

Why the Youth Sector in Victoria Needs a Code of Ethical Practice

by Lauren Hoiles & Tim Corney

The Youth Sector in Victoria has a long history of failed attempts at creating and sustaining both a professional association and a related code of ethical practice for youth work (Irving, Maunders & Sherington 1995; Grogan 2004). However with the recent enactment of the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*, the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*, and the *Working With Children Act 2005*, there is now new legislative impetus to look again at the practice of youth work.

The appointment, under the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*, of the Child Safety Commissioner and his recent public challenges to the youth sector to rethink the issues of safety and protection of both young people and those that work with them (2006), has reopened the debates associated with professional practice and codes of ethics for youth work in Victoria. Given these developments it appears that the time is now right for the youth sector to look again at a code of ethical practice for youth workers.

WHAT IS A CODE OF ETHICAL CONDUCT OR PRACTICE?

A Code of Ethical Practice (CEP) is a document developed by a body of practitioners to provide an agreed framework or set of values for professional practice. A Code of Ethics can also be described as "a set of norms based on the belief systems or values of a group of people who agree to adhere to commonly held philosophical principles" (Outten, 1991, p.8).

At the basic level a Code of Ethical Practice provides a set of statements about what is considered 'best practice', while at its best a Code of Ethical Practice provides an overarching guide for workers to apply ethical principles in a specific practice context (Youth Action and Policy Association: YAPA, 2005). A CEP also provides workers with a frame of reference in which to develop ethical awareness, create discussion of ethical issues

and implement a good and safe practice for both clients and workers. The code may be self-regulatory and voluntarily adhered to, or it may be imposed by government or sector based imperatives (YAPA, 2005; Child Safety Commissioner, 2006; Barwick, 2006).

In the UK, the National Youth Agency (NYA) has produced a Statement of Principles that aims to guide the work practice of youth workers and also "serve as a focus for debate and discussion about ethical practice issues" (The National Youth Agency, 2004, p.2). The Statement of Principles is not designed to be a rulebook, where youth workers are monitored and 'told what to do' nor is it designed to provide a set of standards that must be rigidly adhered to. Rather it provides a "starting point for outlining the broad principles of ethical conduct" (NYA, 2004, p.2) and aims to assist in the development of "ethical awareness and encourage reflection as the basis for ethical conduct" (NYA, 2004, p.2).

Similarly, the Code of Ethics developed by the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA), provides an "ethical foundation" (p.12) to inform practice. The code consists of a list of agreed principles that include, among others, topics such as primary client, empowerment, duty of care and practice boundaries (YACWA, 2003).

In professions other than youth work, a CEP can range from a one-page document of dot-point principles outlining ethical behaviour, thoughts and values (Surrey County Council, 2006) to a manual with professional standards that must be adhered to (Barwick, 2006). Ultimately, whichever form it takes, a CEP is a document developed by the profession for the profession to assist and guide in the development and implementation of ethical and safe practice for both clients and workers (Barwick, 2006).

...CONTINUED PAGE 4

This issue...

The October YIKES! is bursting at the seams. **Lauren Hoiles BA (Hons) & Tim Corney BA.MA** report on why we need a **Code of Ethical Practice for the youth sector**, YACVic gives a more detailed snapshot of the **Future Directions** document and **Lauren Matthews of the Community Child Care Association of Victoria** reports on the lack of services for young people over twelve. The 2006 State Election gets a look in with our upcoming Election Kit, the 2007 National Youth Affairs conference **Call for Abstracts** is out and all our regulars are squeezed in as well.....so best put your feet up and start reading....

CONTENTS

1. Why the Youth Sector Needs a Code of Ethical Practice
2. Executive Officer's Editorial
3. Leaving Primary School
4. Why the Youth Sector Needs a Code of Ethical Practice (continued)
8. 2006 State Election
9. Policy-Future Directions Report
9. YDAS on the Web
10. National Youth Affairs Conference
10. VicSRC
11. State Government News
11. VIYAC Update
12. Up Coming

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!

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CONTRIBUTIONS

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

Editorial

Do we need a code of ethical practice for the youth sector in Victoria? This is a big question and one that YACVic will facilitate discussion on in a couple of ways in the coming months.

Our feature article for this issue of *YIKES!* explores this issue in some depth. Authors Tim Corney and Lauren Hoiles have examined recent work in other states on codes of conduct and recent policy and legislation changes here in Victoria that might lead naturally to us following the same path. I commend this article to you, it is well researched and written and thought provoking to say the least.

In addition to this I am delighted that Child Safety Commissioner, Bernie Geary OAM will present the keynote address at YACVic's AGM this year on October 11 at VicHealth. Bernie will address the question of a code of ethical practice from the perspective of the safety of young people and workers. I hope you can join us in what will be a stimulating and perhaps controversial address.

Included in this mail out of *YIKES!* is YACVic's Annual Report for 2005/06. I am immensely proud of the work we have achieved in the past 12 months and hope you enjoy reading of our successes and achievements.

Also included in this mail out is a short training needs survey. As part of our Strategic Plan YACVic has identified that we need to better understand the training needs of the sector. By filling out this form, you will help us to provide or co-ordinate the training that you need.

Finally, this issue of *YIKES!* provides you with updates on some key projects and activities that we are working on. In particular there is an update on the national youth affairs conference we are organising for May 2007 and we highlight some of the key issues that will be developed further in our response to the Office for Youth's new Youth Agenda *Future Directions*.

There's lots to read, enjoy!



