

YAKKES!

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE YOUTH AFFAIRS COUNCIL OF VICTORIA INC.

New laws to increase fines and ticket inspectors' powers

by Youthlaw

New laws are about to pass the Victorian Parliament which will significantly affect public transport users, including many young people.

The Transport (Rights and Responsibilities) Bill 2003 will make the following changes to the system:

- Fine increases:
 - Failure to produce valid ticket
New - \$150 Previous - \$100
 - Trespass
New - \$200 Previous - \$135
 - Smoking
Next - \$150 Previous - \$100
 - Indecent language
New - \$150 Previous - \$100
 - Litter
New - \$150 Previous - \$100
 - Disorderly Behaviour
New - \$200 Previous - \$100
 - Interference with doors of a vehicle
New - \$200 Previous - \$100

- Protrude part of body from carriage
New - \$200 Previous - \$135
- Feet on furniture
New - \$200 Previous - \$100
- Graduated fines structure for failing to produce a valid ticket, \$200 for a second offence and \$250 for a third and any subsequent offence
- Ticket inspectors permitted to require a person to produce a valid ticket or concession entitlement immediately after he or she has left a tram carriage, train platform or has passed through a barricade. Refusing to cooperate with the request will attract a penalty of \$500
- Transport operators to receive a portion of the money the Government receives from fines for offences on public transport. This is estimated to be \$10-\$20 per fine recovered

Other Government Proposals

- Students who hold valid concession cards but are not carrying proof of entitlement will be given a 7 day grace period to present their valid concession pass in *continued on last page...*

YACVic Policy Update

Here's some of the policy work that's been happening at YACVic recently.

Proposed Medicare Card changes

It was recently reported that the Australian Government is considering raising the age at which young people can access a Medicare card, without parental consent, from 15 to 16 years of age. YACVic opposes to this proposed change as we are concerned that the proposal will undermine young people's access to accessible, affordable and timely health services. It is vital that young people are encouraged and supported to access health services in their own right to ensure that these issues are addressed in a timely manner. Research indicates that adolescence is a time where health behaviours can be set for life. Early intervention will go a long way in preventing longer-term health concerns.

From our own consultations with young people, we know that young people want greater access to confidential, appropriate and accessible health services. This is not about undermining a young person's relationship with their parents but rather *continued on page 3...*

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VICTORIA'S LEADING POLICY ADVOCATE ON YOUNG PEOPLE'S ISSUES

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.

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. The deadline for the next edition of Yikes! is 22 February.

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

Time flies when you are busy!

Who can believe it's almost Christmas? I have now been in the role of Executive Officer for YACVic for close to six months and that time has gone so quickly!

My first few months with YACVic have been action packed. I have busied myself with getting out as much as I can to meet 'the sector'. Our strategic planning consultation process has allowed me the luxury of leaving the office to meet and talk with young people, our members and other key stakeholders. I have been to Ballarat and Bendigo, Gippsland and Geelong, next week I am off to Wangaratta.

I have met a lot of great people and had some really thought provoking conversations. While I don't want to pre-empt any of the findings of the Strategic Planning Working Group, I have drawn a few observations from our work so far.

It seems that most of you are happy with the performance of YACVic, our challenge will be to maintain that satisfaction and ensure that YACVic keeps in touch with its membership and the issues that young people and the youth sector face.

I hope to increase YACVic's membership and further develop our profile and presence in rural and regional Victoria. We will be asking ourselves some questions about why our members join, what you get from belonging and what you might want to get from being involved. We are also interested to know how we can better involve members in the organisation.

I am keen to develop collaborative working relationships with other organisations to work together on issues and areas of common interest. I have talked with many stakeholders about who YACVic should work



with and what policy areas we should be working in. This feedback will be invaluable in setting the direction in our Strategic Plan.

It's not too late to have your say. If you want to have some input into our Strategic Plan there are a number of ways you can do it, call me on 9612 8999 or email me at gferrari@yacvic.org.au and we can have a chat over the phone or in person or download the Strategic Planning discussion paper from our website www.yacvic.org.au and get in touch with your ideas.

Besides the Strategic Plan, things in store for YACVic in 2004 include some research into urban fringe issues for young people, some policy work on consumer and employment issues, drug and alcohol issues and our State Conference around October. We also hope to do some further work building on the work we have done on youth participation.

We will be looking at how we communicate with you, updating our website both in content and design. In this issue of YIKES! we are seeking some feedback from you on what you want from your bi-monthly mag. Fill in the evaluation, fax it back by the 15th of January and you will go into the draw to win a \$100.00 book or cd voucher!!

There's heaps happening at YACVic now and in the future, so watch this space!

Have a great break and we'll see you in the New Year.

Georgie Ferrari ■

YACVic Policy Update

continued from front page...

improving young people's health and well-being. For this reason, YACVic supports the Australian Medical Association's call for the automatic issuing of Medicare cards to all Australians at age 15 years as articulated in the National Youth Health Priorities 2001 statement.

We have contacted Federal Parliamentarians to voice our concerns and to find out more about the Government's rationale for this proposal is and how the Government believes the change will enhance the health and wellbeing of young people.

