

The State Government released its refreshed vision for Victoria's young people last week. Georgie Ferrari provides a brief overview of the document.*

FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

State Government Releases Refreshed Youth Agenda

Future Directions—An Action Agenda for Young People identifies 40 initiatives for young people in Victoria. The initiatives are grouped under five key outcome areas that were arrived at after extensive consultation with young people, parents, workers with young people, service providers, peaks and other government departments.

The outcome areas are:

- **Contributing and Making a Difference** - young people are valued in their communities for their contributions. Young people have opportunities and are acknowledged and supported to participate in meaningful ways.
- **Achieving potential through informed life choices** - young people are engaged with school, training or employment. They have options for staying connected to learning and are valued for their creative expression.
- **Having Resources and Making Connections** - young people are resourced to build and gain access to networks in their communities. Services and resources are easier for young people to access.

- **Managing healthy, active and diverse lives** - young people make healthy lifestyle choices in communities that are inclusive and welcoming of their diversity.
- **Being Safe and Promoting Safe Behaviours** - young people feel safe in environments that matter to them and are able to negotiate decisions about their own safety.

With these outcome areas in mind the State Government states that they will increase the number of young people who:

- Contribute more to their communities and want to make a difference.
- Make a successful transition from school to a job they like.
- Know how to access information, support and services they need.
- Lead healthy, active and culturally diverse lifestyles.
- Live in a secure environment and choose safe behaviours.

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This issue...

Our August issue is late for good reason! The **State Governments' new youth agenda** *Future Directions—An Action Agenda for Young People* has finally been released and Georgie gives a brief overview. Come to grips with **the lack of services for children of prisoners** in an article on *Children: Unintended Victims of Legal Process*, a new report from VACRO's senior researcher, Terry Hannon. **Bernie Geary, the Child Safety Commissioner** has a say, and Sally Goldner reports back from the **Sense and Sensibility conference** held in Melbourne recently. And yes we have all our regular updates plus a few new things too.....

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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.

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.

YIKES!

YIKES! is YACVic's regular newsletter. The views and opinions contained in this publication do not necessarily represent the views of YACVic. This publication is copyright, articles may be reproduced with permission from YACVic.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Contributions to Yikes! are welcome. The deadline for the next edition of YIKES! is **18 September 2006.**

INSERTS & ADVERTISING

If you wish to include an insert or advert in YIKES! please contact the YACVic Communications Officer on (03) 9267 3766 or email lmcdonald@yacvic.org.au.

Victoria might be in the depths of winter, but things are heating up at YACVic. We're busy organising the national youth affairs conference, working hard on the report of the Carrying the Can forums, working with VicSRC to find a project worker to support student representative councils, getting the individual advocacy side of YDAS up and running and much more!

National Youth Conference

It's confirmed, this event will take place on 1-2 May 2007 at the Melbourne Park Function Centre. We aim to attract over 500 workers and young people from across Australia to come together to talk about the work we do, the future of our sector and where we are heading. See the insert in this issue of YIKES! for more information. We thank the State Government for their generous support of this important event.

Indexation Negotiations with DHS

While negotiations are continuing, the current offer on the table from DHS for funded agencies sits between 2.9% and 3.1%. This still falls short of the 4.15% the sector has been asking for. VCOSS estimates the shortfall to community organisations will be in the vicinity of \$15million. For more information and to calculate what the costs might be to your organisation go to http://www.vcooss.org.au/sector_sust.htm. VCOSS is urging organisations to write to your local MPs and relevant Minister (likely to be Ministers Pike, Garbutt, Broad, or Jennings), describing the impact of the gap in funding. If you do write, please copy us in on the correspondence so that we can keep track of the campaign. It's vital that your voice is heard in this subtle erosion of funding that will take place if we do not receive adequate indexation. So write today!

YACVic AGM

The date has been set! Put 5.30 pm, October 11, 2006 in your diaries for YACVic's AGM - venue to be confirmed. And start thinking now about nominating for a position on the Youth Reference Group, Policy Advisory Group or the Board of Governance. Feel free to give

us a call if you would like to discuss any of these opportunities further.

YACVic's Toll Free Number

We have a new toll free number for callers outside of Melbourne. It is 1300 727 176 and we look forward to hearing from you!



Georgie Ferrari, Executive Officer
gferrari@yacvic.org.au

WHAT ARE WE UP TO?

This is a new feature that we will have in each issue of YIKES. It's designed to keep you up to date with who we're meeting with and what we're up to. In each issue we'll tell you who we have met with recently and who we're going to meet with in the coming weeks. If you are interested in feeding into any of our up coming meetings, or want to hear more about a past meeting, be in touch, we'd love to hear from you!

We've recently met with:

- Assistant Commissioner Ken Layre: Police/youth relations in the Flemington/ Kensington region
- Equal Opportunity Commission of Victoria on the Charter for Human Rights
- Community Advocate on Gambling
- Child Safety Commissioner Bernie Geary
- Community Taskforce on Transport Safety - Victoria Police
- Lill Healy, Director Office for Youth
- Tanya Plibersek, Federal Opposition Spokesperson for Youth

In the next few weeks we will meet with:

- Lill Healy, Director Office for Youth
- Jacinta Allan, State Minister for Employment and Youth Affairs
- Nick Kotsiras, State Opposition Spokesperson for Youth Affairs (TBC)
- VCOSS

Do be in touch if you would like any more information on these meetings.

Future Directions for Young People

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1...

How will these outcomes be measured? The Office for Youth will have responsibility to develop measures for achievement and a monitoring framework for the outcomes listed above.

