



***Who pays for youth disengagement and unemployment?  
A case for smarter thinking and for investment***

***A Discussion Paper, with Recommendations  
Prepared by the “Education to Employment” (e2e) Working Group  
July 2015***

**e2e**



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## Background

In March 2015 a Working Group was established by Andrew Neophytou (CEO, Inner Eastern Local Learning & Employment Network) on behalf of the Inner Metro Youth and Community Partnership (IMCYP).

This Working Group was formed to discuss and consider actions around youth transitions and pathways, as a response to worrying levels of youth disengagement and unemployment, whether viewed from a regional, state or national perspective.

Part of the impetus behind the Group's formation was concern for the wellbeing of young people (largely but not exclusively those aged 15 and over) who were at risk of disengaging from education, or were already disengaged.

Like the IMYCP, e2e has these aims:

- Advocacy and strategic input and advice to government about children and young people, and the organisations that support them
- Sharing information and research around transitions and pathways
- Building relationships with key stakeholders to develop a cross-sectoral response to address issues relating to transitions and pathways
- Identifying potential pathways and referral options for young people that are most at risk
- Providing best-practice examples / models for work and professional development.

A dozen stakeholder organisations / bodies have embraced these aims, and form the nucleus of the e2e Working Group:

Representatives from the following stakeholders form the nucleus of e2e:

- Ardoch Youth Foundation
- Capital City LLEN
- City of Stonnington – Youth Services
- Education Engagement Partnership (EEP)
- Inner Melbourne VET Cluster (IMVC)
- Melbourne City Mission (MCM) / SKYS
- Melbourne Polytechnic
- Prahran Community Learning Centre (PCLC)
- SouthPort Uniting Care (SPUC)
- Taskforce Community Agency
- Victoria Police

As a first step, this Working Group agreed to develop a Discussion Paper. This Paper, completed in late July 2015, provides key reflections arising out of discussions the network members have had, and the reading we've done.

Five Principles for smarter thinking and investment are proposed.

Eleven themes, or areas, are then identified, and these serve as headings for each section.

## From the e2e Convenor

This paper might be best summarised as a response to two related questions: *How do we ensure all young people see a future for themselves? How do we ensure all young people have a future?*

Too many young people are not completing education, or not making successful transitions from school to further study, or to employment. Whichever way you look at it, disengagement of young people from school, and high levels of youth unemployment, are costing us all: socially and economically.

Greater reflection is needed to understand and address the challenges we face - and the cost of not doing more. Greater, more effective, actions. Greater investment of our time and resources.

All levels of government, community organisations, education and training providers, business and industry have a role to play. More concerted effort and genuine collaboration, and increased financial investment by governments especially, are required to make a real impact.

We need to show more cleverness to tackle the issues and challenges: to show more empathy, and to be practical in our responses. There's clearly a need for more co-operative efforts to improve policy, and to also increase the amount and quality of education, pre-employment and training program delivery, therapeutic supports, outreach and other initiatives.

It has almost become a cliché to call for more focused, coordinated and integrated approaches, whether we're referring to supporting children and families, or to young people. Despite years of such talk, not enough progress has been made. So too when we refer to "whole-of-government" approaches. Things move slowly indeed.

Yet Victoria now has an opportunity to become a leader among states to effectively respond to increasing disengagement from education and youth unemployment. Although these issues and challenges are not unique to this state, there is much in place here - in funding, organisations, programs and services - which are making a difference.

This Paper's focus is on improving transitions and pathways for young people. In considering all relevant issues, we believe it's important to not just focus on those aged 12 and above, but to also consider those in the middle years, ie children and young people aged 8 to 12. In fact we believe it's time this younger age group was included in all discussions (including consultations) around young people, as well as youth policy and program delivery.

In accordance with our own Terms of Reference, we have highlighted some key themes, and we also recommend some new approaches, as well as revisiting some. We acknowledge those that are current – eg models and programs – that are working well. Taken as a whole if our recommendations were to be adopted they have the capacity to deliver social and economic benefits.

We are aware of the current political landscape, and the challenges that arise when state and federal governments have differing political positions. However we should never accept that we have young people who are not doing well, nor allow them to be treated less equally.

There's no doubt that we should also be striving for "inclusive" growth. Apart from addressing inequalities, growth that is truly inclusive creates opportunities for the most vulnerable. Social equity matters. As a Report from the Foundation for Young Australians says, "the flourishing of young people is important, not just for their own sake, but for the benefit of all of us."

**Andrew Neophytou**

IELLEN CEO/e2e Convenor

## A note about terms and definitions used

In Australia, the terms “youth” or “young people”, “disengaged” “at risk” and “unemployed” have widespread usage in police and practice.

### Youth

Although no fixed, age-based definitions of “youth” exists, the definition of a “young person” or “youth” usually refers to those aged 12, or those aged 15 and over. For the purposes of this paper, “youth” is defined as referring to those aged 12 and over. We also note that the upper age range for “youth” is variously marked as 19, or 24. We use the latter age (ie 24) in this paper as our upper age limit.

We recognise that because we are exploring issues around “disengagement”, transitions and pathways, and “unemployment”, when we refer to “youth” or “young people” we accept that many will be thinking of those aged at least 15. However we also need to acknowledge that disengagement does occur during the middle years.

### Middle years

Although the “middle years” is sometimes variously defined and interpreted, at least two peak bodies, the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) and the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic), have offered 8 to 12 as the age range for the middle years. This is the age range we also refer to here when we use the term “middle years”.

### Disengaged

“Practitioners, researchers, politicians and their education policies use the term disengaged *“to describe young people who do not have a stable learning relationship with a significant adult or institution. This relationship could take place at school, through a distance-learning programme, with an employer or training provider. The important distinction is the stability of the relationship”*.<sup>1</sup>

In the UK and Europe another term for disengaged youth is “NEET” (Not in Education, Employment or Training), although this term is not as widely used here in Australia.

### At risk

“At-risk” is an adjective attached to young people who lack stable learning relationships. There is a substantial literature related to the identification of risk and protective factors amongst young populations. However the literature on this subject covers many risk variables besides education, training and employment. The concept at risk encompasses a broad view of the factors that can lead to a young person being disengaged.<sup>2</sup>

### Unemployed

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)<sup>3</sup> to be classified as unemployed a person needs to meet the following three criteria:

- not working more than one hour in the reference week
- actively looking for work in previous four weeks; and
- be available to start work in the reference week.

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<sup>1</sup> McGinty, S. and Brader, A. 2005 Educational Disengagement: A review of international, Australian & state policy responses. James Cook University

<sup>2</sup> McGinty, S. and Brader, A. 2005 Educational Disengagement: A review of international, Australian & state policy responses. James Cook University

<sup>3</sup> Australia Bureau of Statistics, accessed 16/07/2015 at

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/products/FBE517ECA9B07F63CA257D0E001AC7D4?OpenDocument>

## Some statistics

21% of young people in Australia do not complete secondary school. (Deloitte Access Economics, 2012)

In Victoria an estimated 10,000 school-age people disengage early from education every year. Young people who do not finish school are far more likely to be unemployed into their 20s and beyond than their contemporaries.

In 2011, about 35 per cent of 20-24 year old Victorians whose highest level of school attainment was Year 11 or below were either unemployed or had withdrawn entirely from the workforce or study.<sup>4</sup> Data from the Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth (LSAY) indicates that in 2012, 6.2% of 21 year olds were not engaged in employment, education or training (NEET) and a further 21.2% “not fully engaged”+ (+ those who are unemployed and not studying, not in the labour force and not studying, working part-time and not studying, and studying part-time and not working).<sup>5</sup>

Patterns of year 12 completion rates in schools remain low in Australia. They are below the national target of 90% for Year 12 or its equivalent and have remained relatively static despite multiple initiatives to raise completion rates and amid a further weakening of the fulltime youth labour market.

The Australia Bureau of Statistics Census data 2011 indicates that of the total number of 355,460 Victorian young people aged 15-19 years, about one in ten (10.3%) are not in education, training or employment

If we look at the statistics for particular cohorts, there are even more concerning signs. For example in March 2011 there were 469 young people in Residential Care in Victoria. Educational data is available on 368 of these young people. Of these, 111 – or 30% - of these attended school less than 5 days a week. 108 – or 29% - of children in residential care were not in education<sup>6</sup>

Whilst youth unemployment is not uniform across Australia (with variation between Australian states and territories, and, within states and territories), youth unemployment currently represents just under 40% of all unemployment in Australia. In other words, more than one in three unemployed Australian is young – between the ages of 15 and 24.<sup>7</sup>

Youth unemployment is at its highest level since the 1990.<sup>8</sup> Victoria’s underemployment rate is the highest it has been in more than 40 years. Youth unemployment is also growing in Victoria.

VCOSS analysis of the most recent ABS data shows that Victoria ended 2014 with the highest recorded yearly average youth unemployment rate since the 1990s, at 14.6 per cent for the year.<sup>9</sup>

By the end of 2014 Victoria’s unemployment rate hit 6.8 per cent, its highest level in over a decade.

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<sup>4</sup> Victorian Council of Social Services (VCOSS), April 2015, *VCOSS snapshot: Youth unemployment in Victoria and Melbourne’s North*

<sup>5</sup> National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) September 2014 “*How Young People are faring in the transition from School to Work*”

<sup>6</sup> Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) & Youth Partnerships 2013 *Reforming Support to Vulnerable Young People: A Discussion Paper*

<sup>7</sup> Brotherhood of Saint Laurence 2014 *Australian Youth Unemployment 2014: A Snapshot*

<sup>8</sup> Victorian Council of Social Services (VCOSS), April 2015, *VCOSS snapshot: Youth unemployment in Victoria and Melbourne’s North*

<sup>9</sup> Victorian Council of Social Services (VCOSS), April 2015, *VCOSS snapshot: Youth unemployment in Victoria and Melbourne’s North*

More and more young people are finding themselves in a void between education and employment, participating in neither. Not only disadvantaged youth that are at risk, young people from advantaged households are also becoming disengaged and because they are not in education and not claiming any form of benefits, this means that this group has 'vanished' from the radar.<sup>10</sup>

A government document (obtained by and reported in "The Age") showed that 10,000 students in years 9 to 11 disengage from the education and training systems every year. A further 6000 drop out within 12 months of transferring to the vocational education and training (VET) system.<sup>11</sup>

## **Disengagement and youth unemployment are costly**

Both the Blueprint for Education and Early Childhood Development 2008 (the Blueprint) and the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians 2008 recognise that successful completion of school significantly improves the life chances of children and young people. Ensuring that all children and young people of compulsory school age are engaged in education is a priority for the Department of Education and Training (DET). School completion leads to greater employment opportunities, economic and social prosperity, community inclusion and participation, and health and wellbeing. Conversely, the costs of not engaging in education are high, both for the individual and the community.<sup>12</sup>

When young people do not complete a Year 12 certificate or its equivalent, they risk lifetime social and economic disadvantages. There is a positive correlation between increased individual learning and a reduction in the risk of future unemployment and long-term social and economic disadvantage.