Georgie Ferrari
Executive Officer
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A CODE OF ETHICAL PRACTICE – IT'S TIME!

Hear the Child Safety Commissioner, Bernie Geary OAM speak at

YACVic's Annual General Meeting

Wednesday October 11, 6.00pm
VicHealth, 15-31 Pelham St, Carlton

Light refreshments will be served at the conclusion of the AGM

All YACVic members and friends welcome

RSVP: info@yacvic.org.au

What Happens When You Leave Primary School?

What happens to young people after school and on the school holidays when they leave primary school? They no longer attend outside school hours care services but many families (and the young people themselves) do not want young people to be home alone. Where can these young people go? What do young people want to do?

For many young people, the school holidays and the time after school is a lot of fun - hanging out with friends, going on holidays or spending time with family but for many young people and their families these times are difficult - many young people are shuttled around all over the place because they can't or don't want to stay home alone and there aren't available programs for young people to link in with. Or, the programs that are available are too expensive, not interesting to many young people or booked out and have massive waiting lists. A lack of services for young people over twelve is a real problem for young people, families and communities.

Community Child Care is the peak body for community owned and managed children's services here in Victoria. Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) services form part of our membership, and the issues around programs for young people who have left primary school and are attending secondary school is increasingly a concern for many OSHC services, especially in relation to young people aged between twelve and fifteen and young people with additional needs over twelve.

Many primary school based OSHC services are approached by parents and young people to include young people over twelve in the service, especially during school holiday periods, however increasingly there either aren't enough available places or the program isn't age-appropriate for young people over twelve. Also, many young people who have moved on to secondary school don't want to go back to their primary school and be in a service with younger children. In addition, staff in these services have skills and qualifications in caring and programming for children under twelve and often do not have the expertise or the facilities to meet the needs of young people.

Our work at Community Child Care shows that there is an incredible need in the community for age-appropriate outside school hours care services for secondary school aged young people, and we are interested in hearing what young people and youth workers have to say on this issue. Community Child Care is keen to explore the issues, options and possibilities for the care of young people over twelve.

Here are some things that Community Child Care would like to hear about from young people and youth workers to get you started:

Youth Workers

- ♦ What services are currently available for young people between twelve and fifteen after school and during the school holidays?

- ♦ Are these services accessible, affordable and appropriate?
- ♦ What type of services should be available to young people outside school hours?
- ♦ What would make primary / secondary schools outside school hours care services for children over twelve work well? What would these services include? Should they be staffed by youth workers?

Young People

- ♦ What do you currently do after school and during the school holidays?
- ♦ What would you like to do after school and during the holidays? Where would you like to go?
- ♦ What would your ideal after school care or holiday program look like? What would you do there?
- ♦ Would you like to go back to primary school for after school care or holiday program?
- ♦ Would you attend school holiday program or after school care if it was offered at your secondary school?
- ♦ Would / Do you feel safe staying home by yourself after school and during the school holidays?

Community Child Care is eager to hear your opinions and ideas on these questions as well as any other information you would like to share with us on this issue. After we have collected this information Community Child Care, with the assistance of YACVIC, may convene a forum to explore these issues further. Please let Community Child Care know if you would be interested in attending. Thank you so much for your feedback on this important issue for young people, families and communities.

Report by Lauren Matthews, Policy & Advocacy Worker, Community Child Care Association of Victoria

Please send your feedback, comments, stories, concerns or solutions to Community Child Care's Policy & Advocacy Worker Lauren Matthews - lmattthews@cccinc.org.au or 9486 3455 / Freecall 1800 177 017.

Visit www.cccinc.org.au to find out more about Community Child Care.



Why the Youth Sector in Victoria Needs a

By: **Lauren Hoiles BA (Hons) & Tim Corney BA.MA**

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1...

WHY DO YOUTH WORKERS AND THE YOUTH SECTOR NEED A CODE OF ETHICAL PRACTICE?

Safety of clients

First and foremost the safety of young people is fundamental to the practice of youth work. The Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 states that *'Those who develop and provide services, as well as parents, should give the highest priority to the promotion and protection of a child's safety, health, development, education and wellbeing'* (p.6). Creating a safe environment where young people are able to actively participate in their community is at the core of youth work (Youth Coalition of the ACT, 2003; NYA, 2004).

One of the most effective ways a profession or sector can ensure the safety of the people it works with is to implement a Code of Ethical Practice (Child Safety Commissioner, 2006). A CEP helps to protect young people from harm by making clear *"professional boundaries, ethical behaviour and acceptable and unacceptable relationships"* (Child Safety Commissioner, 2006, p.11). This does not mean that creative ways of working with young people will be marginalised but rather those creative ways can be developed under a set of principles that ensure the safety and well being of the young person is central to any decisions made. *"It is not enough for youth workers to claim that their special relationship with young people is so special that it provides complete justification for their work"* (Barwick commenting on Brent, 2006 p.19).

A Code of Ethical Practice also contributes to an environment of transparency and enables the sector to ensure people are accountable for their behaviour (Child Safety Commissioner, 2006). Again, this is not about the adoption of a big brother mentality but rather holding up a set of clear and realistic expectations of behaviour that youth workers can utilise to ensure their professional practice is conducive to the safety and well being of the young person (YACWA, 2003; Grogan, 2004; Child Safety Commissioner, 2006).

The relationship between client and youth worker is a professional relationship and power is invested in youth workers to advocate for young people. This power is given through communities, organisations, government, and the young person themselves, and creates an unequal relationship. A young person can benefit from the professional relationship only if they know that the youth worker will not manipulate or exploit the young person to meet their own agenda (YAPA, 2005; Sercombe, 2004a).

