What's Important to YOUth
Final Report from
Melbourne City Mission youth consultations

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Organisation profile

Melbourne City Mission is one of Victoria's oldest and largest community services organisations (established 1854). Our mission is to work alongside people and communities who are marginalised, to support them to develop pathways to inclusion and participation. In particular, our programs and services enable people to forge and sustain positive and meaningful connections to family, community, school and work. These programs and services include early childhood development, family support, homelessness services, disability services, employment, education and training, justice services, and palliative care.

Whilst Melbourne City Mission's services include crisis/tertiary responses and our work spans all ages and life stages, we have a strategic focus on prevention and early intervention and a significant child and youth services platform. Some of our 'flagship' programs and services for young people include:

Frontyard Integrated Youth Services – Melbourne's largest early intervention and crisis service for young people who need support to get 'back on track'. It comprises a collection of independent community service organisations working together to achieve agreed outcomes for young people in Melbourne's CBD. These services all have a strategic focus on young people who are at risk of (or in the early stages of) homelessness, early school leaving, or have other risk factors for long-term disadvantage.   Victoria's specialist youth homelessness access point is located at Frontyard, as is the State-wide Leaving Care Hotline and the Transition to Independent Living Allowance service for Victoria's care leavers, the Royal Children's Hospital Young People's Health Service, and YouthLaw.

The Melbourne Academy – delivering flexible education programs to some of the State's 'highest needs' learners, including young people who are experiencing homelessness, young women who are pregnant or parenting, and young people who have grown up in families characterised by inter-generational early school leaving and long-term unemployment. Most students have a two to three year gap in their education attendance history when they first present to the Academy. Specialist youth workers are located in the classroom, to support students and teachers to overcome barriers to engagement.   The curriculum enables young people to work towards the attainment of an accredited qualification (VCAL or VET certificate). The Melbourne Academy currently comprises eight classrooms at six different locations in metropolitan Melbourne, with 250 students enrolled in 2015 (making Melbourne City Mission one of the largest community providers of VCAL in the State). These classrooms are part of a broader education support platform, which includes programs such as Melbourne Academy Online, Connect Youth, Springboard and School Focused Youth Service (including tutoring and mentoring in schools).

 'Foyer Plus' - Melbourne City Mission is a leader in the development and delivery of 'foyer' models, in which young people aged 16-25 years, who are at risk of homelessness or are dislocated from mainstream supports, are provided with long-term supported housing, intensive casework support, and assistance to re-engage with education, employment and/or vocational training, as part of a pathway to independence. Melbourne City Mission currently operates three foyer models: the Precinct model located in North Fitzroy, the High Density model (Lion Garden located in the CBD and Ladder Hoddle Street located in Collingwood), and the Neighbourhood model (dispersed transitional properties located in Melbourne's inner south and north).

Three youth refuges (short-term crisis accommodation) – including the Western Region Accommodation Program ('WRAP'), Victoria's first 'Enhanced Refuge Model'. One of the 'value-adds' of the enhanced model is the employment of a Specialist Practitioner. This means that, as well as providing shelter and safety, WRAP has the enhanced capacity to address the reasons why the young person may have come to the refuge. Staff can work through complexities in a young person's life such as substance abuse or mental health issues. (In the traditional refuge model – which is focused on the immediate need for shelter – there is limited scope to unpack these issues in a meaningful way).

Melbourne City Mission recommendations

The following recommendations have been developed by Melbourne City Mission based on our analysis and synthesis of consultations with 192 young people. Additionally, Melbourne City Mission's 'Youth Action Group' (described in the body of this report) has developed two standalone position papers on mental health and employment, both of which include recommendations specific to their youth cohort. These position papers and specific recommendations are provided in Attachment 3 of this report.

Recommendation 1:

The design of the new Victorian Government Youth Policy Framework has proactively created opportunities for young people whose voices are not typically heard to have their say, and has set a high-water mark for policy and program design and implementation going forward. It is recommended that:

- The best-practice elements of this project – including government and community sector partnerships – are documented, shared across government and embedded going forward.

- The Victorian Government incorporates in its new Youth Policy Framework a strategy to ensure a systematic and sustained approach to co-design with young people, including actions that enable the participation of – and collaboration with – diverse groups of young people. Young people particularly highlighted that the design of public education campaigns (for example, around discrimination and bullying) and public health campaigns (for example, alcohol and other drugs use) need to be designed by young people for young people so that they do not perpetuate stigma or fear, accurately reflect where young people are at, and to ensure messaging will effectively resonate with diverse groups of young people.

Recommendation 2:

Young people highlighted the importance of education as a pathway to employment, but noted personal barriers and system barriers that complicate the trajectory. Melbourne City Mission is aware that the Education State agenda incorporates a focus on those students in the education system who experience significant disadvantage and are disengaging from education, including the LOOKOUT initiative for young people in Out of Home Care and the Navigator program for students who are disengaging. Running parallel to this, Melbourne City Mission recommends that:

- The Victorian Government **increases** the level of investment in school-based mentoring and other personal development and wellbeing programs that provide young people with the guidance and support they have told us they need to make a successful transition to training, higher education and/or employment (currently part of the School Focused Youth Service).

- The Victorian Government ensures that young people who wish to pursue education in alternate settings with accredited community education providers (such as Melbourne City Mission's Melbourne Academy program) can do so, by ensuring the Student Resource Package – currently the subject of the *Schools Funding Review* – is calculated, constructed and delivered in a way that reflects the true cost of delivering a flexible, high-support model.

Recommendation 3:

That the Victorian Government's Jobs Plan incorporates targeted strategies to address young people's concerns that:

- they have minimal support and guidance to access entry-level jobs
- there are limited structured pathways (not enough internships and apprenticeships)
- there are not enough jobs to go around.

Recommendation 4:

Young people identified mental health as the underpinning foundation that enables, or disables, their full participation in other life domains, such as employment and education. They highlighted that without this element of their wellbeing addressed, the ability to move through challenges and develop resilience are significantly lowered. Based on these insights, Melbourne City Mission recommends that:

- Mental health services remove practical barriers to access for young people who are substance affected, and work in non-judgemental, strengths-based ways with young people who use alcohol and drugs, consistent with a harm minimisation approach.

- Bullying, as a form of discrimination, is treated seriously as a factor contributing towards young people's mental wellbeing, and that education and support programs are provided in school settings and integrated with other programs, such as student wellbeing, respectful relationships and student leadership.

Recommendation 5:

Young people talked about the stress of finding and maintaining safe and affordable housing, and how this impacts all other aspects of their life, including mental health, education and employment. They identified housing as an area where they believe Government can have significant influence, and where they want Government to take action.

It is important that the Victorian Government's housing strategy does not see young people who need housing assistance as having a trajectory into lifelong public housing. Melbourne City Mission recommends that the Victorian Government's housing strategy grows the diversity and volume of affordable housing that can be accessed by young people:

- Through additional investment in youth foyers and other supported accommodation options that assist young people to successfully transition to adulthood. Many young people need housing to develop independent living skills, education and employment and address personal issues, but this requires assisted and supported accommodation for a period of up to three years, as distinct from the standard offerings.

- By removing barriers to accessing community housing. Options like community housing, where residents are encouraged to pursue employment and education outcomes, are not currently feasible for young people because of Government-imposed business modelling under which Housing Associations are required to operate. These business rules exclude young people due to their youth wages and level of youth benefits, which don't afford the same security as adults within the community housing sector.

Project context: Methodology/consultations

Melbourne City Mission proactively engaged young people whose voices are not typically heard in policy consultations (because they can be hard to reach and/or because traditional consultative processes present barriers to their participation) by meeting young people 'where they are at'.

How we are 'meeting young people where they are at'

- In consultation with Melbourne City Mission senior managers and frontline workers, project staff:

  - **Identified youth-specific programs and sites** across Melbourne City Mission
  - **Attended scheduled activities** (for example, Melbourne Academy classes and Youth Action Group meetings) **and spent time in shared spaces** (such as the Frontyard waiting room), where they proactively engaged young people in the consultation process, using engagement strategies and consultation methods tailored to distinct cohorts, as described further below and summarised in the table provided in Attachment 1, page 29 of this report.

    In some instances – particularly accommodation programs – frontline staff identified that it was more appropriate for specialist youth workers to lead the engagement with young people and, using materials provided by the project team, took responsibility for supporting young people to provide feedback through the survey tool and/or group discussions.

  This activity – captured in the table in Attachment 1 at the end of this report – was supported by:

  - An **internal communications strategy** designed to generate high levels of 'buy-in'/support from Melbourne City Mission's youth services staff, who have an integral role in providing the project team with access to young people. This strategy identified key decision-makers, opinion influencers and enablers, and targeted information accordingly (including client safeguards/protections, such as consent processes). Importantly, it was structured as a two-way communications strategy with feedback mechanisms. This enabled the project team to test its proposed engagement methods with frontline staff and refine tactics where needed, before the consultation schedule was implemented.

  - **Tailored communications to young people,** to aid participant recruitment, including :

    - The development and distribution of a **plain English information 'flyer'** about the consultation project
    - The development and distribution of a **consent form** that explained why we were collecting information and how it would be used and shared.

    *As described above, these two pieces of printed collateral were supported by **one-on-one verbal communication** (in person and over the phone) between Melbourne City Mission staff and individual youth participants, as well as **presentations/interactive conversations** with groups of young people (e.g. the Frontyard Youth Action Group and North Fitzroy Melbourne Academy classroom).*

- **The project incorporated targeted capacity building activities that empowered young people to design and lead aspects of the engagement and consultation process** – for example:

  o A young Melbourne City Mission staff member (Policy and Strategic Projects Officer Morgan Cataldo) was assigned the project management role, with oversight from the Head of Policy, Advocacy and Government Relations, Deborah Fewster. Morgan coordinated a team of staff from across the organisation who assisted young people to engage in consultation activity. Many of these staff were young youth workers. Morgan led a number of consultations and, during the project, also mentored and supervised a youth work student volunteer, Caitlin Nash, who specifically focused on engagement of young people at Frontyard and data collation and analysis.

  o The Frontyard 'Youth Action Group' members identified that they wanted to complete the survey as individuals, but also collaborate as a group on some short position papers to incorporate in Melbourne City Mission's final report. The group identified the need for training around policy development and submission writing. A training workshop was held on 22 September, which concluded with the group prioritising their top issues, determining which topics they would write a position paper on, and agreeing on the structure of their position papers and the developmental process.

- **Melbourne City Mission created diverse ways for young people to share their views, rather than a 'one size fits all' model.** The following consultation tools were used:

  o A short survey, based on the Office for Youth template. The survey was targeted at young people who are time poor (e.g. those Melbourne Academy students who were in the midst of completing assessments) and those unable to sustain longer engagement due to competing demands and/or the complexity of their circumstances (e.g. young people attending the homelessness access point at Frontyard).

  o One-on-one interviews, using the Office for Youth survey questions as the basis for conversation and data collation. Interviews were conducted by project staff in person or over the phone, depending on each participant's preference. The interviews were particularly targeted at young people receiving Melbourne City Mission supports in the community, as distinct from accessing support at specific MCM sites.

  o Group consultations, comprising a short presentation, interactive discussion, followed by young people individually completing the survey tool. These were particularly targeted at non-crisis accommodation facilities (such as youth foyers and the lead tenant program CIAO), as well as programs where young people regularly convene as an identified group (such as the 'Youth Action Group' and those Melbourne Academy classrooms where teachers and students had capacity to convene a group discussion at this time of the year).

