



## snapshots from the edge



Young people and service providers  
on the urban fringe of Melbourne

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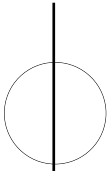


## **Youth Affairs Council of Victoria**

The Youth Affairs Council is the peak body and leading policy advocate on young people's issues in Victoria. YACVic provides a means through which the youth sector and young people voice their opinions and concerns in regard to issues and policies affecting them. YACVic works with and makes representations to government and serves as an advocate for the interests of young people, workers with young people and organisations that provide direct services to young people. YACVic also promotes and supports the participation of young people in debate and policy development in areas that most affect them.

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YACVic would like to acknowledge the services, service networks, researchers and young people who contributed their time and knowledge to informing this issues paper. They are listed in Appendix B of this document.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This issues paper draws on the particular experiences of young people and youth service providers on the urban fringe of Melbourne. It seeks to make clear that there are specific challenges in providing services to young people on the urban fringe, and that young people in these areas are missing out on some services and opportunities because those challenges are typically not recognised or catered for in government policy, program development or funding structures.

In this paper, YACVic calls on the State Government to respond to the needs of young people and youth services providers in urban fringe communities, as illustrated by the findings of this report, in two ways:

1. To work with local government and local community agencies to directly seek to address local disadvantages impacting on young people in those areas.
2. To consider the unique status and characteristics of urban fringe communities in general policy and program development in the future.

This paper draws from previous research and information gathered by YACVic through consultations with young people aged between 12 and 25 and youth service providers in the eight Interface councils on the fringe of Melbourne. These municipalities are:

- Wyndham City Council
- Melton Shire Council
- Hume City Council
- City of Whittlesea
- Nillumbik Shire Council
- Shire of Yarra Ranges
- Cardinia Shire Council, and
- Mornington Peninsula Shire Council.

The issues of concern that are focussed on in this paper are:

- planning, infrastructure and funding of services
- the accessibility, frequency and cost of public transport
- human services on the fringe
- the accessibility of mental health services
- housing and homelessness, and
- education and employment.

It also explores these issues within the current Victorian policy context making recommendations for action and for further exploration of the issues. These are not the only issues of significance for urban fringe communities, and there is diversity

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in the ways these issues are experienced in different municipalities. They are the focus of this report because they were typical areas of concern and because they have not necessarily received adequate attention in previous research.

The report also provides a snapshot of demographic information about each of the Interface municipalities and a review of previous research and key policy documents of relevance to the fringe.

The key findings of the report are explained under each category below:

## **PLANNING, INFRASTRUCTURE AND FUNDING OF SERVICES ON THE FRINGE**

Interface communities commonly experience a shortfall in infrastructure with services unable to match the needs of local communities. Key concerns identified by YACVic are:

- the need for a 'catch up' of service development and infrastructure on the fringe,
- the need for infrastructure to cater for large predicted population growth, and large numbers of young people amongst that population, and
- the challenge of delivering services across large rural/urban areas with dispersed populations.

The report recognises that *Melbourne 2030* outlines policy initiatives to curb urban growth and address local service gaps. YACVic suggests that central to the development of effective infrastructure and service models that account for the needs of young people in the community are funding models that take into account the specific and unique challenges of providing services on the fringe. Key concerns about funding raised in YACVic's consultations were:

- that funding levels either didn't take into account, or adequately reflect the costs of providing outreach services and travel required by many agencies to access young people in the area
- that the impact of locational disadvantage, particularly in those communities with high levels of disengagement from education and high reported levels of risk taking behaviours amongst young people, meant demand for services was higher than funding levels reflected
- that high levels of funding were required to avoid or eliminate the lag in infrastructure in developing communities, and to ensure that problems are not compounded in the future given population growth predictions in these areas

YACVic suggests that the recommendations of a 2003 RMIT report *Human Service Gaps at the Interface between Urban and Rural* should be implemented. They are:

- State and Commonwealth funding methods to reflect the relative population dispersal and distance needing to be covered in funding for regionally-based and outreach services
- funding levels to reflect "real time" population figures to accommodate for population growth and avoid a lag in infrastructure
- State and Local Government and regional agencies to work collaboratively in a strategic planning process

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- the Department of Human Services to ensure regional agencies are funded sufficiently to outreach to fringe communities
  - State Government fund programs that will address those needs of young people and families identified by the study<sup>1</sup>

In addition, YACVic recommends that the State Government fund programs to address the key service gaps outlined in this report.

## **THE ACCESSIBILITY, FREQUENCY AND COST OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT**

Public transport was raised as a key concern in YACVic's consultations in every Interface municipal area. The shortfalls with public transport on the fringe have been documented in research and highlighted by young people for decades. Key problems with public transport identified during YACVic's consultations are:

- public transport schedules, routes and connections
- the cost of public transport
- feeling unsafe using public transport, and
- increased isolation and a lack of independence caused by inaccessible public transport

The State Government needs to work with local communities to find solutions to gaps in public transport services. Drawing from research conducted by the Outer Suburban / Interface Services and Development Committee and the Coalition for Public Transport, YACVic recommends that both the Federal and State Governments work collaboratively to fund effective public transport networks.

## **HUMAN SERVICE NEEDS ON THE FRINGE**

YACVic consultations revealed that of particular concern to local youth service providers was a lack of local referral options, particularly with regard to mental health and counselling services, drug and alcohol services, and services for young people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness.

Many of these services are regionally based and YACVic is aware that the demands on regionally based services exceed resources, creating problems of access to these services for young people throughout their region. These service gaps are of particular concern given the reported higher levels of early school leaving and risk taking behaviour in many Interface Local Government Areas.

This report explores in detail the issues of the accessibility of mental health and homelessness services on the fringe as these areas of concern are not typically detailed in previous research.

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<sup>1</sup> Marston, G. Morgan, L and Murphy, J. *Human Service Gaps at the Interface between Urban and Rural*. Centre for Applied Social Research, RMIT. Melbourne, 2003, p.vi.

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## THE ACCESSIBILITY OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

In each of the eight local government areas consulted by YACVic for this report, youth service providers expressed concern regarding the inaccessibility of mental health services to young people in their area. Key areas of concern are:

- waiting lists for access to regional mental health services
- the challenges of meeting the needs of young people in vast Interface councils for regional and local services, and
- a need for more local counselling services

YACVic recommends that the Victorian Department of Human Services ensure that gaps in availability of mental health services on the fringe are identified and addressed in the context of both regional and local service provision.

Also, the Victorian Government needs to work in partnership with Local Government and existing youth and mental health service providers to devise local solutions to service gaps. Solutions may involve the establishment of new services, the skilling up of existing services or agencies that have ongoing contact with young people in the community such as General Practitioners, or recreation providers to ensure they are able to identify a young person in need of mental health intervention and have the capacity to refer appropriately. The Victorian Government also needs to work with generalist health and mental health service providers to assist them to be more accessible and user friendly, ensuring young people have equitable access to those resources.

## HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

Young people's access to homelessness services was of particular concern to service providers in many of the urban fringe areas. Service providers typically reported a lack of locally based appropriate emergency and general accommodation options for young people. Service providers highlighted the importance of enabling young people to stay connected with local community supports when experiencing homelessness.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that in some fringe areas there are significant levels of youth homelessness, particularly in tertiary homelessness, with very limited locally based services including crisis accommodation. YACVic asserts that the findings of previous research suggest that youth homelessness is a problem in urban fringe communities, particularly if we explore the question of where young people first experience homelessness.

While YACVic commends the Government's focus on youth homelessness through the Youth Homelessness Action Plan, we call on the State Government to explore in more detail these concerns stemming from the sector, and ensure that the Interface areas are adequately resourced with homelessness services accessible to young people.

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## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Previous research has reported that when compared with their inner city counterparts, young people on the urban fringe are:

- more likely to disengage with secondary school early
- less likely to engage with post-secondary education
- more likely to be engaged in employment<sup>2</sup>

Key concerns raised in YACVic's consultations regarding education were:

- Young people having limited choices in secondary schools in some areas, a problem compounded by poor public transport networks.
- Young people's lower levels of retention in secondary education.
- Young people's post secondary education options being limited by the cost and time involved in travel to institutions.
- A need for more alternative education options for young people in the area.

Regarding young people's employment, specific issues raised by young people and service providers in our consultations were:

- limited employment opportunities within their local community
- needing to travel to access work and the costs involved
- whilst young people may be able to find work locally, they often felt restricted by the forms of work available and felt that to get a 'real job' in the field they were interested in they would need to travel closer to the city

Previous research finds that 'some of the Interface municipalities have a major problem to deal with in the immediate and longer-term consequences of youth unemployment, particularly where unemployment is combined with poor school completion rates and consequently lower educational opportunities.'<sup>3</sup>

YACVic recognises that many current programs are making a difference to young people's engagement in education employment and training, such as Job Placement, Employment and Training Programs, Local Learning and Employment Networks and school support services. It finds however that specific focus needs to be placed on working with local governments, schools, and agencies in Interface municipalities to improve retention rates in fringe communities.