A CEP is encouraged to be utilised by youth workers so that they can manage the power imbalance in ways that avoid corruption (Sercombe, 2004; Child Safety Commissioner, 2006). As Sercombe (2004b) states *"power corrupts, and youth workers are by no means immune"* (p.2).

Safety & Protection of Workers

CEP also contributes to the safety of the worker by providing a clear expectation about ethical behaviour, acceptable and un-

ceptable relationships and professional boundaries (YAPA, 2005; YACWA, 2003). Indeed the Child Safety Commissioner (2006) suggests that when professionals *"...are clear about expectations, they are much more likely to act appropriately with each other..."* (p.11) and with young people. Without a Code of Ethical Practice, or a strong set of guiding principles, it can be difficult to ensure that all staff are working together to create a safe environment. If there are no standards upon which to guide good practice it can be difficult to argue against poor practice (Barwick, 2006). If such a situation arises that poor practice is observed a CEP allows the profession, organisation, and/or worker to ask someone to explain their behaviour (Child Safety Commissioner, 2006). It further provides a standard to inform and educate on good practice.

A Code of Ethical Practice can also provide a standard against which to make ethical decisions in a context where an ethical solution is difficult. Not all decisions can be made at leisure, and decisions in youth work are often required to be made quickly and in situations of considerable stress (YAPA, 2005). This can put both the young person and the worker at risk. With a set of guiding principles to work with, making the most ethical decision that ensures the safety of the young person and that of the youth worker is made clear. Overall, a Code of Ethical Practice can contribute to the safety of the worker by setting clear guidelines of what is acceptable behaviour, work practice and relationships (YAPA, 2005; Child Safety Commissioner, 2006; YACWA, 2003).

To develop professional practice/ professional pre-service preparation and in-service training based on a platform of consensus

Many youth work agencies have found it necessary to become agents for government as changes in funding arrangements from grants to contracts for services occurs. As youth work agencies increasingly rely on government and other funding bodies for their survival, the power of government and funding bodies to impose their own regulations on youth workers is also increasing (Barwick, 2006; Sercombe, 2004). An important aspect of developing a CEP is that it can provide the opportunity for a group of practitioners to develop and define their own professional standards, rather than having a government or funding body determine this for them. A CEP also provides a valuable foundation from which to argue against imposed obligations and expectations from government and funding bodies (Sercombe, 2004b).

While not dismissing the necessity of a range of approaches within youth work, a CEP can also lend a unified voice to the area of youth work (Bessant, 2004). Indeed youth workers can often be placed on the peripheral of discussions with other professionals because of their lack of professional status. This may mean valuable knowledge and expertise is ignored and subsequently limits the youth workers ability to effectively advocate for young people. The power of youth workers to advocate as a sector for young people can also be diminished through the presence of diverse practices and a lack of collective professional status (Barwick, 2006; Grogan, 2004). The power of a profession to argue and advocate for the people it works with should

not be underestimated. With a solid foundation of ethics, youth work as a sector can feel more confident to enact change at the societal and governmental levels (Barwick, 2004; Bessant, 2004).

Furthermore, Judith Bessant, Foundation Professor in Youth Affairs at RMIT has suggested that *"restoring and building public trust in those working professionally with young people requires the systematic improvement of their intellectual and professional education... Their professional credibility can only be trusted if the education of its members is taken seriously"* (2003, p.34).

It is therefore of concern to youth work that an agreed set of guidelines, principles and core values be developed to ensure all youth workers are provided with the necessary training to develop and implement an ethical style of practice (Grogan, 2004).

As such a Code of Ethical Practice can provide an agreed standard from which to guide education programs and professional development. By outlining core values and principles a CEP can provide a springboard from which to ensure the youth work sector continues to maintain quality standards in training and education. Indeed, to develop effective training programs the sector must agree on the knowledge, skills and experience required to be an effective and ethical youth worker (Bessant, 2004; Grogan, 2004). Providing training and education that is informed by an agreed CEP will allow all workers to continue working in creative and situation specific ways but from an agreed set of underpinning values and principles (Barwick, 2006; Sercombe, 2004).

WHAT AREAS SHOULD A CODE OF ETHICAL PRACTICE COVER?

A Code of Ethical Practice should cover the core values, professional principles and work practice guidelines of the relevant profession. It is understood that youth work is regulated by a variety of frameworks that include structural, legal, and ethical, in which youth workers are expected to practice. It is recognised that at times these frameworks will overlap or even conflict. A CEP cannot possibly account or cover all the variations in the frameworks youth workers use (YACWA, 2003). Instead a CEP should cover those *"ethical foundations on which we perform our practice and interventions with young people"* (YACWA, 2003, p.12). Importantly a CEP should be developed by youth workers for themselves and should highlight the core values underpinning youth work. These may then inform key principles around topics such as social justice, equity, empowerment, transparency, boundaries, confidentiality, professional development, self awareness, self care and other underpinning values as decided by the profession or sector (NYA, 2004; YACWA, 2003; Grogan, 2004; YAPA, 2005).

WHO SHOULD FACILITATE THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CODE OF ETHICAL PRACTICE?

