



RESEARCH, POLICY AND ADVOCACY UNIT

SUBMISSION

Senate Inquiry

Australia's Immigration Detention Network

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Introduction

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Inquiry into Australia's Immigration Detention Network.

This submission contains a brief description of Jesuit Social Services, who we are, and what we do, feedback from our staff at the front line of the detention network as well our work with newly processed visa holders and the success of our programs in helping young people to avoid further penetration of the justice system.

Jesuit Social Services has the mandate and the responsibility to contribute to the discourse about Australia's detention network based on our 35 years of experience in the field of dealing with young people, relationships with thousands of people in the justice system many of whom have backgrounds as refugees and asylum seekers.

Jesuit Social Service staff report a general level of frustration arising from the length of time taken to process refugees and the uncertainty of visa status. This frustration continues to build towards anger. In this environment, added to the availability of alcohol, hostile behaviour and in some cases bullying in houses has occurred. This presents challenges with regard to implementing appropriate consequences to the perpetrator. It must be made clear that while alcohol contributes to the problem, the rising levels of frustration due to processing times and the lack of meaningful activity are the underlying issues that unless rectified would most likely lead to such behaviour regardless of the presence of alcohol.

Experiences from our staff to date are drawn from work we have done in Community Detention, however, we strongly believe that meaningful activity for those in Immigration Detention Centres, who are waiting to be processed, is critical within all parts of the detention network.

What we do

Our work in dealing with newly arrived immigrants and particularly newly processed refugees has demonstrated that the long periods without meaningful activities and social dislocation mean that the transition to being a productive and fully participating member of the community is made markedly more difficult. Because we now know that the large majority of those in Community Detention will be granted Australian Visas it makes sense financially, notwithstanding the moral imperative, to run such programs as the one described below as this will reap great benefit to the individuals involved but also to the community in the short and longer term.

Earlier this year Jesuit Social Services entered into partnership with MacKillop Family Services and Catholic Care to provide residential care and case management support to young people in Community Detention in Geelong and the North West Metropolitan region awaiting assessment of their refugee status.

As we were developing the residential care and case management partnership with MacKillop Family Services and Catholic Care, we developed a separate proposal for a skills and recreation program to be offered through Jesuit Community College to older unaccompanied minors in Community Detention – those aged 16-17 who may not settle well into school – in the regions in which the partnership would be working.

Jesuit Community College is a Registered Training Organisation offering nationally recognised qualifications in general education for adults, volunteering, visual arts and contemporary craft and creative industries, as well as short courses and pre-vocational programs, to prepare people for further learning, work or more meaningful engagement in their community.

In April 2011 Jesuit Social Services were invited by the Red Cross and the Council for Immigration Services and Status Resolution (CISSR) to join an advisory group working on development of a Meaningful Activity Framework for people in Community Detention.

Meaningful Activity in Community Detention and Immigration Detention Centres – ‘Older’ minors

We are particularly concerned about ‘older’ minors in Community Detention – those aged 16-18 years who would struggle to succeed in the school system. It is critical that they feel welcome and equipped to be part of their new communities.

Our experience in the field has demonstrated the importance of providing an environment that is conducive to learning as well as an approach that fits with the learners’ needs. Jesuit Social Services’ staff at the front line have noted the importance of ‘older’ minors being treated differently to the very young. For instance, in a mainstream setting it would not be appropriate for English language classes for the older teens to be conducted that include younger children of primary school age. In order for these classes to be effective and meaningful in the Community Detention space these same standards should be applied and made accessible. Just as there are capacity and developmental differences between adults and teenagers, so too, are there differences between ‘older’ and ‘younger’ minors.

Jesuit Social Services believes that people in Community Detention need to have a range of tailored recreation, cultural and skills development programs to help them develop positive social connections and solid foundation skills for life, learning and work that will enhance their life options in Australia, or in their country of origin should they have to return.

In order to function more productively once leaving Community Detention, we believe that access to meaningful and purposeful activity needs to be built around four key steps to social and economic inclusion. They are:

- **Connection** – developing trust, engaging with others, seeking assistance
- **Participation** – social connections and networks, empowerment, active involvement in community
- **Learning** – education and training, personal development
- **Earning** – pathways to employment

Drawing on the experience and networks of Jesuit Social Services, Jesuit Refugee Service and the extended Jesuit community, we believe such a program for people in Community Detention would encompass:

- structured recreation and cultural activities, including gender specific activities, that provide opportunities for social learning and development of positive social connections
- themed programs to develop English language and vocational ‘skill sets’ that could be mapped to nationally recognised training on settlement, or that would be useful if the person returns to their country of origin
- an understanding of cultural diversity in Australia and development of cross-cultural communication skills
- highly supported structured learning programs to develop oral language and literacy skills in English
- opportunities for creative expression through art and music
- opportunities to interact with the broader community through involvement in local community activities
- introduction to the education system, job seeking and career planning in Australia
- direct pathways into and through foundation level training at Jesuit Community College and on to vocationally specific higher level training with other training organisations – TAFE and private providers – that offer solid prospects for employment.

Jesuit Social Services argues that such programs are critical in order to ensure optimum outcomes for these people. To reiterate the earlier statement, Jesuit Social Services strongly believes that meaningful activity for people in all parts of the detention network is critical, not just Community Detention.