In 2007, a report by the Education Foundation Australia ("Crossing the Bridge: Overcoming entrenched disadvantage through student-centred learning")<sup>13</sup> identified that young people who disengage from education early are almost four times more likely to report poor health, have mortality rates up to nine times higher than the general population and are more likely to require welfare support and government-subsidised services. It estimates that the consequences of early school leaving and lower levels of education, costs Australia \$2.6 billion a year in higher social welfare, health and crime prevention costs, and lower taxation revenue productivity and GDP. (This cost, with rising youth unemployment since the report was written 8 years ago, would surely be higher today)<sup>14</sup>

Early school leaving and lower education levels are estimated to cost the Australian government \$2.6 billion a year in higher social welfare, health and crime prevention costs, and lower tax revenue, productivity and GDP.)

"Rising youth unemployment in Australia imposes a burden on the economy through both direct and indirect costs. The indirect costs are those associated with losing the valuable talents and potential of young people when they can't enter the workforce and the personal and broader social impacts that often follow unemployment. The direct cost to the public purse lies primarily with the cost of unemployment benefits. The broader social impacts - that is, the indirect costs - of youth unemployment include those linked to increased homelessness, poor health and social isolation. Rising youth unemployment not only affects the individual and their family but also leaves a lasting burden on our economy and community".<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> VCOSS, April 2015 *VCOSS snapshot: Youth unemployment in Victoria and Melbourne's North*

<sup>11</sup> Cook, H. May 2014 *10,000 Children Dropping Out of School*, The Age, accessed at <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/10000-children-dropping-out-of-school-20140511-zr9me.html> on 20/07/2015

<sup>12</sup> Student Wellbeing Division of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development April 2010 *Pathways to re-engagement through flexible learning options; A Policy direction for consultation*

<sup>13</sup> Black, Rosalyn 2007 *Crossing the Bridge: Overcoming entrenched disadvantage through student-centred learning* Education Foundation Australia

<sup>14</sup> Black, Rosalyn 2007 *Crossing the Bridge: Overcoming entrenched disadvantage through student-centred learning* Education Foundation Australia

<sup>15</sup> Brotherhood of St Laurence March 2014 *Australian Youth Unemployment Snapshot: Counting the Costs*

Published in 1988 when unemployment rates in Australia were in excess of 8% and there were significant levels of disguised unemployment, one study by Daryl Dixon (*Unemployment: the Economic and Social Costs*) provided research on the cost of unemployment on the economy and the community at a time when there was little analysis of the topic. That study demonstrates that the direct cost to the Australian government of unemployment is about 50% of the private income lost through unemployment.<sup>16</sup> It also shows there are private and community costs in areas such as housing, health, community services, and correctional and crime prevention services, “possibly adding another 10% of private income lost through unemployment”.<sup>17</sup>

### **Sustaining GDP depends on young workers**

Unemployment is a key determinant of a country’s standard of living, which is conventionally measured by gross domestic product per capita. In fact, gross domestic product (GDP) is explained by three things: the number of people employed, the average number of hours they work and labour productivity. And the number of people employed, in turn, is determined by the participation rate (which measures the proportion of the population aged 15 or more that want to work) and the unemployment rate.

Meanwhile, average hours of work have been declining with an increase in part-time employment. In October 1992, one-third of those aged 15 to 24 who had a job worked part-time. Today, more than half of total employees aged 15 to 24 work part-time. In the 21st century, labour productivity has been growing more slowly than in the second half of the 20th century.

These trends in average hours worked and labour productivity are acting to reduce the rate of growth of GDP per capita. This wouldn’t matter for living standards if participation and unemployment trends were working in the opposite direction. They are not: the participation rate peaked in 2010. And because of the ageing of the population it will continue to fall for several decades.

Trends in GDP per capita are not only the key measures of trends in living standards. They are also the key determinant of trends in budget revenue, shaping the ability of governments to continue to fund things like the age pension, education, health, defence and infrastructure.<sup>18</sup>

### **Inner metropolitan Melbourne: additional data**

Rates of disengagement and youth unemployment are higher in regional parts of the country, and in regional Victoria, as well as in Melbourne’s outer metropolitan areas. However this does not mean the inner metropolitan area is without its problems, and should be bypassed when funding decisions and allocations for programs and services are made.

The Education Engagement Partnership (EEP) has collected and collated the information of over 1000 students disengaged or at risk of disengagement from education training and employment across the cities of Stonnington and Port Phillip since 2011. In 2014 EEP encountered 164 young people, 40% of whom were not attending any form of education training or employment. The majority of young people experienced multiple factors impacting on their engagement the most prevalent being; mental health, family breakdown, housing and seeking alternative modes of education.

The most common age group encountered by the EEP over this time has been 15 – 19 year olds, however 2014 data also indicated a growth in numbers of younger “middle years” students, reinforcing the need for a focus on early intervention. (EEP Annual Report 2014)

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<sup>16</sup> Dixon, Daryl 1988 *Unemployment: the economic and social costs* , Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.

<sup>17</sup> Dixon, Daryl 1988 *Unemployment: the economic and social costs* , Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.

<sup>18</sup> Henry, Ken. April 2014 *Wise Words* as part of the My Chance Out Future Youth Employment Campaign, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.



## **Five Principles for smarter thinking and investment**

As e2e has aimed for a wide ranging overview of issues in relation to the disengagement of young people from education, and youth unemployment, our report's recommendations are based on five principles to guide future investment in the education, and transitions of young people.

### **Principle 1**

Every young person, including those in the middle years, should have an opportunity to access education, and other related services they may need, to ensure that they can learn, develop and flourish.

### **Principle 2**

Additional resources should be directed towards particular cohorts where outcomes are poor or where the risk factors for poor outcomes are high.

### **Principle 3**

Investment should also focus on achieving improved outcomes including successful post-education transitions.

### **Principle 4**

Young people themselves should be given a say in what they need.

### **Principle 5**

Recognising the social and economic benefits of investing in young people, the responsibility for improved transitions and pathways can be shared by all.

## Eleven themes

### 1. Policy

Whilst there is always overlap between the responsibility of the Commonwealth and the states, the Federal Government is generally considered to have the upper hand in this division of power, with the providing services in health, education, justice and the like, whilst the Federal government still oversees pension and benefit arrangements (sometimes referred to broadly as “welfare”). Our Constitution has, over time, evolved to deliver the Commonwealth greater constitutional and fiscal power than the states, giving the Commonwealth the scope to choose between:

- excluding the states from policy determination and implementation
- co-opting the states, as agents of the Commonwealth
- cooperating with the states, as partners
- leaving matters entirely to the States.

It has been said that under the previous federal Labor government of Rudd and Gillard, the government largely opted for the third choice, ie co-operation with the states.<sup>19</sup>

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG), the peak intergovernmental forum in Australia, has a membership including the Prime Minister, State as well as Territory Premiers and Chief Ministers, and its role is to promote policy reforms that are of national significance, or which need co-ordinated action by all Australian governments. COAG has previously initiated reforms to increase productivity, raise workforce participation and mobility and improve the delivery of government services, including health policy changes; early childhood, education and training reforms; and commitments to close the gap in Indigenous disadvantage.

A COAG meeting, 2 July 2009, did agree to a “National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions” and this Agreement covered the period up to 31 December 2013.<sup>20</sup> This Partnership aimed to increase participation of young people in education and training, increase attainment levels and improve successful transitions from school. It contained a package of elements, including:

- strengthened participation requirements to encourage young people aged 15-20 to be engaged in education or training as a first priority
- lifting qualification levels with the aim of 90 per cent of young people nationally attaining a Year 12 or equivalent qualification by 2015 (Victoria’s target was 92.6 per cent) with an accompanying education or training entitlement for young people aged 15-24
- support for successful transitions through the provision of youth career and transition programs.

Programs to support youth transitions were delivered through four broad streams:

- Maximising Engagement, Attainment and Successful Transitions – focusing on multiple learning pathways, career development and mentoring
- Youth Connections – case management and support for at risk young people to remain engaged in, or reconnect with, education and training.
- School Business Community Partnership Brokers – networks to improve community and business engagement with schools
- National Career Development – including current national resources such as Job Guide and the myfuture website that will continue to be an Australian Government responsibility.

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<sup>19</sup> Committee of Economic Development Australia, 2009 *Six Myths of Federal-State Financial Relations*, accessed at:

[http://www.ceda.com.au/research-and-policy/research/2009/11/economy/six\\_myths\\_federal\\_state](http://www.ceda.com.au/research-and-policy/research/2009/11/economy/six_myths_federal_state) on 20/07/2015

<sup>20</sup> Council of Australian Governments (COAG) July 2009 *COAG Meeting 2 July 2009*, accessed at [https://www.coag.gov.au/node/66#Youth Attainment](https://www.coag.gov.au/node/66#Youth%20Attainment) on 20/07/2015

(When the Youth Connections and Partnership Brokers programs were rolled out nationally, in Victoria, the Partnership Broker Program was delivered by Local learning and Employment Networks).

As per the Agreement, it's now been two and half years since this Partnership ended. Since then federal and state governments seem to have agreed we have a crisis in youth unemployment. Yet it's a challenge to identify the policy measures and monetary investment that point to a full, effective and co-operative response to such a crisis. During this period it would appear that policy thinking and practice (in relation to young people, to educational engagement, transitions, and pathways) could again benefit from genuine agreement and co-operation among all levels of government.

There have also been worrying signs around federal policies, including federally-funded benefits, programs and services, and access to them. Last year's Federal Budget proposal to make young unemployed people under the age of thirty wait six months for income support was, fortunately, not passed by the Senate. However, as announced in the most recent Federal Budget, there's still a proposed waiting period, which is to be reduced to one month, and applied to a younger cohort (ie under 25 years of age). This measure remains unjust, and would certainly be counter-productive.

