

# WHO'S CARRYING THE CAN?



*A report into youth services gaps in Victoria*

## EVERY YOUNG PERSON EVERY CHANCE

# YOUTH SUPPORT SERVICES: WHO'S CARRYING THE CAN?



**youthaffairs**  
COUNCIL OF VICTORIA INC.

Victoria's leading policy advocate on young people's issues

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# ABOUT YACVIC and VCOSS

## YOUTH AFFAIRS COUNCIL OF VICTORIA

The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) is the peak body representing the youth sector. YACVic provides a means through which the youth sector and young people voice their opinions and concerns in regards to policy issues affecting them. YACVic works with and makes representations to government and serves as an advocate for the interests of young people, workers with young people and organisations that provide direct services to young people. YACVic also promotes and supports the participation of young people in debate and policy development areas that most affect them. YACVic's resources are primarily directed towards policy analysis and development, research and consultation and to meeting the information, networking, education and training needs of our constituency.

## VICTORIAN COUNCIL OF SOCIAL SERVICE

The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) is the peak body of the social and community sector in Victoria. VCOSS works to ensure that all Victorians have access to and a fair share of the community's resources and services, through advocating for the development of a sustainable, fair and equitable society. VCOSS members reflect a wide diversity, with members ranging from large charities, sector peak organisations, small community services, advocacy groups and individuals in social policy debates. The strategic objectives of VCOSS are to:

1. Advocate for good quality of life outcomes for all.
2. Build a strong sector to create social change.
3. Create a strong public presence for social justice and equity outcomes.
4. Sustain just and equitable outcomes through collaboration

# summary of recommendations

## 1 BUILDING A SERVICE SYSTEM

### a The need for a Victorian youth services system

#### **Recommendation:**

That the Victorian Government develop and invest in a locally-based, integrated and comprehensive youth services system in Victoria, that is structured along a prevention – early intervention – secondary – tertiary service continuum.

### b Understanding service gaps and making informed program and service investment

#### **Recommendation:**

That a project be undertaken to develop a framework for a strong youth services system, identify best models of service delivery, and where the youth service gaps are in Victoria.

### c Investing in services<sup>1</sup>

#### **Recommendation:**

That the Victorian Government dedicate new resources to creating more generalist youth support positions and services in Victoria, and that these be delivered within flexible funding models that allow for a range of support responses to young people.

### d The importance of local planning

#### **Recommendation:**

That local planning process and structures be resourced at the local government level across Victoria.

## 2 STRENGTHENING SERVICES

### a Early intervention in mental health

#### **Recommendation:**

That the development of a youth services system structured along a prevention – early intervention – secondary – tertiary service continuum include targeted resources to provide mental health support at the early intervention and secondary levels of the service system.

### b Improving collaboration

#### **Recommendation:**

That mechanisms be established to improve collaboration across the youth and community sectors and across Government departments. Specifically, the objective of these mechanisms would be:

1. to develop and strengthen the integration of youth specific services provided by the youth and community sector.

2. to develop clear strategies and measures to improve collaboration across government departments and between levels of government regarding youth support services.

### c Investing in Sector Sustainability

#### **Recommendation:**

That Government improve its investment in the development and sustainability of the youth and broader community sector, specifically in the areas of workforce development, training, and ensuring adequate resourcing of services to ensure appropriate and timely support can be available for young people.



# INTRODUCTION

*'If our answer to young people is that "Sorry, we can't help you", we are failing in our duty of care and commitment to young people.'*

Youth service provider, Melbourne.

*'There is always the "someone" scenario, eg someone should do something about these kids, someone needs to provide these kids with opportunities, someone should get these kids off the streets, someone should teach these kids that they have responsibilities as well as rights - who is this someone?'*

Youth service provider, rural Victoria

The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) and the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) have undertaken to work in partnership to collate a range of evidence and information around the gaps in generalist youth support services in Victoria and their impact on both young people and existing youth and community sector service providers.

The collection of evidence exploring youth service gaps began in 2005 through the work of the Western Regional Youth Affairs Network, other Regional Youth Affairs Networks (RYANs) and stakeholders, youth service providers and the Office for Youth. In 2006 VCOSS and YACVic conducted the *Youth support services: Who's carrying the can?* project and

campaign. The project and campaign involved the collection of evidence from the youth and community sectors through surveys and community forums. These mechanisms enabled youth service providers to share their knowledge of the gaps in youth support services in their region, the impact these gaps had on young people, and the impact they had on existing services.

The recommendations in this report stem from the findings of the project and campaign, from the broad work of both VCOSS and YACVic and from the work undertaken by a range of other youth services, organisations and local government networks around the need to better support and promote the wellbeing of young people in Victoria. Other research, including academic research, local government reports, program evaluations and community sector research has also influenced the development of the recommendations outlined in this report. The recommendations made are focused at a state-wide level.

# BACKGROUND



A number of key Victorian Government policy frameworks provide a context for discussions regarding priorities and ways forward to support and promote the wellbeing of young people in Victoria. These include: *Growing Victoria Together*, *A Fairer Victoria* and *Future Directions: An Action Agenda for Young Victorians*.

*Growing Victoria Together: A Vision for Victoria to 2010 and Beyond* (GVT) outlines the Victorian Government's overarching strategic directions, incorporating a triple bottom line model across key government functions.

*The Government's vision is that by 2010 Victoria will have become an even better place to live and work, with a thriving economy, quality health and education, a healthy environment, caring communities and a vibrant democracy. Growing Victoria Together also shows how we'll measure progress towards achieving our visions and goals. We will use Growing Victoria Together as a framework for community discussion about how to achieve our vision and goals.*

Premier of Victoria, May 2005

GVT provides the platform for working towards a more sustainable Victoria, providing clear measures and targets, and encompasses "a broader vision of the capacity and productivity of" Victoria.<sup>2</sup> There are ten goals within GVT that underpin what the Victorian Government seeks to achieve for Victoria across five themes:<sup>3</sup>

## I. Thriving economy

- More quality jobs and thriving, innovative industries across Victoria
- Growing and linking all of Victoria

2. Quality health and education
  - High quality, accessible health and community services
  - High quality education and training for lifelong learning
3. Healthy environment
  - Protecting the environment for future generations
  - Efficient use of natural resources
4. Caring communities
  - Building friendly, confident and safe communities
  - A fairer society that reduces disadvantage and respects diversity
5. Vibrant democracy
  - Greater public participation and more accountable government
  - Sound financial management

*A Fairer Victoria* (AFV) forms the priority action areas of the Victorian Government's social policy statement.<sup>4</sup> While its Economic Statement focused on economic sustainability, the focus of AFV is on social sustainability. It serves as a ten year plan to reduce disadvantage and create new opportunities for all in Victoria.

*Through the actions outlined in A Fairer Victoria, we aim to put in place an effective, long-term approach to making sure that all Victorians – whoever they are and wherever they live – can contribute to the challenge of building a fair and prosperous Victoria.*

Deputy Premier of Victoria, 2005.

*Future Directions* builds on the Victorian Government's overarching strategy, *Growing Victoria Together*.<sup>5</sup> It is also intended to support the Victorian Government's social policy action plan, *A Fairer Victoria*, which seeks to create opportunity and address disadvantage throughout the State. *Future Directions* outlines a list of 40 actions that the Government has invested in, so as to achieve five key objectives. These objectives are to increase the number of young people who:

- Contribute more to their communities and want to make a difference
- Make a successful transition from school to a job they like
- Know how to access information, support and services they need

- Lead healthy, active and culturally diverse lifestyles, and
- Live in a secure environment and choose safe behaviours.

These objectives are concerned with some of the central elements of young people's wellbeing. Other key factors include positive health and wellbeing, opportunities for ongoing learning and development, employment and recreational opportunities, and access to transport.

To better support and promote the wellbeing of young people, an integrated system along the continuum of prevention – early intervention – secondary – tertiary is required. Such a model provides a sound framework on which to base the provision of integrated services and ensure timely interventions as young people transitioned from adolescence to adulthood. This model is similar to the approach evident in public health, which recognises that wellbeing ranges from adequate functioning to those at risk, and encapsulates services across the universal, secondary and tertiary service system:<sup>6</sup>

Primary or universal services are those that are directed to the whole target population – all young people.

Secondary or selected services are those that are directed to clients who have a particular issue or concern and need assistance to resolve this.

Tertiary or targeted services are those where the issue, problem or concern is one that requires intensive and often ongoing intervention. People may seek out the service or be subject to statutory intervention due to the nature of the problem or level of risk.

Generalist youth support services play a pivotal early intervention and prevention role in promoting the wellbeing of young people. They also play an important support role for young people receiving tertiary level services. There has never been in Victoria a youth services system as such, resulting in gaps in the accessibility of crucial youth support services. These gaps have been exacerbated over the past few years following Victorian Government policy shifts from universal and secondary youth services to tertiary services, for example, the redirection of the funding for the Youth Services Grants to Family Mediation Services. Although crisis-based services at the tertiary end of service delivery are essential and continue to be under-resourced, VCOSS and YACVic advocate that crisis-based services should not be made a priority at the expense of preventative and early intervention services at the primary and secondary level.

Research shows that the greatest level of need for young people requiring support is at the early intervention and secondary level.<sup>7</sup> In refocusing generalist programs to target a specific group of young people who are 'at risk', the Victorian Government is isolating the needs of those young people who access generalist early intervention casework and counselling. Adequate funding across the early intervention, secondary and tertiary level of services is essential to ensuring an effective service system that is able to support young Victorians.

For the Victorian Government to fulfil its stated commitment to early intervention, to ensuring a more integrated service system, to services being available in a timely fashion, and, equally importantly, to ensuring that young people have the chance to reach their full potential,<sup>8</sup> it needs to increase investment to ensure that generalist youth support services are available across Victoria.



# some terms explained

## YOUNG PEOPLE

For the purposes of this report 'young people' are defined as people between the ages of 12 to 25 years. Most youth services in Victoria offer services to this broader age range. It should be noted, however, that the Department of Human Services' definition of a child is 0 to 18 years and that very few of their programs are targeted at those over the age of 18. Also, within this report, VCOSS and YACVic highlight concerns reported by youth service providers that the support needs of children aged between 8 and 12 years are not being met. Whilst this group sits outside the definition of 'young people', it is important that the support needs of this earlier age bracket be met as part of an early intervention approach to young people's health and wellbeing.<sup>9</sup>

## GENERALIST YOUTH SUPPORT SERVICES

'Generalist youth support services' are youth specific, universally available and flexible in approach. In this report reference is made to two levels of generalist youth support – primary/early intervention and secondary intervention.

