



Youth Affairs
Council Victoria

Young people and family violence

A submission to the Royal Commission into Family Violence

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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. Our vision is for a Victorian community that values and provides opportunity, participation, justice and equity for all young people. We are an independent, not-for-profit organisation.

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The Royal Commission and Young People

The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) is the state peak body for young people aged 12-25 and the services that support them. We are a vibrant, member based organisation, with 347 members – approximately half of them young people, the others comprising local governments, community and health services and research bodies, all committed to improving wellbeing, participation and equality for young people.

YACVic welcomes the establishment of a Royal Commission into Family Violence in Victoria, and its emphasis on prevention, early intervention, supporting victims of violence, and promoting effective coordination between agencies and services.

The Commission's terms of reference identify a number of groups at risk of violence, but do not mention young people. YACVic will argue that young people are a significant cohort affected by family violence. They are also very vulnerable to relationship violence, which can set a damaging precedent and shape the family lives they later establish as adults. As such, we will be addressing relationship violence, as well as family violence, in this submission, considering how it affects young people's earliest experiences of gender roles, intimacy and violence. Young people face particular risks and need specific strategies for engagement – but working with people early in their lives also provides opportunities for powerful, positive change.

YACVic's submission relates primarily to the following guiding questions from the Royal Commission's Issues Paper (March 2015):

- Question 6 – 'What circumstances, conditions, situations or events, within relationships, families, institutions and whole communities, are associated with the occurrence or persistence of family violence?'
- Question 7 – 'What circumstances and conditions are associated with the reduced occurrence of family violence?'
- Question 8 – 'Tell us about any gaps or deficiencies in current responses to family violence, including legal responses. Tell us about what improvements you

would make to overcome these gaps and deficiencies, or otherwise improve current responses.’

- Question 18 – ‘What barriers prevent people in particular groups and communities in Victoria from engaging with or benefiting from family violence services? How can the family violence system be improved to reflect the diversity of people’s experiences?’
- Question 19 – ‘How can responses to family violence in these groups and communities be improved? What approaches have been shown to be most effective?’

Young people in the Victorian community

Over a million Victorians are aged between 12 and 25 years, comprising almost a fifth of the state’s population.¹ Adolescence and young adulthood are key stages in a person’s life, marked by transitions such as leaving secondary school, proceeding into higher education, training and employment, forming adult relationships, becoming sexually active, and leaving home. At the same time, young people are disproportionately vulnerable to problems including poor mental and sexual health, inadequate housing, and unemployment.

Young people are also disproportionately vulnerable to violence. In their 2012 Personal Safety Survey, the Australian Bureau of Statistics found that 12% of young Victorian women aged 18-24 and 23% of young Victorian men reported that they had experienced some form of violence in the past year, compared to 5% of women and 9% of men in the general population. Young women were more likely to have experienced violence from someone they knew; young men were more likely to experience it from a stranger.²

Frameworks and initiatives to address family violence must recognise young people as a specific cohort, different to adults and young children. Historically, young people have not been well served by policies and service systems which simply absorb them into settings meant for older or younger groups.

At this formative stage of life, when a young person is starting to develop an adult identity and experience sexual / dating relationships for the first time, intervening to

prevent or counter violence can have a powerful impact. The health promotion body VicHealth, for instance, have observed a reduction in harmful attitudes amongst young people since 2009, which they link to recent work in the prevention space, notably in schools.³

Using VicHealth's 'spectrum' of strategies for preventing violence against women, we can identify three levels at which to engage with young people:

- Intervention, which happens after violence has occurred, and involves providing support and treatment to victims and perpetrators to deal with the consequences of violence and stop it from recurring or escalating.
- Early intervention, which targets individuals and groups who show early signs of perpetrating, or being subject to, violence. These strategies aim to change behaviours and attitudes before they can become established patterns.
- Primary prevention, which targets whole populations or particular groups, and seeks to prevent violence before it can occur. These strategies can focus on changing behaviours, skills and attitudes, or transforming broader social structures and contexts in which violence occurs.⁴

Depending on their circumstances, young people may need strategies at any, or all, of these levels. However, due to their early stage of life, at which attitudes and behaviours are still being formed, young people can be seen as an especially important cohort for primary prevention and early intervention. YACVic would argue that even tertiary interventions, which support young people who have been directly and seriously affected by violence, might still be seen as 'intervening early' in the lifespan of that person.

Family violence harms young people

Young people growing up in households where one family member is abusing another should not be seen merely as 'witnesses' to violence, but as victims in their own right. Victoria's 2008 Family Violence Protection Act includes within its definition of family violence 'Behaviour by a person that causes a child [under 18] to hear or see or otherwise be exposed to the effects of [violent] behaviour,' and behaviour which 'causes

that family member to feel fear for the safety or wellbeing of that family member or another person'.⁵

Living in a household where one family member is harming another elevates a young person's own risk of being physically harmed, for example when intervening to protect a loved one. Moreover, living with violence – even when a young person is not the direct target – has been linked to a range of behavioural and emotional problems, ranging from depression and anxiety to aggressive or anti-social behaviours. Trauma sustained at a young age can make it hard for a young person to deal with stressors later in life, and children exposed to violence may exhibit symptoms associated with post-traumatic stress disorder, including hyperactivity, sleep disturbance, poor concentration, fear and aggression.⁶

Growing up with violence can disrupt a young person's life in other ways, too. These include:

- Disrupted schooling, and consequent harm to the young person's chances of getting and keeping a job;
- Difficulty making and keeping friends, due to the stress and shame of trying to keep the violence secret, and the disruption of moving houses and schools to escape;
- Damage to the young person's relationship with their mother, whose ability to care for her children may have been undermined by violence and trauma;
- Harm to pets and damage to treasured possessions, or loss of these things if the young person is forced to move;
- Caring responsibilities assumed by the young person, e.g. towards younger siblings;
- Feelings of responsibility for the violence, especially if it occurred in relation to child custody disputes;
- Fear of the abuser returning, or stress associated with joint custody arrangements.

Youthful exposure to family violence is also associated with higher than average rates of harmful alcohol and drug consumption later in life.⁷

There is also a link between family violence and young people's involvement in the justice system. In February 2014, YSAS (the Youth Support and Advocacy Service) conducted an internal analysis of all Victoria Police referrals to their Youth Support Service (YSS) diversion program, which works with young people aged 10-17 to avoid further offending following a police contact. From a sample of 301 clients, they found that 55% of young people who had had recent contact with Victoria Police reported the frequency of family conflict in their home as 'often' or 'very often'.⁸

Family violence and youth homelessness

Family violence is widely recognised as a major cause of homelessness in Australia, and young people are a significant cohort within this. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) found that over a quarter of Australians who presented to specialist homelessness services during 2013-14 and had experienced family violence were aged between 10 and 24.⁹ Moreover, many stakeholders (including AIHW itself) recognise that traditional data collection methods probably do not capture the full extent of youth homelessness or family violence.

