

# YAKES!

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE YOUTH AFFAIRS COUNCIL OF VICTORIA INC.

## Who's listening?

There is increasing recognition of the need to improve the status of children and young people in the community. This is evident in the establishment of Commissions for Children and Young People both overseas and in several Australian states.

In light of this, YACVic is calling for the establishment of a Children and Young People's Commission in Victoria. Are You Listening to Us? YACVic's discussion paper on the topic presents a concrete tailor made model for Victoria. The discussion paper is divided into two sections. Part one details why Victoria needs a Children and Young People's Commission and examines existing models to determine the characteristics of effective Commissions. Part two outlines the proposed model for a Victorian Commission.

The model proposed by YACVic for a children's commission is strongly embedded in a rights framework as articulated by the Convention of the Rights of the Child. But what do we mean by children's rights? Moira Rayner, the Director, London Children's Rights Commission perhaps put it best in a speech that she delivered to a working conference on the Convention on the Rights of the Child earlier this year when she quoted Janusz Korczak who was a Polish paediatrician 80 years ago and whose ideas formed the basis of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child.

Korczak said: '*Children are not the people of tomorrow, but people today. They are entitled to be taken seriously. They have a right to be treated by adults with courtesy and respect, as equals.*'

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Are you listening to us? can be accessed from the YACVic website or hard copies may be obtained by calling the YACVic office. Comments and suggestions are encouraged either in writing or by emailing Paula Grogan, YACVic Policy Officer [pgrogan@yacvic.org.au](mailto:pgrogan@yacvic.org.au). In around six months time YACVic will collate and report back to you a summary of the comments that we have received.

## Homelessness – developing a strategy for young people

The Victorian Homelessness Strategy Working Report highlights a number of key issues relating to homelessness in Victoria. This article is an edited version of our submission concerning the Victorian Homelessness Strategy.

It is estimated that 44% of homeless people are aged between 0-24 years. Therefore, it is imperative that the Victorian Homelessness Strategy provides a particular focus on the issues that impact on young people and the structural and systemic factors that may result in homelessness. We have identified the following as critical issues in relation to young people and homelessness:

- A lack of income security that reduces young people's capacity to live independently and places them at greater risk of homelessness.
- The criteria that may be used to exclude certain groups from the system which only compounds disadvantage.
- Difficulties in negotiating the homelessness service system.
- These issues need to be addressed if the VHS is to promote early intervention strategies and an increased quality of service for young homeless people.

### Income security

Income is a key factor in the affordability of housing. The disparity between levels of social security benefits and the cost of living means that private rental is often out of reach of young people. As a result, more young people are likely to seek accommodation and support within the homelessness service system. This is placing further demands on an already overburdened system.

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## About YACVIC

The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria Inc. (YACVic) is the peak body and leading policy advocate on young people's issues in Victoria. YACVic's vision is for a Victorian Community that values and provides opportunity, participation, justice and equity for all young people.

The main function of YACVic is to make representations to government and serve as an advocate for the interests of young people, workers with young people and organisations that provide direct services to young people.

YACVic's resources are primarily directed towards policy analysis and development through consultation with its constituency. YACVic also resources the information needs of its members through regular updates and by facilitating networking within and beyond the Victorian youth sector.

YACVic is governed by a volunteer Board and managed by a paid secretariat. The Council's core funding comes from the Victorian Government's Office for Youth.

## Vision statement

Our vision is for a Victorian Community that values and provides opportunity, participation, justice and equity for all young people.

YACVic actively works towards this vision as the peak body and leading policy advocate on young people's issues in Victoria.

## YIKES!

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## Contributions

Contributions to YIKES! are welcome. Please contact us for info on deadlines for 2003.

## Inserts & Advertising

If you wish to include an insert or advert in Yikes please contact the YACVic Communications Officer on (03) 9612 8999 or email [info@yacvic.org.au](mailto:info@yacvic.org.au)

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## MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL REMINDER 2001 – 2002 memberships are now due!

Support YACVic, Victoria's leading policy advocate on youth issues. To keep receiving YIKES! and other YACVic resources fill in the membership form on page 11 and return to YACVic ASAP.

## Victorian Youth Round Table

**O**n the 29th of June, 60 young people gathered in Devenish, near Sheparton, for the fifth Victorian Youth Round Table. We were joined by the Minister for Youth Affairs, The Honourable Justin Madden, to discuss the issues of importance to rural youth. The day focused on youth services in rural areas, what exists, what doesn't and what should be done to improve the situation.

Issues that continued to rise throughout the day included the fate of FReeZa, the absence of knowledge amongst young people in rural communities about existing services and the lack of basic services that city dwellers take for granted, particularly in the areas of communications, transportation, recreation and adolescent health.

Minister Madden commented that Youth Round Tables were "A fantastic way for young people to get their opinions to government, in forums based on specific issues, in order for the government to base their youth strategies on these views."

by Lise Dalla Torre

## YACVic's Youth Policy Resource Centre

For YACVic members interested in youth policy in Victoria the Youth Policy Resource Centre (YPRC) is a valuable tool. The centre is available to all members of YACVic and holds material on the diverse range of issues affecting young people. If you would like to visit the centre please give the office a call on (03) 9612 8999 to arrange a time.

