



What's Important to Youth

Discussion Paper Response



About Us - Moreland Youth Services (MYS)

Moreland Youth Services ("MYS") is an in-house service unit of Moreland City Council delivering programs and services for young people aged 12 – 25. Our programs aim to engage young people early (10 – 18 years) and in particular at points of transition - primary to secondary, secondary to further study, employment or other.

In 2013 Moreland City Council opened the municipality's first purpose built youth facility named "Oxygen Youth Space" which is a place for young people to hang out, meet friends, learn new skills and participate in a range of activities and is operated by MYS.

Oxygen Youth Space currently offers the following free programs:

- Amped Up Productions (Freeza) event management program;
- Homework Help ;
- Open Art Studio;
- YGLAM Queer Youth Theatre Group ;
- General Drop In - Xbox and pool competitions, prizes, games, food
- Accredited training workshops ; and
- Start Up Smarts business training program for young entrepreneurs.

The unit also plays a critical role in local strategic planning seeks to harness the collective leadership, intelligence and skills inherent in the youth, community and education sectors to achieve community level change.

MYS Response – Key Principles

MYS welcomes the opportunity to make a submission in response to the Victorian State Governments "What's Important to Youth Discussion Paper".

Whilst considered specific responses have been provided in accordance with the discussion paper framework, MYS strongly encourages the following principles as a generalist approach to improve the lives of young people:

(1) **Early Intervention** – It is our experience that this principle, is the most important consideration for at risk young people to reach their full potential;

(2) **Service Coordination** – Needs to be driven at the state level and embrace new technology to manage accessible data and information; and

(3) **Funding and Resources** - Needs to be increased, available, strategic and allocated to agencies best placed to affect real outcomes.

Draft Vision – Response

Q: What do you think of the draft vision ?

MYS supports the draft vision in principle.

However given the very broad and generalist nature of the vision, it is suggested that the words “resources, funding” and “accountability” be included into the vision statement as appropriate.

Draft Objectives – Response

Q: What do you think of the draft objectives ?

MYS supports the overall objective and the focus on disadvantaged youth and further recognises and supports early intervention principles which are reflected within the objectives.

It is further suggested that a clear objective be to pursue new technologies and methodologies to better engage with young people beyond traditional forms of engagement.

What’s Important to Young People?

Q: What do you think should be done to improve educational opportunities for young people ?

Moreland has low levels of educational attainment amongst young people under 16 years. The 2006 census figures show that 12.8% of students in Moreland had left school in Year 8 or below, this is much higher than the Melbourne Statistical Division (MSD) average of 7.8%. The prevalence of disadvantage and disengagement is particularly concentrated in Moreland’s northern suburbs, Glenroy and Fawkner. The study found that across 6 Moreland schools on average students miss on average miss at least one day of school per week, equating to 40 days of school on average per year.

In response to these statistics, a project team established the Glenroy Demonstration Project Action Team. The project was supported by funding from Youth Connections program members in Moreland, NMIT, Moreland City Council, The Salvation Army Crossroads and the Inner Northern Local Learning and Employment Network (INLLEN) devised the Moreland Under 16 Glenroy College Demonstration Project.

Moreland Under 16 Glenroy College Demonstration Project:

Project Aim:

To utilise a whole of community partnership model to improve student attendance and engagement at Glenroy College, address the issues and barriers for students and families and implement strategies to assist.

Methodology

The Demonstration Project consisted of 3 distinct phases.

Phase 1 – Intensive Case Management & Advocacy

Phase 2 – Primary to Secondary Transition – mapping and data collection

Phase 3 – Parent Engagement - strengthening school & family engagement

Clarification around the 3 phases is outlined below:

1st Phase - Case Management & Advocacy

A Project Officer was employed in July 2012 for a 5 month period to intensively case manage 23 students selected by the school and liaise with their families to improve attendance and engagement at Glenroy College. Pre and Post evaluations were conducted with students and parents. The success of the campaign led to the Officer that was employed, by the school in 2013 as the Student Engagement Officer to continue her work with at risk students.