Professionalisation of youth work

In August, YACVic attended a forum to discuss the concept of a Professional Association for Youth Workers. A working group was established at this forum to investigate the establishment of a professional association and YACVic is part of this working group. At the forum we also committed to writing a discussion paper about the professionalisation of youth work to stimulate an informed discussion throughout the youth sector and other key stakeholders about this issue. We are in the process of writing this paper which will provide an overview of some of the issues related to professionalisation of youth work.

The paper will be available early in the new year and the Professional Association Working Group will consult the wider sector following publication about the need for a professional association and what such a body could look like.

Young people on the urban fringe

While YACVic continues to work on rural and metropolitan issues, it is becoming increasingly apparent that we need to address the issues facing young people and workers on Melbourne's urban fringe, the interface between metropolitan and rural areas. Urban fringe areas are proving to be significant growth corridors but some concerns have

been raised about the impact of this rapid development. Previous research indicates that the urban fringe is vulnerable to social, economic and physical problems and our own consultations with members have highlighted the unique nature of urban fringe issues. YACVic believes that more attention must be paid to the specific issues facing young people at the interface if the vulnerabilities of the fringe are to be addressed and the strengths enhanced.

In the new year, YACVic plans to undertake research about the issues facing young people and workers on the urban fringe. The research is still in the planning phase but we are aiming to consult with young people and people working with young people living and working in fringe municipalities. Findings from this research will assist us in planning for our 2004 Conference.

Inquiry Into Child Custody Arrangements In The Event Of Family Separation

The Federal Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs is holding an Inquiry into Child Custody Arrangements in the Event of Family Separation. YACVic provided both written and verbal submissions to this inquiry. Following our submission, the Committee sought YACVic's help to organise a focus group with young people between the ages of 18 and 21 to discuss issues around custody arrangements. This focus group was held on November 12 and was facilitated by Felicity Sloman (YACVic Board member). Unfortunately the timing of the sessions (in the middle of exams!) limited the number of young people who were able to attend but it was a good opportunity for some young people to get their opinions heard and we would encourage these focus groups to be held more extensively throughout the inquiry process.

Private rental and young people

Sarah Waters, a final year student, Youth Studies, Victoria University, undertook

research on young people's experience of the private rental market while on placement at YACVic.

Sarah's research aimed to explore the issues faced by young renters and to consider how these issues can be addressed to ensure that the private rental market is a safe and accessible housing option for young people. The key issues identified by the young people surveyed were:

- Discrimination - young people reported that real estate agents and landlords discriminate on the basis of age and stereotypes associated with young people, particularly those who receive social security payments
- Affordability - young people noted the high costs of many rental properties and that properties that were in their budget were often inappropriate
- Appropriateness - affordable properties are often not located near education or employment options or support services. Some properties do not meet basic needs such as heating
- Support structures - many young people rely on family members acting as guarantors or community workers writing references etc to secure a property. Young people stressed the need for more support structures to be put into place to assist them in this process

The research provided young people with an opportunity to identify ways in which the obstacles that they experienced could be addressed. For example, young people suggested that more accessible information about their rights as renters should be made available and distributed widely in school leaver guides, Centrelink offices, via the internet, in cafes etc.

Although only a small-scale study, this research identifies some of the issues that should be addressed in housing policy discussions. YACVic is hoping to undertake more detailed research in this area in the future. ■

Temporary Employment and Security

By Lynn Beaton

The permanent full-time job can hardly be called the 'norm' any more. Increasingly these jobs are disappearing and are being replaced with a whole host of employment types. The new non-standard jobs differ from the traditional jobs in that they are not permanent but temporary or they involve a different or shorter arrangement of hours. There are different issues associated with hours worked and temporariness. They each bring with them a different range of issues that need to be addressed as people arrange their lives around their working practices. Often people think that because a job is part-time it is automatically casual, but this isn't true. Part-time jobs, or rostered hours jobs can be permanent and full-time jobs can be temporary. This article will focus on the implications of temporary employment for young workers.

There are a number of forms of temporary employment. It includes casual employment, fixed-term employment, agency work and self-employed contract work. The big question to ask about temporary employment is what does it do to people's sense of security, even their sense of identity. This particularly true in a society like ours where things like maturity, responsibility, success are often linked to having a full-time permanent job. The most blatant example of this is that as Australians most of our housing is through home ownership and buying a first home is considered a definite sign of having 'made it' - yet mortgages are almost impossible to get unless you have permanent employment. These issues effect everybody but have particular impacts on young people who are starting out on life and finding their identity and making their space. It is also very significant for young people because the amount of them who have temporary work is phenomenally high.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics undertook a special survey of employment arrangements between April and June in the year 2000 (ABS, 2001). An analysis of the results shows that 30 per cent of all jobs in Australia were temporary. For young workers the proportion was much higher. An enormous 69 percent of 15-19 year olds who work have temporary jobs and 40 per cent of people between the

ages of 20 and 25 have temporary jobs (Beaton, 2002).

The situation is significantly worse for females than for males. In the 15-19 age group 76 per cent of women's paid work is on a temporary basis and in the 20 - 24 group it is 43 per cent.

It is often assumed that most of the temporary or casualised workforce are young students, neither of these beliefs are true. That is, while most young workers are temporary, most temporary workers are not under 25. In fact 69 per cent, or nearly two million (1,801,600) temporary workers were over 25.

