



COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN
AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Victorian Government Youth Strategy

**Contributions from Victorian Young People – Facilitated by the
Commission for Children and Young People’s Youth Advisory Group.**

December 2020

Introduction

The Commission for Children and Young People welcomes the Victorian Government's ambition that the new Victorian Government Youth Strategy will make Victoria 'the best place to be for young people'. We also welcome the recognition that the voices of young people themselves are central to achieving that ambition. We have therefore promoted the various mechanisms for children and young people to provide input into the strategy.

This document is a collation of the views of young people gathered by the Commission's Youth Advisory Group (YAG) during November and early December 2020 in relation to the youth strategy.

The Commission made the decision to offer an opportunity for young people to speak about what they most wanted to see in a youth strategy on the advice of our YAG. Based on prior consultations conducted earlier in 2020, the YAG thought there may be some young people, particularly in rural and remote areas of Victoria, as well as those who had direct experience of government service systems such as out-of-home care, youth justice and child protection, who would be unaware of the existing opportunities for contribution or who may not feel comfortable to contribute via those channels.

Considering this advice, the Commission promoted the existing engagement opportunities offered by the Department of Premier and Cabinet via the engage Victoria website and YACVic to young people on our mailing list, together with an offer to organise a Commission facilitated forum if there was interest. We received sufficient interest to hold three separate forums as well as one smaller conversation with young people unable to attend the scheduled times. We gathered input from 25 young people.

The forums were developed and facilitated by the Commission's YAG, with Commission staff attending to provide support and the Principal Commissioner attending one of the forums.

This document sets out a summary of what we heard. Our main aim in providing this summary is to ensure that as many young people as possible have their voices heard as part of this important process.

In addition to sharing the views of an additional group of young people as we do in this submission the Commission would be happy to contribute input, based on our range of legislated functions, should that be useful to the strategy development process. To arrange a direct consultation with the Commission please contact Siobhan McCann at siobhan.mccann@ccyp.vic.gov.au.

Participant demographics

Total number: 25

Age Range 13 – 24:

- 3 x 13 years of age
- 6 x 14 years of age
- 2 x 15 years of age
- 3 x 16 years of age
- 4 x 17 years of age
- 1 x 20 years of age
- 2 x 21 years of age
- 3 x 24 years of age

Locations:

- Nhill
- Bright
- Warracknabeal
- Pearcedale
- Sunshine
- Mooroolbark
- Langwarrin
- Rainbow
- Dimboola
- Ashwood

Language: 5 young people identified that English was not their first language

Disability: 2 young people identified as having disability

Recent migrants: 4 young people identified as coming to Australia as refugees

Gender: 16 female, 7 male, 1 preferred not to say

What we heard

'We have things (forums) like this for youth issues, but every issue is a youth issue. I would generally like to have more input into these issues. Forums like this should be in other areas (topics) as well. We're talking now about matters that are important to young people, but you have a lot of young people who are knowledgeable in outside areas (other topics). A more streamlined way of young people entering into the conversation is important.'

Summary of discussions with young people for the Youth Strategy

The forum discussions loosely followed the youth strategy engagement questions, with some adaptation. The responses to these questions have been summarised and grouped under key themes below.

1. Key issues for young people

The young people the Commission spoke with identified a range of issues currently affecting them including:

- feelings of isolation and lack of opportunities for social activities in rural and regional areas
- limited access to support services, particularly mental health supports
- equal access to education and employment
- lack of opportunity to have a say in decisions that affect them.

Young people in rural and regional areas feel isolated, with a lack of opportunities for social activities and limited access to supports

Young people from rural and regional areas told us that they felt disadvantaged because of where they live. They wanted the government to create more places for young people living in these areas to be able to go to.

'[The Government can] make a space that is kind and positive and caring for all youth.' (Young person, location not specified)

'probably having more gatherings for young people... you can't really go anywhere in the country that I know of where you don't have to have adults there' (Young person, rural)

'I would fund more public community activities and spaces, like youth gyms that are specifically for young people. Just give the young people the possibility of meeting other young people and to follow their hobbies' (Young person, metro)

'Our age group (teens to mid 20's), there isn't a lot of places for us to go. There are ... things the community has needed and the government has delivered, so that's good for some people but not us.' (Young person, regional)

'Youth Hubs-where young people can just go to hang out – where they can eat, play sports, do art, skate park, well-being and mental health support, table tennis – just somewhere young people can go, feel safe and hang out together. Every town needs to have one – like they have elderly people's centres.' (Young person, rural)

'There is nothing to do. We need more activities. There is nothing. There is a real lack of opportunity for young people in our region. So unless they have good options at home, it is bad luck. Whereas those who live in big towns or in the city at least there are opportunities outside of where they live.' (Young Person, rural)

Access to support services are limited, particularly for young people in rural and regional areas. The lack of mental health supports was identified by many young people.

