

Young People

'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.

A community may be very 'liveable' for some, while being highly exclusionary for others. Liveability changes across the lifecycle – simply because a community is liveable for an adult, doesn't guarantee that it is liveable for a young person. Young people have very specific requirements and interpretations of what liveability means for them and may have different priorities and needs from the physical and social environment in their community to ensure liveability.³¹

In order to create a sustainable Victoria the voices of young people need to be recognised and strengthened as part of an integrated and long-term approach to all aspects of young people's lives. Young people need to be given equitable opportunities to achieve their full potential in connected communities and services where they are supported and encouraged to participate.

Generalist Youth Services for all Young Victorians

Flexible, integrated support services play an integral role in ensuring all young people maximise their capacity to participate not only in education and training and/or employment but also in broader community life. Yet many communities in Victoria, particularly in rural and regional areas and in the growth corridor Interface council areas, have no early support or generalist youth services for young people.³²

*'It is expected that the Vulnerable Youth Framework will, over time, strengthen and develop a coordinated service system for vulnerable young people'*³³

VCOSS welcomes the development of the *Vulnerable Youth Framework* and the opportunities that this brings to develop and invest in a youth service system. Currently in Victoria, there is no formal integrated youth services system, meaning that the needs of young people are not adequately met.³⁴

The Victorian Government needs to build on the recommendations of the recent KPMG report *Improving youth service responses in Victoria* and the potential of the *Vulnerable Youth Framework* to develop and invest in a locally-based, integrated and comprehensive youth service system that is structured along a prevention – early intervention – secondary – tertiary service continuum.

31 D Morabito, *Snapshots of life: exploring the barriers faced by people experiencing disadvantage – what can planners do?* Victorian Council of Social Service, Melbourne, 2003.

32 VCOSS & Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, *Who's Carrying the Can? A Report into Youth Services Gaps in Victoria*, VCOSS & YACVic, Melbourne, 2006.

33 Department of Human Services, *Vulnerable Youth Framework discussion paper*, Victorian Government, 2008.

34 VCOSS & YACVic, p.25.

An increased focus on generalist youth support services is one of the key elements to ensure a more timely and integrated approach to supporting and promoting the health and wellbeing of young people.

Research conducted by VCOSS and the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) which resulted in the report, *Who's carrying the can? A report into youth services gaps in Victoria*, identified the need for generalist youth services across Victoria.³⁵ Currently, large gaps exist in the availability of generalist youth services resulting in many young people not being able to access support until they reach crisis point.³⁶

There needs to be the development of and investment in generalist youth services that goes beyond 'embedding' a youth service system, as suggested in the *Vulnerable Youth Framework* discussion paper. Investment in prevention, early identification and intervention, as part of a continuum of youth-focused services, can provide young people with crucial supports before they reach crisis point. The availability of generalist youth services is central at this end of the continuum. Generalist youth services, for example, 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. The Boston Consulting Group report, *Improving Mental Health Outcomes in Victoria*, also noted that services at this level (referred to as Tier one services) can deliver significant economic and social outcomes, and that services at this primary care level are more cost effective.³⁷

Adolescence is a period where the brain goes through key developmental stages, with 17 per cent of brain cell connections being made during this time.³⁸ This research highlights the importance of young people being able to access supports when they may have issues that could have an impact on this development process. A young person's capacity to participate in education, training and employment is linked to the development of the brain and will have long-term impacts. This is where schools have an important role to play in the lives of young people and it is vital that the *Vulnerable Youth Framework* provides a catalyst for change in the way that schools work with young people, this change can ensure schools can be more flexible in the way they are working with vulnerable young people.

The youth service system in Victoria is currently fragmented and isn't informed by adequate planning mechanisms. Planning for adequate supports and services for young people is essential. The *Vulnerable Youth Framework* discussion paper proposes the development of local area youth plans. Local planning has the potential to improve service responses, enhance community capacity and deliver improved outcomes for young people. Local plans also have the capacity to improve collaboration, any collaborations need to be adequately

35 J Rose, & C Atkins, *Who's Carrying the Can? A Report into youth services gaps in Victoria*, VCOSS, Melbourne, 2006, available at: www.vcooss.org.au.

