



**Jesuit**  
**Social Services**  
Building a Just Society

# Federal Pre-budget Submission 2025-26

January 2025

# Contents

Jesuit Social Services: Who we are and what we do .....	3
Introduction.....	4
Summary of Recommendations .....	5
Elevating the rights and wellbeing of children as a Cabinet priority .....	7
Safe and respectful youth justice systems.....	9
Place-based approaches to build thriving and resilient communities.....	11
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination.....	13
Pathways to education, training and employment.....	15
Engaging men and boys to prevent violence against women and children.....	17
Ensuring fundamental supports for children and young people with complex needs.....	22



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

Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation working to build a just society where all people can live to their full potential. For 48 years we have been working with some of the most disadvantaged and marginalised members of our communities, who often experience multiple and complex challenges. We work where the need is greatest and where we have the capacity, experience and skills to make the most difference. Our work has a national focus and we deliver services across Victoria, New South Wales (NSW) and the Northern Territory (NT).

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

Jesuit Social Services' programs and advocacy focus on:

- **Justice and crime prevention** – supporting people involved with the justice system.
- **Education, training and employment** – supporting people facing barriers to education and sustainable employment.

- **Mental health and wellbeing** – working with people with multiple and complex needs including mental ill-health, trauma, homelessness and bereavement.
- **Gender Justice** – providing leadership on the reduction of violence and other harmful behaviours prevalent among boys and men, and developing new approaches to improve their wellbeing and keep families and communities safe.
- **Settlement and community building** – supporting recently arrived immigrants, people seeking asylum and refugees, and communities experiencing disadvantage.
- **Climate Justice** – enabling communities, community organisations and governments to build local climate resilience and adaptive capacity.
- **Place-based approaches** – partnering with communities to undertake research, advocacy and practice that address locational disadvantage in place.

We work with people across the life course and age spectrum. This includes many programs which work therapeutically with children and young people who have experienced harm or trauma. We view and treat these young people holistically, as people deserving of support and belonging. We also work with adults and communities experiencing complex and chronic disadvantage, many of whom have been impacted by the widespread and intergenerational impacts of systems that fail to protect children's rights, meet their needs and foster their potential.

# Introduction

Children’s wellbeing is central to the wellbeing of our society. They represent our shared future across every domain that matters, from economic prosperity and public health to social cohesion and the sustainability of our planet. An investment in children’s future is an investment in the future of all Australians.

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the Australian Government’s elevated focus on these critical domains of wellbeing through the *Measuring What Matters Framework*, which moves beyond the blunt instruments of gross domestic product and employment as measures of the country’s wellbeing. The Framework recognises that children and young people who are protected from harm, and supported to participate in education, work and social activities, are more likely to live safe and healthy lives, and to contribute positively to their communities as they grow older.

Yet we know that too many children in Australia are overlooked – or, worse, harmed – by the adults and systems meant to protect them. This often results in trauma that has a serious impact on the child and can manifest in behaviours that negatively impact their families and communities – sometimes immediately, sometimes across decades and generations. We see this play out through issues such as the significant rise in mental ill-health among young people in Australia<sup>1</sup>, and the significant proportion of children in the justice system who have also had contact with the child protection system and been exposed to family violence (see page 7–9 for further information).

Further, as government action on climate change falls short of community expectations<sup>2</sup>, the projected rise in the frequency and severity of extreme weather events<sup>3</sup> will continue to impact young people’s educational, financial, housing and mental health outcomes. Already, 1.4 million children and young people experience a climate disaster in an average year in Australia, with those in remote areas, from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and First Nations children more likely to be impacted.<sup>4</sup>

While it is understandable that cost of living pressures dominate our national conversation,

we must look more deeply at the root causes of social and economic disadvantage in our communities. When we examine the most pressing issues facing Australian communities – including mental ill-health, perpetration of family violence and child sexual abuse, disengagement from education and employment, substance abuse, and crime – we often discover a child (who may now be an adult) who experienced adult- and system-perpetrated harm early in their life, and is held back by locational and/or intergenerational disadvantage.

Government spending, and the structure of our service and education systems, often don’t reflect an understanding of, or adequate response to, childhood trauma and children’s experiences of poverty. For example, in NSW, three decades of economic growth has not solved child poverty, which now costs the state’s economy \$60 billion annually.<sup>5</sup> This insight highlights that economic growth alone is insufficient for improving the circumstances of Australia’s 761,000 children living in poverty.<sup>6</sup> Targeted investment in their growth and wellbeing is essential.

Children and young people whose behaviours are the manifestation of trauma are seen as ‘troubled’ or ‘trouble’. Our systems too often fail to ask what led to the behaviour in the first place, missing crucial opportunities to prevent trauma from occurring the first place.

By addressing these underlying problems through prevention and early intervention, we can transform individual lives, break cycles of disadvantage and abuse, and create lasting social and economic benefits for all Australians. This cycle-breaking approach, which lies at the heart of Jesuit Social Services’ work, reduces the need for costly crisis and tertiary services, while building stronger, more resilient communities.

This submission, provided in advance of the 2025–26 Federal Budget, highlights opportunities for Government to target spending and policy-making, prioritising research, strategies and programs that support children, young people and their families to live safe and healthy lives.

<sup>1</sup> Rising by almost 50 per cent over 15 years to 2022. Source: National Mental Health Commission (2023): *National Report Card 2023*. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>2</sup> Morison et al. (2024). *Climate of the nation 2024: Tracking Australia’s attitudes towards climate change and energy*. The Australia Institute. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>3</sup> Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) & Bureau of Meteorology (2024). *State of the climate 2024*. CSIRO. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>4</sup> UNICEF Australia & Deloitte Access Economics (2024). *The impact of disasters on children and young people*. UNICEF Australia. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>5</sup> Impact Economics and Policy. (2024). *Lasting impacts: The economic costs of child poverty in New South Wales*. Report prepared for NCOSS. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>6</sup> Davidson et al. (2022). *Poverty in Australia 2022: A snapshot*. Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) and UNSW Sydney. ([Weblink](#))

# Summary of Recommendations

## Recommendation 1

- Appoint a Cabinet Minister for Children with responsibility for the human rights and wellbeing of children in Australia.

## Recommendation 2

- Implement in full, and resource through Commonwealth Government spending, the recommendations of the National Children's Commissioner's 2024 report 'Help way earlier! – transforming child justice', including driving a national approach to child criminal justice reform that provides flexibility for place-based and local solutions. This should entail:
  - funding the establishment of a National Taskforce for reform, and a Ministerial Council for Child Wellbeing to be chaired by a federal Minister for Children
  - implementing evidence-based solutions with appropriate resourcing to ensure their success, including Youth Justice Group Conferencing
  - building in robust mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation, reporting and transparency.