A 2015 study of 298 homeless young Australians aged 13-25, conducted through Swinburne University, pointed to a stronger correlation between family violence and youth homelessness than had been previously recognised. The study found that 90% of the young people interviewed recalled witnessing some form of violence between family members at home. 39% recalled police coming to their home because of violence between their parents, and 14% recalled police coming to their home more than 10 times. 56% of homeless young people recalled having to leave home at least once because of violence between their parents or carers, and one fifth of those who left home because of violence reported sleeping rough in parks or on the streets. Of those who ran away from home because of family violence, the median age at which they left home for the first time was 10 years old.¹⁰

Becoming homeless as a result of violence makes young people vulnerable on many fronts. It disrupts their education, makes steady employment almost impossible, and heightens their vulnerability mental health problems and social isolation. It also makes

it hard to sustain connections to family members, notably in the case of older boys who in many cases can no longer accompany their mothers to a refuge.

Young people fleeing family violence may enter the homelessness service sector with their mothers, and indeed family violence is one of the most common reasons for women with accompanying children to approach a homelessness service. However, we must not lose sight of the particular vulnerabilities of young people who are homeless and alone. In their 2013-14 report on Specialist Homelessness Services, the AIHW found that 15% of unaccompanied young people aged 15-24 who presented to a specialist homelessness service identified domestic / family violence as their main reason for seeking help. A further 13% nominated relationship / family breakdown as the main reason.¹¹ Again, many stakeholders in the youth and homelessness sectors believe these figures do not capture the full extent of the problem.

Young people who present unaccompanied at a specialist homelessness service are exceptionally vulnerable. They are more likely than other clients of homelessness services to be homeless by the time they first seek help; they are also more likely to remain homeless or lose their housing during their support period. Furthermore, homelessness during childhood and adolescence is associated with an elevated risk of persistent homelessness later in life. The family violence and homelessness sectors must be resourced and structured to work with young people as primary clients, if we are to better address the psycho-social impacts of family violence on young people.¹²

In addition, much more must be done to address Victoria's critical shortage of adequate, affordable housing. In the last quarter of 2014, for example, the median weekly rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Melbourne was \$345. This is more than the maximum Youth Allowance payment of \$213.40 for a single young person who is required to live away from home. Even in regional Victoria, the median weekly rental of \$160 would consume three quarters of someone's Youth Allowance.¹³ Meanwhile, as of March 2015, there were 33,933 people on the waiting list for public housing in Victoria.¹⁴

Violence can be intergenerational

Most young men who experience family violence do not go on to perpetrate it in their own relationships – indeed, some are especially critical of violence. However, for young men, growing up in a violent home is associated with an elevated risk of becoming violent later in life. The Australian Institute of Criminology stated in 2001 ‘Witnessing parental domestic violence has emerged as the strongest predictor of violence in young people’s own intimate relationships.’¹⁵ American studies published in the *Journal of Family Violence* in 2007 and 2013 found that while not all men who committed violence towards their female partners had been exposed to family violence themselves as children, the majority had been. Furthermore, these men tended to commit more frequent and severe violence and had especially negative attitudes towards women.¹⁶

Some young people use violence in the home

Reporting of family violence has increased significantly in recent years. In 2013-14 Victoria Police attended 65,393 family violence incidents, and laid 29,403 charges in response. The vast majority of these incidents and charges related to violence by adult men against women and children.¹⁷ However, Victoria Police are also dealing with a rise in reported incidents of family violence where a young person is the offender.

In 2013-14, Victoria Police recorded 2,630 family incidents where the offender who was processed was aged under 20. 58% of them were processed for crimes against the person; other incidents related mostly to property damage and ‘justice procedures’, which included breaches of intervention orders. These adolescent young people made up less than 10% of the offenders who were processed after family incidents in that year. (Similarly, Victorian Legal Aid noted that almost 10% of their intervention order services in 2012-13 were provided to young people involved in family violence intervention order applications.)¹⁸

Thus, adolescent violence in the home is a relatively small part of a much larger problem. Nonetheless, it is a concerning issue, and warrants more targeted research and intervention. For example, a strong opportunity exists to intervene early in the lives of young men (78% of adolescent young people who were processed by police for a

family incident in Victoria last year were male), to head off potential patterns of violence in the home later in life.¹⁹

Family violence committed by young people commonly takes the form of aggression by boys towards their mothers, although girls can also be perpetrators and male parents can be victims. Once again, early exposure to family violence appears to be a significant predictor of such behaviour. Other risk factors include the beliefs that males are entitled to control their households and that violence is an acceptable way to resolve conflict. Violence by young people in the home may be exacerbated by mental illness, alcohol and other drugs, and acquired brain injuries – but it remains a complex and little-understood topic. More research is needed. Young people who use violence may behave, in some ways, like abusive adults, and their aggression is traumatising for their victims. At the same time, though, these young people can be highly vulnerable themselves. Their health may be poor, they may have experienced trauma themselves, and they commonly lack resources and life experience.²⁰

Young people's use of violence in the home is often considered a hidden and shameful subject, with parents feeling too guilty or embarrassed to ask for help. As such, the violence can go unacknowledged until it reaches a crisis point. Many parents who call the police simply want help to address their child's behaviour and make their home safe, but by this stage it can result in a court response and possible criminal conviction. This is not always what families want, and can discourage them from seeking help in the future.²¹

Indeed, some youth services have told us that Victoria's recent moves towards a stronger, consistent justice response to family violence have (inadvertently) led to poorer results in relation to young people's use of violence in the home. Some services have reported a reduction in referrals of young people to programs which might have provided them with age-appropriate therapeutic case work to address their behaviour. Instead, incidents of violence by young people which are reported to the police tend to trigger a generic 'family violence' intervention, prompting the sort of intervention orders and safety notices which were designed to help women separate from their violent adult partners. This approach may not feel appropriate to families experiencing violence from a young son or daughter. Some services have expressed concern, for

example, about young people with intellectual disabilities ending up homeless as a result of intervention orders, in part because their families could not access less punitive and more therapeutic forms of support.

Alternatively, some families who report violence from their children seem to be referred to parenting programs. While these can be useful, they do not necessarily address the young person's own behaviour through age-appropriate direct case work. It is vital to do this, to break the cycle of violence early in life, and vital that there are enough appropriately trained youth workers in funded services to provide this support.

A number of programs to address young people's violence in the home have been established in Victoria – for example, Berry Street's TARA and MATTERS programs, the Who's In Charge program at Monash Youth & Family Services, and the GRIPP program at the City of Greater Dandenong. Addressing young people's violence in the home has also been a focus area of the Geelong Project, which brings together multiple stakeholders to divert young people from homelessness and keep them engaged in school. The project's 'Youth Focused and Family Centred' strategy works with families around boundary setting, mediation, skill development, counselling, anger management and de-escalating conflict, while also linking young people to supports for mental health, income, disability, sexuality, and culture.²²

Programs that work with young people at risk of entering the justice system are also key stakeholders in this space. Responding to family violence is a significant aspect of the work of the Youth Support Service (YSS), for example, a diversion program which works with young people aged 10-17 to avoid further offending following a police contact. In May 2015, YSS surveyed all their current young clients from the North-West Metropolitan region and found that 71% of the young men and 43% of the young women had used violence in the home, while 57% of the young women and 45% of the young men had been victims of family violence. This program's interventions to address young people's offending behaviour – including family mediation, one-to-one sessions with youth workers, holistic health assessments and plans, and referrals to specialist services – have had beneficial effects in reducing family conflict.²³

However, there is no consistent state-wide response to the issue of young people's violence in the home, and referral pathways are not well understood. Nor are there enough supported linkages between the different sectors involved, such as schools, police, the Children's Court, family violence services, youth services, child and family services, lawyers, and health services.