## Latest resources

- Youth Studies Australia (v. 20 n. 2 June 2001)
- National Child Protection Clearinghouse – Newsletter. (V. 9 No. 1 Winter 2001)
- Just policy. Includes article "Student welfare policies in state education" (No. 22 June 2001)
- Children's welfare association collaboration research project. (No. 1 June 2001)
- Ausyouth. (Issue 5 June 2001)
- Young women's guide to services
- Promoting the mental health and wellbeing of children and young people. (Oct. 2000)
- YAPRap (Vol. 11, No. 5 June 2001)
- Purple bus. (February 2001) Issue #2
- YAPA Annual report 2000
- CWAV Members directory June 2001, Issue No. 27
- Voiceworks 0045. Winter 2001

## Youth Participation at the federal level – your feedback wanted.

YACVic has an interest in all political parties having well thought through and researched youth policies.

With this in mind we have received a request for information from YACVic members by Senator Kate Lundy Federal Shadow Minister for Youth Affairs. Senator Lundy is currently engaging in an ongoing process of reviewing and developing the Labor party's youth policy directions and content.

Senator Lundy welcomes input and feedback from YACVic members on Labor policy and youth issues including youth representation, participation and consultation.

With a federal election looming this is a good chance to make sure that young people stay on the federal opposition's agenda.

## For more info contact:

Senator Kate Lundy c/- Verity Newnham

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Website <http://www.katelundy.dynamite.com.au>

# Why our children need a new and powerful champion

By Alastair Nicholson, Chief Justice, Family Court of Australia

Children's rights are firmly on the community agenda of our State. A forum at Melbourne Town Hall recently called for more strategies to advance the rights, interests and well-being of young Victorians. One key recommendation was the establishment of a truly independent and dedicated Commission for Children and Young People that enjoys a fearlessness akin to the office of the Auditor-General.



Danny Sandor – DCI International, Australia; Madeline – Girl Story, YWCA and Gavin Jennings – Parliamentary Secretary to Cabinet at the launch of YACVic's paper *Are You Listening to Us?*

I too think we need a champion for children and young people that has a formal mandate to galvanise attention to their situation and the power to take action to improve it.

On Thursday [June 28, 2001], the momentum was advanced by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria when YACVic released its discussion paper *Are You Listening To Us? – The Case For A Victorian Children and Young People's Commission*. Policy proposals such as this demonstrate why it is imperative to have strong and constructive peak organisations like YACVic.

The discussion paper unfolds the compelling argument for a Victorian Commission. It pays detailed attention to models that have been established elsewhere and to the existing landscape of agencies in our State. It carefully assesses what the limitations are seen to be and explains why the proposal meets these concerns. It puts up for discussion, a concrete proposal that is tailor-made for Victoria.

The proposed Commission would refer children, young people and their families to existing complaints mechanisms, and would take on the role of a support and a chaperone where it was needed. By monitoring rather than dealing with all complaints, the Commission would have a role in improving the accessibility and responsiveness of those systems.

Its comprehensive knowledge of individual grievances will create a unique store of

information about children and young people for the whole Victorian community. Such knowledge would inform the Commission's advocacy strategies and priorities. It could also prompt a formal Inquiry to investigate the best way of dealing with a common complaint.

The proposed model avoids the pitfall of a narrow focus. Obviously as Chief Justice of the Family Court of Australia I have a particular interest in our systems for protecting children and adolescents from abuse. With the benefit of a national overview, I get to see the differences in this intrinsically difficult area. But such cases are the smaller sharp-end symptom of a more deep and widespread community problem – the lack of respect for children and young people.

Whatever might be required to enhance our State's response to particular cases of abuse and neglect is a quite separate issue to why we need a Commission.

The discussion paper has a broader vision. It pictures an expert advocacy body that is directed towards improving how this State can take a great leap forward in pride – pride that our State culture and systems can take on board candid and constructive suggestions about how we all should better advance the rights, interests and well-being of all our children and young people.

Importantly, the Commission would have a role in scrutinising proposed and existing legislation with an expert child-centred eye. Especially with

the Convention on the Rights of the Child as a key part of the Commission's charter, this ongoing process would ensure that our State laws are in conformity with the Convention. I have no doubt that if we had such a dedicated Commission at Commonwealth level, then statutes such as the Family Law Act and child support legislation would be more child-centred.

The Commission is designed to have a leading role in education about children's rights. This is essential because, sadly, talk about children's rights can be wrongly understood as undermining the role of families. But no-one should doubt that the Commission is a "family friendly" proposal. My discussions with the heads of such bodies in New Zealand, Sweden and Norway make it clear that families are forceful allies not antagonists in the pursuit of just outcomes for their children.

For these and many other reasons, all our Members of the Victorian Parliament should therefore welcome *Are You Listening To Us?* YACVic's proposal puts children and young people above party politics, a value that all our elected representatives could not, and I believe, would not, oppose. I hope the concept, its key features and the pursuit of implementing the idea, enjoy unanimous support within the Victorian Parliament. It would be a proud day for Victoria.

*This article first appeared as an opinion piece in The Age on June 29, 2001*

# National Youth and Racism Forum

by Miriam Silberman  
YACVic Youth Reference Group member

‘Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and all kinds of related intolerance have not gone away... while we recognise that human fear is in itself in-eradicable, we maintain that its consequences are not.’

*Extract from the Vision Declaration for the World Conference Against Racism*

With this in mind, I set off the National Youth and Racism Forum, being held in Canberra on the 7 May 2001. 12 of us arrived, part of the youth of Australia, excited by the prospect of helping form Australia’s contribution, via the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, to the UN World Conference Against Racism.

