



Youth Affairs  
Council Victoria

# Supporting young people's access and equity through the L2P program

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## About YACVic

Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic) is the peak body and leading policy advocate on young people's issues in Victoria. YACVic's vision is that young Victorians have their rights upheld and are valued as active participants in their communities.

YACVic is an independent, not-for-profit, member driven organisation that represents young people (aged 12-25 years) and the sector that works with them. Through our research, advocacy and services, we:

- lead policy responses on issues affecting young people
- represent the youth sector and elevate young people's voices to government
- resource high-quality youth work practice.

We are driven by our members and prioritise their needs and concerns.

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## Youth Affairs Council Victoria

YACVic is the state peak body for young people aged 12-25 and the services that support them. In 2015-16 we had 313 members – approximately half of them young people, the others comprising local governments, community and health services and research bodies. Our vision is that young Victorians have their rights upheld and are valued as active participants in their communities.

### Young people, transport and policy-making

Recently we have seen a rise in community concern regarding young people and transport disadvantage. Adequate, accessible transport has emerged as an important issue in relation to youth unemployment. Transport disadvantage was also a central theme in the recent inquiry by Victoria's Legislative Council into whether to lower the probationary driving age to seventeen.

In our submission to the licensing inquiry,<sup>\*</sup> YACVic went beyond the issue of the minimum driving age to focus on other interventions that would prevent and reduce transport disadvantage. In particular, our submission highlighted the importance of the successful and popular L2P program in improving young people's access to transport and, consequently, to education, employment and community life.

The L2P program is funded by TAC, managed by VicRoads and hosted by a range of local governments and health and community services. L2P enables learner drivers under 21 years of age who do not have access to a car or a supervising driver to gain the requisite 120 hours of driving experience with a trained volunteer mentor driver, to get ready for their probationary license. They also receive free professional driving lessons.

In 2015, there were 63 L2P programs reaching 71 out of 79 Victorian local government areas. Since then, several communities without an L2P program have announced they will be hosting one soon. As such, L2P is one of relatively few community-based youth programs in Victoria that are genuinely state-wide.

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<sup>\*</sup> YACVic's submission to the licensing inquiry is available online [here](#).

Following our submission to the licensing inquiry, we received a number of requests from our members to continue advocating about the value and future of L2P.

We argue that L2P plays an important role in promoting safety on Victoria's roads, amongst a cohort of drivers at elevated risk of being involved in an accident. However, the positive impacts of L2P go beyond road safety. YACVic contends that L2P should be seen as delivering value across several areas of government, including employment, education, service access and youth engagement.

YACVic applauded the Victorian Government's very positive decision to continue funding the L2P program at \$16 million over four years from 2015. We also welcomed the other supports pledged by the Victorian Government to help young people become responsible, independent drivers, including:

- The \$24.4 million Practical Safe Driving Program for all Year 10 students to build their knowledge, skills and behaviours around safe driving.
- The \$7 million Free License Scheme which rewards young drivers with a free three year license if they complete their red and green probationary periods without any traffic offences or demerit points.
- 50% discounts on the cost of vehicle registrations for eligible trade apprentices.

'Transport' is cited as a key area for policy development in the Victorian Government's 2016 *Youth Policy*.

However, L2P providers still face challenges to supporting young people to become road-ready. And the future of L2P beyond its current funding period must be considered.

This paper reflects our conversations with the coordinators of 27 L2P programs from around Victoria, as well as other community stakeholders. We welcome further feedback and further opportunities to advocate on this topic. This work forms part of our broader advocacy to ensure that all young people can access the services, infrastructure and connections they need to safeguard their wellbeing, pursue their aspirations and contribute to their communities.

## **Educating young people to be safe on the road**

The L2P program plays a crucial role in encouraging safe driving and reducing transport disadvantage. VicRoads has estimated that each year approximately 1,600 young people take part in L2P, and each year around 850 young people obtain their probationary license through the program.<sup>1</sup>

The 2013 Victorian Health Promotion Foundation Awards celebrated L2P for its role in promoting the health and wellbeing of young people.<sup>2</sup>

Due to their inexperience, young drivers are at elevated risk of harm; in 2015, 22% of drivers killed on Victoria's roads were aged between 18 and 25, although this age group comprises only 13% of licence holders.<sup>3</sup> In addition, some young drivers are at higher risk than their peers, and one casual factor identified by the TAC is a lack of adults in the young person's life who model good driving.<sup>4</sup>

L2P helps young people who are experiencing, or at risk of, disadvantage and isolation to become responsible drivers. The program not only ensures that young people get 120 hours of supervised driving; they also provide young people with professional driving lessons, and with driver-mentors who promote safety awareness, reduce young drivers' over-confidence and risk-taking, and correct dangerous messages that young people may have received from other adults in their lives – e.g. family members who drink-drive, speed, use their phones while driving, or drive without a seatbelt or a license. Joining the L2P program exposes young people to calm, responsible driving, with mentors who demonstrate that it is possible to love cars without engaging in 'hoon' behaviours.

Given the commitment by Victoria Police to reducing 'hoon' driving (which includes road-racing, extreme speed, and provocative behaviours in traffic),<sup>5</sup> it is important to support interventions like L2P which educate against such behaviours on an individual level.