Nor is it true that most temporary workers are students. Interestingly 15 per cent of all workers were part-time or full-time students. A much higher proportion of temporary workers, 24 per cent, were full-time or part-time students but this is by no means the majority of temporary workers.

Whilst the numbers of temporary workers, particularly the increase in casual employment has been greatly debated there has been very little discussion about what the effects of temporary employment on quality of life. The relationship between temporary employment and quality of life is linked by the level of insecurity that exists in the

employment. Insecurity is perhaps better related to a notion of precariousness and not all temporary jobs are precarious. For example if temporary work is in an industry where there is a shortage of the particular skill sets there is objectively no precariousness and neither is the worker likely to feel any more precarious than a worker with a 'permanent' job. However the greatest growth area of temporary work is of casual employment and this is most likely found in industries and occupations that don't require specialist skills.

In the middle of the twentieth century it was assumed that quality of life and well-being improved automatically alongside economic growth or development. Poverty was considered to be the domain of the 'third world' and development was expected to eradicate it. However the spread of 'development' across the globe has shown that this confidence was not warranted. For not only have we seen the spread of hardship and misery accompanying 'development' in many parts of the world, but we also see it growing in the so-called developed world. In fact the term standard of living was once used synonymously with quality of life, but the meanings have diverged - the one being understood as an indicator of levels of economic spending but this has been separated in ideas from concepts of happiness. Now we talk about measuring quality of life if we want to include aspects of the overall physical, emotional and spiritual health of an individual. This has also become known as well-being. The well-being of a community or of individuals is a bit of a buzzword at the moment but comes from attempts to measure or evaluate what the quality of a persons life is in the current circumstances.

The question with regards to temporary employment is what effect does it have on our quality of life. Security involves the knowledge that the basic material requirements for living, that is food, shelter

1.3 million without work

The Australian Council of Social and Community Services (ACOSS) has just completed a major research project into unemployment and underemployment in Australia. Their report, released at their national congress in Canberra, shows that the unemployment figure has been understated by as much as half. They estimate that there are around 1.3 million unemployed and underemployed people in Australia - more than double the official figure.

ACOSS found that while official figures for unemployment stands at 5.6%, the actual extent of enforced joblessness is over 12%. ACOSS estimates that around 716,000 people who are unemployed are excluded from the official figures. These 'hidden unemployed' are excluded because they want to work but have given up looking, or are not available to start work immediately, or already have some part-time work but want more (they could be working as little as one hour per week according to ACOSS).

ACOSS President Andrew McCallum said:

"This confirms what many have suspected. The standard unemployment measure the Government relies on grossly understates the extent of joblessness and underemployment in Australia."

"ACOSS conservatively estimates that 716,000 'hidden unemployed' people are excluded from this standard measure. Most of these people would be on social security payments. They include:

- Mothers who want to work but can't afford or find enough child care
- People with disabilities who need more accessible transport and workplaces
- Mature-age people who want to work but have given up looking because they face employer discrimination or need more skills and training
- Young people with tiny amounts of part-time or casual work

Women comprise two-thirds of the number of the 'hidden unemployed', showing a clear gender imbalance with regards to the figure. ACOSS also found that in rural and regional Australia - particularly in places like South Australia and Tasmania - many jobseekers have given up looking - a fact not captured in official figures.

Source: ACOSS

and clothing are available today and will be available tomorrow and next year as well. Temporary employment can deny us that security. Security also involves the knowledge that we are 'functional' in our own society - or that we are able to live full lives in whatever sense that is accepted by the society in which we live. For example, we may not feel insecure, or 'dysfunctional' if we send our children to school without shoes in a society where no-one wears shoes to school. On the other hand in Australia where everyone wears shoes to school, we would feel very disadvantaged and subsequently insecure in our social being, if we couldn't send our children to school wearing shoes.

So the question here is what does it mean to have temporary employment when the 'norm' is considered (even if unrealistically) to be permanent employment. More importantly, what does it mean to be unsure as to whether you will still have a job next week, next month or next year. These questions are particularly daunting with persistent unemployment, particularly for young people.

One other aspect is worthy of discussion here. The high proportion of young people who are

temporary workers leads some research to assume that this is only a bridge to a permanent employment. In other words there is a picture that as you get older you are more likely to get permanent employment. The trouble and the worry about this view is that it takes no account of the movement of change in time. When we consider this movement we see a different picture. Most of the new jobs created are temporary and the higher proportion of temporary workers among young people is because it is young workers who are most likely to take up new jobs. Whether these jobs will turn into permanent ones as these workers become older, or whether there will be a boom in permanent jobs in the future for workers who have done their 'time' in temporary ones is another story. Of course there are some circumstances in which a 'temporary start' might lead to a permanent job. But these instances are not enough to change the trend. The worry is that as temporary work is growing at the expense of permanent those who are now young and in temporary employment, will stay in temporary employment.

