadvantage is disproportionately concentrated in a small number of communities in each state and territory.⁵

Map of disadvantage in NSW



Source: Tanton, R., Dare, L., Miranti, R., Vidyattama, Y., Yule, A. and McCabe, M. (2021), *Dropping Off the Edge 2021: Persistent and multilayered disadvantage in Australia*, Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne.

³ Tanton, R., Dare, L., Miranti, R., Vidyattama, Y., Yule, A. and McCabe, M. (2021), *Dropping Off the Edge 2021: Persistent and multilayered disadvantage in Australia*, Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne.

⁴ *Dropping off the Edge* measures disadvantage against each indicator at an SA2 level in every state and territory across the country to highlight communities of complex and multi-layered disadvantage. The report also compares the outcomes for locations over time therefore demonstrating the entrenched nature of complex disadvantage.

⁵ Please see the Appendix for a list of the top 40 communities experiencing disadvantage in NSW.

In New South Wales, 13 per cent of locations accounted for just over half of the most disadvantaged rankings – a pattern that was repeated in all states and territories. The report showed clearly that disadvantage is also entrenched in many communities. Nine of the top 10 disadvantaged locations in NSW were all also classified as highly disadvantaged in 2015 – many of them also ranking as highly disadvantaged in 2007.

When looking at where disadvantage is located, it becomes evident that, in general, disadvantage is experienced in mostly regional and remote areas. In New South Wales, only three of the top 40 most disadvantaged locations were in Sydney.

The indicators most closely linked with general levels of disadvantage in NSW include; intergenerational unemployment, family violence, and young people leaving school early without engaging in subsequent employment or learning. For the first time, *Dropping off the Edge 2021* also measured environmental disadvantage, including exposure to heat stress, poor air quality and a lack of green canopy. The inclusion of environmental indicators confirmed that areas experiencing disadvantage across social and economic indicators, are also facing significant disadvantage in terms of the environment impacting their health and cost of living expenses.⁶

While *Dropping off the Edge 2021* shows that the pattern of entrenched disadvantage in NSW is persistent over time, change can be achieved when the interrelated factors causing disadvantage are understood and community-led solutions are properly resourced alongside system-wide responses and policy reform. It is important to acknowledge that no matter the number of challenges faced by a community, each community possesses unique strengths. Place-based work, led by communities, in partnership with government would do well to recognise and leverage of these inherent strengths and resilience within the community.

⁶ See [here](#) for the DOTE 2021 NSW Fact Sheet.

1. Place-based approaches to social and ecological justice

In 2021, Jesuit Social Services established our [Centre for Just Places](#), with significant seed funding from Gandel Foundation and the Victorian Government. It was created to support and enable place-based approaches to social and ecological justice through research, collaboration, engagement and knowledge exchange at a national level.

Place-based approaches aim to empower communities to develop and deliver innovative local solutions over the long term by bringing together members of the community; community organisations; businesses; government: and public services such as schools and health centres. Critically, place-based approaches encompass initiatives that support people from birth across the life span, and in a range of different areas such as mental health, justice and crime prevention, and employment. They should be community led, whilst simultaneously building the capacity and capability of local communities.

As previously mentioned, since 2008, Jesuit Social Services has been building on the strengths of Western Sydney communities to support them to break out of cycles of disadvantage. We work in partnership with local residents and over 20 organisations to deliver a number of place-based initiatives.

Case study: Together in 2770 – community-led collaboration for best start

Together in 2770 is a place-based initiative that brings together residents, services, business and local government so that the 6,000 children aged 0-5 in Mt Druitt (the 2770 postcode) have the best possible start to life. This shared goal has been identified in collaboration with the local community and acknowledges that the first five years of a child's life are crucial.

Jesuit Social Services plays a leadership role in the [Together in Willmot](#) sub-initiative alongside The Hive - United Way Australia, BaptistCare HopeStreet, the Willmot Public School, and Willmot community members. Our Willmot Community Hub has provided a gathering place for this to occur. A 2020 [evaluation](#) found that, in its first four years, Together in Willmot has contributed to change across three levels:

- Improving the enabling conditions for longer-term change through their collective approach;
- Systems-level changes, such as changes in mindset, practice, resource flows, power and relationships; and
- Early instances of change for children, families and the community in Willmot.

Across 2021 to 2022, the Centre for Just Places led a consortium of research partners examining literature, evidence and practice to understand what features enable the success of place-based approaches and how to best support them – information essential to improving the wellbeing of communities into the future.⁷ A key finding was that sustainable, flexible and adequate resourcing is a critical enabler of effective place-based approaches.

Jesuit Social Services calls on the incoming Government to work with communities to identify locations of complex disadvantage, through *Dropping off the Edge* research, and adequately resource long-term,

⁷ Alderton, A., Villanueva, K., Davern, M., Reddel, T., Lata, L.N., Moloney, S., Gooder, H., Hewitt, T., DeSilva, A., Coffey, B., McShane, I., Cigdem-Bayram, M. (2022). What works for place-based approaches in Victoria. ([Weblink](#))

place-based approaches in these locations that centre community decision-making and address the factors that lead to and perpetuate inequity and disadvantage. Additionally, we would like to see the Government develop a framework for place-based approaches in NSW in order to provide greater support to place-based initiatives as well as a common language for this way of working.⁸ This must be accompanied by research to inform what works for place-based approaches in NSW.

1.1 Ecologically-just communities

Communities experiencing disadvantage are often the least responsible for environmental risks and threats, like climate change, but are the hardest hit by them, which in turn exacerbates vulnerability.⁹ In Western Sydney, it is predicted that, if emissions continue to increase, there could be a fivefold increase in the number of days per year over 35°C by 2090 (up from under nine days per year).¹⁰ The impacts of climate change on already disadvantaged communities are becoming increasingly evident over summer in particular. People living on low-incomes, in outdated, uninsulated housing are sweltering through heatwaves without access to effective and affordable cooling.¹¹ The situation is also dire for people in prisons. In December 2019, when bushfires burned close to Lithgow Correctional Centre in New South Wales, people detained – around a quarter of whom were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander – were kept locked inside as nearby areas were evacuated.¹²

Recognising this stark injustice, Jesuit Social Services has woven an ecological justice perspective into the fabric of its work since 2008. This perspective acknowledges that the social is deeply intertwined with the environmental, and seeks to achieve a just society by simultaneously addressing the challenges facing the environment as well as social inequities experienced by marginalised communities.

Given the serious consequences of climate change for people experiencing disadvantage, both state policy and place-based, community-led solutions are crucial. In recognising the urgent need to support communities to build resilience to climate change, Jesuit Social Services' [Centre for Just Places](#) has been delivering a range of climate adaptation and resilience initiatives and workshops across metropolitan Melbourne.¹³ In doing so, the Centre aims to build place-based, climate resilience coalitions that strengthen collaboration between community service organisations and local government agencies. This includes developing knowledge about changing experiences of vulnerability, building common understandings of local strengths and assets, and identifying a range of community priorities to inform adaptation planning and policies.¹⁴ Through these mechanisms, the Centre supports communities to build resilience to extreme weather and protect the health and wellbeing of those most at-risk.

