

Media Release

August 31, 2010

Surveillance report describes discrimination against young people

A new report from the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) and the School of Political and Social Inquiry, Monash University highlights that young people are particularly vulnerable to the abuse of powers in public surveillance practice and to being the target of policing to regulate behaviour in public spaces.

The *Marginalised Young People, Surveillance and Public Space* report - to be launched tomorrow by Dr. Helen Szoke, Commissioner of the Victorian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission - outlines findings of focus groups with young people about their experiences of surveillance in public spaces. Over 50% of the young people interviewed were homeless. The young people interviewed reported feeling targeted by surveillance, being concerned that surveillance images may be misused and expressed a desire for more information about their rights when it comes to surveillance.

“Our report has found that being moved on by security guards is likely to be the most common way in which the rights of young people to occupy public space are violated” said Georgie Ferrari, YACVic CEO. “Sadly, young people felt they were targeted by security guards who stereotype them because of their age and appearance”, Ms Ferrari said.

Young people interviewed said they saw some value in surveillance in assisting in the identification of attackers in situations where they may be victims of assault, but did not actually feel safer because of the presence of surveillance.

“The lived experience of young people we interviewed suggested that cameras did little to secure safety” Ms Ferrari said.

The authors of the report argue that young people’s experience of surveillance in public places should be addressed as a matter of social justice and human rights. Not simply a matter of individual privacy.

As Dr Helen Szoke describes, “The timing of this research is critical. The impact of the ‘law and order’ debates that are going on in our community are adversely impacting on young people, ostensibly under the guise of protecting their interests, but in fact limiting their basic human rights.”

The report supports the recommendation put forth recently by the Victorian Law Reform Commission to establish an independent regulator of public space surveillance, and asks that the regulator place a specific focus on ensuring that homeless and marginalised young people are not discriminated against or made more vulnerable through public space surveillance practice.

Details of the launch:

Date: 1st September 2010

Time: 11:30am – 12:30pm.

Venue: Lionel Murphy Centre, 360 Queen St Melbourne.

For pre-launch copies of the report, please contact Liz Leahy at YACVic on info@yacvic.org.au or 9267 3799.

For media comment: contact Georgie Ferrari, CEO YACVic 0411 484 428.