Primary/early intervention: Services that provide skill development and case management, holiday programs, life skills, drop in programs, homework programs,

recreation and leisure events and arts programs, programs that support young people's participation and civic engagement, the development of leadership skills and that enhance young people's 'protective' factors.

Secondary intervention: Services targeted to young people who are more at risk of family breakdown, early school leaving, bullying, and mental health concerns, such as depression and anxiety that are not experienced at an acute level.

These programs may include family mediation, counselling, advocacy and case work. Most typically these services provide short to medium term interventions (generally 3 months – 6 months) and will refer on for more intensive or specialised support if needed.

Youth workers work with young people at both an early intervention and secondary support level. People with other specialist skills also deliver secondary support to young people, such as psychologists, social workers or family mediators.

The diagram on the following page illustrates the prevention - early intervention - secondary - tertiary service continuum. In this diagram, generalist youth services fall within the primary/early intervention and secondary levels of the spectrum.

## YOUTH WORK

The main purpose of youth work is supporting the personal and social development of young people and their social inclusion.

Youth work is a process of intervention to assist young women and men to transition from childhood to full and effective participation in society. The role is educational and developmental but may include aspects of protection. It also involves a commitment to social change, and principles of equity and social justice.<sup>10</sup>

## WHAT DO YOUTH WORKERS DO?

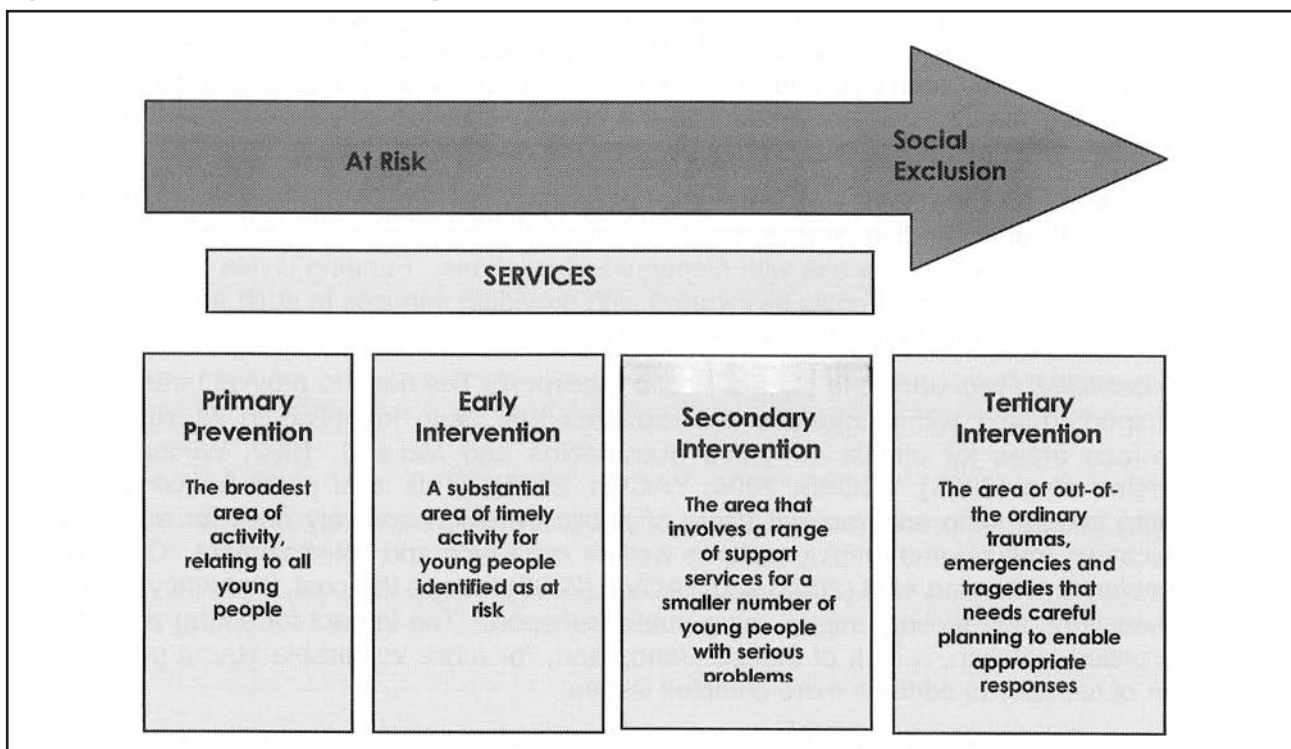
Youth workers provide formal or informal services for young people, in groups or as individuals. These include advocacy, community development, referral, social education, health education, rehabilitation, participation

programs, skills development (such as leadership skills) rescue and correctional services. Youth service providers also provide important advice to other organisations, agencies and different levels of government on the needs of young people.

Youth workers work directly with young people as their primary clients. They can act as managers of premises and services for government and non-government agencies. They also work in areas of social policy formation, systemic advocacy, coordination and implementation, as well as in professional education, training and research. They also work to facilitate and advocate for stronger links between young people and their communities, for the voices of young people to be heard and to enhance young people's civic engagement.

In Victoria, youth workers work in a variety of settings with young people. These include (but are not limited to) local governments, youth services and centres, family services, recreational services, schools, juvenile justice centres, community health centres and churches. In addition to this type of generalist youth service provision, youth workers also work in secondary and tertiary services such as residential care units, homelessness services, drug and alcohol services, mental health services and employment assistance services.

**Figure 1: Framework for understanding services**



Source: *Better outcomes for disengaged young people, presentation for local government*  
Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2005

# ADOLESCENCE AND YOUNG ADULTHOOD: THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORT

Adolescence and young adulthood are critical stages for emotional, social and physical growth and development, including brain development. In this report, adolescence is defined as 12 to 17 years of age, and young adulthood from 18 to 25 years of age.

Adolescence is a critical phase of development, during which young people undergo profound personal and physiological change. The range of experiences that young people have as adolescents not only impacts on them at that time of their lives, but can profoundly impact on their futures. It is a time during which young people can be particularly vulnerable and require appropriate support to ensure that they have every chance to reach their potential, and to assist their development into healthy adults who can make a valuable contribution to society.

## BRAIN DEVELOPMENT DURING ADOLESCENCE

The work of Dr Jack Schonkoff on the development of the brain during the early years of childhood is well known and has provided important information which has influenced the development of the Victorian Government's policy to invest in ensuring all Victorian children have 'every chance' and get the 'best start' in life. In addressing the 'Putting children first: Their future, our future' forum, The Hon. Sherryl Garbutt, Minister for Children and Minister for Community

Services, highlighted the influence of Dr Schonkoff's work in the development of the Government's policy approach and investment in early childhood:

*'Our agenda has been informed by experts and underpinned by the sort of research that Dr Schonkoff and others such as Professor Frank Oberklaid will share with you throughout the course of today's forum. Consistent with another key theme of Dr Schonkoff, the Government has recognized the nexus between investing in our children and the long term prosperity of our community.'*<sup>11</sup>

What is less well known is that during adolescence the brain continues to undergo key development stages, with significant connections or 'wiring-up' occurring. Significant connections and remodelling occur in the frontal lobe, the area of the brain responsible for a range of functions including coordinating behaviour, impulse control, decision making, judgement, planning and other higher order cognitive functions. Much of this remodelling is influenced by a young person's experiences.

This highlights the importance of young people being able to access supports when there are issues that may negatively impact on this development process. A young person's capacity to remain in education and training, their access to opportunities for recreation and creative pursuits are clearly linked to the development of their brains and will impact on their futures in the long term.



## INCREASED RISK TAKING BEHAVIOUR

Young people are particularly vulnerable in a number of ways while their brain is still developing in adolescence. A crucial stage of brain development occurring at this point is the development of the frontal lobes, the area of the brain that 'helps us plan, consider, control impulses, make wise judgements'.<sup>12</sup> This means that adolescents can be more prone to making impulsive decisions, to not necessarily thinking through the longer-term consequences of their actions and to risk-taking behaviours.

## EMOTIONAL VULNERABILITY

At this time of brain development too, adolescents' brains show more activity in the emotional parts of the brain (the limbic system) than they do in the frontal lobes and prefrontal cortex (those parts responsible for planning and impulse control).<sup>13</sup> This explains why adolescence can be a particularly challenging time emotionally, during which young people can be particularly vulnerable to depression and anxiety. Andrew Fuller explains that:

*'Between late childhood and early adolescence there is a 'fall from grace' with the number of reports of feeling 'very happy' dropping by 50%<sup>14</sup> (Larson and Richards, 1994). Even when engaged in the same activities, adolescents find them less pleasurable than adults. They experience an increase in negative feelings, depressed mood and mood ranges than younger and older people.'*

## INCREASED STRESS

Adolescence is typically a time of increased stress for many young people. During adolescence, many young people experience 'more negative life experiences (friendship changes, alterations in romantic liaisons, school work) that they tend to view more negatively and have less control over.'<sup>15</sup>

It is important that young people have access to generalist youth support services through which they can access assistance in dealing with the increased stress they may be experiencing.

## SUBSTANCE USE

Adolescence can be a time when young people experiment with alcohol and drugs, alongside a range of other 'testing out' behaviour. This is not surprising given the greater propensity to risk taking, the typical rise in emotional dissatisfaction and the commonly experienced increased stress levels. ORYGEN Youth Health highlights just how vulnerable young people are to substance use disorders:

*'In the 18-24 age group, substance use disorders were the most prevalent, affecting about 1 in 5 males and 1 in 10 females. Alcohol dependence was the most prevalent substance use disorder, affecting 12% of males and 4% of females.'*<sup>16</sup>

Substance abuse during adolescence can impact on physical health including brain development, on mental health and on emotional wellbeing. Further, 'early onset alcohol use strongly predicts later alcohol abuse and dependence.'<sup>17</sup>

## MENTAL HEALTH

Adolescence and young adulthood is the key period for the onset of a range of mental health disorders, including depression, anxiety disorders, substance abuse disorders and psychotic illnesses such as schizophrenia.<sup>18</sup>

ORYGEN Youth Health notes that:

*'Over 75% of all serious mental health problems commence before the age of 25 years....Mental disorders and related substance abuse disorders account for a staggering 60% of the total non-fatal burden of disease for the age group 15-24 years and are therefore the single most important health issue affecting young people.'*<sup>19</sup>

Research evidence highlights that an early intervention response to a young person experiencing a mental health disorder is the most effective means to recovery and reduced risk of relapse.<sup>20</sup> Such an approach is reinforced in the recent report prepared by Boston Consulting for the Department of Premier and Cabinet, *Improving mental health outcomes in Victoria: The next wave of reform*. This report highlights three key issues in the services delivered in the mental health system in Victoria, one of which is:

*'Limited investment in prevention and early intervention, with many children and young people in particular not receiving support designed to forestall or avoid the escalation of mental illness.'*<sup>21</sup>

The Boston Consulting Group highlights that the limited investment at this level of service intervention occurs in Victoria 'despite emerging evidence from studies around the world that effective early intervention for children and youth can deliver significant social benefits, including a reduction in suicide and crime rates, as well as a strong economic return on investment.'<sup>22</sup>

A lack of generalist youth support services hampers young people accessing timely assistance and increases demands on tertiary services. Over recent years there has been a move to increased targeting of services and to prioritising resourcing of tertiary or crisis-based services. As a result, many young people have no access to any early intervention support services.

