

## Media Release

For immediate release: Date TBA 2016

### SA-based leader in Children's Services taking 'therapeutic' message to the world



Junction Australia Portfolio Manager David O'Rafferty

A therapeutic model for responding to children who have suffered from trauma, abuse and neglect is delivering outstanding outcomes – so much so that the model and its results will be presented to an international conference in the USA.

David O'Rafferty of **Junction Australia**, a leading independent provider of community services and housing, will speak at Cornell University's Residential Child Care Project conference in New York State in June.

Junction Australia manages four Therapeutic Residential Care Services in Southern Adelaide, accommodating and caring for young people aged between five and 17 who are under the Guardianship of the Minister.

"The impact of this leading model can be seen in the way behavioural issues are carefully managed with vulnerable and sometimes volatile children and young people" said Junction Australia's CEO **Graham Brown**.

"Incidents with residents are monitored and recorded and we have seen dramatic changes over the past five years since the therapeutic approach has been implemented," he said.

"In 2011, one of Junction Australia's properties recorded no fewer than 230 incidents, including bullying, property damage, emergency services/police attendance and inappropriate sexualised behaviour. So far in 2016, that same property has recorded just two incidents – and that success is being mirrored across all Junction Australia's 'home-like' residential units."

**David O'Rafferty** said the traditional method for dealing with these children was a behavioural management model based on rules and consequences.

"It is clear that this outdated model does not work for children who have suffered trauma and a more therapeutic response was required," David said.

“We now know that trauma can affect the development of the brain and have long-term impact on how the brain functions. What we see in children and young people who have suffered trauma is an impact on their ability to use their executive cognitive function resulting in a lack of coping strategies. So, instead of reacting logically to a stressful situation, the child or young person may become emotionally flooded, resulting in a verbal or physical outburst.

“The model we’ve implemented over recent years is a ‘trauma-informed’ response with a focus on expectations and respect. This approach allows staff to have a conversation with the child or young person instead of trying to enforce a rule or consequence.”

David said the therapeutic framework model focused on assisting young people to identify the behaviour and emotion they are feeling when they become ‘emotionally flooded’, and to then find alternative safer ways of dealing with that stress next time around.

“We are now seeing a significant drop in the number of behaviour-related incidents and a dramatic increase in the level of positive engagement of the children and young people in the education system and external activities,” he said.

Of the 14 young people currently under Junction Australia’s care, 11 are now in mainstream school and a further two are engaged in alternative education programs.

“In the past, before the therapeutic model was introduced, that ratio would have typically been reversed,” Junction Australia CEO **Graham Brown** said.

“Through the therapeutic framework model and Junction Australia’s innovative ‘Youth Connections’ mentoring program, staff are able to build significant relationships with the young people and, as result, we are seeing an increase in their resilience.

“They can then engage in school and can sit in a classroom with other kids without feeling different from their peers. What we are also seeing is that when a young person has developed and increased their resilience capacity, they are also displaying empathy towards other young people and adults.”

The aim of Junction Australia’s Therapeutic Residential Care Service model, which is funded by the Department for Education and Child Development, is to set the young people on a path of healing, education and engagement in the community, with the end result being the young person entering adulthood as a positive functioning member of society.

The fourth international conference of Cornell University’s Residential Child Care Project will be held at Lake George in New York from June 21-24.

*Junction Australia is a trusted provider of a wide range of community support services and high quality, affordable housing that currently manages 1,700 homes across South Australia. We firmly believe that by working together we can take steps that enable people to navigate their way from ‘Crisis to Connectedness’. Our clients are supported to overcome barriers, access opportunities and pursue their hopes and dreams.*

**Media contact:** Phil Martin, Michels Warren on 0418 817 876