YACVic welcomes the new youth agenda and congratulates the Government on taking an action-based approach to young people in Victoria. The document is a significant departure from the previous framework for youth, 'Respect' that failed to identify actions and was released with no money attached.

While most of the actions listed have a budget component attached, many have previously been announced through the 2006–07 State Budget or through *A Fairer Victoria, the Next Steps*.

Worthy of note are a couple of actions that YACVic particularly welcomes. Under the outcome area *Contributing and Making a Difference* the Government has allocated \$4.5m over four years to a Youth Foundations initiative. This action will see 15 new Youth Foundations established in disadvantaged areas. The money will provide young people with funds to manage and make small grants to youth-led activities in their local communities.

A second initiative that YACVic welcomes is the establishment of a new advisory mechanism that will engage young people in a consultation process directly with the Minister for Employment and Youth Affairs. *Young People Direct* will ensure that young people's voices are heard at the highest level within government and that young people are supported appropriately to provide advice to government.

Future Directions is unique in that it is the first time the State Government has articulated all of its youth focused initiatives right across government within one document. While most of the initiatives have been previously announced in the budget or *A Fairer Victoria*, the money attached is new money and does represent a significant investment in Victoria's young people over the next four years.

***Please note:** At the time of going to print YACVic was only able to provide a brief overview of *Future Directions—An Action Agenda for Young People*. YACVic will provide a critical analysis in our next issue of YIKES! YACVic will also develop a formal response to the document which will be available on our website, www.yacvic.org.au by the end of August.

NEW PUBLICATION ON YOUTH AND VIOLENT CONFLICT

The United Nations Development Programme's Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR) released its report *Youth and Violent Conflict: Society and Development in Crisis?* The report represents a first step to build substantial knowledge on this issue as a basis for policy development and programmatic responses. It reviews existing analytical and policy frameworks, provides an initial mapping of relevant programming efforts put in place by UNDP and partner organisations, and advances preliminary recommendations for the way forward.

The following is an extract from the report's introduction:

"Defining youth is problematic. Definitions are often based on age in order to provide a degree of objectivity. The UN General Assembly defines youth as individuals aged between 15 and 24. According to this definition, youth comprises 18 percent of the world population, or more than one billion people, 85 percent of which live in developing countries.

However, to a large extent, youth is socially constructed, and it has less to do with age than with status and behaviour. The concept of youth is intrinsically linked with the idea of transition from childhood to adulthood - from a phase of life in which the individual needs protection, sheltering and guidance to one of self-determination, maturity, independence, responsibility and accountability for decision-making. The state, the economy, civil society and the community are all predicated on notions of adulthood; they all require the participation of adults in order to function.

Frequently, the concept of youth is approached as an all-encompassing category, as a coherent group where differences related

to gender, class, ethnicity, etc are secondary to a common identification of youth-hood. This review questions this assumption by underlining that youth is, in fact, a very ambiguous term. What is meant by youth, and who comprises this category, is often unclear. Does it make sense to speak of youth as a unified category? Do young people identify themselves as belonging to this social group? Are there common experiences felt by all young people around the world? Who creates the construct of youth, and whose realities does it reflect?

The review also attempts to unpack the notion of youth crisis. There seems to be a shared understanding that young people are somehow 'in crisis'; but this concept is often used inconsistently, as an a priori assumption, and seldom defined. This review seeks to analyse this concept, by identifying two different (and potentially contradictory) meanings of the expression: (i) a crisis of society impacting on youth; and (ii) a crisis originating from youth and impacting on society at large. In the contemporary discourse on youth, these two meanings are often confused or used interchangeably, and 'youth crisis' is often seen as leading to violence of various sorts - including the participation of young people in violent conflict, gang warfare, criminality and other kinds of violent behaviour. Once again, this relationship deserves closer attention as the linkage between youth and violence is far from being pre-determined or automatic. Which factors can explain what makes young people resort to violence or refrain from it?"

A copy of the report can be downloaded at http://www.undp.org/bcpr/whats_new/UNDP_Youth_PN.pdf

Children: Unintended Victims

A review of policies and legislation affecting children with incarcerated parents.

A new report shows how children and young people can experience negative impacts of a parent's arrest and detention.

The incarceration of parents has an enormous psycho-social impact, not only on their dependant children, but on the family, friends, or foster parents that care for the children. A recently published Discussion Paper *Children: Unintended Victims of Legal Process* by VACRO and Flat Out Inc examines current policies and legislation affecting children with an imprisoned primary carer. The report has a particular focus on children whose mother was incarcerated. The study focuses on Victorian families and their first hand experience of the legal process. Each phase of the legal process is considered in the report, from parental arrest, sentencing and imprisonment to release and reconciliation with the family.

Interviews with a broad range of stakeholders indicate a policy vacuum exists in regards to the 145,000 Australian children that have ever been or are currently in this situation. This is nearly 5% of all Australian children and 20% of Indigenous children. There is an absence of policy on police arrest and detainment practices, bail and remand legislation, in sentencing legislation and court protocols and in prison reception procedures.

Guidelines

In the 1998 *Protecting Children* protocol developed between the Victoria Police and the Department of Human Services there are no references to children whose homes will be or have been searched, or whose primary carers have been arrested and taken into police custody, with the exception of children who are direct victims of parental abuse or domestic violence. Definitions are provided for various forms of child abuse including neglect which states:

Neglect includes a failure to provide the child with an adequate standard of nutrition, medical care, clothing, shelter or supervision to the extent where the health and development of the child or young person are significantly impaired or

placed at risk. A child is neglected if left uncared for over long periods of time or abandoned.