*'Delays in help-seeking and major gaps in the continuum of care continue to exist as a result of under-resourcing and/or poor coordination of services.'*<sup>23</sup>

This results in many young people not being able to access support when they need it.

*Future Directions: An Action Agenda for Young Victorians* states that the Victorian Government has identified that this situation is a major concern to young people:

*'Young people care deeply about their mental health and wellbeing and are concerned about the rising rates of anxiety and depression among their peers. They want greater access to support at early stages to prevent issues escalating and to be equipped to manage their own situations.'*<sup>24</sup>

Locally-based, youth-specific early intervention mental health services are key to supporting and promoting the wellbeing of young people and to reducing the onset of tertiary mental health issues.

## THE ESSENTIAL ROLE OF GENERALIST YOUTH SUPPORT SERVICES

Generalist youth support services play a pivotal role in supporting young people across this range of important issues at the early intervention and secondary support level. Currently, large gaps exist in the availability of these support services for young people. This means that many young people do not have every chance to fulfil their potential. Further, these service gaps place increased stress and demand on existing youth services and workers.

*'Unmet need is still too high.'*<sup>25</sup>

Improved coordination across service providers is also critical in supporting and promoting the health and wellbeing of young people. Ensuring strong coordination across the planning, development and delivery of support is important in developing a youth services system.

# EXPLAINING THE GAPS - VOICES FROM THE SECTOR

The following quotes were collected from surveys completed by youth service providers as part of the *Who's Carrying the Can?* project. They illustrate the gaps in generalist youth support services in Victoria.

*'Young people are falling through the cracks. It appears that when a young person is at a critical point, if there is not adequate support then their situation escalates and it is only at this extreme end of need that a young person is eligible to receive support.'*

*'Issues young people are experiencing escalate due to lack of service intervention, resulting in them leaving school/home and being disconnected from family and friends.'*

*'Young people need a quick response to intervene during the time of crisis. Waiting lists and difficult referral processes are not conducive to meeting the needs of young people.'*

*'We are maintaining young people in a "holding pattern" until they are able to access other options/service (if they exist)- often no timely solutions are found.'*

*'Due to lack of services clients are presenting with more complex issues, which means they receive support from the service for a lot longer, which adds to the waiting list.'*

*'Young people are experiencing problems at school, such as bullying, self-harming, attendance issues, and problematic behaviour. [There is] a lack of capacity of services to provide external counselling that would support schools and young people deal with such issues.'*

# WHO'S CARRYING THE CAN? PROJECT METHODOLOGY

In 2005, a campaign around gaps in generalist youth support services started to take shape. The concerns were brought to the attention of YACVic and the Office for Youth, Department for Victorian Communities through the Regional Youth Affairs Network (RYAN) structure, with several RYANs reporting a lack of generalist youth services in their area.

The Western Regional Youth Affairs Network and other RYANs collected case studies to provide evidence of gaps in youth support services, which were collated by the Office for Youth.

Stakeholder meetings were hosted between the Office for Youth, the RYAN convenors, YACVic, local government youth services and mental health services, such as ORYGEN Youth Health and the Centre for Adolescent Health, to discuss the issues of service gaps and ways forward.

Alongside this, a number of VCOSS member organisations that provide youth services highlighted the impacts on young people of a lack of generalist youth services.

At the 2005 VCOSS Congress, Georgie Ferrari, Chief Executive Officer, YACVic, Tracey Carson, Youth Planner, Hobsons Bay City Council, and a young person who had experienced difficulty accessing services, presented on the evidence collected, posing the question 'Who's carrying the can when it comes

to youth support services?', thus launching the *Who's carrying the can?* project and campaign.

In early 2006, VCOSS and YACVic agreed to undertake a joint project to document the impacts of a lack of generalist youth services. In April 2006, YACVic and VCOSS broadly released a survey through the youth and community sectors asking youth service providers to share their knowledge and experiences of gaps in youth service provision in Victoria in order to collect evidence of these issues. The survey asked youth service providers to:

- Describe the gaps in youth service provision in their region.
- Consider whether there had been a reduction in the availability of youth support services in their region over time.
- Describe how existing gaps impacted on their service or agency.
- Describe how these gaps in youth services impact on young people.

Twenty six different youth service providers from across Victoria provided their responses through this survey. A copy of the survey is attached as Appendix I.

YACVic and VCOSS also requested responses from School Focused Youth Service (SFYS) Coordinators, by targeting them with a specific set of questions. School Focused Youth Services are a joint initiative between



the Department of Education and Training (DET) and the Department of Human Services (DHS), and coordinate preventative and early intervention strategies for young people, to be delivered through school and community clusters. The SFYS program is 'designed to support effective links between the primary prevention work done by school-based support services within the education sector and the early intervention provided by the community sector.'<sup>26</sup> The service is state-wide.

School Focused Youth Service Coordinators were targeted because they have a specific knowledge of the work done by school based support services and those provided by the youth and community sector. This means that they are in a unique position to provide insights into where the gaps in generalist support services for young people lie in their region. A copy of the request for information and questions sent to SFYS Coordinators is attached as Appendix 2.

The responses received through the surveys of both youth services and the School Focused Youth Services were confidential. As such, no service providers are identified in this report and the authors of quotes included in this report are only identified as service providers from either metropolitan Melbourne, the urban fringe or rural or regional Victoria.

YACVic and VCOSS also hosted two *Who's Carrying the Can?* forums, one in Richmond on 4 May 2006 and the second in Benalla on 17 May 2006. The forums brought together youth service providers and state and local government representatives to identify service gaps and possible solutions. The objectives of the forums were to:

- Further develop an evidence base of the gaps in youth support services.
- Highlight the impact of the lack of funded support roles on existing services and young people's wellbeing.
- Identify solutions to address current youth support service needs.

The forums were well attended, with 52 people from a range of services participating in the Melbourne forum and 32 people participated in the Benalla forum. Two rounds of structured group discussions were hosted in each forum, with the groups being determined by geographic region. In the initial discussion, participants were asked to identify:

- the main service gaps in their region for young people,
- whether these were gaps that had always existed or if service gaps had increased over time, and
- any compounding issues that make service provision/access difficult, such as poor public transport, high levels of unemployment etc

In the second discussion the same groups considered what needed to happen to improve service responses to young people. They were asked:

- Are more services needed or is it a case of better integration and collaboration of current services?
- What are some solutions to the service gaps in your area?
- How could these initiatives be funded? Who should fund them?

# WHAT YOUTH SERVICE PROVIDERS HAD TO SAY

Following is an overview of the key issues reported to VCOSS and YACVic by youth service providers through the surveys and forum discussions. They describe a range of gaps in current youth support services and how these gaps undermine every young person having every chance to reach their potential.

## LACK OF CARE ALONG THE SERVICE CONTINUUM

All service providers highlighted the lack of youth support services along the prevention – early intervention – secondary – tertiary service continuum (the service continuum), and the need for more early intervention and secondary level support for young people:

*‘Young people often completely miss out on services due to large gaps, particularly in the event that they require individual support, and /or don’t have access to transport.’*

Youth service provider, rural Victoria

The most commonly reported gap in youth support services was in the availability of psycho-social counselling services and early intervention to secondary level mental health support services. One School Focused Youth Service Coordinator described in detail

the gaps on the support service spectrum from a mental health perspective:

*‘There is an identified gap in services for those young people who are experiencing early signs of mental health issues or behaviours. These young people have almost no services available to them until they reach crisis point. This service gap has been identified by schools, CAHMS, PMHT and many other youth agencies.<sup>27</sup> CAHMS are often unable to take on many referrals due to their specific criteria and have huge waiting lists. The PMHT deals with anxiety and depression and offers a secondary consult services and providers a limited shared service model with GPs. This however is not available in all areas of this region. School personnel are not highly skilled to identify at risk behaviours or have the expertise to deal with these young people who present with some serious issues. The role of Student Services or Welfare Workers is to refer on to other agencies for more professional assistance and support, but they are extremely limited as to where they can refer to.’*

Another service provider described the limited support services available in their region:

*‘There is a general lack of counselling support available in the region. There is limited fee for service counselling available, however this is not*



*accessible to most young people as it is far too expensive and often requires considerable distance to travel to access it. Some services provide a visiting service but again this is limited and there is a huge waiting list or backlog. There are limited services provided by the school support centre, but schools find it difficult to access the psychologist/welfare officer as required. Other youth counselling services are provided through district health services, but these are very limited.'*

Youth service providers described the importance of locally accessible, early intervention supports:

*'Early intervention services and strategies are ineffective if young people do not have ready access to them. A young person is unlikely to make a huge effort when experiencing emotional or multi health issues to commute long distances at their expense to access a service or worker with whom they have not developed a connection and level of trust with.'*

Generalist youth support workers provide a very important link between young people and more specialised supports they need often operating as the conduit through which that young person accesses the service. A lack of generalist youth support services means that young people are less likely to access existing more specialised support when they need it. A community legal service for young people explains how this happened to them following the de-funding of two generalist youth support staff whom the service was collocated with:

*'Since the defunding, the linkage between young children and the legal service for kids in trouble has been lost and the legal service has found that it is seeing less young people than it used to. This is because young people often need a relationship of trust with a youth worker before they will link in with the other services. This is why the relationship with the (generalist support) staff was critical. It also was a one stop shop and so we would see the young people pretty much immediately upon referral to us.'*

## A REDUCTION IN AVAILABLE SUPPORT SERVICES

Many youth service providers highlighted that there had been a reduction in the availability of youth support services in their region. One youth service located on the urban fringe of Melbourne reported that:

*'Reduction in staff has resulted in only basic service delivery with little new initiatives taken up and a drop in community development and program delivery.'*

## INCREASING WAITING LISTS

Many youth support services reported increasing waiting lists not only for their own services, but also for more specialist services they refer young people to. One service reported that:

*'Our waiting list has expanded from four weeks to three months.'*

Another service described how ‘waiting lists at peak periods cause clients to wait for up to two months for support – particularly accommodation.’