⁸ Victorian Government. (2020). Framework: Place-based approaches. [\(Weblink\)](#)

⁹ Jesuit Social Services. (2018). Ecological Justice: Expanding the Conversation. Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne.

¹⁰ Melville-Rea, H. & Verschuer, R. (2022). HeatWatch: Extreme Heat in Western Sydney. *The Australia Institute: Canberra*. [\(Weblink\)](#)

¹¹ Kolovos, B. (2022, January 31). "My apartment is literally baking": calls for minimum standards to keep Australia's rental homes cool. *The Guardian*. [\(Weblink\)](#)

¹² Jesuit Social Services. (2021). Prisons, climate and a just transition discussion paper.

¹³ See for example our [Collaborative Action Plan for climate justice in Melbourne's west](#)

¹⁴ See for example our Resilience Community of Practice's [Victorian Election Platform](#)

Climate adaptation and resilience workshops

The Centre for Just Places has been delivering climate adaptation and resilience workshops across metropolitan Melbourne. The workshops bring together diverse cross-sector organisations working in particular locations in the areas of housing and homelessness, mental health, settlement, education and gender justice, as well as religious leaders and local governments. Participants report leaving the workshops with a deeper understanding of climate vulnerability and their responsibility to adapt. Resources are shared with participants, including Jesuit Social Services' [Climate and Ecological Justice Resource Pack](#), which offers practical tools for addressing climate change adaptation within homes and organisations. The place-based workshops serve as a critical conversation starter, building common understandings of climate vulnerability and community needs and catalysing future collaborations. In one local government area, for example, relationships developed through the workshops enabled deep engagement with at-risk community members and their lived experience of climate change. These conversations will inform local government adaptation policy and programs. Elsewhere, we have seen Neighbourhood Houses come together to commit to developing a collaborative climate action plan.

Jesuit Social Services also wishes to highlight the important work being undertaken by Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils through its *Turn Down the Heat* initiative, through which it takes a collaborative, multi-sector approach to building a cooler, more resilient future for Western Sydney.¹⁵ These initiatives align strongly with the NSW Government's Climate Change Adaptation Strategy, which includes a priority for adaptation action plans as "whole-of-society, multi-sector policy documents".¹⁶ This also encompasses developing specific actions to ensure that the plans reflect the need of those most at-risk, including Aboriginal communities.

We call on the NSW Government to actively support approaches such as these in order to strengthen place-based adaptation planning and policies. Further, we recommend that the incoming government take immediate action to drastically drive down emissions across all sectors of the NSW economy.

We call on the incoming NSW Government to:

Recommendation 1: Identify locations of complex disadvantage and resource long-term, place-based approaches such as *Together in 2770* to centre community decision-making and address factors that lead to inequity and disadvantage.

Recommendation 2: Develop a framework for place-based approaches in NSW in order to provide greater support to place-based initiatives as well as a common language for this way of working and invest in research to inform what works for place-based approaches in NSW.

Recommendation 3: Continue to build broader community resilience to climate change by resourcing place-based, cross-sector resilience coalitions working in partnership with local governments and the community sector to inform adaptation planning and policies.

¹⁵ <https://wsroc.com.au/projects/project-turn-down-the-heat>

¹⁶ NSW Government. (2022). NSW Climate Change Adaptation Strategy. ([Weblink](#))

2. Investing in infrastructure to address inequity

Infrastructure plays a key role in mitigating disadvantage and inequity.¹⁷ Yet evidence shows unequal access to infrastructure continues to impact new communities, communities experiencing disadvantage and communities in regional areas throughout NSW.¹⁸ Jesuit Social Services therefore urges the elected Government to prioritise equity in access to essential infrastructure.

2.1 Safe, secure and sustainable housing

Jesuit Social Services emphasises that adequate housing is a fundamental human right.¹⁹ Relatedly, it is widely acknowledged that safe, secure, long-term housing helps set a firm foundation for well-being, enhancing personal agency, and enabling people to pursue aspirations. However, access to affordable housing continues to be a key issue for people living in NSW, particularly for those on low incomes and in disadvantaged areas. Since 2020, incidents of homelessness across NSW have risen by 10 per cent.²⁰ At June 2022, 51,031 people were on the waiting list for social housing in NSW, of which over 10 percent were on the priority list.²¹

Australian research reveals the impact of housing stress on a person's wellbeing, showing that unaffordable housing was associated with greater feelings of being unsafe, community dissatisfaction, and poorer self-rated health.²² We highlight the urgent need to ensure access to sustainable, affordable housing solutions.

With over 50,000 people on the public housing waiting list and a growing rate of homelessness, Jesuit Social Services supports calls for the elected NSW Government to deliver 5,000 new social housing dwellings each year for the next 10 years.²³ This must include supported housing for individuals with multiple and complex needs. It is critical that any new or existing social housing is fit for purpose and that pre-existing inequities in housing are not exacerbated by the impacts of climate change. As we collectively face increasingly harsh weather conditions, the lack of energy efficient, sustainable housing for some members of our community is an inequality that, if unaddressed, will exacerbate existing health inequities and undermine social cohesion.

2.2 Transport solutions

A key factor in ensuring healthy and thriving communities is access to transport. However, poor access to transport in communities that are already experiencing complex challenges is only intensifying disadvantage. For example, in Sydney, the top 33 per cent of the Local Government Areas (LGAs) that are most-connected by transport are in East or North Sydney – meanwhile, all of the Western Sydney LGAs are in the bottom 33 per cent.²⁴ Jesuit Social Services' work in Mt Druitt affirms that access to

¹⁷ Josa, I., & Aguado, A. (2019). Infrastructure, innovation and industry as solutions for breaking inequality vicious cycles. *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science* (Vol. 297, No. 1, p. 012016) as cited in McGrath, L., Zerbib, F., & Lefebvre, M. (2022). Funding the infrastructure of tomorrow. The McKell Institute: Sydney.

¹⁸ McGrath, L., Zerbib, F., & Lefebvre, M. (2022). Op Cit. ([Weblink](#))

¹⁹ Office of the High Commissioner, United Nations. (No date). International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (article 11).

²⁰ NCOSS. (2022). After shock: Addressing the Economic and Social Costs of the Pandemic and Natural Disasters. Report Three – Housing Security. ([Weblink](#))

²¹ Department of Communities and Justice. (2022). Applying for housing assistance: Expected wait times. ([Weblink](#))

²² Badland, H., Foster, S., Bentley, R., Higgs, C., Roberts, R., Pettit, C., & Giles-Corti, B. (2017). Examining associations between area-level spatial measures of housing with selected health and wellbeing behaviours and outcomes in an urban context. *Health & place*, 43, 17-24

²³ Shelter NSW. (2023). NSW State Election: A secure home for all. ([Weblink](#)); and Homelessness NSW. (2023). Ending homelessness together. ([Weblink](#))

²⁴ Lefebvre, M., Zerbib, F. & McGrath, L. (2022). Op cit. ([Weblink](#))

public transport can make the difference between whether someone can get their children to early childhood education, make it to work or access health services.

