

MEDIA RELEASE – DECEMBER 22, 2023

**Early intervention critical in addressing drivers of youth crime:
Jesuit Social Services**

New data published by the Crime Statistics Agency, showing that the number of crimes committed in Victoria by children aged 10 to 17 has increased by more than 30 per cent over the past year, is an important reminder that more intensive intervention services are needed to address the drivers of crime says Jesuit Social Services.

“These new statistics demonstrate that we must do more to prevent children from getting into trouble, and a reminder that we need significant investment from Government into properly resourced early interventions programs to keep children connected with school and family and steer them towards positive pathways,” says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

“It is important to note that while there is understandable concern around increasing crime statistics, this data shows us that serious offending is largely confined to a relatively small group of repeat offenders. New approaches are needed to work with these young people, but we must not lose sight of the fact that youth crime has been trending downwards for a number of years, so we need to stay the course with what has been working in preventing anti-social behaviour and giving children the best chance to lead healthy, positive lives.”

Ms Edwards says that children who have contact with the state’s youth detention system are among its most marginalised.

“The most recent Annual Report of the Youth Parole Board shows that more than half of all children in custody have been subject to a current or previous child protection order, that 64 per cent have been victims of abuse, trauma or neglect, that close to half have experienced family violence and that one in four children have a diagnosed cognitive difficulty,” she says.

“These children need support to address the underlying issues behind their behaviour, and they have been failed by a variety of systems before having contact with the justice system. We must look at the evidence of what works in terms of keeping children on the right track, preventing crime and keeping children away from the harms of the detention system. Overall, we know there is some positive progress being made with the youth offending rate on a downward trend in Victoria over recent years.”

Jesuit Social Services recently welcomed the appointment of an Independent Review Board to support the Victorian Government’s commitment to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 12, and to 14 by 2027.

“We’ve long advocated for the age of criminal responsibility to be raised to 14 with no exceptions in every state and territory, in line with international human rights standards and expert medical evidence regarding children’s brain development and decision-making capacity. Victoria’s process of



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designing an alternative support model for 10 to 12-year old children will help to ensure our response to children who would have previously had contact with the youth justice system is evidence-based, age appropriate and focused on welfare and rehabilitation,” says Ms Edwards.

“As this new data reminds us, we must ensure that our approach towards children causing trouble is focused on working with children and their families to help them work towards better futures.”

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