## THE NEED FOR MORE FLEXIBLE SUPPORT MODELS

*‘In my role we are constantly encouraging schools to refer young people and ask for support from agencies. Yet, when they ask for assistance they are constantly knocked back because the young person does not ‘fit’ into the criteria for receiving support eg not homeless, drugs not involved or they are not being ‘abused’. These are very specific criteria and eliminate the majority of young people the schools want help with!’*

School Focused Youth Service provider, regional Victoria

*‘If young people are not in a “target group” and require support outside the school system, there is little on offer.’*

Youth service provider, rural Victoria

Many youth service providers described their frustrations at not being able to provide adequate service responses to young people due to constraints on the amount of time they could work with an individual young person. These restraints were due both to resource limitations and to inflexible funding agreements that prescribed limited intervention timeframes and rigid service provision targets. As one youth service provider explained:

*‘Staff feel unable to provide the level of care that they would like, due to time constraints.’*

Another described how this could compromise work practice:

*‘There is pressure to meet targets and time and numbers – the quality of engagement is sacrificed.’*

Another service reported the impact that this had on staff morale:

*‘The agency works hard to look after staff although they often have high case loads and feel unable to provide the level of care that they would like to due to time constraints’.*

## DIFFICULTY IN PROVIDING FOLLOW UP SUPPORT

Youth service providers also reported that resource limitations made it very difficult for them to follow up with young people they had provided services to. One service described a typical situation:

*‘After completion of time with service there is limited capacity to follow up after young people have been discharged.’*

## COHORTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE MISSING OUT

Need for support responses for young people between the ages of 8 to 12 years and 18 to 25 years

Many youth services reported concerns that young people aged 8 to 12 and aged 18 to 25 were missing out on access to support services. Ensuring young people aged 8 to 12 receive support is essential as an early intervention strategy. Equally as important is the need for young people aged 18 to 25 to be able to access appropriate, locally-based, youth specific service responses. As the Victorian Government’s new youth agenda, *Future directions: An action agenda for young Victorians* notes:

*‘Today’s young people are reaching significant life milestones at a later age, so the period of ‘youth’ is extending. They face new difficulties in making previously simple life transitions – such as moving from education and training to the workforce.’<sup>28</sup>*

A youth service provider expressed their concerns around service gaps for young people in their early 20s:

*‘Young people between the ages of 22 to 25 are finding it difficult to access services because of eligibility criteria, for eg JPET can’t work with young people over the age of 21 years. There are limited funds available...if a young person over 15 who falls out of mainstream schooling due to issues such as behavioural, social, health and wellbeing issues.’*

Another service provider highlighted the potential long term effects of a lack of appropriate services for this older age bracket, describing:

*‘Young people reporting concerns and exhibiting anxiety in relation to lack of services for 18 to 25*



*year olds. Young people becoming more isolated and resistant to services as adults.'*

One youth service provider described the importance of supports to young people aged under 12 years and their families:

*'There is no agency working with families with children under 12 years. A result of this is that young people in Years 5 & 6 who are identifiably at risk of failing to make a satisfactory transition to secondary school or who are exhibiting social or emotional difficulties are unable to access a local support or early intervention service.'*

Another School Focused Youth Service Coordinator highlighted a similar issue, noting that older children are not receiving support when they need it, particularly early on:

*'Primary aged children aged between seven and ten years of age are not being serviced.'*

## GAPS IN MORE SPECIALISED SUPPORTS

### Homelessness supports

Youth service providers from around the state reported concern with a lack of homelessness assistance support for young people. A lack of accommodation options for young people was cited as a common concern with one School Focused Youth Service Coordinator describing the impact of this on young people:

*'... they are forced to accept accommodation often far removed from school and social context which increases their vulnerability.'*

A School Focused Youth Service provider in regional Victoria put this issue in the context of the lack of affordable housing for young people. Access to affordable housing can be even harder to come by in some rural and regional communities.

*'There is a lack of transitional housing available to young people. In addition to this there is a total lack of affordable housing and there is a long waiting list for public housing.'*

### Mental health supports

Youth service providers from across Victoria reported a lack of availability of early intervention and secondary intervention mental health supports for young people. For those services that did exist, youth service providers reported long waiting lists. Examples of this have been provided in the 'Lack of care along the continuum' section of this report on page 13.

### Supports for young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

Several services reported concerns about a lack of appropriate supports for young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. One service provider described the way in which often basic needs needed to be met for refugee or newly arrived young people before they were able to access more specialised supports they may need:

*'Refugee young people also have issues in terms of basic needs being met (housing, food, health, education) which hampers them seeking and gaining access to this service.'*

A School Focused Youth Service coordinator from a region with high numbers of refugee and newly arrived families identified that there were 'not enough good quality counselling and therapy for young people who have experiences trauma/loss/grief.'

A lack of culturally sensitive services can mean that young people receive an inadequate service response. As one youth service provider noted:

*'Referrals for D&A and mental health are mostly made to mainstream services who are not currently meeting the needs of CALD communities.'*

Some areas with growing communities of recently arrived and refugee families report inadequate levels of culturally appropriate services available for young people. One service on the urban fringe stated that:

*'There is a need to increase the cultural sensitivity of many of the services. As more newly arrived and refugee young people become part of the community there is a strong need to ensure they are able to access all available services and programs.'*

Another SFYS provider reported that in their regional community, a lack of services meant that people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds were unable to stay in the area:

*'There is not enough access to English language services. The result in this is that often there people leave and go back to Melbourne where they can access relevant services better.'*

## Supports for young people with a disability

At both forums the lack of support services for young people with a disability were raised as a concern. Forum participants identified several areas in which service gaps were a particular problem, including:

- Support to access opportunities for recreational activities;
- Youth specific disability support services;
- Concerns regarding young people losing funding to assist in accessing support services after the age of 18;
- Support to move out of the family home and to access suitable housing;

- For those living with family, more flexible support packages and respite services;
- Supports in education;
- Supports in accessing aids and equipment;
- Support to access transport and travel options;
- A lack of accessible information available to young people with a disability and the need for the development of intervention in alternative frameworks and the development of different communication strategies.

Service providers also identified the need to ensure that generalist and mainstream youth services are accessible to young people with a disability and that services receive the required resources to ensure their accessibility.

## Supports for Victorian Aboriginal young people<sup>29</sup>

Forum participants also raised concerns about the accessibility of existing youth support services for Aboriginal young people at all levels of the service continuum. There are very large service gaps for Aboriginal young people. This includes prevention programs such as cultural and recreational programs, through to more specialised secondary supports such as homelessness supports or mental health supports.

Service providers commented on the critical need for Aboriginal specific, culturally sensitive services for adolescents and young adults, which they reported as being scarce. Participants also commented on the need for generalist (mainstream) youth support services to ensure they were accessible to Aboriginal young people and their families through ensuring culturally sensitive practice. These services need further resources to improve their accessibility.

## 'YOUTH FRIENDLY' REFERRAL SYSTEM'

Youth service providers typically reported a lack of more specialist support services to refer young people to when they needed specific assistance. However, a lack of services was not the only factor making referral difficult. Service gaps and a lack of service system in the youth sector means that referral processes are frequently described as not being 'youth friendly' with young people and youth workers struggling to 'navigate the system'. This was described as having the consequence of exacerbating young people's vulnerability at a difficult time. The impact this can

have on young people is described by a youth service provider:

*'The system is very unclear for young people to negotiate their way through. They are not necessarily clear why they might be eligible for one service and not another and may feel 'rejected' by this. The delays in responses can also mean that young people disengage from help seeking due to feeling like it is too hard. The strict criteria mean that a young person may go through a lengthy assessment process only to find out that they will be referred elsewhere.'*

One youth service provider described the way this impacted on staff's use of time:

*'Staff spend much time and energy guiding people through the system and not always able to refer appropriately ... We need a 'youth friendly' referral system.'*

Another described the frustration this caused:

*'There can be difficulties in finding an appropriate support service following an episode of care with our service, leaving staff feeling that their hard work may not be followed through on.'*

A lack of clear referral options and processes was not just of concern to youth service providers. It impedes the capacity of other agencies or individuals coming into contact with young people, such as the police, to link them in with appropriate supports. As one police officer reported in response to the survey:

*'Not having a comprehensive referral program for young people who have come into contact with police, means they have very few positive options to explore. This affects future decisions to be made when young people are at crisis point and give police few pro active alternatives to offer young people.'*

## ISSUES COMPOUNDED ON THE URBAN FRINGE

Youth support service gaps are often compounded in communities on the urban fringe, or the 'interface' between rural and urban areas. Issues of geographic isolation, population growth without adequate infrastructure, poor public transport networks and the emergence of new communities with specific needs are all issues commonly experienced in urban fringe communities which impact on the availability of support services to young people. As one youth service provider on the urban fringe explains:

*'We are an Interface Council - thus we are experiencing unique issues in youth service provision in our region. Most youth agencies that service young people in our region are located outside of our municipality. Young people are having to commute to access services in a community that is transport challenged. Most of these services do not offer outreach to young people in our region which are rurally situated.'*

Another service from the urban fringe described the compounding effect of infrastructure and service gaps in their area:

*'Our area has seen massive growth in recent years, that has been matched by available services. For services that are in the area access is an issue as public transport is poor in our area. Some main gaps include: mental health services, counselling, alternative education, generalist services, housing (especially emergency), day programs.'*

The lack of specialist services was commonly reported as being of particular concern in urban fringe communities: One urban fringe service provider stated that:

*'In the North East there is a massive gap in emergency accommodation in general but specifically in crisis accommodation for young people. Currently there is NO crisis accommodation throughout the LQAs of Whittlesea, Nillumbik and Banyule. Geographically this is a huge area. The nearest crisis accommodation for someone say from Hurstbridge is in Reservoir or Brunswick. This effectively removes and isolates young people from their local area and any supports they may have, especially school, friends, medical services and other community services.'*

The same service provider reported:

*'No appropriate crisis accommodation specifically for CALD young people especially CALD young women who find it difficult to be housed with mixed gender.'*

Significant public transport gaps compound the problems young people have in accessing services on the urban fringe. As one youth service provider explained:

*'Young people cannot get to services that are available due to transport issues.'*

## RURAL AND REGIONAL COMMUNITIES

### A lack of counselling services

The issue of access to generalist youth counselling is compounded for some rural and regional communities by geographic isolation. Some communities stated that there was no counsellor available to young people in their community at all. For example, one regional youth service provider explained that:

*'There are no generalist youth workers in most of the region.'*

Some service providers reported that generalist youth support services had been lost in their regions. One regional survey response reported that:

*'In two rural communities outreach youth support services have been lost. This involved 0.8 worker in one shire and 0.4 worker in another shire. The 0.4 worker funding was reallocated to placement prevention across the wider region. The 0.8 worker funding went in a youth participation program following changes to the DVC Youth Support Grants.'*

Another rural service provider described the gaps in support for young people on a range of issues of critical importance to young people's wellbeing:

*'There is no case management of general youth worker positions for young people who do not have homelessness as an issue. There are limited youth focused programs especially for sexual health, pregnancy and drug and alcohol issues.'*

A number of service providers noted their frustration at not being able to refer young people to the more specialised support they needed, a problem made more difficult by geographic isolation.