A Code of Ethical Practice is usually developed by a group of professionals for their profession and this is to ensure that the

values, principles, standards and behaviours outlined in the Code are appropriate to the profession itself (Child Safety Commissioner, 2006; Barwick, 2006; APS, 2006). Psychologists, social workers and many other professions working with young people have a Code of Ethical Practice that was developed by professionals for the profession (APS, 2006). Currently, there is no professional association to facilitate self-regulation of youth workers in Victoria (Grogan, 2004). An on-going working group, however, has been established under the umbrella of the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) to facilitate the development of a professional association for youth workers, and forums have been conducted to discuss the issue of professionalism for youth work (Barwick, 2006).

Other states in Australia are at varying stages of the same process. Western Australia has already endorsed a Code of Ethics, while the Australian Capital Territory is working towards ratification of a Code of Ethics. In New South Wales adoption of the Western Australian Code of Ethics has received considerable support and is under review, while South Australia has formulated a standard policy manual but no code of ethics as such. Tasmania and the Northern Territory are both looking at developing youth policy frameworks, while Queensland has had some debate about a Code of Ethics (Sercombe, 2004).

If a Code of Ethical Practice is to be introduced in Victoria it is imperative that it is developed by youth workers for youth workers. As such this paper argues that the Minister for Youth Affairs and/or the Child Safety Commissioner should encourage peak bodies in the sector, such as YACVic, to facilitate a sector wide process of consultation, development and implementation of a Code of Ethical Practice for Youth Workers.

WHAT WOULD A CODE OF ETHICAL PRACTICE LOOK LIKE?

There is no standard pro-forma for what a Code of Ethical Practice should look like. A Code of Ethical Practice by necessity is a document which is developed to be specific and responsive to the profession, sector, organisation or group it is being established for (Child Safety Commissioner, 2006; Barwick, 2006; Grogan, 2004). As such a CEP can range from a one-page document of dot-point guidelines, usually entitled a Code of Conduct, (Rochdale Youth Service, 2006; Surrey County Council, 2006) to a manual of enforced ethical standards and regulations, usually entitled a Code of Ethics/Ethical Practice (APS Website, 2006).

However there is a difference between a Code of Conduct and a Code of Ethics. Generally a Code of Conduct will be a list of statements of acceptable/unacceptable behaviours derived from core values and aimed at the individual (RYS, 2006; SCC, 2006). A Code of Ethics, meanwhile, is a more comprehensive document that focuses on the core values and ethical principles that underpin the profession and is aimed at the profession as a whole. A Code of Ethical Practice meanwhile, is different yet again. A CEP can be viewed as a combination of a Code of Conduct and Code of Ethics containing ...CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

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not only acceptable/unacceptable behaviours, but also detailing core values, ethical principles and professional boundaries (Child Safety Commissioner, 2006; NYA, 2004; Barwick, 2006). A CEP is aimed at providing a framework for the profession to be used by individuals in their work practice and the sector as a whole. A CEP can be self-regulatory and voluntarily adhered to, or it may be imposed by government or sector based imperatives (Grogan, 2004; Barwick, 2006).

The type of code developed, how such a code is regulated or enforced and the length of the document must and should be decided by the sector developing the code (NYA, 2004; YACWA, 2003). To demonstrate the type of CEPs that can be developed, two examples of CEPs will be outlined, one Australian and one international.

YOUTH AFFAIRS COUNCIL OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA - CODE OF ETHICS

The Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (2003) has developed an 18-page document entitled Youth Affairs Council of WA: A Code of Ethics for Youth Work in WA. The Code lists 17 core principles, provides a commentary on each principle and then gives a case example to demonstrate a practical application of the principle. Principles include primary client, equity, empowerment, duty of care, boundaries and self care. This is a particularly clear way of constructing a Code of Ethics. The Code of Ethics also includes a prologue and summary providing a rationale for introducing a CEP and its possible uses. Currently, the YACWA Code of Ethics is adhered to by youth work agencies on a voluntary basis. As the first state to develop a comprehensive code of ethics YACWA (2003) can provide an example for other states in Australia to also develop a CEP.

THE NATIONAL YOUTH AGENCY - ETHICAL CONDUCT IN YOUTH WORK

The National Youth Agency, UK (2004) meanwhile has developed a 9-page document entitled Ethical Conduct in Youth Work which provides, and delineates between, ethical and professional principles. The document details each ethical principle and then provides the 'practice' principles associated with the ethical statement. Principles include social justice, respect, rights, boundaries, skills and competency. The NYA (2004) specifies however that it does not provide advice on issues of confidentiality and "detailed guidance" (p.2) on conduct. The NYA (2004) prefers to view the document at "the level of general principles" (p.2). The NYA Code has produced the document in comprehensive dot-point form and also provides a summary of background, purpose and importance of the code. The NYA code provides an international example of a CEP.

CONCLUSION

Overall, a Code of Ethical Practice is developed to ensure three basic factors, the safety of clients, the safety of workers and to underpin education and training with agreed values for the sector (Child Safety Commissioner, 2006; Grogan, 2004; YACWA, 2003; NYA, 2004). A CEP is also designed to develop a frame of reference for workers to develop ethical practice and aware-

ness, as well as providing a centre point for the discussion of ethical issues. What the document looks like will therefore depend on all of these factors and more, including the homogeneity/diversity of the sector, requirements of regulation and government and peak body support (Barwick, 2006; YAPA, 2005). Ultimately, it is essential that any Code of Ethical Practice is developed by youth workers for youth work.

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- ## LEGISLATION
- Children, Youth and Families Act 2005*
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005*
- Working With Children Act 2005*


 Victorian State
**2006
ELECTION KIT**


YACVic reveals what the politicians have to say on key youth sector issues

They are starting to appear in the newspapers, on telly and at community functions all over Victoria. No, they're not the finalists of Australian Idol, they're politicians and the State election on 25 November has got everyone talking. Amongst all that "politician speak" it can be pretty tough to pick out the things that matter to young people so we've done the hard work for you.