In Victoria, under s.261 (2) and s.262 (2) (b) of the Children and Young Persons Act (1989) it is an offence to leave a child unattended and it is an offence to fail to protect a child from harm. In the process of apprehending primary carers, both of these Sections of the Act are often contravened.

An interviewed police-officer stated in regard to a fifteen year old child left without a carer at the time of arrest:

I actually went out to her house to knock on the door to find out if she lived there, and she was actually out the front at the time. So I grabbed her out the front, and off we went. I don't know whether the daughter was home or not, I never actually went into the house. (Police)

There are no guidelines in either the *Victorian Police Manual (2003)* or *Protecting Children (1998)* regarding the treatment or reporting of children whose primary carers have been taken into custody, or have been unable to obtain bail, including in situations where no other protective adult can be mobilised prior to or after the removal of the primary carer to the police station.

Being arrested and taken away from your children can be traumatic for both parent and child as one mother described:

I didn't know what had happened, or where they were. I didn't see them [my children] for about a month and a half. I

was in the Magistrates Court cells for nearly a month. I had DHS, in the end, coming in to see me in the cells. I was shattered. I was very upset. They had never left my side before in their entire lives, so for that to happen... it was just like, yeah.

Impact on children

Children with a primary carer who has been incarcerated are faced with issues around transition like residential relocation, transfer between interim carers and transfer of primary carers from one prison to another as well as coping with the arrest, bail and remand traumas and uncertainties. In addition to this there are the upheavals associated with the return of the incarcerated carer on day leave, and their eventual permanent return.

The findings from the review of these policies suggest that children are rarely acknowledged in legal processes and are consequently often left at risk in various ways by their primary carer's removal to prison.

They just dumped him there, they did not give a fuck, didn't even go in to see if anybody was there. He was about 11 yrs old and they said I would get bail and be home in a few hours. Six months later I got back. (Mother).

Children have displayed a range of symptoms related to post-traumatic stress disorder stemming from the trauma of separation from primary carers such as depression, anger, guilt, flashbacks of arrests. Interim carers also report traumatised children.



".. everywhere I went, she had to go; do or die, she had to go with me. She was just so scared that one day I was going to go out the door, and I wasn't going to come back either. She would never ever sleep in another bed, well, she is still in the same room as me, but now she's got her own little mattress on the floor It's been five months, and it's only actually twice in the last two weeks that she went somewhere with my father, and that's basically the first time she has chosen to go away from me, in five months. (Carer)

Education

The impact on education outcomes for children with a parent in prison can be profound. Children can suffer a number of difficulties in the school environment that may include bullying, either as victims or as perpetrators, teasing, truancy, poor academic performance and dropping out altogether.

My oldest quit school. He left in year 10, but he had failed year nine. He was just starting year nine when I was arrested. He is being more concerned with keeping the house going, and the family together. So, his life is sort of on hold... We're all in limbo waiting for two years to pass. (Mother)

For the older girl it has been a bit harder to adjust - she told people her mother was overseas and living in Mexico, and that's why she couldn't see her, and then when it hit the papers of course, it all came home to roost. (Carer)

During their parents' legal processes children remain unacknowledged and unprotected by policies or legislation. The peri-

od of time waiting for committal, and then trial, is often a time of great uncertainty and anxiety for children, as their future hangs in the balance along with that of their primary carer.

He asks that a lot, when are you coming home? And I couldn't answer him, because I was on remand I was on remand 17 months, and it was the hardest thing to tell him I didn't know when I was coming home. And then I had to tell him it would be seven years. (Mother)

The effect of this legal limbo affects not only children but also impacts on the incarcerated and post-release mothers, their arresting police officers, their defence counsel, the sentencing judge and creates further demands and stresses for interim carers dealing with the uncertainties and anxiety experienced by children.

Sole mothers who are arrested and detained are often faced with the task of simultaneously negotiating two major legal systems - the criminal legal system and the child welfare system.

I wasn't able to concentrate on the court case, because I was so concerned about who would get custody of my son. (Mother)

With no protocols, policies or legislation the children of prisoners and their carers must therefore experience the criminal-legal processes of parents with no rights and little support. As a result, the agencies, social workers and other stakeholders working with this group of children are reduced to providing ad hoc, band-aid style support to a significant and increas-

ing number of families attached to prisons.

Conclusion

The findings of the report reflect international research about the children of prisoners. Many of their experiences, such as truancy, self-harm and anti-authoritarianism, are accepted precursors for intergenerational recidivism. Furthermore, it appears that the people who are responsible for enacting current policies and legislation - police officers, solicitors, and judges - are also negatively affected by their involvement with primary carers and their children in the current legal context.

Findings suggest that what is required is a cohesive, interdepartmental approach to the development of policies, protocols and legislation aimed at protecting children while pursuing the goal of criminal justice. This umbrella of protection must extend from the point of arrest; through bail and remand; in sentencing legislation and court protocols; through prison policies and parole directives; between criminal, family and children's courts; and police, courts, prisons and child protective services. Children must not remain the unintended victims of legal processes.

Further information about the project, including PDF versions of the Discussion Paper and an Executive Summary, can be found on the VACRO website at www.vacro.org.au/Children_Unintended_Victims. Hard copies are available on request.

Terry Hannon, Senior Researcher, Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (VACRO)

VACRO Discussion Paper Consultations: *Children: Unintended Victims of Legal Process*

VACRO are conducting a consultation process based on the findings published in the Discussion Paper. The purpose of these consultations is to develop recommendations aimed at creating holistic, integrated policies that protect and support children and their carers in these situations. We would particularly like to invite you or a member of your organisation to participate in these consultations;

your area of expertise would be of great benefit in informing recommendations.