Investment in community transport solutions and in more reliable, frequent and direct public transport is critical. Further, it is important that our transport systems are environmentally sustainable and energy efficient. Jesuit Social Services strongly supports Western Sydney Dialogue’s recommendations for the incoming NSW Government to increase bus service levels to communities in Greater Western Sydney, including school bus routes and to incentivise employer-provided shuttle services to these same communities.²⁵

2.3 Digital inclusion

Jesuit Social Services’ 2021 *Dropping Off the Edge* report showed that the overwhelming majority of communities with the least internet access were also ranked highest for overall disadvantage in NSW.²⁶ Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Jesuit Social Services witnessed the impact of digital exclusion on many of the people we work with. The impact of digital inequity and digital illiteracy are issues that demand more policy attention as online tools and platforms become increasingly central to work, education and other services.

Case Study: Michelle – Western Sydney community member

“Living on a Centrelink benefit, I’ve never been able to consider the possibility of signing up to an internet plan. I use pre-paid data when I need to access the internet for my studies, but it is really difficult. Things are particularly difficult at the moment because of COVID. I need to access all my studies online as well as my kids’ school work. I need to participate in Zoom meetings for my TAFE course and for my part-time job. I eat through my pre-paid data really quickly. I have explored signing up for a plan but Telstra won’t allow me to because of past debts. Figuring out a plan that I can afford is really confusing. I’m worried about signing up for a long-term plan when my income may not be stable.”

Jesuit Social Services plays a leadership role in [Wester’ly](#), a place-based campaign in Western Sydney that has formed around the issue of digital inclusion, especially in relation to education. Wester’ly first formed in 2020 in response to digital exclusion challenges faced by Western Sydney community members during lockdown measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19.²⁷

We urge the NSW Government to invest in subsidising affordable access to home internet, data and technology for people experiencing disadvantage to ensure no one is excluded from broader social and economic participation. A flexible, tailored response is required that takes account of different needs, such as those of people experiencing homelessness. For low-income households, the ‘No Australian Left Offline’ campaign for affordable broadband offers a potential model that would see the NBN Co offer a 50 mbps unlimited broadband service at a wholesale price of \$20 per month to households receiving government financial support.²⁸ This proposal should be strongly considered by the NSW Government.

²⁵ Western Sydney Leadership Dialogue. (2022). 2023 NSW Election Priorities. [\(Weblink\)](#)

²⁶ Tanton, R., Dare, L., Miranti, R., Vidyattama, Y., Yule, A. and McCabe, M. (2021), *Dropping Off the Edge 2021: Persistent and multilayered disadvantage in Australia*, Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne.

²⁷ According to the 2016 Census, 30 to 40 per cent of people in Mount Druitt do not have access to the internet. (Note: the 2021 Census did not collect data in relation to digital inclusion).

²⁸ ACCAN. (n.d.). No Australian Left Offline. [\(Weblink\)](#)

2.4 Food security

Research shows that people experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage are also more likely to experience food insecurity.²⁹ In the Blacktown LGA (in which Mt Druitt is located), disadvantaged areas often have fewer supermarkets and a greater number of fast food outlets.³⁰ In Willmot, Mt Druitt, the local store rarely stocks fresh fruit and vegetable, providing mostly packaged food and alcohol. Children experiencing food insecurity face an increased likelihood of missing out on school activities and facing emotional and behavioural challenges.³¹ For adults, food insecurity can lead to chronic disease, including diabetes, cardiovascular issues, depression, and interrupted social and economic participation.³²

Jesuit Social Services' Ignite Food Store in Emerton, Mount Druitt provides a vital community service. The store offers low-cost, fresh and healthy food for Mount Druitt residents. Young families are our largest group of customers, however, we also see many older adults, people experiencing homelessness, unemployed younger people, people with disabilities, and women and children escaping from family violence.



Ignite Food Store Manager, Rose, and the van ready for delivery.

Additionally, our Currawong Community Kitchens provide healthy food options to children at the Willmot Public School and Lethbridge Park Public School, as well as delivers healthy food hampers to people experiencing food insecurity in the community.³³ Many students haven't been exposed to the broad range of fresh food offered by the canteen and neither have their parents. Many families don't have the time, resources or access to food like this to cook at home.

²⁹ Seivwright, A. N., Callis, Z., & Flatau, P. (2020). Food insecurity and socioeconomic disadvantage in Australia. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 17(2), 559.

³⁰ Lawton, A. (2016). Food security in Blacktown city (blog post). *Blacktown sustainable food stories*. ([Weblink](#))

³¹ Ramsey, R.; Giskes, K.; Turrell, G.; Gallegos, D. Food insecurity among Australian children: Potential determinants, health and developmental consequences. *J. Child Health Care* 2011, 15, 401–416 as cited in Seivwright, A. N., Callis, Z., & Flatau, P. (2020). *Op Cit*.

³² *Ibid*.

³³ For further details, please see the Appendix.

“If you’re a single mum who’s working, cooking, cleaning, and caring for your children... That’s a lot to manage. If your local supermarket has next to no fresh produce but there’s a pre-made meal that’s much cheaper, you’re more likely than not going to pick up the pre-made meal. Many parents can’t just drive a car to another store. That requires having a car or being able to afford the extra petrol.” – Chandelle Mallitt, Currawong Kitchens Supervisor

Jesuit Social Services calls for increased investment in community-led, environmentally sustainable initiatives, such as the Ignite Food Store and Currawong Community Kitchens, to increase food security, particularly in areas of disadvantage. Further, we emphasise the need for longer-term solutions, including the development of a comprehensive, cross-sector strategy to support access to healthy food for all groups and areas experiencing disadvantage.³⁴

We call on the incoming NSW Government to:

Recommendation 4: Deliver 5,000 new social housing dwellings each year for the next 10 years, including supported housing for individuals with multiple and complex needs, and retrofit existing social housing that is over 10 years old with energy efficient upgrades.

Recommendation 5: Increase bus service levels to communities in Greater Western Sydney, including school bus routes and to incentivise employer-provided shuttle services to these same communities.

Recommendation 6: Subsidise affordable access to home internet, data and associated technology for low-income households.

Recommendation 7: Invest in community-led, environmentally sustainable initiatives such as Jesuit Social Services’ Ignite Food Store and Currawong Community Kitchens to strengthen access to healthy and affordable food in communities experiencing disadvantage.

³⁴ Institute for Sustainable Futures. (2022). Who is responsible for Sydney’s food security? UTS: Sydney. [\(Weblink\)](#)

3. Giving children the best start to life

All children have the right to grow up in healthy and supportive environments, connected to culture and family, and with access to education, play and an adequate standard of living.³⁵ We know that supporting children to thrive is essential to improving life outcomes.³⁶ We therefore call on the incoming Government to prioritise policies that give children in NSW the best start to life.