Urgent responses are required to address the problems faced by those Interface municipalities with high unemployment rates, given the lower levels of educational attainment on the fringe, such as Hume and Melton. Again, these responses need to be locally focused and involve a partnership between State and local government and local schools, industry and services.

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<sup>2</sup> These findings are drawn from previous research including the 1995 NYARS report by Ian Winter. *Young People Living on the Urban Fringe* and RMIT's 2003 report *Human Service Gaps at the Interface between urban and rural*. The findings of these reports and other supporting evidence are discussed in detail in Part 3 of the report.

<sup>3</sup> Marston, G., Morgan, L. & Murphy, J. *op.cit.* p. 28.

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## CONCLUSION

By exploring the need for more public transport, general infrastructure and mental health and homelessness services, and the education and employment status of young people in fringe communities, YACVic paints a picture of some of the ways in which Government can improve services and opportunities for young people on the urban fringes of Melbourne.

In summary, YACVic makes recommendations in this report concerning:

- ***Improving funding to youth service providers on the urban fringe***  
Funding mechanisms must address the unique demands placed on service providers in urban fringe communities and must accommodate for predicted population growth and the need for a 'catch up' of services in these areas.
- ***Improving public transport***  
The Victorian Government work with the Federal Government to increase funding to public transport on the urban fringe, and that the Victorian Government work in partnership with local Government and communities to improve the availability of public transport.
- ***Closing gaps in human services on the urban fringe***  
That the Victorian Government work in collaboration with local Government and local service providers to identify and address gaps in human services in fringe communities.
- ***Improving accessibility of mental health services***  
That access to mental health services is improved for young people on the fringe, with the Government increasing resources to regional mental health services to improve waiting lists; increasing the availability of local counselling services to provide services to young people before they need acute mental health care; recognise and respond to the challenged faces by mental health service providers in Interface, fringe areas.
- ***Improving access to housing and assistance to young people experiencing homelessness on the urban fringe***  
The State Government explore in more detail concerns stemming from the sector around increasing youth homelessness in fringe areas and ensure that the Interface areas have adequate homelessness assistance services and resources. That the issue of the accessibility of housing to young people on the urban fringe be explored and addressed by the Office for Housing, and that a youth specific housing strategy be implemented to target young people in those locations where accessibility to affordable housing is a problem.
- ***Improving the education and employment outcomes for young people on the urban fringe***  
Locally focussed responses need to be made to address the issue of lower educational achievement where it exists on the urban fringe and local employment prospects for young people. Particular focus needs to be placed on those areas where both high unemployment and lower than average education attainment exist.



# SNAPSHOTS FROM THE EDGE

Young people and service providers  
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# INTRODUCTION

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Young people often occupy the fringes of our communities - politically, economically, geographically and culturally. While some young people may choose to occupy the margins rather than the mainstream, fringe dwelling is often associated with disadvantages which impact on young people's opportunities and wellbeing. It is therefore important to explore the issues young people experience on the fringe and to address these issues at a policy and practice level.

One way in which young people can experience the fringe relates to where they live. In research and policy there is often a focus on the urban/rural dichotomy when looking at issues of locational disadvantage. This approach overlooks the unique circumstances of those urban fringe communities positioned on the edge of urban and rural areas and including elements of both. These communities face specific challenges in providing services. The issue of adequate service networks and infrastructure is of particular importance to those communities predicting rapid future population growth and further urban development. Services in urban fringe municipalities often need to cater for the needs of young people living in diverse, geographically dispersed communities. Young people living in these areas commonly experience problems of isolation and locational disadvantage, particularly in accessing public transport and services in similar ways to rural and regional young people. The circumstances in urban fringe communities can be overlooked in funding and service structures designed for metropolitan Melbourne.

For this reason, YACVic has undertaken to provide a snapshot of some key issues impacting on young people and services for young people on the urban fringe. The urban fringe has been the subject of ongoing research, some of which has focused on young people. This overview draws from this previous research and information gathered by YACVic through consultations with young people aged between 12 and 25 living in these areas and workers with young people providing services on the urban fringe. It also explores these issues within the current Victorian policy context. This report does not explore every issue in depth, but rather raises several issues that need further consideration and investigation. Our primary aim is to draw attention to the unique status of the urban fringe and to highlight the importance of the consideration of that status in policy development. This is done through focusing specifically on the following issues:

- planning, infrastructure and funding of services on the fringe
- the accessibility, frequency and cost of public transport
- human services on the fringe
- the accessibility of mental health services
- housing and homelessness, and
- education and employment

It is timely for YACVic to be exploring issues on the urban fringe considering the Victorian government policy focus on the fringe in *Melbourne 2030: Planning for sustainable growth*, released in October 2002. *Melbourne 2030* provided 'a 30 year plan to manage growth and change across metropolitan Melbourne and the surrounding region' providing a 'framework for governments at all levels to respond

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to the diverse needs of those who live and work in and near to Melbourne.<sup>4</sup> The findings of Melbourne 2030 led to the implementation of urban growth boundaries with the aim of limiting the expansion of the urban sprawl. It also outlined strategies to direct future development to infrastructure strong areas and improve infrastructure on the fringe more broadly.

YACVic welcomes initiatives to ensure that urban fringe areas are more effectively resourced. YACVic asserts, however, that the needs of urban fringe communities should be a focus area not just for urban planning policy but for broader government policy on the delivery of human services, health, housing, education and employment.

This is not the first time YACVic has explored the urban fringe. In 1992, YACVic published *"Too Far From Civilisation": Young people's perceptions of living in a growth corridor*,<sup>5</sup> a research paper that gave voice to young people's experiences of living on the fringe. Our recent consultations with young people and services reveal that the key concerns raised then continue to be raised now. In addition, anecdotal evidence collected from service providers in these areas reflected increasing concern about gaps in service provision for young people in these communities, with two key areas of concern being access to mental health and homelessness services.

Urban fringe areas in Victoria do experience locational disadvantage and these issues need to be addressed if fringe regions are to meet the needs of local young people.

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<sup>4</sup> Victorian Department of Infrastructure. *Melbourne 2030: Planning for Sustainable Growth*. 2002.p.12.

<sup>5</sup> Karapetkos, A and McLeod, J. *"Too Far From Civilisation" Young People's Perceptions of Living in a Growth Corridor*. Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, January 1992.



# PART 1: DEFINING THE URBAN FRINGE?

Essentially the term 'urban fringe' refers to geographic communities on the outskirts of metropolitan Melbourne. The fringe has moved increasingly further away from central Melbourne over the last few decades due to greater urban development. Melbourne 2030, notes that in 1972 'someone wanting to live on the city fringe could buy a house on one of the new estates in Doncaster or Glen Waverley, where long-established orchards were being cleared and their land subdivided.'<sup>6</sup> Today the urban fringe lies much further out. Expected growth in some urban fringe communities is predicted to increase dramatically in the near future.

A term often used to describe local government areas on the urban fringe is 'interface municipalities.' 'Interface municipalities' are those local government areas that sit directly at the interface between urban Melbourne and rural Victoria. Within their municipal boundaries they encompass, both urban and rural communities and are considerably larger than their neighbouring local government areas closer to the city. In Interface municipalities approximately 70 percent of the population lives in around 30 percent of the area.<sup>7</sup> Melbourne's Interface municipalities are:

- Wyndham City Council
- Melton Shire Council
- Hume City Council
- City of Whittlesea
- Nillumbik Shire Council
- Shire of Yarra Ranges
- Cardinia Shire Council, and
- Mornington Peninsula Shire Council

Whilst the focus of YACVic's consultations for this report have been on these municipalities, anecdotal evidence suggests that many residents and workers based in neighbouring Local Government Areas in both urban and rural settings also identify with the term 'urban fringe' as they share specific characteristics with interface municipalities. For example, the City of Casey is not officially an Interface municipality. However, it is sufficiently far from central Melbourne for many young people and workers to say they are on the fringe. Likewise, Bacchus Marsh lies approximately 20 kms further west than the Interface City of Melton, however anecdotal evidence suggests workers with young people in this area consider themselves to be on the urban fringe. While the term 'urban fringe' is flexible, we have restricted the focus of this report to the Interface municipalities listed above.

## DIVERSITY ON THE FRINGE

There is considerable diversity on the fringe, both between urban fringe municipalities and within the boundaries of a single municipality.

The Local Government Areas across Melbourne's fringe differ in many ways including size, population demographics and extent of urban development. For example it is a very different experience to live along the coast of the Mornington Peninsula than to live in the bushy hills of Nillumbik Shire. The Mornington Peninsula, spanning the Port Philip and Western Port Bays, is made up of a mixture of urban areas, resort towns, tourist development and rural land. It has a below average

<sup>6</sup> Victorian Department of Infrastructure. *op.cit.* p.29.