While only a one-day conference officially, it began, for me, the previous night. Although we had never met before, the group bonded immediately, sharing life-stories and experiences throughout the night. Racism was a subject we all related to in some way, impacting on our own lives and on the lives of those around us. The group was so diverse! No two people had the same background. Although we were Indian-Pakistani, Aboriginal-English, Chinese-Australian, Jewish-Australian-Lithuanian-Scottish.... through all our differences, racism, our beliefs about it and how we experienced it, united us!

The morning welcome was made by Dr. William Jonas, ATSIC Social Justice Commissioner and Acting Race Discrimination Commissioner, a warm, empathetic and charismatic man, who discussed the importance of youth participation. This was followed by an Aboriginal girl’s heartbreaking account of her experience with racism. We then formed groups to discuss sources, causes and victims of racism, with participants sharing their experiences and relating those of others. In the afternoon, we discussed preventative and remedial measures to combat racism, with our ideas formulated into strategies and recommendations to improve equity.

I am thrilled YACVic gave me this wonderful opportunity to take part in an event that allowed me to express my commitment to the eradication of racism through this unique multi-level dialogue. I left even more certain there is truly only one race – the human race!



Human Rights Commissioner, Dr Jonas  
with Miriam Silberman



# The Reach Out! Rural and Regional Tour is heading to Victoria!

Reach Out! [www.reachout.com.au](http://www.reachout.com.au) is a service that uses the Internet to help young people get through tough times. The Inspire Foundation, the organisation behind Reach Out!, developed the service to inspire young people to help themselves by providing them with access to important information, stories, contacts and suggestions on a whole range of issues facing young people today, in an environment that is fun, interactive and engaging.

The Reach Out! Rural and Regional Tour promotes the benefits of using the Internet to link up young people with those who can support them as well as providing a positive profile of young people through a tailored website.

The tour has four key objectives that focus on promoting positive mental health outcomes for young people in rural and regional areas:

1. To capture and share positive experiences of young people in rural and regional Australia
2. To promote help-seeking behaviour and coping skills via the promotion of local services and the Reach Out! Service
3. To assist and enhance existing community networks to better support their youth
4. To promote "Net Social Benefits" – the use of the Internet as a valuable social tool

So far the RORRT has toured NSW, Tasmania, Queensland and Western Australia, and engaged with over 23,000 young people in over 230 towns. Also, to showcase the many great things that young people are doing in their communities, 263 town websites ([www.rorrt.reachout.com.au](http://www.rorrt.reachout.com.au)) have been built profiling their lives, artwork, music and opinions.

The next stop on the RORRT is Victoria with the consultative phase of the tour kicking off around the end of July. During this phase, the RORRT team will visit a number of regional centres around the state.

Local youth service providers and youth advisory councils in the regional centre and outlying areas will help determine youth issues and gauge interest in the RORRT.

If you work with young people ~ teacher, GP, youth worker, nurse, mental health promotion officer, principal, police officer, work in

**W**hen the Reach Out! Rural and Regional Tour (RORRT) began in April 1999, it was in response to the need to do something in rural Australia where, overall, suicide rates were twice as high and Internet access far more limited than in the cities. That was when the Idea to take Reach Out! on tour was born.



TAFE/Uni/training centre, custodial officer, sport and recreation officer, ambulance officer, distant ed, flying doctors, health/arts worker, work in the local community health centre, church youth group leader, scout leader, guides leader (etc!) you will soon be sent an invitation to attend these regional meetings, to determine where you would like the RORRT to visit in your area.

The formal phase of the Victorian RORRT will follow next and consists of a series of presentations to young people living in towns across rural and regional Victoria letting them know about Reach Out! and help services in their local area. For each town visited, the RORRT team will build a website to profile young people and the towns they live in with interviews, stories, artwork, poetry and images.

While the formal phase of the tour can make a substantial contribution to building community, portraying rural young people in a positive way, and promoting the benefits of using the Internet, most important is the impact the RORRT can have on the lives of young people living in remote areas:

"Seeing their images and art and stuff probably the strongest thing in the whole site... The kids were just queuing up to have a look and a listen. That was really powerful stuff...genuinely a really motivation thing that was good for them." (Rural youth worker. QLD)

You can help the Reach Out! Rural and Regional Tour work with communities to promote positive mental health for young people living in rural and regional Victoria. Why not come along to one of the meetings during the consultative part of the tour to help us determine the key issues for young people living in those areas and to guide us on where you would like the RORRT to visit in your local area.

If you would like to know where the RORRT is happening in your area or further information on the RORRT, please contact

Kylie Lee, RORRT Manager,  
Ph (02) 9818 3055  
email: [kylle@inspire.org.au](mailto:kylle@inspire.org.au) or visit any of the following websites:

[www.reachout.com.au](http://www.reachout.com.au) or  
[www.inspire.org.au](http://www.inspire.org.au)

# Member profile: Craig Marshall

**C**raig Marshall, a member of YACVic State Council is the Policy Development Manager at the Children's Welfare Association of Victoria (CWAV). Craig has been an individual member of YACVic for around 20 years. Craig talks to YIKES about himself, CWAV and the push for a Victorian Children's Commission.



**YIKES!:** Tell us about your role at the CWAV

**Craig:** Before I begin, I just want to clarify that whilst I might work for CWAV, in terms of my involvement with YACVic I don't represent CWAV – CWAV isn't a member of YACVic. My continuing involvement with YACVic is related to my career as a youth worker and my long-standing personal interest in youth affairs. Any views expressed here are my own and not necessarily representative of CWAV policy.