## Recommendation 3

- Fund further research to build the knowledge base regarding locational disadvantage, such as the research undertaken in Jesuit Social Service's Dropping off the Edge report, that can inform decision-making and program delivery, including through the Investment Dialogue for Australia's Children (IDAC) and Partnerships for Local Action and Community Empowerment (PLACE). This should include research to develop indicators of community strength (to function alongside indicators of disadvantage), a framework for understanding the readiness of a community for a place-based approach and a suite of evidence-based strategies that can be flexibly applied to specific community contexts.

## Recommendation 4

- Expand the Disaster Ready Fund with increased investment, and a dedicated stream for the community sector to strengthen disaster resilience in vulnerable communities.

## Recommendation 5

- Establish a First Nations Self-determination and Strengthening Fund for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs). The fund should enable smaller or emerging ACCOs in areas and communities that experience acute and chronic disadvantage to secure funding and engage a trusted and more established organisation of their choosing (ACCO or mainstream) to work in partnership, strengthening their capacity to design, lead, deliver and govern services and programs that meet the needs of communities.

## Recommendation 6

- Ensure an ongoing commitment to long-term funding for community-led Justice Reinvestment sites, as part of the National Justice Reinvestment Program. This should include adequate resourcing and time to strengthen community readiness to engage with and lead the programs.

## Recommendation 7

- Establish a stewardship model led by the Commonwealth, in partnership with state and territory governments, to effectively support increased access to employment for people who encounter significant barriers to employment.

## Recommendation 8

- Building on data collected as part of Jesuit Social Services' '[Man Box 2024](#)' research as well as our work with the UNSW to understand [child sexual abuse perpetration](#), invest in the collection of more and better data on the extent of perpetration of family violence and child sexual abuse, as well as its dynamics and drivers. This research should explore risk and protective factors across different population groups, places and settings, with the aim of informing targeted prevention strategies and early intervention efforts to prevent men's violence against women and children.

## Recommendation 9

- Greater investment in targeted early intervention programs enabled by outcomes-based funding for adolescents who are at risk of using violence, including those who are victims of violence and those who have used violence in the home.

## Recommendation 10

- Investment in trials of innovative programs that focus on the strengths and resilience of women and children and enable recovery and healing for children who are victim-survivors of family violence, such as the CEDAR model established in Canada and adapted and delivered across Scotland.

## Recommendation 11

- Legislate requirements for technology companies to ensure children's safety online, including requirements to prevent and disrupt child sexual abuse on their platforms, and to enforce age limits on pornography websites (noting the [age assurance trials](#) currently underway to determine the effectiveness of available technologies).

## Recommendation 12

- Through the Second National Action Plan to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse, provide additional funding for the development and implementation of:
  - online interventions that prevent child sexual abuse, including pop-up warnings in online spaces that may enable child abuse perpetration or victimisation e.g. pornography, gaming or dating sites
  - early intervention services for people (including children and young people) concerned about their use of pornography and/or sexual thoughts and behaviours towards children (such as Jesuit Social Services' Worried About Sex and Pornography Project and Stop it Now!).

## Recommendation 13

- Increase funding to state and territory governments for targeted, specialised and holistic programs of housing and support for people whose multiple and complex needs are not met through social housing systems and support programs.

## Recommendation 14

- Increase funding for Settlement Engagement and Transition Support program (SETS) and expand eligibility to include people who have arrived on humanitarian visas and become Australian citizens, so that SETS providers can provide the intensive support required to achieve positive long-term settlement outcomes.

## Recommendation 15

- Ensure National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) reforms provide for the system to reset to ensure equitable outcomes for all participants, including through:
  - inclusion of equity and access for marginalised cohorts in the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) Terms of Reference, and
  - a review of NDIA processes through an equity lens – in particular the inclusion of equity considerations into the development of the new planning and needs assessment process.

# Elevating the rights and wellbeing of children as a Cabinet priority

Across Australia, service systems that are meant to support the rights and wellbeing of children are failing the most vulnerable. This was a key finding of the 2024 National Children's Commissioner's (NCC) report '[Help way earlier! – How Australia can transform child justice to improve safety and wellbeing](#)'.<sup>7</sup> It pointed to issues such as fragmentation and lack of coordination across basic health, education and social services, as well as youth justice systems – meaning children fall between gaps in portfolios and jurisdictions.

Concerningly, state and territory governments are acting in flagrant violation of Australia's obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which is rightfully drawing international criticism<sup>8</sup>. The Human Rights Watch World Report 2025 highlights a number of alarming features of Australia's youth justice system, including high rates of incarceration among First Nations children, the use of solitary confinement, reinstated use of spithoods in the NT, the detainment of children in watchhouses and adult justice facilities and the age of criminal responsibility being as low as 10 in some states and territories.<sup>9</sup>

Jesuit Social Services reiterates calls from the NCC and other advocates<sup>10, 11</sup> for a federal Minister for Children. That is, the creation of a dedicated role within Cabinet that would provide leadership, oversight and have accountability across a range of portfolios and systems that have the potential to prevent childhood trauma and/or respond effectively to it. This would include, but not be limited to, issues addressed within this submission, such as:

- children in the criminal justice system
- child sexual abuse prevention
- children who require support for disabilities, including through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

- healing and recovery for children and young people who are victim-survivors of violence, and who in some cases may also be at risk of perpetrating violence (including opportunities for earlier intervention), and
- the unique issues faced by children from migrant or refugee backgrounds settling in Australia.

Jesuit Social Services sees firsthand how these challenges intersect and compound to entrench disadvantage. For young people aged 15–24 who participate in our programs addressing complex needs<sup>12</sup>, 61% experience four or more of the following: unemployment, disengagement from school, disability, family violence, justice system involvement, insecure housing, mental ill-health and/or alcohol and drug misuse (and these factors are likely underreported for a range of reasons). For adults aged 25 and over who participate in our complex needs programs, these risk factors are consistently higher among those who experienced family violence as children and/or had child protection involvement, compared to those who did not. Further, our 25-year study on place-based complex disadvantage, *Dropping of the Edge*<sup>13</sup>, underscores the interconnected and intergenerational nature of these issues, highlighting the need for holistic approaches to policy-making and service delivery.

A focus on children within Cabinet would also provide an opportunity to consider other critical issues from the perspective of their disproportionate impact on children and young people – including poverty; inequality and cost of living; the housing crisis; climate change. It could ensure holistic oversight of laws, policies, systems and services so they are properly integrated to prevent any child from falling through the cracks.

<sup>7</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission (2024). *Help way earlier! How Australia can transform child justice to improve safety and wellbeing*. Australian Human Rights Commission. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>8</sup> Australian Lawyers for Human Rights (@AusLawyersHR). (2024, December 4). *ALHR is alarmed by the QLD Govt's archaic Making #Children Safer Bill. These measures flagrantly violate the #CRC & UN...* [Video attached] [Post on X]. X. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>9</sup> Human Rights Watch (2025). *World Report 2025* p39. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>10</sup> Batty, R. & Fitz-Gibbon, K. (2024). *The case for a federal minister for children*. The Saturday Paper, June 29. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>11</sup> Australian Childhood Foundation. (n.d.) We need a federal minister for children. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>12</sup> Jesuit Social Services' complex needs programs includes [Connexions](#), [Navigator](#), [Individual Support Program](#) and youth justice programs.