<sup>7</sup> Marston, G. Leonie, M and Murphy, J. *op.cit.* p.1.

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income level compared to greater Melbourne, with residents engaged in a range of employment activities spanning a mix of both higher and lower skill occupations. Nillumbik Shire is on the other side of town, located to the north east of Melbourne CBD and encompasses the main townships of Eltham, Diamond Creek and Hurstbridge and large areas of nature and recreation reserves. Nillumbik residents earn an above average income with a large proportion of residents professionally employed.

Despite these geographic, demographic and socio-economic differences certain common issues arise in both areas and these relate to living on the urban fringe of Melbourne. For example, youth services from both the Mornington Peninsula and Nillumbik identified isolation as a key issue for young people in their Shire. They have also identified a lack of locally based services in some service areas and the need to travel for access to services as problems impacting on local young people.

There is also considerable diversity *within* fringe Local Government Areas and this presents one of the main challenges for youth service providers. For example, the Cardinia Shire encompasses over 40 suburbs and townships. As the South East Local Learning and Employment Network (SELLEN) notes '(t)here are obviously great distinctions between the opportunities and challenges facing young people from different areas within Cardinia.'<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the City of Hume encompasses the culturally and linguistically diverse and comparatively well serviced area around Broadmeadows and the more isolated geographically, less culturally diverse communities of Sunbury and Craigieburn. Within Hume there is also very diverse land usage including, residential, rural, industrial and future urban development sites. The challenges of providing services to the diverse communities in these areas are often overlooked in policy, funding models and program development.

## **YACVIC'S CONSULTATIONS**

The process of producing this issues paper involved three stages of information gathering. Firstly, a literature review of previous research was conducted and is presented in the 'setting the scene' sections of the report. To build on this previous knowledge base, YACVic conducted a range of direct consultations with service providers, service networks and young people in the eight Interface municipalities. This exercise enabled YACVic to gauge if the findings of previous research were still relevant, if the picture had changed, and where future investigation and policy attention was needed. These consultations guided YACVic in identifying the key focus areas of this report. Having an understanding of those key areas, YACVic then went back to other resources, such as locally conducted needs analyses and data collected by service providers, to further substantiate the issues raised by young people and service providers on the fringe.

YACVic consulted directly with twenty-four youth agencies and networks across the interface local government areas. This included the Local Government Youth Services in each of the Interface municipalities (eight in total) two community health services, two local government network meetings, and six other youth services including Werribee Youthlaw, Peninsula Youth and Family Services, Kildonan Youth Services, Werribee Anglicare, the South East Local Learning and Employment Network the Youth Voice project stemming from the Whittlesea Youth Commitment and the Interface Council's Network.

In order to have young people's perspectives reflected in this report, YACVic consulted with young people's networks through the Sunbury Youth Forum, the Werribee Youthlaw Forum, the Cardinia Youth Forum and the Yarra Ranges Youth Leaders. This meant that young people's perspectives from the East, North, South and

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<sup>8</sup> South East Local Learning and Employment Network. *Cardinia Shire Environmental Scan 2003. SE LLEN, Dandenong*. 2003. p.13.

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West of Melbourne influenced this report. See Appendix B for a list of organisations and networks consulted.

Consultations with services and young people involved guided conversations in which key questions were addressed, but these questions were flexible enough to allow discussion of the unique elements of living or working in that particular area. Workers with young people were asked a mixture of questions about the Shire, the issues for young people living in the Shire and the experience of delivering services in that area. Key questions were:

- What is the role of your service?
- What do you understand about young people's experiences of living in this Shire? What are the key benefits and downsides?
- Do these issues vary in different areas?
- What are the common issues across the Shire?
- Are there any gaps in services to young people in the Shire? If so, what are they?
- What is unique about delivering services to young people in this Shire?
- What are the positive things about working in this Shire? What is really working effectively?
- What are your strategies for overcoming distance barriers when delivering services in the Shire?
- What needs to happen to improve the delivery and availability of services to young people in the Shire?

Young people were asked questions about their experiences and perceptions of living in the area and what could be improved. Key questions were:

- What are four words you might use to describe your area?
- What is good about living in this area?
- What are the downsides?
- Do you feel safe in your area? Why/why not?
- What do you like to do for entertainment in your area?
- What is public transport like in your area?
- How hopeful are you of getting a job in this area after you leave school?
- If you could change three things about where you live, what would they be?
- Would you like to continue to live in your area as an independent adult?
- If you didn't live here, where would you like to live?

Having an understanding of the key areas of concern for the young people and service providers with whom we had consulted, we then drew from other sources such as data services had collected through surveys of young people, demographics reports, youth

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forum recommendations or projects through which young people had expressed opinions about their local area. The information in these documents and reports, along with previous research, provided valuable substantiating evidence for those issues raised in the consultations. We also looked at how these issues are reflected in and relate to Victorian Government policy. Given YACVic's role as the Victorian peak body, we have focussed attention on State Government legislation. Those policies of particular relevance to the focus areas of this report are *Growing Victoria Together, Respect: the Governments Vision for Young people, Melbourne 2030: Planning for sustainable growth*, the *Victorian Homelessness Strategy* and the *Youth Homelessness Action Plan* first stage report. YACVic also recognises the central role that Local Government has in addressing these issues, and the role of the Commonwealth Government. While this report does not detail recommendations for local or federal Governments, various recommendations call on collaborative responses across the tiers of government.

## LIMITATIONS OF THIS REPORT

Whilst original research has been conducted by YACVic in the production of this report through consultations with young people and youth service providers, this document is not a research report as such, but an attempt to draw together information from many sources to highlight key issues on the fringe and to advocate for change where needed.

As outlined in the methodology section, consultations consisted primarily of conversations led by some guiding questions. As such, the findings of the consultations are not quantifiable but do provide important information about the experiences of young people and services in fringe areas.

The compilation of this report has involved consultation with a range of youth networks and services, as outlined in Appendix B. These consultations were largely directed by which services were available and YACVic's resource capacity to consult broadly. This means that a wide range of perspectives were collected, however, there is not consistency in the types of services consulted in each area. For example, a community health service perspective may have been collected in one area and not another. To ensure some consistency and to gain the perspectives of more generalist youth service in each area, we started consultations with local government youth services. However, local governments can provide quite different services. Their focus is driven by factors like the specific needs of local young people and the existing local service structure meaning they can shed light on issues depending on their relevance to their experience.

Another limitation of this report is that it only focuses on those key issues most commonly raised in the consultations. It does not attempt to report on all areas of need as identified in each individual Interface municipality, and as such the different experiences of each community are not always fleshed out, nor are all the community specific issues in each area raised. The focus in this report is infrastructure and funding of services on the fringe, young peoples access to public transport, mental health and homelessness services and education and employment opportunities.

## PART 2: PREVIOUS RESEARCH AND POLICY

### — PAINTING A PICTURE

The unique status of the urban fringe of Melbourne has been investigated over many years and recently it has come more specifically under the government policy spotlight. This section of the report highlights key findings of previous research and provides details of some key pieces of State Government policy that impact on the urban fringe.

In 1992, YACVic released *'Too Far From Civilisation' Young People's Perceptions of Living in a Growth Corridor*. This report sought to bring young people's voices into the debate surrounding urban sprawl and the future of Melbourne. Young people from secondary schools in the Shire of Berwick, the Shire of Hastings and the City of Whittlesea filled out questionnaires and participated in workshops. They provided their perspectives on the adequacy of services in their area, the pros and cons of living in their area and where they believed the social planning focus needed to be in the future allocation of resources.

The findings highlighted some common experiences for young people in each of the three areas. Many young people felt ambivalent about where they lived. The report relayed that 'they like the advantages of living close to the country, in an area which is sparsely populated; but they do not like the lack of opportunities and facilities which occur as a consequence of small populations.'<sup>9</sup> When asked to rate key service areas of importance young people were specifically concerned with:

- a lack of frequent, safe and comprehensive public transport
- the need for more recreational activities in their area, and
- the need for more part-time employment opportunities.

The report recognised that young people on the urban fringe have a unique experience of locational disadvantage, with these issues being compounded by their dependence on others and their exclusion from political decision making. It concluded that:

There is some concern that the benefits of living on the fringe of Melbourne are being outweighed by the disadvantages associated with isolation and lack of community facilities. For young people, these problems are exacerbated because of their dependence on other people. This dependence occurs at a number of levels. In terms of the physical isolation of these suburbs for example, means that young people rely on public transport or their families or older friends to get around. At a more important level, young people do not have direct or formal access to political decision-making. Their voices are often not heard and they are reliant on others to represent their views.<sup>10</sup>

At the time *Too Far From Civilisation* was written, the urban fringe was under the Victorian Government policy spotlight. The Department of Planning and Housing outlined a strategy of directing future development to specific designated growth areas, reporting that:

(t)he costs of allowing urban sprawl to continue are too high. The environment cannot sustain the rapid rate of development that is occurring on the fringes of the metropolitan area. Residents moving into isolated newly created fringe developments with little access to services and amenities are disadvantaged in many ways.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Karapetkos, A and McLeod, J. *op.cit.* p.10.