*'I would like to be able to refer complex clients to more appropriate services but due to them being under staffed or stretched to the limit they request that I deal with clients and they have used the excuse that I am closer geographically to the client therefore I am best placed to meet the client's needs. Down time in travel seems to be expensive on agency staff time.'*

Regional youth service provider

### Young people missing out on opportunities

Service providers in rural and regional Victoria described the frustration of young people missing out on opportunities and important services because of a lack of transport options and a lack of funding to be able to arrange for alternative transport options. For example:

*'Schools are constantly frustrated with their inability, and the inability of agencies, to transport young people to places and services that would connect them to something that interests them eg a different school, a different sport or interest group, a specific service. For example, a 14 year old drove himself to an appointment (in another town 45kms away) the other day because he didn't want to get into trouble for missing it and his family let him down.'*

### Maintaining privacy

Maintaining privacy can be difficult for a young person wanting to access support in a small community. One service provider describes the difficulties experienced by young people wanting to access health care:

*'Young people have a lot of hurdles to jump in country areas (eg medial receptionists who know their family, being known at the local chemist) to access health services. Privacy is a real concern for many young people who want to access health services.'*

Youth service provider, rural Victoria

Another youth service provider commented that in a rural setting:

*'Everybody knows everyone - so you walk through the door of a service and everyone knows.'*

Youth service provider, rural Victoria

### Lack of access to youth friendly health services

Access to health services in rural and regional Victoria was of particular concern in communities that experienced high levels of sexual risk taking behaviour and teenage pregnancy.



## Lack of access to peer support programs

Access to peer support programs can be more difficult for young people in rural and regional Victoria. This is due to a range of reasons, including service availability and poor transport links. One youth service provider explains that:

*'Marginal support groups such as same-sex attraction don't exist in any of the towns in our network. If young people were to access this sort of support they would have to have transport and it would be at least a 40 minute drive.'*

Youth service provider, rural Victoria

## Insufficient outreach resources

The majority of youth service providers in rural and regional Victoria who responded to the survey or participated in a forum raised a concern that outreach services were insufficiently resourced and that more were urgently needed. Outreach models are an essential means of ensuring the availability of services to geographically isolated young people. In some cases, the costs of working in an outreach model were not recognised in service funding models. The increasing cost of petrol also means that these costs are rising.

One School Focused Youth Service Coordinator based in rural Victoria described the impact of distance and

geographic isolation on the capacity of agencies to do outreach:

*'Many regionally delivered services are based 300kms or more from remote communities. Frequency of visits and response times are often an issue. The Shire is 20,000 square kilometres, so existing resources are spread thinly.'*

Another reported that:

*'There is a critical shortage of outreach youth support services in rural towns and communities. This contributes to family disconnection and young people disengaging from education.'*

## Lack of local recreational activities

Where young people are geographically isolated, it is particularly important that locally available activities and recreational opportunities exist. Existing youth service providers in rural and regional Victoria reported that these opportunities were not readily available and that this had the consequence of isolating young people from involvement in their community. One service provider described a reduction in recreational programs:

*'Outreach services in the form of recreation has been reduced from weekly activities to school holiday programs.'*

## Pressures on existing services

Existing services in rural and regional Victoria reported specific pressures from the community to be ‘all things’ to young people stemming from a lack of services on the ground. As one School Focused Youth Service provider described:

*‘we are the only youth agency in the ... network. There has been a recent youth suicide and we are being contacted - yet we cannot provide generalist support or counselling. How are we then seen by the public? Do you provide support for youth or not?’*

Existing services reported the same pressures on staff as commonly reported elsewhere. For example, having to respond to young people with increasingly complex needs without the resources or necessarily the expertise to do so. This had the same impact reported elsewhere, of increasing staff turnover. These problems were compounded though by difficulties in recruiting new staff in geographically isolated areas. As a School Focused Youth Service Coordinator in a rural area described:

*‘There is a lack of peer support for workers and staff burn out is high which causes high turn over. Agencies and organisations can’t retain staff and recruiting and attracting adequate staff in rural areas is a problem.’*

## Difficulties in providing a local response

Local service responses help ensure that a young person is not dislocated from any existing support mechanisms they may have established in their community. The importance of providing a local response to a young person needing assistance is undermined by a lack of local services. Service providers in rural and regional Victoria reported this as a key concern. One service provider explained that:

*‘Our placement protection services that work across a rural region, are clearly noticing that many young people in rural towns are being referred (by Child Protection) to placement protection, due to a lack of locally based youth services. Many of these cases would normally link to a locally based youth support service if it were available.’*

Service providers in rural and regional Victoria also reported particular difficulties in ensuring young people could access a range of services locally. Whilst the provision of outreach services is a means of improving accessibility of support services to young people, many

youth services providers advocate for the establishment of a ‘one stop shop’ service delivery model as well. This model would see the collocation of a number of services, such as general health, counselling, recreational programs, homelessness supports, and Centrelink, on the one site. This model not only assists with the delivery of a range of services without high infrastructure investment, but it can also improve the accessibility of support by offering greater privacy to young people accessing the centre. Collocation of a range of services means that the reason for a young person’s visit is not exposed.

## FUNDING AND SERVICE SUSTAINABILITY PROBLEMS

Youth service providers also reported that in some cases they were needing to spend valuable time that would usually be allocated to direct service delivery seeking additional funding through fundraising in order to sustain the service. As one youth service provider commented:

*‘In seeking additional funding, the submission process is timely and there is no guarantee of success - this takes staff time and energy.’*

## THE IMPACT ON YOUNG PEOPLE

The impacts of a lack of generalist support services on young people are varied and can be very serious. One youth service provider described a host of impacts that a lack of support services was having on young people in their region:

- Limited access to activities/recreation;
- Lack of involvement in community;
- Lack of access to youth specific counselling;
- Waiting lists for other services;
- Inability of specialist services to remain involved or become involved;
- Increased notification to child protection as community supports not able to mitigate risk;
- Young people coming to attention of service sector later and with a more chronic situation.

Another youth service provider described the various impacts they saw as a consequence of a lack of generalist counselling support:

*‘The lack of youth counselling impacts on young people in many ways: they may leave home early, they may continue to live in a dysfunctional home, they may turn to alcohol or other drugs,*



*there are less opportunities for them to be supported to create positive change in their lives, they may have a reduced ability to participate in everyday life (education, employment, relationships) which then has lots of implications for health, well-being, self-esteem etc. It also impacts upon the community as a whole when there are young people who cannot access the support they need.'*

Another youth service provider described the way in which a lack of support services can make a young person feel an increase sense of isolation at an already vulnerable time:

*'The biggest impact would have to be their disengagement with their school first, then the community itself. They don't feel there is support for their 'problem' and therefore that their problem much not be very common.'*

Youth service provider, regional Victoria

Generalist youth support services play a very important role in referring young people to services and advocating on their behalf to assist them to receive the assistance they need. One youth service provider described how the lack of generalist youth support services was reducing young people's access to existing services:

*'Since losing generalist worker positions a few years ago, young people have difficulty plugging into the services which are available.'*

Youth service provider, rural Victoria

When a young person cannot access a timely, appropriate support response, their situation can escalate having very serious consequences. As one youth service provider explained:

*'Their problems get out of hand, their level of stress increases, they resort to criminal activity to get them out of debt, they feel isolated where there are family issues and may self medicate with drugs or alcohol, they get into bad peer groups and some suicide.'*

A School Focused Youth Service Provider described the impacts of youth service gaps on young people's capacity to access education:

*'Young people not being guided in to educational pathways that are appropriate for them, not being able to attend school due to lack of money to pay fees, ...'*

A police officer who participated in a forum described how a lack of support can lead to re-offending:

*'Many young people are re-offending due to a lack of support service or non-existent referral program.'*

Another School Focused Youth Service Coordinator described the impact that youth support service gaps had on young people specifically in rural and regional communities:

*'There is a high level of drug and alcohol abuse. Young people feel disconnected from society and not at all supported....There is an increasing incidence of anxiety and depression amongst young people and youth suicide rates are high. Many young people leave rural areas due to the lack of opportunities and services.'*

## THE IMPACT ON YOUTH SERVICE PROVIDERS

Service gaps were reported as having a range of impacts on existing services, including:

- Increasing waiting lists;
- Service providers doing crisis driven work rather than effective early intervention;
- Causing a reduction in the capacity of services to work in effective partnerships and to be innovative in service delivery;
- High staff turnover.