Young people told us they need better access to support, particularly for their mental health. This was often identified as an issue by those in rural areas with mental health issues being exacerbated where they lived in families affected by family violence.

'I've had professional help for a while, but a lot of my friends don't have that. We talk together but it's tough. So I think there should be more ... support(s) for young people about their mental health, no matter where they live. The world is different now, just cos we live in a country area doesn't mean we aren't impacted by mental health. And it shouldn't then mean we don't get the same support that kids in the city get.' (Young person, rural)

'More safe meeting spaces for young people. I know there was a place ... a youth hangout where we could just chill. Especially for young people who have abusive families or problems with mental health.' (Young person, rural)

'I live in a rural community and we don't have many support services here. Like mental health services. Support services over a lot of fields would be really, really nice.' (Young person, rural)

'Mental health and disaster recovery [are the most important issues to me]. The massive political mess – climate change – that our generation will be dealing with. That is a really scary thing for us.' (Young person, regional)

'For me I'll not join any organisation, if I feel sad I stay home and just be lonely.' (Young person, rural)

'Most of us have depression or anxiety or both and most of that has cropped up in the last year.' (Young person, metro)

'I feel like more kids are getting severely depressed and sad and no one can talk to one another anymore because they're all like locked away and no one really knows how to show their emotions. No one really talks anymore. I used to go to parties and talk to heaps of people but now I have like 2 mates.' (Young person, rural)

'Mental health services are far away. People need to come out and see young people-services need to be mobile-to reach out to young people. Young people can't always get to services.' (Young person, rural)

'[there is] a clear gap in the Mental Health support available.' (Young person, rural)

'I think that there should be more places for younger people with mental problems to go talk to someone or for someone to seek them because I had a friend, he was suicidal and depressed but no-one would help him.' (Young person, metro)

'People becoming more depressed. Kids are trying to get jobs as well. Kids are wanting to buy their first car now and get their learners and it's been hard because no one's been able to.' (Young person, rural)

Equal access to education and employment

Young people told us they felt that access to quality education and employment opportunities is not equitable and they often feel disadvantaged in their education and employment options after school because of where they live.

'If I had one thing to make Vic a better place. In my area (which is a lower socio-economic area) it would be better if the government would make the funding more equitable. In my previous school we had not much. I shouldn't finish high school and start adult life at a disadvantage because I came from a poorer school. Making more mindful funding decisions, so many more things should be taken into consideration.' (Young person, metro)

'Again, with the prices. I understand that they want us to go into the job acquiring courses but if someone wants to do a certain job they should be able to [study for it] without paying the really big prices.' (Young person, rural)

'We need to be consulted about education and access to subjects etc. For example, there is a bus that goes to Horsham for young people to do VET subjects – this should happen more so we can access other subjects that can't get offered at our school. We don't even have an agriculture subject. More young people are going off to private schools so that they can do the subjects they want to do.' (Young person, rural)

'I'm worried about the people that graduate year 12, after they graduate they just apply for Centrelink you know. We only got here like one company called [name of company], they just apply there and that's all there is, if they don't work there they stay home. Some of the people I know they use a lot of drugs because there is nothing to do. Even in Horsham (closest regional town) there is nothing to do, it is very hard for them to live there. For me I just worry about the young people that are growing up here.... I am one of them who just sits at home, because I can't get job.' (Young person, rural)

'I reckon the way that we deal with ATAR and Year 12 we've seen that it can be pretty flawed when something like this happens (COVID). It would be interesting if we could see if there was some kind of work around.' (Young person, metro)

'I go to a country school so we didn't really get the resources that the government said we would. Even non COVID times our school is about 18-20 months behind metro schools. I'm also in VCE and I have a disability. Up here we are really lucky – I was allowed to go on site. We were really badly hit with COVID so a lot of our families were ruined. We didn't really see any of the financial support. Only in the past couple of weeks, we're only seeing it now. It was really disheartening and disappointing because my community has really struggled with COVID. Our graduating cohort nearly halved because we didn't have the support from government. It really just wasn't fair, especially for our graduating class.' (Young person, regional)

'Secure job prospects in the long term are really concerning. It does feel informative in that "we're creating new jobs" but where do we find these jobs. It doesn't feel like action is being taken.' (Young person, metro)

'Where are these jobs. Are we supposed to just take the Maccas job for \$5 per hour?' (Young person, regional).