<sup>10</sup> Karapetkos, A and McLeod, J. *op.cit.* p.25.

<sup>11</sup> Department of Planning and Housing. *Melbourne's Sprawl - time to act*. State Government of Victoria, Melbourne, 1991 as noted in Karapetkos, A and McLeod, J. *op.cit.* p. 4.

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Three years later the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme released a study of *Young People Living on the Urban Fringe*. The study examined the experiences and needs of urban fringe young people, including young parents, from a sample of urban fringe communities from Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide. Using data from the Australian Living Standards Study conducted from 1991 to 1993 by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, the report explored social, economic and locational disadvantage for young people on the urban fringe. It found that 'urban fringe young people are locationally disadvantaged, when compared with inner city young people, in that their living standards are adversely affected by spending more time travelling to post-secondary education institutions, being more likely to experience transport-related study problems, and by a lack of independent means of transport to and from entertainment venues.<sup>12</sup>

Other key conclusions the report made about the living standards of those young people included in the survey data were:

- that their living standards varied according to participation in education, training, employment and leisure
- that higher proportions of young people earned an income through paid employment but that this needed to be understood in the context of higher levels of early school leaving
- that there may be a cycle of lower educational achievement among some families on the urban fringe
- That young parent families appeared to be the most disadvantaged group on the fringe, with two thirds living in relative poverty, having clear implications for the children in those families<sup>13</sup>

Recommendations stemming from these findings related to changes in the policy areas of income support, school retention rates, post-secondary school courses, public transport and employment growth strategies.

Poverty on the urban fringe would be explored in more detail in a Brotherhood of St Laurence 2001 report. *Poverty on the metropolitan fringe* considered poverty in fringe areas generally and then focused on the issues for low-income residents in the City of Hume, Frankston and the Mornington Peninsula Shire. The study found that whilst people of low income have similar experiences of poverty across a variety of areas, living on the urban fringe presented a unique situation. It pointed out the cycle whereby people of low income move to fringe communities because housing is more affordable, however the locational disadvantages of those areas compound their experiences of poverty:

In general the people on low incomes whom we interviewed had moved to outer-urban areas because of housing affordability (private rental or purchase) or availability (public rental) or for social and family reasons. Access to employment then becomes a problem.

In many ways the issues for people on low incomes in outer Melbourne are similar to those living elsewhere - the issues of adequate income, housing, education, employment, health and other services, recreation and social support. Geographic access however becomes crucial for outer-urban residents with transport a key issue that mediates many other aspects of life.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Winter, I. *Young People Living on the Urban Fringe*. National Youth Affairs Research Scheme. National Clearinghouse for Youth Studies, Hobart, 1995. p.viii - ix.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> Jope, S. & Taylor, J. *Poverty on the Metropolitan Fringe*. Brotherhood of St. Laurence, Melbourne, 2001. p.2.

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## CURRENT VICTORIAN POLICY CONTEXT

Victorian government policy outlines commitments which relate to creating equal opportunities for young people throughout Victoria. *Growing Victoria Together* outlined the Bracks Government's key priority areas for the next 10 years, aiming to 'balance economic, social and environmental goals and actions'<sup>15</sup> in order to achieve three key goals:

- providing decent and responsible government
- getting the basics right - good schools, quality health care, more jobs, safe streets
- leading the way to a better Victoria with education and lifelong learning as the key<sup>16</sup>

Of particular relevance to the urban fringe theme is the commitment made by the government to focus on education, accessible health and community services, safe streets, homes and workplaces, effective public transport and 'building cohesive communities and reducing inequalities.'<sup>17</sup>

The following year *Respect: The Government's Vision for Young People* was released from the Office for Youth, then within the Department of Education and Training. The document outlines the priority areas of program and policy development for the government in order to achieve communities in which young people are:

- valued and respected
- supported through social, educational, cultural and employment opportunities
- able to live healthy, satisfying lives and
- able to realise their full potential<sup>18</sup>

*Respect* outlines policy and program directions, reflective of a 'whole of government' approach to ensure 'that all young Victorians have the opportunity to benefit from, and contribute to, a full range of social, educational and cultural activities.'<sup>19</sup> YACVic has found that there can be specific challenges for young people living on the urban fringe that can affect their access to these opportunities.

With regard to education and employment, *Respect* outlines the Government's commitment to '(assist) more students from rural and regional Victoria with transport options to ensure their participation in education and training.'<sup>20</sup> This is also a priority for urban fringe communities, and this commitment needs to extend to those areas. The Government also commits to giving 'priority to allocating employment programs and interventions in communities with high youth unemployment and low school retention rates.'<sup>21</sup> This also has specific relevance to urban fringe communities as low retention rates are a problem in many of these communities and locational disadvantages of living on the urban fringe can also impact on young people's employment opportunities. These issues are discussed in more detail in Part three of this paper.

The delivery of services, including support services, to young people presents unique challenges on the urban fringe, which are also discussed in more detail in Part three of

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<sup>15</sup> Department of Premier and Cabinet. *Growing Victoria Together*. State of Victoria, 2001. p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Department of Premier and Cabinet. *op.cit.* p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> Department of Education and Training. *Respect: The Government's Vision for Young People*. State of Victoria, 2002. p.2.

<sup>19</sup> Department of Education and Training. *op.cit.* p.4.

<sup>20</sup> Department of Education and Training. *op.cit.* p.12.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

this report. *Respect* outlines some priority areas for government about supporting young people, some of which YACVic's investigations reveal, have a specific relevance to the urban fringe, such as improving services and developing new initiatives to assist young people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness.<sup>22</sup>

In 2002, the Department of Infrastructure released a policy document with significant consequences for the urban fringe called *Melbourne 2030: Planning for sustainable growth*. *Melbourne 2030* is a government blueprint for the management of growth and change across metropolitan Melbourne and the areas surrounding it. It identifies key priorities for change, outlines a strategic framework 'to coordinate the location and management of new infrastructure and services, minimising cost and environmental impact and maximising economic and social benefit.'<sup>23</sup>

*Melbourne 2030* put the fringe under the spotlight as many of the proposed strategies have a very direct impact on Interface municipalities, including strategies to ensure that development is aimed at creating a more compact city. The implementation of an 'urban growth boundary to set clear limits to metropolitan Melbourne's outward development' was a key policy initiative from *Melbourne 2030*.<sup>24</sup> It also contains strategies to plan for a more equitable distribution of social infrastructure and to improve the coordination and timing of installation of services and infrastructure in new development areas. Strategies to improve transport links area also a focus, as is the planning of development to make jobs and community services more accessible.<sup>25</sup>

*Melbourne 2030* recognised that locational disadvantage is experienced on the fringes of Melbourne and maps out planning strategies to concentrate development:

On the city fringe, concentrating development in compact settlements will have benefits for sustainability while protecting primary production, major sources of raw materials and valued environmental areas. It will help provide efficient and effective infrastructure that supports new development, especially public transport and community services.<sup>26</sup>

The need for improved public transport and community services were highlighted again in the findings of a detailed analysis of the gaps in service provision on the urban fringe of Melbourne. *Human Service Gaps at the Interface between Urban and Rural*, released in 2003 by the RMIT Centre of Applied Social Research, explored the socio-economic vulnerabilities on the fringe, the social needs of young people and families with young children in these areas, the specific challenges of delivering human services in these communities and some solutions for closing the service gaps.

The report painted a detailed picture of 'the particular challenges in delivering human services (in interface municipalities) because their demographic dynamics place distinctive demands on the human service system'<sup>27</sup>. Key challenges identified by the report were:

- providing services at the urban fringe that keep up with very high rates of population growth and large numbers of families with children under five
- maintaining the sustainability of services in small rural towns, and
- providing outreach services to more dispersed populations in rural areas<sup>28</sup>

The report also identified some specific 'disturbing trends' on the fringe, highlighting the

<sup>22</sup> Department of Education and Training. p.16 – 17.

<sup>23</sup> Department of Infrastructure. *op.cit.* p. 24.

<sup>24</sup> Department of Infrastructure. *op.cit.* p.18.

<sup>25</sup> Department of Infrastructure. *Melbourne 2030: Planning for sustainable growth*. State of Victoria, 2002.

<sup>26</sup> Department of Infrastructure. *op.cit.* p.33.