More work is also needed to address issues of cultural difference. The Centre for Multicultural Youth, in their submission to this Royal Commission, have noted that young people in newly-arrived families may be expected to take on a range of adult roles. This may include older brothers using violence to control their younger or female siblings – sometimes with their parents' endorsement, sometimes when parents are absent or struggling to cope.

Greater and more consistent action is needed to address young people's violence in the home, building on evaluations of existing or lapsed programs which have shown success. International models should be considered too, notably the Step-Up program in Seattle, Washington. The Step-Up model has recently been piloted, in a local customised form, at CAFS (Child and Family Services) Ballarat and Peninsula Health Frankston.²⁴

Young people are vulnerable to relationship violence

While violence in young people's intimate relationships is different from 'family violence', we argue that youthful relationship violence should still be considered by this Commission. Abusive experiences early in life can have profound effects on a young person's later relationships – but positive interventions at a young age can prove highly beneficial.

In their 2012 Personal Safety Survey, the ABS found that young women were more likely to be assaulted by someone they knew than by a stranger, and were more likely to be attacked in someone's home than outdoors, in a workplace, or in a place of entertainment. (Young men were more vulnerable to stranger violence, and to violence in public places.)²⁵

In 2010, K.A. Murphy and D.I. Smith surveyed 146 girls aged 14-18 in Victorian schools about their experiences of controlling and emotionally abusive behaviours from boyfriends, which could be seen as ‘warning signs’ of future violence. More than 90% of the young women had experienced at least one abusive or controlling behaviour, and more than half reported experiencing five or more such behaviours.²⁶

Sexual violence is a particular concern. In the Fifth National Survey of Secondary Students and Sexual Health (2013), a survey of over 2,000 Australian secondary students found that of the students who reported being sexually active, 28% of young women and 20% of young men reported having experienced unwanted sex. The most common reasons selected were ‘My partner thought I should’ (53% of respondents), ‘Too drunk’ (49%), and ‘I was frightened’ (28%). Fear and pressure from a partner were reasons more commonly cited by girls than by boys.²⁷ The impact of readily available, highly violent pornography in shaping boys’ attitudes towards girls, relationships and gender equality (discussed later) is presumably also significant here.

Many young people are worried about violence

Young people are concerned about violence in their communities, and their growing awareness presents new opportunities for education and community action. A study published in 2015 by Youth Action NSW and White Ribbon Australia (based on a survey of 3,193 young Australians conducted through the University of New South Wales) found that 76% of young Australians felt family violence was common or very common in Australia. 59% felt that dating violence was common or very common. Concern about these issues was higher amongst young women than young men.²⁸

Meanwhile, Mission Australia’s 2014 Youth Survey of 13,600 young Australians found that 20% of young people were very concerned or extremely concerned about ‘family conflict’ and 15% were very concerned or extremely concerned about ‘bullying and emotional abuse’. Concerns were more commonly expressed by young women than by young men, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people were more concerned about both issues than the general youth population.²⁹

Many young people are ill-informed about violence

In spite of these concerns, young people appear more likely than the rest of the population to be poorly-informed about family violence and relationship violence, and to have been influenced by beliefs that encourage or excuse violence.

A 2015 report released by Our Watch for the Australian Government's 'The Line' campaign found that young people showed disturbingly high rates of attitudes which supported or excused violence against women. Drawing on a survey of 2,000 young people and focus groups with young people and parents, the study found:

- 1 in 3 young people didn't think exerting control over someone was a form of violence.
- 1 in 4 didn't think it was serious when guys insulted or verbally harassed girls in the street.
- 1 in 4 thought it was pretty normal for guys to pressure girls into sex.
- 15% thought it was OK for a guy to pressure a girl for sex if they were both drunk.

Our Watch found that young women were widely expected to take responsibility for ensuring that a relationship was seen as successful and that violence and damage to the woman's reputation did not occur. In contrast, many of the people surveyed expected young men to be both aggressive and irresponsible. Parents rarely spoke to their children about healthy relationships, especially not to their sons. Some parents thought the topic was less important than other subjects like drugs or unemployment, while others worried that they did not know how to talk about it. Meanwhile, few schools focused on gender equality or respectful relationships, and young people heard very few male community leaders speaking out against violence. As a result, young people were left with dangerously little in the way of relationship guidance, and were left to get much of their information from popular culture and the porn industry.³⁰

These findings echo the results of a 2013 publication by VicHealth, based on the National Community Attitudes towards Violence Against Women Survey. This report found that 27% of young men surveyed believed 'domestic violence is a private matter to be handled in the family', compared to 17% of the general Australian population. Two

thirds of young men and over half of young women believed that women could leave a violent relationship if they really wanted to, and 46% of young people believed it was sometimes OK for a man to track his female partner without her consent using a mobile phone or computer.³¹

VicHealth attributes these attitudes partly to a message often imparted to young people that gender equality has already been achieved and is no longer an issue. This encourages them to blame victims of violence for making ‘poor choices’, and discourages them from reflecting upon inequality in their own families, communities and relationships.

Another cause of violence cited by VicHealth and other stakeholders is the rise of a ‘raunch’ culture that objectifies women and treats them with violence and contempt.³² This claim echoes the concerns raised through the community education project, ‘Reality & Risk: Pornography, young people and sexuality’, developed by Maree Crabbe and David Corlett through Brophy Family & Youth Services. Based on extensive research and 140 interviews with young people, academics, and people working in the porn industry, this project contends that:

- online pornography is aggressively marketed to young people and its use has become normalised, with 93% of boys and 62% of girls having seen porn by the age of 16;
- pornography has become significantly more aggressive or ‘hard core’, and focused on behaviors that many women do not enjoy and may find painful or degrading;
- pornography is the first and primary source of sexuality education for many young people and is influencing their sexual imaginations, expectations and behaviors.³³

Some young people are at heightened risk

Young women in general are vulnerable to gender-based violence in their families and relationships. However, some groups of young people also face specific vulnerabilities. VicHealth, for instance, has raised concerns about young people who are disengaged

from schooling and employment, and who lack positive, supportive adult role models. These factors are associated with higher rates of victimisation amongst young women, and higher rates of offending amongst young men.³⁴

Vulnerable cohorts of young people are affected by the fact that Victoria has no coordinated youth services system. As we will discuss later, many excellent interventions exist to improve the wellbeing of young people, but the youth services setting as a whole is fragmented and piecemeal, and many gaps have been identified. This impacts upon young people's ability to receive appropriate, timely support.

Aboriginal young people

Aboriginal young people are vulnerable to a range of harmful life outcomes, due to a long history of intergenerational discrimination, disadvantage and dispossession. Their experiences of family violence occur within the context of high rates of poor health, low educational and employment outcomes, incarceration, cultural disconnection and racism. Here, we refer the reader to the submission made to this Royal Commission by the Koorie Youth Council. We also note the ten-year plan *Strong Culture, Strong Peoples, Strong Families: Towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities*, which any future interventions must engage with.