Lynn Beaton is a research consultant with URCOT. URCOT specialises in applied research that is grounded in the experiences and opinions of the people who are the subjects of the research. Lynn is also currently writing a PhD on the social implications of temporary employment. If you want more information about this topic, or about URCOT phone Lynn on 9663 4555 or email lbeaton@vicnet.net.au

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Getting SMART with Youth

Knox Community Health Service has been well known for its innovative youth and drug education programs. Focus on young people has been a constant in Knox due to the high youth population (Coulson Barr, 2000). Subsequently, programs such as Safe Party (Australian Drug Foundation & Knox Community Health Service, 2002) and CODE (Australian Drug Foundation & Knox Community Health Service, 2001) have been effectively designed and implemented in the region. The success of these programs has led to the publication of manuals for schools and other health services that have been widely used within Australia.

The SMART (Skills, Mentoring And Resilience Training) Project has taken many of the core ideals from these successful programs. Funded by the National Illicit Drug Strategy for two years, it has endeavoured to examine the deficits in drug education and aimed to overcome the problems often inherent in programs that just tackle the drug issues. The SMART project looks at how to encourage resilience in students so they can make healthier decisions for themselves concerning drugs and a wide range of other issues. Now entering its second year, the schools-based project is beginning to show some very positive outcomes for students and schools alike.

The SMART Project's main objectives are based around the concept of raising resilience in 10-17yo in the Knox Region.

- To increase resilience in young people to mediate the impact of drug and alcohol use and the associated problems
- To increase young people's personal skills to encourage greater resilience
- To facilitate relationships with trained adult mentors for at-risk youth

Strategies designed to meet these objectives:

- To design, implement and evaluate life-

skills workshops to be run in upper primary (grades 5 & 6) and secondary schools in the Knox Region

- To design, implement and evaluate a mentor program for at-risk young people
- SMART Project Worker to act as a resource for schools and other youth-orientated agencies for increasing resilience in young people in Knox

SMART Life-Skill Workshops

Life-skill's workshops were planned for primary and secondary schools. These classroom-based workshops were designed to be a 'one off' while allowing for teachers to play a role within the one and half hour sessions. As a consequence of teacher participation, there was a range of activities that could act as a follow up to further consolidate the knowledge gained by students.

Workshops have a 'hands on' focus with a range of activities including role-plays, debate and discussion, physical activities, presentations, etc. Workshops take place with the whole class, rather than segregating those who exhibit 'problem' behaviour. In this way the whole class learns skills to use as individuals and as a group. Topics were

chosen from a range of areas to increase personal skills of participants that have been identified to enhance resilience.

Grade 5 & 6 of Primary Schools would have access to topics such as:

- Anger Management & Assertiveness Training
- Bullying
- Drug Education
- Problem Solving
- Self-Esteem

Workshop activities for Secondary Schools were split in years 7-9 and 10-12 due to the developmental differences in student's ability to abstract and reflect. Topics included:

- Anger Management & Assertiveness Training
- Coping Skills
- Drug Education
- Responsibility, Rights and Values
- Self-Esteem
- Stress Management & Relaxation

Evaluation of Life-Skill Workshops

The SMART Project has gathered data about student's and teacher's beliefs concerning the value of the workshops.

Surveyed, via questionnaire, random groups of students who participated regarding the merit of the workshops' content. Questions were asked about how much the content could help them with problems with friends, parents, teachers, school work, bullying, feelings, illegal behaviours and drug use.

Gathered feedback from co-facilitating teachers concerning the relevance, difficulty and their ability to build on the content of the workshops.

The SMART Mentoring Program: Why Mentoring?

Life-styles of families in many 'Western' countries have undergone a radical shift over the past century. The times when the majority of families lived in cohesive townships where everyone knew each other have passed. This change has impacted upon families in that there is less likely to be a range of 'concerned and connected adults' that aid parents in child rearing. Where once grandparents would live in the house with the family, they now stay on in their own residences or move to retirement homes. Extra pressures concerning child rearing also exist for many families where there may be a single parent, or both parents need to work. Additionally, issues such as drug use, domestic violence, and poverty within families seem to be becoming more prevalent. Where are children turning when they may not get all the support and understanding from their family that they require? Who are they utilising as role models?

Previous emphases for mentoring have been academic, careers, and personal. The SMART Mentoring Program links young people who are experiencing a period of difficulty, with a responsible adult to provide them with extra support and encouragement. The SMART Program utilises a role model, task-focused mentoring structure where schools are the main, but not only, referral source. During the 6-month program, mentors and mentees complete an activity of their choice and present their achievement on the completion of the program. Therefore, mentoring teams are matched on both their personality and their interests.

Young people referred to the program would not be considered to be in a 'high-risk'

category, as high-risk youth would be better suited to working with a trained professional. However, many have experienced a range of issues such as problems with peers, family, mental health issues, or a lack of school connectedness.

Evaluation of the SMART Mentoring Program

As with the life-skills workshops, it is important to gather information about the outcomes of the program.

Pre and post program testing in relation to self-esteem, depression, coping skills, risk taking behaviours and general activities of mentees. This information is gathered from the mentees, parents and teachers.

Separate focus groups for mentors and mentees during and after program concerning the value of the program and any difficulties faced.

Conclusion

Although the SMART Project and its evaluation are far from finished, the outcomes in terms of raising resilience via personal skills are extremely positive so far. This 'skilling up' of our youth enables them to better express their feelings, be more self-confident, and solve problems as they arise, rather than feel the need to detach themselves or 'escape' into other detrimental behaviours.