We've put together an Election Kit with responses from most of the major parties on some of the key issues that relate to young people and the youth sector in the upcoming election. We developed statements and questions on nine key issues after comprehensive consultation with the Policy Advisory Group, the Youth Reference Group and other representatives from the youth sector. We asked all the major political parties for their policy positions on:

- ♦ Their commitment to improving health and wellbeing outcomes for young people leaving state care in their transition to independent living.
- ♦ The establishment of a Children and Young People's Commission in Victoria.
- ♦ Identifying and addressing the gaps in homelessness prevention and support services across Victoria.
- ♦ Tackling the human service and infrastructure gaps in urban fringe communities, particularly in relation to young people's access to educational, employment and recreational opportunities.
- ♦ Improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in areas such as education, employment, health and juvenile justice.
- ♦ Ensuring equitable access to quality education and training for all young people.
- ♦ Retaining the dual track system and providing accessible, appropriate legal advice and support services to young people.
- ♦ Supporting young people's access to youth friendly mental health support services.
- ♦ Addressing the particular needs of culturally and linguistically diverse young people.

We know that this list only scratches the surface so we're also conducting a forum, 'The State Election and Young People: Rhetoric or Reality?' on October 25. This is a great opportunity to hear each party's position on youth issues but more importantly it will give you the chance to engage directly with the politicians during 'Question Time' and ask about the issue that matters to you.

Keep a close watch on the YACVic website and keep reading YACVic *Announce*. We'll be releasing the kit and details about the forum soon! In the meantime, if you want to know more give Jen a call on (03) 9267 3722 or email her at jrose@yacvic.org.au.

Article by Kate Wilson-Smith, YACVic Volunteer

Youth Support Services: Who's Carrying the Can?

YACVic and VCOSS to launch report highlighting critical youth service gaps

As the cover story of the June edition of *YIKES!* reported, YACVic and the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) have been working in partnership to explore the issue of gaps in youth support services in Victoria through the *Youth Support Services: Who's Carrying the Can?* campaign. VCOSS and YACVic will be launching a report detailing the findings and recommendations of the campaign on October 11th at the RACV Club in Bourke St, Melbourne from 10:00–11:30am. This event will also launch *Staying Connected: Solutions for Addressing Service Gaps for Young People Living at the Interface* - a report commissioned by the Interface Council in Metropolitan Melbourne. Speakers will include Susan Sawyer, Director, Centre for Adolescent Health and David Hugh, President, VCOSS.

The *Who's Carrying the Can?* campaign built on the work

already initiated by youth service providers and networks such as the Western Regional Youth Affairs Network to highlight service gaps to Government. The campaign has sought evidence from youth service providers themselves on the nature of the gaps in youth support services, and their impact on young people and existing youth services.

Key findings and recommendations of the report relate to the need to build a youth services system in Victoria, the need for increased investment in early intervention and secondary intervention support services for young people and the need to invest in sector sustainability.

Places at the launch are limited, so please register your attendance by the October 5th by contacting YACVic on 9267 3799 or info@yacvic.org.au

FUTURE DIRECTIONS—SOME KEY ELEMENTS

YACVic welcomes the release of *Future Directions: An Action Agenda for Young Victorians*. Here we provide a snapshot of some key elements of YACVic's response to the document. YACVic is still in the process of developing our response in consultation with the youth sector and a detailed analysis will be made available from our website at www.yacvic.org.au from the 16th of October.

What is it...A policy document or an action agenda?

The *Future Directions* document brings together the top 40 of the state government's actions for young people in Victoria.

These are grouped under five outcome areas which are:

- ♦ Contributing and making a difference
- ♦ Achieving potential through informed life choices
- ♦ Having resources and making connections
- ♦ Managing healthy, active and diverse lives
- ♦ Being safe and promoting safe behaviours

These five outcome areas sit under a broader vision that is articulated in the document as:

All young Victorians have a strong sense of belonging, are motivated to create and share in opportunities and are valued for their contributions and influence in their communities.

The government has explicitly recognised the importance of hearing young people's voices in the development of policy and programs, the importance of collaboration, the value of a whole of government approach and the need to acknowledge diversity and the importance of investing in prevention and early intervention.

These outcome areas and the vision statement are key aspects of a document that is essentially otherwise an articulation of the government's spending on young people. While we welcome these announcements with funding attached, YACVic was hoping for a document that contained a stronger and clearer expression of the government's vision and policy for Victoria's youth.

While the document has been referred to in various arenas as a 'policy' document, and even claims on the front cover to have a policy inside, YACVic asserts that *Future Directions* is not a policy document, rather it is a summary of new government investment, across departments, that relates to young people with some intended outcomes discussed in relation to that spending.

What's good?

YACVic welcomes the new investment in young people that *Future Direction* contains. Specifically, initiatives like Youth Foundations Victoria (\$4.5m over four years) and Youth Transition Support (\$10m over four years) are very welcome. One of the problems with *Respect*, the government's previous framework for youth in Victoria, was that it lacked specific initiative and had no funding attached. *Future Directions* outlines concrete actions, most of which have funding attached to them.

YACVic congratulates the government on the extensive consultation phase that informed the document. A great deal of work went in to ensuring young people, parents, communities and organisations had a chance to feed into the development of the document.