<sup>27</sup> Marston, G. Morgan, L and Murphy, J. *op.cit.* p. i.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

importance of addressing service gaps in these areas. The following is a summary of these trends:

- infants at the Interface have a higher incidence of low birth weight, and are less likely to be breast-fed than those in both the metropolitan and rural health regions
- the Interface has significantly higher rates of post-natal depression than both metropolitan Melbourne and rural Victoria
- the Interface has higher rates of child protection notifications, substantiations and care and protection orders than metropolitan Melbourne
- young people living at the Interface are less likely to complete secondary schooling, with knock-on effects in terms of participation in higher education and opportunities in the knowledge economy<sup>29</sup>

Key challenges impacting on the delivery of services in Interface municipalities highlighted in the report were:

- 'a significant lag between the settlement of new areas, and adequately developed and linked up services.'<sup>30</sup>
- 'the relatively weak development of the community and church based service sector at the Interface.'<sup>31</sup>
- 'the costs and challenges of providing outreach services ...where significant communities live beyond the urban fringe in small towns or in rural communities.'<sup>32</sup> These are often not recognised in funding structures.
- '(m)any agencies that are funded on a regional basis to deliver services are simply too far away, and therefore struggle to project their services to the communities at the fringe of Melbourne.'<sup>33</sup>

The report resolved that 'the gaps in inadequacy of human services at the Interface are partly about the need to meet distinctive social needs, partly about deficits of services and partly about problems of funding.'<sup>34</sup>

In March 2005 the Bracks Government released a position paper *Challenges in Addressing Disadvantage* that outlined a new framework for addressing disadvantage in Victoria. It recognised that '(o)ngoing disadvantage is linked to several factors including...geographic isolation, such as in some of Melbourne's outer suburbs and rural and remote areas, which are poorly served by public transport.'<sup>35</sup>

The core elements of this new framework are:

- ensuring that universal services provide equal opportunity for all (with a particular focus on the critical transition points in life)
- reducing barriers to opportunity (including individual and structural barriers such as poor access to services)
- strengthening assistance to disadvantaged groups

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Marston, G., Morgan, L. & Murphy, J. *op.cit.* p.35.

<sup>31</sup> Marston, G., Morgan, L. & Murphy, J. *op.cit.* p.37

<sup>32</sup> Marston, G., Morgan, L. & Murphy, J. *op.cit.* p. 39.

<sup>33</sup> Marston, G., Morgan, L. & Murphy, J. *op.cit.* p. 42

<sup>34</sup> Marston, G., Morgan, L. & Murphy, J. *op.cit.* p.44.

<sup>35</sup> Department of Premier and Cabinet. *Challenges in Addressing Disadvantage in Victoria*. 2005. p.16.

- providing targeted support to the highest risk areas (addressing disadvantage where it is concentrated in particular locations), and
- involving communities in decisions affecting their lives and making it easier to work with Government (to improve local outcomes).

The Government's position paper was followed by the policy paper *A Fairer Victoria: Creating Opportunity and Addressing Disadvantage*. In relation to young people, *A Fairer Victoria* focused on 'Getting young people back on track' with attention primarily directed toward programs aimed at improving engagement in education and training opportunities. It also places some focus on urban fringe and growth corridor areas with regard to community strengthening initiatives.

YACVic welcomes the Government's focus on addressing disadvantage and the focus the strategies place on reforming the way government develops services 'to ensure that services become more localised, better coordinated and relevant to communities.'<sup>36</sup> Much greater focus however, is needed on addressing disadvantage on the urban fringe.

YACVic suggests that two levels of policy approach need to be taken to addressing disadvantage on the urban fringe. Firstly, government needs to produce targeted policy and program responses to directly improve the accessibility of services and opportunities for young people on the urban fringe. Secondly, the unique needs and characteristics of urban fringe communities need to be taken into account in the development of broader policy and program development to ensure the needs of the fringe are not overlooked in the future.

In order for the Victorian Government objectives as outlined in *Growing Victoria Together, Respect: the Government's Vision for Young People and Challenges in Addressing Disadvantage in Victoria* to be achieved, the specific needs of young people and service providers on the fringe need to be addressed. Whilst Melbourne 2030 has particular focus on urban development, more State government policy and program development focus needs to be placed on the service gaps in these areas to ensure 'that all young Victorians have the opportunity to benefit from, and contribute to, a full range of social, educational and cultural activities.'<sup>37</sup>

Previous research suggests however, that policy and program responses to gaps on the fringe need to take into account the specific needs of the local community too. The NYARS report pointed out that a variety of factors affected the experiences of young people on the urban fringe, stating that:

The living standards of this group of urban fringe young people vary according to participation in education, training, employment and leisure. This heterogeneity demands targeted rather than blanket policies to address the different needs of these different groups of young people<sup>38</sup>

The diversity of fringe communities in Victoria also dictates the relevance of targeted policy development in Victoria. *Too Far from Civilisation* advised that, with regard to service needs of young people on the fringe, 'there were important regional differences. Planning for specific services needs to occur at the local level.'<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Department of Premier and Cabinet. *A Fairer Victoria: Creating opportunities and addressing disadvantage*. 2005, p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> Department of Education and Training. *op.cit.* p.4.

<sup>38</sup> Winter, I. *op.cit.* p.viii

<sup>39</sup> Karapetkos, A and McLeod, J. *op.cit.* p.12.

## PART 3: KEY ISSUES ON THE URBAN FRINGE

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YACVic's consultations raised the following key issues for young people and workers with young people on the fringe. The diversity of urban fringe communities means that not all of the issues relate to each Interface municipality. However, the significant issues of concern can be broadly categorised under the following headings:

- Planning, infrastructure and funding of services on the urban fringe.
- The accessibility, frequency and cost of public transport.
- The accessibility of mental health services.
- Housing and homelessness for young people on the fringe.
- Education and employment opportunities for young people on the fringe.

There were other concerns raised within YACVic's consultations which have not been dealt with in detail in this report, but which YACVic recommends exploring in more detail by future research and considering in policy development. For example, a lack of locally available recreation opportunities for young people was commonly raised.

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# PLANNING, INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE FUNDING OF SERVICES ON THE FRINGE

A key concern raised by service providers and young people in YACVic's consultations was the inadequacy of infrastructure on the urban fringe, ranging from public transport networks, to recreation facilities and counselling services. Also of particular concern were funding structures that don't recognise the unique needs of Interface communities. Key concerns could be summarised as:

- the need for a 'catch up' of service development and infrastructure on the fringe
- the need for infrastructure to cater for large predicted population growth with large numbers of young people amongst that population and
- the challenge of delivering services across large rural/urban areas with dispersed populations.

These issues underlie many of the specific experiences of young people and youth service providers on the fringe. Here they will be explored to create a context for understanding the more detailed picture of the gaps in specific services. The findings of the RMIT study *Human Service Gaps at the Interface between Urban and Rural* will also be explored in detail as they relate closely to anecdotal evidence collected by YACVic.

## SETTING THE SCENE: PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The vast geographic spaces and dispersed population groups in Interface Local Government Areas relates to infrastructure and service gaps and needs to be considered in funding for services in these areas. *Human Service Gaps at the Interface* used Victorian Grants Commission data to measure the population dispersion scores of the Interface local government areas. A higher percentage means that the population is spread through various urban, rural and small town areas within the municipal boundary. Based on 1996 census data, it found that Wyndham, Whittlesea and Nillumbik have relatively concentrated populations, closer to service areas. Melton and Hume were in the middle range and Cardinia, Yarra Ranges and the Mornington Peninsula had dispersion rates resembling rural areas.<sup>40</sup>

This presents particular problems when funding structures classify these areas as urban.

Many Interface communities currently have large populations of young residents, with growing numbers of children and young families presenting a current and future high demand for local infrastructure to meet young people's needs.

Interface areas are commonly already on the back foot in terms of social infrastructure. *Human Service Gaps* reported 'a significant lag between the settlement of new areas, and adequately developed and linked up services.'<sup>41</sup> It notes that 'the effects of deficits at the Interface can produce a "knock-on" effect, with one problem magnifying another.'<sup>42</sup> The report shows that in a climate of service deprivation 'problems compound one upon the other.'<sup>43</sup> It explores the issues of child and maternal health to illustrate the compounding nature of service delivery problems:

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<sup>40</sup> Marston, G. Morgan, L and Murphy, J. *op.cit.* p.8.

<sup>41</sup> Marston, G., Morgan, L. & Murphy, J. *op.cit.* p.35.

<sup>42</sup> Marston, G. Morgan, L and Murphy, J. *op.cit.* p.33.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*

(I)n areas of rapid growth with a preponderance of young families, the available level of service lags behind real-time demand, while the additional costs of servicing more isolated families are not recognised. When added to the increased incidence of problems of low birth weight and low breastfeeding rates, this lag in the level of services is magnified further. Greater risk factors, plus rapid population growth, plus some more dispersed families all combine to produce extra pressures on Maternal and Child Health Services on the Interface.