In their 2009 *State of Victoria's Children* report, Victoria's Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (now DET) reported that during the past year 20% of Aboriginal young people aged 15-24 had been the victims of physical violence, and 27% had been threatened with violence. 82% of those who had experienced violence knew the perpetrator.³⁵

These high rates of danger and assault have serious ramifications for the right of Aboriginal young people to be safe within their families. Aboriginal children and young people are taken into out-of-home care at a much higher rate than rest of the Victorian community – 63 per 1000 Aboriginal children in June 2014, compared to 5 per 1000 children in the general population. Victoria's Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People reported in 2015 that of those Aboriginal children who had been placed in

care, violence by men within the family, and alcohol and drug use, were driving factors in 90% of cases.³⁶

Victoria's 2005 Children, Youth & Families Act requires that Aboriginal children and young people in care be supported to maintain kinship ties and cultural knowledge. However, key stakeholders such as the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention & Legal Service Victoria assert that this frequently does not occur. Disconnection from culture can exacerbate the harm, disengagement and alienation experienced by young people who have already been the victims of violence.³⁷

It is vital that Aboriginal young people who are vulnerable to family violence can access prevention interventions, assessment processes and support services which are culturally competent and which emphasise cultural connection as a key aspect of emotional and social wellbeing. A 2012 research project by La Trobe University, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency and Berry Street Take Two provided an example of an assessment tool ('The Cultural Yarn') to better understand and nurture Aboriginal children's degrees of cultural connection.³⁸ Meanwhile, mainstream support services for young people must work towards greater cultural competence, including in the recruitment and training of employees. Meaningful partnerships should be encouraged between Aboriginal-controlled community organisations (ACCOs) and the youth sector, to develop culturally appropriate programs and services that address young people's concerns around family violence at all points along the spectrum from prevention to tertiary interventions.

It is crucial that leadership against family violence is nurtured and supported in Aboriginal communities, and that Aboriginal young people are seen as experts on their own lives, with opportunities to offer their own insights and solutions.

Young people with disabilities

Young women with disabilities are at high risk of violence from people they know, and in the places where they live. This violence can take place in the family home, in intimate relationships, in schools, group homes, supported accommodation or institutions. It can range beyond physical, mental, sexual and financial abuse to

include behaviour like withholding care and medication, withholding access to transport or communications, preventing someone from attending school, forced sterilisation, or harming someone in the course of 'caring' duties. Women with disabilities are rendered unequal and vulnerable not only in the context of family and partner relationships, but also in relation to institutional staff and management who may be responsible for their care. Violence against women with disabilities is under-reported, and young women with disabilities have poor access to legal and support services. Due to their disability, gender and age, their views are often ignored or diminished.³⁹

According to Women with Disabilities Australia, women with a disability are 40% more likely to experience domestic violence than women without a disability, and between four and ten times more likely to experience sexual assault. Abuse often begins early; of women with an intellectual disability, a shocking 90% have been sexually abused, with around two-thirds of abuse taking place when the young woman is aged under 18.⁴⁰ It is the experience of the Youth Disability Advocacy Service that young people who do not use verbal communication are at particular risk of abuse and lack of support.

Young men with disabilities can also be vulnerable if they lack adequate supports to live independently. A young man living in a violent household may be highly dependent on his relatives, unable to access a refuge system designed for women with young children. (For similar access reasons, women caring for adolescent or adult children with disabilities may find it especially hard to leave a violent household.)

In order to combat and prevent violence against young people with disabilities, it is important to address the systemic inequalities they experience in housing, education, employment, leadership, and social and cultural life, all of which contribute to their vulnerability to violence.

It is also important to provide support specific to the needs of young people with disabilities, who are often sidelined from the planning of their own lives. One example of a recent positive initiative is the Youth Disability Rights Hub (2015), developed by the Youth Disability Advocacy Service, the only advocacy service in Australia which focuses specifically on young people with disabilities. The online hub provides accessible

information to young people about their rights, with headings such as ‘What can I do if my carer or support worker is treating me badly?’, ‘Where can I get help if somebody has sexually abused or assaulted me?’, ‘What can’t a worker tell other people about me and my sex life?’, ‘If I live in a Community Residential Unit, can my boyfriend or girlfriend sleep over?’, ‘What is sexting and what does the law say about it?’, ‘How do I report a crime and who will be involved?’, and ‘What help can I get if I have been a victim of a crime?’⁴¹

Young people in out-of-home care

Many young people who are in contact with child protection, or living in out-of-home care, are experiencing the ongoing effects of violence, neglect and trauma. It is important that they have access to age-appropriate supports that prioritise young people’s wellbeing and treat them as clients in their own right, not merely in addition to working with their parents.

To address the trauma experienced by many young people in care, it is important to ensure adequate access to intensive, specialist therapeutic care. The Victorian Auditor-General’s Office has found that therapeutic support is vital to improving the health, wellbeing, family connection and educational outcomes for young people in care. But in 2014 only 17% of residential care placements were therapeutic, although this is expected to rise to 30% during 2015.⁴² The Victorian Government has committed to ensuring that ‘children are placed in the most appropriate therapeutic out-of-home care,’⁴³ and the 2015-16 state budget saw significant investment in Child FIRST and child protection staff. As part of this work, we hope to see therapeutic placements for young people continue to expand.

Meanwhile, each year approximately 400 Victorian young people turn 18 and must leave out-of-home care. This group is highly vulnerable in relation to health, housing, education and job prospects, and these risk factors, coupled with isolation and the lingering effects of trauma and neglect, can make them vulnerable to abusive relationships. In their 2013 ‘Report Card’ on Australian children and young people in care, the CREATE Foundation found that less than 60% of Victorian young people aged 15-17 in care indicated that they had spoken to anyone regarding their life after leaving

the system.⁴⁴ Without improved support, especially with housing, these young people will remain at risk.

Young people in rural and regional communities

In 2011, Victoria's Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (now DET) found that rural and regional young people and children were more likely than their metropolitan peers to have witnessed family violence or to have been the subject of a substantiated child abuse report. Family violence incidents where a child is present, as recorded by Victoria Police, occur at a higher rate per 100,000 population in rural and regional areas than in metro ones.⁴⁵ As of June 2011, 47% of Victorian children in out-of-home care were from rural or regional areas, despite the fact that rural and regional children comprise only around 30% of the state's child population.⁴⁶

This reflects higher than average rates of disadvantage in rural and regional areas, and poorer access to family violence services, child protection workers, youth and family supports, and specialist Children's Court services.⁴⁷ Rural and regional young people's broader protective factors are also compromised by shortages of infrastructure such as public transport and GP services, and relatively limited options for education, employment and social life.

Same sex attracted and sex / gender diverse young people

Young people who are same sex attracted or sex / gender diverse can be vulnerable to particular forms of violence within the family home. A 2010 study from La Trobe University of over 3,000 GLBTIQ young Australians found that 61% had experienced verbal abuse over their sexuality or gender identity, and 18% reported physical abuse. A quarter of the young people who'd been abused had experienced that abuse at home, most commonly from their fathers. The risk of abuse at home was especially high for young people who were transgendered or from religious households.⁴⁸ A 2014 study of 1,032 GLBTIQ young Australians aged 16-27 linked rejection by families to youth homelessness, disrupted schooling, and suicidal ideation.⁴⁹

Discrimination, shame and abuse can also place same sex attracted and sex / gender diverse young people at risk of harmful or exploitative relationships. The 2010 study found that these young people were more vulnerable than their peers to unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections; only half of them reported using a condom during their last experience of penetrative sex, and a fifth of the young women interviewed had sex only with men, despite their attraction to women. While the study attributed some of this to youthful experimentation, it also seemed that young people living with fear, guilt and stigma over their sexuality could be particularly vulnerable, under pressure to prove themselves 'normal'.⁵⁰

For young people who are unable to stay at home due to homophobic or transphobic violence, the mainstream homelessness system may not always provide adequate support. Some young people feel unsafe in general services due to the attitudes of other residents. One example of a targeted model is the Alsorts transitional housing response, first developed in partnership between the Family Access Network and the ALSO Foundation in 2006. It provides transitional housing properties for same-sex attracted, transgender and intersex young people at risk of homelessness, as well as a weekly support group and information to the sector about best practice in this space.