- **Valuing young people's time.** Melbourne City Mission has a long-standing policy of recognising and thanking clients for participation in media interviews, speaking engagements at events, and other forms of policy and advocacy. Consistent with our policies and procedures, all young people participating in Melbourne City Mission's consultations received $20 gift cards in appreciation of their time.

Table 1: Demographic information

Total # Young People	Age Range	Gender	Cultural Identity	Location	Sexual Identity	Disability	LOTE	Studying	International Student	Employment	Government Assistance	Government Areas
192	12 – 14 years old: 8 15 – 19 years old: 84 20 – 24 years old: 100	Female: 103 Male: 88 Other: 1	Australian born: 153 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander: 17 Overseas born: 39	Rural / Regional: 25 Metro: 167	Lesbian: 4 Gay: 4 Bisexual: 15 Pansexual: 7 Queer: 1 Straight: 148 Other: 2 *Asexual* Prefer Not to Say: 11	Yes: 39 No: 153	Yes: 44 No: 148	Yes, at school: 25 Yes, at university: 15 Yes, at TAFE or technical school: 15 Yes, through VCAL: 32 Yes, at an English Language school: 2 Yes, Other: 11 No: 92	Yes: 2 No: 190	Yes, Full-Time: 3 Yes, Part-Time: 17 Yes, Casual / Contract / Freelance: 17 No, But Looking: 113 No, Not Looking: 36 Other: 6	Yes: 170 No: 22	Input into Policies & Programs: 85 Participate in Advisory Groups: 40 Work with Community Organisations: 86 Take Actions with Friends / Community / School: 57 Other: 11

* As per the project methodology, we undertook a number of group consultations which comprised a short presentation and interactive (facilitated) discussion, following which young people individually completed the survey tool. Data from these group consultations has been aggregated with all the other completed surveys in the table above.

* Government Areas: young people chose multiple answers for this question.

Suburbs:

Altona North; Ardeer; Avondale Heights; Balaclava; Ballan; Bentleigh; Braybrook; Brighton; Brighton East; Bulleen; Bundoora; Burwood; Carlton; Carnegie; Carrum Downs; Caulfield North; Caulfield South; CBD; Clarinda; Clayton; Clifton Hill; Coburg; Collingwood; '**Couch Surfing'**; Dandenong; Derrimut; Dingley Village; Doreen; Eltham; Elwood; Epping; Footscray; Frankston; Frankston North; Frankston South; Glenroy; Hastings; Hawthorn; Highton; **'Homeless'**; Hoppers Crossing; Horsham; Ivanhoe East; Kealba; Keilor Park; Kingsville; Knox; Laverton; Melton; Melton South; Middle Park; Mill Park; Montrose; Mount Waverley; Newport; Northcote; North Fitzroy; North Melbourne; Nunawading; Parkville; Pearcedale; Point Cook; Port Melbourne; Preston; Reservoir; Richmond; Rosanna; Rosebud; Sale; Seaford; Shepparton; Southbank; South Melbourne; South Yarra; St Albans; St Kilda; St Kilda East; Sunbury; Sunshine; Sunshine North; Sunshine West; Tarneit; Thomastown; Thornbury; Werribee; Whittlesea; Wyndhamvale.

Languages other than English:

Amharic; Arabic; Bosnian; Cantonese; Chinese; Creole; Dinka; French; Greek; Hakka; Hindi; Indonesian; Italian; Japanese; Kirundi; Korean; Macedonian; Mandarin; Mandingo; Maori; Russian; Serbian; Somali; Spanish; Swahili; Tamil; Turkish; Vietnamese.

Employment 'other':

- Apprenticeship
- Medical injury
- Placement; Studying
- Yes, without pays

Government Areas 'other':

- Benefits
- Parliamentary seat for homeless representation – for consumer with lived in experience
- National Recognition
- Social Media

Consultation outcomes: key findings

Key findings: What is important to young people?

The **top three priority areas**
- Number one priority issue – Education
- Number two priority issue – Mental Health
- Number three priority issue – Employment.

Interestingly, young people distinguished between the **issues most important to them** and the **priority areas for State Government action**.

The top three issues that young people wanted to see **Government take action on** were:

- Number one area for action – Employment
- Number two area for action – Housing
- Number three area for action – Mental Health.

In identifying priority issues and areas for action, young people consistently noted the intersectionality of issues, in particular the inter-relationship between education and employment, as well as substance use and mental health.

Themes and trends

The following section details what young people told us about:

- their priority issues and areas for Government action
- other issues identified in the Office for Youth survey

EDUCATION

Young people told Melbourne City Mission:

- **That without an education, opportunities are limited for young people**

  "Because without education you can't get a job, and most children don't have motivation to come to school for whatever reason, but education is really important."

  "Having a good education guarantees a better future, and suitable pathways."

  "It is very hard to get jobs without an education."

  "Without education I can't move forward. It is a key in my life. I need it to succeed in life."

  "Better education means a better life and independence."

  "Knowledge is power."

  "I think that education is important for young people because you can't really do anything without a good education."

"Because it is the foundation of skills that will be used throughout life, through employment and further education."

"Education is important. School helps you to become independent, work experience teaches you how to act in the workplace, deal with situations."

"Education is kind of the base for your future, and the better calibre of students we're producing, the better our future as a state, nation and world will be."

"Everyone has a right to learn so they can get a good job."

"You need an education to actually get somewhere in life."

"The type of education a person has helps them throughout their entire life."

- **That some young people miss out on an education due to mental health, drug & alcohol, homelessness and other issues**

"A lot of youth miss out on education due to mental health and alcohol plus drug issues. I think if more work was put into concentrating on the problem, they would find it easier to solve."

"Youth are faced with many problems with drug & alcohol, which affect schooling (education) working and mental health. I think these issues are to be dealt with ASAP."

"Kids need to be educated life outside of school. School can be stressful and put a lot of pressure on them."

"We, as young people in this modern age, are pressured into the highest level of standards, people who had experienced homelessness in the last 10 years reported levels of educational attainment, after standardising for age, of adults who had been homeless, one third (33%) had not gone beyond year 10 at school or obtained a non-school qualification above a Cert. II level, compared with 23% of those who had never been homeless. Having been homeless is associated with a lower likelihood of having obtained a bachelor degree of higher (17% compared with 24% of those who had never been homeless). The Australian Bureau of Statistics has proved that young disadvantaged people are left behind. Modern western culture arguably fails to meet the most fundamental requirements of our culture, to provide a sense of belonging and purpose, and so a sense of meaning and self-worth."

- **That the mainstream school system is not working for all young people – for some, traditional education models are acting as a deterrent away from education**

"Because we lack the motivation to do so (go to school). Mainstream schools are something kids don't want to wake up to."

"I wanted mainstream, but they didn't want me."

"Building better schools for children. Have more courses that are hands on, instead of just studies."

"Everyone by law has to attend school. Everyone has the right to enjoy school and feel that their school is providing them with everything that they need and their teachers are supportive of their choices. I think students should have more of a say in the school rules because at the moment schools are having a huge crackdown on uniforms and in my opinion the uniform doesn't have anything to do with the education. There also needs to be more classroom helpers for the students who need extra help or have learning difficulties."

"I think that young people should be more encouraged to pursue further education, whether it be TAFE or university."

"I believe everyone deserves a chance to complete secondary college or any other type of education. There are so many young people, like myself, who never had the opportunity to complete year 12 because we were left on the back bench of life, being homeless didn't stop me from studying."

"Most young people would rather go through TAFE / training mostly because there are so many more pathways to choose from and it could also lead to a full-time apprenticeship / traineeship early on in life."

- **That the cost of education is unaffordable for young people and acts as a barrier to learning**

"Issues with underprivileged youths who wish to study interstate to get into their desired course and come out with a career they want. Due to financial limits, insufficient government support in this area, many youths would have to give up this opportunity".

"Stemming the rising cost of tertiary education."

"If the government raises HECS/fee help fees it will discourage people from further study."

"Bring in certificate courses for free or minimal cost at high school level to make youth more employable."

- **That the education system is in need of reform**

"Schools in Victoria are not up to date."

"Young people need help getting the education they need to pursue the career they want. Young people need some guidance when looking for jobs they want or further education to get the career they want."

"With employment and education I think that it is important that there is more support for youth transitioning from high school to employment, rather than having to face the real world on their own without any experience."

"Work more collaboratively with the universities! Make placements and networking with people in the industry mandatory for ALL courses. There is no point encouraging students to go to university for a successful future when they aren't guaranteed work afterwards despite their grades or work ethic."

"It's a very competitive job market and all young people need to be educated at an earlier age (I think around grade 10, when they are selecting VCE subjects/apprentices etc.) about the principles behind obtaining work and networking, that nothing is guaranteed, just more realistic information about tertiary education and job opportunities."

"Raise awareness, provide appropriate/more services and support to schools, young people and those surrounding them → national campaign."

"Sex education needs to drastically change and adopt a similar curriculum to certain European curriculums. Sex education needs to go beyond contraception & pregnancy and discuss deeper issues."

"Young people need to be educated on issues beyond traditional subjects, so that they may be adequately equipped to face a rapidly changing and globalizing society. Australia is becoming dangerously individualistic and hedonistic, where people are increasingly letting go of desirable morals and virtues such as patience, self-control, selflessness, etc. The distinction between pleasure and happiness is becoming increasingly blurred, which may be considered as the root cause of many mental health issues. The endless pursuit of momentary pleasure leaves people dissatisfied and wanting more: people in Australia are so rich yet so unfulfilled.

Education should incorporate the following topics:

- o *Dealing with (and diagnosing) mental health (of self and peers)*
- o *What it means to be a responsible citizen (in a local and global/online community)*
- o *Use of social media*
- o *Promoting and fostering desirable morals and virtues*
- o *Dangers of pornography, drug abuse, alcoholism (how to have self-control)*
- o *Practical life skills such as:*
    - ▪ *How to vote responsibly*
    - ▪ *How to avoid online scams*
    - ▪ *How to find a job*
    - ▪ *Consumerism and wastage*
    - ▪ *Environmental/social conscience"*

"Realistically, I believe that society has already moved too much towards the wrong direction, and that the society we are creating for future generations is one that we will regret. Education must improve, and people/youths must learn to learn to think for themselves."

MENTAL HEALTH

Young people told Melbourne City Mission:

- **That mental health is the underpinning foundation for being able to live a healthy & happy life**

  "They are all going along-side each other, but mental health is the most important. Focusing on mental health will help with the other issues."