It is quite common in Australia for schools to run a variety of resilience or values programs. However, it is essential that schools and community organisations implement programs that address all students, rather than those just identified as potentially having 'problems'. If students are encouraged to raise resilience as a school or

class it not only aids them as individuals but it also can keep students feeling connected to a common goal.

Anyone interested in finding out more about the SMART Project can contact Natalie Rinehart, the SMART Project Worker, at Knox Community Health Service on 03 9757 6200.

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Providing a Platform for young people to talk about mental health

These speeches are the work of the Platform Team - a group of young people who have used the services at ORYGEN Youth Health and work to make ORYGEN a better place. The team presented these at *Not Another Youth Conference - Foundations for Real Reform*, a statewide conference tackling issues around young people and mental health. They were very well received and the discussion they prompted demonstrated the huge benefits of involving young people in all levels of service sector reform.

Who are we - about The Platform Team and Youth Participation

Eric Brown

I'd just like to take the opportunity to tell you a little bit about the Platform Team and what we do because I think it's a great project that other mental health services could learn from. The original concept of the Platform Team was to act as a bridge between the clients and the staff at ORYGEN. In the beginning many of the staff frowned upon the idea of having a youth team incorporated into the working structure of the service. Many of the staff also believed that the team wouldn't last very long and get very far. That was in 2001. The team faced those obstacles and fought through them. Since then the team has significantly grown. Not only in members, (although it has grown significantly), but more-so by the concept of the group. It started off with the bridging of that gap and now stretches across a vast plain.

A few of the things that the Platform team now cover:

- Staff consulting with the team on a range of topics
- The development of a client complaint system
- The Jargon Filter - a newsletter which publishes the works of clients
- The team has also been asked to attend and talk at conferences, talk to the media, talking at high schools and universities

The list goes on.

A more recent success for the Platform Team was the current application for a grant from

the Foundation for Young Australians to set up a Peer Support system - which was approved. I now believe that both the staff and clients of ORYGEN now consider the Platform Team to be a valued part of the service.

Youth participation within an organisation is really important - especially when the organisation works or is centred around the youth sector. It can bring a whole new spin on the way an organisation operates.

With a youth team like Platform - staff can consult with the team for a youth perspective.

All members of the Platform Team had formerly been treated at the service - with that experience, they can provide information from not only a youth perspective but also from a former clients perspective. With that information the service can go off and taking that information into account, they can reform parts of the service accordingly.

Youth Participation can be a sure winner!

Proud to be crazy - with crisis comes opportunity.

Jolan Tobias

I am an ORYGEN graduate. I graduated in December 2000. I am proud that I am crazy. It's a part of me and I am choosing to see it as an asset of my personality (it has taught me to be an active participant in life). I think going through psychosis has been good for me. I am better in tune with how I feel and what I need to do if things aren't quite right. Managing and maintaining wellness is a balancing act and going through psychosis has made me



Members of the Platform Team with Esther Singer

stronger and better equipped to deal with life's ordinary hurdles and stresses. It's taken me a couple of years to get to the point where I am now and I think a lot of it has to do with how you look at things.

It hasn't been all easy these last few years, and I do not choose to forget it but instead I remind myself every once in a while of how far I have come and pat myself on the back. It's much easier to focus on things that we aren't coping with, or goals we aren't achieving. It's at this point when I realise I am thinking this way, and I stop, slow down and refocus.

I spent a long time looking at what I missed out on during being unwell, what I was not capable of, and how much of life I would have to catch up on. It was all about loss. Then one day I woke up and changed my mind. Everything no matter what it is a learning process and an asset in some way. Everything, even if it hinders, helps. As Deltron the Funky Homosapien says, 'crisis precipitates change' or better still 'with crisis comes, opportunity' (all that effort working out how to cope and the exposure to a mental health system, has got to help somebody. Even if it is only one person, someone who is unwell, or someone who is working with a person who is unwell, that's good enough for me.).

When I first got sick I was doing my Honours at Uni. My goals were to finish Honours and go on to complete my Masters by research continuing on my theme in Emergence. I will give you a quick run down of my achievements from then till now:

I have a Degree in Fine Art, my Honours in Psychosis, my Post grad in the Mental Health System, my Masters in coping, and I am working my way through my Phd in making the most of life (living).

As a client of a system we spend so much time in it, it is like a Degree in itself. You learn about, dealing with things on a personal level, but at the same time how the system has worked for you, and in what ways. And you can use this knowledge to help make the system better. It makes sense to have clients involved in the service structure and decision making: first hand experience should be a valued experience. To have young people involved in a service that is helping them is achievable and shouldn't be a feared process. I know it can often seem difficult for staff because not only are we young but we are crazy as well. But have faith in your work. Remember it was the staff that helped us find our feet. You helped us to get our thoughts and decisions clear, we trusted you with that, its ok to trust us, relax a little, and see your efforts with us put to good use (give us a chance to share our knowledge with others).

Another thing that drives me is those who have had similar experiences to me mine and for reasons related to stigma don't want to open up to those around them. This way of denial, guilt or shame can inhibit future. There are also people out there who are very unwell and don't get a chance to speak out their views (if I am willing and able to, I think it is my duty to do so).