But to answer your question, CWAV is the peak body for child youth and family welfare services in Victoria. I'm one of four senior officers including the CEO, deputy CEO and the membership and communications manager. My primary role is to research and formulate advice about policy and practice issues in which CWAV's membership has an interest.

For example, one of the things CWAV has been working on is facilitating discussion within its membership about whether Victoria needs a Children's Commissioner so that CWAV can establish a policy position. CWAV hosted a forum on 3 July about Children and Community Commissioners, which featured Robert Fitzgerald (NSW Commissioner for Community Services) and Moira Rayner (Director of the Office of Children's Rights Commissioner for London).

This forum followed the launch of YACVic's proposal for a Victorian Children and Young People's Commission and picks up from the working conference on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, hosted by the Federation of Community Legal Centres earlier this year.

There's been quite a push for a Victorian Children and Young People's Commission over the last two years, which is reaching a culmination at the moment, and hopefully we'll be able to influence the Government's thinking.

**YIKES!:** Why do you think Victoria needs a Children and Young People's Commission?

**Craig:** Apart from the community sector peaks like YACVic and CWAV, there's no one that can give an overall systemic view of the status and welfare of children, young people and their families in Victoria, or in Australia for that matter.

There's no one that can test how the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has been enacted. People will argue that there is enough advocacy around to ensure that those rights are up-held. But I think you can look at situations where we have a Health Services Commissioner. Why do we have a Health Services Commissioner? Because there's an ongoing need to advocate for service user's rights and needs within the health system.

Organisations like YACVic and CWAV aren't always in a position to take up issues with governments in a way that is going to be given a high public profile. We have a high profile amongst our members but we don't have the sort of public profile that a Children's Commissioner would have.

I would envisage a Commissioner could achieve a profile like the Ombudsman, the Public Advocate and the Auditor-General have. They are able to speak quite freely, openly and critically with government in confidence and, if necessary, publicly. An Act of Parliament would give the Commissioner the power and authority that community sector peaks could never achieve.

**YIKES!:** How can YACVic members get involved in the push for a Victorian Children and Young People's Commission?

**Craig:** Be seen and heard at forums like the YACVic Children's Commission proposal launch, the CWAV forum and the CROC working conference.

Danny Sandor (Defence for Children International - Australia) summed it up when he made his closing remarks at the CROC working conference: Danny presented us with the concept of a people's movement that gets behind the proposal.

The nature of politics in a democracy is that often you have to try to influence and change public opinion before politicians will commit to any particular policy. I'm reminded of the work of the Purple Sage Project as an example of an influential people's movement that had a significant impact on policy development in Victoria. With three significant events promoting the idea and facilitating discussion held in the first half of this year I think we've made a good start.

**YIKES!:** It's often said that most Children's Commissions, both interstate and internationally have been set up in response to a "crisis". Many would argue that there is no "crisis" in Victoria so why do we need a Commission?

**Craig:** There are lots of little bits of evidence of chronic unresolved issues that come into the public gaze from time to time. For example, The Age investigative series on children and young people in the protection and care system "Broken Lives". A Children and Young People's Commission would be able to, in an ongoing way, monitor and examine those issues to establish whether they are chronic faults in the system or whether they are one-off incidents. Hopefully that will help stop us from having a knee jerk reaction to events that come under public scrutiny and allow us to concentrate on the protection and advancement of children's rights in a much more holistic way.

The public's perception might be that there is nothing to be concerned about, but certainly much of CWAV's advocacy was borne out in the Community Care review that was conducted by Professor Carter.

When the Bracks Government came into power in 1999, one of the things that Minister Campbell (Minister for Community Services) did was to set up a review of the newly named "Community Care" sector. Basically that's child protection, juvenile justice, family and community support. It includes kindergartens and neighbourhood houses and some youth support. The brief was to have a look at the system and see what its needs were.

Out of that there were a couple of recommendations. One was to look at the Children and Young Persons Act and other relevant state legislation to test whether it's effective, and to also look at the practice that surrounds that legislation and how the legislation is enacted.

Alongside that set of recommendations is the notion of an Office of Child and Youth Futures, which is in essence the concept of a commissioner as we have been talking about.

Editors note: Although the Office of Child and Youth Futures was recommended in the Carter Report it is not supported by the State

# Are you listening to us?

## A Victorian Children and Young People's Commission would

Government who's response to the recommendation stated that "the establishment of an independent Office of Child and Youth Futures and appointment of a Children's Commissioner are not part of the Government's policy." The State Government suggests instead "open and accountable government is provided through Freedom of Information provisions, the activities of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, the Ombudsman's office and the activities of the Auditor-General's Office"<sup>1</sup>

**YIKES!:** How do you think the Children and Young People's Commission would make sure that young people are involved?

**Craig:** There's lots of ideas and models around how young people can be heard and how their participation can be facilitated. We're good at dreaming up the models and tend to do things on a small scale. What we don't do well is applying them on a larger scale, which takes commitment and resources.

**YIKES!:** So what's your background in the youth sector?

**Craig:** I started to develop youth leadership skills in my teens and became a youth leader volunteer. I started a science degree and ended up in a hospital working with geriatrics. Meanwhile I continued my voluntary youth work and then switched to studying social services. I was 25 when first became a youth worker.

In the early eighties I worked for the then Department of Community and Welfare Services doing basic welfare work with children and young people. I went into what was then called the youth welfare service, which was focussed on trying to keep kids out of Youth Training Centres or helping them to re-enter their local communities after they had served a sentence and were on parole.