  "I believe that mental health is the main issue and that it's the people and environment that you are around."

  "Without mental health, there is no point in even living. If people don't have sound mental health, then they won't be able to properly enjoy life, which would mean that even if they found their ideal career and/or got good results in schooling, they wouldn't be able to appreciate their achievements."

  "Mental health Affects every-day life."

- **That poor mental health is a barrier to attaining education, employment & other life goals**

  "Mental health can have the ability to stray from studying, having friends, having work, etc."

  "Mental health, drugs and alcohol get in the way of education a lot so I think getting your mind/mental health in the right place should come first as it interferes a lot."

  "A lot of young people have a lot of psychological issues and suffer, even those without the means for help and in order to strive in life they need to not only understand mental health, but to overcome it."

  "I think that mental health issues can prevent youth from pursuing careers they really want and leave them feeling lost, leading to further issues."

  "If we can't find dull time work and/or a career to engage in, it can affect our mental health."

- **That more effective services are needed for young people accessing help for their mental health**

  "Support/help systems – when you go through a rough time, some people don't really know where to go or where help is, that by the time they find something somewhere, it's too late."

  *"Mental health issues tend to formulate in a person's youth, if not from circumstances, then from biological/chemical imbalance, so intercepting and dealing with symptoms as soon as they appear can result in transformative changes in a person's future life.
  One of the main things I believe is lacking in Victoria is in depth education and information on issues surrounding mental health. If someone feels isolated in their mental illness, possibly unaware of the fact they are suffering from an illness, their symptoms are likely to worsen. Similarly, if a friend or peer notices changes or symptoms in another person, knowledge of mental health symptoms could lead to directing that person to mental health services and facilities. I truly believe mental health is the most fickle and tedious issue to face on a personal, social and political level.*

Consequentially, it is hard to see positive short term results in changes made to mental health strategies, however with heightened awareness, progressive change in societal attitudes and transparent and collaborative mental health services, positive long term benefits are sure to ensue."

"More mental health/wellbeing education in state schools."

"In regards to mental health, I believe there should be more transparency and communication between services. This is essential for the person being treated as communication between services personalizes their treatment. I have heard horror stories about people that have accessed mental health services and have repeated themselves consistently which only worsens their symptoms and isolated them more."

- **That bullying & discrimination are strong factors in the breakdown of mental health**

"Provide more services or group programs to tackle bullying and other mental health issues."

"Being discriminated against by locals can affect you mentally, it can have a big impact on you."

"A lot of young people are stressed and bullied at school or home."

"Mental Health is a major issue at the moment. Lots of young people struggle with bullying or anxiety because of how much pressure is put on them at school."

"If people understood mental health, maybe they wouldn't bully so much."

- **That stigma is prohibiting young people accessing help for their mental health needs**

"People generally need a stable mind, a place to call home, and income to support that. With those three, the others can be accessed much easier. Mental health isn't as accepted or understood as it could be. The stigma from previous generations made it sound worse than it is."

"I think it (Mental Health) is an important issue as there is a lot of stigma surrounding mental health and schools need to educate young people and support them with this issue."

"There is still an overwhelming stereotype associated with mental health, and this leads to shame felt by the individual suffering with a mental illness.
Mental health issues, even when addressed, are done so in such a negative format that it is still reaffirming the sense that mental illnesses are bad and shameful. Mental illness should be treated like any other illness, and not shrugged off or disregarded simply because it is not a visible ailment. Mental illness is experienced by an overwhelming number of people, yet it is still poorly understood and inadequately handled."

"Mental health is the area of least support within our community and is a taboo topic of conversation. This also hinders youth progression when issues are not addressed earlier on."

"Mental health issues have such a detrimental effect on young people's lives. Also the negative stigma associated with mental issues prevents people from speaking up and they often suffer in silence."

"I think it is partially ingrained in our culture to ignore mental health issues and try to put them out of focus, for this reason I think it is an incredibly hard issue to tackle, nevertheless I feel it is the most important as it is evident that rates of depression, anxiety and suicide are on the rise."

"A lot of young people hide their mental health problems and don't get help. If it weren't for the refuge services I accessed, I wouldn't have gotten help or admitted I needed help. I've realised I needed a lot more help than I thought."

- **That mental health issues often drive drug & alcohol use**

"Start programs (more) that help mental health, drug and alcohol issues."

"I think Mental Health and Problems with alcohol and drugs are an important issue to tackle as there are often many underlying issues that need to be addressed and resolved. Furthermore, without properly addressing these issues and tending to them, it can have a lasting effect on a young person's decisions and life direction."

EMPLOYMENT

Young people told Melbourne City Mission:

- **That young people have minimal support and guidance to access entry-level jobs – there are limited structured 'pathways' (refer also to earlier comments under the heading 'Training')**

"It is incredibly hard to get a job, even as a young person. I'm not sure what can be done, but the way in which unemployment is currently handled by the government is horrible. It is a complete nightmare trying to move through that system. I feel incredibly lucky to have found myself a job."

"It is extremely daunting process to break through the many barriers that young people have to face when looking for employment. It is definitely an issue that demands attention as it is the key to the young person's future and to the shaping of their lives."

"Getting employment needs to be made simpler so people can support themselves."

"Have a singular source to advertise jobs instead of 500 million different JSA's and websites."

- **That there are not enough entry-level jobs for young people: demand for these jobs exceeds supply and employers require experience that new jobseekers do not have**

"There are more people than there are jobs and the inexperienced don't have a chance to get experience."

"It's hard to find work if you don't start working at a young age."

"Create more employment opportunities through more entry level jobs."

"The youth unemployment rate is the highest it has ever been and junior / entry level roles ask for 5 years of experience."

"This means that youth can't get full time work, have to volunteer in the industry to get experience and still don't possess the kind of experience and skill employers want. Then after obtaining a qualification, young people usually need to do even more study or start working in an industry completely different to what they were initially trained in because there is no help or transition from study into paid full time work."

"It is becoming increasingly hard to find employment as a teenager as everywhere wants "experience" – how am I expected to get a job to get experience when you want experience in the first place?"

"Employment is hard to gain when you are young and lack experience. People also don't treat you as seriously when you're young and believe your problems and issues aren't as important or as real as an adults'."

"Job availability is an important issue for me because any income is really low. Young people struggle a lot to get jobs in Australia, especially immigrants like me."

"Youth unemployment is so high. It is a huge struggle for most graduates to get full time work with no prior work experience which is mandatory for most jobs. There are lots of young people with either university degrees or TAFE diplomas with qualifications that can't get jobs because they are considered too inexperienced and a risk for employers."

"We need experience & no-one is hiring me because I lack experience, but no-one will give me the experience I need in the first place. They don't give me the chance because I have a child and don't think I'll turn up."

"Develop policies where the employer benefits from hiring more young people, e.g. tax cuts."

- **That young people identify that their challenging experiences in the labour market are affecting themselves and their peers in profound ways, including adverse impacts on mental health, access to housing, future career progression and other life opportunities**

"No job, no life."

"There is a big epidemic with the rising unemployment rate. This contributes to young people's state of mind (mental health)."

"People aren't getting employed which means they aren't getting income which is causing them to lose housing, because of this people are turning to crime."

"If young people don't get a job while they're young it will be a lot harder for them in the future."

"Young people need work experience to better themselves and have skills. Also, to have income. Working is a must and to find a job is hard. You have to give 100% effort [so there is no time for anything else in your life]*, and that's why it's an issue for young people."*

"High living expenses drive young people to make desperate decision, reducing quality of life, e.g. taking a job for the wage rather than the work itself."

- **That many young people with higher education are not finding jobs in their field of study or expertise**

"There is very little in the way of worthwhile employment available, with only low level casual positions seeming to be available."

"More people than ever are studying at university/TAFE, but there are fundamental flaws in the entry level job system that need to be addressed – as in there are so many fewer graduate jobs than there are graduates. This leads to unpaid internships that lead to exploitation etc. Fix this. "Young people are then often forced onto Newstart, which is a farce that feeds on vulnerable people. Provide businesses with incentives to employ graduates and watch the unemployment rate drop. Make Centrelink less demeaning. Feeling worthless leads to poor mental health that contributes to other health concerns."

HOUSING

Young people told Melbourne City Mission:

- **That there are insufficient housing options & services available for at-risk young people**

"Because youth shouldn't be stuck homeless, and finding a suitable house is hard due to pricing and availability to them."

"Homelessness services need to be drastically increased".

"If more services were provided for young people who legitimately needed financial/housing options who were under 16, the options should be there, even if an assessment needs to be conducted."

"I think housing is an important issue because artificial inflation has made it almost impossible to stay off the streets as a young person without support from someone such as a parent or partner."

"Removing negative gearing and the build-up of high density residences without proper checks and balances. Trying to keep rent affordable (it is not affordable right now)."

"Young kids should have a helping hand with finding houses."

"There needs to be more help for people who need housing. More opportunities for people with children who need housing."

"More housing whether it be private rental or transitional."

"It would make life a lot easier if there was more housing options for everyone, but I believe all refuge youth workers try their very best to find suitable living options for each individual homeless person struggling on their own!"

- **That there is insufficient funding for housing**

  "Build more community houses for homeless people."

  "One of the suggestions the government could do to tackle the issue is to increase funding for housing, in building refuges or providing more locations with beds for young people. Another suggestion is for the government to do is to raise awareness of the seriousness of homelessness amongst young people. Furthermore, policy changes such as making the system more fluid or less rigid for young people to access housing would be helpful as well."

  "More funding to go towards places like Launch Housing who provide hotel vouchers. If they were funded more money there would be more options for more accommodation!"

- **That the process to find housing is extremely difficult, especially for young people experiencing homelessness**

  "Housing should be easier to get, especially when homeless."

  "Finding information on how to get into private rental is needed (paying bills, what to expect, what services you need to know about, paying rent or applying for loans / mortgages)."

- **That there is a link between homelessness and family breakdown**

  "Young teenagers are in need of stable accommodation because of family breakdown, drug/alcohol abuse, etc."

  "Family breakdowns are more common than I personally thought. Being homeless and overcoming getting and holding a full-time job with age being a huge factor is hard. Most hostels won't help young people under 16, and, when DHS doesn't help, as is common, there are minimal flexible places for young people."

  "Have funding/payments for under 16 years. Have an array of housing options. Should give more support for people undergoing family breakdown."

- **That there is a link between homelessness and drug & alcohol use**

  "Young teenagers are in need of stable accommodation because of family breakdown, drug/alcohol abuse, etc."

- **That stable housing affects young people's resilience & mental health**

"You need stable accommodation to maintain a healthy life."

"Not having a house is really stressful so provide more housing for young people."

"Housing has been the most difficult one for me as a young person."

"Housing is important to me because being able to keep a roof over my head can be difficult. A home is a place you can de-stress, study, be social etc.
Money causes stress and if a person is unable to afford a place to live, it can elevate those stress levels, which in turn can cause other problems such as mental, physical and social issues."