3.1 High-quality and affordable early learning

In order to support children's development, they must have access to quality early childhood education and care.³⁷ However, too many children in NSW continue to miss out on formal early childhood education³⁸ due to multiple and complex reasons, including a lack of cultural safety, financial stress, poor transport and mistrust of institutions. In Mount Druitt, to support children and families who struggle to access early learning, Jesuit Social Services partners with the community and a number of other organisations to facilitate Kids' Days (for children 0-5 years), and school holiday programs.

The 2021 Australian Early Development Census measured how children are faring on five key domains of early childhood development as they start their first year of school. Across NSW, 22 per cent of children were developmentally vulnerable in at least one area and 11 per cent on two or more areas.³⁹ For the communities in which Jesuit Social Services works, the comparable figures for Willmot were 63 per cent and 41 per cent, and for Emerton 36 per cent and 27 per cent – both significantly higher than the average population in NSW.⁴⁰

In response to these challenges, Jesuit Social Services is part of the *Equity in Early-Ed* advocacy group alongside United Way Australia (The Hive), The Smith Family, Connect Child and Family Services and other partners. The group formed around deep concerns in relation to the accessibility of local early learning services for families experiencing vulnerability in Mount Druitt. More specifically, up-front bonds, unaffordable daily fees, exclusion of children based on debt and shortages in appropriately qualified teachers is leading many families in the local area to miss out on vital early childhood education and care. It is crucial that any model of early childhood education and care is based on social equity, rather than commercial interests.

We therefore commend the NSW Government on their announcement of significant funding to deliver universal preschool access and to fund better outcomes across more early childhood education and care types.⁴¹ In order to deliver a high-quality, universally accessible and affordable early learning system across NSW, we support calls for the incoming Government to fund sustainable infrastructure and appropriately skilled and qualified educators.⁴² Jesuit Social Services also highlights the need to make high quality, culturally safe after-school care and vacation care available for all school-aged children.

³⁵ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

³⁶ World Health Organization. (2018). Nurturing care for early childhood development: a framework for helping children survive and thrive to transform health and human potential.

³⁷ Britto, P. R., Lye, S. J., Proulx, K., Yousafzai, A. K., Matthews, S. G., Vaivada, T., Perez-Escamilla, R., Rao, N., Ip, P., Fernald, L. C. H., MacMillan, H., Hanson, M., Wachs, T. D., Yao, H., Yoshikawa, H., Cerezo, A., Leckman, J. F., & Bhutta, Z. A. (2017). Nurturing care: promoting early childhood development. *The Lancet*, 389(10064), 91–102. ([Weblink](#))

³⁸ The Hive. (n.d.) Early learning linker. ([Weblink](#))

³⁹ AEDC. (2022). 2021 AEDC Results and Resources. ([Weblink](#))

⁴⁰ Ibid; and ABS. (2022). Mount Druitt Latest release 2021 Census All persons QuickStats ([Weblink](#))

⁴¹ Cormack, L. (2022, June 23). *NSW Labor vows to deliver pre-kindergarten sooner than state government*. The Sydney Morning Herald. ([Weblink](#))

⁴² Kolovos, B., & Rose, T. (2022, June 16). What the new year of preschool education means for parents and children. *The Guardian*. ([Weblink](#))

3.2 Targeted earlier intervention

In NSW, while most Aboriginal children are safe at home, connected to family, culture and community, Aboriginal children are almost ten times more likely to be in out-of-home care than non-Indigenous children.⁴³ The overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care must be understood in the context of colonisation, racism and dispossession, which continue to be felt by Aboriginal people and communities in New South Wales today. While Jesuit Social Services welcomes the NSW Government's recently announced child removal protections,⁴⁴ we urge the incoming Government to build on these by increasing investment in high-quality, culturally safe and targeted early interventions.

As part of the NSW Department of Communities and Justice Targeted Earlier Intervention Program,⁴⁵ Jesuit Social Services receives funding to deliver place-based, flexible support to strengthen the wellbeing of children, families and communities. As part of this, we fund school holiday programs, young women's groups, and Aboriginal cultural awareness sessions at the Willmot Public School. Aboriginal families and staff members are at the heart of this work.

As highlighted by NCOSS, recent reforms have placed a greater onus on community service organisations requiring them to expand their service delivery, to take on increasingly complex cases and implement outcomes frameworks.⁴⁶ However, a commensurate level of funding has not followed this. Jesuit Social Services support NCOSS' recommendation for the incoming NSW Government to increase investment in the Targeted Early Intervention Program by 25 per cent, prioritising Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations. Further, we advocate for the Government to implement the Family is Culture blueprint through genuine partnership and shared decision making with Aboriginal leaders, Community Controlled Organisations and communities.⁴⁷ It has now been three years since the [Family is Culture report](#) was published and key reforms that were previously agreed on, are yet to be implemented.⁴⁸

3.3 Raising the age of criminal responsibility

A small number of children experiencing vulnerability enter the criminal justice system at a very young age. We know this group is among the most vulnerable in our community and that children detained between the ages of 10 and 14 are more likely, compared to those at older ages, to have sustained and frequent contact with the criminal justice system throughout their life.⁴⁹ Child offending experts, psychologists and other health experts agree that younger children have rarely developed the social, emotional and intellectual maturity necessary for legal responsibility before the age of 14 years, and lack the capacity to properly understand their culpability.

The current age of criminal responsibility disproportionately impacts children from vulnerable backgrounds, particularly Aboriginal children who are overrepresented in the number of children under 14 years of age involved in the justice system. In line with international standards embodied in the

⁴³ Sue-Anne, H., Burton, J., Blacklaws, G., Soltysik, A., Mastroianni, A., Young, J., & Shlonsky, A. (2021). The Family Matters report 2020: Measuring trends to turn the tide on the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care in Australia.

⁴⁴ McGowan, M. (2022, November 10). New child removal protections passed but NSW minister says more can be done to end Indigenous "over representation." *The Guardian*. ([Weblink](#))

⁴⁵ Department of Communities and Justice. (2023). Targeted Earlier Intervention Program. ([Weblink](#))

⁴⁶ NCOSS. (2022). NCOSS Policy Platform 2023. ([Weblink](#))

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Torre, G. (2023, February 9). NSW inquest into death of Indigenous teenager in state care reveals failures in the system. *National Indigenous Times*. ([Weblink](#))

⁴⁹ Jesuit Social Services (2013). Thinking Outside: Alternatives to remand for children ([Weblink](#)); Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2013). Young people aged 10–14 in the youth justice system 2011–2012 ([Weblink](#))

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and enacted in many overseas jurisdictions⁵⁰, we call on the NSW Government to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14 years.

Table: Age of criminal responsibility: international comparison⁵¹

AUS	USA	FRA	SWE	NED	JPN
10	6-12	13	15	12	14

Our paper, [Raising the Age of Criminal Responsibility: There is a Better Way](#), demonstrates alternatives to incarceration that are clearly better for the children in question and for society as a whole. Funding for restorative practice, family-centred and therapeutic approaches to respond to children under 14 who come into contact with police is also required. We need responses that take account of their broader family and social circumstances, work with the child to help them to understand the impact of their behaviour and equip them with the tools to take a different path and prevent contact with the justice system. This requires governments to divert funding from youth justice systems towards community services, and child and family wellbeing services.