One of the things that was difficult to do as a youth worker back then was that when you tried to link kids into the community there wasn't a lot of community based services. It was all government services and you needed to have some "status". There was no in between. Once you weren't on a probation order, or if you weren't a ward of the state there were no services. I hope it's better now!

I left to work for local government to establish community based and local government services across Victoria. I had fun setting up and running a youth housing group and a youth centre, and services like Western Youth Law Line. Then I had the opportunity to manage a foster care service, which led me to CWAV two years ago.

**YIKES!:** With a one month old baby on his hands (Hayden) Craig is now in training to be a real expert in adolescent development!

**Reference:** <sup>1</sup> Stronger Citizens Stronger Families, Stronger Communities: Partnerships in Community Care, Department of Community Services, Community Care Division.

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A Children and Young People's Commission would provide us with a tool to do this in Victoria.

As always however, the devil is in the detail and it's the detail that I'd like to invite you to consider as you read *Are you listening to us?* Because as the Chief Justice of the Family Court, the Hon Alastair Nicholson said back in 1997 on the subject of a federal commissioner – to have a poorly thought through, under funded and easily manipulated

commission would not enhance the rights of children and young people in Victoria and could in fact provide a greater barrier than currently exists.

The model that we are proposing has six principles that are fundamental.

Firstly the commission must be independent. It must be able to make fearless assessments of government and other institutions in our community and lobby for change without being subject to political pressures.

Secondly, the Commission must be established by legislation and given the authority to carry out its functions. Its charter for operating within a human rights framework should be underscored by reference to CROC in the enabling legislation.

Thirdly, YACVic believes that the Commission must have a focus on children and young people up to the age of 18. This age defines the border between adulthood and childhood for most formal purposes and places under 18 year olds at a distinct disadvantage. As part of that focus, the Commission is expected to have the meaningful participation of children and young people as a core feature of how it "does business".

Fourthly, the Commission must have adequate resources to do its job well. Funding should not be determined by party politics. Parliament rather than the government should set the budget for the commission and funding should remain transparent in the Government's budget papers.

Fifthly, the Commission must have a broad jurisdiction that takes into account all levels of government, non-government and commercial organisations which impact on children and young people. A whole of government vision is necessary to ensure "leadership by example" in the fulfilment of CROC obligations.

Finally, the Commission should be required to recognise the diversity of children and young people and to ensure that the Commission is



accessible to all young people. There should be an awareness of those children and young people who may find access particularly difficult including those from an indigenous background or ethnic background, children and young people with disabilities, those in state care and detention and those in regional and rural areas. The Commission should be first and foremost a place where young people can go and be heard!

We believe that the model as proposed by *Are you listening to us?* will further the Victorian Government's commitment to placing children and young people at the centre of government policy, providing a vital mechanism to promote a 'whole-of-government' approach on issues relating to children and young people.

It will complement and add to the work of existing bodies in Victoria such as the Equal Opportunity Commission and the Ombudsman because it will have an exclusive focus on issues affecting children and young people and will not be limited in its ability to address issues specific to them. The proposed model for a Victorian Commission would complement not duplicate their work.

As an expert and specialised 'Champion for Children and Young People' it will have a unique and comprehensive store of information about their rights, interests and well-being which will be of service to the entire community.

*Are you listening to us?* is not the definitive model for Victoria, though we think that it's a pretty good one! *Are you listening to us?* is a discussion paper that we hope takes the call for a Children's commission from the abstract to the concrete.

We welcome comments from you all and hope that our discussion paper is the base from which we can develop a better model than anywhere in the world – but perhaps more importantly, a model that is tailor made for Victoria. One that works for children.

by Janet Jukes  
YACVic Executive Officer



# homelessness

## developing a strategy for young people

Continued from page 1

For this reason, YACVic believes that Commonwealth policies relating to income support need to be an integral part of the VHS as there are key links between income security and homelessness. The VHS must highlight the impact of inadequate income on the housing and homelessness service sectors.

In addition to inadequate income, Centrelink breaching policies are impacting on the capacity of young people to meet rent obligations. This increases the likelihood of them entering the homelessness system. The welfare system is becoming increasingly conditional and punitive and homeless young people are particularly affected by harsh penalties. Centrelink letters may be sent to old addresses, received too late or not received at all due to the transient lifestyle of many homeless young people.

**Breaching significantly reduces income levels, which in turn decreases the ability to establish or sustain suitable housing. The current policies are reinforcing disadvantage.**

YACVic recommends that the VHS address the issue of breaching with the State Government and that this is taken up with the Commonwealth. This may be a one way to address early intervention policies.

### Recognising diversity

Consultations with our members have raised the issue of exclusionary criteria being adopted to prevent certain young people from using services. This serves to exacerbate the cycle of homelessness. The additional barriers facing gay and lesbian homeless young people have not been addressed in the Working Report. Research suggests that gay and lesbian young people are over represented in the homeless population.<sup>1</sup> These young people are often homeless because their families refuse to accept their sexuality and this compels or forces the young person to leave home.<sup>2</sup>

These young people are particularly at risk of exclusion. There are very few housing services specifically for same sex attracted young people and few agencies train staff to address their needs. Across all agencies, staff should be trained to address sexuality issues to prevent the further exclusion of gay and lesbian young people. This was a specific recommendation in the Seen and Heard report.<sup>3</sup> In addition, there is a need for specific services for gay and lesbian young people. This policy has been adopted in NSW. The Department of Community Services provides funding to the Twenty-Ten Association to operate a youth refuge specifically for gay and lesbian young people.