We note that the 2015/16 Federal Budget did announce a Youth Employment Strategy, with an investment in school to work transition programs to help vulnerable young unemployed people. This suggested that the Government had "listened to community concerns about the ending of the Youth Connections program."<sup>21</sup> However, as of July 2015, no details were available regarding this budget announcement. It does appear unlikely that services under this Strategy will have national coverage, and suggests that young people in areas not deemed as having high unemployment may miss out.

Concerns also remain around the Work for the Dole in the new federal employment services "Job Active" system, and the scrapping of specialist (including youth specialist) providers. Only generalist providers have been contracted in the new system, whilst Work for the Dole (WfD) has been described as a "centrepiece" of the federal government's new Employment Services program.

Significant levels of funding have already been allocated to the WfD initiative, but as Jobs Australia, a peak body, has stated "successful implementation of WfD relies to a considerable extent on the availability of sufficient numbers of genuinely work-like placements. In areas with limited employment growth opportunities and with low numbers of small to medium-size enterprises it may be difficult to find adequate numbers of eligible placements to achieve the programme's outcome of providing a genuinely work-like experience".<sup>22</sup>

The 2015/16 Victorian State Budget announced significant spending in the areas of education, health, job creation and social services as well as \$22 billion of funds earmarked for major infrastructure projects, including public transport. There's also clearly a commitment to bettering the lives of some of Victoria's most vulnerable children and young people.

Labor has vowed to make Victoria "the education state" and the 2015/16 Budget locks in \$3.9 billion of funding "to fulfil ambitious election promises for schools, TAFEs and disadvantaged students"<sup>23</sup>. More than 60 state schools will be upgraded and renovated at a cost of \$325 million, and \$111 million will be spent on 10 new schools in some of the state's fastest growing areas. This includes a new government secondary school in the City of Stonnington, a welcome announcement among many.

Among the many measures included in the 2015/16 State Budget - all of which are welcomed - are:  
\$300 million to further strengthen the TAFE sector, in addition to the previously announced \$50 million TAFE Back to Work Fund;  
\$148.3 million for the Camps, Sport and Excursion Fund;

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<sup>21</sup> Australian Council of Social Services 2015 *ACOSS on Budget 2015: Better direction but lower income earners still doing the heavy lifting*

<sup>22</sup> Jobs Australia 2015 *2015/16 Prebudget Submission*, Melbourne

<sup>23</sup> Cook, Henrietta May 6, 2015 *State budget 2015: Schools gain funding boost but fail to lock in Gonski money*, The Age, Melbourne.

An additional \$15.7 million for the State School Relief Fund for affordable school uniforms; \$13.7 million for Breakfast Clubs in the 500 most disadvantaged government primary schools; \$8 million for youth participation and engagement, helping reconnect young people to education and employment pathways and \$1.6 million for a mentoring program for disadvantaged students; \$48.1 million over four years for Child FIRST and family services, and extending the funding for Springboard, a program that supports young people to transition from residential out-of-home care into independent living.<sup>24</sup>

Whilst an “education state” is very much a worthy aspiration, it should be noted that a previous (2012) report from the Victorian Auditor General’s Office (Student Completion Rates) did have some criticism of one of our own key departments. According to the report the state DEECD (now the Department of Education and Training) had “failed to significantly improve student completion rates in the past 10 years”.<sup>25</sup>

For example, “DEECD did not provide comprehensive evidence-based information to decision-makers to inform recent funding changes to the Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) and Vocational Education and Training in Schools (VETiS) programs.”<sup>26</sup> Important commissioned research was ignored, and stakeholders, including schools, were not consulted about the likely impact of the changes. DEECD also “did not have sufficient evidence to assess the impact of funding changes on schools’ ability to meet the growing demand for VCAL, and, in turn, on the impact that this would have on future completion rates”.<sup>27</sup>

“The issues highlighted in this audit (relating to DEECD’s advice on VCAL) “raise broader concerns about its ability to gather and use sufficient evidence to assess the potential impact of policy changes and provide comprehensive, informed advice to decision-makers to improve student completion rates”.<sup>28</sup> Although the Department had a “range of strategies for schools to assist students to complete Year 12 or equivalent” ... “these are no longer improving student completion rates”.

In this section we have only referred to two tiers of government. Some might argue that all three tiers need more effective and consistent strategies and policies to help address youth disengagement and unemployment. At the very least LGAs could have a greater role to play in supporting young people.

In fact a 2013 report found that all Victorian LGAs believed they could play a key role in the delivery of universal prevention and early intervention programs for young people. Almost every Council (43 of 45) reported already providing ‘Generalist’ Youth Services (i.e. to the general youth population).

This report also identified a number of themes that are in common to role/position descriptions for generalist youth workers including:

- individual support to young people
- planning, development and implementation of programs and activities for groups of young people
- advocating for young people and youth services to ensure appropriate service options, and
- liaison with other service providers—including education and employment, as well as specialist and general youth services—to promote sharing of resources and opportunities for collaboration in the delivery of services to young people.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> State Government of Victoria, Department of Treasury and Finance, 2015 *Victorian Budget 2015/16 For Families Overview*

<sup>25</sup> Victorian Auditor General’s Office (VAGO), 2012 *Student Completion Rates*

<sup>26</sup> Victorian Auditor General’s Office (VAGO), 2012 *Student Completion Rates*

<sup>27</sup> Victorian Auditor General’s Office (VAGO), 2012 *Student Completion Rates*

<sup>28</sup> Victorian Auditor General’s Office (VAGO), 2012 *Student Completion Rates*

<sup>29</sup> Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) and Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), July 2013 *Right in the Mix, Roles of Victorian Councils in the delivery of services to vulnerable young people*, Melbourne.

### Some recommendations:

- Any waiting period for federal benefits should be scrapped. Income support should be available to young people as soon as they are eligible.
- Whilst “mutual obligation” may be here to stay, we support flexibility in the system to allow appropriate matching of each young people to activities, eg training, voluntary work, or Work for the Dole. WfD should not be a centrepiece of any employment services system, and additional flexibility should be given to employment services providers (under the new federal Job Active system) regarding which (young) job seekers are referred to WfD.
- Government at all levels, together with peak bodies, organisations and service providers, should review policies or strategies that may be related to young people’s transitions and pathways. Gaps in policy and service provision are a responsibility of all levels of government, with the support and input of the community services sector, education providers, and young people themselves. Cross-sector responses are needed.
- Whilst it is not unreasonable for governments to expect contracted or funded organisations to develop partnerships (to support an holistic servicing of young clients) it should be acknowledged that additional resources (or a “backbone organisation” with dedicated staff) are often required to ensure that partnerships are properly supported.
- A new COAG Agreement on “National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions” is worthy of serious consideration. When the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) was proposed by the Gillard government, it was backed by then Opposition Leader. The current Federal Minister for Social Services has recently said, “everyone supports the NDIS...the NDIS has bipartisan support...it’s a goal everybody agrees with.” All young people should be engaged in education, and successfully transition and pathway to further education and/or to paid employment. These are also, we maintain, goals with which everyone might agree. Given their importance, there’s a strong case for greater bipartisan support and approaches.
- Local Government Areas provide funding for and or direct service provision in the area of “generalist” youth services. This of course should continue. We are aware that just over half of Victorian LGAs have six or more EFT dedicated to working with young people. It should be possible, given this level of resources, that targeted welfare support be provided to young people at risk of disengaging from education. This addition to “generalist” youth services could be achieved through professional upskilling of existing staff, or requiring a percentage of new staff to have a distinct set of skills for their role.

## 2. Consultation

The transitions and pathways of young people involves many stakeholder groups, and the views of all stakeholders need to be sought and valued - including those of young people. Consultation with young people can mean better awareness about their lives, illuminating sometimes otherwise unheard stories and experiences. It's also important, as they can not only articulate their ideas but recommend solutions.

Young people have important and relevant things to say in how programs which affect them should be shaped, developed and delivered. Feedback can lead to an improved understanding of the experiences of young people in their transition from schooling to working, while informing the development of transition programs and support services.

When young people are given a voice on matters which directly affect them, (adult) biases and assumptions can also be tested. There have been many important youth surveys and consultations during recent years, and we highlight several below. .

In 2007 a Report, "Youth Voice: Peer Research into Youth Transitions" was prepared by Peter Kellock from The Asquith Group with support from the members of The Youth Collaboration, in partnership with the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic). It involved research conducted at government secondary schools, community VCAL programs, and assorted youth programs.<sup>30</sup> Among its findings was that knowledge of available local services was limited, and that young people are generally unaware of the various options that are available. This is all exacerbated by the ways in which services are branded and identified by funding sources.

During the second half of 2012, a series of "Shout Out" Youth Summits were held in every State and the Northern Territory. These summits were an opportunity for young people to meet with local decision makers who witnessed young people completing a survey which captured their thoughts and experiences with the Youth Connections program, and with education more generally. These Shout Outs were also well supported by Federal, State Members of Parliament and by Local Government. Youth Connections clients that undertook the "Shout Out" survey ranged from age 11 to 30, with 60% of participants aged 14-16. Almost 500 Youth Connections clients (current and exited) took part.<sup>31</sup>

In a survey conducted late 2012 of clients in the federal Youth Connections program, over 1,400 responses were received to a question which allowed respondents to pick as many options relevant to their future. The large number of responses indicated a real sense of aspiration. Whilst the standard education setting was not working for them, they still had aspirations like all other young people to "get a good job". This is noteworthy, and challenges the stereotype sometimes perpetuated in the public and political arena in relation to young people and employment.<sup>32</sup>

In 2013 the Youth Reference Group (YRG) of YACVic held a forum, "YOUth Untitled", bringing together over 80 young people from around Victoria (eg representatives from youth-led organisations, politicians, youth workers) to discuss several topics, one of them being secondary education. After the forum the YRG analysed the data created, conducted additional research to further explore the issues, and then published a set of findings and recommendations for the Victorian Government.

