

# **Strengthening youth justice and helping young people avoid a life of crime**

## **From the Minister for Community Services**

**03/05/2011**

Strengthening youth justice and helping young people avoid a life of crime

The Coalition Government's \$17.5 million initiative aimed at reducing crime by young people, will strengthen Victoria's youth justice system and create clearer pathways into prevention and rehabilitation programs.

Minister for Community Services Mary Wooldridge today announced improvements to youth justice services, including significantly expanding the Youth Justice Group Conferencing program.

"We are delivering on our election commitment to build a youth justice system that ensures better outcomes for young offenders, and effective pathways for rehabilitation and community integration," Ms Wooldridge said.

"Youth Justice Group Conferencing is a program encouraging dialogue between individuals who have offended and their victims.

"It is an alternative to dealing with matters in the Children's Court and, to date, has been successful in reducing the extent to which young people re-offend," Ms Wooldridge said.

Ms Wooldridge said an extra 650 young people will be diverted to Youth Justice Group Conferencing over the next four years.

"The funds will also be used to increase the number of youth justice workers to supervise community based orders and the community work component of court orders," Ms Wooldridge said.

"There will be support and supervision for an extra 175 young offenders on community based orders."

In addition, \$1.1 million is being provided to expand a successful pilot program that uses bail supervision as a strategy to keep young offenders from unnecessarily being placed in custodial care.

"We know that the earlier a young person enters the criminal justice system, the more likely they are to re-offend," Ms Wooldridge said.

"This funding will enable young people at risk of being remanded in custody to be released on bail and case managed effectively in the community. As part of this, we will also provide extra case workers for 120 young people each year.

Minister Wooldridge said there were significant benefits for the community in reducing youth offending.

"It costs approximately \$528 per day to hold a young person in custody compared to just \$52 per day for community-based supervision. Investments like these offer significant benefits, not just for the young offenders involved but also the taxpayer," Ms Wooldridge said.

The 2011-12 Budget also provides \$7.6 million for a range of drug, alcohol, health and rehabilitative services for youth justice clients. These services play a pivotal role in the assessment and treatment of some of the most complex offenders.