Significant concerns were raised regarding how service gaps mean many young people are receiving an inadequate level of support. This is evidenced in this statement from a youth service provider:

*'Already over stretched services are working beyond their capacity to pick up high risk young people who are falling through the gaps. These young people may not be in their service provision criteria.'*

A lack of availability of services that offer generalist psycho-social counselling support to young people means that youth workers and support staff in schools are forced to provide assistance to young people who require a more specialised support than they are trained to provide. This places both the young person and the worker/teacher in a risk situation, as one youth service provider described:

*'School welfare and support staff are constantly called upon to assist with many issues that... are often outside the teacher/workers area of expertise.'*

Another service provider described the link between increased pressure on existing youth support staff in schools and agencies and the lack of timely mental health intervention:

*'Schools and agencies are often confronted by long waiting times for specialist assistance especially re mental health intervention. They are therefore at times pushed beyond their level of comfort or competence in supporting young people with highly complex needs.'*

In describing the impacts that youth support service gaps have on existing youth support services in their region, one School Focused Youth Service coordinator reported that:

*'All staff report being over burdened with cases that are outside of their role. Youth development workers are often expected to take on a counsellor-case manager role.'*

The issue of staff being expected to take on responsibilities outside their role was also highlighted for support staff in schools:

*'School welfare and support staff are constantly called upon to assist with many issues that are not directly related to the student's school life and are often outside the teacher/workers area of expertise.'*

School Focused Youth Service Coordinator,  
regional Victoria

Several survey respondents highlighted the impact that stretched resources had on the capacity of services to be innovative in practice:





*'It is clear that the capacity of agencies in partnerships with schools to develop new initiatives is hampered by the pressure to just keep their heads above water in terms of meeting current demand. This limits their availability for innovation.'*

One School Focused Youth Service Coordinator highlighted the lack of support for existing services and workers, and the impact this had on staff retention rates:

*'The major impact is the increased burden placed on existing services due to limited resources. There is a lack of peer support for workers and staff burn out is high which causes high turnover. Agencies and organisations can't retain staff and recruiting and attracting adequate staff in rural areas is a problem.'*

Another service provider described the compounding effect on remaining staff of high staff turnover:

*'High staff turnover means an empty position for a long time and other staff have a higher workload.'*

# KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following findings and recommendations have been developed from the collation of the evidence collected through the surveys and forums, the consideration of broader evidence and research and following a process of consultation with members of the Office for Youth, the Office for Children and the Mental Health Branch of the Department of Human Services. Drafts of the findings were released to the Regional Youth Affairs Networks for feedback, before being finalised.

The key findings and recommendations are listed under two broad headings: 'Building a service system' and 'Strengthening services'. YACVic and VCOSS recommend that measures to build a service system and to strengthen services occur simultaneously. For example, further examination of service needs and gaps should not be a precursor to service investment.

## 1 BUILDING A SERVICE SYSTEM

Section one of the recommendations outlines the need for a youth services system to be developed, the need for a framework to shape the development of that system; the need for investment in more generalist youth support services; and the value of local planning exercises.

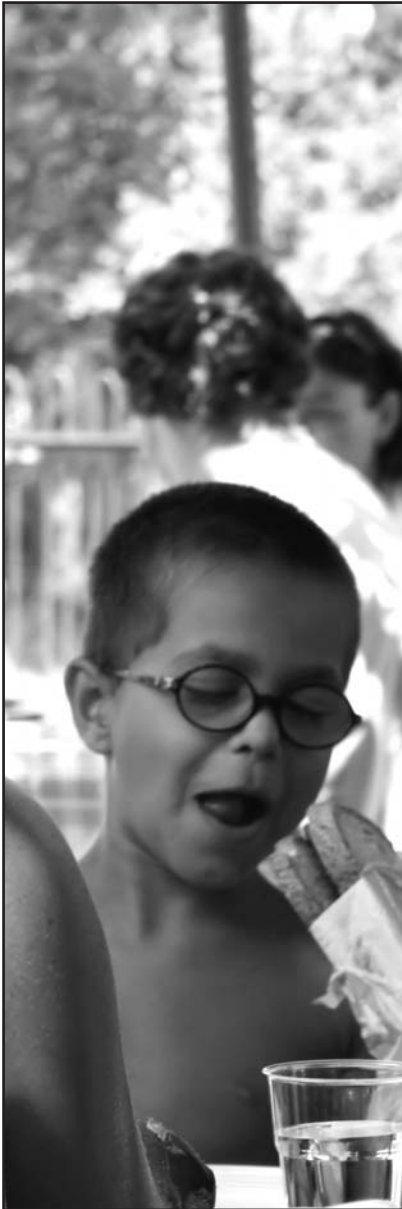
a The need for a Victorian youth services system

### **Finding:**

**In Victoria, there is currently no formal integrated, comprehensive youth services system. While there are many highly effective youth services across the State, there is no coherent framework incorporating clear principles and measures. This results in inconsistency of service delivery and access to support for young people, and means that the needs of young people are not appropriately or adequately addressed nor do young people have every chance to reach their potential.**

The lack of a generalist youth services system in Victoria results in gaps in service responses that support the wellbeing of young people. This means that young people often do not receive the support they need when they need it. The lack of an integrated youth services system that exists along a prevention – early intervention – secondary – tertiary service continuum (the service continuum) has a range of impacts on both young people and services, including:

- a lack of timely and sustained supports for young people;
- a lack of support services to work with young people and their families, as an essential means



of strengthening young people's wellbeing;

- an increased level of risk experienced by the young person, which in turn increases their risk of disengagement from education and training, employment, and community life;
- a greater likelihood of developing an acute mental illness and experiencing a relapse;
- undue pressure on existing services to find funding for their core work from a range of sources,
- exposing services to project / program vulnerability; and
- excessive reporting requirements and difficulties in measuring and evaluating services in an effective and relevant way.

Middle childhood through to adolescence and adulthood is a time of significant change, both emotionally and physically.<sup>30</sup> When this is combined with external factors, such as relationships with family members, peers and school, and factors such as domestic violence and drug and alcohol abuse, there are clear risks to young people's wellbeing. For young people to reach their full potential, it is critical that supports are in place at each level – family, community, school, peers, community services etc, and that these services are available in a timely and sustained way.

One of the factors that has been identified as critical for healthy development and wellbeing is a coherent, supportive, locally-based and responsive service system.<sup>31</sup> In developing a generalist youth services system for Victoria, it is important to note that this does not mean that a 'one size fits all' model of service delivery would be appropriate. Locally focussed, flexible service models along a prevention – early intervention – secondary – tertiary continuum are required to best meet the diverse needs of young people across Victoria. The specific needs of young people and the differing structures and types of existing youth services in all communities are diverse and need to be considered in service development and provision.

In developing a generalist youth services system, it is also critical to ensure that planning and resources are included to enable collaboration and partnerships at the local level which focus on improved linkages across service planning and delivery. Further, particular focus should be directed at young people living in rural and regional areas, urban fringe areas (Interface Council areas), and in communities that have higher levels of socioeconomic disadvantage.

### **Recommendation:**

**That the Victorian Government develop and invest in a locally-based, integrated and comprehensive youth services system in Victoria, that is structured along a prevention – early intervention – secondary – tertiary service continuum.**

The development of a youth services system structured along a prevention – early intervention – secondary – tertiary service continuum (the service continuum) would assist in ensuring that all young people have every chance to reach their full potential. The service continuum is illustrated in detail on page 6 of this report.

Clear principles should guide the development of policy and the delivery of services. A core principle should be that of equity in service provision

for all young people, with equity encompassing the elements of affordability, accessibility (including proximity), inclusivity, and timeliness.

In developing a generalist youth services system, it is critical to ensure that planning and resources are included to enable collaboration and partnerships at the local level which focus on improved linkages across service planning and delivery. The *Best Start* initiative provides a sound model for such an approach. The focus within *Best Start* on providing local, flexible, early intervention responses through an integrated approach should underpin the development of a Victorian Government youth services system framework to support and promote the wellbeing of young people in Victoria.

It is important to note that while the *Best Start* initiative built on existing service networks to improve service integration, further investment is required in generalist youth support services (as outlined in recommendation 1c) in order to strengthen the capacity of the youth services system to operate in an integrated way. It is critical that this service investment is made in order to make possible an integrated service system that better supports and promotes the wellbeing of young people.

The Victorian Government has significantly invested in children and families through a range of early years initiatives. The aims of these initiatives to improve the health, development, learning and wellbeing of children are equally as relevant to young people as they are to children. These could be built upon and extended to ensure their relevance to young people, such as to include a focus on accessing and staying engaged in education, employment and training opportunities and building connectedness with their communities.

Extending the investment in the early years to young people through the development of a youth services system structured along the service continuum would have a range of positive outcomes. Such a step would deliver a more consistent model of assistance and care that supports and promotes the wellbeing of older children and young people, a model which extends as they transition into adolescence and into adulthood.

Such a step would also recognise the significant brain development that continues during adolescence. Similar to the early years, adolescence is a period where significant connections or 'wiring-up' occurs in the brain. During adolescence 17 per cent of brain cell connections are made. Significant connections and remodelling occur in the frontal lobe, the area of the brain responsible a range of functions including

coordinating behaviour, impulse control, decision making, planning and other higher order cognitive functions.<sup>32</sup> Much of this remodelling is influenced by a young person's experiences.

The development of a youth services system structured along a prevention – early intervention – secondary – tertiary service continuum would assist in ensuring a whole of government response to supporting and promoting the wellbeing of young people. This in turn helps ensure positive, nurturing experiences which promote young people's wellbeing. A range of factors influence young people's well-being, including their access to:

- opportunities for ongoing learning and development;
- employment and recreation opportunities;
- mental health and other generalist counseling;
- access to support for families in their role as the primary source of support for young people;
- transport;
- housing;
- community health services and more specialised support, such as drug and alcohol support or homelessness support.

In this context a whole of government approach is required to ensure better outcomes for young people.

Within a locally-based and comprehensive youth services system, it is important to have a focus on Aboriginal young people. To enable this, policy and service responses need be strengthened to better support the wellbeing of Aboriginal young people. Central to this would be ensuring the accessibility of a range of services provided by both Aboriginal-controlled organisations and generalist or mainstream organisations, and having specific services for Aboriginal young people as required.<sup>33</sup> Two steps are required for this to occur. Firstly, the capacity of Aboriginal-controlled organisations needs to be further strengthened to ensure they can remain responsive to the needs of their community. Secondly, generalist organisations should provide culturally sensitive practice to the Victorian Aboriginal community and be accountable for doing so.

A comprehensive youth services system needs also to provide a service response that meets the diverse needs of young people with a disability in order to ensure their access to youth support services.



### Targeting need and ensuring effective evaluation

A youth services system for Victoria structured along a prevention – early intervention – secondary – tertiary service continuum would better support the needs of all young people in Victoria.

In the initial stages of developing and strengthening a youth services system, programs should be focused in areas where there are high concentrations of young people, such as the growth areas on the urban fringe (Interface Council areas) and in rural and regional areas. The Interface Council areas have published a report, *Staying Connected*, which provides an overview of the key steps required to address service gaps for young people living in urban fringe areas.<sup>34</sup> VCOSS and YACVic endorse the recommendations contained in *Staying Connected*, and view these recommendations as forming part of an integrated youth services system structured along the service continuum, which includes generalist youth services

This focusing of service provision could provide the site for demonstration projects for the comprehensive youth services system, being viewed as the first stage in the service system roll-out process. It is critical that these demonstration projects contain a dedicated funding component for an evaluative action research model to enable the collation of evidence and learnings around the effectiveness of the model as measured against the key aims of improving health, development, learning and wellbeing of young people in Victoria.