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<sup>30</sup> Kellock, P. of the Asquith Group with support from members of the Youth Collaboration and Youth Affairs Council 2007 *Youth Voice: Peer Research in Youth Transitions*

<sup>31</sup> (former) Youth Connections National Network (YCNN) 2013 *The Space In-between – Future Policy Directions for Youth at Risk*

<sup>32</sup> (former) Youth Connections National Network (YCNN) 2013 *The Space In-between – Future Policy Directions for Youth at Risk*

### Some recommendations:

- Government and service providers should consult young people on the issues they face, and involve them in decision-making on issues/areas that affect them, in age appropriate ways. For example input should be sought with regards to (a) ideas, or when seeking feedback on available options; (b) informing any planning and development of activities, policies and programs, and (c) gauging satisfaction levels about any existing programs, services and facilities.
- Youth consultations can take many forms and among many noteworthy efforts are Youth Summits or Forums, face-to-face consultations, on-line surveys, and the establishment of youth reference groups.
- Providing young people with a voice on youth transition issues is important, and the benefits of providing opportunities for a peer research approach should be noted and incorporated into youth transition programs wherever possible.
- Consultations should ideally include the broadest cross-section of ages and cohorts. For example, with disengagement occurring in the middle years age group (8 to 12 years of age), greater efforts need to be made to seek this group's views, in age appropriate ways.
- Greater efforts also need to be made to actively seek the views, opinions and experiences of dis-engaged young people, alongside those of young people enrolled in school. Similarly cohorts of young people (such as those with disabilities, those leaving Care, and young people leaving juvenile justice) also should have opportunities to participate in consultations. If necessary additional resources should be allocated to ensuring this can occur.

### 3. Funding / youth specific programs

We might expect any service or program provided to young people to have a capacity to engage with, and meet the needs of, this cohort. Young people and the youth services sector consistently report that young people are more likely to engage with or respond positively to youth-specific programs; that these programs are best delivered by, or at least supported by youth workers or by those who understand, can engage with and advocate for this cohort.

As obvious as this seems, in practice this doesn't always happen. Young people who have left school and apply for a government benefit do not see youth workers, but are referred by the Australian Department of Human Services to a contracted employment services provider, seen by an adult not necessarily equipped to engage with them, and only in an office setting, usually by appointment only.

There are and should be differences between services for youth people and those for adults. In services for the former, young people can "look for advice from their peers, take risks and are often limited in their capacity to think about longer term consequences", all "normal aspects of growth and the development of a person from a child to an adult."<sup>33</sup> However in an adult service they "are not easily accommodated, with the consequences of non-compliance becoming an impediment to success". As a Jobs Australia Policy Report states, "young people respond best to a youth specific service ...".<sup>34</sup>

The federal employment services market until recently included specialist youth providers, and there was a time when young unemployed people with barriers to employment could be assisted by specialist youth services. There have been at least two worthy federal programs during the past ten years which have had funding discontinued. The first program was the Jobs Placement Employment Training (JPET for short) which provided intensive case management and outreach to young people with barriers to further training or employment, operated between 2004 and 2009. The second most recent program was Youth Connections, which was funded from 2010 to the end of 2014.

Whilst we welcome in principle the 2015/16 Federal Budget announcement of a Youth Employment Strategy, and an investment in school to work transition programs to help vulnerable young people, we would add that the previous federally funded "Youth Connections" program was actually a capped service, and so "not able to meet all the demands for services, even from those who meet eligibility requirements".<sup>35</sup>

Whilst we can see contracted employment service providers change (with new tenders or re-allocation of business), the same situation has not applied to federally-funded youth programs.

With the commencement of a new federal system (Job Active), there are now questions being asked as to how effectively this system is going to cater to certain cohorts, including young people.

In past research young people have indicated that they would prefer ongoing support relationships to assist with their transition. They would like a more personal form of assistance than that which is frequently available through short-term, 'outcome-focused', government-funded services".<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Jobs Australia 2014 *Jobs Australia Policy on Youth Transitions*, Melbourne

<sup>34</sup> Jobs Australia 2014 *Jobs Australia Policy on Youth Transitions*, Melbourne

<sup>35</sup> Jobs Australia 2014 *Jobs Australia Policy on Youth Transitions*, Melbourne

<sup>36</sup> Kellock, P. of the Asquith Group with support from members of the Youth Collaboration and Youth Affairs Council 2007 *Youth Voice: Peer Research in Youth Transitions*



### Some recommendations:

- Governments need to ensure transparent, long-term sustainable funding for youth specific programs and services (and an investment in their evaluation). Supporting young people in their transition to paid work - through income support as well as effective pre-employment/training programs - is vital. Sustainable long-term funding can also avoid gaps in service provision which arises out of the relatively short-term nature of program/s, such as has been the case with the previously funded Jobs Placement Employment and Training (JPET) and Youth Connections.
- There is a need for the establishment of a program, or range of programs, to help young people achieve Year 12 or its equivalent; and/or facilitate re-engagement with education or training to improve job prospects. Such a program or programs needs to be creative, engaging and flexible in its delivery.

Features of such a program/s would include:

1. the provision of and focus on individualised (case management) support
  2. group activities including re-engagement and/or pre-accredited training;
  3. assertive outreach;
  4. possible co-location with complementary programs, or services
  5. other activities which might be delivered through partnerships with other providers, business and industry etc (such as those listed in our section on Partnerships)
  6. flexibility and variety in the frequency of client contact, and the ability to work according to the varying needs and capacities of young people
  7. availability across all regions, not just in areas identified as “high” need
  8. availability in regional and remote regions (where access to other or youth services may be limited).
- Where any federal program or programs are established to assist young people still enrolled at school, we support full and transparent consultation with the states.
  - Generally speaking young people would benefit more from a program(s) that complements, but is distinct from federal employment services (eg the new Job Active), especially where such programs(s) contain the features listed above.
  - Consideration should be given by state governments to funding a program, or range of programs, to help young people achieve Year 12 or its equivalent; and/or facilitate re-engagement with education or training to improve job prospects. State funding for such a program(s) could still occur even if there is a federal one, especially if the federal program(s) has capped places or is not available in all regions.

#### 4. Workforce strategy - including professional learning

How do we ensure that the range of professionals who are involved in the education and support of young people, who help facilitate pathways and transitions – and the organisations they work for - are suitable, are the best that we have? This question encompasses many issues, among them the suitability, training and management of people, as well as about the organisations (eg not for profits and government) in which front-line staff work. We pose these questions as they are part of the discussion about improving outcomes for young people.

What are the right levels of staffing and workloads? Who determines them? Being able to attract and retain highly skilled staff is an obviously important aspect of providing the highest quality schooling and education, as well as further training, welfare support, youth and employment services. What are the impacts of federal, state and even local government funding? And of contractual arrangements?

In not for profits, in training organisations, in schools too, we increasingly hear about burdens and pressures. There are funding shortfalls and uncertainties, which may follow a change of government or Minister, or whenever another government review is called. There are greater expectations, eg around generating income and cutting costs. There are greater compliance measures and costs associated with this. A range of stakeholders and providers can experience real tensions between these burdens and expectations and the efforts to fully meet the needs of young people, either as students or clients.

We also hear of varying levels of funding for and access to professional learning, and of varying workloads (eg caseloads) for teaching staff, Principals, trainers, youth workers, compliance staff etc.

We also know that work pressures (including caseloads) can overshadow the capacity to attend professional learning, contribute to staff turnover burn-out, and so impact on the quality of work being done. For example, in a report and survey of staff carried out by the Australian Services Union in 2011 two of the top three issues that respondents selected as having an impact on their preparedness to stay in an organisation were 'inadequate staffing levels' and a 'lack of training'.<sup>37</sup>

It is commonly acknowledged that some areas of work – eg those working in child protection, personnel employed in employment services – have had caseload levels contributing to a higher staff turnover than compared to other workers and sectors. For example, turnover rates for the employment services sector in 2008 were estimated by the industry to be between 25% and 30%.

In the ASU report two of the three major impediments to receiving training (as highlighted by employers and employees in the research) was "lack of time to attend training" and "the cost to an organisation to have workers attend".<sup>38</sup>

Whilst this paper cannot fully explore all the issues, we would highlight the need for further policy development and research in the area of workforce development, and practical measures (including adequate funding) put in place to both ensure sufficient staffing levels are present, and access to relevant professional learning/training can occur.

More work needs to be done by government, schools, training organisations, and not for profit organisations to ensure that staff are able to do the best job possible in teaching, supporting and or transitioning young people. This includes staff at more senior levels who oversee those in the front-line. Management style and management's expectations of workers matter, as do organisational cultures – whether we refer to government departments, schools, training organisations, and not for profits.

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<sup>37</sup> Australian Services Union, 2011 Employment Services: Not just a job", Australian Services Union, Melbourne

<sup>38</sup> Australian Services Union, 2011 Employment Services: Not just a job", Australian Services Union, Melbourne

### Some recommendations:

- Further policy development and research in workforce development is needed, as well as appropriate levels of funding guaranteed, to ensure that there are sufficient staffing levels in relevant government departments, educational settings, TAFE Institutes, community and not-for-profit organisations, and any other key stakeholder body or group.
- Professional learning should be encouraged, properly funded, and embraced by management and staff, to enhance existing skill levels and knowledge.
- Professional learning (including workshops and Conferences) should work towards bringing together personnel from across sectors, where opportunities for interaction and information sharing insights between and among sectors, can be enhanced. For example, staff in employment services can benefit from professional learning that's offered to workers with young people (eg youth workers). Similarly, workers with young people could benefit from professional learning or training geared towards staff in employment services.
- Housing, mental health specialist staff, disability sector staff, and A&OD specialist workers, should be encouraged – and funded – to provide professional learning to colleagues who might not normally have access to their knowledge, skills and approaches. Similarly, professional learning offered to the above should also be extended to include Child Protection / Youth Justice and family support workers.
- Among the more specific areas where professional learning would be beneficial to the above, we have identified the following:
  1. Trauma informed theory and practice
  2. Child and adolescent development
  3. Working with challenging behaviours
  4. Working with people with disabilities (including intellectual disabilities)
  5. Strength-based approaches
  6. Family inclusive work and practice

## 5. Partnerships – including with industry

School systems, industry, RTOs, training package developers, curriculum bodies and VET regulators need to collaborate to ensure the quality, value and relevance of vocational learning and VET delivered to secondary students. This collaboration needs to occur at all levels, from local to national.<sup>39</sup>

Vocational orientation for young people, career education, work exploration and work-related curriculum are all vital to help students explore career options and understand the nature and expectations of different jobs and industries. Interested students also need to be able to begin acquiring workplace skills while still at school, through nationally recognised training that provides a clear line of sight to a job.<sup>40</sup>

Students reap greater benefits from vocational learning programs when these are based on strong collaboration with employers. Contact with employers gives students a real-world insight into what jobs exist (and may exist in the future), what those jobs are like, and what skills and qualifications they require.<sup>41</sup>

A central characteristic of good transactional and integrative corporate/community partnerships is a determination for each party to understand the operations of the other, including culture. For example, the need to strengthen understanding between NFP organisations and business was a common theme in all consultations reflected in a 2008 report “Relationship matters: not-for-profit community organisations and corporate community investment”.<sup>42</sup>

There are today numerous examples of programs, services and initiatives which involve partnership arrangements and/or collaboration (between and among not for profit community providers, LLENs, RTOs, business and industry and education providers), and these include:

- workplace visits / industry tours and general workplace “exposure”
- career pathway forums
- work experience and student placements
- job and career expos
- mock job interview panels (conducted within or outside learning settings)
- trade taster programs
- informing the delivery of VCAL and VET
- School Based Apprenticeships / Traineeships (SBATs); and
- Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs.

