



# Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne

Media release – Friday 3 April 2009

## Victorian Government called on to act urgently to protect vulnerable children and young people



“The Victorian Government must act decisively to better protect vulnerable young people in out of home care,” said Denis Fitzgerald, Executive Director, Catholic Social Services Victoria.

“The system of care for young people in Victoria is at breaking point. It does not respect the dignity and needs of those who need our care. It does not reflect the solidarity and concern that we all want to express for the most vulnerable members of our society.”

Today’s report (3 April 2009) in *The Age* highlights this crisis: a 12-year-old boy was placed in a house with other children because the organisation had not been advised by the Department of Human Services that there were previous rape allegations outstanding against the boy.

“Tragic mistakes like this happen when the system, as whole, is under more pressure than it is resourced to handle,” said Mr Fitzgerald.

Recent media articles have highlighted the problems that those active in this area have long been aware of: the shortage of suitable placement options for children and youths, the negative consequences flowing from inappropriate placements, and reports of more innocent youngsters being introduced to prostitution and drugs by older residents.

“There needs to be an independent position, with power to protect the interests of children in care. The role of the Child Safety Commissioner needs to be expanded,” said Mr Fitzgerald.

“We as a community have accepted a responsibility to protect and care for these young people, and it is clear that we are not doing enough – the worst aspects of the current system are shocking and intolerable.

“The Victorian Government has a clear duty of care towards these vulnerable members of our society that it must meet. Catholic Social Services calls on the Government to act decisively and comprehensively to ensure that sufficient funds and systems are in place to guarantee the safety, personal development and future of our vulnerable children.”

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Media inquiries: James O’Farrell, Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne on 0437 661 030.

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Catholic Social Services Victoria is a peak body for Catholic social service agencies in Victoria. We work with member agencies, as part of the Catholic Church in Victoria, to fulfil the gospel imperatives to stand with and serve the poor, disadvantaged and marginalised, and to work for a just, equitable and compassionate society. Further information about Catholic Social Services Victoria can be found on our website: [www.css.org.au](http://www.css.org.au)

Our policy analysis, and our response to marginalisation and disadvantage, builds on the principles of Catholic social teaching. These are based on gospel values and the collective reflection and experience over time of the application of those values in working with the poor, the disadvantaged and the marginalised. Our members continue in this tradition in applying these principles to contemporary issues.