### b Understanding service gaps and making informed program and service investment

#### Finding:

**Evidence collected by YACVic and VCOSS highlights large gaps in generalist youth support services for young people in Victoria. This evidence draws on the direct service experiences of youth and broader community sector service providers in Victoria.**

There is clearly an urgent need to put in place universal and early intervention support services for young people at the primary and secondary level of the service system. In doing so, it is important to develop a clear framework and an understanding of both the best service delivery models and the areas in Victoria where the service gaps are greatest.

#### Recommendation:

**That a project be undertaken to develop a framework for a strong youth services system, identify best models of service delivery and where the youth service gaps are in Victoria.**

A strategic framework and implementation plan for a strong youth services system, structured along a prevention – early intervention – secondary – tertiary service continuum, is required to drive whole of government and inter-government reforms and facilitate improved integration from the policy level through to the program delivery level. Such a framework should be based on a clear vision of how young people's wellbeing can be supported

and improved through whole of government – ie. across-government and across-departments – initiatives and approaches.

The development of a framework for a strong youth services system, along with an increased investment in youth support services, would complement and assist the achievement of the Victorian Government's objectives in both *Future Directions* and *A Fairer Victoria*. These objectives are achievable through the delivery of effective, locally-based, accessible, integrated youth support services. These services are essential to ensuring that the outcomes identified are achieved for all young people and that the opportunities they offer are equitably accessible.

It is important to note that while *Future Directions* provides a vision with some specific actions, there are no key milestones to monitor progress. Any framework and implementation plan should spell out the next steps across all government policy and programs, and include localised decision making regarding the types of infrastructure and programs delivered at a local level. Equally important is both a better linking across government – across divisions within departments, between separate but related departments, and across the three tiers of government, federal, state and local; and improved evaluation.

The development of a framework for a strong youth services system would provide a structure through which the key objectives of *Future Directions* could be monitored and indicators of the success of those objectives being met could be measured.

In developing a strong youth services system, the project should also focus on five priority areas:

- determining where the service gaps lie both geographically and socio-economically;
- determining the capacity and sustainability of existing youth services;
- identifying the types of interventions and supports required in these areas;
- identifying evidence based best models of service delivery, and mechanisms by which these could be shared across youth and broader community service organisations in Victoria; and
- resourcing and requiring the development of integrated Youth Plans for each local government area that explicitly engage community sector organisations.

Through focusing on these five priority areas, clarification will be provided around where the Government should focus investment to best support

the wellbeing of young people. The research for the project should build upon existing programs that map service delivery gaps, and take into consideration existing networks that are in a position to identify service needs, such as (but not limited to) Regional Youth Affairs Networks, Local Learning and Employment Networks, School Focused Youth Services, Primary Care Partnerships, and Family Reconciliation and Mediation Programs. The identification of agencies and programs that are best placed to identify local youth service needs should directly involve local services, as the best placed agencies and programs will differ between communities.

Any framework should also incorporate a strong evaluation component. It is important to link future policy and program development and implementation to an analysis of outcomes to date. Improved evaluation is urgently required. An action or learning based methodology is the most effective and should be funded as part of ongoing policy and program development. Alongside improved evaluation, Victoria needs to develop its own evidence and research base regarding what is most effective, in addition to drawing on international evidence. A shift has developed to relying solely on international evidence and not resourcing our own academic and practice-learning.

The project would inform the development of a strong youth services system in Victoria, through which the most effective investment by the Victorian Government can be identified and service gaps addressed. Such a project would complement the valuable evidence base collected by VCOSS and YACVic through the *Who's Carrying the Can?* project.

The project should be undertaken in collaboration with the community sector. It would be optimal if the research was conducted by an external party and that the process delivered a proposal or range of recommendations agreed with by the youth and broader community sector.

## c Investing in services<sup>35</sup>

### Finding:

**Essential to the development of a youth services system and a framework for a strong youth services system is investment in generalist youth support services. The development of a services framework should not be a precursor to service investment. Substantial evidence exists highlighting the serious gaps in generalist youth support services. These gaps mean that young**



**people miss out on support when they need it. Investment in generalist youth support services needs to happen as a matter of urgency to better ensure that every young person has every chance to reach their potential.**

Generalist youth support services place a central role in assisting young people to make important transitions in their lives. VCOSS and YACVic acknowledge and support the Victorian Government's announcement of funding for Youth Transition Workers focussed on supporting young people disengaged from education and training as outlined in *A Fairer Victoria: Progress and Next Steps*. While these are key points of transition for young people, young people experience many different transitions, and for marginalised young people these transitions may involve a range of complex circumstances that impinge on their ability to navigate through this important life phase. Examples include shifting in and out of accommodation arrangements, family conflict and/or abuse, mental health issues or substance abuse. Generalist youth support services are crucial in supporting young people through these transitions.

### **Recommendation:**

**That the Victorian Government dedicate new resources to creating more generalist youth support positions and services in Victoria, and that these be delivered within flexible funding models that allow for a range of support responses to young people.**

d The importance of local planning

### **Finding:**

**Local area planning processes and structures would improve the service response to the needs of young people. Such planning would help ensure improved infrastructure, continuum of care, and a more robust and integrated service system that can better ensure that every young person has every chance to reach their potential.**

### **Recommendation:**

**That local planning processes and structures be resourced at the local government level across Victoria.**

Local planning processes and structures would improve service responses, enhance community capacity building and deliver better outcomes for young people. The recent report *Improving mental health outcomes in Victoria: The next wave of reform* notes the significant social and economic gains that could be achieved through the development of strategic

responses at the local level.<sup>36</sup> Such benefits would be further enhanced by improved collaboration and planning at the local level across youth services.

To be most effective, local planning exercises need to involve the community sector, local government, state government and relevant Commonwealth agencies, schools and young people themselves, assisted by youth workers to develop their capacity to contribute to planning. Local planning exercises would need to build upon existing planning processes.

## 2 STRENGTHENING SERVICES

Section two outlines recommendations regarding the importance of providing mental health support at the early intervention and secondary intervention level as part of the youth service system; measures to improve collaboration of existing services; and measures to improve sector sustainability.

a Early intervention in mental health

### Finding:

**In Victoria, depression among young people is one of the most frequently reported mental health problems.<sup>37</sup> The overwhelming majority of demand for mental health support is at the early and secondary intervention end of the service continuum. Large gaps exist in the availability of these services, denying many young people access to timely and appropriate support. This serves to significantly undermine the potential for early intervention and relapse prevention.<sup>38</sup>**

Mental health services should form a key part of generalist youth services, as generalist youth services play a pivotal role in reducing the onset of tertiary mental health issues by providing timely support for young people presenting with primary and secondary mental health issues. As noted in the recent report prepared by Boston Consulting for the Department of Premier and Cabinet, *Improving mental health outcomes in Victoria: The next wave of reform*, services at this level (referred to as Tier 1 services) can deliver significant economic and social outcomes.<sup>39</sup> This report also notes that services at this primary care level are more cost effective.

Importantly, any investment in early intervention/ primary and secondary support should not be made at the expense of tertiary services, and vice versa. As

noted in *The next wave of reform*, social and economic gains would be evident from investment across the three Tiers.<sup>40</sup> Further, such earlier investment may alleviate some of the pressures on the tertiary services, however this will not occur immediately.

The Federal Government has placed a focus on early intervention in mental health through the establishment of 'headspace', the National Youth Mental Health Foundation. headspace will offer brokerage funding through the youth services development fund to 'Communities of youth services'. These will be a consortium of services including generalist youth support services and mental health service providers. They will need to demonstrate that they have well-established relationships with other services. headspace, therefore, is a program that builds on existing services and can only be effective where there are adequate services on the ground. In order for Victoria to benefit from the Headspace program, the mental health response of the generalist youth support services in Victoria needs to be strengthened.

### Recommendation:

**That the development of a youth services system structured along a prevention – early intervention – secondary – tertiary service continuum include targeted resources to provide mental health support at the early intervention and secondary levels of the service system.**

The mental health initiative of the Coalition of Australian Governments (COAG) is well placed to ensure that this resource and program commitment is made. Such a step would be in line with the following three key elements that were addressed in the *National Mental Health Action Plan* that was recently finalised:

- a renewed focus on promotion, prevention and early detection and intervention;
- getting the balance right between hospital care, community and primary care and the best type of accommodation for people who are unable to manage on their own;
- improving and integrating the care system to enable the right care to be accessed at the right time.<sup>41</sup>



## b Improving collaboration

### Finding:

**Currently many services within the youth sector have established very effective models of collaboration. However this collaboration needs to be extended and strengthened to better support young people and improve service responses. Building networks and improving collaboration between agencies to enable improved service linkages and integration is dependant on both resources and cultural change.**

A clear barrier to the collaboration of youth and broader community sector services and a factor in youth service gaps is a lack of collaboration between levels of governments and across government departments. As one youth service provider explained in their survey response:

*'We need to move away from the planning of youth services being done in isolation across the range of departments ie in Federal, State and Local government. There is a clear lack of coordination and planning between all levels of government, this results in fragmented youth services within communities and this particularly impacts on smaller rural communities.'*

### Recommendation:

**That mechanisms be established to improve collaboration across the youth and community sectors and across government departments. Specifically, the objective of these mechanisms would be:**

- 1. to develop and strengthen the integration of youth specific services provided by the youth and community services sector.**
- 2. to develop clear strategies and measures to improve collaboration across government departments and between levels of government regarding youth support services.**

Resources are required to build sustainable networks and improve collaboration between agencies. Such collaboration enables improved service linkages and integration of services both in the youth sector and other relevant sectors including: youth specific supported accommodation assistance program (SAAP) services and family support services. Any resources allocated should build upon the collaborative networks already existing in youth services, such as the School Focused Youth Service.

## c Investing in sector sustainability

### Finding:

**An increased focus is required on supporting a sustainable youth and broader community sector. A key element of a strong youth service system in Victoria is an adequately trained, remunerated and supported workforce. Those working in generalist youth support services report that young people are presenting with increasingly complex needs and as such it is increasingly important that the training, development and support needs of youth service providers be met.**

Opportunities for workforce development, professional training and the potential establishment of a professional association for youth workers are all important means of developing a sustainable sector.