<sup>13</sup> Tanton et al. (2021). *Dropping Off the Edge 2021: Persistent and multilayered disadvantage in Australia*. Jesuit Social Services. ([Weblink](#))

It is well understood that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are disproportionately and uniquely impacted by intersecting injustices and systemic failures. For example, across Australian jurisdictions in 2022–23, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were between two and thirteen times more likely to be subjects of child protection orders, and between two and sixteen times more likely to be in out-of-home care, compared to non-Aboriginal children.<sup>14</sup> On an average day in 2022–23, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were about 28 times as likely as their non-Indigenous counterparts to be in detention on an average day.<sup>15</sup>

Decades of interventions by western systems of government and non-First Nations organisations have proven ineffective and, in turn, eroded trust in government among Aboriginal communities. As such, it is critical that the impacts of repeated failures to protect Aboriginal children and young people are addressed as a priority. This needs to occur in a way that is First Nations-led, culturally appropriate and safe.

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the establishment of the National Commission for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People and calls for the provision of adequate resources and infrastructure to support its critical role.

#### **Recommendation 1:**

- Appoint a Cabinet Minister for Children with responsibility for the human rights and wellbeing of children in Australia.

<sup>14</sup> Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision. (2024). *Report on Government Services 2024 Community services (part F)*. Productivity Commission. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>15</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2024). *Youth justice in Australia 2022–23*. ([Weblink](#))

## Safe and respectful youth justice systems

In her most recent report, National Children's Commissioner Anne Hollonds called the treatment of children in the criminal justice system 'one of the most urgent human rights issues facing Australia today.'<sup>16</sup> Having worked alongside children and advocated for their rights for decades, Jesuit Social Services concurs with this assessment.

While responsibility for youth justice sits with state and territory governments, the ongoing failures of these systems cannot be ignored by the Commonwealth – national leadership is now critical.

Instances of cruel and degrading treatment in the youth justice system continue to be recorded on a range of fronts by a raft of reviews and inquiries across jurisdictions. This includes the use of spithoods, isolation, solitary confinement and policies that mean children as young as 10 and 11 can still be held criminally responsible and placed in custody across most jurisdictions. This is despite Australia having ratified international agreements that obligate the Government to ensure children's rights are upheld, and international pressure on Australia to do better.<sup>17</sup>

Aboriginal children continue to bear the brunt of failed systems, resulting in their ongoing over-representation in the justice system. For instance, the Office of the Children's Commissioner in the NT recently found that 94% of children aged 10 to 13 held in NT youth detention in 2022/23 identified as Aboriginal. Moreover, every child involved in the Commissioner's audit had significant ongoing contact with child protection services and more than 90% had been exposed to domestic and/or family violence. In Victoria, 64% of Aboriginal children and young people subject to Victorian youth justice supervision have also had child

protection involvement.<sup>18</sup> For this cohort, states and territories effectively serve as children's guardian, then go on to be their jailer.

Evidence is clear that the younger a child is at the time of first contact with the justice system, the more likely they are to reoffend and ultimately become entrenched in the system.<sup>19</sup> In other words, jailing is failing.

Evidence about what does work is available. For example, the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) analysed 61 reports and inquiries produced over approximately a decade, including over 3,000 recommendations, on the child protection and justice systems.<sup>20</sup> The AIFS study sets out numerous evidence-based recommendations for change relating to: information sharing and coordination; First Nations self-determination; oversight and transparency mechanisms; workforce capacity; levels of investment; and child voice and participation.

There are international examples of promising reform. In Aotearoa New Zealand, Toi Hau Tāngata, the Social Wellbeing Agency, found over three-quarters of youth crime was being committed by 10% of young people who experience the most hardship and disadvantage. From a young age these individuals were subject to repeated referrals to government agencies for serious concerns.<sup>21</sup> This research informed policy responses, including a rapid, integrated diversionary program, resulting in 82% of referred young people not reoffending.<sup>22</sup>

Through our own work, we know alternative justice solutions should be pursued to support children on a path that keeps them, their families and their communities safe.

<sup>16</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission (2024). *Help way earlier!: How Australia can transform child justice to improve safety and wellbeing*. Australian Human Rights Commission. Pp 4. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>17</sup> Human Rights Law Centre. (2021, July 8). *Australia rejects UN call to raise the age of criminal responsibility*. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>18</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2022). *Young People under Youth Justice Supervision and Their Interaction with the Child Protection System 2020–2021*. Pp 79–80 ([Weblink](#))

<sup>19</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission (2024). *Help way earlier!: How Australia can transform child justice to improve safety and wellbeing*. Australian Human Rights Commission. Pp. 21–22. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>20</sup> Stevens, E. & Gahan, L. (2024). *Improving the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable children: A consolidation of systemic recommendations and evidence*. Australian Institute of Family Studies. Pp. 4. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>21</sup> Toi Hau Tāngata. (2023) *Social Wellbeing Agency, Wellbeing of children and young people who offend*. Te Atatū – Insights. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>22</sup> Mana Mokopuna – Children and Young People's Commissioner. *Ram raid bill will place children in the pipeline to prison*. Media release, 25 October 2023. ([Weblink](#))

## Restorative Youth Justice Group Conferencing

Restorative practice is a holistic process that recognises the relational impacts of offending. It is grounded in community and promotes the rights of the victim-survivor, the child who has caused harm, and their families and communities. Beyond youth justice orders, restorative practice has also been used as part of diversion programs in Victoria and within schools to address conflict.

Jesuit Social Services runs restorative Youth Justice Group Conferencing with children and young people in Victoria and the NT, and we see first-hand its significant positive outcomes.

An evaluation of the NT Group Conferencing program in 2019 found that 78% of those harmed by the young person were satisfied with the process overall, and 85% were satisfied with the young person's plan to prevent further criminal behaviour. Among young people who had caused harm, 83% had improved engagement in education and employment, and 76% reported improved connection to social supports, both of which are factors that protect against future offending.

*"It was like a wake-up call for me that I had to change, I needed to stop doing bad stuff and concentrate on my future."* – Billy, Youth Justice Group Conference program participant.<sup>23</sup>

The NCC report identifies our federated system of government as a barrier to reform – coupled with siloing and fragmentation of portfolios and responsibilities between and across government departments.<sup>24</sup> To overcome this, we need a national approach that will not only uphold children's rights but drive states and territories to move towards more effective youth justice solutions.<sup>25</sup>

A national approach to youth justice must be transformative – that is, it must not be benchmarked against current practices in any Australian jurisdiction, as none is good enough. It should provide for nationally consistent standards and coordination, whilst enabling flexible, place-based approaches that empower communities to take an active role in identifying issues, developing solutions and implementing interventions and responses, as per recommendations 5 and 6.