This pressure is then worsened by an underdeveloped social infrastructure at the Interface.<sup>44</sup>

*Melbourne 2030* recognises that the development of services are often playing a catch up game with urban development and asserts that '(c)hanges (through *Melbourne 2030* policy initiatives) to the way development is planned and implemented in outer suburban growth areas will ensure that facilities such as roads, bus services, schools, libraries and child care centres are provided much earlier in the development cycle.<sup>45</sup>

A key *Melbourne 2030* strategy which has been implemented to achieve this in the introduction of an urban growth boundary 'in order to better manage outward expansion.' As the strategy describes:

This is a tool to facilitate the achievement of a more compact city. It promotes sustainable development by directing growth to areas best able to be supplied with appropriate infrastructure and services by protecting other valuable land from urban development pressures.<sup>46</sup>

Just as important to restricting urban expansion is the further development of infrastructure and services on the urban fringe. In recognition of this, *Melbourne 2030* commits to 'working with local communities (so that) gaps will be identified in major social and cultural facilities in areas such as health, education, justice, recreation and the arts' and states that '(t)hese gaps will then be addressed.<sup>47</sup>

A Fairer Victoria commits the Government to new 'place-based' approaches to addressing disadvantage with priority on 'areas experiencing rapid growth, such as Melbourne's growth corridors, where there is a risk of future disadvantage unless community facilities are developed early in the area's growth and community capacity is established and strengthened.'

A *Fairer Victoria* commits the Government to new 'place-based' approaches to addressing disadvantage with priority on 'areas experiencing rapid growth, such as Melbourne's growth corridors, where there is a risk of future disadvantage unless community facilities are developed early in the area's growth and community capacity is established and strengthened.<sup>48</sup>

## FUNDING—WHAT DID YACVIC FIND?

Central to the development of infrastructure and service networks that can meet the needs of young people in interface areas, are funding models that take into account the specific and unique challenges of providing services on the fringe. Key concerns raised in YACVic's consultations around funding were:

- That funding levels either didn't take into account, or adequately reflect the costs of providing outreach services and travel required by many agencies to access young people in the area

<sup>44</sup> Marston, G., Morgan, L. & Murphy, J. *op.cit.* p.34.

<sup>45</sup> Department of Infrastructure. *op.cit.* p.18.

<sup>46</sup> Department of Infrastructure. *op.cit.* p. 58.

<sup>47</sup> Department of Infrastructure. *op.cit.* p.38.

<sup>48</sup> Department of Premier and Cabinet. *A Fairer Victoria: Creating opportunity and addressing disadvantage.* 2005. p12.

- That the impact of locational disadvantage, particularly in those communities with high levels of disengagement from education and high reported levels of risk taking behaviours amongst young people, meant demand for services was higher than funding levels reflected
- That high levels of funding were required to avoid or eliminate the lag in infrastructure in developing communities, and to ensure that problems are not compounded given the future population growth predictions in these area

Again it needs to be highlighted that the above issues did not impact in the same way on services and young people in all Interface municipalities, but were commonly raised.

The issues raised by service providers in YACVic's consultations were supported by *Human Service Gaps at the Interface*. The report examined funding levels and mechanisms, service delivery models and ways in which the service system could be strengthened on the fringe. The report summarised the key reasons why funding levels and mechanisms on the fringe are inadequate:

The problem of isolation is poorly recognised in State and Commonwealth allocations that see the Interface as simply urban, rather than part-urban and part-rural.

In addition, because human services at the Interface are largely funded on the same basis as an inner suburban local government area, the Interface municipalities are not compensated for their substantial infrastructure deficits compared with inner suburban areas that have long histories of developing agencies, services and infrastructure.

Finally, many human services are based on funding for regional agencies that are oriented to, and based in inner or middle suburbs, and are increasingly distant from the fringe of the city. With rapid growth at the Interface, these services frequently struggle to reach these growing communities.<sup>49</sup>

The report also makes several recommendations about how human services can be better funded on the fringe. A central recommendation relates to the way in which being classified simply as urban for funding purposes doesn't meet the needs of Interface communities, 'the Interface municipalities advocate for changes to definitions of rural and non-rural to ensure that services outside the urban growth boundary (as defined in *Melbourne 2030*) can access State and Commonwealth funding programs targeting rural and regional Victoria.'<sup>50</sup>

YACVic supports the recommendations of *Human Service Gaps*. In relation to the funding of services, the report calls for:

- State and Commonwealth funding methods to reflect the relative population dispersal and distance needing to be covered in funding for regionally-based and outreach services
- funding levels to reflect "real time" population figures to accommodate for population growth and avoid a lag in infrastructure
- State Local Government and regional agencies to work collaboratively in a strategic planning process
- the Department of Human Services to ensure regional agencies are funded sufficiently to outreach to fringe communities
- State Government fund programs that will address those needs of young people and families identified by the study.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Marston, G. Morgan, L and Murphy, J. *op.cit.* p.46.

<sup>50</sup> Marston, G. Morgan, L and Murphy, J. *op.cit.* vi.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*

YACVic extends these recommendations to include the funding of services to address the areas of need identified in our consultations. These are detailed in the following section of the report, which focuses on some key areas of concern raised by both service providers and young people, in relation to service gaps on the fringe. They include public transport, recreational services and local mental health and homelessness services and young people's access to education and employment opportunities.

YACVic also recommends that the Bracks Government ensures that particular priority is allocated to urban fringe areas when allocating future community strengthening initiatives such as the expanded Community Capacity Building Initiative and new community projects as earmarked in *A Fairer Victoria*.<sup>52</sup>

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## THE ACCESSIBILITY, FREQUENCY AND COST OF PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Safe, accessible and affordable transport is essential to enable people to exercise their rights to work, education and wellbeing; if you can't get to school, a job, services or friends and family your right of access is denied. Transport is as fundamental a right as the provision of schools and hospitals.<sup>53</sup>

### SETTING THE SCENE: PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The most commonly raised issue negatively impacting on young people's experiences of living in urban fringe communities is the inadequacy of public transport. In each of the fringe local government areas consulted this issue was raised as a key concern by both young people and service providers. Of major significance were public transport schedules, public transport routes, the cost of travel and the impact of poor public transport networks on young people's safety, independence, access to services and opportunities for work, education and recreation.

This problem has been well documented in previous research and young people have continuously raised this issue through consultative forums at organisational and both local and state government levels.<sup>54</sup> The need for improved public transport networks is also recognised in core government policy documents. *Respect: the Governments Vision for Young People*, lists 'providing safe, accessible public transport services' as a priority for the State Government.<sup>55</sup> Another key priority area is 'supporting and increasing the participation of young people in a diverse range of community, cultural and recreational activities.'<sup>56</sup> For young people in urban fringe areas the improvement of public transport is central to the accessibility of these activities to young people.

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<sup>52</sup> See Strategy 12, *A Fairer Victoria: Creating opportunity and addressing disadvantage*. pp 49 - 56.

<sup>53</sup> Coalition for People's Transport. *The Place to be on PT: A Vision for Greater Melbourne's Transport*. Victorian Council of Social Services, 2004. p. 2.

<sup>54</sup> Examples of young people having raised this issue in these forums can be found in YACVic's 1992 report *Too far from civilisation* which reported young people complaining of a lack of frequent, safe and comprehensive public transport. In March 2001, the Victorian Youth Round Table report *Young People Planning for Melbourne's Future*, revealed that whilst the round table members own satisfaction with public transport varied depending on where they lived, it was generally agreed that 'public transport in the city is great, but in the outer suburbs it is unreliable.'

<sup>55</sup> Department of Education and Training. *op.cit.* p. 9.

<sup>56</sup> Department of Education and Training. *op.cit.* p.20.

Accessibility of public transport is uniquely problematic on the fringe. The Brotherhood of St Laurence reports that '(h)igh unmet transport needs were considered to be the major disadvantage of living in the fringe areas.. (which) was seen as a major barrier to many opportunities.'<sup>57</sup> The Coalition for People's Transport point out '(p)ublic transport across Melbourne is not distributed evenly, with many suburbs - particularly in growth corridors - poorly serviced by public transport.'<sup>58</sup> The NYARS, report *Young People Living on the Urban Fringe* revealed that public transport was of particular concern to urban fringe young people nationally, finding that 'dissatisfaction with the availability of transport among urban fringe young people is nearly twice that of inner city young people.'<sup>59</sup>

Poor public transport networks impact directly on young people's access to employment, education and community services. The Coalition for People's Transport 2004 report *The Place to be on PT* points out the specific impact that poor public transport networks have on young people's employment opportunities on the fringes:

young people living in areas without seven-day public transport services are at particular risk of transport disadvantage as a lot of jobs available to young people, such as apprenticeships or hospitality work, require travel in the early morning, evening or on weekends, when public transport services are not always available.<sup>60</sup>

Young people also rely on effective public transport networks to access educational opportunities. Young people on the urban fringe often have to travel very far distances to access post secondary school education courses. Whilst some tertiary education institutions are based in urban fringe areas, they typically have a limited specialised curriculum on offer. The NYARS report found that urban fringe young people were 'locationally disadvantaged with regard to accessing preferred post-secondary education courses ...compared to their city counterparts.'<sup>61</sup>

The effectiveness of public transport has very specific implications for young people's access to human services. In 2003, *Human Service Gaps at the Interface between Urban and Rural* showed the challenges this presents for services:

Inadequate public transport compounds problems of access to human services. This is an issue in areas with dispersed populations, who consequently require human services delivered by outreach. However, Interface municipalities are insufficiently compensated for the costs of delivering these services, because they are classified as urban.<sup>62</sup>

*Melbourne 2030* outlines the proposed policy to '(p)lan urban development to make jobs and community services more accessible'<sup>63</sup> through initiatives such as 'the design of public transport services in new development areas (to) ensure that route, bus stop and interchange arrangements are included in the planning process.'<sup>64</sup>

A commitment to improving public transport on the fringe is made again by the Bracks Government in *A Fairer Victoria* where the Government states it's intention to '(s)trengthen the links between communities with more flexible and frequent public transport services in growth areas as part of the Government's Metropolitan Transport Plan.'<sup>65</sup>

Large geographic areas and dispersed communities are characteristic of Interface local government areas. Public transport routes frequently do not span across these areas, limiting young people's capacity to travel. For example, the *Whittlesea Youth Network*

<sup>57</sup> Jope, S., and Taylor, J. *op.cit.* p.29.