The following topics will be covered separately in a series of group consultation sessions on:

- Arrest 26 September
- Bail/ Remand 3 October
- Courts/Sentencing 10 October
- Prison /Visits/Programs 21 August/

- 17 October
- Pre and Post-release 20 September/ 23 October
- Interdepartmental 31 October

All sessions will be held from 1.30–4.30pm. To register for the consultation or to find out more, contact Terry Hannon at VACRO on 03 9602 1366 or email thannon@vacro.org.au

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY

Report by Sally Goldner, YACVic member



reminding of the saying "if you're afraid, don't do it. If you do it, don't be afraid."

As always, the theatre group Y-GLAM gave a fantastic per-

Wednesday 19 July saw the inaugural 'Sense and Sexuality' conference held at Docklands stadium. The conference looked at issues facing same-sex attracted (SSA) and transgender people in schools. While the emphasis was clearly on young people in schools, the issue also has wide-ranging effects in other ways. The necessity to deal with the issue was brought home by the statistic in 'Writing Themselves In Again' which showed 74% of SSA young people had been bullied at school. This deterioration from the results of the 1998 'Writing Themselves In,' where the comparative figure was 69%¹ saw the first long overdue 'official' recognition of the issue.

Jacinta Allan, Minister for Education Services, Employment and Youth Affairs, opened proceedings and was followed by Professor Ray Missen who gave a solid and accurate picture from an academic perspective, using the case of "Jane," a student teacher who was sacked for simply saying she was a lesbian.² It is unfortunate that Professor Missen was obviously uncomfortable with transgender issues as evidenced by his defensive comments about terminology other than homosexual, gay and lesbian. The reality is transgender (and bisexual) issues exist, they differ from gay and lesbian, so they need separate identification. Any "problem" with that is the person's problem with the issues, and to demonstrate that at such a conference was highly discouraging.

The highlight of the day was the presentation from those in schools who have tackled the issue. Representatives from Northcote High School, Colac Secondary College and Spensley Street Primary (Clifton Hill) gave positive accounts of how they dealt with the issues in their schools. The comments reinforced the idea of a "whole-of-school" approach always working well. The approach of Colac, being in a rural area to take a "whole-of-community" approach as well as combining the issue with others was also well received. Sue-Ann Post facilitated the session with professionalism, humour and relevant self-disclosure.

Sadly, the lowlight of the day followed soon after. This was the comment (from Tony Cook of DEET) that it was "brave to tackle the issue". This comment is nothing short of utterly offensive and is internalised homophobia. It's not "brave" to tackle homophobia (regardless where it happens); it's just plain necessary as part of a decent society. Many of the professionals attending were utterly appalled by the comment and the general flavour of this presentation. Maybe the department had the willies after the sensationalist and biased coverage of the Sunday Herald-Sun on the issue. These relate to reporting the conference was taxpayer funded when it was funded by paid attendances and the comments by State Opposition spokesperson Martin Dixon that it was "political correctness gone mad." Perhaps, like Prof Missen, they need

performance over the lunch break, reprising their show 'Is There Anybody Out There.' The performance really struck home the isolation that SSATY face in schools - and also that something can be done about it.

The afternoon saw two series of workshops covering a range of specific issues, including how to respond when "that's so gay" comes up, transgender young people, rainbow families and issues surrounding religion and sexuality.

Overall, the lack of acknowledgement of transgender issues was a concern. It was also disappointing that the Rainbow Network and its presenters were not acknowledged, nor were the youth facilitators thanked. However as Sue-Ann Post said, the fact that gay and lesbian issues even being discussed in primary schools was unthinkable 10 years ago and that it is happening now is certainly a positive. That 300 people attended and showed great interest and concern is highly positive. Let's hope that by the time 'Sense and Sexuality 2' rolls around, that any fears have been eradicated—if only for the sake of SSAT people in schools.

1. http://www.latrobe.edu.au/arcshs/downloads/Reports/writing_themselves_in_again.pdf p 39.

2. As reported in "The Age" 7 March 2005 at <http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2005/03/04/1109700685285.html> and elsewhere.

AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY IDOL FINALIST: WAYOUT



Banner displayed at community events in response to homophobic comments by bands at local events.

Recognition was given recently to the young people in the Macedon Ranges WayOut group when selected as one of three finalists in the Australian Community Idol, a nationwide competition open to community groups. Around 300 organisations entered and were assessed on a range of criteria such as: promotes access and equal participation, demonstrates leadership and advocacy and demon-

strates a track record of community action. Since the awards there has been interest about WayOut from across Australia asking if there are similar projects running in other communities.

For more info on WayOut: Sue Hackney (03) 5421 1619 or shackney@cobaw.vic.gov.au or check www.wayout.org.au

Introducing: THE CHILD SAFETY COMMISSIONER

This is my first opportunity to communicate with you through this newsletter, and I am pleased to be able to tell you something about what I do as the Child Safety Commissioner and the valuable place of children and young people in our community.

Commencing in mid 2005 I was delighted to be able to take up my appointment as the inaugural Victorian Child Safety Commissioner, seeing it as a great opportunity to be able to make a real difference to the lives of children and young people.

It is a job that I relish and that I am seriously committed to. As I move around the state and talk to a very diverse range of dedicated and committed people who run services for young people, I never cease to be surprised at finding people who have committed many years of their life and professional careers to improving the lives of children and young people.