### Recommendation 2:

Implement in full, and resource through Commonwealth Government spending, the recommendations of the National Children's Commissioner's 2024 report 'Help way earlier! – transforming child justice', including driving a national approach to child criminal justice reform that provides flexibility for place-based and local solutions. This should entail:

- funding the establishment of a National Taskforce for reform, and a Ministerial Council for Child Wellbeing to be chaired by a federal Minister for Children
- implementing evidence-based solutions with appropriate resourcing to ensure their success, including Youth Justice Group Conferencing
- building in robust mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation, reporting and transparency.

<sup>23</sup> Name changed to protect Billy's identity. Read the full story on our website ([Weblink](#))

<sup>24</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission (2024). *Help way earlier!: How Australia can transform child justice to improve safety and wellbeing*. Australian Human Rights Commission. Pp. 101–103. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>25</sup> National leadership on adult justice is also required, to address the systemic and intersecting issues that drive people to come into contact with the system. Jesuit Social Services is a key provider of justice programs in Victoria; our participants have consistent experience of having fallen through the cracks of systems for which the Commonwealth Government is responsible, including housing, income security, disability and social support. System failures not only underpin many of our participants' journeys to incarceration but also hinder their successful reintegration post-release.

## Place-based approaches to build thriving and resilient communities

Every Australian should have access to the opportunities in life that will enable them to flourish – to complete their education, to get a job, to access secure and affordable housing, to raise their children in safe communities and to see the next generation thrive. Yet persistent and entrenched locational disadvantage is holding some back. To address this, we must look towards place-based solutions.

Jesuit Social Services' [Dropping off the Edge 2021](#) (DOTE), the fifth in a series of reports, clearly shows that complex and entrenched disadvantage is concentrated in a small but persistent number of locations in each state and territory across Australia. For example, 13% of locations in NSW accounted for 55% of the most disadvantaged positions across all indicators that were analysed – including social distress (low income, digital exclusion and overcrowding), health, community safety, economic wellbeing, education, lifetime disadvantage and environmental factors.

Climate change poses a serious and increasing threat to all young people, with extreme weather and disaster events already impacting their economic, health, and social prospects.<sup>26</sup> Children and young people who are exposed to climate disasters are 4.2% less likely to complete high school, up to 4.5% more likely to experience symptoms of psychological distress and 2.9% more likely to experience short-term homelessness or temporary displacement than those who are not exposed to these events. Recent research has found that for every 1°C rise above average daily mean temperature, emergency department visits across NSW by young people for suicidal thoughts and behaviour increased by 1.3%.<sup>27</sup>

Governments must uphold their responsibility to safeguard children's futures through meaningful climate action (including a just transition away from fossil fuels<sup>28</sup>), while also investing in place-based, child-centred adaptation strategies.<sup>29</sup> This is especially critical for young people experiencing locational disadvantage, who will continue to be disproportionately impacted by climate change and extreme weather.

In line with the cross-cutting dimensions of the Measuring What Matters framework, Government spending on place-based work should be targeted to prioritise the communities that need it most. The findings from DOTE can be used to guide decision making, tailor program delivery and inform interventions, as well as to provide a baseline upon which to measure change.

We acknowledge the Government's significant efforts to address entrenched disadvantage through the Targeting Entrenched Disadvantage package, the Investment Dialogue for Australia's Children (IDAC), Partnerships for Local Action and Community Empowerment (PLACE) and the Outcomes Fund. Jesuit Social Services' Centre for Just Places was proud to be an enabling partner in developing the concept for the Nexus Centre, which led to the establishment of PLACE. As part of this package, we encourage a focus on the design, implementation and evaluation of evidence-based interventions that work to break cycles of disadvantage and poverty where it is most deeply entrenched. Communities should also be involved in setting the research agenda, as they have inherent strengths that can be harnessed, and a deep understanding of the systemic challenges that perpetuate disadvantage.

<sup>26</sup> OHCHR (2015). *Understanding Human Rights and Climate Change*. Submission of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to the 21st Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>27</sup> Dey et al. (2024). *Youth suicidality risk relative to ambient temperature and heatwaves across climate zones: A time series analysis of emergency department presentations in New South Wales, Australia*. Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>28</sup> Jesuit Social Services (2019, September). *Just Transitions* (Discussion paper). ([Weblink](#))

<sup>29</sup> Treichel, P. (2020). *Why focus on children: A literature review of child-centred climate change adaptation approaches*. Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience. ([Weblink](#))

## Together in Willmot

Together in Willmot is a place-based, collective impact initiative that brings residents, services, business and local government together to ensure children aged 0–5 in the Willmot, NSW area have the best possible start to life. The shared goal of this initiative has been identified in partnership with the local community. It acknowledges that the first five years of a child's life are crucial and for a child to start life well, the ecosystem around them (family, community and systems) needs to be functioning effectively.

Together in Willmot involves a core group of services, including Jesuit Social Services, as well as Willmot community members. This collaboration supports events and activities including community breakfasts, Kids Days, NAIDOC events, music festivals, community forums and school holiday programs. Partners have also advocated for, and supported, upgrades to local infrastructure, including digital infrastructure to help overcome digital exclusion and strengthen children's access to education.<sup>30</sup>

## Climate Partnerships: Service Organisations Collaborating to Strengthen Community Resilience Project

Funded through the Commonwealth Government's Disaster Ready Fund, Jesuit Social Services is undertaking a three-year project that supports community legal centres to collaborate with local community service organisations to reduce climate vulnerability and strengthen place-based resilience in the Victorian communities of Yarra Ranges and Campaspe.

The project will support place-based, cross-sector coalitions in each region to design and

implement a 'Collaborative Action Plan', which will articulate a shared vision and guide for strategic action on disaster and climate resilience in their communities.

The project commenced in 2023 and is delivered through a partnership between Jesuit Social Services, ARC Justice, Eastern Community Legal Centre and the Federation of Community Legal Centres.

*"This [project] is the first time that...somebody has suggested this type of approach of collaborative learning and planning. I'm grateful for that because otherwise there isn't any other current forum that I know of where this happens."*  
– Climate Partnerships workshop participant.

## Recommendations 3 and 4:

- Fund further research to build the knowledge base regarding locational disadvantage, such as the research undertaken in Jesuit Social Service's Dropping off the Edge report, that can inform decision-making and program delivery, including through IDAC and PLACE. This should include research to develop indicators of community strength (to function alongside indicators of disadvantage), a framework for understanding the readiness of a community for a place-based approach and a suite of evidence-based strategies that can be flexibly applied to specific community contexts.

- Expand the Disaster Ready Fund with increased investment, and a dedicated stream for the community sector to strengthen disaster resilience in vulnerable communities.