- **That homelessness affects capacity to engage with education & employment**

"If they do not have a secure and safe place to sleep or come to, they cannot continue to study because they won't have access to do homework or study, which will affect their employment skills. The jobs they try to get will not be secure or full time."

"Youths who don't have a stable career may be hindered due to the high rent fees for housing. Those who are studying won't have as much time to focus on education if they are to maintain a job on the side to pay for housing."

TRAINING

Young people told Melbourne City Mission:

- **That young people are in need of higher-quality internship and apprenticeship programs**

"We need a Government-based internship program for graduates coming out of University who didn't get with the big companies."

"Bring back apprentice reimbursement and take-away trade loans."

"Force employers to run more apprenticeship and training programs."

The potential automation of certain industries that may erode entry level positions in the future."

- **That young people require further training on the process of gaining employment**

"More training information in regards to what to expect in terms of number of job opportunities in study field, how to apply for jobs & resume, cover letter & interviews, & making it compulsory. Giving young people greater exposure and guidance of opportunities available. Encouraging through incentives, some way for business to take on and train more young people, giving them more valuable experience. Give students a more informed decision before they enter into further expensive tertiary education."

"Prepare kids more on life outside of school like taxes, housing & bills. Also help guide them in finding further education needed for the job they want, any apprenticeships available and so on."

"More accessible training for job experience."

ALCOHOL & DRUGS

- **That the promotion of an alcohol bingeing culture impacts the choices young people make**

"De-promotion of alcohol consumption and restrictions on advertising, similar to cigarette marketing."

- **That other issues act as a precursor to young people's drug use**

"If I didn't have employment, housing or transport issues; I wouldn't have drug issues."

- **That young people want to be educated about the risks of long term drug & alcohol abuse**

"There needs to be more proactive seminars in schools, especially with the younger age groups about discouraging binge drinking and drugs. Social pressures and norms will often outweigh people's pre-conceived notions of alcohol & drug abuse."

"If you have a serious drug problem, it's frightening and can affects all walks of life. What's more frightening is not knowing how to fix it."

"If people understood long-term drug abuse, maybe they would re-think their decision."

- **That the 'war on drugs' messaging acts as a barrier to preventative education and more informed choices when it comes to health, wellbeing and substance use**

"In terms of the issue surrounding drug and alcohol addiction, I feel the government is out of touch with how to reach out to people that are suffering. The government on both a federal and state level tends to impose scare tactics and pour funding into campaigns that go unnoticed by those suffering addiction. These ads and campaigns tend to make drug takers the 'Other' in society, further isolating and de-humanizing them. Furthermore, I can tell you from my experience with youth culture, that no person addicted to drugs notices these campaigns, let alone is deterred by them. What these campaigns do is further instil fear within society and reduce the compassion and empathy for those suffering addiction. The government funding poured into these campaigns would be better spent on support and rehabilitation centres to actually help these people face their problems and pave their way forward to sobriety."

"Legalising drug use and implementing / funding drug education."

DISCRIMINATION

- **That stereotyping is harmful**

  "I think that judging people for tattoos and piercings, and for wearing makeup isn't fair and should be fixed in schools and employment places."

  "Racism is hurtful. We are all equal."

  "Because there is a lot of disconnect between certain groups of people. A lot of people acting out of hate and ignorance. It is a major problem in our society today."

- **That discrimination affects young people's mental health**

  "There is an overwhelming stereotype surrounding young people in our community, which sometimes makes it very difficult to pursue any activity without fear of being judged or treated poorly simply because society is fed the twisted ideas and perceptions. There needs to be something that will highlight that sometimes young people are the way they are for a reason, and not just because they're in a 'rebellious, hormonal state'."

- **That the LGBT community is particularly discriminated against**

  "Bullying and alienation of LGBT young people. I believe it is not being looked at."

  "I believe advocacy and equality for the LGBT community is essential to the moral foundation of our society, however I am aware a lot of legal changes to support this notion work at a federal level. Although at a community level, I believe it is essential to have services to support the discrimination of these people or any and all problems this community is battling."

- **That discrimination leads to bullying**

  "Discrimination against people with Disability."

  "Discrimination leads to bullying and can be hurtful and lead to unfair treatment."

  "Bullying is not right."

- **That young people envision a society free of judgement and are open to being challenged and educated about discrimination and bullying.**

  "I care about fairness and equality."

  "I think young people should think of each other as equals."

  "I feel as if judgmental and outdated views regarding sexuality, disability, race & religion are still prevalent. Disturbingly, discrimination is increasing in my generation."

"With discrimination, mental health, gender diversity; [we should] have talks, programs in schools for more acknowledgement."

TRANSPORT

- **That young people find the public transport system unaffordable**

"Transport costs more than it should."

"It costs so much and always takes so long to get somewhere."

"Make transport cheaper."

"Our transport system sets you up to fail."

"[I travel from Sunbury] and I always seem to stress over my Myki because the money goes down so quickly."

Key findings: Draft vision

As noted in our Interim Report, we did not ask young people to comment on the proposed vision of the strategy after workshopping this question with key frontline staff during project planning. Consistent with our focus on 'meeting young people where they are at', our consultations were focused on those consultation questions that were most tangible and accessible for young people we are working with.

Consequently, our consultations focused on capturing the lived experience of youth cohorts accessing Melbourne City Mission programs and services, their priority issues and concerns, individual goals and aspirations, and specific supports they need to work towards their desired future, rather than the overarching vision of the new youth policy framework.

Key findings: Objectives

All of the feedback obtained from our consultations completely aligned with the draft objectives proposed by the Office for Youth:

- For example, in relation to *'Have the opportunity to participate in education, training and employment to secure their economic future'* and *'Are given a fair go no matter their ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability, health, religion, mental health status or whether they live in a rural or regional location'*, young people told us:

  "It is becoming increasingly hard to find employment as a teenager as everywhere wants "experience". Like, how am I expected to get a job to get experience, when you want experience in the first place?"

  "All I want is to work in a job I enjoy, live in a nice place that doesn't zap all my money and marry the person I love. Get on board."

- For example, in relation to *'feel a sense of belonging, safety and connection with their families, culture, local communities and civic society'*, young people said:

  "It's important that young people realise the importance of friendships and relationships and how to keep them."

- For example, in relation to *'Young people are heard'*, young people said:

  "Have belief and trust that young people have constructive views about moving forward."

- For example, in relation to *'Are supported to address emerging challenges'*, young people said:

  "There needs to be something that will highlight that sometimes young people are the way they are for a reason, and not just because they're in a 'rebellious, hormonal state'."

Key findings: Actions for the new whole-of-government youth policy

Melbourne City Mission's recommendations, provided earlier in this report, are drawn from our analysis of qualitative data from our consultations with young people. Following is a selection of specific asks and ideas as expressed by young people in their own words. These should be read in conjunction with the key themes captured on pages 10 – 23 of this report.

Strengthening education and employment pathways:

- *"Force employers to run more apprenticeship and training programs."*

- *"Create more employment opportunities through more entry-level jobs."*

- *"Build better schools for children. Have more courses that are hands on, instead of just studies."*

- *"Work more collaboratively with the universities! Make placements and networking with people in the industry mandatory for ALL courses. There is no point encouraging students to go to university for a successful future when they aren't guaranteed work afterwards despite their grades or work ethic. It's a very competitive job market and all young people need to be educated at an earlier age (I think around grade 10, when they are selecting VCE subjects/apprenticeships etc.) about the principles behind obtaining work and networking, that nothing is guaranteed, just more realistic information about tertiary education and job opportunities."*

- *"Prepare kids more on life outside of school, like taxes, housing and bills. Also help guide them in finding further education needed for the job they want, any apprenticeships available and so on."*

- *"I think young people need more guidance and respect. We don't get a lot of credit for doing the same things as an adult. We're still growing and developing, and we need more support from the government, authority figures and adults in this period of our lives."*

Mental health and substance use:

- *"School can be stressful and put a lot of pressure on kids. Their mental health is important and we need to take care of any mental health issues they may have."*

- *"In this society we need to cooperate with police and communities to overcome alcohol and drug addictions and activities because they are affecting us in so many ways."*

Housing:

- *"One of the suggestions the government could do to tackle the issue is to increase funding for housing, in building refuges or providing more locations with beds for young people. Another suggestion is for the government to do is to raise awareness of the seriousness of homelessness amongst young people. Furthermore, policy changes such as making the system more fluid or less rigid for young people to access housing would be helpful as well."*

- *"Build more community houses for homeless people."*

Public transport:

- *"Improving public transport and usable bike paths throughout Melbourne would vastly improve the lives of young people."*

- *"Transport costs more than it should."*

Federal issues:

- *"Also, though it is a federal issue, get on with same sex marriage (I know the state government supports this)."*

- *"The Centrelink service that is made to help struggling youth whose workers make people run around the same steps repeatedly and the website is confusing."*

Key findings: Existing Government youth-related policies and programs and service provision for young people

Young people generally reflected that they do not see the State Government's role connected directly with program delivery – rather, they believe:

- The Government's role is to support service providers (for example, through funding), rather than being a provider in and of itself.

- The Government has a key role to play in overall messaging and advocacy for the young people of Victoria.

Young people consistently expressed dissatisfaction with Government's role in advocating for them, including disappointment about a lack of positive messaging about young people's roles in the community (several relevant quotes are provided in the section immediately below).

Key findings: The potential for co-design of Victorian policies and programs affecting young people

There was a high level of enthusiasm amongst young people wanting to work alongside the State Government to ensure their voices and experiences contribute to government policies and practices. There was a view that existing mechanisms, such as Youth Parliament, only seem to capture "mainstream" young people, particularly those aspiring to traditional professions such as law. In relation to co-design, young people said:

- *"Ask for my help!"*

- *"I think the government needs to actually listen to young people's ideas because we only offer ideas to improve our country and make sure that everyone is living a healthy and happy life."*

- *"I think the government should be more actively communicating with the groups or minorities they are making decisions for, through surveys, votes and employment."*

- *"Be realistic and listen fully to what people have to say. Change the language around young people and lift the stereotypes surrounding all issues, that way discrimination is minimised and everyone would feel more included and less intimidated, therefore actions and initiatives will be taken in greater stead and far more positively."*

- *"Have genuine input from young people that goes beyond the superficial. I'm sure Jenny Mikakos and her team would love to meet and consult with different groups of young people every week."*

- *"Discuss things with the community and young people, and propose – as well as accept – ideas to change these laws."*

- *"Government officials need to talk with young people at schools & refuges on a regular basis."*

However, a small number of young people were apathetic and one young person expressed the need for government to re-build trust with young people before entering into a conversation around co-design:

- *"The youth of Melbourne, now more than ever, lacks trust in the government, which has unfortunately resulted in a lack of care about what positive things happen within the government."*

Conclusion

Throughout September and October 2015, Melbourne City Mission engaged 192 young people accessing supports across our broad service platform, including homelessness support, education re-engagement, employment services, and disability support.