<sup>58</sup> Coalition for People's Transport. *op.cit.* p.9.

<sup>59</sup> Winter, I. *op.cit.* p.28.

<sup>60</sup> Coalition for People's Transport. *op.cit.* p.20.

<sup>61</sup> Winter, I. *op.cit.* p.35.

<sup>62</sup> Marston, G., Morgan, L. & Murphy, J. *op.cit.* p. (find)

<sup>63</sup> Department of Infrastructure. *op.cit.* p.134.

<sup>64</sup> Department of Infrastructure. *op.cit.* p. 139.

<sup>65</sup> Department of Premier and Cabinet. *op.cit.* p.51.

*Youth Needs Analysis 2003* reported that young people were 'asking for improved East/West services and more services on the weekends. More routes from the rural north that connect with services and shopping facilities were also mentioned.'<sup>166</sup>

Bus services are commonly used to maintain these cross-suburban public transport routes. These are a focus of Melbourne 2030, which asserts that '(l)ocal public transport services will be improved, particularly bus services, and a key focus will be improved services in the middle and outer metropolitan areas.' The *Inquiry into Sustainable Urban Design for New Communities in Outer Suburban Areas* recognised that local bus services needed improvement and offered a collaborative solution, suggesting that the 'Department of Human Services, in conjunction with the Municipal Association of Victoria interface group of councils, undertake an assessment to determine the availability of, and demand for, local buses that could be used during off peak times as cross suburban passenger or community service bus lines.'<sup>167</sup> In the 2005–06 Budget, the Bracks Government has committed \$37 million over four years towards providing new bus services and improve bus frequency in Melbourne, with a particular focus on the outer suburbs which have experienced high population growth. YACVic welcomes this spending commitment and encourages the Government to maintain a focus on improving bus networks on the fringe.

A central policy approach of Melbourne 2030 to improving access to public transport relates to future development, 'focussing fringe development in growth areas based around major regional transport corridors, with the bulk of new development to be accessible distance of the Principal Public Transport Network.'<sup>168</sup> While YACVic supports the development of increased public transport networks, and the targeting of future development sites around these networks, clearly it is equally as important for adequate public transport services to be made available to those already established areas not near to Principal Public Transport Network sites.

*The Place to be on PT* highlights the need for public transport, like other infrastructure, to be provided in real time rather than in a catch up model that can take years, or even decades to develop. It also observes that the late development of public transport systems are less effective as people have had to make their own public transport provisions in the mean time:

Melbourne's new subdivisions are continuing to be built outside the public transport network, with no timeframe for the delivery of public transport or other services. This undermines the viability of public transport once they have already bought second and third cars.<sup>69</sup>

*Melbourne 2030* also recognises this problem, suggesting that better management of metropolitan growth would produce 'an urban form that can be serviced efficiently so that public transport services are provided concurrent with development. This will avoid delays in public transport provision that require new residents to commit to multiple car ownership—which tends to entrench car use—and will encourage activity centres with a range of facilities and jobs.'<sup>70</sup>

The Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee *Inquiry into Sustainable Urban Design for New Communities in Outer Suburban Areas* recognised the lag between development and adequate public transport networks are recommends 'the integration of public transport services be a mandatory requirement for the development of new communities in outer suburban areas.'<sup>71</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Estridge, O. and Cornell, N. *Whittlesea Youth Network Youth Needs Analysis 2003*. Praxis Consulting, 2003. p. 55.

<sup>67</sup> Outer Suburban / Interface Services and Development Committee. *Inquiry into Sustainable urban Design for New Communities in Outer Suburban Areas, Final Report*. 2004. Recommendation 24. p 202.

<sup>68</sup> Department of Infrastructure. *op.cit.* p.35. *Melbourne 2030* commits to the development of a Principal Public Transport Network, by 'building on existing train and tram services, and creating new cross-town bus services, between Principal and Major Activity Centres in Metropolitan Melbourne.' p.39.

<sup>69</sup> Coalition for People's Transport. *op.cit.* p 12.

<sup>70</sup> Department of Infrastructure. *op.cit.* p.35.

<sup>71</sup> Outer Suburban / Interface Services and Development Committee. *op.cit.* Recommendation 25. p xxiv.

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## WHAT DID YACVIC'S CONSULTATIONS REVEAL?

In YACVic's consultations the availability of public transport was of key concern to young people and service providers for various reasons. In each of the local government areas young people and workers highlighted public transport as an area needing improvement if not to be a major impediment to young people's quality of life.

Young people in each of the youth forums consulted, reported poor public transport as the worst thing about living in their area and something they would ideally change in their community to make it a better place in which to live.

Public transport was also identified as of major concern to youth service providers, with most identifying it as the major disadvantage that young people living on the urban fringe face. Key problems associated with public transport identified by young people and service providers are outlined below:

### Public transport schedules, routes and connections

Inadequate public transport routes, infrequent timetables and poor public transport connections were identified as a major disadvantage to living in a fringe community by both young people and youth service providers. Of particular concern were after hours services, services on the weekends and the inadequacy of service routes and connections, increasing the further away from the city you travelled.

Anecdotal evidence collected in YACVic's consultations revealed the following examples of poor public transport services:

- In hamlet areas in the Shire of Cardinia, public transport is infrequent and often unavailable increasing young people's geographic isolation. For example, the township of Pakenham Upper is 8 kms from Pakenham Station, the nearest train station. The 826 bus, which leaves from the Pakenham station runs hourly on Saturdays, ceasing at 5:40pm and not at all on Sundays. In a previous consultation with YACVic, young people from various areas of Cardinia identified poor public transport at various stages of a brainstorm about their sense of place. Poor public transport was identified as a central defining feature of living in Cardinia, and the development of better public transport networks was suggested as something that needs to happen to improve the community.<sup>72</sup>
- For young people living on the Mornington Peninsula, after hours transport options are severely limited. For example the 788 bus, which services Dromana, Rosebud, Rye and Portsea ceases to run at 10.40pm on a Saturday. In order to get home from the city, you would need to catch a 9:40pm train to meet the bus in time. The Nightrider bus is also limited. It only runs on the weekend, and only four times on Sunday. It runs from the City to Frankston, Mt Eliza, Mornington and terminates in Rosebud. For young people living beyond Rosebud, there is no alternative evening transport at this time.
- In the City of Hume, public transport is relatively accessible for young people living in Broadmeadows, however public transport from Sunbury to Broadmeadows is limited, for example the 500 Bus departing from Victoria University in Sunbury, running to Broadmeadows runs only from Monday to Friday, ceasing at 5:30pm.

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<sup>72</sup> YACVic consultation with Cardinia Youth Forum Consultation, April 28, 2004.

- Typically on the urban fringe buses stop running in the early evening and infrequently on weekends, with many not running on Sundays. For example:
  - in the City of Whittlesea, the 562 Humevale to Greensborough Bus runs only eight times on a Saturday and twice on a Sunday.
  - in the Shire of Yarra Ranges the 686 Bus, connecting areas surrounding Badgers Creek to Healesville does not run on weekends at all.
- Public transport routes typically cover an inadequate area in fringe communities, becoming increasingly sparse the further out you travel. For example, a participant in the YACVic consultation with the Yarra Ranges Young Leaders pointed out that the bus only travelled straight down the highway, but that no services existed to take him inland from the highway to his home. Consistent with this, the Yarra Ranges townships of Gruyere and Mt Toolebewong lie between the Maroondah Highway and the Warburton Highway, they are not serviced by any buses. The same problem was reported in Cardinia where public transport runs only down Emerald Rd and the Princes Highway. Public transport does not stretch into the inland region between these roads, including Pakenham Upper, Nar Nar Goon and Mary Knoll.<sup>73</sup>

Participants of the Yarra Ranges Youth Leaders also reported concerns about the high cost of public transport in their area, personal safety at the end of train line, infrequent transport, poor connections and having to rely on taxis in poorly serviced areas. This supported evidence YACVic received in 2003 from young people in the Yarra Ranges, who reported that public transport was 'too expensive, unreliable and infrequent'.<sup>74</sup>

Poor public transport links also had an impact on delivering services to young people. In many urban fringe areas, young people either have to travel large distances within their own municipality or into neighbouring municipalities closer to the city to access services, recreational opportunities, employment and education opportunities. This makes the accessibility of public transport a crucial issue in young people's wellbeing.