<sup>30</sup> See 'Westerly' Digital Inclusion for Western Sydney ([Weblink](#))

# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination

Many children across Australia facing disadvantage and exclusion have been let down for a long time – yet none more so than Aboriginal children. The rates of poverty experienced by Aboriginal children and their families, particularly in remote areas of the NT, provide a current and shocking example. Recent research shows that 50–75% of Aboriginal households in remote areas of the NT live below the poverty line<sup>31</sup>. Between 2016 and 2021, while First Nations poverty rates decreased marginally across most of Australia, the NT saw an increase.<sup>32</sup>

Successive government budgets have failed to raise the Remote Area Allowance, which is not indexed and was last increased 24 years ago. This is despite the cost of living in remote areas increasing, estimated at 138.8% of the cost of living in capital cities.<sup>33</sup> As a result, Aboriginal children in these areas often lack access to the basics – affordable healthy food, education and health services, and a safe and secure home with reliable energy. Their experiences starkly contrast with the wellbeing standards outlined in the Measuring What Matters framework.

Undoubtedly, these circumstances – and similarly disproportionate experiences of poverty among Aboriginal children across the country – stem directly from colonisation and governments’ failures to address its impacts. As acknowledged by the Victorian Government in its submission to the Yoorrook Justice Commission, the historical “dispossession, criminalisation and dehumanisation of First Peoples, the removal of their children, and the denial of Law, Lore and culture, created the conditions for the intergenerational trauma and social and economic inequality experienced today”.<sup>34</sup>

Solutions lie in funding for First Nations-led initiatives that promote self-determination, empower Aboriginal people to make decisions for their own communities and enable Aboriginal

Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to run services and programs tailored to Aboriginal children and families. This is consistent with Closing the Gap Priority Reform two: *There is a strong and sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector delivering high-quality services to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the country.*

Evidence clearly shows self-determined approaches are more effective. For example, the Yoorrook Justice Commission reported that First Peoples children have a family reunification rate of 83% when case-managed by ACCOs, compared to 64% under state department management.<sup>35</sup> Yet many ACCOs remain underfunded, or in other cases face challenges as they step up their growth, limiting their ability to provide culturally safe and responsive family support and child protection services.<sup>36</sup>

The National Justice Reinvestment Program represents a positive step forward. Justice Reinvestment aims to achieve generational change by addressing deep-rooted, entrenched disadvantage and systemic causes of offending through community-led, place-based initiatives. In April 2024, the K Town Justice Group in the NT received funding through this program to deliver a Justice Reinvestment project through a consortium made up of Savanna Solutions (a local Aboriginal organisation), Jesuit Social Services and Flinders University. This partnership builds on Jesuit Social Services’ history of working respectfully alongside Aboriginal communities and ACCOs in the Northern Territory since 2007. When invited, we accompany these communities and organisations and help to strengthen their capacity to deliver programs independently and, ultimately, without our involvement.

<sup>31</sup> Markham, F. (2023). Submission to the Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs’ Inquiry into the extent and nature of poverty in Australia. Pp 5. (Download the submission via [aph.gov.au](http://aph.gov.au), [weblink](#))

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p7.

<sup>33</sup> Markham, F. (2024) *The poor pay more: Why the Remote Area Allowance needs urgent attention*. Australian National University Tax and Transfer Policy Institute. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>34</sup> State of Victoria (2023). *Response to Issues Paper 1: Call for Submissions on Systemic Injustice in the Criminal Justice System*. Pp. 46. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>35</sup> State of Victoria (2023). *Response to Issues Paper 2: Call for Submissions on Systemic Injustice in the Child Protection System*. Pp. 24. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>36</sup> Liddle et al. (2024). *Family Matters: report 2024*. ([Weblink](#))

## Atyenhenge Atherre Aboriginal Corporation (AAAC)

In 2008, the Eastern and Central Arrernte people invited Jesuit Social Services to participate in a workshop that explored ways to strengthen the community's control over its own affairs and to uplift social and economic wellbeing. This came after pre-existing community-led initiatives were dismantled through changes in government policy, including the NT Emergency Response and the NT Government's move to a Shire structure of local government. Following the workshop, Jesuit Social Services continued working with the community and other invited organisations to scope local needs, priorities and pathways forward.

Critically, through this work, the Atyenhenge Atherre Aboriginal Corporation (AAAC) was established in Ltyentye Apurte in 2010, with

membership in line with traditional Eastern and Central Arrernte family groupings, represented by an elected group of directors. The AAAC's purpose is to determine service delivery models that are most suitable for their community, and to realise the community's vision for a resilient, self-reliant future for the Ltyentye Apurte people.

Jesuit Social Services provided mentorship to the AAAC across its earliest years of operation, with a focus on strengthening governance, partnerships, advocacy, research and the development of in-language resources. Jesuit Social Services was invited to have a seat on the board of AAAC and this has continued to the present time. AAAC has operated effectively for more than a decade, and Jesuit Social Services remains strongly connected, continuing to assist the organisation when requested.

### Recommendations 5 and 6:

- Establish a First Nations Self-determination and Strengthening Fund for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs). The fund should enable smaller or emerging ACCOs in areas and communities that experience acute and chronic disadvantage to secure funding and engage a trusted and more established organisation of their choosing (ACCO or mainstream) to work in partnership, strengthening their capacity to design, lead, deliver and govern services and programs that meet the needs of communities.
- Ensure an ongoing commitment to long-term funding for community-led Justice Reinvestment sites, as part of the National Justice Reinvestment Program.

# Pathways to education, training and employment

Young people's ability to engage in education, training and employment is crucial – not only for their development, but for building a socially cohesive society<sup>37</sup> where people can access well-paid, secure jobs. The Measuring What Matters Framework acknowledges the importance of employment opportunities and secure work as key contributors to wellbeing.

Yet many young people in Australia face significant barriers to accessing these pathways, and government spending to address this is lagging. Firstly, the low rate of income support for job seekers is depriving people of essential material needs.<sup>38</sup> The Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee 2024 report indicated that an increase would improve jobseekers' capacity to search for and accept employment.<sup>39</sup> This would enable people to maintain a dignified standard of living, cover the cost of their basic needs and focus on securing employment and/or engaging in education and training. Jesuit Social Services supports the Australian Council of Social Service's call for income support to be raised to \$82 a day with routine indexation of Youth Allowance and Austudy payments occurring every six months in line with the Age Pension.

While employment can provide a pathway out of poverty, poverty can also present a substantial obstacle to education, training and work opportunities. Many individuals in Australia face significant disruptions in their training and employment journeys because of individual, organisational and structural barriers. Factors like unequal access to transport, digital exclusion, experiences of disaster events and housing instability can impede a young person's ability to attend training, to secure a job, and to keep it – regardless of how dedicated they may be. For example, a recent report on digital equity and education found that students in Western Sydney and regional NSW face a significant disadvantage, with less access to devices, broadband, and technical support compared to their Sydney

counterparts. This is believed to impact students' learning outcomes, as well as future educational opportunities and employment prospects.<sup>40</sup>

Such challenges often persist across generations and become entrenched within disadvantaged locations. Research from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare found that young people in the lowest socioeconomic areas were more than twice as likely to be disconnected from education, training or employment compared to their peers in more advantaged areas. Young people are also the hardest hit by economic downturns. Young people accounted for 55% of job losses during the 2021 COVID-19 lockdowns, despite comprising only 14% of the workforce.<sup>42</sup>

An early intervention approach can support the development of skills required to avoid the lasting consequences of unemployment and disengagement from education, and can mitigate the compounding effects of disadvantage. It can also foster greater economic participation, improve social outcomes and help build a more resilient and inclusive workforce for future generations.