These cohorts of young people are working to forge pathways to social and economic inclusion and participation against a backdrop of significant personal challenges and structural barriers. They are the types of young people who are typically 'studied' and are the targets of policies and government and community interventions that have been designed without their input and the rich perspectives that come with lived experience.

This project has highlighted the depth of insight that these young people have into their personal circumstances and those of their peers (despite the labels of 'disadvantaged' or 'disengaged' often ascribed to them). It has also highlighted their awareness of personal and system barriers, and their knowledge of solutions. As one young person told us: "Younger people know what they want for their generation."

It is Melbourne City Mission's view that the State Government's approach to the development of the new whole-of-government Youth Policy Framework – in which the Office for Youth commissioned organisations like Melbourne City Mission to run consultations with diverse cohorts of young people – has generated significant goodwill amongst young people whose voices are not traditionally heard.

Throughout the project, young people consistently expressed surprise that the Government wanted to hear from them and, once engaged, asked the project team what other opportunities they could have to work with Melbourne City Mission to have their say at the highest levels of policy development going forward. There is a significant appetite for co-design of policies and programs, and this is reflected in Melbourne City Mission's recommendations. We commend the State Government for this approach to the development of the new Youth Policy Framework, and believe that this project has established a 'high-water mark' for future youth-focused initiatives.

As noted earlier in the report, young people consistently noted the intersectionality of issues, in particular the inter-relationship between education and employment, as well as substance use and mental health. This affirms the State Government's intention to develop a whole-of-government policy framework that drives join-up and leverages investments in young people across all parts of government.

Melbourne City Mission looks forward to the next stages of this work.

Attachment 1: Engagement strategy and consultation schedule

This table sets out 'who' Melbourne City Mission consulted with, 'where', 'how', and provides the total number of young people engaged in the consultations.

Cohort ('who')	Place of engagement/program area ('where')	Consultation tool ('how')	Number of young people engaged
Young people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness	Frontyard – Melbourne Youth Support Services program (MYSS is Victoria's specialist youth homelessness access point)	Survey (with project and/or youth worker support)	34
	Reconnect homelessness early intervention program	One-on-one interviews and survey	8
	Detour homelessness early intervention program	Survey (with project and/or youth worker support)	29
	Melbourne City Mission youth refuges – Stopover (North Fitzroy) Vicky's Place (Rosanna) Western Region Accommodation Program (Sunshine)	Survey (with project and/or youth worker support)	14
	Youth foyers – Lion Garden (CBD) Step Ahead (North Fitzroy)	House meetings + Survey (with project and/or youth worker support)	2

	Finding Solutions	Survey (with project and/or youth worker support)	1
Young people transitioning from the Out of Home Care system	Frontyard – Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA) service	Survey	3
	Community Integration and Accommodation Options (CIAO) program	Survey	1
	Springboard	Survey	2
Young people who have justice system involvement	Frontyard – YouthLaw	Survey	Captured via Frontyard intake
Young women who are pregnant and/or parenting	Young and Pregnant Parenting Program (YAPP)	Interviews	Case worker on leave for entirety of project
	Cradle to Kinder	Phone interview/long-form case study	1 (Jasmine's Case Study)
	Melbourne Academy: Maribyrnong young mothers' classroom	Classroom activity/workshop (poster making) + survey	5

Cohort ('who')	Place of engagement/program area ('where')	Consultation tool ('how')	Number of young people engaged
Early school leavers/'disengaged learners' who are re-engaging in education	Melbourne Academy classrooms	Varied across class rooms, depending on student workload/end-of-year assessment deadlines. Some group discussions and some individual student engagement, via survey tool.	19
	Connect Youth	Surveys, as part of a learning activity	4
	MA Online	Survey	1
Disadvantaged jobseekers	Job Active and Work for the Dole participants	Combination of one-on-one conversations and small group discussions, with young people then individually completing survey	54
Young people who have a sibling with a disability or chronic health condition	Siblings Support program	Email & phone communication + survey	4
Young people with disabilities	ABI program	Phone interview/long-form case study	1 (Leigh's Case Study)

Cohort ('who')	Place of engagement/program area ('where')	Consultation tool ('how')	Number of young people engaged
Youth Action Group	Frontyard	Individual engagement via survey tool, plus policy development and submission writing workshops – the group also produced two short position papers on priority issues they identified.	10

Attachment 2: Case studies – examples from long-form interviews with young people

Leigh

I want to tell the Government to keep an open mind about disability.

I'm 19 years old. I don't look or sound like I've got a disability. My disability is an invisible disability – I have a brain injury. I've had surgeries in two countries. But when some older people find out I'm on a pension, I've had dirty looks. I've been told I'm rorting the system. I've been told I'm lying to people. So now I've hidden this.

My memory of my brain injury is very 'in and out'. It's only through getting told stories and going to doctor's appointments that I have been able to piece it together.

When I was 16, I was in Sweden on a holiday, when I had a brain haemorrhage (an 'AVM'). Once that happened, one of the things they did was to glue a blood vessel through a catheter. They more or less stuffed up. They glued the plastic casing of the catheter into my brain. When I woke up, they realised: "Crap, we've left something inside him". I suffered multiple acute strokes. When I came to in hospital, not only was I recovering from a brain haemorrhage, but from stroke. I couldn't walk. I couldn't talk. I couldn't eat – I had to be tube fed. I was in a Swedish hospital for a month. Then I was in Monash for two-and-a-half to three months.

Once I was out of hospital, I wasn't exactly as right as rain to hop back into class. Going back to school was an interesting time.

I know that if a person is really young or is not deemed to be in the right mental state, then the young person's guardians or parents need to make decisions. But when I went back to school and we were dealing with my health problems and decisions were being made about my classes, **I wanted to be involved in my own affairs.** I had extreme fatigue – I was absolutely knackered – but I was still trying to listen and understand. I knew I was unhealthy, but I thought: "If I can still hear and think and talk, then I want to be involved in discussions and decisions". I wanted to be right there for **all** of it. My doctors, and OT, and mother and father agreed – they said "we'll talk to you".

I needed a lot of help in my life. That was one of the biggest things for me.

Before I had my injury, I was always pushing myself to be more academic, but I never got there. When I suffered my injury, things went south. [Before the brain injury] I was not exactly being the highest IQ in the class. [But] afterwards, I was bottom of the class. From where I was before – and where I was now – it was a big shock.

I had always loved theatre, drama ... I'll do anything in front of a crowd! I love doing monologues. When I got back, I still wanted to do it. But – excuse the language, though I think it's appropriate in this situation! – I had to do a fuck-tonne of repetition to learn my lines. Even then, I would just barely remember it. For my drama exam, my teacher was really good. He suggested I do Charlie Chaplin, which is mime. I still had to remember the routine. But it was easier than having to remember lines. **It's important that people and services are very adaptable to people with disabilities.**

As I got near the end of high school, I wasn't doing VCE. I did work experience. No employer wanted to pay me full quid because of my disability. I'd only get paid $20 for an entire day's work, but I wanted to do something, and it was such a good feeling knowing that I could do this: that I could work, come home and not fall asleep straight away.

Not finishing high school makes me feel like shit. I look at myself and go: "I want to do so much more". But one of the things my OT has said to me is to focus on the achievements you're getting, not on what you still need to do.

I work an eight-hour shift one day a week, and do one day of study. I'm studying my Certificate 3 in Disability. A Certificate 4 was open to me, but because of the stage I'm at with my recovery, I need to do stuff that is the right level for me. My mind is ahead of my body at this stage. I decided to do something that is attainable. If I want to do the Certificate 4 at the end of the Certificate 3, then I can get a credit transfer.

I'm also going to be volunteering on a 'Heads Together' camp. 'Heads Together' gets people with acquired brain injury socialising again, networking. I was so blown away by how I was accepted straight away. I was looked at as 'normal' by everyone at Heads Together. It's where I met my girlfriend, Taylor.

I remember sitting in my room early on when I had the brain injury and I'd go onto Facebook and see everyone having so much fun. I'd be online – and I'd see the green dots showing my school friends were online too – but they wouldn't be talking to me. The fact that the Heads Together group has got a Facebook page, and all the kids get online talking ... as a young person with a disability, it makes you feel it's not just you.

My best friend – I love him to pieces – still looks at me like I'm no different, but because I didn't act the same way I did before the injury, some of my other school friends thought I was a weirdo.

Sometimes people feel bad and say "I haven't seen you or gone out with you. Let me make it up to you. I'll take you for a drink."

Drinking is a big issue. Society says 20 year olds are meant to drink lots, but take a person with a disability and drinking ... it doesn't take much for a person with a disability to be pretty far gone.

If I go somewhere I'll be expected to drink. I can have one or two drinks, but any more than that and I'll get really sick. Normally, I wake up with a headache because of my brain injury. Combine that with a hangover, and I'll be sick for two days.

People see that I'm sitting on one drink all night and they're like "Why aren't you drinking?" I'll go to parties where they're doing shots, and I know I can't do that. My throat can tolerate it, but I know that if I do it, I'll be cancelling things out later on [because of the headaches, sickness and fatigue].

Sometimes I **will** do shots. I'll prepare before the party, by drinking a litre of water, and I'll only do a few of them. Then I'll drink more water afterwards.
It's not just peer pressure, but the pressure I put on myself. I want to be normal and go with my friends and mates.
Being social makes me happy.

There's hardly anything [in terms of social activities] that are not alcohol-related, unless you have a disability like Down Syndrome or an intellectual disability and you go to a day activity centre and do more things like cooking activities. That's why Heads Together is so important to me.

Straight after my injury I could hardly remember anyone. I got told by my brother and certain people that I used to be very popular and have a lot of people as my friends.

Now, I can remember that I didn't strive to be popular, I strived to be known – which is something different. After my injury, I **was** known, but as the kid with a disability. Being that open [exposed], not by choice, was extremely hard. Everyone knew – or thought they knew – the details of what had happened to me. I have always been good with people and that helped me deal with the situation. But I had to learn to be sociable once again.

When I spoke to some students recently – for Heads Together – one thing I said to them was: "Look at the **person** you're dealing with, person to person, human to human. Don't just work off the disability – disability is just something you add to the equation".

Jasmine

I left school when I was 15 and I had been ushered from school to school. I had problems with lots of schools when I was younger. This impacted me heaps later on in life. I never finished year 12 and this impacted me in a huge way; in every way. I had a lot of family problems and experienced family breakdown – this affected my learning capabilities. This wasn't even looked at by the schools I was at though. I was never linked up with a school welfare officer or anything. **I was quiet and withdrawn and you sort of get forgotten about when you're like that.**

I just sort of went under the radar. My parents both identify as Muslim and I don't so that was also really difficult. **I wish I could go back and finish my education.** When you're already going through a tough time though, everything just gets worse. **You just try to get through each day.** I was looking for a job for quite a while before falling pregnant. I was with a job provider and they were really far out from where I lived and I didn't feel supported at all. There was no assistance with applying for jobs. I had pretty limited skills, so looking for work was really hard. The job I did get was hospitality and paid below minimum wage. It was awful. **I didn't know where to seek help about it or have someone advocate for me about my wages and the way I was treated there.**

As a young girl who was travelling on her own, I didn't feel safe and I even had a stalker at one stage. You have no idea who to contact or who to turn to, to get help. Like, you laugh about it with your friends but underneath, it's a really scary thing. I don't think there is enough awareness of who to contact. **When you are crippled with shame and embarrassment of the situation you're in, you don't want to have to look that hard for a service**. **Advocacy services need to be accessible and visible.** For example, why are there no posters on transport for young women who are being harassed? Is there a service out there for this? There are so many apps available these days, surely something can be developed.