We call on the incoming NSW Government to:

Recommendation 8: Provide a system of high-quality, universally accessible and affordable early learning by investing in sustainable infrastructure and appropriately skilled and qualified educators.

Recommendation 9: Increase funding for the Targeted Early Intervention Program by 25 per cent, prioritising Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (as recommended by NCOSS).

Recommendation 10: implement the Family is Culture blueprint through genuine partnership and shared decision making with Aboriginal leaders, Community Controlled Organisations and communities

Recommendation 11: Raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14 years and partner with key stakeholders to develop therapeutic, restorative responses for this age group.

⁵⁰ Child Rights International Network (2016) Minimum ages of criminal responsibility around the world. ([Weblink](#))

⁵¹ Hazel, N. (2008). Cross-national comparison of youth justice. London: Youth Justice Board for England and Wales.

4. Family violence: Gender and culture

Jesuit Social Services has worked with men and boys for over 45 years. We know that too many men and boys are in trouble and causing trouble. As a society we have begun to acknowledge the significant problem of violence against women and children. The focus has been, as it should be, on supporting the victims of this violence. However, the need to do more in preventing violence and challenging gender stereotypes led Jesuit Social Services to establish [The Men's Project](#) in 2017. The Men's Project focuses on supporting boys and men to live respectful, accountable and fulfilling lives, where they are able to develop loving relationships free from violence and contribute to safe and equal communities.

The 'Man Box'

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 men aged 18 to 30. The findings shed a new light on the social pressures that young men experience to be a 'real man' and the impact this can have on their wellbeing, behaviours and the safety of our wider community.⁵² For example, the initial Man Box report found that almost half of men inside the 'Man Box' reported making sexual comments to women they didn't know in a public place in the past month. Compared with seven per cent of men who did not endorse the rigid beliefs about masculinity represented by 'The Man Box'.

A further report building on these initial findings – **Unpacking the Man Box** – found that young men's belief in rigid masculine stereotypes is a stronger indicator of 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.⁵³

We need to work towards a culture and a society where everybody can lead healthy, safe lives and hold respectful relationships – engaging with men and boys is an important part of this.

4.1 Primary prevention: Engaging men and boys to prevent violence

Acknowledging the critical need to prevent violence before it starts, Jesuit Social Services supports calls made by the NSW Women's Alliance for the NSW Government to work closely with the sector and victim/survivors to develop and implement a plan for the primary prevention of sexual, domestic, and family violence.⁵⁴ Any plan must ensure its commitments have a clear direction and are adequately funded. Further, there must be strong mechanisms for transparency and accountability. As part of this, we call on the incoming Government to invest in workforce capacity building to support people who work with boys and men to challenge harmful stereotypes and promote respect and equality.

Our **Unpacking the Man Box** workshops provide a range of participants (social workers, wellbeing staff, teachers, students, early childhood educators, faith leaders and parents) with awareness of the negative consequences associated with outdated forms of masculinity as well as tools and resources to foster healthier forms of masculinity. These sessions have also been adapted to other contexts including workplaces, early childhood education, justice and maternal and child health settings. Additionally, our

⁵² 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. ([Weblink](#)).

⁵³ 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. ([Weblink](#)).

⁵⁴ New South Wales Women's Alliance. (2022). *A Safe State for New South Wales: 2023 Election Platform*. ([Weblink](#))

Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE) program helps role models to be agents of change in their schools, clubs and communities.

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 meetups 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.

In addition to these programs, The Men's Project is currently supporting implementation of the Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships curriculum in Victoria. Too often, teachers report a need for greater knowledge, skills and confidence in order to teach topics such as gendered violence, gender norms, power and privilege. In response, through a partnership with the Victorian Department of Education, we are engaging school leadership, teachers and other staff in capacity building programs to support more effective delivery of the respectful relationships curriculum. We expect the evaluation of the work will have implications for the NSW Government. We call on the elected Government to scale up workforce capacity building approaches such as these to decrease adherence to harmful masculine stereotypes.

4.2 Preventing and responding to child sexual abuse

A collaborative, multi-agency approach is critical to intervening early and addressing the root causes of violence and other harmful behaviours. As part of this work, we are piloting **Stop it Now! Australia** to prevent child sexual abuse. Stop it Now! is a helpline for people worried about their own or someone else's inappropriate thoughts and behaviours towards children. Following an expression of interest process extended to all states and territories, Jesuit Social Services has worked with police across Queensland, Western Australia and Victoria. We are also engaging with organisations representing victim-survivors, researchers, practitioners and the private sector.

Additionally, in collaboration with the University of Melbourne, Jesuit Social Services has engaged in a research project, the **Worried about Sex and Pornography Project (WASAPP)**, for young people concerned about their sexual thoughts or behaviours. This 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 and build and trial a WASAPP online help tool. We call on the incoming Government to continue to invest in and rigorously evaluate pilot programs to engage at-risk young people with the view to developing scalable early intervention programs.

4.3 Restorative approaches to adolescent family violence

Research from the Australian Institute of Criminology has found that adolescents charged for a family violence related offence are more likely to be violent towards family members in adulthood (even relative to adolescents who had committed non-family violence offences).⁵⁵ As the study notes “identifying the minority of adolescents who engage in domestic and family violence behaviours is a worthwhile intervention target, potentially preventing a substantial proportion of adult domestic and family violence offending”.⁵⁶ However, existing legislation and family violence response systems across Australia are largely geared towards adults and do not meet the complex needs of adolescents using violence who may have also experienced violence. Responses to police call-outs, at times, result in adolescent involvement with the criminal justice, out-of-home care and homelessness systems. This risks entrenching young people and their families in cycles of disadvantage.

In response to this, Jesuit Social Services is developing and trialling new ways of working with adolescents who use family violence, including the pilot of our Victorian-based program **RESTORE** as well as **Starting Over**, an adolescent family violence program piloted in Western Sydney. These initiatives are guided by restorative practice principles, providing a restorative process, and applies a family systems, strengths-based, culturally sensitive and trauma-informed approach to working with all family members.⁵⁷ A key finding from an evaluation of Starting Over conducted by the University of Melbourne was that: “Given the positive outcomes documented, there is sufficient promise in applying a restorative family group conferencing model to address adolescent family violence to warrant ongoing government investment in additional pilot programs”. Funding for Starting Over has lapsed, which means we have had to end this program leaving adolescents, their families and our partners – schools and local community organisations – without a service to meet significant need.

To prevent young people from coming into contact with the out-of-home care, housing and justice systems, and to prevent the intergenerational impacts of family violence, we advocate for the incoming NSW Government to invest in adolescent family violence programs such as RESTORE and Starting Over.

We call on the incoming NSW Government to:

Recommendation 12: Partner with sector representatives and victim/survivors to develop and implement a plan for the primary prevention of sexual, domestic, and family violence in NSW.

Recommendation 13: Invest in scaling up workforce capacity-building training for role models working with men and boys in a range of settings such as schools, youth justice facilities, prisons and community health services to prevent the use of violence.