We believe that the additional problems facing homeless gay and lesbian young people must be addressed in the VHS and that recommendations are put forward to increase staff training and levels of specific support.

### Common Assessment and Referral

It is estimated that there are up to 400 entry points into the homelessness service system in Victoria.<sup>4</sup> The system is difficult to navigate particularly for young people experiencing crisis. The Working Report suggests that a better approach may include being able to enter the system through a single access point.

YACVic supports the call for a more coordinated approach but is concerned about the possible implementation of this approach. Although a centralised service may help to increase the accessibility of the system, this approach does not address the limited capacity of the system. We believe that the need to provide 'bricks and mortar' and appropriate support systems is a matter of greater urgency.

We are also concerned that the individual needs of young people may be lost in a centralised service. An access point should not simply be about contacting the system but about being able to access appropriate accommodation and support. If a centralised service was to operate, there needs to be a service that is specific to young people.

A common assessment and referral approach could be adopted as part of a longer-term strategy but should not be adopted as an immediate solution. YACVic urges the Government to make a long-term commitment to increasing housing stock through the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement. This must be a key element of the VHS.

### Conclusion

YACVic welcomes the development of a Victorian Homelessness Strategy. We call on the State Government to endorse a strategy that provides a comprehensive framework to respond to levels of homelessness in Victoria. No young person should face homelessness due to their inability to afford housing, a lack of housing options or due to government policies and practices.

by Paula Grogan  
YACVic Policy Officer

### References

<sup>1</sup> Hillier, L., Matthews, L & Dempsey, D. (1997), A low priority in a hierarchy of need: a profile of the sexual health of young homeless people in Australia, Centre of the Study of Sexually Transmitted Diseases, National Centre on HIV Social Research, La Trobe University, Carlton, Victoria.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) and the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), 1997, Seen and heard: priority for children in the legal process, Report No 84.

<sup>3</sup> ALRC & HREOC, *ibid*, Recommendation 22, p.654.

<sup>4</sup> Thomson Goodall Associates Pty Ltd, Assessment and Referral in Homelessness Services Project Context Paper, March 2001.

# Changes afoot for the YACVic constitution

**A** new constitution for YACVic will be considered at a Special General Meeting to be held on Tuesday, 17 July 2001 at 5pm. The proposed constitution, if adopted, will create substantial change for the organisation.

This article provides an overview of the proposed changes. The most significant change proposed within the new constitution is the movement to a Board of Governance as distinct from the current State Council and Executive Committee structures.

## Organisational Authority

Presently, the body that has the authority for the manner in which the organisation operates and is managed is our 20 person State Council. Some of these responsibilities are delegated to the Executive Committee drawn from the membership of State Council.

In recent years this has seen State Council meet on a quarterly basis with the primary focus being on the setting of policy priorities for the organisation and associated policy development work. With much of the authority in relation to financial matters, 'signing off' of submissions, committing to particular initiatives and the like, being delegated to the Executive Committee.

The distinction between governing the organisation by the Executive Committee with the Executive Officer responsible for the 'management' of the organisation has been one of the keys to the rebuilding of YACVic. The involvement of members in the policy setting agenda of the organisation, via State Council, without the need to participate in the more intricate details of operational issues has seen a greater, more focused contribution to the shaping of the work YACVic undertakes. As has the continued commitment to, and the re-establishment of, the Youth Reference Group. The new constitution seeks to support these processes structurally.

## Board of Governance

A seven-member Board of Governance is proposed in the new structure. The Board of Governance will be the ultimate authority for the organisation. Members of the Board will be elected by the membership at an annual general meeting

The Board shall comprise of four Officers and three ordinary members. The four Officers being the Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson, Treasurer and significantly, the Young Media Spokesperson, will become a constituted Officer.

Election to the Board will be for a two-year term. This will create the process whereby positions of half of the Board are declared vacant on alternate years, ensuring both continuity and turnover.

## Policy Advisory Group

The direct involvement of the membership is an important and valued aspect of the organisation, which adds weight to the policy positions, and public stances that YACVic articulates.

The proposed constitution will require a Policy Advisory Group be established on an annual basis with the Board setting the terms of reference for the Policy Advisory Group each year. Comprising between 6-15 members, the Policy Advisory Group will provide expert advice on policy and policy initiatives to the Board.

This structure will ensure that there is a high level, structured avenue for members to actively shape the policy setting of the organisation.

## Youth Reference Group

The Youth Reference group has created an opportunity for younger members of the organisation to take a more active and direct involvement within the organisation. Since inception, the Youth Reference group has contributed to the development of YACVic policy, actively consulted with, and organised consultative processes targeted at, young people.

In part, the Youth Reference Group is a practical demonstration of the organisation's commitment to the participation of young people in the structures, process, debates and environment, which shape their lives. The Young Media Spokesperson, drawn from the membership of the Youth Reference group, is one of the official spokespeople for YACVic.

Established 4 years ago the Youth Reference group has effectively become a standing sub-committee of the organisation with the Young Media Spokesperson having a position on State Council and the Executive Committee. The proposed organisational structure will see the Youth Reference Group constituted as a formal advisory body of the organisation with the same

stature, importance and responsibilities of the Policy Advisory Group.

The proposed constitution will require a Youth Reference Group be established on an annual basis with the Board setting the terms of reference each year. Comprising between 6-15 members, the Youth Reference Group will provide expert advice on policy and policy initiatives to the Board. Following an open call for nominations at an AGM, the Board will make appointments to the Youth Reference Group.