2nd Phase - Primary to Secondary Transition

In 2012 preliminary investigation was undertaken with feeder Primary Schools to discuss Year 5 & 6 transition processes. To understand the deeper issues that affect local primary schools, a data collection exercise on Year 5/6 student attendance was undertaken.

3rd Phase – Parent Engagement

- a) Undertake a consultation process with students, parents and teachers to understand the issues that prevent positive engagement between the parent and school community
- b) Consultation results presented and a self assessment conducted with the School leadership team and community providers to inform parent engagement strategies
- c) Initiate a project that targets specific families of Arabic speaking backgrounds utilising a similar process of intensive case management as per Phase 1
- d) An Action Plan developed for 2014 and included a range of strategies to engage parents such as parenting programs and breakfast programs

Whilst the Moreland Under 16 Glenroy College Demonstration project is but one example of improving educational opportunities for young people, MYS recognises that learning model of young people differ substantially and there is not one simple solution to address the issue. Therefore, MYS has developed a series of key consideration points as follows:

- Accessible information about different pathways opportunities;
- Supported programs that aim to assist young people to work through and identify their educational and career goals and what is available to assist in achieving them;
- A transition program that supports Kinder to Prep transition, grade 6 to Year 7 transition and Year 12 to further education, training or employment transition;
- Wellbeing programs that tackle the challenges young people are confronted with while in Secondary School to build resilience to deal with issues faced at school;
- Work experience or further education opportunities while in VCE to create understanding around their chosen field of employment or study;
- Trained and experienced youth workers who can provide them with intensive case management support
- Teachers to be better trained on student wellbeing to provide a supportive educational experience;
- To restore funding to vocational courses;
- Equitable funding across all government primary and secondary schools;
- Strengthening partnerships between schools and community services; and
- Strengthening relationships between families and schools.

The Moreland Under 16 Project found that 129 young people U16 were missing at least 1 day of school per week. Some of the contributing factors to these absentees were family poverty and dysfunction, negative school experience of parents and on-line bullying. These issues can often affect the mental health of a young person. From this project we found that supportive relationships, applied learning options, flexible learning environments and parental involvement can help them re-engage with education. Ultimately the most significant result from this project was the need and evidence for social worker/trained professionals in schools who can assist a young person with support, navigating the education system, finding the appropriate help and providing a holistic approach that addresses issues that are stemmed from outside the classroom.

Q: What do you think should be done to improve training opportunities for young people ?

MYS identifies a lack of jobs available to young people, the situation is compounded by the fact that many young people are not job ready and are lacking in the foundation skills and qualifications required in the modern workforce. In response to this, MYS has devised and delivered a range of training programs to assist young people increase their employment opportunities:

Training Calendar: delivered over a 12 month period, young people have the opportunity to access a selection of free training workshops. Workshops include, Barista training, First Aid Level 2, Job Readiness/CV Writing session and Leadership Training.

R U Ready Program: delivered over a 9 week period, the program is tailored to the career and training needs of Year 10 students. The program provides students with industry visits to relevant workplaces which enable them access to employees and the workplace. Industry visits include, Essendon FC, Sutton Tools, NCI Packaging and John Fawkner Private Hospital.

Pool Life Guard Training Program: delivered in partnership with Life Saving Victoria and the YMCA, this program supports newly arrived young men and obtain swimming proficiency in order to then successfully gain their pool life guarding certificates. The program has been delivered over 3 years with all participants successfully completing the program, many have secured employment with the YMCA.

Football Umpiring Program: working in partnership with local sporting clubs and the Essendon District Football League, provide opportunities for young people to acquire relevant umpiring skills (AFL and soccer) to gain employment in the sports industry.

Jobs For Youth Campaign: The 2015 Jobs for Youth Campaign is a whole-of-community response to youth unemployment. Schools, young people, government, industry and business, local service providers and community are collaborating to effect real change. The Campaign consists of job-readiness events and activities, activities for employers, activities for professionals advising young people about career pathways and evaluation and development with a long-term perspective. As a part of the Jobs for Youth Campaign the Real Industry Job Interviews (RIJI) was delivered to students, preparing them for interviews in the future. Future Skills Forum is a forum which is aimed at local business, local service providers, careers and VET teachers and will present the findings of the Northern Work Force Development Master Plan 2015-2024.