Partnerships and collaboration between and among key stakeholders (e.g. education and training providers, business and industry, all levels of government, and not for profit organisations) are increasingly cited for their importance. However a stronger and more committed co-operative effort between all stakeholders is still needed. There is value in partnerships and collaboration amongst stakeholders at all levels: national, state, regional and local.

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<sup>39</sup> Education Council (Education Services Australia), 2014 *Preparing Secondary Students for Work: A framework for vocational learning and VET delivered to secondary students*

<sup>40</sup> Education Council (Education Services Australia), 2014 *Preparing Secondary Students for Work: A framework for vocational learning and VET delivered to secondary students*

<sup>41</sup> Education Council (Education Services Australia), 2014 *Preparing Secondary Students for Work: A framework for vocational learning and VET delivered to secondary students*

<sup>42</sup> Centre for Corporate Public Affairs, 2008 *Relationship Matters: Not For Profit Community Organisations and Corporate Community Investment*, Centre for Corporate Public Affairs.

A best practice model of how partnerships can be established, supported and co-ordinated can be seen in the example of Local Learning Employment Networks (LLENs), which have been operating, largely through state government funding, for just over a decade. LLENs now have a solid track record in facilitating or fostering partnerships and effective collaboration, locally and regionally, to improve outcomes for young people.

LLENs varied work has included:

- the establishment of school-industry-community partnerships at a strategic level,
- facilitating and co-ordinating various networks, including around applied / flexible learning,
- supporting alternative and/or non-mainstream education providers / options,
- the provision of new programs / networks for specific “at risk” cohorts,
- data gathering, analysis and local research.

LLENs are incorporated associations, and whilst funded by government, also work independently, and so are well placed to support co-operation, partnerships and collaboration among diverse, sometimes competing stakeholders, for a “common agenda”. e2e would also like to acknowledge the current Victorian government and its foresight in its commitment to LLEN funding for four years.

### **Some recommendations:**

- School-based provision of vocational orientation and work exploration need to be increased, and consideration needs to be given to commencement from a younger age.
- As employers generally expect school leavers to already have had some practical experience, more creative thinking is required as to how we can facilitate greater engagement between and among SMEs and education providers, especially for the benefit of young people whilst they are still attending schooling. Overseas models of vocational orientation, work exploration, and vocational education and training generally, are worth investigating.
- As schools need to be confident that their teachers and career advisers are able to link learning content to the workplace and give sound career advice based on a good understanding of workplaces and practices, we should strive towards greater engagement (including professional learning opportunities) between schools and industry. For example teaching staff (especially careers teachers) might benefit from placements in industry. Connecting SMEs and corporates and schools (to enhance mutual understanding, to share knowledge) is worthy of further exploration and development, as are Teacher - Industry Partner Schemes or Industry Placement programs.
- A wide range of partnership arrangements or collaboration are worthwhile, and should be encouraged and nurtured. Partnerships can and should vary. In responding to youth unemployment, we need to go beyond Work for the Dole and employer “incentives”, such as job subsidy payments. For example, vocational orientation and work exploration is not always readily available to young people outside of the secondary school system (ie to those disengaged). More work needs to be done to ensure young people who have left mainstream education and or who are unemployed can also benefit from such orientation and exploration.
- As some partnership arrangements need to be co-ordinated, they may require “backbone” support to either become established, or to continue functioning. As a minimum, most networks or partnerships need administrative and secretarial support. Rather than duplicate existing networks there is merit in “topping up” funding, where appropriate, to existing organisations (such as LLENs), which have the mandate and expertise to broker or support partnerships. The current Workplace Learning Co-ordinators (WLC) Program (which some LLENs have contracts to deliver) also needs to be continued, to ensure coordination of school-based apprenticeships and traineeships, structured workplace learning and work experience for students.

## 6. Education disengagement

There are children and young people either not regularly attending or disengaging altogether from school, and this group includes cohorts who are younger than the school leaving age of 17.

### Some recommendations:

- As the integrity of reporting data needs to be maintained, all schools should ensure that “Transition from School Forms” (ie, to regional DET offices), are submitted.
- Schools which are holding the Student Resource Package (SRP), and any other funding for a student, should be accountable for follow-up regarding student non-attendance. Transition from School Forms need to be tracked. Where students are attending an alternative program the SRP should be handed over from the school to the program, so that these programs can continue. In many cases this currently does not happen.
- Greater communication with, and partnerships between mainstream schools and any community/satellite education (including VCAL) programs should be encouraged. More frequent communication and clearer protocols developed among and between mainstream schools (primary and secondary) and alternative or non-mainstream education providers (eg operating in the same area) would help facilitate the best outcome for these children and young people.
- There needs to be more support for schools and non-mainstream education providers with regards to transitions from schools to another provider, for example, through a re-engagement contract.
- With the ending of the federal Youth Connections program, there is a recognised gap in service provision to schools which previously had received support for children and young people who were at risk of disengaging, eg through case management provided by youth workers employed under Youth Connections. As it is not desirable nor realistic for schools / and teaching staff to provide all health and well being / welfare support in-house, schools should be encouraged to contract with external (welfare / community / youth support agencies and services) to deliver welfare support to students, especially to those who under 17 years of age, who are at risk of disengaging. Although some providers have attempted fee-for-service arrangements with schools, this has generally had little take-up, as schools are unfunded for this.
- As previously stated, the need still exists for a program or programs, federally (and/or state) funded, which is sustainable in the long-term, and which includes the provision of individualised (case management) support, and other services (as outlined in Section 3’s Recommendations).

## 7. Education – VCAL and VET

“The VCAL was introduced in 2002 in response to the Kirby Report (2000) that recommended a set of reforms to ensure that all students were able to access a senior secondary program of study. As an alternative to the VCE, the VCAL has proved to be highly successful, with enrolments steadily growing....”<sup>43</sup> In 2013, there were 22,853 certificate enrolments with 443 VCAL providers.<sup>44</sup> In 2014, 14 new providers commenced delivery of VCAL.<sup>45</sup> Although most VCAL providers are secondary schools, VCAL is also provided by some TAFE institutes and Learn Local organisations.

Surveys of young people consistently show that participation in VCAL is an important reason that students decide to stay at school. As an applied learning option for students, VCAL facilitates progression to apprenticeships, TAFE studies, or paid employment. “The On Track destination data for 2013 Intermediate and Senior VCAL students indicated that 27.3 per cent of VCAL students continued with further education or training, and 57.4 per cent commenced an apprenticeship, traineeship or employment.<sup>46</sup> This means that 84.7 per cent of VCAL students had a direct pathway to further education, training or work – an outstanding achievement”.<sup>47</sup>

Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Schools is a vocationally oriented program that is part of either VCAL or VCE. It provides credit towards these certificates as well as the opportunity to undertake a nationally recognised VET qualification within the Australian Qualifications Framework.

In Victoria, the term ‘VCE VET’ has been adopted to describe the formalised arrangements under which VET certificates have been incorporated in the VCE. Most students undertaking vocational education and training as part of their VCE or VCAL are enrolled in VCE VET programs.

In his keynote address for the Victorian Applied Learning Association conference, Professor Bill Lucas from the Centre for Real-World Learning suggested that “Any division between the academic and vocational is an unhelpful one”.<sup>48</sup>

Applied learning – that is, learning by doing; “real-world” relevance and application - is important.

If, as Professor Dr Bill Lucas has said, that “in many ways, Victoria is the home of applied learning,”<sup>49</sup> more needs to be done to champion its value within the education sector, as well as to parents and the community in general. There is in fact too little awareness of the VCAL “brand”. Some teachers have still never even heard of it. For some VCAL Co-ordinators and VCAL teachers, this option is simply misunderstood, and these staff still air frustrations that VCAL is viewed as “second tier” (to VCE), dismissed as “VCE lite”. This is despite the fact a VCAL Certificate is a fully legitimate alternative to undertaking VCE, and has a more than decade-long track record in Victoria.

Perhaps in an ideal world we could better blend academic and vocational learning? At the very least we – educators, policy shapers, bureaucrats, parents, etc – should ensure they are equally regarded. VCE and VCAL are two sides of the same coin.

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<sup>43</sup> Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority (VCAA) 2013 *Strengthening Senior Secondary Pathways*, VCAA, Melbourne.

<sup>44</sup> Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority (VCAA) 2013 *Strengthening Senior Secondary Pathways*, VCAA, Melbourne.

<sup>45</sup> Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority (VCAA) 2014 *VCAA Annual Report*, VCAA, Melbourne.

<sup>46</sup> Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority (VCAA) 2014 *VCAA Annual Report*, VCAA, Melbourne.

<sup>47</sup> Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority (VCAA) 2014 *VCAA Annual Report*, VCAA, Melbourne.

<sup>48</sup> Lucas, B. June 2015 *Keynote Address Melbourne VALA Conference*, Victorian Applied Learning and Association, Melbourne.

<sup>49</sup> Lucas, B. June 2015 *Keynote Address Melbourne VALA Conference*, Victorian Applied Learning and Association, Melbourne.



### Some recommendations:

- Both VCAL and VET need to continue, to be supported, and where required, to be expanded.
- Greater incentives may need to be provided to schools and non-mainstream education providers, to either take up or continue VCAL programs, as well as to give greater weight to vocational training, and real world application of learning.
- All young people deserve to receive education most relevant to them, no matter where they live. Where numbers may be limited in an individual school, we endorse cluster models or arrangements (ie among a group of schools) to ensure VCAL is provided. More staff and physical resources, more professional learning opportunities for teachers, improving careers advice and guidance, are all desirable.
- Young people enrolled in VCAL at a non-school provider should have the same access to funding for the VET programs as those enrolled in government schools.
- We would also add the recommendation in the 2014 “Secondary Education” Findings and Recommendations (in the previously cited), YOUth Unlimited Summit: Increase the amount of activities and communication between VCE, VET and VCAL students in order to ensure the VCAL stream or VET subjects are as valued as VCE by students, parents and the wider community.