Recommendations for change:

- Centralise online help! MyGov is difficult and unfriendly. You only have to sit in Centrelink to witness people's frustrations. **People need help to manoeuvre the system, not just told to go 'figure it out' and get punished when they can't.** It's like no-one wants to deal with the problem

- If the Government decides to work alongside young people, make it known and publicized on a large scale so that young people can get involved; don't just advertise to a select few groups

- With the current political climate**, I feel it's really important to speak up as a young person, so we need more opportunities to do so.**

Attachment 3: Youth Action Group (YAG) Position Papers

Mental Health

Background – about the Youth Action Group

We are a group of emerging young leaders (ages 18–25) who are passionate about raising the profile of young people in Melbourne. Our group, the YAG – which is supported by Melbourne City Mission through the State Government 'Engage!' initiative – works collaboratively with other young people over the course of one year to create and deliver two campaigns that champion the voice and accomplishments of Melbourne youth, and the issues that we care about.

We believe that young people are all **one step** away from making a life changing difference for themselves, and each other. We want to walk away from stereotypes and towards a fairer and more inclusive society for young people. We will do this by:

- Creating fairer futures
- Deconstructing stereotypes
- Bridging gaps
- Promoting inclusion
- Advocating for the issues affecting the young people in Melbourne

The overarching goals for the YAG are to foster Melbourne's next generation of civic leaders, create connections between diverse groups of young people, and make a difference in Melbourne.

As part of the Victorian Government's 'What's Important to YOUth' consultations, we were eager to put together a position paper on the topic of Mental Health, affirming our stance on this issue as one of the most important affecting young people in Victoria.

What's happening right now? [1]

More than ever, young Australians and Victorians are experiencing high levels of mental health distress.

- **One in four young Australians currently has a mental health condition**
  Breakdown: 26.4% of Australians aged 16 to 24 currently have experienced a mental health disorder in the last 12 months. This figure includes young people with a substance use disorder. This is equivalent to 750,000 young people today.

- **Suicide is the biggest killer of young Australians and accounts for the deaths of more young people than car accidents**
  Breakdown: 324 Australians (10.5 per 100,000) aged 15-24 dying by suicide in 2012. This compares to 198 (6.4 per 100,000) who died in car accidents (the second highest killer).

- **Concern about mental health among young people is growing**
  Breakdown: 15.2% identified mental health as a major issue facing Australia in 2013, up from 12.7% in 2012 and 10.7% in 2011.

- **A quarter of young Australians say they are unhappy with their lives**
  Breakdown: In 2013, almost one in four young people (24.3%) said they were sad, very sad or not happy when asked to report how happy they were with their life as a whole.

Young people's perspectives
As part of the youth consultations for 'What's Important to YOUth?' we dedicated one of our weekly meetings to brainstorm some of the more prominent issues linking young people and mental health.

We've themed the information into three distinct categories:

- Stigma
- Quality of life
- Community awareness, education & support services.

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[1] Beyond Blue, 'Stats & Facts' https://www.youthbeyondblue.com/footer/stats-and-facts

Stigma

Community stigma prevents us and our peers from seeking help, and gets in the way of being able to clearly identify and support our peers during times of crisis.

- *"Young people are not educated about this enough in schools. There is no specific emphasis on Mental Health or raising awareness in school. Mental Health is just as critical as First Aid. We learn about how to give CPR but we are not as equipped to deal with Mental Health First Aid. If we are educated to know the signs of when our friends are going through crises, we will know how to help each other. There will become a support network rather than young people not knowing where to go and seek help."*

- *"Mental health is important for motivation and how it links into 'wanting' to move forward in life, such as seeking employment. Not knowing where we are going in the world is scary. It changes how you wake up in the morning and think about the world. Some people wake up and don't feel a purpose in life. There are real reasons why this happens and why we are suffering. I think the term 'lazy' is ignorant."*

- **"***The stigma around suicide has to shift. My mum suicided almost 11 years ago and it's really impacted on me mentally and emotionally. Not really fitting in and not being able to concentrate really impacted me at school."*

Quality of Life

Our own personal stories and experiences highlight the impact of mental health and mental illness on our own, and our loved ones', quality of life.

- *"We understand that all aspects of life and society impact on us; body, mind, and spirit. In the same way that our physical health impacts the way we relate to society, so does the state of our mental health. This is a symbiotic relationship; society impacts on us, and we impact on society.
As a whole, society seems to be experiencing greater levels of stressors that impact upon the individual: family violence and the breakdown of the family unit, increasing unemployment rates and the difficulty breaking into the market, and the infiltration of social media into all aspects of life, social isolation, and disconnection from nature. All of these things are placing greater pressures upon the mental resilience and wellbeing of young people."*

- *"I don't think Mental Health as an issue is any more important than it's ever been, it's the amount of stress that is now placed on people as whole in society that's increased the need for help. The pressures we experience every day raises the stress on all of us.*

  There is a real reduction in kinship and community structures and I really believe this has impacted upon our mental health. Mental health is exactly like our physical health but we don't know how to deal with it. If we learn we've put on weight or eaten badly, we know how to deal with it. If we have episodes in life where we struggle with mental health, because of the stigma of being or looking 'crazy', we don't know how to deal with it effectively. This generation is moving away from compartmentalisation and have more of a sensitivity about fluidness and questioning ineffective structures."

- *"It's hard for people with mental health issues to connect with people in general. The problem with a lot of community-based services is they are not treated as a person, they are treated as a subject. It comes back to that sense of isolation in the community. I feel like there's people with mental health issues and people without them and that's how we relate to each other. Almost like people who experience mental health issues seek solace with others experiencing them."*

- *"The rise of individualism where people have less compassion and less awareness of those around them is worrying. Our perception of life is so skewed by what we see online. We see the best in everyone's life and this creates false expectations. You then feel like something's wrong with you if you can't meet those standards. It's so superficial."*

Community Awareness, Education & Support Services

We think that community awareness and support for young people and their relationship with their own mental health is important. We identified sexual abuse, family breakdown, and a lack of education around mental health as issues that impact the overall wellbeing of young people.

- *"Sexual abuse happens a lot during the teenage years and this affects mental health in a really serious way."*

- *"I suffered with really serious depression and I found that there was a lot more support through the education department during high school but not at university. When I hit university, there was just no support. Although there are a lot of services at universities, young people sometimes don't know how to reach them. I remember going and visiting one and I was told 'come back next week, we're full today'. When you're contemplating suicide, you can't wait. I needed to see someone then and there. I think mental health is highly related to personality types.*

If you are introverted, it can be really hard for people to see that something is happening inside of you. Mental health is just as important as say, sex-education, for example. We don't live in a world where we need to learn about all this random stuff; the curriculum needs to adapt to reality."

- *"I've battled with anxiety and depression since I was small and my whole family history has dealt with many mental illnesses. I refused to take medication but I now do take medication and it's changed my entire life. I can now actually leave my house, for example. I think the clinical nature of psychiatry is highly stigmatised and the breakdown of services such as psychologists and psychiatrists. I really do believe that there are people that do better with medication but because of the stigma, it's looked at really badly. I think there is a combination between stress and anxiety and physical health. Physical symptoms can sometimes manifest when underneath there are mental health issues. There is such a need for love and connection and I think deep down, this is what everyone is yearning for. The medical testing for example, rate your happiness from 1 – 10, if I'm manic that's going to be different each day!"*

- *"Last year a friend of mine told me he was going through depression for a year and I didn't even realise it. He went through suicidal thoughts and was on medication and this was all new to me. I had a lot of compassion for him but I felt really helpless, I didn't know how to help him.*

    I think that education and awareness is really important. Sometimes, you feel crap for a few weeks and you don't know how long it's going to last. It would be helpful to know more about these things."

- *"Mental health has impacting my relationship with my mum, and it comes down to education. I only did a Mental Health First Aid course a month ago, and I was told that prevention is the answer. But, my mum is 60! I feel like it's too late now. I don't want to see my mum as a disease."*

- *"We need a shift in culture, it's not just a 'one-size-fits-all- approach. Each person is unique and they need to be treated that way. More supports needed for an individual approach."*

- *"Basic support is routine and clinical. There is not enough support out there, particularly when you 'crack.' You can break at any time and the supports need to be there when that happens. It's like, yeah you can call Lifeline, but you need someone to actually be there to support you at your greatest time of need."*

- *"What would be more beneficial is having education that teaches about being in relationship with yourself. How to look after yourself and how to be in relationships with others. This is how you take care of your mental wellbeing. Allowing people greater choice in their own mental health treatment."*

- *"I was forced to take anti-depressants and they didn't help me. I didn't feel like myself and I wasn't offered any other options."*

Recommendations

We had many ideas on how we felt the Victorian Government could support young people in Victoria to look after their mental health needs. Our suggestions focus on:

- **Greater education around Mental Health awareness**
    - Peer education models in schools for mental health
    - Mental health studies as part of the core national curriculum
    - Ongoing education for professionals working in the mental health field

- **Better quality services for young people at their time of need**
    - More beds in mental health wards & private hospitals
    - Cost of treatment & medication be affordable, particularly for young people
    - Provide more spaces for young people to receive drop in counselling
    - Emphasis on holistic practices being embedded into common practice (e.g. meditation, yoga and other therapeutic services)

- **The role of Government in Mental Health awareness**
    - To act as a support pillar for community service organisations in the community
    - To ensure Mental Health consistently remains within the sphere of public discussion, and not treated as a stand-alone, tokenistic issue.

"Younger generations are less ashamed and more active in learning about their mental health."

"We have been kicked out of society and told to deal with it. People can be cold and harsh towards people experiencing adversity."

Youth Action Group (YAG) Position Papers

Employment

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The overarching goals for the YAG are to foster Melbourne's next generation of civic leaders, create connections between diverse groups of young people, and make a difference in Melbourne.

As part of the Victorian Government's 'What's Important to YOUth' consultations, we were eager to put together a position paper on the topic of Employment, affirming our stance on this issue as one of the most important affecting young people in Victoria.

What's happening right now?

- Victoria is in the midst of a youth unemployment crisis. The average Victorian youth unemployment rate is now sitting at 14.7 per cent[2].

- Youth unemployment is correlated with low educational attainment. More than 62 per cent of people unemployed in their youth have less than Year 12 education[3].

Young people's perspectives

As part of the youth consultations for 'What's Important to YOUth?' we dedicated one of our weekly meetings to brainstorm some of the more prominent issues linking young people and employment.