Recommendation 14: Scale up the Adolescent Man Box survey to inform the respectful relationships curriculum with longitudinal data on underlying attitudes related to stereotypical masculine norms and associated behaviours such as the use of violence.

Recommendation 15: Resource research and program design to better understand concerning sexual behaviours among children, and the sexual abuse of children, such as through Jesuit Social Services’ pilot project in collaboration with the University of Melbourne, the Worried About Sex and Pornography.

Recommendation 16: Commit to recurrent funding for adolescent family violence programs aligned with restorative principles, in collaboration with the Children’s Courts and Police, including Jesuit Social Services’ RESTORE and Starting Over programs.

⁵⁵ Voce, I., Boxall, H., Morgan, A., & Coughlan, M. (2020). Responding to adolescent family violence: Findings from an impact evaluation. Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice [electronic resource], (601), 1-18.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷ For further details, please see the Appendix.

5. Pathways to education, training and employment

Research shows when people are able to access and engage in education, training and employment, it positively impacts on their wellbeing, their family's wellbeing and the wellbeing of communities.⁵⁸ In supporting people to reach their full potential, including to find and retain sustainable and secure work, we must address the structural barriers to participation that many people face including tailored, flexible pathways.

5.1 Youth transitions to education, training and employment

Engaging in education or commencing work after finishing secondary school allows young people to grow their skills and abilities, and builds a socially cohesive and inclusive society.⁵⁹ Conversely, an absence of education or employment after completion of high school can lead to future unemployment, lower incomes and employment insecurity.⁶⁰

Where a young person lives impacts their vulnerability to becoming disengaged from education, training and employment after secondary schooling. In May 2020, data from AIHW showed the proportion of young people who were not in employment, education or training was more than twice as high for those living in the lowest socioeconomic areas as for those in the highest.⁶¹ This is supported by *Dropping Off the Edge 2021* findings which show that young people leaving school early and not engaging in subsequent employment or learning is common in areas with there is multilayered and complex disadvantage.⁶²

Jesuit Social Services supports Youth Action NSW's calls for the NSW Government to partner with the Federal Government to implement a Youth Job Guarantee.⁶³ This would ensure all young people are supported into secure employment, education or training that is aligned with their interests and goals, after leaving formal education or becoming unemployed. More broadly, we endorse Youth Action NSW's recommendation for the Government to develop a NSW Youth Employment Strategy accompanied by strong oversight and monitoring by a steering committee.⁶⁴ Jesuit Social Services is currently partnering with Youth Action NSW to undertake consultations with young people in Western Sydney and South-West Sydney who are experiencing barriers to education, training and employment. We look forward to sharing the findings and corresponding recommendations from this research, which could inform the development of a NSW Youth Employment Strategy.

5.2 Pre-accredited training and education opportunities

People facing barriers to employment often need assistance to upgrade their skills and their readiness for work. For example, individuals who have lost work at an older age and been unable to secure new employment; those who have left school early or arrived as refugees; who experience poor mental

⁵⁸ Cole, K., Daly, A., & Mak, A. (2009). Good for the soul: The relationship between work, wellbeing and psychological capital. *The Journal of Socio-Economics*, 38(3), 464-474.

⁵⁹ AIHW. (2021). Australia's youth: Engagement in education or employment. ([Weblink](#))

⁶⁰ de Fontenay C, Lampe B, Nugent J & Jomini P 2020. Climbing the jobs ladder slower: young people in a weak labour market: Working paper. Canberra: Productivity Commission; Pech J, McNevein A & Nelms L 2009. Young people with poor labour force attachment: a survey of concepts, data and previous research. Canberra: Australian Fair Pay Commission.

⁶¹ AIHW. (2021). Australia's youth: Engagement in education or employment. ([Weblink](#))

⁶² Tanton, R., Dare, L., Miranti, R., Vidyattama, Y., Yule, A. and McCabe, M. (2021), *Dropping Off the Edge 2021: Persistent and multilayered disadvantage in Australia*, Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne

⁶³ Littleton, E. & Campbell, R. (2022). Bearing the Brunt: Youth Employment and the Pandemic in NSW. *Youth Action: Sydney*. ([Weblink](#))

⁶⁴ Youth Action NSW. (2023). Youth Action NSW Election Platform What matters to young people in the 2023 election. ([Weblink](#))

health; or who have been involved in the justice system, may experience significant barriers to securing employment.

Through delivering our pre-accredited training in Victoria, Jesuit Social Services has been able to provide an important stepping stone into employment for people with low levels of educational attainment and for people who have been out of the workplace or education for some time. The training allows participants to gain the essential vocational and personal skills they need to make a successful transition to formal accredited training and employment.

Jesuit Social Services supports Community Colleges Australia's recommendations for the incoming NSW Government to provide a 50 per cent increase in funding for the NSW Adult and Community Education (ACE) Community Service Obligation program,⁶⁵ and to re-allocate Smart and Skilled⁶⁶ funding from private, for-profit providers to not-for-profit community providers in areas experiencing disadvantage such as Western Sydney. We note that the most effective support for people facing barriers to employment occurs through relationship-building and taking the time to understand each person's unique strengths, hopes and aspirations. Further, pre-accredited training is critical to give people the confidence and skills to transition into further education and employment. Through our experience delivering education, training and employment services,⁶⁷ we believe this support is best delivered by a not-for-profit provider.

5.3 A social procurement framework

Jesuit Social Services acknowledges the NSW Government's work to integrate social procurement with public spending decisions.⁶⁸ However, further efforts are needed from the incoming NSW Government to ensure that procurement spending meaningfully contributes social value. The size of government procurement contracts underlines the significant potential for a proportion of this spending to be better targeted to achieve greater gender equity and to drive the recruitment of people who are long-term unemployed, have low skill levels and who live in communities experiencing disadvantage.

We therefore support the Western Sydney Leadership Dialogue's calls for a bold and visionary whole-of-government Social Procurement Framework that includes ambitious targets and reporting mechanisms, and places communities' needs and priorities at the centre. The Framework must include a specific objective to create local job opportunities for people living in locations of complex disadvantage where infrastructure projects are under development. In Western Sydney, for example, we note that a number of significant infrastructure projects are underway, including the expansion of the Sydney Metro network and the development of the Western Sydney Airport. We call on the incoming NSW Government to use social procurement policies to ensure investments in projects such as these also create long-lasting and meaningful social change. The [Victorian Government's Social Procurement Framework](#) is a promising example that could be drawn upon that is resulting in significant early progress.

⁶⁵ *The NSW Adult and Community Education (ACE) Community Service Obligation program resources not-for-profit community education providers to support groups experiencing disadvantage.*

⁶⁶ NSW Government. (n.d.) The Smart and Skilled program for 2023-24. ([Weblink](#))

⁶⁷ <https://jss.org.au/what-we-do/education-training-employment/>

⁶⁸ Jenkins, S. (2020, August 11). NSW government signs deal to increase procurement from social enterprises. *The Mandarin*. ([Weblink](#))

We call on the incoming NSW Government to:

Recommendation 17: Develop a NSW Youth Employment Strategy to ensure all young people in NSW are able to engage in education and training and have opportunities to pursue further education and employment.