Most of all though, I enjoy getting the chance to talk to as many young people as possible about what is happening in their lives and finding out about some of the challenges they face.

I have always enjoyed working with young people, having started out as Victoria's first outreach youth worker in the 70's intrepidly pounding the pavements of Heidelberg and Preston, full of optimism and a strong belief that I could make a difference to someone's life—even if it was only a small difference. I saw my role as being a bridge between a young person and the services they required or the aspirations they harboured.

Since that early beginning, I can honestly say that while some things have changed, some things never change. I still hear young people's stories of how tough it can be growing up, as well as great stories of courage and resilience that still profoundly affect me. I never fail to be inspired by the way in which many young people continue to strive to get on in life, to do their best, often in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

The odds can include finding a job they like and working with people who respect

them while keeping up in a competitive and technologically changing world, coping with the devastating impact of drugs and alcohol on their own and their family's lives, living with the sadness of childhood abuse, surviving a family challenged by chronic mental illness, experiencing homelessness, living with a disability, coping with hurtful and often debilitating social or cultural discrimination or, for many, just simply the experience of poverty.

There are many children and young people who are the unsung heroes of our community; the ones who are isolated in their individual challenges that are beyond most people's experience of life. This includes the journey of so many refugee children and young people, who, with their families are so often expected to 'hit the ground running' as they come to Australia. It is impossible for those of us who are ensconced in our communities through layers of generations to begin to comprehend the hurdles they face including the aftermath of family and cultural destruction through the trauma of war, and invasion of their countries of origin.

It is often said that in adversity people often find strength, but we also know that quite often, extreme adversity can break people. Some young people are more resilient than others, while some have more luck in finding a helping hand when it is needed. With this resilience and support, many young people do overcome these odds and go on to make a contribution in life. They also can and do make a contribution to the wellbeing of other young people, through sharing their own stories of survival and hope. Children and young people continue to teach my colleagues and me the way in which they

have managed to keep going, even in the face of extraordinary adversity. The practice of my office is constantly informed by their stories and experiences.

There is usually a good reason for why a child or young person is angry and being difficult. Perhaps there is something going on in their life that is beyond what they consider to be fair and reasonable and that they feel powerless to change it. When we know their story we better understand their pain.

Our community needs more of us to be on the look out for each other - particularly for vulnerable children and young people. It is all of our responsibilities to maintain vigilance, share our concern and act appropriately.



Bernie Geary and the band

*Bernie Geary OAM
Child Safety Commissioner*

*For more information about the Office of
the Child Safety Commissioner see
www.ocsc.vic.gov.au*

WHAT'S NEW AT YACVIC

re-SEARCHING QUESTIONS

WHO: Judith Bessant, Professor of Youth Studies and Sociology, RMIT
ON: A New Social Contract: Intergenerational Equity in an Ageing Society
WITH: Lill Healy, Director, Office for Youth as 'respondent'
WHEN: 17th August 10.00 am to 12.00 noon
WHERE: YACVic, 2/172 Flinders St, Melbourne
COST: Free
RSVP: info@yacvic.org.au by Wednesday August 16th.

YACVic is delighted to present *Re: Searching Questions*—a new bi-monthly seminar series that aims to put the sector in touch with current research and academic work. Please join us for the first of the series above. The next seminar in the series will be in October. Watch this space for more info!

NATIONAL YOUTH AFFAIRS CONFERENCE—ARE WE THERE YET? PAST LEARNINGS, CURRENT REALITIES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR YOUTH AFFAIRS IN AUSTRALIA

When: 1–2 May 2007

Where: Melbourne Park Function Centre.

A conference for youth workers, young people, community workers, policy makers, academics and researchers, health workers, teachers and activists!

See the insert in this issue of YIKES! for more details.

VIC SRC PROJECT

YACVic, in partnership with the Victorian Student Representative Council, is establishing a 12-month project to further support SRCs across Victoria. The project will have a particular focus on strengthening rural and regional SRCs. Donkey Wheel Charitable Trust and the Lance Reichstein Foundation have generously supported the project. We have recently advertised for a project officer and anticipate they will start in late August. The next issue of YIKES! will have further information on this exciting new initiative.

YOUTH SUPPORT SERVICES – WHO'S CARRYING THE CAN?

YACVic and VCOSS are finalising the report that follows the two successful forums we held on Youth Support Services. We have developed a preliminary list of recommendations and have met with DHS and DVC to discuss these. All YACVic members will receive a copy of the report, due out by early september.

TELSTRA PHONE CARD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

YACVic has been distributing \$5.00 Telstra Phone cards to organisations who work with young people. The program has been very popular with 1800 cards distributed so far to approximately 50 services. YACVic still has 200 cards to give to services.

To receive cards the agency must assess the person as being someone who resides in Australia and relies on public payphones from time to time for their communications and is assessed as being in need.

Distribution Process

YACVic will give services the phonecards in multiples of ten, with a maximum of 50 cards per service. Services interested in receiving phonecards should email or call

Larissa Barrie, info@yacvic.org.au or ph: 9267 3799.

Services can either pick up the phone cards from the YACVic Office, or send a self addressed, stamped, C4 sized envelope to YACVic and we will post the cards to you (please note: postage costs \$2.45 within Victoria).

Once YACVic is satisfied that your service works with young people who meet the eligibility criteria, distribution will be based on a first in, first served basis.

DON'T LET THIS BE YOUR LAST ISSUE OF YIKES!