36 J Rose & C Atkins, *Who's Carrying the Can?*, 2006.

37 Boston Consulting Group, 2006, *Improving Mental Health Outcomes in Victoria: the next wave of reform*, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Melbourne.

38 National Mental Health Institute, *Teenage brain: A work in progress – A brief overview of the research into brain development during adolescence*, NIH Publication No. 01-4929, 2005.

resourced and build on existing networks.

It is essential that planning undertaken at a local level is used to inform policy development at a state-wide level. This was reinforced by the recommendation of the KPMG report *Improving youth service responses in Victoria*, which suggested the development of a State-wide Strategic Framework for Youth Services. It is essential that any planning mechanisms are accompanied by development, implementation and on-going sustainability resourcing.

*'While the majority of young Victorians are faring well, for a minority this is not the case and there are clear inequalities in outcomes for some young people.'*³⁹

It is important that all young Victorian's are provided with the services and supports that will enable them to achieve their full potential. In particular there need to be targeted responses to address the particular issues facing vulnerable young people and VCOSS welcomes the emphasis on these particular groups of young people in the *Vulnerable Youth Framework* discussion paper and anticipates that the Framework will include a range of responses. VCOSS believes that strategies need to focus particularly on homeless young people,⁴⁰ young people in and leaving State care, Indigenous young people, young people in contact with the youth justice system, young people with a disability, young people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

Young People Leaving State Care

The outcomes for young people in out-of-home care are very poor both during their time in care and when they leave the formal state care system.⁴¹ Young people leaving care continue to have significantly poorer life outcomes than other young people.⁴² Despite this there remains limited support for young people leaving care.

For further detail regarding this issue, see the Out-of-home care sector on p.23

39 Department of Education and Early Childhood Development & the Department of Planning and Community Development, *The state of Victoria's young people*, Victorian Government, 2008.

40 For more detail see National Youth Commission, 2008, *Australia's Homeless Youth: A Report of the National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness*, Melbourne, p.10.

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42 S Raman, B Inder & C Forbes, *Investing for success: The economics of supporting young people leaving care, Monograph number 5*, Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, Melbourne, 2005; P Mendes & B Moslehuddin, *Transitioning from the state care system: the impacts of incare experiences on the post-care outcomes for young people leaving care*, Paper presented at the Australian Social Policy Conference, Sydney, 13 July 2007.

Recommendations

1. VCOSS recommends that the Government improve the life chances of young people by:
 - developing and investing in generalist youth services;
 - developing and investing in a continuum of integrated youth services;
 - resourcing local planning and collaboration between all organisations providing services and supports to young people; and,
 - developing a State-wide Strategic Framework for Youth Services.
2. VCOSS recommends that the Government increase the availability of prevention and early intervention mental health support services.
3. VCOSS proposes that the Government resource more flexible learning environments to better support the education outcomes of vulnerable young people.
4. VCOSS recommends that the Government better support Indigenous young people by:
 - investing in Indigenous specific services for young people; and,
 - continued investment and targeted resources for Indigenous youth mentoring programs.
5. VCOSS recommends that the Government better support CALD young people by:
 - investing and expanding VicRoads L2P learner driver program to develop targeted driver education supports for newly-arrived, refugee and asylum seeker young people as part of the new Graduated Licensing system; and,
 - providing equipment grants to sporting and cultural groups that support CALD young people, in particular, refugee and asylum-seeker young people.
6. VCOSS recommends that the Government better support young people in contact with the youth justice system by:
 - investing and expanding an after-hours legal advice line for young people;
 - developing and investing in services that prevent high-volume offending and recidivism by young people; and
 - increasing funding to diversionary programs for young people to prevent engagement in the criminal justice system.
7. VCOSS recommends that the Government increase investment and support for young people in and transitioning out of State care by:
 - extending the support available to young people transitioning from State care to include increased brokerage funding, active case management and more effective and flexible program responses.