We've themed the information into three distinct categories:

- The importance of employment for young people
- That young people hold alternatives views on the traditional employment system compared to previous generations
- The barriers to attaining and maintaining employment and how these impact young people.

The importance of employment for young people

Employment is an important aspect of life, giving us the freedom to be independent and responsible. It also allows us to provide for ourselves, having income to pay for things such as travel, education & training, medical bills and social activities. We also see our work as a reflection of who we are.

- *"Having a job provides you with independence and essentially, it gives you resources for you to do things you want to be able to do – whether that's travel, food etc. There is an element of identity intertwined with a person's work. If you've got a job, you have more status in society to be able to interact with it."*

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[2] ABS data cited by VCOSS in The Age 14/08/14 at http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/youth-unemployment-in-victoria-hits-15year-high-20140826-1089hk.html
[3] HILDA survey, waves 1 – 11

- *"It's a source of income and a way of socialising. It forms part of your identity. I would like to say it summarises your skills as a person but it doesn't. My job at the moment does not reflect my background or study so I don't feel like it's who I am."*

- *"Employment is a step into the future – it provides direction."*

- *"To an extent, some independence as it's your own income. Learning skills you may not learn in school, you are then able to apply elsewhere."*

- *"I almost died last year, so I had this realisation that you have to be able to look after yourself and your medical needs to provide you with what you need."*

- *"Based on my upbringing in an Asian culture and also identifying as a Christian and having Christian values, there's lots of social responsibility in having a job. My parents taught me that I should always contribute to society. They taught me that I should never work less than what I am capable of."*

That young people hold alternatives views on the traditional employment system compared to previous generations

We are part of a generation who want to do things differently and hold a vision for our working future. We identified the breakdown of the relationship between older generations currently in the workforce, and younger generations looking to enter the workforce as a factor in the current climate of unemployment for young people.

- *"I don't want to buy into the system. I have my own questions and answers I want to seek and I don't think getting a 9am – 5pm job is the only way of living life. I don't want to buy my way into a job."*

- *"I would rather have a PURPOSE than a JOB."*

- *"The world is changing so rapidly. Maybe in 10 years traditional jobs won't even exist. Education and communicate to younger people about where the future is going is crucial. We don't know where we can help or where we can contribute because we don't know what's going to happen in the future. From the time I study to when I eventually graduate, the world is already so different."*

- *"The Government and politicians don't get it because they are out of touch. I feel like we're kind of stuck with the baby boomer generation who think it's EASY to gain employment but it's the complete opposite. I feel like it's kind of like leading lambs to slaughter. Just jump through the hoops, but then what? What's at the end of it? Education for education sake. And then there's the issue of 'interning', which is working really hard for nothing to gain some sort of experience."*

- *"There is this classic tip we're told as young people, which is to 'go in and make a good impression', but then you get there and you're told 'we only take applications online.' The system is out of touch and every organisation has a different process."*

- *"If we weren't under so much pressure to find a job, we could actually explore ourselves and figure out what we were passionate about. I feel like there should be more of an emphasis on entrepreneurship."*

The barriers to attaining and maintaining employment and how these impact young people

We identified barriers which impact on young people being able to find and keep a job. Factors such as disability, mental health, job market competition, and the current 'one-size-fits-all' system make it increasingly difficult to find ongoing employment, which is both suited to our career of choice and fulfils our needs.

- *"We have to choose a 'career' at a young age; 18 years old. This creates so much inefficiency. We don't know what we want to do as a career when we are that young."*

- *"It's not been easy to get a job at all, even for those of us that have studied. It's so hard to get into your chosen industry, particularly without the right networks and connections. We answer key selection criteria with silent tears. I feel the system is raising people to just get and make money. Young people would rather pick up an extra shift than complete their degree because it's easy money. If you don't volunteer or have connections, you are basically set-up to fail."*

- *Sitting on more of the 'disadvantaged' scale of things. Things weren't easy for me or my family and that's followed me. Not having a caring parent to support and guide me has been really hard. Education & training – I've only gotten to year 9 and everywhere I go, I get kicked out. Everywhere I go, I feel isolated and socially unaccepted. I have a learning disability so I have a lot of trouble coping. I've never fit in at school."*

- *"The process should be easy but it's totally not. The competition out there is enormous. The amount of time I have tweaked my resume and cover letters is crazy. You get to a point where you get so desperate you will take anything, even if they treat you badly or don't officially have you on the books. Transferring from student to JobSeeker through Centrelink is a nightmare. I had to apply for any jobs and not jobs that were in alignment with what I had studied. So I was applying for all these jobs I didn't even want or wasn't interested in. Centrelink doesn't help you and neither do JSA's – they are all just ticking boxes and making quotas. It doesn't help us get where we want to go. You're encouraged to keep studying even if you've already finished higher education, just so you can get a job you don't even want."*

- *"Jobs advertised as 'entry level' but they require all these skills that you can't get without getting a job in the first place! It's a vicious cycle. There's increasing competition and more processes; it's insane the amount of hurdles we have to jump through just to get a job."*

- *"Centrelink make you attend appointments when other really important things are happening, like sitting for an exam!"*

- *"JSA's – they didn't help me, they hindered my progress."*

- *"I was being bullied at my hospitality job and my job agency wouldn't help me find new employment because I 'already had a job.' I got to a point where I would rather go to work every day and be bullied than be unemployed."*

- *"I had to leave my job because I was bullied and harassed. There was no support for me when this was happening either."*

- *"The world doesn't work like how we want it to work – we can't just walk into a place we like and 'get a job.' People don't just give you a chance."*

- *"Not finding or having the right connections is a huge barrier."*

- *"I volunteer for many different organisations and I'm trying to get a job in the community sector. I've never had proper paid work, and not having that has made it nearly impossible to get a job.*

  Because of all the different stages you can progress to in a job application, I wasted weeks just jumping through these hoops and at the end I didn't make it. I didn't get the job. I could have spent all that time looking for something else, it felt like such a huge waste of my time."

- *"I think there's a lot of oversupply for lots of industries of students. For example, there are heaps of commerce students in my course and I think this puts companies in a particularly difficult position and increases competition. I know people who are willing to pay money to get an internship, just so they have a better chance to get a job. Companies need to be more specific about the kind of people they're looking for and universities don't help this process at all."*

- *"Work experience and not being able to satisfy employer's requirements. They are looking for the perfect candidate and there is NO SUCH THING as a perfect candidate!"*

- *"Having an older workforce is a barrier. We have people staying in jobs until their 70, so they are staying in jobs longer and positions aren't opening up.*

- *"Lack of opportunity and the way the system is currently built for 'one-size-fits-all.'"*

- *"The application process is so intimidating."*

- *"Medical reasons are a barrier to me finding work."*

- *"The Government is punishing people for not being able to find a job. **There is no job factory.**"*

Recommendations

We had many ideas on how we felt the Victorian Government could support young people in Victoria to find and maintain employment opportunities: Our suggestions focus on:

- **The role of businesses**
    - Affordable and accessible ways to create networks and connections
    - Creating healthy working environments and cultures, which don't stigmatise or de-humanise employees

- Develop processes which increase and improve communication between employers and employees, allowing for an equitable and fair working system for all

- **How the education system can better prepare us for employment**
    - Mandatory and relevant placements; particularly in the higher education system
    - Improve the job-matching process
    - More effective pathways out of education and into employment

- **The role of Government in making the education system accessible for all young people**
    - Free education!
    - Complete overhaul of the Centrelink and Job Services systems. There needs to be a review on the way job service agencies currently operate, so that the focus is not on 'ticking boxes' but rather on finding meaningful and sustainable employment
    - Accommodate more to youth and have this in mind when developing policies that affect young people.

"We need a whole of society approach to employment. We need to come together as a community."

Attachment 4: Academy Young Mum's classroom – poster workshop

As part of our engagement strategy with the Academy Young Mum's classroom, five of the young women told us what was most important to them through creating a visual poster.

Below are quotes taken from the Young Mum's completed surveys on these topics, which are to be read in conjunction with the themed posters.

Racism / Discrimination:

- *"Disturbingly, discrimination is increasing in my generation."*

- *"I feel that outdated and judgemental views regarding sexuality, race and religion are still prevalent."*

Sex Education:

- *"Sex education needs to drastically change and adopt a similar curriculum to certain European countries. Sex education needs to go beyond contraception and pregnancy, discussing deeper issues."*

Employment:

- *"Give us more opportunities to get experience."*

- *"We need experience. No one is hiring me because I lack experience, but no one will give me the experience I need and they also don't give me the chance because I have a child and don't think I'll turn up. "*

Transport:

- *"Transport is expensive and costs so much and takes so long to get somewhere."*
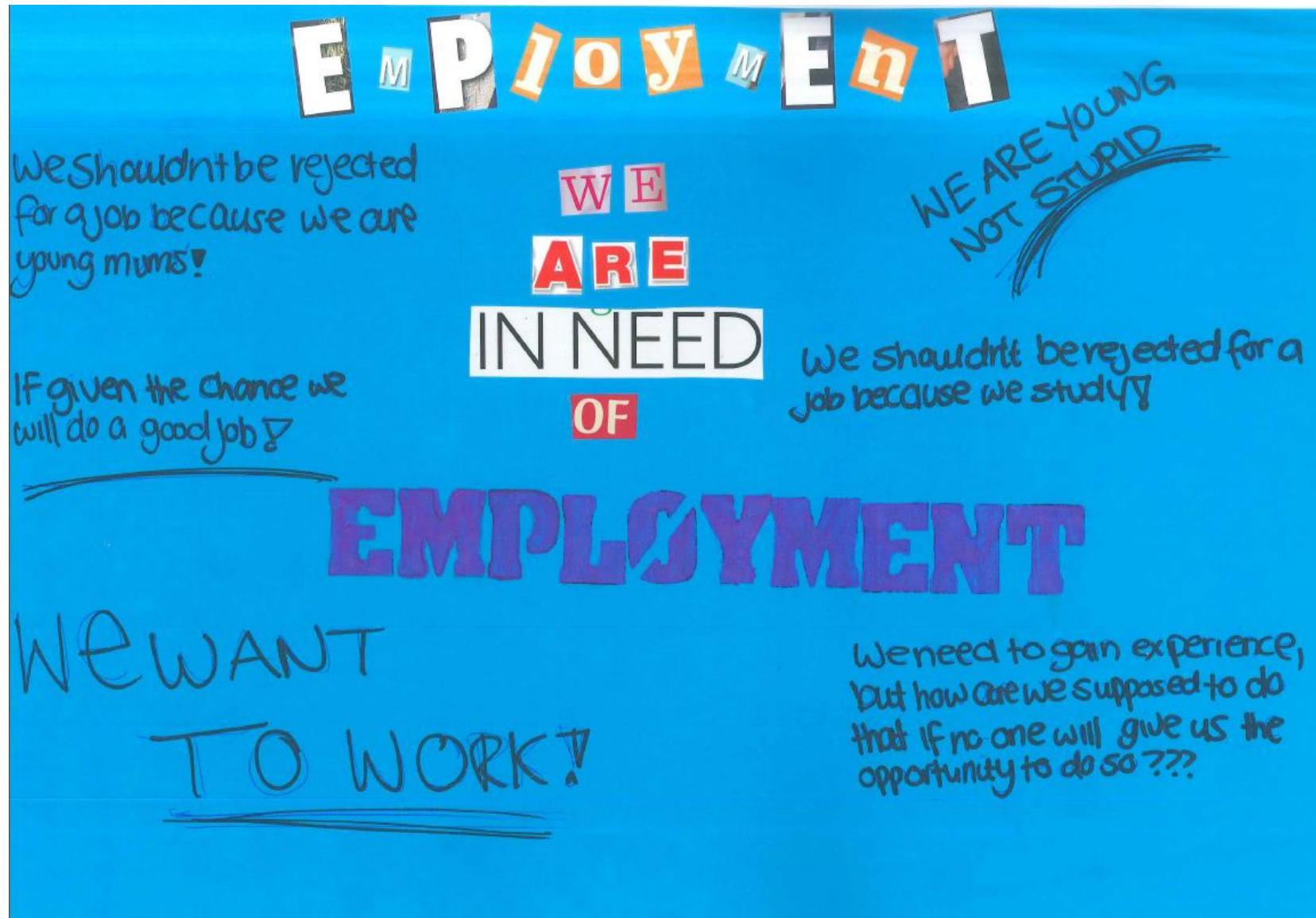
"Stop Racism"
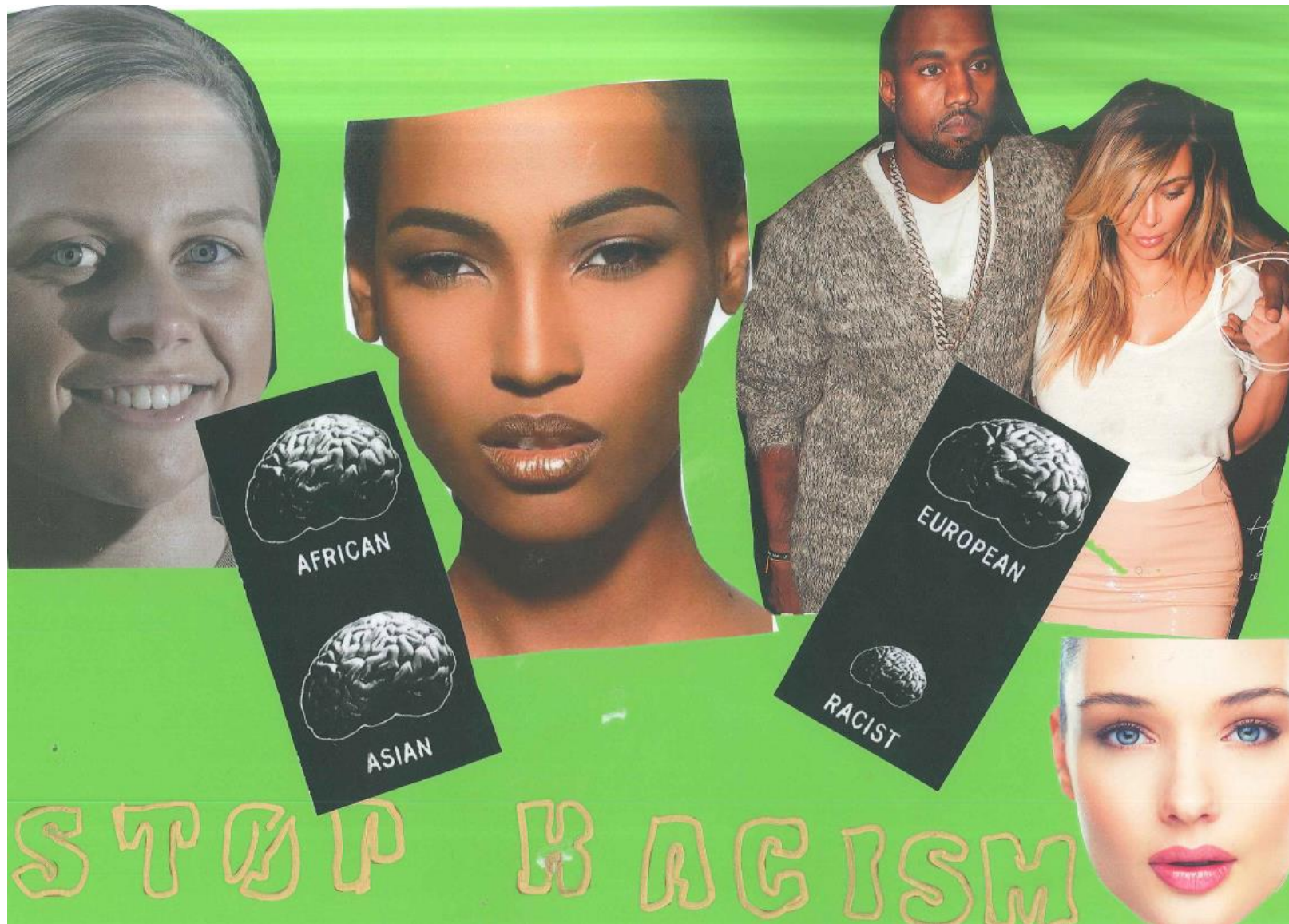
"Sex Education"

"Employment"

"Employment"

"Public Transport"

Attachment 5: Examples of internal & external communication

Information flyer for young people:

WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO **YOU**TH?

melbourne city mission

Tell us what you think!

The Victorian Government is developing a new policy to improve government support for young Victorians aged 12 to 24.

The new youth policy will:

- Guide the way that government engages with young people; and
- Identify new government actions to improve outcomes for young people in a wide range of areas – for example, school, training, work, health, housing and transport.

Your feedback is really important – it will help ensure that the programs and initiatives that flow from the new youth policy are relevant to you and your friends.

How you can get involved

Melbourne City Mission is working with the Victorian Government to create opportunities for young people to have a say. You can do this by:

- completing a short survey; or
- participating in an interview with a Melbourne City Mission worker; or
- being part of a group discussion at Melbourne City Mission.

How your feedback will be used

Melbourne City Mission will be collecting feedback from at least 100 young people throughout September and October 2015.

During this time, we will look at all the diverse views and ideas that young people share with us, and identify common themes. We'll then write two reports for the Victorian Government that summarise the feedback we've received.

Your privacy and rights

We will ask you your gender, age, location, and cultural background as part of the consultation process, to help the Government develop policy that is relevant. However, the information you provide to us will not identify you personally – it will be grouped anonymously with information from other young people who are being consulted.

If you'd like to be involved, we'll ask you to read, review and sign a consent form – this form will confirm that you are happy to participate and for Melbourne City Mission to share our consultation findings with the Victorian Government.

A Melbourne City Mission staff member will be on hand at all times to provide you with support. You have the right to stop the survey or interview, or leave the discussion, whilst the process is underway.

As thanks for your time, you will receive a $20 Coles gift voucher from Melbourne City Mission for your time.

Stay updated

Facebook: www.facebook.com/youthcentralvic   www.facebook.com/MelbourneCitymission

Twitter: @youthcentralvic   @VicGovDHHS   @MelbCityMission

'Mission Edition' (MCM staff newsletter) article:

Victorian Government's new youth policy framework

Melbourne City Mission is thrilled to be working with the Office for Youth on the development of the Victorian Government's new youth policy framework.

Throughout September and October, the organisation will be supporting the Government's comprehensive engagement strategy by running consultations with young people who do not usually have an opportunity to have a voice in policy discussions.

There will be diverse ways for young people to share their views, including opportunities to complete a short survey, participate in a one-on-one interview in person or over the phone, or be part of a group discussion.

In the days and weeks ahead, **Morgan Cataldo**, Policy and Strategic Projects Officer, will be contacting youth-focused programs across Melbourne City Mission to discuss opportunities for client participation and develop a consultation schedule.

The new whole-of-government youth policy will provide a coordinated approach to the way the Victorian Government supports young people, particularly those who are disengaged, disadvantaged or facing particular challenges. It will focus on strengthening their engagement in policies and programs that affect them, and increasing the focus on preventing and responding early to problems.

Young people are disproportionately vulnerable to problems such as low income, unemployment, housing and mental health issues.

A new whole-of-government youth policy will:

1) guide the development of government policies and programs, and the way government engages with young people
2) identify new government action to improve outcomes for young people
3) support seamless pathways and transitions between school, training and work that supports young people staying and succeeding at school, obtaining employment and being connected to the community.

Facebook posts:

Melbourne City Mission
September 16 at 9:00pm ·

The Victorian Government is developing a new youth policy and it's essential that it reflects the needs of all young Victorians. So, we're consulting the young people who use or services on what's important to them. Here's our Youth Action Group having their say. Do you want to get involved? You can complete a survey here.
http://consult.youthcentral.vic.gov.au/

👍 Like   💬 Comment   ➡ Share

You and 18 others like this.

Write a comment...

Melbourne City Mission
October 9 at 5:30pm · 🌐

What's important to youth? These young mums tell us what's important to them - including employment, education, public transport and addressing racism.

👍 Like   💬 Comment   ➤ Share

You and 21 others like this.

Write a comment...   📷

Twitter posts (Tweets):

MelbourneCityMission @MelbCityMission · Sep 16
Our Youth Action Group complete survey to let VicGov know its youth policy priorities @youthcentralvic @JennyMikakos

↩   ↻ 5   ★ 10   •••

↻ MelbourneCityMission retweeted

Jenny Mikakos MP @JennyMikakos · Sep 16
@MelbCityMission @youthcentralvic my thanks to all of them!

RETWEETS   FAVORITES
3   4

4:07 PM – 16 Sep 2015 · Details

↩   ↻   ★   •••   Hide conversation

MelbourneCityMission @MelbCityMission · Oct 9
What's important to youth? This group of young mums let us know.
@youthcentralvic @JennyMikakos
#youthpolicy

RETWEETS   FAVORITES
6   4

11:25 AM - 9 Oct 2015 · Details

Reply to @MelbCityMission @youthcentralvic @JennyMikakos

Jenny Mikakos MP @JennyMikakos · Oct 9
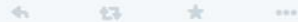@MelbCityMission @youthcentralvic thanks so much for their feedback

★ 2

Judie Gade @ADDventurous · Oct 9
@MelbCityMission @JennyMikakos @youthcentralvic Has anyone thought of a business the girls could do under the #NEIS?
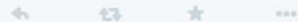
MelbourneCityMission @MelbCityMission · Oct 9
@ADDventurous @JennyMikakos @youthcentralvic Hi Judie, these young people are currently students of our Academy bit.ly/1Opi7ZH

Judie Gade @ADDventurous · Oct 9
@MelbCityMission @JennyMikakos @youthcentralvic If they've an idea for business, a plan & evidence to support, post-course they could do it.