Without the support provided by L2P, it's probable there would be higher numbers of young people cheating on their learner logbooks and driving unlicensed. Several L2P

coordinators have told us that many of their learners disclose privately that they have driven illegally in the past. This is concerning, as TAC have identified that unlicensed drivers (while few in number) pose a high risk to themselves and others; unlicensed drivers make up 8% of drivers and riders in all fatal road crashes.<sup>6</sup> Drivers who have never had a license are five times more likely than their licensed peers to be involved in a serious accident. A recent South Australian study of 1,032 young drivers aged 17-19 years found that 12% had engaged in pre-licensed driving, and that young unlicensed drivers engaged in significantly higher rates of dangerous driving than their licensed peers. The researchers emphasised the responsibility of parents to discourage unlicensed driving.<sup>7</sup> But as the L2P program recognises, not all young people have parents who model appropriate driving habits. Other supportive adults are needed.

Without L2P, there would also be higher numbers of inexperienced young drivers going for their license after turning 21, when 120 hours' practice is no longer mandatory. Some would presumably obtain a license, but without the experience and skills to be truly competent on the road.

### **The impacts of transport disadvantage**

Victoria's Graduated Licensing System plays a vital role in reducing the road toll and encouraging a safer community. However, there has been a downside for learner drivers who do not have regular access to a car and a supervising driver. As learner drivers are expected to meet increasingly rigorous standards of experience and skill, some disadvantaged young people are unable to obtain a probationary license in a timely fashion. In consequence, some spend years without equitable access to education, training, employment and social life - while others resort to unsafe, illegal driving.

Transport barriers are especially concerning in light of the persistent problem of youth unemployment. As of December 2016, Victoria's unemployment rate for 15-24 year olds was 13.9%, more than double the overall unemployment rate (5.9%). Most worryingly, 9.9% of young Victorians not in full-time education were unemployed.<sup>8</sup>

For young people there is a strong correlation between lack of a license and lack of a job. In a recent report, *U-Turn: The Transport Woes of Australia's Young Job-Seekers* (2016), the

Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) scrutinised the latest Household Labour Income and Family Dynamics in Australia survey of more than 13,000 Australians. They found that 25.1% of unemployed young people nominated transport as a barrier to securing work. (Transport barriers were significantly more common for young job-seekers than for those aged over 25.) BSL found that 41% of unemployed 18-25 year olds had no driving license, and of course unemployed 16 and 17 year olds were legally unable to drive. In contrast, of those young people who *did* have jobs, only 27.4% were unlicensed.<sup>9</sup>

Some communities are especially vulnerable to these problems. Outer suburban and regional areas with high levels of youth unemployment also tend to have high levels of car dependence,<sup>10</sup> and public transport access tends to be particularly poor outside of typical business hours. (Many young people need to work ‘after hours’, either because their employers require it – for example, in the hospitality industry – or in order to fit their work around their study commitments.)

YACVic supports a strong, comprehensive public transport system. However, we also recognise that localised supports are needed right now for young people in communities where public transport access is poor.

In 2013 the Victorian Auditor-General’s Office (VAGO) found that the growth areas of Cardinia, Casey, Hume, Melton, Mitchell, Whittlesea and Wyndham were inadequately serviced by public transport. VAGO found that people living in growth areas had, on average, less than half as many public transport routes as inner metropolitan residents, that bus services were less direct in growth areas (making for longer journeys), and that access to public transport stops was worse in growth areas. For example, approximately 45% of households in Cardinia were further than 400 metres from a public transport stop, as were almost 60% of houses in Mitchell shire.<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, many rural and regional areas have scant access to public transport. The 2011 Victorian Government report *The State of Victoria’s Children* found that young people aged 12-17 in rural Victoria were much less likely than their metropolitan peers to report having access to public transport – 56% compared to 81%. 51% of young people aged under 18 in rural areas reported that lack of transport made it hard for them to work,



study, socialise, and/or see a doctor, as did 41% of young people living in Melbourne.<sup>12</sup> For example, the coordinator of an L2P program in central Gippsland commented to us:

*'We are very worried about our young people's future especially in light of the Hazelwood Mine Closure and the future impacts this may have on young people and their employment. This is also important in other rural communities such as South Gippsland and Shepparton, where young people cannot access public transport. Young people are now required to travel outside of their immediate town to seek work ... We are very passionate about this [L2P] program. Young people with a licence can travel for employment, and we have seen the results of this.'*

### **How L2P reduces disadvantage and isolation**

The L2P program delivers significant benefits beyond the field of 'road safety'. By becoming independent drivers, young participants improve their prospects of securing education, training and employment. L2P also helps strengthen their connections to the wider community.

One young woman from a rural area who obtained her probationary license through the Geelong L2P program described how her father's death and her mother's inability to drive left her isolated and struggling to get to university:

*'I thought I would be doomed to follow my mother's cycle of never getting a license ... I was begging all my other family to help, but it just wasn't going to happen ... Since getting my Ps I have felt so free and so happy. I am empowered, I am independent.'*<sup>13</sup>

Meanwhile, the L2P program links vulnerable and isolated young people with mentors. High quality mentoring programs have a range of benefits for young people, including boosting their confidence, optimism, social connections and engagement with education and employment.<sup>14</sup>

L2P coordinators have told us of young people who connected to job opportunities, apprenticeships and support services thanks to the personal networks and encouragement of their mentors. L2P mentors also help young people to build basic 'work-ready' qualities, such as time-keeping, confidence, English conversation and

social skills. For young people who may be struggling to keep regular hours due to unemployment, poor mental health or social isolation, keeping appointments with their mentors helps to encourage a routine. L2P coordinators have told us that connecting with a mentor can help young people who have just left school or home to deal with feelings of isolation during this transitional time. One young driver who took part in L2P in the Melton area described her mentor as *'absolutely amazing ... It has been a great experience and motivated me to give back when I can and become a mentor driver myself.'*<sup>15</sup>