YACVic would also like to acknowledge that *Future Directions* is a "youth friendly" document. However, the design may not be very accessible to people with a disability such as vision impairment and YACVic would hope that the document is made available in various accessible formats.

Some concerns

While all of the 40 initiatives listed in *Future Directions* represent new investment, most had been announced in the 2006 State Budget or through *A Fairer Victoria: the Next Steps*. Some do not have specific funding attached and others, it could be argued, are not youth specific in their focus.

For many of these initiatives there will be specific challenges in ensuring that beneficial outcomes for young people are maximised and that those benefits can be clearly measured in accountability mechanisms. Examples include:

Action 14: Flexible Transport Solutions - Young people have specific transport needs that may not be the same as those of other community members. A focus will need to be placed on ensuring that the Transport Connections Program develops solutions that meet young people's specific transport needs.

Action 24: Skills Stores - Skills Stores 'will provide public access points for information and advice on education and training options'. Young people will no doubt access these, but again this is a broader initiative that may be more focused on addressing the skills shortages in specific areas than on a youth specific program.

Action 30: Promote multicultural and multifaith harmony - Again, this initiative is community focused and not youth specific. Young people's participation would need to be specifically supported and resourced in order to be achieved.

Action 39: Improving rail safety and security - This initiative includes funding for 30 authorised officers on public transport on Friday and Saturday nights. Whilst young people are concerned about safety on public transport, this would seem to be an initiative not specifically aimed at young people but aimed at public transport users more broadly.

What's missing?

YACVic would have welcomed the inclusion of more of the contextual information and research that helped to shape the Agenda in the final document. We understand that hundreds of people had input into the document and have concerns about where the rich data collected through the consultation phase is and whether it will be utilised in the future. YACVic also believes it would have been valuable to have relevant contextual information clearly tied to the Outcomes and Actions listed.

YACVic has concerns that the resource needs of participation focused actions are not adequately recognised. For example, *Action 3: Neighbourhood Renewal Youth Engagement Program*, is concerned with 'developing a strategy that will better integrate and involve young people within the governance structures of Neighbourhood Renewal projects...' Such engagement strategies need allocated resources in order to be successful, yet this

OF YACVIC'S RESPONSE.

is one of the few Actions for which there is no clear funding allocation.

Young people's capacity to maintain engagement in programs, courses or initiatives needs to be supported to ensure some of the Actions achieve the desired outcomes. For example, Action 8 outlines the Youth Training Guarantee, offering all young people under 20 a guaranteed place in TAFE or another public training provider to the end of year 12 or its equivalent. Young people who are marginalised need specific supports to ensure their sustained engagement with that training provider or course, not just a place. This support needs to cater for young people's specific needs, such as the diverse needs of CALD young people.

The levels of unmet need faced by young people with disabilities were not sufficiently addressed. While we welcome Action 35 which will help reduce the number of young people living in nursing homes, significantly more funding is needed for young people with disabilities with high support needs to live independent lives in the community.

Young people with disabilities also need greater access to aids and equipment, meaningful and individualised day programs, and support in education. While Action 9 specifies more support for students with disabilities, it is not likely that this level of funding will sufficiently address the unmet need that exists in this area, and it is a concern that the reforms that are mentioned may exclude some young people with disabilities from accessing support.

The document does not adequately respond to the concerns of Indigenous young people in Victoria who have greater levels of need in terms of access to appropriate health services, lower school retention rates, higher unemployment rates and over-representation in the juvenile justice and child protection systems.

A more rounded response to the issues impacting on young people's safety in accessing public transport is needed. The issue extends well beyond employing more authorised officers to support late night train services and converting seven stations to premium stations that are staffed.

Other issues are:

- ♦ The document lacks a focus on meeting young people's learning and education needs through the provision of education in diverse settings in the compulsory years of schooling.

- ♦ The document lacks a strong focus on the needs of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse young people. An example is that the support needs of young people for whom English is a second language in engaging in and completing apprenticeships are not addressed.
- ♦ The document fails to respond to widespread calls for greater funding for generalist youth support services across Victoria.

What's needed?

Following are a few areas in which the Government could also focus resources and investment.

- ♦ Strengthened accountability measures and better supported whole of Government approach to the implementation of the action agenda.
- ♦ The document would have benefited from an allocation of responsibility for implementation within Government for each Action.
- ♦ *Action 22: Supporting young people leaving care* could be substantially built upon to ensure all young people leaving State care are adequately supported up to the age of 25.
- ♦ Mental health investment could be extended to include a focus on providing services available to all young people at all levels of the continuum of care (including at the levels of primary/early intervention and secondary intervention).
- ♦ Special focus could be placed on meeting the needs of growth corridor communities.
- ♦ Investment could be placed in the development of effective crime prevention strategies focused on young people.
- ♦ Government could develop and invest in strategies to address the negative imaging of young people in the media and promote positive images.
- ♦ Initiatives to ensure access and participation in sporting activities is made more broadly available to all young people.

YDAS HITS THE WORLD WIDE WEB

The Youth Disability Advocacy Service (YDAS) now has an official web presence. The site is part of an intensive promotional strategy that will raise the profile of YDAS, a service which provides advocacy for young people with disabilities between 12 and 25. The YDAS website was designed with accessibility as a key priority and there are a number of functions that are designed to make it easier for people with vision impairments to explore. The website has been tested on screen reading computer software and the font size and back-

ground colour can be easily changed to suit the web surfer's needs and preferences. The site features an interactive forum where young people with disabilities can tell their stories, ask questions and offer support to others. The site will grow with upcoming additions including profiles of the YDAS steering committee and the latest YDAS news and events. Take a moment to check us out at www.ydas.org or if you would like copies of the new YDAS brochures featured on this page, call George on 92673755 or email gtaleporos@yacvic.org.au

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

Planning for the 2007 National Youth Affairs Conference is now well underway.