Young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds

Family violence has particular impacts on young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. Their families can be under strain due to factors including overcrowded housing, recomposed families (where people who were separated for years are now living together), stresses over migration status, and expectations that young people will interpret for their elders and that young women will take on significant caring responsibilities. This is in addition to the effects of trauma, interrupted education, and financial strain. Conflict can occur between older and younger generations, as young people struggle to reconcile the cultural differences between their home lives and their experiences of school, friends and popular culture in Australia. It is important to support young people and their families to engage in positive dialogue, supported by skilled facilitators, about growing up and parenting in a new country and bridging the generational divide.

Young people from newly-arrived communities can be vulnerable to family violence in several contexts. Some are living in insecure arrangements with distant relatives or acquaintances. If abuse occurs here, either towards the young person or amongst other household members, the young person may feel trapped by isolation, fear of homelessness, or threats to their migration status. Others are growing up in families where violence in the home (notably by older brothers) is normalised, excused or not discussed. Reporting violence to the authorities may be seen as shameful and stigmatising, and young people may not feel comfortable engaging with Australian community services or police, who may appear unfamiliar and hostile.⁵¹ There is an urgent need for stronger, regular support for family services and child protection workers to build their cultural competency in working with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

Educating about respectful relationships

The majority of young people in Victoria are engaged in secondary schools on a regular basis. With proper support and resourcing, schools can be places where students, staff, parents and community organisations can come together to create safer, more equitable and respectful communities, where gender stereotypes are challenged and violence is rejected. Based on their reviews of violence prevention initiatives, VicHealth have concluded that school-based interventions should be a priority for any violence prevention plan, as they show strong effectiveness when they are delivered by well trained staff, have a strong program logic and evaluation, are culturally sensitive and inclusive, and take a whole-of-school approach.⁵² Young people themselves often identify schools as places where they would like to be able to access more support. We note, for example, a bill to be introduced shortly to Victoria's Youth Parliament by young delegates from Hobsons Bay, calling for family violence to be a compulsory topic in teacher training and in the school curriculum.

However, while secondary schools are mandated to deliver health and physical education units which address sex education and consent, there is currently no mandated requirement for students and staff to be taught about respectful relationships.

Following a 2009 review by VicHealth of violence prevention efforts in Victorian schools, Victoria's Department of Education and Training (DET) worked with VicHealth, CASA House and Deakin University to develop a resource for secondary schools 'Building Respectful Relationships - Stepping Out Against Gender-Based Violence' (the final package was released in 2014). This resource, which is targeted at Years 8 and 9 students, is well regarded by the prevention sector. It gives students a grounding in gender, relationships and respect, helping them to interrogate the messages they receive about gender and sexuality, build their media literacy, and understand family violence, sexual assault, gender based violence and homophobia. Early evaluations of the model found that health education teachers implemented it fairly easily, while teachers from other areas such as English needed more support to integrate it into their curriculum. The module is designed to involve reviews of the school's broader culture, policies and procedures, including as a workplace.⁵³

Under the *Action Plan to Address Violence against Women and Children 2012-2015*, the Victorian Government Department of Health and Human Services funded the Respectful Relationships Education in Schools (RREiS) project. This project works across three locations (Outer Eastern Metropolitan, Central Victoria and Western Metropolitan), to support up to thirty schools to implement 'Building Respectful Relationships' as a whole-school approach. Project Implementation Leaders from the national violence prevention initiative Our Watch have been placed in regional DET offices for an 18 month pilot to provide expert support to schools, including training school staff in delivering the prevention curriculum and dealing with disclosures of violence. The pilot aims to build strong partnerships between schools, DET regional offices, local government and community providers. This work should produce useful data on the kinds of support schools need, and how best to target resources.⁵⁴

However, concerns remain about how schools engage with respectful relationships education. Models developed by DET are not always taken up or implemented as they were intended, and some schools are delivering different modules of relationships education. This is not necessarily a problem, but it makes for a complex picture.

Some prominent models of respectful relationship education, developed by stakeholders outside of DET, include:

- Breaking the Silence – an initiative of the White Ribbon Foundation. This program works with school principals to deepen their understanding of violence against women and support them to introduce prevention activities into schools.
- Girls Talk / Guys Talk – an initiative of Women’s Health West. This program combines Year 9 sexuality education with a World Health Organisation whole-of-school approach, a feminist philosophy, and VicHealth’s ‘Participation for Health: Framework for Action’.
- Gippsland Respectful Relationships Education in Schools – an initiative of Gippsland Women's Health. This primary prevention program seeks to prevent violence against women by promoting gender equality and reducing adherence to rigid gender roles in school communities.
- Respect Protect Connect (RPC) Program – an initiative of South Eastern CASA. This program offers workshops for female and male students at all secondary year levels, building understandings of violence, healthy relationships and respect.
- Sexual Assault Prevention Program in Secondary Schools (SAPPSS) – an initiative of CASA House. This program includes staff professional development, respectful relationships curriculum for Year 9 and 10 students, train-the-trainer workshops for teachers, peer educator programs for older students, and evaluation. It depends on strong, committed partnerships between sexual assault services and schools.

These programs have shown positive outcomes, and provide valuable lessons. For example, a 2011 evaluation of the Breaking the Silence program highlighted the importance of working closely with school principals and regional leaders, and building the confidence of principals and teachers to discuss violence against women and address the harmful myths around gendered violence. The program also found it was important to provide continued support to schools to remain engaged in prevention, and to integrate violence prevention into the mainstream curriculum, rather than treating it as a ‘one off’.⁵⁵

However, the diversity of respectful relationships programs offered to schools presents its own challenges. As public awareness of family violence has grown, many community

members have become interested in working with young people on the topic, developing their own modules and engaging directly with schools. This process is not guided by any central coordinating body, accreditation process, or minimum standards, and as such the style, content and quality of programs vary considerably. Some programs are not informed by current research, and may promote ideas about gender and violence which are confusing or harmful.

Meanwhile, schools also vary in their understanding of the issue, with some schools opting for very short programs for the sake of convenience, which may not address the students' needs. Other schools do not engage in this space at all.

Teachers and principals are grappling with a full curriculum, and are understandably wary of taking on new work. It is important they receive expert support and adequate resourcing in this area. Anecdotally, we have heard that many principals and teachers are more attracted to an anti-bullying curriculum – for example, using DET's Bully Stoppers resources – than a respectful relationships module. It would be valuable to engage further with schools which have embraced an anti-bullying approach, to ensure they understand the value of incorporating into this a strong understanding of gender, sexuality and power.

Schools supporting vulnerable young people

As community awareness of family violence grows, and as respectful relationships programs in schools become more common, student disclosures of violence will increase. It is vital that adequate pathways for reporting and responding are put in place.