A 2014 survey of over a hundred novice drivers who'd taken part in L2P found that two-thirds of them felt they had become more responsible and confident in general as a result of L2P, nearly half said their relationships with other people had improved thanks to the program, and a quarter said L2P had helped them focus better on school or work.<sup>16</sup>

For young people who have been clients of the child protection system, a positive relationship with a driving mentor can be especially significant. One L2P coordinator told us that young people who had grown up in out-of-home care remarked on how rare and special it was to have a supportive, caring adult who was happy to spend time with them, of their own volition, without being paid to do so. A Wesley Mission Victoria representative said of their L2P program for young people in out-of-home care:

*'This really is a mentorship role and our young drivers gain a lot from the conversations they have with their mentors. One young person I spoke to recently said that she'd never really been outside of the suburb she grew up in, so her mentor took her to the other side of town ... And the mentors really enjoy it too. It's a special feeling to be able to empower someone with a skill they'll have for life.'*<sup>17</sup>

Volunteer mentors (many of them retirees) experience benefits from taking part in the program, including greater and more diverse social connections, and the opportunity to use their skills and contribute to their communities.

This community-strengthening aspect of L2P takes considerable work on the part of the (part-time) coordinators. To recruit young people, some coordinators build strong working relationships with secondary schools, youth services and employment services, while others develop specific arrangements with Youth Foyers and FLO

(flexible learning) programs. Some of the young people they work with have struggled to engage regularly with other learning opportunities or to build trusting relationships with adults in the past; supporting them to engage successfully with a driver-mentoring program takes work. Meanwhile, some L2P coordinators must also work intensively to develop or transform the reputation of their program and build the confidence and capacity of their mentors, in communities where the young people involved in L2P have a reputation for being ‘challenging’ or ‘high needs’, and where potential mentors fear they are not up to the task or will get ‘burned out’.

### **Supportive adult role models – the policy context**

Recently there has been a rise in interest in how strong community connections and positive adult role models can help to strengthen young people’s wellbeing and mental health, and reduce their likelihood of engaging in harmful behaviours.

Many service settings must be responsive to this issue. However, we note the particular potential for youth mentoring programs to foster nurturing and beneficial relationships between vulnerable young people and responsible adults.

Mentoring programs which are high-quality, well evaluated and resourced to operate sustainably in the long term, have the potential to deliver results which align well with the policy priorities of several areas of the Victorian Government.

For example, at the 2016 Chief Commissioner’s Summit to address youth crime in Victoria, summit participants repeatedly stated that crimes were being committed by young people who feel ‘locked out and not accepted by their own community.’ Victoria Police Chief Commissioner Graham Ashton observed of these young people ‘They don’t feel like they are a part of our broader society; they don’t feel like they are welcomed to participate in it’ – ‘Family is of course a critical component, but sadly, for some, there is no family support or role models.’ The Chief Commissioner said:

*‘This is a critical issue – the role of families, and how we support children who lack caring and supportive adults in their lives. Everyone needs someone to disappoint – to know that someone cares and takes an interest in their wellbeing.’<sup>18</sup>*

The same points were articulated in several other key documents which will guide service reform in the coming years. For example, Victoria's new *Suicide Prevention Framework*, introduced under the 10 Year Mental Health Plan, highlights the importance of positive community connections as a preventative and protective factor:

*'Communities can build resilience through fostering social cohesion, increasing understanding of diverse cultural and social identities, providing a safe and secure environment, and ensuring access to healthcare and health promotion. Participation in community groups of all kinds - from formal clubs to informal peer support groups - provides social and cultural connections, encourages positive beliefs and reasons for living, and establishes networks of personal and informal support that strengthen resilience.'*<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, the Royal Commission into Family Violence observed the important part that positive adult role models can play in the lives of young people who are vulnerable to becoming involved in cycles of violence. The Commission recognised the value of quality youth mentoring programs like Big Brother and Big Sister in helping young people to connect with:

*'role models who demonstrate non-violent behaviours, positive adult behaviour and healthy relationships ... such programs can help build the resilience of young people through the development of trusting, ongoing relationships with volunteers who also act as alternative role models.'*<sup>20</sup>

While the L2P program is a small part of the bigger picture of youth mentoring and youth support services, its mentors can still play a significant positive role in the lives of young people. The benefits of this go beyond safe driving.

In order to achieve these benefits, mentoring programs must be resourced to operate effectively and safely in the long term. They should align with the Australian Youth Mentoring Benchmarks (developed by the Australian Youth Mentoring Network), which set out the elements of an effective, ethical mentoring program in the areas of planning and design, management and governance, evaluation, staffing, recruitment, screening and selection, orientation and training, making the match, monitoring and support,

and closing the match. Bringing a mentoring program up to these standards takes considerable work, and can require expert support. One example of such targeted support was the Quality Assurance Project run by the Victorian Youth Mentoring Alliance (VYMA) in 2012-14, which helped 17 participating programs (including an L2P program) reach the Benchmarks and achieve Quality Membership Status with the VYMA.

### **Resourcing of L2P**

The Victorian Government's 2015 refunding of L2P was welcomed enthusiastically by the youth sector. Several L2P coordinators have reflected to us that being managed by VicRoads has been important to the program's success, as the funding body's approach has been flexible, supportive and responsive to the needs of different communities. However, VicRoads' own resources are necessarily limited, and L2P continues to face logistical challenges.