The Call for Abstracts has been circulated and information can be found on YACVic's website www.yacvic.org.au. If you would like to present, or know someone who might, please download the information and submit your ideas.

To receive regular conference updates email conference@yacvic.org.au with the subject line "conference e-list".

If you would like to be involved in the planning and organising of the conference, give Erin a call on 9267 3713.

KEY DATES

Abstracts close: October 30, 2006

Generous early bird registrations:

January-February 2007

Registrations close: April 27, 2007

Conference runs: May 1-2, 2007

INTRODUCING YACVIC'S CONFERENCE ORGANISER

Hi Everyone, I'm Erin Johnson and have just started as Conference Organiser at YACVic for the *Are We There Yet?* conference planned for May 2007.

Over the last year and a half I have been working as a social worker in Melbourne and the UK providing support to people experiencing homelessness. In 2004 I worked within the youth sector in Melbourne, specifically in eastern suburb secondary schools. I loved my time in the youth sector and am glad to have found my way back to it!

In the past I have worked within the community development field and gained experience organising conferences and events. In 2003 I worked alongside YACWA to plan and implement a Youth Health Conference and found this experience both challenging and rewarding.

I am sure you have all read about the upcoming National Youth Conference being planned. I am very excited to be

working on such a valuable and significant project. I feel it is an amazing opportunity to create the space for genuine discussion relating to young people and youth affairs. The conference is still in its early stages so I welcome any vision, feedback or opinions readers may have.

To register your interest in the conference and to receive regular updates please email conference@yacvic.org.au with 'conference e-list' in the subject line.

Please feel free to call or email me on 9267 3713 or conference@yacvic.org.au



Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC)



G'day, I'm James Tonson the new project worker with the Victorian Student Representative Council (VicSRC) based at YACVic. The VicSRC is a democratic network of Student Representative Councils working to strengthen the capacity of SRCs to speak and take action on behalf of secondary students throughout Victoria.

I first became involved with the VicSRC

after being on my own SRC at Balwyn High School for four years and realising that there was a bigger world than just my school and how much more we could do for students if we could work together and have a voice at a broader level. Over the last eight years I've worked with other students and ex-students to try and make the vision of a state wide SRC a reality. This has been a process of ups and downs due to the lack of consistent support from over-committed volunteers, but hopefully we can change all that.

My role now is to provide support for SRCs across Victoria by encouraging them to network together both locally and across the state. In particular I'm trying to set up a series of local SRC cluster meetings and I'd like to hear from anyone who might be interested in getting something happening in your area. If your

SRC or school would be interested in such a meeting or if you work for a youth service or LLEN or other group and are interested in providing on-going support for a local SRC cluster then please contact me on 9267 3744 or vicsrc@yacvic.org.au. I'm also interested to hear about anything similar that is already running such as youth councils or reference groups that might include SRCs so that we can co-operate rather than compete.

This is the first time there has been an independent paid person working for the VicSRC and is a great opportunity to really get things happening. Having been involved in trying to establish an active secondary student body for so long I'm really excited at the new potential this gives the VicSRC and that I've been asked to help make it happen.

STATE GOVERNMENT NEWS

WORKCHOICES AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Not sure what the Commonwealth Government's new Industrial Relations (IR) legislation means for young people?

Well worry no longer, because there's a new booklet to clearly explain the laws to young Victorians and inform them of their rights at work.

Minister for Employment and Youth Affairs, Jacinta Allan launched the new booklet at a roundtable hosted by the Office for Youth and Industrial Relations Victoria (IRV) in September to discuss the new Industrial Relations laws.

WorkChoices and Young People was prepared by the Office of the Workplace Rights Advocate to clearly explain to young people what the Commonwealth Government's new Industrial Relations laws mean to them.

The booklet is available on-line and arose from research commissioned by IRV in early 2006 that showed 85% of young workers did not know which of their conditions were protected by law, while 82% had accepted the pay and conditions in their last job without any negotiation.

WorkChoices and Young People can provide young people with information about WorkChoices and guidance about what to do if they are offered new terms

and conditions or if they feel they are being treated unfairly at work. It also highlights the employment rights that young people have under Victorian law.

The booklet can be found online at www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au, as can other information for young people including: salary and wages; contracts and quitting; casual work; WorkCover and employment rights for people under 15 years.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS: AN ACTION AGENDA FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Future Directions is the Victorian Government's new action agenda for young Victorians aged 12 to 25.

It brings together a "Top 40" list of initiatives which are grouped under five specific outcomes that the community, young people and their families told Government were priorities.

The Government's role is to provide options and services for young people, as well as ensuring their rights are respected and they have real opportunities to build meaningful careers and lives.

To read more about *Future Directions* visit www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au

NATIONAL YOUTH WEEK

National Youth Week offers a great opportunity for Victorians to join the rest of Australia in recognising and celebrating the diverse skills, knowledge and ideas that young people contribute to our society. It is also a perfect time for young people to showcase their talents or highlight an issue in their region that is important to them.

All events and activities held during National Youth Week are planned and developed by young people, for young people.

In Victoria, 2007 National Youth Week is an initiative supported through the Victorian Government, VicHealth and the Federal Government. Young people and their communities can get involved in the celebrations by running events and attending activities in their local area.