As the Government undertakes reform of employment services nationally, we support the call from ACOSS for this reform to be large-scale, with adequate resources provided to address and prevent prolonged unemployment and entrenched disadvantage.<sup>43</sup> This should include support for young people facing complex challenges, including social and emotional support as well as support with education and training (both accredited and pre-accredited). The reformed system should also encompass and facilitate transition between foundational skill-building, training and tertiary studies.

Many young people who want to work or need more hours of work are not eligible for Commonwealth employment services. A more effective system is required to support Australians facing medium and complex barriers to employment who are ineligible for income support.

<sup>37</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2021). *Australia's youth: Engagement in education or employment*. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>38</sup> Australian Council of Social Service & UNSW Sydney (2024). *Material deprivation in Australia: the essentials of life*. Pp. 11. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>39</sup> Department of Social Services (2024). *Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee 2024 Report to Government*. Pp. 50. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>40</sup> Dastyari et al. (2024). *Digital Equity and Education: a NSW Case Study*. Whitlam Institute and Centre for Western Sydney. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>41</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2021). *Australia's youth: Engagement in education or employment*. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>42</sup> Littleton, E. & Campbell, R. (2022). *Youth unemployment and the pandemic*. *The Australian Institute*. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>43</sup> Stainsby, J. & Davidson, P. (2004). *Faces of Unemployment 2024*. Australian Council of Social Service. ([Weblink](#))

As recommended in Jesuit Social Services' response to the Inquiry into Workforce Australia Employment Services<sup>44</sup>, employment services should be designed to maximise participation and opportunities for meaningful employment; and to support employers to be more inclusive of young people. Some states have developed tailored models to effectively address long-term unemployment. In Victoria, for example, the suite of programs under Jobs Victoria has proven to be a successful model.

Critically, the design and implementation of the new employment services for people experiencing complex barriers to employment should be a shared responsibility between the Commonwealth and states and territories. Such a model could deliver flexible programs in partnership with communities that respond to local needs. This model would be the mechanism to align national and regional priorities and funding while enabling state and territory governments to assume primary

responsibility for the delivery of tailored state, regional and local solutions in partnership with their local communities.

The rebuild of the Commonwealth Employment Services System should address historical structural barriers to participation, including complex and overlapping factors prevalent in areas of high disadvantage. A new model would enable an agile response to emerging labour market challenges, promote innovation and better enable collaboration and coordination with other welfare services.

In Jesuit Social Services' response to the Inquiry into Workforce Australia Employment Services<sup>45</sup>, we propose a well-designed and implemented Commonwealth Social Procurement Framework as a strategic instrument to address social policy objectives. The Social Procurement Framework would help to unlock social and economic opportunities within communities, including for priority cohorts such as young people.

### Accredited training pathways

Jesuit Community College works with participants who are highly disadvantaged, often facing multiple and complex challenges. Trainers' skills are complemented by their capacity to recognise people's strengths and the barriers they face, which enables the provision of holistic forms of support.

Sue, an experienced trainer from the College, delivered a Certificate in General Education course in regional Victoria in 2024. The course qualifies individuals with basic functional knowledge and skills to undertake work and further learning. Of the 15 people who commenced the course, 12 graduated – a completion rate of 80%. This exceeded the College's typical foundational skills course completion rate of 75% and far exceeds the federal average of 32%.<sup>46</sup>

This outcome indicates that the College's holistic approach works to keep students engaged for the full course duration.

There are examples that indicate a broader effectiveness of our approach, which works to address intergenerational disadvantage and motivate further engagement with educational, professional and personal development opportunities. For instance, a young First Nations graduate said she got so much out of the course she had convinced her mother to do the next one. She is now undertaking a Certificate III in Community Services, which will eventually lead her to her dream job working in AOD support. Another young man who had struggled with alcoholism had a dream of becoming a butcher. On completing the course, he was able to secure five interviews for casual work in a butcher shop. During the course, he also stopped drinking, discussed his alcoholism with his doctor and began attending counselling sessions.

Sue commented on the significant challenges faced by each participant but commented that "the collective impact the course had is profound".

### Recommendation 7:

- Establish a stewardship model led by the Commonwealth, in partnership with state and territory governments, to effectively support increased access to employment for people who encounter significant barriers to employment.

<sup>44</sup> Jesuit Social Services (2024). *Response to the Inquiry into Workforce Australia Employment Services Report*. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>45</sup> Jesuit Social Services (2024). *Response to the Inquiry into Workforce Australia Employment Services Report*. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>46</sup> As reported by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) ([Weblink](#))

# Engaging men and boys to prevent violence against women and children

## Preventing violence

The prevalence of violence against women and children in Australia has been rightly acknowledged as a national crisis that is persisting across generations. Jesuit Social Services welcomes the Commonwealth Government's \$4.7 billion package to prevent violence and support critical legal services, and the \$3.5 million investment in initiatives to promote healthy, respectful relationships among school-aged boys. With that said, more needs to be done.

Despite growing attention and some increased government spending on this issue, we still know

very little about the prevalence of different forms of violence, who is committing it and how it can be prevented.

Launched in 2018, Jesuit Social Services' Man Box research was the first comprehensive study that focused on attitudes to manhood and the behaviours of young Australian men. The findings shed new light on the social pressures that young Australian men experience to be a "real man", and the impact this can have on their wellbeing, behaviours and the safety of our wider community. A further Man Box study in 2024 built upon this and included an examination of the prevalence of sexual and physical violence among Australian men.

### The Man Box 2024

Our [Man Box 2024](#) study, undertaken in partnership with Respect Victoria, explored the association between adherence to traditional masculine norms ('Man Box rules') and men's attitudes and behaviours. The research measured the pressure felt by male participants aged 18–45 to conform to rules related to self-sufficiency, acting tough, physical attractiveness, rigid gender roles, homophobia and transphobia, aggression and control, and hypersexuality. It also asked participants about their personal beliefs about these 'rules', as well as a series of questions about their use of violence and their personal wellbeing.

In the study, 3,500 survey respondents were asked whether they had ever committed any of eight forms of sexual or physical violence against a current or former intimate partner (for example, kicking, dragging or beating up). Almost a third of men (28%) reported that they had perpetrated at least one of the eight forms.<sup>47</sup> These results are likely to be under-reported due to the response options being 'yes', 'no' and 'prefer not to say'.

Further, the men who most strongly agreed with the Man Box rules were 17 times more likely to have hit their partner.

The shockingly high figures provided above signal the need for much more research into the dynamics of perpetration of gender-based violence, including pathways into perpetration and factors related to the person, relationship, family, community, place and systems. We welcome the Commonwealth Government's funding support of research into [the perpetration of domestic, sexual and family violence](#) – beginning in NSW with the aim of building a national profile.