An exemption to the Equal Opportunity Act (1995) granted by the Equal Opportunity Commission of Victoria has allowed for membership of the Youth Reference group to be restricted to people 12-25 (inclusive) years of age.

## Young Media Spokesperson

The proposed constitution enshrines the Young Media Spokesperson as an Officer of the Council and structurally requires one of the seven positions on the Board to be filled by the Young Media Spokesperson. This formalises the current practice of having the Young Media Spokesperson being a member of the Executive Committee.

The election to the position of Young Media Spokesperson will be determined by following the nomination and election process similar to the election of members to the Board, that is an open nomination process and election at an AGM. Unless otherwise determined, nominees to the position of Young Media Spokesperson must be between 12 and 25 years of age (inclusively) at the time of the AGM. An exemption to the Equal Opportunity Act (1995) granted by the Equal Opportunity Commission of Victoria has allowed for this to occur.

It is envisaged that the Young Media Spokesperson will be both a member of the Board and a member of the Youth Reference group.

For more info on changes to YACVic's constitution contact Jamie Crosby, YACVic Chairperson on (03) 9372 1877

# Guarantors

Prepared by Jenny Lawton, Financial Counsellor

Car,  
Jewellery  
Stereo  
I think that's  
everything  
Thanks miss...



When you said  
you'd take me for  
a ride if I went  
guarantor on your  
car, I never  
suspected you  
meant to the  
cleaners!

## **Borrowing money can be a risky business – and not just for you...**

The bank, credit union or finance company may want guarantor or co-borrower as a condition of the loan.

In some cases this means that your financial problems could cause your friend or relative to be sued – they may even lose their house!

But if you can afford to repay the loan, you should not need a co-borrower or guarantor. Don't pass the buck – your loan is your responsibility not your parent's or friend's

Tell the bank, credit union or finance company that **you** want the loan, and that **you alone** will be responsible for payment – no guarantor, no co-borrower or no deal.

If you really want to be independent, you won't risk your parent's house or your friend's property to get a loan

A guarantor is someone who promises to pay the debt of a person who borrows money if that borrower can't or won't pay.

The promise is made in writing on a contract called a guarantee.

Guarantees are very expensive promises because the guarantor is not only promising to pay the amount actually borrowed. Guarantors are also held responsible for any accrued interest (or default interest) on the outstanding loan balance

plus the lender's costs in trying to recover the money from the borrower and the guarantor

Lenders try to get a guarantee over loans if they think the borrower is a "bad credit risk". Bad credit risks include people who haven't been in their job for very long, who are young, who are borrowing to buy something that will reduce in value over time (like a car) or who have stuffed up with credit in the past. If the lender thinks the borrower is a bad credit risk, the lender will try to increase their chance of getting their money back by dragging someone into the loan as a guarantor.

If you are asked to be a guarantor, suggest the borrower try other lenders so that they get the loan on their own two feet. Point out that it's not fair to drag anyone else into their finances. Be firm – you don't need the 24/7 worry of whether the borrower can keep up to date on their loan payments. Nor do you need the hassle of having to find big bucks if something goes wrong.

If a lender asks you to get a guarantor for your loan – just walk away. You don't want to saddle your friends or family with your money issues. Find another lender who'll treat you as an individual or wait until you can save a bigger deposit and get the loan independently.

**Credit unions & building societies** – There are a number of complaint resolution schemes for credit unions and building societies, but some of these lenders do not participate in any scheme. Ask whether they participate in complaint scheme and if they do so, the lenders will give you the contact details.

## **Where to get help and advice...**

### ***For referral to a financial counsellor:***

Financial and Consumer Rights Council (03) 96145433

Credit Helpline (03) 9602 3800

### ***For assistance with a complaint about a lender:***

**Banks** – Australian Banking Industry Ombudsman (03) 96137333

**Finance companies** – Australian Finance Conference 1800231587

### ***Credit unions & building societies***

– There are a number of complaint resolution schemes for credit unions and building societies, but some of these lenders do not participate in any scheme. Ask whether they participate in complaint scheme and if they do so, the lenders will give you the contact details.



YACVic welcomes your submissions to the calendar. Please email contributions to [info@yacvic.org.au](mailto:info@yacvic.org.au) or phone us on (03) 9612 8999. The calendar on the YACVic website is also updated regularly see [www.yacvic.org.au](http://www.yacvic.org.au)

# events and resources

**Deadline for contributions to the next edition of yikes is 10:08:01**

## ■ Lecture "Multiculturalism: Refugees & Indigenous Policy"

**Date:** 17 July 2001

**Time:** 8:00 PM

The Catholic Commission for Justice Development & Peace, Melbourne is proud to present this lecture by the Right Hon. Malcolm Fraser, former Prime Minister of Australia

**Where:** 383 Albert St, East Melbourne

**For more info:** Genevieve phone (03) 9926 5710 to book

## ■ A model for consultation in early psychosis

**Date:** 24 July 2001

**Time:** 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM

Presenter: John Gleeson, Early Psychosis Prevention & Intervention Centre.

**Where:** Boardroom, Australian Drug Foundation, 409 King Street (cnr Batman St), West Melbourne

## ■ Youth Health Summit

**Date:** 26 July 2001

**Time:** 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM

The aim of the summit is to determine key issues and funding priorities for young people within Australia.

**Where:** 3rd Floor, Conference Room, AMA House Macquarie Street, Barton ACT

**Email:** [jmurray@ama.com.au](mailto:jmurray@ama.com.au)

## ■ Homeless young people in Melbourne & Los Angeles

**Date:** 14 August 2001

**Time:** 9:30 AM - 10:30 PM

Presenter: Dr Shelley Mallet, Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society.