Recommendation 18: Partner with the Federal Government to implement a Youth Job Guarantee that would ensure all young people are supported into secure employment, education or training that is aligned with their interests and goals, within four months of leaving formal education.

Recommendation 19: Increase funding for the NSW Adult and Community Education program, and re-allocate Smart and Skilled funding from private for-profit providers to not-for-profit community providers in areas of disadvantage such as Western Sydney.

Recommendation 20: Implement a whole-of-government Social Procurement Framework that includes ambitious targets to: create employment opportunities for people experiencing disadvantage; address cultural issues related to the safety of women and other minority groups in male-dominated industries; and leverage infrastructure projects to create local jobs in local areas experiencing disadvantage.

6. Specialist post suicide support

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 17 people died by suicide each week in NSW in 2021.⁶⁹ The overall suicide rate for people living in the most disadvantaged areas was more than twice that of those living in the least disadvantaged areas.⁷⁰ Research suggests that every suicide touches approximately 135 people, including family members, friends and colleagues⁷¹ and the stark reality is that people bereaved by suicide are themselves at a higher risk of suicide.⁷² However, we know from our experience that specialist postvention support delivered by experienced practitioners reduces this risk.

Jesuit Social Services has delivered Support After Suicide, a specialist suicide bereavement counselling and group support service, throughout Melbourne and regional Victoria for almost 20 years. In 2021, Jesuit Social Services received funding from the NSW Ministry of Health through the Post-Suicide Support Service to expand Support After Suicide into New South Wales. The program provides critical supports to people after a death of a loved one to suicide through specialist counselling, group programs and online support (including for children and young people), and secondary consultation to professional education and other professional organisations working with people bereaved by suicide.⁷³

⁶⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). Causes of death, Australia. ([Weblink](#))

⁷⁰ AIHW. (2022). Suicide and Self-Harm Monitoring. ([Weblink](#))

⁷¹ State of Victoria. (2021). Royal commission into Victoria's mental health system. Final Report. ([Weblink](#))

⁷² : 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.

⁷³ For further details of our model of postvention support, please see the Appendix.

CASE STUDY: Chris's story

Chris still recalls the feeling she had when she first discovered Support After Suicide. "It was a connection with other people in the same experience to you – for the first time, I actually felt ok," she says. The year was 2005 and Chris' 21 year old son Luke had tragically taken his own life months earlier. A friend recommended Support After Suicide, and Chris was surprised that such a specialist service existed. "In the early days, we weren't capable of even looking or thinking that there would be specific support for those left behind after suicide. "We didn't think there would be any other normal, everyday person like we used to be, going through what we were going through." After attending the program's Early Bereavement Group, Chris began coming to monthly meetings and engaged in individual counselling. "It was a life saver for me as my husband and I returned to work and tried to reshape our family and our whole life in some way," she says. Chris now volunteers with the program and is able to use her family's own experiences to assist others who are bereaved. "It is very satisfying to be able to give something back to a program which has helped me so much."

Jesuit Social Services commends the NSW Government for their five-year strategic framework for suicide prevention, which identifies post suicide support as a core aspect of suicide prevention efforts.⁷⁴ However, we are concerned that the framework conflates StandBy and Support After Suicide.⁷⁵ It is critical to note that StandBy and Support After Suicide offer distinct models of care – StandBy is a crisis intervention model that provides people bereaved by suicide immediate practical support on a medium-term basis while Support After Suicide engages on a deeper, more clinically therapeutic level through specialist counselling and support groups.

As of December 2022, Jesuit Social Services no longer receives funding from the Ministry of Health to deliver Support After Suicide. Instead, this important service receives a small amount of funding from StandBy via the National Suicide Prevention Leadership and Support Program (NSPLSP), with no long-term funding certainty. This is placing people in NSW who are bereaved by suicide at risk of missing out on timely specialist supports.

We urge the incoming Government to fund comprehensive and evidence-based suicide postvention support that encompasses specialist suicide bereavement counselling, support groups and tailored assistance designed to meet the needs of people navigating a complex and distressing experience. It is critical that this support extends to people in rural, regional and remote areas of across NSW.

We call on the incoming NSW Government to:

Recommendation 21: Provide long-term funding for a comprehensive and evidence-based model of specialist suicide postvention support such as Support After Suicide. This must encompass specialist suicide bereavement counselling, support groups and tailored assistance designed to meet the needs of people navigating a complex and distressing experience.

⁷⁴ Mental Health Commission of NSW. (2022). Strategic Framework for Suicide Prevention in NSW 2022-2027. ([Weblink](#))

⁷⁵ The Framework implies that the [Post Suicide Support Initiative](#) (Standby) encompasses suicide bereavement counselling as well as peer support.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Top 40 communities experiencing disadvantage in NSW

MOST DISADVANTAGED POSTCODES IN NSW - COMPARISON WITH PREVIOUS YEARS

(Bands illustrate the severity of disadvantage experienced by a location with Band 1 being most severe. Locations listed alphabetically within bands.)

List of 40 most disadvantaged locations in NSW

BAND	SA2 NAME	POPULATION	LOCATION	IN LIST IN 2007	IN LIST IN 2015
MOST DISADVANTAGED LOCATIONS					
1	Bidwill - Hebersham - Emerton ¹	18,781	Greater Sydney	Y	Y
	Bourke - Brewarrina	3,968	Rest of NSW	Y	Y
	Coonamble	4,069	Rest of NSW		Y
	Far West ²	2,387	Rest of NSW	Y	Y
	Kempsey	15,373	Rest of NSW	Y	Y
	Nambucca Heads	6,841	Rest of NSW	Y	Y
	Port Kembla - Warrawong	10,068	Rest of NSW	Y	Y
	Tamworth - West	5,865	Rest of NSW		
	Tuncurry ³	6,352	Rest of NSW	Y	Y
	Walgett - Lightning Ridge	6,145	Rest of NSW	Y	Y
2	Beresfield - Hexham	8,416	Rest of NSW		
	Broken Hill	17,269	Rest of NSW	Y	Y
	Casino	12,528	Rest of NSW	Y	
	Condobolin	6,455	Rest of NSW		
	Lethbridge Park - Tregear ⁴	22,665	Greater Sydney	Y	Y
	Moree	8,176	Rest of NSW		Y
	Moree Region ⁵	5,435	Rest of NSW		Y
	Mount Hutton - Windale ⁶	9,192	Rest of NSW	Y	Y
3	Taree	20,909	Rest of NSW	Y	Y
	Berkeley - Lake Heights - Cringila ⁷	14,803	Rest of NSW	Y	Y
	Cessnock	23,875	Rest of NSW		
	Gilgandra	4,390	Rest of NSW		Y
	Grafton	19,019	Rest of NSW		
	Inverell	11,865	Rest of NSW	Y	Y
	Inverell Region - East ⁸	5,208	Rest of NSW	Y	Y
	Mount Druitt - Whalan	23,748	Greater Sydney	Y	Y
	Tweed Heads South	8,444	Rest of NSW	Y	
	Wellington	9,413	Rest of NSW	Y	
	Wingham	5,471	Rest of NSW		
	Cowra	9,280	Rest of NSW		
	Glen Innes	8,873	Rest of NSW		
	Lavington	15,208	Rest of NSW		
	Muswellbrook	12,364	Rest of NSW		
	Narrabri	7,340	Rest of NSW		
	Narrandera	6,048	Rest of NSW		
	Narromine	6,533	Rest of NSW		
	Raymond Terrace	13,995	Rest of NSW		
	Tenterfield ⁹	6,470	Rest of NSW	Y	Y
	Windang - Primbee ¹⁰	4,346	Rest of NSW	Y	Y

