

### Lucas' story

Lucas had a complicated family life growing up. His older brothers, who he looked up to, had been in trouble with the police. That sort of behaviour was normal for Lucas – he saw it as a rite of passage. He left school and moved out of home when he was 13 years old.

Lucas wanted to get a job but didn't know where to start, and found it hard to ask for help even though he desperately needed it.

At 17, Lucas was arrested for breaking into a home and stealing an iPad. He participated in Group Conferencing and sat opposite the family he had stolen from. Lucas was deeply confronted by the reality of his actions, and returned the iPad along with a letter of apology to the family – but more than that, he committed there and then to turn his life around.

Since completing the Group Conference, Lucas is finishing a plastering pre-apprenticeship at TAFE, attending regular counselling, and feels grateful to have a second chance.

### How you can help

These are four things you can do to help fix youth justice in Victoria:

- Sign up to the campaign at [www.worthasecondchance.com.au](http://www.worthasecondchance.com.au)
- Share the campaign on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram
- Invite us to visit your workplace or community group
- Host a #worthasecondchance kitchen conversation with your friends

### More information

For more information about the campaign, visit [www.worthasecondchance.com.au](http://www.worthasecondchance.com.au), contact Nick Orchard on 0427 595 077 or email [Nick.Orchard@jss.org.au](mailto:Nick.Orchard@jss.org.au)

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I am Charlie.  
I didn't like failing at school.  
But I got used to it.  
By 14 I was living on the streets.  
I got used to it.  
Now I'm 19 and on parole.  
I'm sorry.  
I'm learning.  
I've started an apprenticeship.  
I am...

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## The facts about youth justice

### Giving young people a second chance works

For many years, Victoria led the country in supporting kids in trouble. There was a common understanding across sectors, including Government, police and community, about holding young people who offend accountable while giving them the chance to make amends for their actions.

As a direct result of this approach, we saw long-term decreases in first time and repeat offending. We saw more children and young people reconnecting with family, education, employment and other opportunities.

### What has changed?

We have seen a negative shift towards harsh punishments that close the door on kids early, and less investment in proven programs that give them a second chance in life and support them to take advantage of that opportunity.

For example, we have seen kids placed in adult prison, longer sentences, more kids locked up in remand (unsentenced), and the erosion of the successful 'dual track' system whereby young people aged up to 21 years can be placed in Juvenile Detention.

This has made it harder for everyone trying to work with kids in crisis, including parents, teachers, carers, youth workers and health professionals. That means worse outcomes for young people and the community.

### What does this mean for our communities?

Not only are we inflicting greater harm on kids through these policies but we are undermining the long-term safety of our community. Instead of helping kids to get their lives back on track, we are setting them up for a lifetime of social and economic exclusion – and that hurts all of us.

We are asking the people of Victoria to join with us to call for the youth justice system our community deserves.

#### The facts speak for themselves:

- **61% of 10–17 year old Victorians charged and sentenced in the Children's Court go on to re-offend within six years (SAC, 2016).**
- **80% of young Victorians with access to group conferencing have not re-offended two years later (KPMG, 2010).**
- **The detention rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is 13 times the non-Indigenous rate (AIHW, 2018).**

#### Of young people who have contact with the youth justice system:

- **71% were victims of abuse, trauma or neglect.**
- **56% had previously been suspended or expelled from school.**
- **40% presented with mental health issues.**
- **37% had involvement with child protection at some time.**

(Youth Parole Board Annual Report 2016 – 17)

## Campaign Policy Platform

We are asking the people of Victoria to join with us to call for the youth justice system our community deserves. This can be achieved by Government, the sector and community working together to:

### Strengthen the foundations for real justice and safer communities.

Develop a ten year plan, backed up with investment for the Victorian youth justice system including:

- A rollback of regressive sentencing practices such as mandatory detention.
- Setting and monitoring targets to reduce the number of young people offending, reoffending, on remand and in prison.
- Through the better use of data and investment in research and evaluation, build a shared understanding of what is working and what else is needed to improve outcomes.

Get the foundations right:

- Raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14.
- Restore access to the dual track system and extend age eligibility to 24 years old.
- Work alongside Aboriginal agencies and communities to reduce over-representation in the justice system.

### Supporting kids and communities to prevent offending.

Start locally with long-term investment in place-based solutions to tackle disadvantage, including justice reinvestment.

Step in early to support kids in trouble, to keep them safe and connected to school, family, culture and community:

- Lower the age of eligibility for the successful Navigator Program from 12 to 10 years.
- Trial new programs that work with children from 8 years, at the first signs of anti-social behaviour and disengagement.
- Expand programs that provide culturally safe support for Aboriginal children and families.

Strengthen pathways to specialist training and employment programs to give young people purpose, stability and opportunity.

### Giving kids the support they need to get back on track.

Continue to strengthen diversion opportunities with a focus on rehabilitation and restorative justice for all young people at each point in the justice system.

Avoid unnecessary detention through a focus on housing and alternatives to remand.

Break the cycle of crime with more intensive support for the small number of high-risk young offenders.

Strengthen in-prison and transition support to set kids up for success when they return to the community.

- Ensure education and therapeutic support are a priority in detention.
- Improve intensive support when young people exit prison to connect with housing, education, training and the community.
- Ensure the new children's prison is built according to the evidence of best-practice in the rehabilitation of young people, with transparent monitoring of numbers in detention.

Strengthen the capability of the workforce to address the complex needs of young offenders.

Introduce a minimum qualification standard for the workforce.