Supporting young people who disclose family violence can be challenging for teachers and other school staff. Teachers and principals are mandated to make a Child Protection report if they hold a reasonable belief that a student needs protection because they are at risk of harm or neglect, or are being subjected to physical or sexual abuse.⁵⁶ However, many family violence and youth service providers have told us they are concerned about the shortage of time, expertise and specialist support available to school staff.

If a student appears to be in direct danger, there are clear reporting pathways for school staff. However, staff members may struggle to find an appropriate response for a secondary-aged student who is ‘only’ witnessing violence in the home. Such students may be supported within the school, but they are not always connected to age-appropriate specialist services.

Advice to school staff on dealing with disclosures of violence has been developed – for example, by the Partners in Prevention network hosted by the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria. Their resource advises teachers about actively listening to a student in a way that validates their experience, prioritises their safety, takes their story seriously, treats them respectfully and without judgement, and makes clear the listener’s legal responsibilities and the student’s rights around confidentiality. DET’s ‘Building Respectful Relationship’ module also addresses the need for teachers to be prepared for disclosures and to understand their legal obligations and the school’s procedures.⁵⁷

However, school staff also need in-person support with these issues. The Respectful Relationships Education in Schools project educates staff in participating schools about understanding and responding to disclosures of violence. Equivalent support should be available to all schools, state-wide, on a regular basis.

Many school staff might also benefit from more regular training concerning their obligations under mandatory reporting, and under the new ‘failure to disclose’ laws, which require all adults to report to Victoria Police if they hold a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child under the age of 16.⁵⁸ These new laws have significant ramifications for the whole community.* With support from YACVic, the specialist community legal centre Youthlaw has run valuable training about these laws for the youth sector on a very limited basis. However, it is our

* Note: While the family violence sector supported the effort to make institutions more accountable, they expressed deep concerns that the new laws might increase the vulnerability of women who ‘failed’ to protect their children from a violent partner, and children whose abuse might now go undisclosed for fear of repercussions. The Federation of Community Legal Centres and ten family violence and sexual assault advocacy organisations opposed this aspect of the legislation.

understanding that in-depth training for teachers has not yet been delivered state-wide.

If schools are to respond adequately to family violence, it is vital they are supported by strong partnerships with relevant community services and Victoria Police. Schools do not have the capacity to forge and maintain such partnerships themselves. Appropriate local brokerage bodies are needed. One example is the School Focused Youth Service (SFYS, funded until December 2015), which works across Victoria to support young people with complex needs or mental health issues to remain engaged in school, by creating partnerships and pathways between schools and community services. In some regions SFYS has supported police and school principals' networks to ensure a more coordinated response to safety and justice issues.

The role of youth services

Youth services provide a crucial point of engagement and early intervention for young people, including those who are disengaged from mainstream schooling, and those who would feel uncomfortable asking for help from specialist services, doctors or police. Some youth services provide a range of generalist programs in areas such as arts, recreation, homework clubs and life skills. Others may offer specialist support with issues such as homelessness, mental health, justice, and alcohol and other drugs. Youth workers recognise the young person as the primary client, acknowledging their developing independence, and supporting them to make decisions about their own lives. This work is based on the belief that all young people should have access to someone who will uphold their interests, help them navigate challenges and build coping skills, and connect them to specialist supports if needed.

Services have developed a range of interventions for young people concerning family violence and relationship violence. Some of these initiatives focus on education and prevention – for example, the You, Me and Us peer educator initiative at Women's Health West, and the discussion workshops for young people held as part of the Week Without Violence and the Clothesline Project. Other interventions combine case management with therapeutic arts, music and drama programs for young people who have experienced family violence – for example, the Bright Futures program at Merri

Outreach Support Service. There are a limited number of homelessness services specifically for young women escaping violence, and young people who have experienced violence may also receive support through programs in areas like youth justice, mental health, and young parenting.

Thus, the youth service sector response to family violence is very diverse. Nor is it adequate to meet the extent of the need. In 2012, YACVic and the Victorian Council of Social Service surveyed 213 youth services around Victoria, asking them about identified gaps in the youth service system. Approximately a quarter of respondents identified 'sexual assault / domestic violence' as an area of unmet need, while over half the respondents identified unmet need in the related areas of crisis accommodation and transitional housing. One respondent to the VCOSS / YACVic survey commented: *'(In this area there is) no funding for family violence programs that target young people, sibling violence, child to parent, or same sex relationships (violence). Family violence funding is adult, heterosexual, couple targeted.'*⁵⁹

The youth sector's capacity to support vulnerable young people was reduced further in 2014 when the federal government withdrew funding from the Youth Connections program, which had worked with young people who were disengaged from secondary school, linking them to support services and helping them reengage with education, training and work. In the 2015-16 federal budget, new undertakings were made to support vulnerable young people back into education and employment. So far, it is not yet clear what shape these initiatives will take. Significant questions remain about whether these initiatives will be enough to provide holistic care and support to vulnerable young people, and how they will engage with the youth support, family violence and homelessness sectors.

In the mean time, projects which have already worked with young people around family violence and relationship violence should be examined for their findings and scalability. Funding and contracting systems should work to enhance collaboration between services and other community stakeholders, instead of forcing organisations to guard against each other in highly competitive funding environments. Services supporting young people have shown no shortage of innovation or achievements; what

is often missing is the sustainable resourcing to keep programs going in the long term, and coordinated support for the youth services system as a whole.

Youth workers identifying family violence

Youth services can be a welcoming 'soft entry' point for young people who are unwilling or unable to access other services. As such, it is important that their staff are well supported to respond adequately to young people's experiences and disclosures of family violence. Unfortunately, at present not all workers in the youth sector are well supported to deal with these issues.

A key tool for assessing family violence is the Victorian Common Risk Assessment Framework (CRAF). CRAF was developed to help a range of professionals, including those in mainstream services, to identify and respond to women and children whom they believe may be experiencing family violence. The first of the CRAF Practice Guides, designed for general professionals, is relevant to youth workers and teachers. It educates about the indicators of violence, explains the integrated family violence system, and provides a standardised approach to assessing risk, responding, and referring.

A consortium of the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria, Swinburne University and No to Violence developed a valuable training module to help professionals use CRAF. However, our stakeholders tell us that demand for training outstrips supply, especially in rural areas, and that many workers in the youth sector are not familiar with CRAF, believing it is only for family violence workers. Online eCRAF training is now available through The Lookout (an online education hub for workers and community members, developed by the Domestic Violence Research Centre Victoria and Domestic Violence Victoria), which is a positive innovation.⁶⁰ However, in-person guidance is still needed.

Such assistance should be offered regularly (to address high staff turnover in some services and regions), and should be tailored to the youth sector to ensure its relevance. For example, it would be valuable for CRAF training to engage with the Code of Ethical Practice for the Victorian Youth Sector, which guides youth workers according

to principles concerning duty of care, the young person as the primary consideration, non-discrimination and anti-oppressive practice, privacy and confidentiality, maintaining professional boundaries, recognising a young person's social and cultural context, and acting with honesty and integrity.⁶¹

Furthermore, some of our stakeholders have raised concerns about the cultural appropriateness of family violence assessment tools, and whether workers using these tools have a solid understanding of wellbeing, family life, and family violence amongst young people from culturally diverse and Aboriginal backgrounds. Any training for the youth sector in using assessment tools should also address issues of cultural competency.