Other key considerations include:

- Work experience: which will enable young people to trial different work types, build networks and learn about their options. At Moreland we are looking to run work inspirations.
- Coaching: support to identify their strengths and aspiration;
- Vocational opportunities: increase vocational opportunities and support young people to work towards their career aspirations;
- Prevention: to provide young people with information on vocational opportunities at the beginning of middle school; and
- Connecting with employers: creating partnerships to ensure young people meet current work place needs and create links with real employment opportunities.

Q: What do you think should be done to increase employment opportunities for young people?

MYS has a strong focus on youth unemployment and more importantly finding young people employment. We are heavily invested through our work as a key partner on the Jobs for Youth Campaign led by Inner Northern LLEN, supporting collaborative initiatives such as Real Industry Job Interviews (RIJI) and the Jobs for Youth Expo. The 2015 Jobs for Youth Campaign is a whole-of-community response to youth unemployment. Schools, young people, government, industry and business, local service providers and community are collaborating to affect real change. The Campaign consists of job-readiness events and activities, activities for employers, activities for professionals advising young people about career pathways and evaluation and development with a long-term perspective.

Five core preconditions have been identified by the *Inner Northern Youth Employment Taskforce* which are necessary for a successful transition to work and engagement of young people in the labour market. These are:

- Stable economic supports (the level of economic security in the family and parental resources available)
- Supportive relationships and networks (levels of support from family or institutions)
- A capacity to assess new employment opportunities on both the supply and demand sides of the labour market (job search skills, knowledge of the labour market, and ability to career plan)
- Provision of supports for the formation of job readiness and employability skills (generic skills including literacy and numeracy)
- The opportunity to undertake skill development which is formally recognised and valued by both the labour market and the jobseeker (higher level skills and the capacity to recognise the skills acquired)."
- Additionally there is a shortage of entry-level employment opportunities that have previously provided a pathway into employment for young people. Finding ways to engage with the private sector to potentially increase the supply of suitable entry-level jobs is a key prerequisite to improving job prospects for young jobseekers.

Research also indicates that there are 7 trending jobs of the future and we believe it is important for this information to be communicated through to young people and their parents so they can best prepare with educated decisions. The 7 trending jobs of the future are:

- Medical technician and pharmaceuticals
- Information technology
- Food and Fibre Manufacturing
- Business Services/Professional accounting marketing
- New energy technology
- Transport defence and construction technology
- International education
- Major events

Subjects of relevance to these employment opportunities are:

- Science
- Technology
- maths
- engineering

The Future Skills Forum being held on 17 November 2015. As mentioned at the forum the findings of the Northern Work Force Development Master Plan 2015-2024 will be presented, which for teachers and community organisations the forum and findings will help to better understand the occupations and skills that students will need to take advantage of emerging industries. For businesses this forum will provide an understanding of the industry landscape and emerging commercial opportunities as well as how young people fit into the skills gaps business may experience.

Q: What do you think should be done to improve the mental health of young people ?

MYS as a generalist service provider acknowledges our limitations in this highly specialised area, however we understand that mental health does not discriminate and services needs to be accessible to all young people.

Mental health is a very prevalent issue for young people in Moreland caused by various factors. Local research indicates that health and wellbeing services were identified by young people as very important services to have locally.

Interestingly one key factor of health and wellbeing which affects young people's mental health was the significant drop in physical activity once young people leave primary school and start attending high school; however it does increase again once young people leave high school. Local data also found that young people 12 – 17 years of age eat more takeaways than any other age group which can lead to body image issues and a precursor to mental health and depression.

As MYS has a strong focus on early intervention and community engagement we tackle this issue by delivering activities such as the Fawkner Muslim Women's Program, Social Soccer and the Oxygen Youth Space open sessions. The Fawkner Muslim Women's program and social soccer program specifically targets young people from marginalised backgrounds, providing them with a platform for engagement and social connectedness to their community. These programs provide young people with a space that they feel connected to their peers, as well as community and to support workers that they might others not access due to barriers such as stigma, cost and awareness.