## 8. Disabilities

While maximising the choice and opportunities of people with a disability regarding their lifestyle and community participation is increasingly at the centre of both State and Federal policies, employment levels continue to fall well behind in this area. Recent figures illustrated Australia's comparatively lacklustre position with a ranking of 21 out of 29 OECD countries for employment levels of people with a disability. Workforce participation for the 20% of Australians who identify as having a disability has dropped to 53%, with a large number of this cohort also dealing with underemployment<sup>50</sup> ( ) and workplace discrimination<sup>51</sup>. This predicament is compounded by a shortfall in school completion rates of students with a disability<sup>52</sup>. At the current time, while over 9% of students identify as having a disability only 36% end up finishing their Victorian Certificate of Education, with a further 26% not making it past year 10. It is imperative that improvements to outcomes in the area of employment, training and education are made sooner rather than later, especially given the current focus on maximising efficiency across the economy.

In 2015 the Federal Government made a strong commitment in its budget, announcing that it would "support and enhance the social and economic opportunities of people with disability. Everyone who has the capacity to participate in employment should have the opportunity to enjoy the dignity of work ...".<sup>53</sup> This announcement was backed up by a \$25 million dollar investment in job seekers with a disability and employers, a \$17 million dollar investment in Australian Disability Enterprises to improve their viability, as well as the introduction of a central information point (JobAccess Gateway) at the cost of \$9 million dollars to be introduced in July 2016.<sup>54</sup> Further promises were made in the area of school transition with a \$2.2 million dollar investment being made to Disability Employment Service Providers to increase time spent with young people immediately after finishing their schooling.<sup>55</sup> These commitments suggest that there are strong intentions to improve outcomes for people with a disability when it comes to employment and education. However a number of challenges await these reforms as structural concerns continue to plague efforts for change.

### Disability Employment Services

Disability Employment Services (DES) providers continue to work hard to source employment for their clients, delivering a number of training, placement and employment opportunities in different industries. However, while the recently announced funding increase could strengthen their position to deliver on these objectives, existing contractual parameters and growing responsibilities due to cuts in other areas (such as Youth Connections) may well counteract the benefits from these changes. With initiatives such as Youth Connections being defunded a number of employment and training services for young people are feeling the strain of increased expectations on the same budgets. If the roles and responsibilities in this area are not properly refined a great risk is being run in confusing not only the service providers, but the students themselves on where to turn when attempting to take the next step towards further schooling or work.

Further to this, the transition from a school environment to an employment service for young people, let alone those with a disability, can be a particularly difficult and confronting shift. With the current focus being on an immediate transition from school to work, young people with intellectual disabilities are being sent to employment agencies when they may want or need to develop further skills and knowledge to be work ready.

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<sup>50</sup> <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4433.0.55.006>

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/projects/willing-work-national-inquiry-employment-discrimination-against>

<sup>52</sup> *DEEWR, 2011, Review of Funding of Schooling – Final Report*

<sup>53</sup> [https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05\\_2015/2015\\_budget\\_fact\\_sheet\\_-\\_disability\\_employment.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05_2015/2015_budget_fact_sheet_-_disability_employment.pdf)

<sup>54</sup> [https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05\\_2015/2015\\_budget\\_fact\\_sheet\\_-\\_disability\\_employment.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05_2015/2015_budget_fact_sheet_-_disability_employment.pdf)

<sup>55</sup> [https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05\\_2015/2015\\_budget\\_fact\\_sheet\\_-\\_disability\\_employment.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05_2015/2015_budget_fact_sheet_-_disability_employment.pdf)

Without extra training and support, the additional service or attention from DES providers post school could mean little to young people with a disability who may lack motivation, skills and/or confidence to begin and sustain employment for lengthy periods of time.

Activities such as job search appointments with a case worker can provide useful connection for young people looking for work, but this relationship also comes with a variety of challenges. With DES providers still receiving minimal funding by government, the expectations placed on them may be too high to make any meaningful impact in the short term.

While there are positive steps being made towards assisting and supporting young people with disabilities in training and attaining employment, a risk also remains that DES providers may provide in house training delivered by staff who are under or not qualified for these challenges. The diversity within disability cannot be underestimated, with the need to cater sensitively to any individuals needs being a challenge within itself. There is also a risk in DES providers developing partnerships with Registered Training Organisation's to deliver accredited courses either at inappropriate sites such as Australian Disability Enterprise's or at the site of the DES provider. The geographical barriers are an underappreciated challenge to committing to work and training, especially when it comes to young person with a disability who may rely on a parent or carer for transport and extra care.

## **Career Planning**

It should also be acknowledged that career planning is still not given enough attention in the current schooling curriculum, especially when it comes to people with a disability. While it is a positive step promoting earlier interactions for students with qualified planners for schools, the part time nature of these roles means these positions can either be invisible to students, or overwhelmed with a lack of on-the-job time. Further to this, realistic expectations must be placed on students with a disability from this point of view, as it may take longer to hit milestones compared to peers without disabilities.

Hence, effective career planning needs to support young people to identify what they can do, rather than what they cannot do, while also appreciating the reality that a career doesn't necessarily mean one line of work for life. A career includes a lifetime of experiences with periods of education, training, paid employment, unpaid employment, unemployment, volunteer work and life roles just some of the diverse areas that everyone must participate in. Young people with disabilities can participate in a variety of valued work activities regardless of the level of their ability, and should not be discouraged from thinking creatively and strategically about their decisions in this area.

One area of concern that relates to the need for career planning has surfaced as a result of the Service Agreement Notification (SAN) in August 2013. This agreement has meant that a student enrolled in a school cannot attend further education and training such as at TAFE concurrently. This has created an unnecessary barrier for students with intellectual disabilities and autism spectrum disorder in particular. Previously students in their final/ senior years of schooling were enabled part time enrolment within a TAFE as a means transitioning to employment opportunities, as well as reducing anxiety into a new unfamiliar environment. The learners affected by the changes outlined in the SAN are already amongst the most marginalized members of our community, so they come as a surprise when bold claims are being made towards improving outcomes and increasing funding for initiatives that support employment and transition for young people with a disability.

RTOs still have a number of issues that must be addressed, namely the type of work/study being undertaken and an examination into the locations where this training is occurring.

The use of Certificates 3 levels which currently underpin School Based Apprenticeship and Traineeship (SBAT) programs are pitched at a higher level that students with intellectual disabilities are not able to successfully undertake based on their numeracy, literacy and cognition levels.

A danger could be students undertaking activities engaging in work for the sake of itself rather than working through graded levels of tasks required by the level of the course level (Certificate III in Warehousing). Further to this, Victoria does not list Certificate level one courses (e.g. Certificate 1 in Hospitality) as able to be funded within the SBAT system and this may have lead schools and others picking up funded options at higher Australian Quality Framework levels as a result.

The volume of learning, as it pertains to people with intellectual / learning disabilities, is also a concern. There is a risk with providers delivering courses at substantially reduced hours than recommended. The contestable market has opened the flood gates for RTOs to take advantage of vulnerable people with intellectual disabilities, due to the funding dollar. People with intellectual disabilities take longer to learn and gain skills and be work-ready. The intention of the 2014 Foundation Skills Preferred Provider list was to ensure quality provision in delivery of these courses. People with intellectual disabilities are significantly under represented in employment. This requires to change with quality education and training to improve employment opportunities for this cohort.

### **Cross Sectoral Coordination and Transparency**

Across Public, Private and Not-For Profit sectors there must be a greater level of coordination in activities, initiatives and advocacy. Currently many diverse and well-meaning disability action plans, working groups and policy announcements take place in the aforementioned organisations and entities, yet how these initiatives are held to account, and by whom is often left open for discussion. This situation promotes an air of uncertainty among stakeholders, and, ultimately, a disorganised and mostly ineffectual approach to long term and meaningful change within these organisations and the wider community. It may seem a bridge too far for these diverse entities to work together more efficiently on this matter considering the infinite number of matters they regularly have disputes on. Yet the cause of improving employment, education and training outcomes for people with a disability, especially the younger cohort, is one which has been shown bi-partisan support on multiple occasions in recent times. It is of fundamental importance that relationships across these areas are built as numerous myths (e.g. additional costs, lower productivity, too many adjustments to workplace etc) regarding the employment of people with a disability continue to persist, and dissuade employers and others from contributing to the betterment of Australians level of employment of people with a disability.

### **Summary**

The importance of a continuous, sustainable and supported pathway for people with disability from school to further education to employment cannot be overstated. The reality is that students with a disability may take longer to establish and work through their own pathway than their peers without disabilities, yet they can contribute just as much if not more given the opportunity and support that many of us take for granted. Greater employment levels of people with a disability are universally associated with increased productivity and growth across the economy.<sup>56</sup> On top of this, findings from a recent paper from the Disability Investment Group demonstrated reduced rates of absenteeism and increased morale, as well as decreased reliance on welfare services. Thus, the commitments made in the most recent budget cannot go by as mere alterations to the existing structure of transition for young people with a disability. Rather, these commitments must be built upon and strengthened in the short and long term and across a variety of sectors so that a coordinated and inclusive approach to producing positive outcomes for people with a disability is developed. Increased access to employment opportunities is key to improving economic security and personal wellbeing, and with the level of poverty or near-poverty experienced by people with a disability, change in this areas must be swift rather than subtle.

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<sup>56</sup> <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/disability-and-carers/program-services/for-people-with-disability/disability-investment-group>

### Some recommendations:

- As a means of engaging learners and increasing their opportunities for employment, students with intellectual / learning disabilities should be able to attend further education and training organisations whilst concurrently attending school.
- There needs to be more education of school sectors and employers regarding the expectations of AQF levels in training.
- To provide an entry point in training and employment and engage more young people, Certificate I & II level courses should be funded at a higher rate for students with intellectual/learning disabilities and those who are disengaged
- Access to training, support and incentives should continue to be available to support businesses employ people with disabilities.
- People with intellectual/ learning disabilities should be given the opportunity to engage in further education and training, career planning and gain employability skills prior to or concurrently registering with an employment agency.
- Greater transparency and accountability on Disability Action Plans, across all sectors, needs to occur.
- Greater linkages need to be created between private and public sector to spread awareness of resources/incentives available for employers hiring a person with a disability.
- There needs to be greater investment in education and training for people with intellectual disabilities. Courses specifically delivered to this cohort, such as Certificate I in Work Education, needs to be removed from the contestable market. Meeting the guidelines as outlined in curricula needs to be rigorously monitored to ensure professional standards, Disability Act and Charter of Human Rights are met. Only then will education and training for people with disabilities improve and lead to employment.