Family violence services and young people

While the youth sector is struggling to fill the gaps in service delivery to young people, the mainstream family violence and homelessness sectors are under grave pressure to meet the needs of their adult clients. Their capacity is severely stretched, and many of their workers have no background in supporting young people. As such, services cannot always provide in-depth support to teenage children accompanying their mothers; the parent tends to remain the primary client.

Meanwhile, young people are unlikely to approach a family violence service independently. They may be unable to access services due to geographical distance, lack of knowledge, fear of repercussions, or the difficulties of leaving home. In addition, youth services and family violence services have told us that young people tend not to see family violence services as relevant to their own intimate relationships. A recent study by Youth Action NSW and White Ribbon, along with a 2007 study by Anastasia Powell, showed that most young people saw 'domestic violence' as adult behaviour.⁶²

Community legal centres also observe that many young people (including young parents involved in child custody disputes) do not access the legal supports they are entitled to in relation to family violence. This can be due to confusion, poor self-esteem, and lack of accessible advice about family law and the service system. This lack of

engagement can have serious negative impacts on young people's wellbeing and safety, and that of any children they may have.

There is an urgent need for age-appropriate supports, ranging from legal assistance to therapeutic care, for young people who have experienced family violence and relationship violence. The services involved should be well supported through partnership brokerage to work together, and should not be undermined by hostile competitive tendering processes.

Connecting and supporting services

Interventions focusing on young people and family violence are diverse and piecemeal; there is no consistent service system in this space and many projects are short-term. It is important to connect and support the relevant services, to create opportunities for partnerships and ensure knowledge is not lost. One valuable initiative is the Partners in Prevention (PiP) network, hosted by the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (DVRCV). PiP builds the capacity of stakeholders in the youth, health, community and education sectors who are working with young people in the primary prevention of violence against women. It gives its members opportunities to share ideas and findings and learn from expert presenters. PiP provides online resources, email bulletins, and support to evaluate primary prevention projects. The network, operating since 2007, supports over 450 Victorian professionals. It is valuable to consider how models like this – often staffed part-time and with limited funding – could be extended, especially to provide greater support to rural communities.⁶³

Online interventions

It is also worth considering a greater role for online interventions to engage young people about violence prevention, and direct them towards support. 1800 RESPECT operates as a general portal for all Australians experiencing family violence and seeking online or telephone counselling, while some valuable websites have been developed to educate young people about respectful relationships, such as DVRCV's 'Bursting the Bubble' and 'Love: the good, the bad and the ugly'. The specialist community legal centre Youthlaw have observed that online pathways are very

important to young people who are worried about family violence but uncomfortable or unable to approach a legal service in person.

More work could be done to build on the findings of these initiatives. Other possibilities might also emerge from the extensive work done to engage young people online about mental health. It would be useful to consider whether anti-violence initiatives could draw on the findings of models such as eheadspace's online and telephone counselling service, the apps and online forums developed by ReachOut.com, and the Online Wellbeing Centre being piloted by the Young and Well Cooperative Research Project, which links young people to tools about health, relationships, thoughts and emotions. Any new online interventions should engage young people fully in their design.

In-person consultations with young people

YACVic welcomes the news that the Royal Commission will conduct consultations with young people aged 18-24 in mid-2015. We will be delighted to work further with you to support young people to engage in this process. We would also urge the Commission to give further consideration to options for consulting with young people under the age of 18, in recognition of their particular circumstances, needs and perspectives.

Engaging directly with young people will help the Commission to more fully understand their concerns and needs. Facilitating young people to come up with solutions to the problems in their lives helps to ensure fresh ideas and innovative approaches. It also builds young people's confidence, initiative, and sense of community. From a human rights perspective, young people who have been vulnerable to violence – and who may have faced disadvantage and isolation as a result – should be heard and respected as the experts on their own lives.

YACVic would be happy to discuss any of these issues further with you. For enquiries, please contact Jessie Mitchell, on (03) 9267 3722 or policy@yacvic.org.au

RECOMMENDATIONS

Engaging and supporting young people in education settings

1. Provide adequate support and expert guidance to ensure that all Victorian secondary schools (state, Catholic and independent) implement respectful relationships education, along the lines developed in the module 'Building Respectful Relationships – Stepping Out Against Gender-Based Violence'.
Specifically:
 - Respectful relationships education should be provided not only as a specific curriculum item, but as a whole-of-school approach, with teachers trained to understand and communicate the material, and schools assisted to review their whole institutional practice.
 - A central coordinating body should be resourced to support teachers, principals and community partners to implement the model, and to broker strong relationships between schools and relevant community services. This work should be guided by the upcoming findings of the evaluation of the Respectful Relationships in Schools (RREiS) project, as well as by the expertise of the Partners in Prevention Network. Their work considers the value of placing support in regional education offices; such a model of coordination might prove valuable in the future.
 - Recognising and responding to family violence and understanding violence prevention should be a stronger part of university training for secondary school teachers.

2. If schools have the option of choosing from a diverse range of respectful relationships programs (as is currently the case), introduce a quality control and accreditation process, and require that all such programs meet these standards. All programs should be evidence based, evaluated, and informed by a strong understanding of health promotion, gender, sexuality and violence. Family violence peak bodies and health promotion research bodies are key stakeholders here, and should be supported to take a lead in this work.

3. Ensure teachers and other staff at all Victorian secondary schools have access to regular training concerning their obligations under mandatory reporting and the new 'Failure to disclose' laws.
4. Ensure teachers and other staff at all Victorian secondary schools have access to regular training concerning identifying, understanding and responding to disclosures of violence, including situations where a student has witnessed violence. This training should be informed by the findings of the Respectful Relationships Education in Schools project.
5. Invest in an education re-engagement program that provides intensive, case-managed support for students who have disengaged, or are at risk of disengaging, from school, to address the gap left by the removal of federal funding to Youth Connections. Such a program should include links to specialist support for young people affected by family violence.
6. Ensure all secondary schools are resourced to employ adequate numbers of school counsellors, psychologists and student wellbeing staff, appropriately skilled in identifying and addressing family violence, including across different cultural communities.
7. Increase access for schools, youth services, Victoria Police and health services to evidence-based training about the impacts of online pornography on young people's sexuality and relationships, its relationship to violence against women, and how best to engage with young people about these and the related issues of pleasure, consent, violence, and respect.
 - Note: In the past, YACVic and other organisations such as the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria have worked with Maree Crabbe and David Corlett to support the delivery of training based on the 'Reality & Risk' project. Our organisation is eager and well placed to support further work in this space.
8. Fund partnership brokerage between schools, community services and Victoria Police, to plan coordinated responses to family violence and ensure students

experiencing family violence are linked to appropriate specialist services. The partnership brokerage models developed through the School Focused Youth Service (funded until December 2015) should be drawn upon and extended.

9. Build the capacity of education settings outside of mainstream secondary schools to address young people's experiences of family violence. These settings include alternative education settings and community schools, English Language Schools, TAFEs and community VCAL settings. Staff should be trained in identifying, supporting and referring victims of violence, and students should have access to culturally-sensitive workshops about respectful relationships and how to seek help.