YACVic's membership cycle runs from July 1st each year and YIKES! is sent out to current members only. If you were a YACVic member in 2005/06, you should have recently received a membership renewal form in the post. Memberships are now due, so please get them back to us! This is the only way to make sure that you don't miss out on a single issue of YIKES! in your letterbox every two months.

If your membership renewal form seems to have disappeared, or if your dog ate it, or if you have any questions at all, just contact Larissa, Information and Participation Officer on (03) 9267 3799 or email info@yacvic.org.au

Policy Update

The latest happenings in the area of youth affairs policy.

A FAIRER VICTORIA II - THE NEXT STEPS

The Bracks Government has recently released *A Fairer Victoria - Progress and the Next Steps*. The strategy builds on the first iteration of *A Fairer Victoria*, bringing with it a further \$33 million worth of initiatives. While many of these initiatives were announced in the latest budget, there is some new spending, worthy of a mention.

The government has announced an investment of \$4.5 million over four years for the development of Youth Foundations. The proposed model will see young people, from a range of backgrounds, making decisions about funding and grant making. YACVic welcomes this initiative as a very positive and important step in genuine and meaningful youth participation. For a full run down on the new Fairer Victoria initiatives go to: <http://www.vic.gov.au/VictoriaOnline?action=content&id=1760&pageName=Latest&pageTitle=Latest>

HUMAN RIGHTS CHARTER

After successful passage of the legislation through Parliament, the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities* was launched on July 26 by the Attorney-General, the Hon. Rob Hulls.

While the Charter only provides for the protection of individuals' civil and political rights, it is a significant step forward for human rights in Victoria. We are only the second state or territory in Australia to develop a charter of rights.

Many in the community sector pushed for the inclusion of cultural, social and economic rights and while these were not included the act will be reviewed in four years time with a view to considering the inclusion of these rights as well as Indigenous self determination and specific rights covering women and children and young people.

The Charter has implications for all Victorians, but from a compliance point of view the act specifies that 'public authori-

ties' have obligations to comply. Public authorities include community organisations who are funded by government to carry out a function that government might otherwise do. This will no doubt have implications for many YACVic members.

YACVic will work closely with VCOSS, Youthlaw and others with an interest in human rights to ensure community education on the Charter is rolled out across the State.

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY ACT 1995 (VIC)

Victoria's Equal Opportunity Legislation is currently under review. Proposed changes include:

- Allowing for representative complaints to be lodged with the Equal Opportunity Commission.
- Expanding the powers of VCAT to allow for the making of orders affecting a broader group of individuals than the complainant.
- Expanding the EOCV's educative and research functions.

These proposed changes could be a positive step in making the Equal Opportunity Commission more accessible for young people and better able to consider systemic issues that affect groups of young people rather than just individuals. Youthlaw has developed a submission in response to the issues paper produced by the Department of Justice. see www.youthlaw.org.au.

FAIR PAY COMMISSION

The newly established Fair Pay Commission has recently been conducting consultations around Australia with a view to setting minimum wages, youth wages and a disability wage.

YACVic has recently participated in a consultation with VCOSS and the Disability Sector. We have also attended a meeting convened by VCOSS to discuss the best way to ensure a range of voices are heard in the consultation phase.

The Fair Pay Commission has the responsibility to set the minimum wage. This is a change in practice that has been brought about by the new Work Choices Legislation. Previously unions and other groups that had standing put a 'national wage case' to the Australian Industrial Relations Commission who, with a full bench, made a ruling.

While the new Work Choices legislation states that the Fair Pay Commission cannot reduce the minimum wage, they can decide to not increase it (which has been the case in other countries that have a similar system). A decision not to increase the minimum wage is in effect a decrease in real terms for low-income earners once increases in the cost of living are factored in.

YACVic is particularly interested in the Commission's inquiry into the setting of youth wages. YACVic has been long opposed to youth wages and continue to advocate for equal pay for equal work regardless of age. Similarly we have concerns about the setting of a disability wage. The Australian Federation for Disability Organisations has stated clearly that there is already a system of pay for those people with disabilities who are less productive - the supported wage - and therefore an introduction of a 'disability wage' would be discriminatory. YACVic and the Youth Disability Advocacy Service support this view.

The Commission called for submissions by July 27th. As this is a Federal issue and in the absence of a Federally funded youth peak body, YACVic worked with VCOSS and the other State and Territory Youth Peaks to ensure that youth issues were raised in any submissions that were tendered. YACVic also submitted some key considerations directly to the commission. To find out further information on the Commission and the submissions go to: <http://www.fairpay.gov.au/fairpay>

YACVic's submission can be found on the policy and projects page of our website.

Jen Rose, YACVic's Policy Officer can be contacted on 9267 3722 or by email jrose@yacvic.org.au

YDAS: Individual Advocacy Open For Business

The Youth Disability Advocacy Service is now fully operational! We are now undertaking both individual and systemic advocacy to support the needs of young people with disabilities in Victoria. Michelle Bowler commenced working with YDAS as the Individual Advocate at the beginning of July. Michelle has been working with George, the coordinator, to promote the individual advocacy service and has hit the ground running in her role, already supporting clients on issues such as housing and income support.

The individual advocacy service is open to any young person with a disability between the ages of 12 and 25. The service can support young people with disabilities to access their rights in a range of areas including employment, education, housing, Centrelink benefits, disability services and discrimination and with a wide range of other access and equity issues.

To give you a better idea about the role of the Individual Advocate at YDAS, it is to support the young person with a disability

by working with them to identify what they want to achieve and assist them to develop and implement a plan for how to achieve it. The Individual Advocate may support the client with letter writing, telephone calls as well as arranging and attending meetings that are all aimed at achieving the outcome that the client wants.