## 9. Middle Years

In photography a triptych form consists of separate images that are variants on a theme. We think of these three sections (Middle Years, Abuse and Trauma, Diversion) as a kind of “triptych”.

We know that there are children and young people disengaging from school as early as the middle years, ie from between the ages of 8 and 12. Among the factors that can contribute to early disengagement are family disruption, residential mobility, parent(s) with mental health problems and substance misuse, all of which may be associated with poverty and financial hardship.

It is true that today “family life itself is less secure and predictable” than it once was. “Relationships are dissolved with less stigma than in the past, marital separation and divorce are more common”.<sup>57</sup>

Both Australian and international research also suggests that high levels of residential mobility also have negative consequences for the development of children.<sup>58</sup>

Children raised in dysfunctional environments (where there is substance misuse, parental mental health difficulties, financial disadvantage and many other problems) do not fare well. Parental substance misuse frequently co-occurs with many other problems, the combination of which place children at heightened risk of abuse and neglect.<sup>59</sup>

The higher prevalence of histories of mental illness, substance abuse, and incarceration among disrupted families helps account for why certain children are more severely impacted by family disruption in the long run than others.<sup>60</sup>

Clearly, if we accept some of the most likely contributing factors to early disengagement from school, the challenges that follow are great. However “at present it is not clear whose responsibility it should be to address the gaps in middle years policy and service provision, but generally speaking, policies and services do not cater for those aged between 8 to 12, or 8 to 14. Some organisations and Local Government Areas (LGAs) are now adopting middle years-specific policies. However this is not yet standard practice”.<sup>61</sup>

Victorian local government has become the largest single provider of early years’ services in Australia and all councils in Victoria have developed individual early years’ plans. Whilst 93% report of Victorian LGAs provide generalist youth services, only 36% of report operating in the “middle years”.<sup>62</sup>

Some existing models and programs (especially ones funded by the Victorian State Government) have the capacity to engage with and support children and young people in their middle years, and or their families. Among them we note and welcome the 2015/16 Victorian State Budget which included an allocation of \$48.1 million over four years for Child FIRST and family services.

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<sup>57</sup> Premier’s Children’s Advisory Committee, September 2004, *Joining the Dots: Report to the Premier of Victoria*

<sup>58</sup> Edward, B., Mullan, K., Katz, I. & Higgins, D. September 2014 *The Stronger Families in Australia Study: Phase Two (Research Report No. 29)*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne

<sup>59</sup> Dawe, S., Harnett, P. & Frye, S. September 2008 *Improving Outcomes for Children Living in Families with Parental Substance Misuse*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.

<sup>60</sup> Zill, N. March 2015 Substance Abuse, Mental Illness, and Crime More Common Disrupted Families, Family Studies, The Blog of the Institute of Family Studies access at <http://family-studies.org/substance-abuse-mental-illness-and-crime-more-common-in-disrupted-families/> on 20/07/2015.

<sup>61</sup> Inner Metro and Community Partnership (IMCP), 2014 *The Middle Years: A Policy Recommendations Paper*, IMCP, Melbourne.

<sup>62</sup> Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) and Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), July 2013 *Right in the Mix, Roles of Victorian Councils in the delivery of services to vulnerable young people*, Melbourne.

### Some recommendations:

- A proper allocation of resources – both from government and philanthropic sources - can help minimise the proportion of children and young people aged 8 to 12 who disengage from school. Investment in programs and support services for families need to continue, if not be extended.
- There is a continuing need (as highlighted in a 2007 Peer Research Report “for more support services to be made available to young people at an earlier age, as problems for some young people emerged while they were still at primary school”).<sup>1</sup>
- Gaps in the provision of policies, strategies, supports and interventions show a need for government at all levels, together with organisations and service providers, to do more work.
- Aside from the recommendations in the (abuse and trauma) section which follows, governments and stakeholders can be working together to ensure transparent, long-term sustainable funding for current programs and services (and other middle years programs as well), and invest in their evaluation. These programs and services include all of the Adventure Playgrounds which operate in Victoria; ChildFIRST; the state funded Youth Support Service (currently funded until 30 June 2018); and Family Relationships Centres (FRCs) which operate across Australia.
- It is widely acknowledged that there are grandparent(s) playing an active role in caring for children, not just for those in the early years (up to 8) but for those in the middle years too. The extent that this is occurring is not fully known, however in 2006 the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated that over 22 000 grandparents in Australia were raising more than 30 000 grandchildren. As these arrangements are often made informally these statistics are probably an underestimate. We acknowledge that some grandparents may also be facing their own pressures, stepping in as carers a result of family circumstances, including disruption, and also that they may face financial hardships too. Investment in broader middle years programs and supports should also extend to grandparents.

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<sup>63</sup> The Youth Collaboration (prepared by Peter Kellock) 2007 *Youth Voice: Peer Research into Youth Transitions*, Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, Melbourne.

## 10. Abuse and trauma

The “Gonski Review” identified five factors of disadvantage impacting on educational outcomes: low socio-economic status, indigeneity, English language proficiency, disability, and school remoteness.<sup>64</sup> We might well add a sixth factor: childhood trauma (including sexual, emotional and physical abuse, and witnessing family violence) and neglect.

It is now widely acknowledged that childhood trauma, abuse and neglect can lead to a wide range of adverse consequences for children and young people, and that they can affect “all domains of development - physical, psychological, emotional, behavioural, and social - all of which are interrelated...” Among the possible consequences (as identified in research literature) includes “attachment and interpersonal relationship problems, learning and developmental problems, mental health problems, alcohol and other drug use, behavioural problems, and aggressive and violent behaviours in adolescence...”<sup>65</sup>

Berry Street’s Childhood Institute states that “one of the indicators of poor school engagement is exposure to traumatic stressors including abuse, neglect and violence directed at young people. The Institute maintains that “unfortunately, the frequency of this type of abuse is on the rise in Australia”.<sup>66</sup> It’s also our view that early disengagement from education and youth unemployment, is more likely to occur among children and young people who have been traumatised or severely neglected.

“Pegasus Economics estimates that the fiscal (budget) cost to Australian taxpayers of unresolved childhood trauma is at least \$6.8 billion per year for child sexual, emotional and physical abuse alone. In other words, if the impacts of child abuse and trauma (on an estimated 3.7 million adults) were adequately addressed through active, timely and comprehensive intervention, the combined budget position of Federal, State and Territory Governments could be improved by a minimum of \$6.8 billion annually.”<sup>67</sup>

When broader definitions of childhood trauma are taken into account, the estimated cost has been put as high as \$9.1 billion. In other words, if adult survivors of childhood trauma experienced the same life outcomes as non-traumatised adults, the collective budget deficits of Australian governments would be improved, at a minimum, by an amount roughly equivalent to the entire Government outlay on tertiary education”.<sup>68</sup>

According to ACSA, childhood trauma, including abuse, affects millions of Australian adults. Unresolved childhood trauma has short-term and life-long impacts which substantially erode both national productivity and national well-being. Over two decades of research have demonstrated potential negative impact of child abuse and neglect on mental health including depression, anxiety disorders, aggressive behaviour, suicide attempts, eating disorders, use of illicit drugs and/or alcohol abuse, post-traumatic stress, and self-harming behaviours.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Gonski, D, Boston, K., Greiner, K., Lawrence, C., Scales, B. and Tannock, P. 2011, Review of Funding of Schooling – Final Report, Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations, Canberra.

<sup>65</sup> Australian Institute of Family Studies, January 2014 *Effects of child abuse and neglect for children and adolescents*, *Child Family Community Australia (CFCA) Resource Sheet* accessed at <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/effects-child-abuse-and-neglect-children-and-adolesce> on 20/07/2015

<sup>66</sup> Berry Street Childhood Institute 2015 *Frequently Asked Questions* accessed at <http://www.childhoodinstitute.org.au/EducationModelFAQs> on 20/07/2015

<sup>67</sup> Kezelman, C., Hossack, N., Stavropolous, P. and Burley, P. 2015 *The cost of unresolved childhood trauma and abuse in adults in Australia: A report for Adults surviving child abuse, Adults Surviving Child Abuse and Pegasus Economics*, Sydney.

<sup>68</sup> Kezelman, C., Hossack, N., Stavropolous, P. and Burley, P. 2015 *The cost of unresolved childhood trauma and abuse in adults in Australia: A report for Adults surviving child abuse, Adults Surviving Child Abuse and Pegasus Economics*, Sydney.

<sup>69</sup> Kezelman, C., Hossack, N., Stavropolous, P. and Burley, P. 2015 *The cost of unresolved childhood trauma and abuse in adults in Australia: A report for Adults surviving child abuse, Adults Surviving Child Abuse and Pegasus Economics*, Sydney.



