

Jesuit Social Services Response to Corrections Victoria statement

Jesuit Social Services' report *All alone: Young adults in the Victorian prison system* was informed by our 40-plus years of experience working directly with people involved in the prison system, the lived experiences of our participants and desktop research including the use of isolation in international jurisdictions.

The lack of transparency around this issue is a key focus of our report and we have made recommendations to improve this, such as that the Victorian Government require all prison operators to record data on the use of isolation and restraints in Victorian prisons and that this data be made public.

Corrections Victoria notes that 'fewer than two per cent of male prisoners' are in long-term management placements of over 30 days. Two per cent of the current male prisoner population amounts to roughly 145 people. This is not an insignificant number and our report raises concerns about the vulnerability of the young adult group within this cohort.

Further, these figures don't include prisoners in management of less than 30 days, which should not be overlooked.

We recognize that balancing safety and obligations as well as managing disruptive/violent behaviour within the prison system is complex and challenging. We understand that the use of isolation is necessary in some rare scenarios and that the safety of both staff and prisoners within the prison system is paramount.

However punitive isolation should never be permitted as an option for behaviour management of young adult prisoners.

Our research and the experiences of our participants inform our position that responding to challenging behaviour within the prison system with punitive responses, such as subjecting someone to isolation, can be counter-productive. The prison system should be focused on rehabilitation and ensuring people have the best chance to get their lives back on track when they exit.

In our report we state our belief that isolation should only be permissible in rare cases where immediately safety to persons is a concern and that the use of isolation should never exceed 14 consecutive days.

We also recommend the establishment of an Independent Custodial Inspectorate that is responsible for overseeing prisoners in Victoria and reports directly to Parliament. The Victorian government should also legislate to ensure any isolation is subject to daily review by an independent mental health professional. In line with existing guidelines, any person placed in isolation must be told the reason for this, and should also be told the expected duration.

Our report shares the stories of program participants to give the public an insight into the use of isolation in practice. Our hope is that it can be the genesis for greater transparency and accountability within the system.