I am lucky, I have had the support of my family and friends, I have made some very close friends that share the same experiences as me, I would encourage people who use the system to do this, it is invaluable. I have never, at least to my knowledge, experienced discrimination. Everyone that I know and that I have met since my first episode has accepted and embraced my openness about it. This encourages me to continue being open. I have even had some conversations with people who have spoken very badly about those with mental illness and have felt embarrassed and ashamed when I have told them they are talking to one of those. 'But you don't look crazy' they say. And what exactly does crazy

look like I wonder. At the end of the day it all comes down to who is 100% all of the time anyway? That mixed with a little bit of hope can get you a long way.

My experiences of re-entering the workforce after psychosis

Sheree Barton

By the time I was 19 years old I had lived a pretty normal working life. I had completed a certificate 2 in commercial cookery. This helped me to find work as a cook for Cut Paw Paw Café where I worked for half a year and then as a kitchen hand for a BP diner for another 6 months. I also worked part time for the YMCA as a childcare assistant. I am hearing impaired and my dream was to one day work with deaf children.

In 2000 I had a psychotic episode. I was hearing voices, hearing messages from the TV - I thought I was dying. I was having hallucinations and believed that the S11 protests were about me. I was seeing the colour red a lot. It was the scariest thing I have ever experienced. I was admitted into hospital.

During my time at ORYGEN I began a long recovery process. I got involved in group programs, was case managed, saw a psychiatrist, took medication. Over two years this helped me to regain my self esteem, confidence, communication and social skills.

The next step was to get back into work. What was I feeling before going back to work?

Nervous
Scarred
Doubting myself
Worried about getting sick again
Increased stress
Unsure about whether I could manage a job

This task was made even harder by the fact that my experiences of being unwell resulted in me having partial memory loss. I could not remember anything that I studied during my certificate 2 and only bits of my previous jobs.

So how did I do it?

I was linked up with an employment agency for people with a disability. They helped me with interview skills, motivation and job experience. They arranged work experience for me - including a 4 week placement at Coles.

Even when I was turned down for a job at the end of this I didn't give up - I kept looking for work. Finally I found a job at Big W where they are very supportive of me and they understand what I go through.

Now I've been working for a year. I have a lot of hope, I have my confidence and self-esteem back and I'm proud to be back to a working life and earning my own money. Next year I'm going to start studying AUSLAN and working towards my dream of working in childcare with deaf children.

All young people need support and encouragement. With the right help from agencies and workers and enough hope they can get their lives back on track too.

There is a life after mental illness

Chris Dixon and Chrisan Kelly

A mental illness is not the end of your life. It is the beginning of a new insight into life. Young people with mental illness issues can still go on to a fruitful future with good career possibilities.

So where is this life after mental illness?

There are four elements of a person - the physical, mental, spiritual & social aspects. It is important to look after all these parts.

Doing physical exercise helps the body and brain chemicals improve reducing stress as well as giving the brain a functional activity to focus on.

Doing mental exercise like reading, writing, drawing, painting, art, mathematics (e.g. cost of shopping), and computer games also helps.

Having social activities and building confidence in not feeling being alone is important also. Having hobbies that can be done in a stress free environment, where a sense of achievement can be established allows a growth in self-esteem and a belief that we can still do anything we put our minds too.

Coming to an understanding, spiritually, as to what the mental illness means to us as individuals, is an important part in being comfortable with what it means to our lives. Living with a mental illness evolves a belief that I want to live, do what I can, and be me.

There are many different actions that assist the rebuilding of our lives after mental illness. Activities and hobbies such as music, model building, watching movies, playing pool, riding on Puffing Billy, river trips, beach trips, bush walking, rock climbing, go karts, relaxation, yoga, tai chi, aromatherapy and many more.

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YACVic News...

See you in March 2004...

This is the final edition of Yikes! for 2003. We will be back next year one month later than usual. We will be publishing the first edition of the year in March 2004. This is so that we can refit and redesign Yikes!, both in its look and in the content Yikes! carries.

Inserted into this edition is a reader's survey. The survey is to help us make a better Yikes! for you, our members. We would like to know what you think of Yikes!, and how we can improve YACVic's bimonthly newsletter.

The survey covers everything from how you read and use Yikes! now, to changes in frequency and format, and changes in content and style.

Members who return the survey will be eligible for a prize - either a cd or book voucher to the value of \$100, so get those surveys in quick! ■

continued from previous page...

Young people with mental health issues need programs and groups that have such activities. In the Platform Team we have all used groups such as the Tribe Group at Macaulay, Outdoors Inc, and out patient groups at ORYGEN to help us. Groups like the Catering group, the Horticulture group and Body and Soul.

There are work or study avenues like the work it out-group that helps job search, career paths, goal setting, interview skills, CV or resume. There are employment agencies that also assist in the rebuilding of our careers. There are the Disability Liaison Office at TAFE that can help get back to studying. ORYGEN offers out patients the chance to complete a certificate II in hospitality and in horticulture.

So there is a life after mental illness. Just help young people rebuild skills in the four elements of ourselves - physical, mental, spiritual and social. Rebuild the confidence, concentration, sense of achievement and ability to function. It is possible. We have done it and others can too.