¹ Part of Postcode 2770 – Mt Druitt in 2015 report

² Part of the 2836 and 2840 postcodes in 2015 and the 2879 postcode in 2007

³ Part of postcode 2428 – Forster postcode in 2015 report

⁴ Part of postcode 2770 – Mt Druitt in 2015 report

⁵ Part of postcode 2400 – Moree in 2015 report

⁶ Part of postcode 2306 – Windale in 2007 and 2015 reports

⁷ Part of postcode 2502 – Warrawong in 2007 and 2015

⁸ Part of postcode 2360 - Inverell

⁹ Part of postcode 2469 – Northern Rivers MSC in 2015 report

¹⁰ Part of postcode 2502 – Warrawong in 2007 and 2015 reports

¹¹ Note that as outlined in Chapter 2, this is an index of disadvantage. None of our indicators measure advantage, like high income or high occupation. Therefore it cannot be said that an area of low disadvantage is high advantage.

Appendix 2: Jesuit Social Services' Currawong Community Kitchens

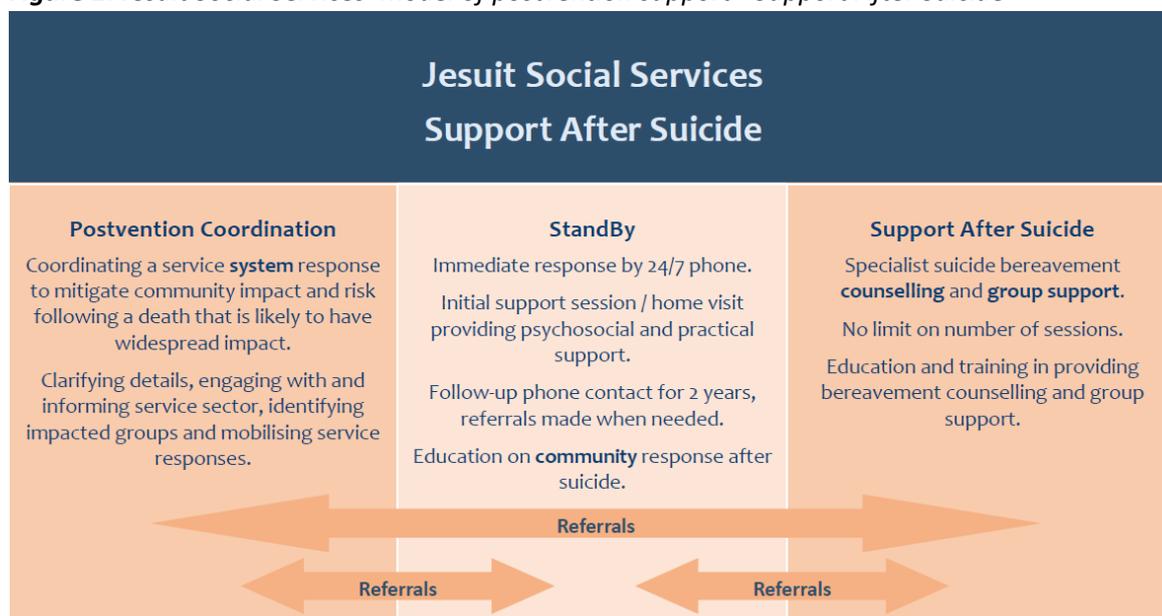
Our Currawong Community Kitchens are different to a typical canteen. We are passionate about inspiring children to be curious about what they eat and encourage them to try a variety of healthy food. Additionally, ecological justice underpins our approach; we have a composting system, grow our own veggies, implement strategies to avoid food waste, and recycle wherever possible. Our food is largely sourced from organisations like Oz Harvest that fight food waste through food rescue work.

Appendix 3: Jesuit Social Services' model of postvention: Support After Suicide

Jesuit Social Services offers people bereaved by suicide a multifaceted approach to healing and recovery. We have developed a model of support based on *Our Way of Working* practice framework, which underpins all the work we do with individuals and communities (for further details, please see the Appendix). Critically, the Support After Suicide postvention model was developed based on research and consideration of best practice counselling approaches to reduce the suicide risk and improve the mental health and wellbeing of people bereaved by suicide. The development of the program has been informed by those with lived experience; a thriving volunteer peer support has ensured that new activities and resources are developed by people with lived experience of suicide bereavement.

Jesuit Social Services' model of suicide bereavement support encompasses three postvention support programs. Implementing these three components of postvention support is providing a unique opportunity to develop a coordinated response. From a systemic perspective, working collectively and strategically to provide a response is reducing the risk of fragmentation, siloing of services and duplication.

Figure 2: Jesuit Social Services' model of postvention support - Support After Suicide



The three postvention programs are:

- Postvention Coordination.** This program involves coordinating a service system response after a suicide with the aim of mitigating community impact and reducing the risk of suicide following a death that is likely to have widespread impact. More specifically, it involves, clarifying the details of who is involved and what has occurred, then engaging with and informing the service sector. It also involves identifying any impacted groups, particularly young people and mobilising service responses.

Postvention coordination is governed by a documented protocol that guides communication, privacy and confidentiality. The agencies and organisations that may be engaged in this service system response include mental health services, headspace, headspace BeYou, local councils, education department, Support After Suicide and StandBy.

This program is operating in southern Melbourne (City of Greater Dandenong, City of Casey, Shire of Cardinia) and Frankston Mornington Peninsula and will soon be set up across Gippsland.

- **StandBy** provides an immediate response with a 24/7 phone line. An initial support session / home visit is provided which offers psychosocial and practical support. Follow-up phone contact is made at specific intervals for 2 years and if any needs are identified, referrals to appropriate services and organisations are made, including to counselling and group support with Support After Suicide. Education to community on how to respond after a suicide is also provided. This program is operating across Victoria; the areas covered by Jesuit Social Services are metropolitan Melbourne and Gippsland.
- **Support After Suicide** which offers specialist suicide bereavement counselling and group support. In this program there is no limit on the number of sessions. The program also provides education and training in how to provide bereavement counselling and group support. Support After Suicide provides services to north western Melbourne, south eastern Melbourne, Gippsland and Western Victoria.

Referrals are made between each of the three programs, for example, StandBy and Support After Suicide regularly refer individuals and families to the other program. Support After Suicide may notify the Postvention Coordinator of a death by suicide that may need a service system response.