Additional to our programs we provide general individual support work to young people who we refer through to the relevant specialised agencies where required. It is extremely beneficial for these services to be local, easily accessible and approachable such as Merri Community Health Services and Headspace.

Other opportunities to respond to this issue include:

- Removing the stigma of young people who suffer from mental illness;
- Providing simple and streamlined service which limits bouncing from service to service;
- Encouraging empowerment and positive life choices;
- Mitigating the academic pressure on young people and reconsidering the traditional grading/scoring systems into higher education; and
- Early intervention.

Q: What do you think should be done to tackle alcohol and drug issues for young people ?

MYS as a generalist service provider acknowledges our limitations in this highly specialised area, however our experience indicates that alcohol abuse is the most frequently abused and most accessible in an area of “binge drinking” followed by cannabis then graduating onto more serious drugs like meth/amphetamine.

Key considerations to respond to this issue include:

- Building the capacity of families, carers and school communities to respond effectively to substance use issues;
- Early intervention starting at primary school aged young people;
- Supporting specialised services and acknowledging that the 16 to 18 year old age group is strongly represented in the ‘most at risk’ population and the least likely to use centre based counselling services;
- Consider increasing the legal alcohol consumption age to 21;
- Continue to further limit alcohol and tobacco advertising ;
- Continue to highlight the detrimental health affects of drugs and alcohol at an early age; and
- Educate parents and provide simple resources to promote positive life choices.
- Encourage pathways for young people into structured sporting, recreational and music clubs and environments

Q: What do you think should be done to improve housing for young people ?

MYS as a generalist service provider acknowledges our limitations in this highly specialised area, however many localised service providers in this area advise that that youth homelessness is on the rise in Moreland and demand is outweighing supply of housing.

It is further reported locally that in some cases the problems are further complicated with mental health and on occasions substance abuse matters also being prevalent. However it is important to note that dysfunctional families a result of innocent young people becoming homeless through no wrongdoing of their own can lead to.

Key considerations to respond to this issue include:

- Expansion of specialised youth accommodation services and industry training to actively pursue the possibility of reuniting homeless young people with their families, where appropriate through conciliation and counselling;
- Increase incentive for existing families to accept foster children;
- Consider tax incentive for property investors and landlords to provide low cost rental accommodations to eligible young people facing homelessness;
- Develop or revamp a new and innovative scheme which will enable young people to enter the housing market and secure property.
- Invest in additional early intervention outreach services.

Q: What do you think should be done to tackle discrimination of young people?

MYS acknowledges that the task of tackling discrimination is a complex social issue and one that requires a multifaceted approach. In light of the numerous types of discrimination a person(s) may be victim to, the strategies employed to combat the issue should be tailored to those discrimination types experienced by young people. For clarity purposes the considerations have been classified into sub categories which include:

Education:

- Providing opportunities for the Human Rights Commission to deliver forums to young people about their rights (council coordinated this forum to a group of Brunswick Secondary College students in 2013); These forums should be extended to include other local schools including primary schools on an annual basis;

Reporting:

- Encourage young people to report incidents of discrimination and continue to support and build upon anti-discrimination campaigns and zero tolerance such as Fight Against Hate and White Ribbon campaigns.

Effects:

- Highlight the impact and detrimental effects discrimination has on individuals and groups through community forums, Youth Summits and online conferences;

Programs:

- Continue to provide opportunities for young people to advocate and raise awareness on discrimination via committees and forums;
- Continue to offer a diverse range of programs and events that reflect the interests of local young people;
- The rationale for implementing youth programs and initiatives should be to enhance community connectedness and promote social belonging. This provides opportunities for different groups of young people to socialise and share their beliefs, and experiences.

Community Forums/ Campaigns:

- Commitment to hosting an annual anti-discrimination event annually as part of an awareness raising campaign;
- Provide an opportunity for secondary school students to participate in the awareness raising campaign.

Leadership:

- Councils to demonstrate leadership on the issue through highlighting its incidence with the community and its impact of individuals and groups.