L2P programs do not receive 'core funding'; rather they are funded at a rate of \$1,900 per young person per year, with an agreed quota of young people for each program. This funding is intended to cover program administration (usually a part-time coordinator), professional driving lessons and vehicle running costs.<sup>21</sup> Resourcing does not increase automatically with CPI. It is widely recognised that L2P programs must raise their own additional funds and sponsorship and receive support from their host organisations, in order to run effectively.

### **The need for supplementary resourcing**

It is generally recognised that the base funding of L2P is not sufficient to cover the program's full operational costs.

More work is needed to enumerate the shortfalls experienced by L2P providers. From what we have gleaned through our consultations and the available documentation, we would tentatively suggest that it is common for approximately 30% of an L2P program's operational costs to be sourced from host organisations, donations, sponsorship, community contributions and additional voluntary work by the coordinators.

Informally, a number of L2P coordinators have provided us with approximate estimates of the proportion of their resourcing which they must source from outside their TAC funding; these estimates ranged from 10% to 50% of their programs' actual operational costs. YACVic does not have sufficient data access to test these estimates, but they are a source of concern in communities where alternative sources of revenue are scarce.

### **Contributions by host organisations**

The supplementary support available to an L2P program varies according to the contributions of their local communities and host organisations. Supports which may be provided by a host organisation include administration, vehicle bookings, vehicle housing, ICT support, use of an organisational vehicle, induction of mentors into the organisation (some hosts induct their L2P mentors in the same way they do new staff members), events to celebrate the young people and the mentors, and additional mentor training on top of the standard L2P training. For example, one host organisation with high numbers of very vulnerable young people provided their L2P mentors with 12 hours of intensive training in relating to young people who've been impacted by neglect and abuse.

The capacity and willingness of host organisations to provide these forms of support varies considerably.

### **New pressures on local government youth services**

We are concerned that over the next couple of years there is a likelihood that a number of L2P programs hosted by local governments will find themselves under pressure to operate without supplementary support from council, or else seek hosting elsewhere.

Local government has traditionally been one of the most significant providers of youth services in Victoria, playing a vital role in supporting young people's participation and wellbeing. Over half of Victoria's L2P programs are hosted by local governments, and local government is an especially significant L2P host in smaller rural communities, along with local learning and employment networks, community health services and volunteer organisations. (Larger not-for-profit providers, who host approximately a

third of Victoria's L2P programs, are mostly based in metropolitan Melbourne or in larger regional centres.)<sup>22</sup>

Some local governments are highly invested in the L2P program and willingly provide the necessary levels of supplementary support. However, this is not the case everywhere, and currently a number of L2P programs are experiencing new pressures as an indirect result of local government rate-capping and uncertainty over local government's role in youth service provision.

In a limited fiscal environment, some local governments are seeking to focus on their formally mandated services. Despite the importance of local government to youth service delivery, not all councillors and senior management staff recognise youth services as a 'core' duty of local government. (In addition, many rural local governments have a limited financial base to begin with.)

Some L2P coordinators report that their local government hosts are signalling an intention to reduce the supplementary supports they provide to the L2P program. Without these supports, coordinators will struggle to maintain high standards. Furthermore, some local governments are starting to suggest their L2P programs might be better off being hosted elsewhere, including by small not-for-profits whose own capacity is limited.

Even if rate-capping does not impact on an L2P program directly, it may still affect the strength of the program if the wider local government youth services lose capacity. L2P depends on a strong local youth sector for promotion and support.

### **Some essential L2P costs are not fully covered by the TAC funding**

Limited resourcing poses challenges for L2P coordinators. These challenges, and their severity, vary across different communities. However, it appears common for coordinators to need to seek external resourcing or support from their host organisations in order to meet costs which are essential to the program's operation, but which the per-head TAC funding does not fully address. Common ones include:

## - **Vehicle costs**

Vehicle costs can be considerable, especially in rural communities where the cars are regularly being driven very long distances on roads of varying quality, and where local car dealerships and corporate sponsors can be scarce. Key costs include:

- Time and effort required to source sponsorship, donation or leasing arrangements for a new vehicle.
- Pressure on programs to meet the driver demand if they are operating without enough vehicles.
- Upgrading and maintaining vehicles to an appropriate standard in light of the ‘wear and tear’ caused by learner drivers.
- Insurance costs, with each L2P programs making their own arrangements. Some programs report that they are obliged to take up insurance policies where the excess is several thousand dollars – an unsuitable arrangement for vehicles which can be expected to sustain multiple instances of minor damage.
- Securing accessible, secure and appropriate housing for the vehicle. Some L2P programs house their cars at the local police station, but this can be problematic for a range of reasons.
- The strain of sharing a vehicle with other programs within the host organisation, which is the case for some L2P programs.

## - **Mentor recruitment and retention**

In some communities, word of mouth is enough to publicise the L2P program. However, other coordinators must invest significant effort into mentor recruitment, screening, matching support, relationship-building and promotions. Some coordinators report that they do not find the existing promotional materials fully sufficient, or that they must put additional resourcing into producing their own.

Once mentors are recruited, their needs can include training in specific aspects of working with young people, celebratory events to honour mentors’ contributions, and regular ‘touching base’ between mentors and program coordinators, to work through any issues the mentors may be experiencing when supporting the young people.



Maintaining an adequate ‘pool’ of supervising drivers, able to respond flexibly to demand, is important.

- **Supporting vulnerable young people and their communities**

A number of L2P coordinators are under pressure to address transport barriers for young people in communities with higher than average rates of geographical isolation and economic and social disadvantage.