Our Individual Advocate can also help young people with disabilities to access information about their rights and can refer clients to other services if they are in a better position to assist with the issue. Our service is unique in that it focuses on the needs of the young person with a disability and we work directly with the young person to help them to achieve the outcomes that they want. Our Individual Advocate, Michelle, is available on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday and our Coordinator George, can assist on other days. Michelle can be contacted on 9267 3733 or email mbowler@yacvic.org.au for more information or to make a request for advocacy.

In other YDAS developments, the steering committee is up and running and has had two meetings that have focused on setting some systemic advocacy priorities. Issues relating to access and support in education and employment as well as access to places where young people hang out, were chosen as the key areas that the service will focus in its systemic advocacy. The steering committee has also decided on a slogan for YDAS: "Raising Voices, Enhancing Choices, Creating Change". It is really exciting to see the service developing with so many great ideas coming directly from young people.

If you want to learn more about YDAS, you can contact George Taleporos on 92673755 or gtaleporos@yacvic.org.au. People with hearing impairments can call via the National Relay Service on 1800 555 630. Our Toll-Free number (from outside of Melbourne) is 1300 727 176.

Great News for VIYAC

VIYAC has had a very productive few months to say the least. We are extremely excited to be able to announce that we have secured another 12 months funding from Aboriginal Affairs Victoria (AAV).

This funding means that I now work four days per week and that we can also work further on various projects.

VIYAC had our second meeting with the Hon Mr. Gavin Jennings in June, which was attended by four VIYAC members, AAV representatives, YACVic representatives and myself. Areas discussed included the VIYAC and YACVic oral history research piece & the relationship between Elders and young people in Community.

VIYAC held another full council meeting on June 18th. We had two presentations on the day, one by Peter Jones from AAV, the second by Joanne Harrison from VACCHO. The day was used to start plans for the upcoming "youth gathering",

at this stage planned for November, which will promote young Indigenous talent and inform young people of opportunities available to them.

VIYAC is holding a "New Logo" art competition. It's a great opportunity for a young talented artist to be awarded for their work. We are also holding nominations for the "VIYAC Community Spirit Police Award" which will award a Victorian Police Officer or station, for great work with Indigenous young people. This award is a great way of developing a positive relationship between youth and police. The joint research piece VIYAC has embarked on with YACVic, which focuses on the issues of culture, identity and racism is nearing to a close. It is looking really great with lots of strong voices and great stories, so keep an eye out for the upcoming launch soon.

VIYAC members will also be attending the Annual Women's Summit at the end

of July, an "Achieving Social Justice for Indigenous Australians" night in August and will participate in a cultural day in September at the Austin hospital.

On a very high note, one of our VIYAC representatives, Miss Emily Fien was named the "2006 Miss NAIDOC", so a big congratulations goes out to her.

VIYAC as you can see is steaming ahead at full speed. We now have 22 members on board, and our next council meeting will be held on the 13th of August.

Jade Colgan, State Coordinator, VIYAC can be contacted on 09267 3788 or by email viyac@yacvic.org.au

The Latest From the YRG

Well, it's been a very interesting time here in the Youth Reference Group lately. Members have been busy trying to find time to take up a whole range of opportunities whilst juggling other commitments like exams, work, friends, as well as the odd moment just to take a breather!

The Youth Reference Group recently had the opportunity to contribute to the development of the City of Melbourne's new Safety Strategy. We have YRG members who live within the City of Melbourne, members who live in other council areas but regularly visit the City, and members who live in rural Victoria and travel to Melbourne on a monthly basis. It was a great opportunity to explore not only what the current concerns are, but to propose a range of measures to improve young people's safety in the City of Melbourne.

I had the privilege of attending the Multifaith Multicultural Youth Forum, which was held at Melbourne Town Hall on July 30th. This was an amazing event, with approximately 150 young people facing an early-morning rise on a Sunday to attend the forum, sharing experiences, ideas and suggestions on multifaith and multicultural issues. Workshop sessions were facilitated by young people, including the YRG's Jamie Byron, who ran a workshop on youth participation across all levels of government. Participants presented a number of recommendations to community leaders and government representatives, and it will be exciting to be part of the next steps in this process.

With the Youth Reference Group now officially five years old, we decided that it's time to step back and reflect on how the group has been working so far, and to develop new ways to support young people's participation in to the future. YACVic has appointed an external reviewer to undertake the evaluation and YRG members, past and present, are strongly encouraged to step up and provide their feedback and suggestions on the YRG. If you happen to be a past YRG member and would like to contribute to the review, please contact me at info@yacvic.org.au or (03) 9267 3799. Who knows what next year's YRG will look like?

Larissa Barrie, Information and Participation Officer

STATE GOVERNMENT NEWS

FReeZA Grants Open

Applications are now open for the Victorian Government's popular FreeZA program. Local Councils and not-for-profit organisations are encouraged to partner with young people and apply for grants of up to almost \$20,000 to deliver the youth music and culture program in 2007. Both new and existing FReeZA providers are welcome to apply for the \$2 million program.

FReeZA grants are a great way for communities to support young people to organise and stage safe and secure entertainment events for other young people.

The program offers young people a chance to not only put on music and cultural events for their friends and peers, but also gives them terrific opportunities for individual skill development.

Young people can become involved in all aspects of organising FreeZA events, including selecting and booking bands, negotiating agreements, promoting events, managing venues, budgeting and administration.