Jesuit Social Services also affirms the need for governments to build on Australia's current

approaches to prevention, increase spending to keep pace with inflation and consider whether effort and needs to be adapted or refined.

In our [paper](#) published in light of the Commonwealth Government's rapid review of evidence-based approaches to prevent gender-based violence, we support a focus on primary prevention but urge the government to target spending on early intervention opportunities informed by more in-depth research and data.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> The Men's Project & Flood, M. 2024. *The Man Box 2024: Re-examining what it means to be a man in Australia*. Jesuit Social Services. Pp. 60–65. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>48</sup> Jesuit Social Services (2024). *Perspectives on prevention of gender-based violence: Identifying and disrupting pathways to violence*. Jesuit Social Services. ([Weblink](#))

While not every child who experiences violence will go on to perpetrate it, those who use violence have often been victims of it themselves during their childhood. An analysis of Jesuit Social Services' staff case notes from 2023–24 show that at least 74% of participants in our adult justice programs and at least 53% of participants in our youth justice programs reported being a victim-survivor of family violence<sup>49</sup>, with the vast majority of the reported experience occurring during childhood. While some participants are in contact with the justice system for reasons other than using violence, the significant overlap of these issues indicates an opportunity to better target early intervention efforts.

Therein lies an opportunity to engage earlier with men and boys to disrupt intergenerational cycles of violence and set young people on a path to living safer, more secure lives.

## CEDAR (Children Experiencing Domestic Abuse Recovery)

[CEDAR](#) supports children and young people aged 4–16 and their mothers in a group work program to heal and recover from domestic abuse by focusing on strengthening the mother-child bond and understanding the abuse through the children's eyes. Organisations work in partnership to deliver the program alongside CEDAR coordinators, who upskill and role-model trauma-informed and relationship-based family violence recovery work. This practice then becomes sustainable within the partner organisation, with trained facilitators feeling more knowledgeable and capable in conversations with families around recovery from family violence.

### Recommendations 8–10:

- Building on data collected as part of Jesuit Social Services' 'Man Box 2024' research, as well as our work with the UNSW to understand [child sexual abuse perpetration](#), invest in the collection of more and better data on the extent of perpetration of family violence and child sexual abuse, as well as its dynamics and drivers. This research should explore risk and protective factors across different population groups, places and settings, with the aim of informing targeted prevention strategies and early intervention efforts to prevent men's violence against women and children.
- Greater investment in targeted early intervention programs enabled by outcomes-based funding for adolescents who are at risk of using violence, including those who are victims of violence and those who have used violence in the home.
- Investment in trials of innovative programs that focus on the strengths and resilience of women and children and enable recovery and healing for children who are victim-survivors of family violence, such as the CEDAR model established in Canada and adapted and delivered across Scotland.

<sup>49</sup> These rates are likely to be underreported.

## Child Sexual Abuse Prevention

Jesuit Social Services' research into the prevalence of child sexual abuse in Australia, conducted in partnership with the University of NSW, is the first of its kind. It finds that one in five men in Australia report having sexual feelings towards children and/or having committed child sexual abuse offences.<sup>50</sup> Tackling this issue is vital if we are to genuinely protect the wellbeing of children and enable them to live safely in their homes and communities.

Our research has established a foundation for exploring the relationship between child sexual abuse offending and other experiences and behaviours. While victimisation in childhood is by no means deterministic of future offending, our findings reveal correlations between traumatic life experiences, "Man Box" attitudes, and harmful or concerning behaviours. This provides directions for further research as well as targeted prevention and intervention programs. Specifically:

- Yet to be published elements of The Man Box research found a relationship between strong adherence to 'Man Box rules' and attitudes that are supportive of child sexual offending.
- Our child sexual abuse perpetration prevalence study found<sup>51</sup> that:
  - one in five Australian men have sexual feeling towards children and/or have committed child sexual abuse offences, including 6.7% of men who have accessed child sexual abuse material during their lifetime
  - men with sexual feelings towards children who have sexually offended against children are four times more likely to have experienced domestic violence during childhood; six times more likely to have experienced sexual abuse during childhood; much more active on social media; over 11 times more likely to watch violent pornography; and over 26 times more likely to watch bestiality content, compared to men with no sexual feelings or offending against children

- the majority of Australian men who have viewed child sexual abuse material began such behaviour when they were children
- men who report sexual feelings towards children but who have not yet offended were, on average, younger than men with sexual feelings who had offended, which illustrates an opportunity to intervene prior to offending occurring.

These research findings indicate key opportunities to prevent and disrupt child sexual abuse, which is particularly critical given only a small number of offenders are ever arrested or charged.<sup>52</sup>

Jesuit Social Services has begun actioning the research insights through the development of programs which we highlight on page 20. However, these insights should be further harnessed and built upon with government support to target prevention and early intervention programs across key settings and cohorts.

Online platforms in particular offer an opportunity to disrupt and deter offending on a large scale. Technology platforms and providers are well-positioned to play a role in this, but some may not do so unless mandated. The Commonwealth Government should take steps to make technology companies responsible for preventing child sexual abuse on their platforms. Further, in parallel with the recently announced social media ban for children under 16, the Government should require technology companies to enforce age limits on pornographic content.

<sup>50</sup> Salter et al. (2023). *Identifying and understanding child sexual offending behaviours and attitudes among Australian men*. Jesuit Social Services & University of New South Wales. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Seto, M. C. (2008). *Pedophilia and sexual offending against children*. American Psychological Association (APA). ([Weblink](#))

## Stop It Now!

Jesuit Social Services' Stop It Now! is a child sexual abuse prevention program for adults concerned about their own or someone else's sexual thoughts or behaviours towards children. A service based on the Stop It Now! model in the UK was highlighted as part of the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse in September 2021 to address a gap in preventative interventions for potential perpetrators.

The key features of the service are an anonymous helpline, chat service, and online resources. The helpline is staffed by highly skilled practitioners

and provides an anonymous space for people to talk about their concerns and get the help needed to prevent child sexual abuse. We work closely with professionals and victim-survivors of child sexual abuse to ensure their knowledge and voices help shape the service and the response.

An evaluation of Stop It Now! by the University of Melbourne and has found that the program is having its intended effect. People concerned about themselves or others, as well as practitioners, reported planning and executing actions which are associated with reduced risk and increased protective factors in relation to child sexual abuse perpetration.

## Worried About Sex and Pornography Project

The Worried About Sex and Pornography Project (WASAPP) commenced in 2019, arising from Jesuit Social Services' advocacy for Stop It Now!. We are currently undertaking an action research project in collaboration with the University of Melbourne to develop knowledge regarding harmful sexual behaviour prevention. This knowledge will inform the development and pilot of an online early intervention service for children and young people at risk of engaging in harmful sexual behaviours.