A skilled workforce to support young people

10. Fund regular, state-wide training for the youth services sector in using the Common Risk Assessment Framework. This training should be tailored to the experience of working with a young person as the primary client, using the Code of Ethical Practice for the Victorian Youth Sector. It should also address the different experiences of wellbeing, family life, and family violence amongst young people from Aboriginal and CALD backgrounds.
11. Fund mandatory state-wide training for the youth services sector concerning the new 'Failure to disclose' and 'Failure to protect' legislation concerning sexual abuse of children and young people under the age of 16.
 - Note: A preliminary introductory training module for the youth sector has been developed by Youthlaw; possibilities for extending it further should be explored. YACVic would welcome the opportunity to support this process.
12. Build on the findings and achievements of the Partners in Prevention (PiP) network (hosted by the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria) to strengthen the access of youth and community services to expert guidance, resources and connections around the primary prevention of violence against women. Evaluations of the work of PiP provide us with good directions for future

work. In particular, support for services in rural and regional Victoria should be strengthened.

13. Strengthen the capacity of community, legal and health services to understand and address violence against women and girls with disabilities, and ensure young women with disabilities have equal access to services. Good practice interventions involve young women with disabilities in their design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Consumer-led disability advocacy bodies such as the Youth Disability Advocacy Service and Women With Disabilities Victoria are key stakeholders here; they should be supported to take a lead in guiding these changes.

14. Develop a Victorian Government workforce strategy that ensures all workers supporting young people, including DHS Services Connect case management staff, are familiar with the Victorian Code of Ethical Practice and undertake training in cultural competence in working with Aboriginal, refugee and migrant young people and their families. They should also undertake disability competence training, including planning for accessibility, working directly with young people with a disability, and involving young people with disabilities in decision making. (Cultural competence training has been embraced by many workers in the out-of-home care and family services sector, but should be more comprehensively available to all workers with young people.)

A strong services sector to support young people

15. Establish and strengthen youth-specific family violence interventions. This process should begin with a scoping of existing programs, ranging from early intervention to tertiary case work, and assessing their scalability and potential for wider implementation. It is particularly important to ensure young people can access therapeutic counselling to address trauma and long-term impacts of family violence. Co-location with other relevant services in areas such as youth homelessness and substance abuse should be considered.
 - Note: Funding for services should take into account the particular needs of rural and regional communities, including higher than average rates of

disadvantage, higher than average involvement in the family violence and out-of-home care systems, higher delivery costs, and lower economies of scale.

16. Conduct a scoping of evidence-based, evaluated programs to prevent gender-based violence amongst young people, which have been delivered in settings outside of secondary schools, such as TAFEs, sporting clubs, recreational groups, universities, and alternative education providers. Successful models should be assessed for scalability and, where appropriate, expanded.
17. Ensure all young people in out-of-home care can access therapeutic models of care to promote healing and recovery from trauma.
18. Further fund community legal centres to provide more accessible, comprehensive, age-appropriate legal assistance to young people and their families experiencing family violence.
19. Support family violence services to create environments where young people can disclose their experiences of family violence, access effective, age-appropriate counselling, and have a meaningful voice in their own living and parenting arrangements.
 - Note: such models are discussed at greater length in the 2011 literature review on the impacts of family violence on children (University of Sydney and Australian Domestic & Family Violence Clearinghouse).⁶⁴
20. Draw upon the upcoming findings of the evaluation of the HEY Project to support community interventions to combat homophobic and transphobic violence against young people in their homes and communities.
21. Build the advocacy and leadership skills of young people with disabilities, and increase their access to peer support, individual advocacy, and control over their Individual Support Packages.
22. Pursue the priorities identified by the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People, who in his open letter of 3 February 2015 called for:

‘the development of a state-wide strategic response to improving the lives of vulnerable Aboriginal babies, children and young people with child protection, youth justice and child homelessness as well as children’s trauma and mental health at its core...The strategic response should be an initiative agreed between the broad Aboriginal community and government, with governance arrangements on par with the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. The response at a minimum should include; principles, protocols, targets and measureable outcomes monitored through a partnership forum.’⁶⁵

Such actions should also be informed by the recommendations made the previous year by the Commissioner in collaboration with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and other community service organisations, concerning the wellbeing of Aboriginal young people and children in care.⁶⁶

23. Conduct culturally safe research with Koorie young people into effective strategies to address family violence and strengthen young people’s wellbeing and connections to culture. Draw on the results to resource programs to fill identified gaps. These could potentially be delivered through supported partnerships between Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations and the youth services sector. (For further discussion, see the submission made to this Royal Commission by the Koorie Youth Council.)
24. Resource partnerships between multicultural and settlement services, mainstream youth services, and child and family violence services to develop, evaluate and extend initiatives which engage multicultural communities around family violence, build prevention and intervention strategies, and support community advocates against violence, including young people.
25. Develop, evaluate and expand culturally relevant parenting workshops and support for communities from refugee and migrant backgrounds.
26. Resource and evaluate innovative projects to bring together younger and older people from migrant and refugee communities in a positive, supported environment, with the aim of strengthening intergenerational relationships.

27. Fund and publicise an online and phone service specifically for young people who are experiencing, or have experienced, family violence, to provide them with an accessible, youth-friendly point of entry. This intervention could potentially be built as a youth-specific portal upon an existing model such as 1800 RESPECT. It should be informed by findings about other virtual interventions – including those in the related space of youth mental health, where online, phone and Skype models of education and support for young people appear to be more prolific and evaluated.

Housing and homelessness

28. In keeping with recommendations made by the Council to Homeless Persons and the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS):

- Establish a rapid rehousing program to assist women and children escaping family violence to be quickly rehoused with appropriate supports in place. \$10 million per year could assist over 1000 women and their children.
- Develop a long-term affordable housing strategy to address the soaring public housing waiting list and the unaffordability of private rental for low-income Victorians. A new affordable housing growth fund of \$200 million per year could build a minimum of 800 homes.⁶⁷

29. Extend support to young people leaving out-of-home care until at least the age of 21, and provide a housing guarantee to young care leavers, as recommended by VCOSS, the Council to Homeless Persons, the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, and Berry Street. This guarantee could be used for a range of supports, including rental guarantees and supplements, to encourage landlords to rent to young people and to assist young person if they are studying and/or unable to work.

30. Ensure that young people who are made homeless, or at risk of homelessness, by family violence, have adequate access to age-appropriate transitional housing and related supports around health, transport and finances.

31. Support access for young people with disabilities to housing in the community with appropriate individualised supports, rather than clustered or institutional housing. Housing should be accessible, affordable, and protected by tenancy rights. Tenancy should be kept separate from service provision, so that young people are not afraid of losing one service if they complain about the other. Young people should not be forced to live with, or be cared for by, people they do not want around.

Adolescent violence in the home

32. Invest in pathways to support families experiencing adolescent violence in the home. This approach should include engaging young people in well-evaluated behavioural and attitudinal change programs, connecting them to culturally-competent services to address trauma, mental illness, alcohol and other drugs, and providing expert support for family reunification where this is safe and desired by all participants.
- Note: See research conducted Good Shepherd concerning the different models piloted and their usefulness for young people and parents.⁶⁸
33. Provide regular training in understanding, recognising and responding to young people's violence in the home to staff at community organisations around Victoria that work with young people and their families. Further steps should also be taken to improve understanding of young people's violence in the home amongst lawyers, courts and Victoria Police.
34. Review the referral processes for police call-outs to incidents of family violence, to ensure that families have the option of referral to targeted interventions to address adolescent violence in the home, where this is safe and appropriate.

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