## Recommendation:

**That the Victorian Government increase its investment in the development and sustainability of the youth and broader community sector, specifically in the areas of workforce development and training, and ensuring adequate resourcing of services to ensure appropriate and timely support can be available for young people.**

Inadequately funded services face a range of barriers to the support and provision of development opportunities for their employees. The Victorian Government needs to ensure services are adequately funded, and that the support and professional development needs of workers are considered in the funding of services. Further, funding models need to include a transparent unit costing for services.





# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1

### YOUTH SUPPORT SERVICES: WHERE ARE THE GAPS?

Anecdotal evidence demonstrates gaps in generalist support services for young people in Victoria. The purpose of this confidential questionnaire is to identify the need for increased resources and better responses in early support and generalist services for young people in Victoria. Please take the time to participate in this important process and have your say about youth service gaps.

'Generalist support services' in this context is interpreted to range from early intervention support (for example, skill development/case management) to secondary intervention (for example support provided to young people "at risk" of developing tertiary issues like chronic mental health issues, drug and alcohol issues or homelessness).

Examples of these services might be Local Government youth support services, counselling services, peer support programs for young people etc.

This questionnaire will be distributed through the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) and Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) membership base and networks.

VCOSS and YACVic are working in partnership on the *Youth Support Services: Who's Carrying the Can?* project and campaign. As part of this project and campaign we are undertaking this survey and hosting the *Whose Carrying the Can?* forums exploring this issue, one in Melbourne on 4 May and one in Benalla on 17 May. You are encouraged to attend a forum. For more information see the YACVic website: [www.yacvic.org.au](http://www.yacvic.org.au).

The findings of the survey and forums will be presented in a report released to the Victorian Government and the youth and community sectors, made available through the YACVic and VCOSS websites and distributed to YACVic and VCOSS members.

Please complete this survey by Thursday 11 May

Return to YACVic either by

Email: [info@yacvic.org.au](mailto:info@yacvic.org.au)

Fax: 9639 1622

Post to: Level 2, 172 Flinders St Melbourne, 3000

**1. Please describe your organisation:**

- a How would you describe the size of your organisation?  
Small (less than 5 EFT paid staff)  
Medium (5-20 EFT paid staff)  
Large (over 20 EFT paid staff)
- b If your service/organisation does not only provide youth specific services, how many EFT paid staff are employed to work with young people?
- c Who do you receive funding from?  
Local Government  
Privately funded  
State Government  
Philanthropic Grant  
Federal Government  
Other
- d How are your youth services funded? For example are they funded through a three year contract, a philanthropic grant, a combination of sources?  
Please describe....
- e) Does your organisation self-fund any component of your youth services?  
Yes  
No  
If yes, what percentage?
- f Does your organisation provide only youth specific services or other support services such as health services, child protection services, family support services etc?  
If so, please list the services you provide:
- g Where are you based?  
Metro Melbourne  
Rural/Regional  
Urban Fringe

**2. What are the gaps in generalist youth support services?**

- a Please describe the gaps in youth service provision in your region.
- b Has there been a reduction in the availability of youth support services in your region over time?
- c Have you had to reduce your level of service provision? If so, when?
- d If your service has maintained the level of service provision, how has this been achieved?
- e How do these 'gaps' in youth service provision impact on your agency? Do they impact in relation to:  
Staffing:  
Referrals/outourcing:  
Waiting lists/ response time:  
Eligibility criteria/ access:  
Clients re-presenting:  
Capacity to follow up/ monitoring:  
Delivery of outreach services:  
Length of engagement  
(ie crisis intervention only, short term etc.)  
Other:

### **3. How do these 'gaps' in youth support services impact on young people ?**

Is there anything else you would like to add:

Thank you for your time.

## APPENDIX 2

### SCHOOL FOCUSED YOUTH SERVICE SURVEY

Thank you for taking the time to fill in the feedback form below. Should you have any questions about the form or the report we will be compiling, please contact Jen Rose at YACVic, E: [jrose@yacvic.org.au](mailto:jrose@yacvic.org.au) or T: 03 9267 3722.

Please return this form to Jen Rose via email on the above address, via fax to 9639 1622, or by mail: Attention Jen Rose, Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, Level 2, 172 Victoria St, Melbourne VIC 3000. It would be much appreciated if responses could be returned by 11 May 2006.

- 1. What area does your School Focused Youth Service cover?**
- 2. Where are the gaps in youth support services in your region? Please be specific about the types of support services in which the gaps exist. The following list is to prompt your thinking only. Any feedback would be much appreciated.**

For example, are there gaps in the domains of:

- General support/counselling:
- Mental health service intervention:
- Physical and sexual health:
- Family relationships, including domestic violence:
- Homelessness and accommodation:
- Other peer support programs:
- Drug and alcohol:
- Culturally and linguistically appropriate support services:

- 3. What are the impacts that youth support service gaps have on young people in your region?**
- 4. What are the impacts that youth support service gaps have on existing youth support services in your region?**

**Is there anything else you would like to add?**

# ENDNOTES

1. The Melbourne Interface Councils have undertaken research specific to their areas and have developed a framework for service delivery presented in their report, *Staying Connected: solutions for addressing service gaps for young people living at the Interface*.
2. Office for Youth, *Future directions: An action agenda for young Victorians*, Victorian Department for Victorian Communities, Melbourne, 2006, p.6.
3. Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet, *Growing Victoria Together: A vision for Victoria to 2010 and beyond*, State of Victoria, 2005, p.3.
4. Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet [DPC], *A fairer Victoria: Creating opportunity and addressing disadvantage*, State of Victoria, May 2005; DPC, *A fairer Victoria: Progress and next steps*, State of Victoria, June 2006.
5. Office for Youth, *Future directions: An action agenda for young Victorians*, Victorian Department for Victorian Communities, 2006.
6. South Australian Department of Human Services, *Social welfare services planning framework: Family and youth services 2002–2005*, Adelaide, August 2001, see: [www.dfc.sa.gov.au/cyfs/documents/publications/discussion-social-welfare-framework.doc](http://www.dfc.sa.gov.au/cyfs/documents/publications/discussion-social-welfare-framework.doc), viewed 22 September 2005.
7. M. Marven, Orygen Youth Health, Mental health and young people: The importance of generalist youth support services, Presented at: VCOSS-YACVic Youth Support Services: Who's carrying the can? forum, Melbourne, 4 May, 2006; Boston Consulting Group, *Improving mental health outcomes in Victoria: The next wave of reform*, Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2006, p.5 - details one of the key findings of the report that there is limited investment in prevention and early intervention, with young people in particular not receiving support.
8. The Victorian Government's commitment to early intervention is articulated in the following policy documents: *A Fairer Victoria: Creating opportunities and addressing disadvantage*; *Future Directions: An action agenda for young Victorians*; and *Protecting children: The next steps*.
9. See *Cohorts of young people missing out: Need for support responses for young people between the ages of 8-12 years and 18-25 years* on page 21 of this report.
10. National Youth Agency, UK, *Spending wisely: Young people, youth work and youth services - An introductory guide*. Retrieved from <http://www.nya.org.uk>, 26/06/06 and RMIT University Youth Work website <http://www.rmit.edu.au/programs/bp191>, 7/08/06.

11. Official Opening 'Putting Children First: their future our future', A speech from The Hon. Sherryl Garbutt, MP Minister for Children and Minister for Community Services, Friday 3 March, 2006, p 7 – 8. Retrieved from <http://www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au>, 29/09/06.
12. A. Fuller, *Don't Waste Your Breath – An Introduction to the Mysterious World of the Adolescent Brain*, p.7, Retrieved from <http://www.andrewfuller.com.au>, 20/09/06.
13. A. Fuller, *Don't Waste Your Breath*, p.9
14. A. Fuller, p.14.
15. A. Fuller, p.17.
16. Orygen Youth Health, *About youth mental health, unpublished, Orygen Youth Health, Melbourne*, p.1.
17. A. Fuller, p.19.
18. Orygen Youth Health, *About youth mental health, unpublished.*
19. Orygen Youth Health, *About youth mental health, unpublished.*
20. Orygen Youth Health, *About youth mental health, unpublished.*
21. The Boston Consulting Group, *Improving mental health outcomes in Victoria: The next wave of reform*, p. 5
22. The Boston Consulting Group,(2006). p.24.
23. Orygen Youth Health, *About Youth Mental Health*. (web). P.1.
24. *Future Directions*, 2006, p.12.
25. Orygen Youth Health, *About youth mental health, unpublished.*
26. School Focused Youth Service Homepage, Retrieved from <http://www.sfys.infoxchange.net.au/>, 10/08/06.
27. CAHMS are Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. PMHT are Primary Mental Health Teams.
28. *Future directions*, 2006. p.11.
29. More information can be found in M Bamblett, Koorie high risk adolescents: Responding to their needs – Culture and connection, Presentation to the *Aboriginal Human Services Forum, March 2006*, VACCA.
30. Centre for Adolescent Health, *Investing in young people getting back on track*, Melbourne, 2005.
31. NLT consulting, *Staying connected: Solutions for addressing service gaps for young people living at the Interface– A report commissioned by the Interface Councils in metropolitan Melbourne*, Interface Councils, September 2006.
32. National Mental Health Institute, *Teenage brain: A work in progress - A brief overview of research into brain development during adolescence*, NIH Publication No. 01-4929, 2001, NMHI website: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/Publicat/teenbrain.cfm>.
33. M. Bamblett, Koorie high risk adolescents, Presentation to the *Aboriginal Human Services Forum, March 2006*.
34. NLT consulting, *Staying connected: Solutions for addressing service gaps for young people living at the Interface*, 2006.
35. The Melbourne Interface Councils have undertaken research specific to their areas and have developed a framework for service delivery presented in their report *Staying Connected*.
36. The Boston Consulting Group, *Improving mental health outcomes in Victoria*, 2006.
37. Beyond Blue, *Young people*, on Beyond Blue website: [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au), retrieved 5/9/06.
38. The Boston Consulting Group, *Improving mental health outcomes in Victoria*, p.24.
39. The Boston Consulting Group, p.24, 41.
40. The Boston Consulting Group, p.40-41.
41. Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) *Meeting 10 February 2006 Communiqué*, <http://www.coag.gov.au/meetings/100206/index.htm#mentalhealth>, accessed 11/8/06.





# EVERY YOUNG PERSON EVERY CHANCE

*'If our answer to young people is that  
"Sorry, we can't help you",  
we are failing in our duty of care  
and commitment to young people.'*

Youth service provider