WASAPP aims to synthesise current evidence and generate new evidence about intervening early in problematic or harmful sexual behaviour, and to apply that evidence to the codesign of an online early intervention service for children and young people worried about their sexual behaviours.

This project responds to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2017), which identified a gap in secondary prevention services in Australia that work with children and young people who are worried about their sexual thoughts or behaviours.

## reThink' chatbot trial<sup>53</sup>

Over the past two years, the UK-based child protection charity Lucy Faithfull Foundation has partnered with the Internet Watch Foundation and Aylo (the parent company of Pornhub UK) to trial a first-of-its-kind chatbot and warning message aiming to reduce the number of online searches that may be indicative of intent to find sexual images of children.

An evaluation by the University of Tasmania found there was a decrease in the number of searches for sexual images of children on Pornhub in the UK during the time the chatbot was deployed. The vast majority of users (82%) whose searches

triggered the warning and chatbot did not appear to search again for sexual images of children.

The trial involved use of a 'reThink chatbot' which engages in conversation with users attempting to search on Pornhub for these images. Alongside a static warning page, the chatbot tells users these images are illegal and signposts them to Stop It Now! where they receive help and support to stop their behaviour. Hundreds of people also clicked through to the Stop It Now! website or called the helpline during the trial. The chatbot resulted in 1,656 requests for more information about Stop It Now! services, 490 click-throughs to the Stop It Now! website, and approximately 68 calls and chats to the Stop It Now! helpline.

<sup>53</sup> University of Tasmania. *Pioneering chatbot reduces searches for child sexual abuse material*. Media release, 4 March 2024. ([Weblink](#))

### Recommendation 11:

- Legislate requirements for technology companies to ensure children's safety online, including requirements to prevent and disrupt child sexual abuse on their platforms, and to enforce age limits on pornography websites (noting the [age assurance trials](#) currently underway to determine the effectiveness of available technologies).

### Recommendation 12:

- Through the Second National Action Plan to prevent and respond to child sexual abuse, provide additional funding for the development and implementation of:
  - online interventions that prevent child sexual abuse, including pop-up warnings in online spaces that may enable child abuse perpetration or victimisation e.g. pornography, gaming or dating sites
  - early intervention services for people (including children and young people) concerned about their use of pornography and/or sexual thoughts and behaviours towards children (such as Jesuit Social Services' Worried About Sex and Pornography Project and Stop it Now!).

# Ensuring fundamental supports for children and young people with complex needs

There are fundamentals that all people need to thrive: safe and secure housing, access to supportive services (including for disability), and social and economic opportunities. Yet some children and young people struggle to access these critical foundations.

Young people settling in Australia experience particularly complex challenges. Many arrive with experiences of trauma, conflict and displacement, creating additional barriers to establishing stable lives. Through our programs, we've witnessed how insecure and unsuitable housing can compound settlement challenges for entire families, disrupting

employment and education pathways and increasing risks of social isolation and justice system contact. For example, the cohort we work with in our youth justice programs are predominantly from migrant and refugee backgrounds, in single parent families, who have had very limited settlement support provided. This is deeply concerning, particularly given Australia's obligation to uphold the rights of all children, including non-citizens. Conversely, holistic settlement support can be transformative and create intergenerational opportunities that deliver rewards for the whole community.

## Settlement Engagement and Transition Support Program

Anita is 16 years old, and she arrived in Australia on a humanitarian visa alongside her mother and two younger brothers. Anita picked up English quickly upon arrival and, despite disruptions to her education, performed well in school. She also carried a lot of responsibility within her family. Anita provided support to her mother, who had complex physical and mental health challenges arising from pre-arrival trauma, which prevented her from learning English, finding work and, on some days, leaving the home.

Anita was worried about her family's unstable housing situation and whether it would mean she and her brothers would have to change schools.

Anita was referred to Jesuit Social Services' Settlement Engagement and Transition Support program (SETS), who were able to provide holistic support for Anita and her family. The program

provided intensive support for Anita's mum to navigate the housing and health systems. With these supports in place, Anita's mum was eventually able to go to English classes, reconnect with her sewing hobby and become more involved in her children's activities, like driving her sons to soccer.

Extra support for her mum meant Anita had more time to focus on her own goals. Her support worker helped her to identify her strengths and what was important to her, plan for VCE and understand her options for further education. They also liaised with the school to identify extra supports available and sought help for Anita to understand her role as a young carer and connect with others in similar situations.

Jesuit Social Services wants to continue supporting Anita and her family so that they can reach their full potential, but limitations on eligibility for SETS support puts this support at risk.

More broadly, strategic government spending can dramatically transform young people’s trajectories and put them on a path to addressing many of the other issues discussed in this submission. For instance, targeted housing and support programs can help to address interconnected challenges like mental health, substance use and potential justice system involvement, by enabling young people to maintain their tenancy and consistently engage with local services. Without stable housing, it is difficult for young people and the services that support them to make progress in these other areas.

For people with disability, the housing crisis is having a particularly concerning impact. Innovative, alternative models of housing and support are needed for people whose complex needs include disability support, to promote their independence and stability, and reduce costly longer-term service interactions. Yet, the current categories of NDIS supported housing inhibit such innovation and do not meet the needs of all Scheme participants.

Further, there is growing concern that NDIS reforms and reassessment of individual plans will result

in people being wrongly moved off the Scheme,<sup>54</sup> particularly children<sup>55</sup>, while many people with complex needs who’ve struggled to access the system to date will continue to be disadvantaged.

The reformed NDIS should make support pathways clearer for people with complex needs, and provide equitable access for those who haven’t been adequately supported by the existing system. Further, pricing of NDIS supports must allow for quality service provision, and the NDIS Commission must be resourced to take action against unethical providers that exploit vulnerable scheme participants for financial gain, and compromise the Scheme’s financial sustainability.

More funding is needed to ensure all young people, including those from newly arrived backgrounds and those with complex needs, have access to safe and secure housing, alongside services that support their overall health, wellbeing and community connection. Without these foundations, we risk missing critical opportunities for early intervention and positive settlement outcomes.

### Recommendations 13–15:

- Increase funding to state and territory governments for targeted, specialised and holistic programs of housing and support for people whose multiple and complex needs are not met through social housing systems and support programs.
- Increase funding for Settlement Engagement and Transition Support program (SETS) and expand eligibility to include people who have arrived on humanitarian visas and become Australian citizens, so that SETS providers can provide the intensive support required to achieve positive long-term settlement outcomes.
- Ensure that the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) reforms provide for the system to reset to ensure equitable outcomes for all participants, including through:
  - inclusion of equity and access for marginalised cohorts in the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) Terms of Reference, and
  - a review of NDIA processes through an equity lens – in particular the inclusion of equity considerations into the development of the new planning and needs assessment process.

<sup>54</sup> Morton, R. (2024). Exclusive: NDIS crackdown wrongly withdraws support. The Saturday Paper. ([Weblink](#))

<sup>55</sup> Morton, R. (2025). Exclusive: Children targeted in NDIS crackdown. The Saturday Paper. ([Weblink](#))