Coordinators are creative and dedicated to helping their communities, and they have developed a number of strategies tailored to the needs of local young people. For example, we know of one L2P program which works closely with a local flexible learning setting, using L2P vehicles and mentors to get students to educational spaces around the shire. By re-engaging in education, the students get the opportunity to prepare for a driving license - a significant incentive for many of them - while also bolstering their engagement by spending hours in a car with a responsible, supportive adult.

However, the extent of the need is often higher than what L2P coordinators can provide. Key areas of need include:

▪ **Communities with high numbers of young people facing disadvantage**

We suggest that the need for the kind of support L2P offers is particularly high in communities which have simultaneously higher than average rates of youth unemployment, higher than average dependence on cars, and higher than average proportions of single parent families in the community. These factors combined place young people under particular pressure to travel long distances by car to access employment etc, while they are less likely to have enough adult support to accumulate 120 hours of driving practice. From our reading of the 2011 Australian Bureau of Statistics community profiles, we would suggest that the communities experiencing this need include the regional centres of Geelong, Warrnambool, Ballarat, Mildura, Wodonga and Latrobe; the growth areas of Hume, Melton, Wyndham and Casey; the Melbourne LGAs of Frankston, Dandenong and Brimbank; and the rural communities in

Central Goldfields shire.<sup>23</sup> (However, more current research is needed to pinpoint the highest areas of need.)

- **Rural isolation**

Meanwhile, demands on the L2P program can also be especially high in rurally isolated communities – not always in numerical terms, but in terms of challenges and the costs of service delivery.

Support for young people to become safe, cautious drivers is vital in rural Victoria – of the 27 young drivers killed in 2015, almost two-thirds were killed on country roads. Given the relatively small population in rural areas, this demonstrates how high the risks are, notably on high-speed, single-lane roads.<sup>24</sup>

However, rural L2P coordinators often find it especially hard to meet the needs of their young people and mentors. Rural L2P programs must cover vast distances and work with young people who live a significant distance from their mentors and the program vehicles. For example, the Buloke & Loddon L2P program must serve the needs of two shires which, together, cover almost 15,000 square kilometres.

Such circumstances involve greater wear and tear on the cars, and sometimes require young people and mentors to make their own way over large distances (where public transport is poor), just to reach each other and the L2P vehicles.

Sourcing adequate supplementary support for an L2P program can also be a particular challenge for rural providers. While small rural communities are often distinguished by their high rates of volunteering and their strong willingness to rally around their young people, yet some communities are also struggling with longstanding financial difficulties. Local businesses are not always able to provide the levels of sponsorship and practical assistance which an L2P provider needs.

Some L2P coordinators have told us, as a general estimate, that the average costs of rural service delivery are approximately 15% higher than the costs of running L2P in metropolitan Melbourne.

- **Young people who are marginalised for several reasons**

Some groups of young people can face particular difficulties accessing the right support to become independent drivers. In a 2014 evaluation, 53 L2P coordinators were surveyed and over half of them felt there were specific cohorts of young people who were not accessing L2P. While the most common barriers cited by the coordinators were long waiting lists and high demand, the coordinators also indicated that certain young people were at particular risk of not accessing the program successfully. The groups mentioned most often included Aboriginal young people, young people with disabilities, youth justice clients, newly arrived young people, and geographically isolated young people.<sup>25</sup> Some L2P coordinators have also told us that they struggle to retain young people whose high levels of disadvantage have left them transient or homeless.

This suggests a need for targeted, culturally appropriate interventions to assist the most highly disadvantaged groups of young people. At present, there are two L2P programs aimed specifically at young people in out-of-home care in eastern and southern Melbourne (one of these also works with youth justice clients), and one L2P run by a multicultural community organisation in south-eastern Melbourne. Other programs have been flexible and innovative in supporting young people at high risk of exclusion, but they are not generally resourced to provide high levels of support for the most vulnerable young people within their current capacity.

There is an undertaking in the VicRoads *Indigenous Action Plan 2011-2015* to increase Aboriginal participation in L2P,<sup>26</sup> but so far we have not heard of this impacting much on most L2P programs around the state.

L2P coordinators and mentors are not always fully equipped to meet the needs of all the young people who approach them. Some mentors need additional training in working with young people who have experienced neglect, trauma and significant disengagement – sometimes host organisations will provide this, but it is not guaranteed across the board. Other L2P coordinators have raised concerns about their mentors' capacity to support young people with cognitive disabilities, feeling that specialised supports may be needed there. In addition, some coordinators feel there are

some young people who need more than the seven professional driving lessons currently provided through L2P. For example, some newly arrived young people have virtually no meaningful experience of Australian roads or modern cars.

- **Young people ineligible for the program**

L2P coordinators may also receive calls to provide additional supports which go beyond their program's remit. For example, some coordinators commented that they are often contacted by parents who do not have the confidence or skills to supervise their children's driving practice, despite their families being technically ineligible for L2P. At least one L2P program has responded to this problem by working with other local stakeholders to run sessions for parents to skill them up as driving role models, along similar lines to the training provided to L2P mentors.

Such interventions can play an important role in strengthening the capacity and safety of the local community. But such work goes beyond what L2P is funded to deliver.

### **Impacts of limited resourcing on L2P programs**

Not all eligible young people who seek the support of L2P are able to access the program. Waiting lists are common, and can last many months. One coordinator told us their waiting list was 12 months long, and this does not appear to be exceptional. The numbers of young people a program can assist at one time (often approximately 40) do not necessarily reflect the extent of local need, particularly in growth suburbs with high rates of disadvantage, new arrivals and young families.