Q: What do you think should be done to improve public transport of young people ?

Public transport is the main mode of transport for most young people and essential for them to access the services and networks that support them especially during crisis periods.

It has been MYS experience that young people therefore often travel without a ticket and over time accumulate significant related fines which escalate with non-payment. Public transport fines that are left unpaid can lead to a downward spiral that can result in cyclical or long-term homelessness amongst other things.

Access to public transport is integral to the social inclusion of young people. Social inclusion is beneficial to society by increasing economic productivity and a sense of community. It also enables active participation in the community, maintenance of important relationships with friends and family, educational and employment opportunities and ultimately contributes to pathways out of homelessness amongst other things.

Free public transport is not a common form of assistance, but is not unprecedented in Victoria, and similar assistance is provided to those in financial crisis through the Victorian Utility Relief Grant Scheme. Overseas governments are increasingly recognising the need to address the issue of access to public transport for young homeless people. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act in the United States for example requires States to provide free public transport for young homeless people to their educational institution, thereby reducing the risk of their falling out of education.

In response to this issue, MYS supports previous recommendation developed by *Youth Law* in consultation with other community agencies which recommend:

- Issue young homeless and seriously disadvantaged young people who satisfy agreed eligibility criteria with a full concession cards enabling them free public transport within Victoria for a period of 6-12 months;

Other considerations for non-seriously disadvantaged or homeless young people include:

- Reducing fines for no ticket offences;
- Completely scrapping the zone system and implementing a flat rate regardless of location;
- Provide free service for under 18 between certain hours;
- Issue community agencies with pre-paid myki passes for clients;
- Continue to encourage all Victorians to use public transport more often; and
- Significantly improve public transport infrastructure.

Q: What else do you think should be done to improve the lives of young people in Victoria?

As previously mentioned MYS has a focus on early intervention and is committed to supporting young people in their successful transition. Support for youth initiatives that encourage early intervention would make a huge impact as we have seen this through the work at Glenroy College with the appointment of a Student Engagement Officer. This position has made an immense impact to the well being of young people and provides them with supports which they require. Early intervention has proven to have better chance of long term positive change and is also a more cost effective option long term. Providing schools with the adequate resources to employ qualified and experienced youth workers to respond to the needs of students, particularly those who are 'at risk' of disengagement.

Local Government Youth Services are best placed to work with an early intervention focus, supporting local schools, community groups, and agencies and through their own initiatives. Providing support through resourcing at a local level with infrastructure grants or project grants that give Local Government Youth Services the resources to provide greater support and even more opportunities for young people.

Other considerations include:

- Youth infrastructure Funding similar to SRV Community Infrastructure Program (match funding) would provide much needed additional resources for young people.
- The defunding of Youth Connections has left a large service gap for early school leavers and reintroducing youth connections or exploring options that would meet the service need left vacant would make a huge impact to these young people who are missing out on this support.
- The youth sector is required to take a more whole of community approach when seeking to improve the lives of young people. As is evidenced in this report, many of the successful youth initiatives implemented involve collaboration and cooperation across a multitude of health care specialists, sports industry and employment and training sectors;
- Provide incentives for local sporting clubs and leisure centres to better engage and sustain young people's involvement in sport and recreation;
- Council to maintain opportunities for young people to participate in civic life and influence the outcomes which affect them;
- Greater investment and emphasis in delivering the recommendations from papers/reports that seek to identify youth needs;

Response Data Sources

Our responses have been derived predominately from the following publications:

- Inner Northern Youth Employment Taskforce Report 2014, *Youth Employment Strategy for Melbourne Inner North*;
- Moreland Youth Commitment, *Jobs for Youth Campaign Report 2014*
- Moreland City Council, *Oxygen Project Phase Two: Report and Action Plan 2014*
- Moreland City Council, *Economic Development Strategy 2011 – 2016*
- Moreland City Council, *Integrated Transport Strategy 2010 – 2019*
- Youth Law, *Getting There: A Homeless Youth Policy Proposal for Victoria, 2008*
- *Moreland Under 16 Demonstration Project Report*

These publications can be produced upon request.