'Like education stuff like that. Because its kinda hard where I live there is only 2 high schools you can kinda go to. And I personally struggle with school already. You either have to catch the bus really really, early in the morning or you go to the one that's local. And there is so many kids there that you can't really focus.' (Young person, rural)

'Being locked away and not being able to talk to anyone people just assume that no one really cares anymore and they keep it all to themselves.' (Young person, rural)

'Probably having it more like self learning instead of like this is the stuff go do it and then bring it back. More having a student's input rather than basing it on what the teacher says. 'So the kids can actually have a input about what we have to learn. Not like oh we have to do this again for the 5th year in a row.' (Young person, rural)

'There isn't a whole lot of choice for work placement. Well I'm currently partially working at the butchers but there's just a lot of kids around that don't really get jobs. Not sure if they are not interested. They get kids to work at the grain ports working with all the harvest people. Climate change its more the older people that don't care because it doesn't affect them that much.' (Young person, rural)

'Low quality and low speed internet (NBN) is an issue also.' (Young person, rural)

Lack of opportunity for young people to have a say in issues that impact them

Young people told us that they don't feel like they have a say in decisions that affect them. Those in rural areas in particular said that, due to their rural location they are excluded from decision-making processes.

'I think just more access to what the current political discussions are and an 'open-invitation' type thing for young people to have an input into that. Not in a tokenistic sense though, in a way that they will be taken seriously and their ideas and input will actually be considered.' (Young person, metro).

'I think the government should give younger people a say in what happens.' (Young person, metro)

'From everything you see and hear, I think the focus is on Melbourne, Melbourne, Melbourne (and not country). Sometimes it is like we don't even exist cos we aren't in Melbourne!' (Young person, rural)

'I don't know what government does.... We aren't connected really.' (Young person, rural)

'... A few years ago, we did a video campaign, but have not really had any say in the design or development of the new school or to comment on what's being proposed, even though it's for us. No consultation at all with young people.' (Young person, rural)

'4 out of 10 confidence that the Government would listen to young people, but I would try to make my voice heard.' (Young person, rural)

'We have no future at the moment. We can't see the future.. no hope.' (Young person, rural)

2. Looking forward – what are the solutions to some of the issues that have been identified?

Young people identified a range of options to address the key issues concerning them, including:

- spaces and opportunities to be involved in decisions that affect them
- a supportive community with access to support services
- equal opportunities for young people living in rural and regional areas.

Spaces and opportunities opened for young people to be involved in political discussions and decisions that impact them

Young people told us that if the government creates more opportunities for them to be involved in a meaningful way, it would solve many issues they discussed with us.

'We have a say so we aren't having to worry about the future due to recession, climate change, political disruption etc.' (Young person, regional)

'It would be good if there was a space like the SRC pages where people could comment or ask questions.... but to be less exclusive ... and create more awareness about how to do that [for young people].' (Young person, metro)

'...we could have an organisation that kind of works like that so you can seek out involvement with the state organisation that works in that area.' (Young person, metro)

'Well I hope there's more female people in like different work joints. Like personally I work as a mechanic. And I just hope there are more females wanting to do that.' (Young person, rural)

A supportive community where young people have equitable access to necessary supports

Creating spaces that are community centred because I think they are important and you can create a culture around that. Also, I'd love to see a more community centred approach from everyone. We have better mental health because people really do care for each other, not just a coffee shop 'how are you'. I'm pretty hopeful from some of the things I have heard Daniel Andrews talking about. If we don't invest in our community ...'. (Young person, metro)

'In person and online resources for young people such as mental health, education, health, finances, jobs.' (Young person, regional)

Young people in rural and regional areas should not be disadvantaged due to where they live

'A hope for the future around where I live is to see more youth being engaged in things. Quite often there will be something in Warracknabeal at the skate park but a lot of youth can't travel to it because they live too far away, so trying to spread out the facilities in more regional and rural areas.' (Young person, rural)

'I want people to feel equal and to have the same opportunities. I want the other kids around here to have opportunities.' (Young person, rural)