Some young people who apply for the program will not be matched with a mentor before they reach the age cut-off. The coordinator of one L2P program in a growth area of Melbourne commented recently that she had a waiting list of 100 young people for a program with 30 mentor drivers:

*"I've got young people that have been sitting on (the list) for at least two years ... Once they hit 21, I can't take them any longer. It's really disheartening to tell a young person that's so desperate that you just don't have a volunteer here at the moment."*<sup>27</sup>

It also appears quite common for L2P coordinators to contribute more to their programs than a part-time worker would typically be expected to do. For example, a number of coordinators, while employed part-time, are expected to be on call for their mentors after hours, and to work flexible hours when required. One coordinator commented to us ‘We are three-day-a-week workers on call seven days a week!’

Furthermore, the isolated nature of the program – L2P typically employs one person per program site – means that while coordinators may build great local expertise, networks and knowledge, their program is placed under significant strain when they eventually depart. Some coordinators told us they have returned from annual leave or maternity leave earlier than they had originally intended because it was too difficult to find another person who could meet all the program’s demands for the full length of time.

Because they are dedicated to supporting young people in their communities to reach their potential, many L2P coordinators take pride in making additional personal contributions to the program. For example, we know of one coordinator who regularly volunteers their own time to L2P as a qualified driving instructor.

However, in the long term there are real concerns about the sustainability of a program which depends so much on the flexibility and goodwill of its part-time staff.

### **Young people aged 21 and over**

It is common for L2P coordinators to get requests for help from disadvantaged young people aged 21 and over. These young people are not legally required to demonstrate 120 hours of driving practice in order to obtain a license. However, they still need support to become safe, responsible drivers.

The TAC’s *Towards Zero* identifies young drivers as a group at elevated risk on the roads, due to inexperience, immaturity, lifestyle factors and risk taking. The age group TAC cites is 18-25.<sup>28</sup>

Twenty-five is a very common upper age limit used by youth support services. For example, local government youth services work with people up to the age of 25, as do

many prominent services such as headspace, the Centre for Multicultural Youth, Orygen Youth Health, Youthlaw and Frontyard Youth Services. The Victorian Government's Engage! and FReeZA youth programs support community engagement for young people aged up to 25, and the Victorian *Youth Policy* reflects the Government's commitment to young people up to the age of 24.<sup>29</sup>

L2P coordinators tell us that the groups of young people most likely to need driving support past the age of 21 include:

- Young people from recently arrived refugee or migrant families, who may know little about driving in Australia, and who may not have a fully licensed driver in their family who can support them.
- Young people with cognitive disabilities or mental health problems, who may not be ready to start driving independently until a few years later than their peers.
- Young mothers.
- Young people who have been seriously disengaged from education and employment for a long time.

L2P programs cannot work with young people aged 21 and over, and there is no equivalent state-wide assistance available to this age group, beyond a free one-hour session offered by the RACV through their Keys 2 Drive program.<sup>30</sup>

We do not consider that this is an adequate level of support for disadvantaged young people who may have no driving experience and no responsible driver in the family who can support them.

A small number of local communities have taken the initiative of developing their own supports for this older age group. One example is the P21 program, which has been run through Licensing the Wimmera. P21 provides the same style of support as L2P to young people aged 21 and over who are facing the same barriers as L2P participants – lack of access to a car and/or a supportive driver – and the mentors are trained along the same lines as L2P mentors. There is strong demand for the program. But while P21 was initially funded for two years with the support of the departments for community development and multicultural affairs, this resourcing is now at an end and the future

of the program is under discussion. We know of very few equivalent programs currently running in Victoria, other than an enhanced L2P program running in South Gippsland Shire for young people between 21 and 26 who have a mild intellectual disability, in recognition of the particular barriers they face to becoming independent.

### **Volunteer mentoring and 'Child Safe' standards**

L2P programs are beginning to face other new demands, as most of their host organisations are now required to meet Victoria's 'Child Safe' standards for working with people under the age of 18. All organisations providing services to children were required to meet Child Safe standards by January 2017.

Under Child Safe standards, organisations providing services to children up to the age of 18 must provide all volunteers (as well as staff) with clear principles, policies and procedures about how to behave with children, and ensure that volunteers understand the importance of child safety within the organisation. Policies and procedures should address volunteers' responsibilities in relation to child safety and outline the steps for volunteers to take if they have concerns about child safety in the organisation. Volunteers must know how to report abuse allegations and feel confident doing so. 'Relevant' volunteers should be aware of how to identify inappropriate behaviour in other adults and signs of abuse in children; they should also understand culturally safe behaviour and relationships with Aboriginal children and children from multicultural backgrounds, and safe behaviour with children with disabilities.<sup>31</sup>

Making organisations Child Safe is a complex, evolving task, and the full ramifications of the new requirements are still emerging. Our information is that while some local governments and not-for-profits are familiar and confident with Child Safe standards, others are still somewhat uncertain about their new obligations and how to report on these and seek advice.

The Commission for Children and Young People has provided resources and assistance around Child Safe standards, which is very welcome. However, some support will need to be ongoing, and greater education for the local government and not-for-profit sectors

may be needed. We are still hearing of some organisations where decision-makers were unaware they needed to be compliant with Child Safe standards by January this year.

The requirements to update policies, procedures and staff training to meet Child Safe standards can be daunting to smaller organisations especially. In this context, there would appear to be a risk that volunteers, not being regular 'core staff', may not always receive the support and information they require. Since the removal of funding from the Victorian Youth Mentoring Alliance in 2014 under the previous Victorian government, expert tailored support for mentoring programs has been harder to access.