National Youth Week 2007 is to be held from Saturday 14th to Sunday 22nd April 2007.

Visit www.youth.vic.gov.au for more information about the Week and how you can get involved.

(State Government News continued on page 12)

THE VIYAC YOUTH GATHERING IS COMING...

VIYAC has had a very busy couple of months. We held our 4th council meeting on Sunday the 27th of August. 11 VIYAC members attended the day, which was a fabulous turn out. The day was used to start preparations for the VIYAC 'Youth Gathering'. The day was also used to plan the final details of the VIYAC and YACVic joint research piece and set some further future direction for the group.

The VIYAC 'Yean Yan Gathering' ('Yean Yan' meaning 'youthful' in Woiwurrung) is shaping up to be a wonderful event, and will be held on December the 2nd at the Darebin Arts and Entertainment Centre. It

will be a day of celebration of all Koorie young people in Victoria, to showcase upcoming talent and promote opportunities available for Koorie youth. The day will comprise traditional dancers, bands, singers, art exhibitions, a smoking ceremony, modern performances, traditional sports, and an extensive job market including stalls exhibiting opportunities, services and education paths for Indigenous youth. It will be an event not to be missed.

The VIYAC research project in partnership with YACVic is drawing to a close. The results are looking really great and is something the VIYAC are extremely

proud of and are looking forward very much to the upcoming launch in October at The Koorie Heritage Trust.

VIYAC has many projects on at the minute, including the 'VIYAC Community Spirit Police Award', numerous upcoming consultations, a digital storytelling project which is in the development stages, a redesign of the VIYAC logo and the development of a long awaited website and much much more...

For more info please contact Jade Colgan, State Coordinator on 9267 3788 or email: jcolgan@viyac.org.au

Up Coming

YACVIC EVENTS

Who's Carrying the Can Report Launch

A joint report launch with the Interface Councils on youth service gaps

Where: RACV Club

501 Bourke St, Melbourne

Date: Tuesday 10 October 2006

Time: 10–11.30am

RSVP: info@yacvic.org.au

YACVic Annual General Meeting

Where: VicHealth,

15-31 Pelham St, Carlton

Date: Wednesday 11 October 2006

Time: 6.00pm

RSVP: info@yacvic.org.au

VIYAC/YACVic Research Report Launch

Where: Koorie Heritage Trust

295 King St, Melbourne

Date: Tuesday 24 October 2006

Time: 5.00pm

RSVP: viyac@viyac.org.au

Election Kit Launch and Political Forum

Where: Richmond Town Hall

333 Bridge Road, Richmond

Date: Wednesday 25 October

Time: 2.30pm

RSVP: info@yacvic.org.au

TRAINING

Meeting your obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act

Do you work in the youth sector and have an interest in how your service can meet its obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act?

When: 18 October 2006

Time: 2–5:00pm

Where: Youth Affairs Council of Victoria,
Level 2, 172 Flinders St
Melbourne

The Youth Disability Advocacy Service is offering a free training workshop to increase the capacity of the youth sector to provide services that are inclusive of the needs of young people with disabilities. The workshop is designed to help youth workers to understand their obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act and to support them to develop strategies to overcome the many barriers that people with disabilities face when accessing mainstream youth services. The workshop will also provide a better understanding of disability issues for young people and practical examples of inclusive practices in youth service settings.

Places are limited so book early to avoid disappointment! The workshop is free to youth workers. A non-attendance charge of \$50 will be applied for those who register but do not attend on the day without 24 hours' notice of cancellation.

For more info and to RSVP email your details to George Taleporos, YDAS Co-ordinator, on gtaleporos@yacvic.org.au

Juggling Expectations: Supporting CLD young people in the family context

This full day training session will explore issues around family conflict and how this relates to the experiences of CLD young people.

When: 15 November 2006

Time: 9.30–4pm

Where: Queen Victoria Women's Centre
Level 4, 210 Lonsdale St
Melbourne

For more info contact Rosemarie Iera at CMYI on 9340 3700 or by email riera@cmyi.net.au

GRANTS

2007 NATIONAL YOUTH WEEK GRANTS ARE NOW OPEN

Grants of up to \$2,000 are now available for local events and activities celebrating 2007 National Youth Week.

The grants are available to groups of young people who are supported by local governments, not-for-profit organisations or their school. The funding will support National Youth Week activities and events that are organised by young people for young people in their local community.

National Youth week is a tripartite initiative supported through the Victorian Government, VicHealth and the Australian Government.

For more info on grant guidelines and application forms visit: www.grants.dvc.vic.gov.au

STATE GOVERNMENT NEWS

VIYAC MEMBER ANNOUNCED AS NATIONAL YOUTH WEEK YOUNG MEMBER

At the national level, each State and Territory is represented by a National Youth Week 'young member'. These nine young people play a vital role in directing the shape and success of National Youth Week. They are involved in all aspects of planning, developing, implementing and promoting National Youth Week across Australia.

Minister for Employment and Youth Affairs, Jacinta Allan, recently announced Jamie McConnachie as the 2007 National Youth Week Young Member for Victoria.

Jamie is a 22-year-old law student living in Melbourne and is a member of the Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council (VIYAC) and has spoken at the Future Leaders forum.

Jamie will be writing a regular "blog" on youthcentral. Jamie's role is to provide a youth perspective and contribute to the decisions made by the National Planning Group (NPG) for National Youth Week.

You can read Jamie's blog at www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au.