You are not alone Melissa Ward

It is so important for people to know that they are not alone - that lots of people are in the same situation. The best way to learn this is through group activities, where it's easy to see

11 December: YACVic's XMAS Do - in three stages

Stage one - for everyone

4.30 - 5.30 - Cheap and Cheesy Kris Kringle at YACVic - come to the YACVic Office with a cheap and cheesy Kris Kringle gift - worth no more than \$5.00 - nibbles and non-acholic drinks provided - RSVP by Tuesday the 9th of December

Stage two - for those over 18

Join us for drinks at Blue Train Cafe - Mid level Southgate Landing - Southbank from 5.45 onwards - no RSVP needed, just rock up

Stage three - for those hard core YACVic supporters

Stay for dinner (sorry, at your own cost) from 7.30 onwards ■

that everyone has similar problems. Groups can help you be more confident with other people and the friends that you make in these groups stay with you long after you have left the service. They understand you and the things you've been through. It is very important that all young people get a chance to have this contact with their peers in the mental health system. Otherwise they just stay feeling scared and alone.

The experience of psychosis Paris Kritikos

I believe there is a big gap in the communication between someone experiencing psychosis and the mental health workers who are in the position of making vital decisions that could lead to determining if a person may be certifiable.

In the current system I believe the pressure and the responsibility of communication and explanation wrongfully falls more on the person who is in the position of inhibited expression, the person who is experiencing the 'psychosis'. It is hard enough trying to understand what is going on let alone express it in a language that is specific and direct to an audience that is judging every word. This communication is demanded in a highly stressful situation that could ultimately see one placed in a position of persecution in that which comes with a label of mental illness.

New Director of the Office for Youth

Ms Lill Healy will take up duties as the Director of the Office for Youth on Monday 1 December 2003.

Lill has extensive experience in working with community organisations both as an employee and through her various consultancy roles. Her most recent position was as a Senior Consultant with SMS Management and Technology.

Among her many other achievements she was selected to represent Rotary International in its Youth Exchange Program and was been appointed a member of the Youth Policy Development Council.

Lill's experience in working with government, community and the private sector well equips her to make significant contributions both to the development of Youth policy and programs and to DVC's directions more broadly.

YACVic welcomes Ms Healy to the role and looks forward to working with her. ■

Personally I believe all human experiences including psychosis are relative to one's 'holistic growth'. The idea of 'nurturing the exploration' of the 'experience' must not only be adopted by the system but also initiated by it.

Basically you know that you've experienced something (psychosis) but you're told to forget about it because it's only 'insanity'. The whole process is de-personalizing. It's aim separates the experience from the person, you can't separate an experience from a person and call it insanity. Personal experience is subjective.

The task of the 'psychotic' now lays in convincing the Jury to accept the HUMANITY AND NOT THE INSANITY. The mental health system fails to acknowledge and treat these powerful experiences as being significant to one's self. This failure undermines any effort within the system for an individual's own struggle for truth and understanding, the Right to the ongoing learning experience which is LIFE.

ORYGEN...

ORYGEN Youth Health is a specialist mental health service for young people living in the Western and North Western areas of Melbourne. The Platform Team is part of ORYGEN's youth participation program and is supported by Esther Singer, Youth Participation Worker For further information email esther@unimelb.edu.au ■

Put young people on the Agenda

Gain invaluable access to a

state-wide network of young

people, organisations and

individuals who work with

young people... join YACVIC!

WHAT TYPE of MEMBER AM I?

► Organisational Members

Organisations entitled to become members of YACVIC will be organisations that are generally concerned with direct service delivery for and with young people or organisations run by young people. Organisations that are concerned purely with policy formulation will not be entitled to join as organisational members. Organisations are defined as a legal entity. Each organisation is entitled to join once. Additional membership is available for service streams or regional offices. Local Government Youth Services are entitled to become organisational members. **Voting entitlement:** A maximum of two votes at any general meeting of the Council

At YACVIC we:

► Listen to the needs of young people,

workers with young people and organisations that provide direct services to young people.

► Provide advice to the government and

other institutions about these needs. **Analyse and develop policy** through **consultation** with our members.

► Provide our members with

information through our regular printed newsletter YIKES! our email announcement list and our website.

YACVIC is governed by a volunteer board and managed by a paid secretary. We are a not-for-profit organisation and our core funding comes from the Victorian Government's Office for Youth.

Having an active youth peak body in Victoria with a strong membership base means that your issues will be heard!

► Associate members

Associate members are generally organisations whose main function is to formulate policy. An associate member of YACVIC is any political party, federal government department, state government department, local government council or local government policy unit. **Voting entitlement:** not entitled to vote

► Additional members

A service stream, regional or local affiliate of a larger umbrella organisation which is an Organisational Member of YACVIC. **Voting entitlement:** One vote at any general meeting of the Council.

► Individual members

Any member of the public is entitled to apply for membership of the Council. Young people and those working for and with young people are particularly encouraged to join YACVIC. **Voting entitlement:** One vote at any general meeting of the Council.

Address: Level 6, 1 Elizabeth St, Melbourne 3000 **Ph:** (03) 9612 8999 **Fax:** (03) 9620 4802

Email: info@yacvic.org.au **Website:** www.yacvic.org.au

Youth Affairs Council of Victoria Inc. ABN: 39 774 045 170

MEMBERSHIP FORM : TAX INVOICE

This form is for new members only. If you are already a YACVIC member, renewals are sent out on 1 July every year.

youthaffairs
COUNCIL OF VICTORIA INC.