### **Ensuring L2P programs remain Child Safe**

Our information to date is that L2P programs are receiving most of their guidance and expectations concerning Child Safe standards from their local host organisations, rather than experiencing a strong, centralised push from their funding body. (We acknowledge that the standard Victorian training for L2P mentors addresses issues related to working with vulnerable young people, but being Child Safe goes beyond this.)

In some ways, the individualised approach makes sense, given the diverse communities that L2P coordinators work in, and given their need to function effectively within their different host organisations. However, we are concerned that leaving so much development of policies and procedures to individual L2P coordinators and their steering committees can place considerable pressure on coordinators to work in isolation on some demanding and sensitive issues.

The localised approach to L2P policy development and processes also poses some concerns in light of the varied capacity of their host organisations to meet Child Safe standards.

We have found that some L2P coordinators feel very well supported within their host organisations about Child Safe policies and practices. Some host organisations provide in-depth support to L2P coordinators about matters such as handling complaints and concerns, risk management, training mentors in the organisational code of conduct,



matching young people with mentors, and assessing the safety and appropriateness of potential driver-mentors. Coordinators may be meeting very high standards of accountability, with regular auditing, comprehensive case notes and detailed safety / background checks for mentors.

However, the majority of this work appears to occur at the level of the individual L2P program and its local host organisation. As a result, policies and procedures (including in relation to Child Safe standards) vary between L2P sites, and there appears to be relatively little centralised guidance. Some coordinators have told us they feel rather isolated, or report that they are the ones taking the lead in their organisations and educating their colleagues – and their managers – about how to be Child Safe. More broadly, some coordinators feel they are investing time and resources in developing policies and processes when a close equivalent may have already been developed in other communities.

More seriously, some coordinators have told us they are concerned about how much guidance they would have (beyond their host organisation) if something went seriously wrong with a young person and/or a mentor.

The limited resourcing available to L2P programs also has the potential to affect their attainment of Child Safe standards. We know that L2P coordinators are vigilant in educating their mentor drivers about matters like reporting obligations and Failure to Disclose laws, and some go beyond this. For example, some L2P providers host regular events for their mentors with expert speakers on topics like confidentiality and trauma-informed practice. However, much of this supplementary support falls outside the parameters of what L2P is funded to provide. Thus, in order to promote a fully Child Safe setting, coordinators must seek additional resourcing from their host organisation or elsewhere.

Compared to other services, L2P programs may seem relatively ‘low risk’. It is not the job of L2P mentors or staff to provide young people with case management, counselling or formal support with issues such as housing, family violence or mental health. However, L2P programs do place adult mentors in private conversation with young people for many hours. Many of these young people are aged under 18, and many of

them are dealing with some form of disadvantage or isolation. Some of the young people will be clients of community services – indeed, some may be accessing other supports or social events within the same host organisation where L2P is based. Meanwhile, their driver-mentors may have little or no prior experience in the youth sector.

Some host organisations have developed excellent and rigorous approaches to Child Safe standards and other policies and procedures, we would not wish to shift their L2P coordinators away from abiding by these. Nor would we wish to put undue pressure on coordinators to engage in another level of reporting.

However, we are concerned about what appears to be a relative shortage of centralised, state-wide communications and expert support for L2P coordinators about how to handle sensitive policies and procedures, and the expectations of their funding body. It is important to demonstrate that the Victorian Government is continuing to provide adequate direction and support regarding issues of safety and confidentiality.

Some coordinators have told us they would like to see a one-off, targeted set of resourcing aimed at ensuring that all L2P programs can reach an adequate standard of Child Safe preparation and reporting. Coordinators might also benefit from greater access to an expert, state-wide support figure within the Victorian Government whom they can call for guidance on matters of policy development, procedures and standards.

We recognise the excellent work already done in bringing L2P programs up to Child Safe standards. More resourcing is needed to cement these high standards in all L2P programs and ensure the right expert policy guidance and support structures are in place for all L2P programs around the state.

### **Where to from here?**

The L2P program delivers significant value across several areas of government responsibility, not just road safety alone. We strongly support its continued resourcing by the Victorian Government.

However, the current funding model is widely recognised as not being sufficient, in itself, to enable local programs to meet the needs of young people. While some coordinators can source adequate supplementary funding from their host organisations and local communities, such help is not available in all L2P sites. With the new demands placed on programs as a result of local government rate-capping and Child Safe standards, accessing the right supports is likely to be more challenging in the future. As such, there are serious questions being raised about the future viability of some L2P programs.

New commitments will be needed to make the L2P program secure and sustainable and enable it to meet the extent of the need. The funding of the program through the TAC and its management through VicRoads has been highly valued and welcomed. However, given the value the L2P program delivers across other areas of government responsibility, YACVic feels there is an argument for recognising and funding this work through additional budget streams.

## **Recommendations**

1. We recommend that the Victorian Government work with TAC, VicRoads and L2P coordinators to articulate the value that L2P delivers to the community beyond its benefits to road safety. New funding commitments are needed, to recognise the benefits of L2P in strengthening young people's access to education, employment, nurturing adult relationships, and positive community engagement.

L2P programs are diverse in their needs and approaches, and we advocate further consultation with all stakeholders before any new resourcing is structured. However, we suggest that new resourcing from the Victorian Government could include the following:

- A funding commitment to guarantee, at a minimum, that no eligible young person remains on an L2P waiting list for so long that they lose access to the program, and that coordinators can meet the requirements of their program without needing to work additional or voluntary hours.