Many survivors' lives are characterized by frequent crises, the result of unresolved childhood abuse issues. The reasons are complex, but for many survivors ongoing internal chaos prevents the establishment of regularity, predictability and consistency.<sup>70</sup>

Victims of child abuse and neglect are more likely to commit crimes as juveniles and adults.<sup>71</sup>

Child sexual abuse has been found to be a key factor in youth homelessness, with between 50-70% of young people within Supported Accommodation Assistance Programs having experienced childhood sexual assault.<sup>72</sup>

- Of the 170,000 notifications of suspected abuse or neglect in 2011-12, 46 per cent were further investigated.
- About 37,700 children were found to be the victims of abuse or neglect (or around 1 in 135 children aged 0-17 years).
- Emotional abuse was most the common abuse type, followed by neglect and physical abuse.
- Across Australia, almost 41,000 children were on a care and protection order at 30 June 2012.
- Rates of children aged 0-12 on care and protection orders nearly doubled between 2000-2011.
- Nationally, over 39,600 children were in out-of-home care at 30 June 2012, most in foster care.
- Indigenous children were: almost 8 times as likely to be the subject of substantiated abuse or neglect.<sup>73</sup>

Too many young people are abandoned by the people and the systems that are supposed to care for them; and there are not always happy endings for these young people, who tend to have higher rates of mental illness and involvement in criminality than other young people.<sup>74</sup>

The most recent national figures from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), indicate that during 2012-13, there were 184,216 Australian children suspected of being harmed or at risk of harm from abuse and/or neglect. This resulted in 272,980 notifications being issued by state and territory authorities (a rate of 35.5 notifications per 1,000 Australian children). The total number of notifications represents an increase of 7.9% from the 252,962 reports made in the previous year.<sup>75</sup>

Child protection statistics are one indicator of the extent of the problem of child abuse and neglect in Australia. However, they do not reveal with accuracy how many children in the community have been abused or neglected. Child protection data reflect only those families reported to child protection services. Economically disadvantaged families are more likely to come in contact with, and therefore under the scrutiny of, public authorities. This means that it is more likely that abuse and neglect will be identified in economically disadvantaged families if it is present. More work needs to be undertaken to enable more accurate estimates of how much abuse and neglect occurs in the community.<sup>76</sup> Some estimate 40% of students have been exposed or witness to traumatic stressors.<sup>77</sup> One in three girls and one in six boys are abused before the age of 18<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Adults Surviving Child Abuse, 2015 *Impacts of Child Abuse*, accessed at <http://www.asca.org.au/About/Resources/Impact-of-child-abuse.aspx> on 20/07/2015

<sup>71</sup> Adults Surviving Child Abuse, 2015 *Impacts of Child Abuse*, accessed at <http://www.asca.org.au/About/Resources/Impact-of-child-abuse.aspx> on 20/07/2015

<sup>72</sup> Adults Surviving Child Abuse, 2015 *Impacts of Child Abuse*, accessed at <http://www.asca.org.au/About/Resources/Impact-of-child-abuse.aspx> on 20/07/2015

<sup>73</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2013 *Child Protection Australia 2011/12 Child Welfare Series No. 55* Canberra.

<sup>74</sup> Downey, L. 2009 *From isolation to connection: A guide to understanding and working with traumatised children and young people*, a report commissioned and published by the Child Safety Commissioner, Melbourne.

<sup>75</sup> Child Family Community Australia (CFCA), 2015 *Resource Sheet: Child Abuse and Neglect Statistics*, accessed at <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/child-abuse-and-neglect-statistics> on 20/07/2015.

<sup>76</sup> Child Family Community Australia (CFCA), 2015 *Resource Sheet: Child Abuse and Neglect Statistics*, accessed at <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/child-abuse-and-neglect-statistics> on 20/07/2015.

<sup>77</sup> Child Family Community Australia (CFCA), 2015 *Resource Sheet: Child Abuse and Neglect Statistics*, accessed at <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/child-abuse-and-neglect-statistics> on 20/07/2015.



### Some recommendations:

- There is much to be said for the development of a National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 (Council of Australian Governments, 2009). Any such Framework which provides a shared approach with national leadership (as reflected in the title "child protection is everybody's business") is worthy of ongoing commitment.
- Justice Peter McClellan (Chair of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse) has recently highlighted the absence of a National Framework for Working with Children's Checks, calling this absence a blight on the community's efforts to protect children. We support calls for such a Framework.<sup>1</sup>
- There is much work being done (and being increasingly documented) regarding frameworks for practice with "high-risk" young people, and "trauma informed" theory and practice. More professional learning (across all sectors) in trauma informed theory and practice needs to occur.
- In a Report Commissioned by the Victorian Child Safety Commissioner (a guide to understanding and working with traumatised children and young people) there are a six recommendations we would like to repeat here. Organisations and services should (i) work from practice frameworks that are based on theory and research; (ii) use well-documented and resourced structures for supervision; (iii) have enough staff to manage crises (iv) provide appropriate training to do the job (v) provide access to debriefing and (vi) encourage reflective practice. In addition to these six points, we would add that effective crisis management plans should also be put in place.
- All schools ought to have sufficient resources to equip staff with professional learning, ongoing in-service training and support, so as to be able to effectively teach and support students who are clearly at risk of disengaging as a result of previous, childhood abuse and/or trauma. However as this is an educational system we do not yet have, it's important that non-mainstream or alternative education options should continue to be made available to young people.
- Non-mainstream education providers (which may more effectively cater to students who have both disengaged from mainstream schools and who may be exhibiting patterns of behaviour consistent with previous or current abuse, and/or the effects of trauma) are an important part of the education system. Young people can still learn, thrive and prosper if the conditions are right, and if their individual learning needs can be addressed and met. These education providers (among them Berry Street School, Oakwood School, Prahran Community Learning Centre, Pavilion School, and the Pickles Street site of MCM / St Kilda Youth Service) all have their own model/s of practice, and approaches to teaching, student support and engagement. All such providers have their place and value.
- Appropriate outreach models, to meet the needs of some young people, should be explored, tested, and/or implemented. Assertive outreach programs can be beneficial. Generally speaking, more workers with young people should also be engaged in assertive outreach.
- Better communication between and among schools / non-mainstream education providers, and including other departments, such as the Department of Human Services and Youth Justice (including cross agency professional learning) are also to be welcomed.

<sup>78</sup> Child Family Community Australia (CFCA), 2015 *Resource Sheet: Child Abuse and Neglect Statistics*, accessed at <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/child-abuse-and-neglect-statistics> on 20/07/2015.

<sup>79</sup> McClelland, P. Hon. Jus. 2015 *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* accessed at [https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/documents/redress/redress-and-civil-litigation-justice-peter-mcc\(1\).pdf](https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/documents/redress/redress-and-civil-litigation-justice-peter-mcc(1).pdf) on 20/07/2015.

## 11. Diversion

All available evidence suggests that young people coming into contact with the justice system are some of Victoria's most vulnerable. For example, the Youth Parole Board and Youth Residential Board Annual Report for 2013-14 highlights that a significant number of young people in youth detention come from particularly disadvantaged backgrounds, with 89% having a history of alcohol and/or drug misuse, 60% having been victims of child abuse, trauma or neglect, 59% being current or former child protection clients, and 56% having been suspended or expelled from school.<sup>80</sup>

The earlier children and young people have contact with the justice system, the more likely they are to experience further problems with the law, particularly when there are underlying factors. It is imperative that those in the middle years especially are diverted from the justice system into support services at the earliest opportunity. While there have been or are a few valuable pre-plea diversion programs, (including ROPES and Right Step), these have been either limited in scope, locality and/or have had insecure funding.<sup>81</sup>

The Victorian government's investment in a Youth Diversion Pilot program is welcome. We are aware that following a tender process, Jesuit Social Services (JSS) is the provider of this 2105 / 16 program, together with the Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS), who will target young people with little or no history of offending. However we do note that as a Pilot, this Program operates for a limited period (12 months), and caters to limited numbers.

There is a strong case to be made for greater investment in diversion programs as part of a bigger package of programs and services in the community, rather than spending money to keep individuals in prisons. For example the cost of new prison infrastructure and expansion of prisons to accommodate an increasing prison population within Victoria is in the hundreds of million of dollars. The 2013–2014 Victorian State Budget committed an extra \$131.5 million on top of the \$819 million prison funding announced last year to extending the prison system.<sup>82</sup>

Prisons are pretty ineffective in preventing reoffending. Imprisonment in many cases is likely to have a negative impact on a young offenders offending trajectory. In Victoria, the most recent data shows re-offending rates of 57 per cent amongst juveniles sentenced to detention. It is widely accepted incarceration foster further criminality.<sup>83</sup> Prison can diminish the health, economic and social outcomes in a young person's life whilst also increasing the risk factors associated with offending.

Diversion early in the criminal justice process offers a less costly and more effective way of addressing youth offending, especially when compared to the cost of detention or further matters coming before the court. Community based diversion and support programs cost about one tenth of what detention of a young offender in a youth justice facility costs Government.

Resourcing programs in the community that address the underlying causes of young people's offending by promoting rehabilitation and reintegration are key to preventing their trajectory into the criminal justice system and reducing reoffending. This is particularly the case given the well-known indicators of disadvantage that are characteristic of young people entering the criminal justice system, such as mental illness, alcohol and or substance abuse, and child abuse, trauma or neglect.

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<sup>80</sup> Youth Parole Board & Youth Residential Board 2014 *Youth Parole Board & Youth Residential Board Annual Report 2013-1*, Victorian Government, Melbourne. Accessed at [http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/890932/Youth-Parole-Board-and-Youth-Residential-Board-Annual-Report-2013-14.pdf](http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/890932/Youth-Parole-Board-and-Youth-Residential-Board-Annual-Report-2013-14.pdf) on 27/07/2015

<sup>81</sup> Downey, L. 2009 *From isolation to connection: A guide to understanding and working with traumatised children and young people*, a report commissioned and published by the Child Safety Commissioner, Melbourne.

<sup>82</sup> Youthlaw, 2013 *It is smarter to invest in diversion than in prisons*, accessed at <http://youthlaw.asn.au/2013/05/its-smarter-to-invest-in-diversion-not-prisons/> on 20/07/2015

<sup>83</sup> Youthlaw, 2013 *It is smarter to invest in diversion than in prisons*, accessed at <http://youthlaw.asn.au/2013/05/its-smarter-to-invest-in-diversion-not-prisons/> on 20/07/2015

### Some recommendations:

- Money spent on keeping individuals in prisons can be better spent on justice reinvestment. We support the principle of funds currently allocated to prisons being redirected to programs that tackle some of the underlying causes of crime, which includes child abuse, trauma and neglect; substance abuse; and mental illness.
- Governments need to invest in a continuum of programs and interventions that divert young people at the earliest opportunity, are proportionate to the offence, and empower local communities to support at risk young people and address the specific underlying causes of their offending
- Government need to legislate to make diversion options and programs available state-wide to all young offenders (before they formally enter a plea) in the Children's Court (as is already the case in the adult system).
- We also note and welcome that providers holding contracts to deliver the Youth Support Service (which supports young people aged 10-17 who have had recent contact with police and who may be at risk of entering the youth justice system), have funding until 30 June 2018. However, as we believe the need for this service is greater than its capacity, we hope that a future state budget(s) will be in a position to increase funding to expand the YSS, enabling it to assist larger numbers, and to more effectively meet need across all of its catchment regions.

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- Taskforce Community Agency
- Victoria Police

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