Title First Name Surname Position

Organisation Name Approx No of members in organisation

Address

Suburb/Town State Postcode

Phone Number Fax Number Mobile

Email Website address

I/We agree to the purpose and objectives listed* and hereby apply for membership to the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria Inc.

Signature Date

Fees (all prices are GST inclusive)

Organisational		
<input type="checkbox"/> Member with annual income less than \$50,000		\$55.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Member with annual income more than \$50,000		\$120.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Associate Member (no voting rights)		\$120.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Additional Member		\$55.00

Individual

<input type="checkbox"/> Member		\$55.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Member — Concession		\$15.00

Payment: Total amount paid: \$

Cheque or money order payable to Youth Affairs Council of Victoria Inc.

Credit Card: Visa Mastercard Bankcard

Name on Card:

Card number

Expiry date / Signature

Areas of policy interest

So that we can actively involve you in our policy discussions please tick one or more boxes:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arts, recreation and leisure | <input type="checkbox"/> Mental health |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Consumer and finance | <input type="checkbox"/> Multiculturalism |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Disabilities | <input type="checkbox"/> The law |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education and training | <input type="checkbox"/> Rural |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Employment | <input type="checkbox"/> Sexuality |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Environment | <input type="checkbox"/> Substance use |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health | <input type="checkbox"/> Violence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Housing | <input type="checkbox"/> Young women |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Indigenous | <input type="checkbox"/> Youth participation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Media and technology | |

If you are under 25 and would like to be involved in our youth consultation processes tick here

*YACVIC'S purpose and objectives are listed on our website or may be obtained by calling us on (03) 9612 8999 Any personal information collected by YACVIC is subject to our privacy policy and treated as strictly confidential

New laws to Increase Fines and Increase Ticket Inspectors' Powers

continued from front page...

order to avoid a penalty. This grace period will only be available for a first offence

- The above proposal is not part of the current bill before Parliament. It is not clear whether this will be achieved by the introduction of new, legally enforceable regulations or merely as part of the Code of Conduct which may not in itself be enforceable by members of the public
- Currently not all not all Centrelink health care card holders are entitled to purchase concession tickets and tertiary students must first purchase a concession card before being able to be entitled to concession fares. There are no proposals to deal with this inequitable situation by expanding the range of people eligible to purchase a concession ticket to include tertiary student card or all Centrelink health care card holders. Further, the cost of Student Passes and concession cards, even for low income families has not been reduced
- The government proposes a uniform code of conduct for ticket inspectors from all transport companies. The code suggests that ticket inspectors should 'use discretion when dealing with senior citizens and give them the benefit of the doubt and, where appropriate assist with the purchase and/or validation of a ticket.'
- However, no corresponding discretion is provided for dealings with young people. The code only states that ticket inspectors 'take care to use appropriate language when dealing with passengers aged under 16 and always remain respectful, non-threatening and courteous, even if their behaviour is aggressive, smart or argumentative'
- This will be a voluntary code. No details have yet been provided about whether there will be penalties for ticket inspectors or their employers who fail to comply with the code. Nor have details been announced as to whether there will be training for inspectors in cross-cultural and youth related issues
- The government still plans to establish a Public Transport Industry Ombudsman 'PTIO'. A transport Ombudsman would investigate and try to resolve public transport users' complaints against transport companies or their employees about issues such as fares and ticketing and conduct or behaviour of ticket inspectors. If this office operates like the other Industry Ombudsman, the transport companies can choose whether or not to agree to be subject to the Industry Ombudsman's powers. We await further details about how this will work

- A Public Transport Industry Ombudsman will not take away other avenues that people already have for asserting their rights in the transport system. These include legal action in the Equal Opportunity Commission Vic to stop race or age related discrimination or harassment or racial taunts; legal action in a civil Court for damages for injuries caused by ticket inspectors; asking a Children's or Magistrate's Court to decide whether a fine should have been given in the circumstances or whether a fine is the appropriate penalty, given a person's financial situation

What do you think?

Youthlaw welcomes some of the changes outlined above such as the grace period for concession cardholders in certain circumstances and the continued promise of a Public Transport Industry Ombudsman that may be able to resolve simple ticketing complaints.

On the other hand, Youthlaw is very concerned about the negative impact that other changes will have on young people. In particular we oppose the increase in fines and the graduated system, that continues to fail to take into account a person's financial or personal circumstances. The new system of payment by the Government to the transport operators of a proportion of the fines recovered acts as a new financial incentive to issue excessive numbers of infringement notices to young people for trivial offences or in circumstances where there is no capacity to pay the fine, or for even a valid ticket.

Please contact us at Youthlaw and let us how you think the changes will affect you.

What can you do?

Youthlaw will continue to work with other organisations to seek a fairer and more affordable system for young people who use public transport. As part of this campaign, we will continue to collect stories from young people, workers with young people and others, that highlight the impacts of the system has on young people. These stories are useful when arguing to Government for reforms and improvements to the system. We will also continue to help young people challenge their fines and the improper conduct of ticketing inspectors through legal and other processes.

If you can help us, or you want us to help you dealing with your fines or the way you have been treated by a ticketing inspector, please contact us at Youthlaw on 9611 2412 or email us: info@youthlaw.asn.au