- A commitment of core funding to each L2P site, sufficient to ensure that vehicle costs are covered and that host organisations do not face unfeasible costs as regards provision of administrative, ICT and HR support, vehicle housing, any additional mentor training necessary to meet the needs of the local community, and events to celebrate the achievements of the mentors and young people.
  - A commitment to a reasonable increase in the per-head funding of the program, for example in line with CPI. Further modelling is needed, but it may also be beneficial to develop a ‘rural loading’ in recognition of the higher costs of L2P service delivery per young person across large distances in isolated communities.
  - A central pool of resourcing to produce strong, appealing and relevant promotional materials – e.g. videos, flyers, pamphlets, business cards – which are easy and affordable for local communities to adapt and adopt.
  - More coordinated state-wide (or at least regional) approaches to lowering vehicle-related costs, through mechanisms such as centralised, sponsored deals on vehicle procurement, servicing, insurance and/or petrol through a common supplier. (We recognise this would not be appropriate for every community, but suggest it would benefit many. Further modelling with coordinators on this matter is needed.)
  - Targeted resourcing to support identified L2P programs to develop disability-competent and culturally-competent approaches to working with cohorts of young people who face high levels of transport disadvantage and significant barriers to accessing the L2P program. These approaches should strengthen the programs’ alignment with the Australian Youth Mentoring Benchmarks.
2. Provide new and targeted resourcing to guarantee access to L2P support for all young people leaving out-of-home care (who wish to take part in the program), up to at least the age of 21. This is in recognition of their very high vulnerability to isolation and multiple forms of disadvantage.

3. Resource a new driving support program along the lines of L2P for disadvantaged and isolated young people aged 21-25 who lack access to a vehicle and expert support to become safe, independent drivers – especially if they live in communities with high levels of unemployment and car dependence. Existing models for this age group, such as the Wimmera’s P21 program, should be considered in the planning of this, and the program should align with the Australian Youth Mentoring Benchmarks.
4. Ensure all host organisations for L2P are being adequately supported to engage appropriately with Child Safe standards and requirements, including as regards their L2P volunteer mentors.
5. Deliver a coordinated, state-wide, targeted set of resourcing aimed specifically at ensuring that all L2P programs are supported to reach an adequate standard of Child Safe preparation and reporting.
6. Ensure that all L2P coordinators can access expert, centralised guidance on matters of policy development, procedures and standards (especially around risk management), if and when they require assistance beyond their individual host organisation.
7. Take steps to strengthen the formal recognition of youth service delivery as a core responsibility of local government – see YACVic’s recommendations in our submission to the Review of the Local Government Act 1989 (available [here](#)).
8. Investigate the viability of a new model recommended by the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL), whereby the Victorian Government could work with secondary schools to resource the development of a specialised intensive supervised driving service for students who do not have family support to gain a license, in communities with high levels of unemployment and car dependence.<sup>32</sup>
  - Such an initiative might target communities where schools have identified that they have higher than average numbers of students who plan to go straight from school into job-seeking, making access to independent transport imperative. Participating schools might undertake to identify all students who wish to go directly into employment or apprenticeships, and

who do not have access to a vehicle and a supportive adult driver. Schools might then work with community stakeholders such as L2P programs and LLENs – provided these programs were adequately funded and well positioned to do this work – to enable interested students to access intensive, accelerated support to prepare for their probationary license. The ideal outcome would be to ensure that every young participant is ready to sit for their probationary license by the time they turn 18 or move into the workforce, whichever happens later. Approaches which might facilitate this outcome might include devoting some school hours to driving practice (if this was felt to be strongly beneficial to the young person’s engagement in education and training), drawing on existing volunteer / parental networks in the school community to recruit mentors, or storing vehicles on school grounds if this was agreed to be appropriate and likely to increase students’ and mentors’ access. As part of the initiative, data should be gathered on how participation in the program affects young people’s confidence levels, access to job opportunities, and access to a license.

- These suggestions are preliminary; more work remains to be done. We refer the reader to the work of BSL, and urge strong consultation with local L2P providers and other community stakeholders on this topic.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues further. Please contact Jessie Mitchell on [policy@yacvic.org.au](mailto:policy@yacvic.org.au) or 9267 3722.

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Yarra, Yarra Ranges, as well as YACVic's Policy Advisory Group and the Brotherhood of St Lawrence.

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<sup>4</sup> TAC, 'Parents - driving role models,' accessed November 2016, <http://www.tac.vic.gov.au/road-safety/tac-campaigns/young-drivers>

<sup>5</sup> Victoria Legal Aid, 'Hoon driving and impoundment', accessed November 2016, <https://www.legalaid.vic.gov.au/find-legal-answers/traffic-offences/hoon-driving-and-impoundment>

<sup>6</sup> TAC, Towards Zero, 'Unlicensed Driving', accessed November 2016, <https://www.towardszero.vic.gov.au/safe-people/focus-areas/unlicensed-driving>

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<sup>15</sup> *Melton Leader*, 30 September 2014, p.19

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<sup>20</sup> Royal Commission into Family Violence, *Report and Recommendations*, vol.II, p.136

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<sup>22</sup> VicRoads, *Annual Report 2014-15*, p.16; VicRoads, 'L2P Learner Driver Mentor Program,' accessed August 2016, <https://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/licences/your-ps/get-your-ps/preparing-for-your-licence-test/l2p-learner-driver-mentor-program>; Victorian Government media release, 'Labor Saves L2P for Young Victorians,' 8 March 2015

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