

MEDIA STATEMENT

April 16, 2008



2020 Summit

Father Riley urges Reverend Costello: “Gambling is not the only social evil challenging Australian families and communities today.”

As participant in the Federal Government’s 2020 Summit, Father Chris Riley, CEO and Founder of the charity organisation, Youth Off The Streets is urging the Reverend Tim Costello, Chair of the 2020 “Strengthening communities, supporting families and social inclusion” Steering Committee, to reflect ALL the challenges facing Australian families and communities in the Committee agenda.

“We are living in an unprecedented social experiment. Gambling is not the only social evil challenging Australian society today,” said Father Chris Riley.

“Never have so many young people lived so far from extended family or away from communities that traditionally provided support. We have lost the ability for adults to serve as collective parents for all a neighborhood’s young people.

Never have so many marriages ended in divorce or divided families. In many cases this results in the loss of parental role models and extended family support for both the young and the elderly. Potentially, this leaves a large proportion of our population open to neglect and abuse.

Never before have families had to rely so heavily on dual incomes to survive. This can leave children without care and supervision and contributes towards the disconnectedness of parents and their children.

All of these developments have reduced our social capital; they have eroded the relationships that bind people together and create a sense of community. It takes a village to raise a child. We must find ways to deal with our profound loss of social connectedness,” he said.

Father Riley will be urging summit participants to recommend the government take steps to support and strengthen families and to create solutions to enable our communities to connect with and nurture our youth.

Father Riley stated: ***“Our young people are in trouble. If we do nothing it will be at our own peril”***

- 36,000 youth are homeless in Australia today.
- One in four girls & one in seven boys will be sexually assaulted.
- In the last 12 months, 123 children died in NSW alone.
- 63 children died because of parental substance abuse.
- 49 children died because of parental mental health problems.
- 85 children died because of domestic violence.
- 9 children died because of neglect.
- 73 children who died were under the age of 12 months.
- 25 children who died were Aboriginal – 20% of all reviewable deaths.
- At least 451,621 children live in a household where they are at risk of exposure to binge drinking by one adult.
- 78,000 children live in a household where there is at least one daily cannabis user.
- 27,000 children live in a household where an adult is using methamphetamines monthly.

Meanwhile:

- Pedophilia has reached epidemic proportions with some experts calling it Australia’s biggest health crisis – yet it is a crisis that is rarely spoken about. Statistics show 2,277 attacks by pedophiles were reported to NSW police last year.
- Last year the average gaol sentence given to 120 pedophiles was less than three years, while 48 were let off without a gaol sentence.

Father Riley will be recommending that the summit encourage the government to focus on early intervention strategies such as:

- Provide infrastructure that is youth friendly, particularly in our troubled communities. Youth Centers need to be built to reduce youth boredom, to provide a place of safety for young people and to give them a sense of hope.
- Develop mentoring programs that will engage people across the country to reconnect young people to their communities.
- Communities should be encouraged to come together to build 'villages' to raise their children and to bring unity where there is divisiveness and apathy.

Father Riley was nominated to attend the 2020 Summit by The Hon Minister Kate Ellis MP. He has over 33 years of experience working with disadvantaged youth.

Father Riley is available for interview.

Please phone Ina Mullin: 0412 377 217 / 8332 5000

Youth Off The Streets Mission:

Helping disconnected young people to discover greatness within, by engaging, supporting and providing opportunities to encourage and facilitate positive life choices.

About Youth Off The Streets:

Youth Off The Streets is a community organisation working for young people who are chronically homeless, drug dependent and recovering from abuse. We support these young people as they work to turn their lives around and overcome immense personal traumas such as neglect and physical, psychological and emotional abuse.

Since opening in 1991, Youth Off The Streets has grown from a single food van delivering meals to young homeless people on the streets of Kings Cross to a major youth specific agency providing a wide range of services offering a full continuum of care.

It is our goal that these young people will leave our care drug free, with a high school education, living skills and a full or part time job in hand.

-ENDS-

For more information, about Youth Off The Streets please contact:

Ina Mullin on Ph: 02 8332 5005 / 0412 377 217 or email: inam@youthoffthestreets.com.au