**Where:** Boardroom, Australian Drug Foundation, 409 King Street (cnr Batman St), West Melbourne

## ■ CWAV Practice/Policy Forum: Youth & Substance Abuse Issues

**Date:** 15 August 2001

**Time:** 9:30 AM - 1:30 PM

Models for working with young people who are substance abusing.

**Where:** Shell Theatre, Shell House, 1 Spring St (cnr Flinders), Melbourne

## ■ Volunteerism and loss and grief support services

**Date:** 29 August 2001

**Time:** 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM

This open forum will provide an opportunity for volunteers, community members and professionals to learn about the range of services and programs that use volunteers in providing loss and grief supports to the community. Professionals \$11, Volunteers \$5.50, refreshments provided.

**Where:** Function Room, Hotel Y, 489 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne

**For more info:** Jan Tully or Mary Predebon - Education & Resource Officers, National Association for Loss & Grief Ph (03) 9351 0358

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

## ■ Literature Board young writers initiative - applications close

**Date:** 31 August 2001

The Literature Board has allocated up to \$40,000 towards a youth initiative in 2001- 2002. By offering an initiative that focuses on the areas that already attract much energy, commitment and participation among young writers, the Literature Board is hoping to encourage the further development of these emerging art forms and to support young people in their work on projects about which they are passionate. The Board will consider proposals requesting support of up to \$5,000 for collaborative projects involving young writers, which could include, but are not limited to, the creation, production, promotion, and distribution of:

> spoken word/performance events;

> zines/e-zines/webzines;

> comics;

> web-based projects;

> cd-roms.

**For more info:** Intending applicants are advised to ring Dallas McMaugh, Program Officer on (02) 9215 9052 to discuss proposals

**Email:** [d.mcmaugh@ozco.gov.au](mailto:d.mcmaugh@ozco.gov.au)

## ■ Call for Submissions: Eccentric Billionaire

**Date:** 1 September 2001

Eccentric Billionaire is a cross-media event, in development now, backed by Next Wave, to be launched in 2002. Lots of categories for funding of bizarre social experiments in subversion!?!

**Email:** [submissions@ebtv.org](mailto:submissions@ebtv.org)

**Web:** <http://www.ebtv.org>

## ■ The Shape of Things to Come - 2nd National Body Image Conference

**Date:** 7 September 2001 - 8 September 2001

Relevant to people interested or working in areas of public health, social advocacy, media, policy, young peoples wellbeing and community health.

**Where:** Melbourne

**For more info:** Louise Wigg ph: (03) 9411 4029

**Email:** [louise@corporeal.com.au](mailto:louise@corporeal.com.au)

## ■ Freedman Foundation Travelling Scholarship for Emerging Artists - applications close

**Date:** 14 September 2001

Study and Travel opportunity for young Visual Artists. The scholarship is open to emerging artists aged 30 or under, practicing in the areas of sculpture, painting or photography. Up to 4 scholarships of \$5,000 each will be awarded for overseas educational travel. The scholarship is administered by the National Association

for the Visual Arts (NAVA). Applications forms can be downloaded from NAVA's website.

**For more info:** Catherine Benz, Communications & Promotion Officer National Association for the Visual Arts Phone: 02 9368 1900

**Web:** [www.visualarts.net.au](http://www.visualarts.net.au)

## ■ National Youth Conference

**Date:** 21 September 2001 - 23 September 2001 hosted by the Office of Youth Affairs WA - theme is "Imagine Your Australia" - giving young people the opportunity to reflect on the past and plan for the future.

**Where:** Perth Sheraton Hotel, Perth

**For more info:** Libby Winchcombe, Conference Co-ordinator ph (08) 9228 0808

**Email:** [conference@westrek.com.au](mailto:conference@westrek.com.au)

## ■ 3rd Commonwealth Youth Forum (CYF)

**Date:** 30 September 2001 - 8 October 2001

All 54 commonwealth countries to be represented at this meeting in Queensland. The CYF provides an opportunity for young men & women (18-25) from Commonwealth countries to come together to share their vision and concerns & develop capacity to contribute.

**Where:** Queensland

**For more info:** DEETYA, Suzi Hewlett ph (02) 6240 9232 or Kerrie Atkins ph (02) 6240 7323

**Email:** [youthforum@detya.gov.au](mailto:youthforum@detya.gov.au)

## ■ Sixth International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (ICCAP)

**Date:** 5 October 2001 - 10 October 2001

LaTrobe University will co-host the Sixth International Congress on AIDS in Asia and the Pacific (ICAAP) which is expected to attract 5000 people to Melbourne in October, and will be the first major international AIDS gathering after the UN General Assembly Special Session on AIDS in June. Chairs of the Congress are Professor Dennis Altman of the School of Social Sciences, Professor Rob Moodie from VicHealth and Robin Gorna from the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations.

**Web:** [www.icaap.conf.au](http://www.icaap.conf.au)

## ■ National Youth Week 2002

**Date:** 7 April 2002 - 14 April 2002

**For more info on youth sector events:**

### VICTORIAN EVENTS

InfoXchange: <http://www.infoexchange.net.au/youth>  
Vicnet: <http://events.vicnet.net.au/events.cgi>

### NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL EVENTS

Australian Clearing House for Youth Studies:  
<http://www.acys.utas.edu.au/ncys/events/>  
Youth Gas: <http://www.youthgas.com/calendar.htm>