Last year 68 organisations worked with young people across Victoria to deliver more than 370 safe and supervised events attended by 160,000 young people.

FReeZA is famous for its "Battle of the Bands" gigs, but FReeZA Committees each year organise a huge range of events in, and for, their communities - from skating, BMX and hip-hop competitions to music, song-writing and dance workshops and live radio shows.

Taking part in a FReeZA organising committee provides young people with terrific experience which could lead to opportunities for ongoing involvement in

the music and entertainment industry.

Young people will also be involved in the selection process, with a panel of young people sitting on assessment panels recommending projects for funding.

FReeZA is a program run by young people, for young people, reflecting the Government's commitment to valuing the contributions of young people, listening to their views and providing them with genuine opportunities for involvement.

For more information please visit www.freeza.vic.gov.au

Boost to Mentoring for Young People.

The Minister for Employment and Youth Affairs, Jacinta Allan has also recently announced funding to a number of mentoring organisations and networks across Victoria, including in:

- the Grampians region, based in Ballarat;
- Emerald and Cockatoo;
- Warrnambool;
- Whittlesea and Darebin; and
- the cities of Melbourne and Yarra.

The Victorian Government is funding these programs through the Mentoring and Capacity Building Initiative as part of Leading the Way, the first coordinated strategy to mentoring young people in Australia.

By supporting mentoring through Leading the Way, the Government aims to make a real difference to the lives of many young people, by helping them re-connect with education, training or employment and by building self-esteem and life skills.

For more information, please visit www.youth.vic.gov.au

COMMUNITY SECTOR? The Parties Respond

5th September 2006

9.30–11.30am

Treasury Theatre

1 Macarthur St, Melbourne

RSVP—kate.johnson@vcoss.org.au

Hear the major parties address their party position on issues around sector sustainability. VCOSS invites you to be part of a landmark gathering and to show your support for the sector. For more info see www.vcoss.org.au

Up Coming

CONFERENCES

National Youth Summit

When: 22–24 September

Where: 1 Vision Drive, Burwood East, Melbourne

Vision Generation (VGen), World Vision Australia's national youth movement is running a Youth Summit of workshops and practical advocacy actions that will explore the theme "Take It Personally."

Applications are now open to any young person or youthworker from Victoria to attend. For more info please refer to <http://stir.org.au/stir/Content.aspx?topicID=400> or contact Chris Varney on 0432 405 384 or craskoo@hotmail.com

New Transitions: Challenges Facing Australian Youth

Date: Friday 18 August 2005

Venue: Richmond Town Hall

Time: 9:00–1:00pm

The Brotherhood of St Laurence will launch the second report in its Social Barometer series - the Youth Barometer - at a half-day conference.

The Youth Barometer aims to show how well equipped Australian youth are to negotiate the important transition from school to the next phase of their development, including further study, training or work. It presents indicators of young people's capabilities covering seven key dimensions of life from physical and mental health to education and employment.

Registration form: www.bsl.org.au/events
More info: Joel Supple on (03) 9483 1364

Changin' It, Lovin' It

When: 23-24 September

Where: Hotel Y, 489 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne

Changin' It, Lovin' It is a two day national forum for young women hosted by YWCA Australia to enhance abilities to become leaders and make the most of life, career and community.

The program covers open floor panel discussions and workshops on campaigning, business management, environmental activism and political careers. All workshops will be led by successful women in their fields.

More info on see www.ywca.org.au or contact YWCA Australia (02) 6230 5150 or email yprojects@ywca.org.au

Amnesty International's Youth Conference for Human Rights

When: 15-16 September

Where: Adelaide University Union
Amnesty International SA/NT is holding its second annual Regional Youth Conference for Human Rights. Registration is open to high school students who want to make a difference and become an 'Ambassador of Freedom'.

The conference will offer participants the opportunity to learn about human rights issues in Australia and overseas and develop their own skills to become advo-

cates for human rights. The program includes a variety of workshops, covering debates on human rights issues, sassy campaigning tools, breaking the media code info and creative campaigning ideas.

Registration information can be found at: http://sant.amnesty.org.au/home/youth_conference. For more info: Jessica Hemphill on (08) 8110 8100.

PARTICIPATION

Making Radio

SYN (Student Youth Network) in Melbourne is looking for interested Under 18s to get involved in making radio on SYN 90.7 FM!

Through a program called "The Awkward Stage" participants learn how to create professional radio, while being trained by an experienced SYNner. The training course runs over 10 weeks. From there, you are set up to run your own radio program at SYN.

For more info email Adrian at training@syn.org.au

NEW YDAS STAFF MEMBER



Hi! I'm Michelle Bowler, the new Individual Advocate with the Youth Disability Advocacy Service (YDAS) based at YACVic.

Since joining YDAS I've been promoting my role and the service and

I've started providing advocacy to young people with disabilities. I'm looking forward to helping young people with lots of different issues and working with George, the YDAS Coordinator, and all the young people on the YDAS Steering Committee to create a stronger voice for young people with disabilities in Victoria.

Prior to starting with YDAS I most recently worked with One Parent Families, a national charity in England, the UK. I advised single parents in England and Wales on their social security rights, housing, debt and family law. I also advised

single parents of children with a disability on disability issues.

Before travelling to the UK, I worked as a Solicitor and Welfare Rights Worker in Community Legal Centres including Villamanta Legal Service and Eastern Community Legal Centre. At Villamanta I worked on policy and law reform issues for people with disabilities including public transport and access to services.

For information on the YDAS program give me a call on 9267 3733 or email mbowler@yacvic.org.au.