## The cost of public transport

Young people on the urban fringe often have considerably larger public transport costs compared to young people in the inner city. Accessing the city for young people on the urban fringe usually means purchasing a Met ticket covering zone 1 and 2 or zone 1, 2 and 3 ticket. Much of the Mornington Peninsula, Cardinia and the Yarra Ranges falls outside of the met zoning system. For young people in these areas the cost of buying a country fare ticket is a substantial cost burden.

For a young person who is not eligible for a concession card needing to travel across zone 1, 2 and 3 for work, educational or recreation purposes their fare for one day is \$12.30. Should this be a daily need during the working week, their travel costs would be \$58.50 per week. This compares to a cost of \$26.00 per week for a young person without a concession card travelling in the inner city.<sup>75</sup>

Anecdotal evidence from YACVic's consultations with young people also suggests that young people frequently incur travel costs for hiring taxis where public transport is not available.

<sup>73</sup> The examples listed in this section stem from YACVic's consultations and are substantiated with information from the metlink web site [www.metlinkmelbourne.com.au](http://www.metlinkmelbourne.com.au) sourced on the 7th December, 2004.

<sup>74</sup> YACVic consultation with Yarra Ranges youth group, August 2003.

<sup>75</sup> Figures quoted here were correct at the time the consultations were conducted—prices may change over time.

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## Feeling unsafe

There are many issues that affect a young person's sense of safety in public places. For young people living on the urban fringe, using public transport can often make them feel unsafe. Accessing trains at the end of the line, needing to wait long periods of time for connecting services and having to walk when connections are bad or when there is no public transport alternative, all compound young people's sense of vulnerability. For example, during YACVic's consultations various youth services reported safety at train stations and on trains as of particular concern in Broadmeadows, Werribee and Lilydale. The Yarra Ranges Young Leaders shed light on this issue describing their fear of crime on trains, compounded by being at the end of the line and needing to wait around for services. They suggested more official presence on trains through 'safe travel teams' as a solution.

Local Government research further supports what young people have reported to YACVic. The *Whittlesea Youth Network Youth Needs Analysis* (2003) reported that '(t)rain stations figured prominently in young peoples' and adults responses as a public space where young people do not feel safe.<sup>76</sup> The *Youth in Yarra Ranges Report* (2001) highlighted a lack of security on trains and around train stations and concerns about young people hitchhiking due to poor access to public transport.<sup>77</sup> Youth Services in Cardinia also reported hitchhiking as a problem in their area in YACVic's consultations.

Youth service providers commonly raised concerns about young people's safety on the roads. A lack of public transport options for young people may contribute to high road death tolls in some fringe areas. Between January 1994 and December 1998 the Yarra Ranges had the second highest number of road fatalities by Local Government Area in the State. A high proportion of casualties involved 18-39 year olds.<sup>78</sup>

A lack of public transport inhibits young people's independence in their communities making it difficult for them to access services confidentially. A lack of independence can also contribute to feelings of depression, boredom and hopelessness.

The Eltham community health service raised concerns that young people's access to services they provide may be impaired if they cannot access the service independently. This impacts particularly on young people in need of support services around mental health, sexual health or general peer support programs such as same sex attracted support networks.

The Casey Cardinia Same Sex Attracted Youth Support Project reported that it was young people in the more isolated communities within Cardinia who were unable to access the support group run by the program, factoring a lack of adequate public transport as central to this problem. This has meant that the program worker has needed to take on an outreach model of working in order to engage with those young people, placing high demands on the time resources of the program.

It is clear that public transport is inadequate in fringe areas. Young people and previous research has been reporting this as a major concern for a long time. The effects of inadequate public transport systems are far reaching and impact on young people's wellbeing and access to service and opportunities. The State Government needs to work with local communities to find solutions to gaps in public transport services.

The development of improved public transport networks is dependant on adequate government spending and is a costly exercise. The *Inquiry into Sustainable Urban*

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<sup>76</sup> Estridge, O. and Cornell, N. *Whittlesea Youth Network Youth Needs Analysis 2003*. Praxis Consulting, 2003. p.11.

<sup>77</sup> Shire of Yarra Ranges Community Well-Being Profile, March 2003 p.26.

<sup>78</sup> Shire of Yarra Ranges Community Well-Being Profile, March 2003. p. 27 - 28.

*Design* recommends that 'the Victorian Government work with the Federal Government to provide additional funding for public transport within outer suburban and interface areas.'<sup>79</sup>

As reported in *The Age* on the 21 February 2005 the Melbourne 2030 Implementation Reference Group has recommended the Government borrow significant amounts of money to improve public transport systems in order to be able to satisfy its goals outlined in *Melbourne 2030*.<sup>80</sup> YACVic supports the call for the Government to increase infrastructure spending to improve public transport for urban fringe communities. YACVic acknowledges the focus placed on improving and expanding bus services in outer suburbs in the 05–06 Budget, and encourages the Government to continue and strengthen its focus on the public transport needs of urban fringe communities.

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## HUMAN SERVICE NEEDS ON THE FRINGE

A general concern voiced by youth service providers consulted in each of the Interface Municipalities was with gaps in locally based human services for young people. This issue is of particular concern to those urban fringe communities:

- with geographically isolated young people in communities with poor public transport,
- recording higher than average incidences of risk taking behaviour amongst young people,
- with large predicted population growth in young residents and inadequate social and physical infrastructure. The 'catch-up game' that infrastructure is often playing with housing development in fringe communities puts young people and communities at risk of poor access to much needed services.

YACVic's consultations revealed that of particular concern to local youth service providers was a lack of local referral options, particularly with regard to mental health and counselling services, drug and alcohol services, and services for young people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness. Although not the only types of services that young people and workers with young people identified as lacking on the urban fringe, mental health and homelessness services are the focus of this section because they have not received much attention in previous urban fringe studies.

Often these services are regionally based. YACVic is aware that the demands on regionally based services exceed resources, creating problems of access to these services for young people. *Human Service Gaps* also identified this problem describing 'a pattern of human service agencies located in inner suburbs and funded to provide services to a region that is a wedge of Melbourne, and that includes an Interface population, but that are not adequately funded to cover the travel costs of their outreach to the Interface. This compromises the quality and availability of services for young families who need services such as family counselling, domestic violence services, youth support, drug and alcohol counselling and ethno-specific support.'

These service gaps are of particular concern given the reported higher levels of early school leaving and risk taking behaviour in many Interface Local Government Areas.

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<sup>79</sup> Outer Suburban / Interface Services and Development Committee. *op.cit.* Recommendation 22. p 198

<sup>80</sup> Millar, R. 'Future grim for roads and rail' *The Age*. 21/2/05. p.1.

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Early school leaving and lower levels of post-secondary educational attainment on the fringe is discussed in more detail later in this report. A lack of locally based services that can offer support during the waiting period for specialist services, or in cases where regional services cannot be accessed, exacerbates the vulnerability of young people in these municipal areas.

In 2000, the Centre for Adolescent Health released *Improving the Lives of Young People in our Community: a survey of risk and protective factors*, exploring the risk taking behaviours of young people in each Victorian Local Government Area. It found higher rates of alcohol consumption in several Interface municipalities. When compared to the Regional average, young people in the Yarra Ranges, Melton, Mornington Peninsula, Nillumbik and Cardinia reported higher than average rates of consumption of alcohol within the past 30 days.<sup>81</sup> It also found that rates of marijuana use was particularly higher than the Metropolitan regional average for most Interface Local Government Areas, with the Yarra Ranges, Hume and Melton showing particularly high rates.<sup>82</sup> Most alarmingly, it also reported that in each of the eight Interface municipalities, the rates of deliberate self-harm were higher than for the Metropolitan Health Region, with particularly high rates reported in Nillumbik, Melton, Wyndham and the Yarra Ranges.<sup>83</sup>

The data from *Improving the Lives of Young Victorians* is now five years old, however local data collected since then suggests that in those Interface local government areas, levels of risk taking behaviour remain problematic. For example, in March 2003, *Improving the Lives of Young Victorians in the Mornington Peninsula Shire: a survey of risk and protective factors*, an updated locally specific report prepared for the Mornington Peninsula Shire Communities that Care board was released. It found that compared to figures for Victoria in 1999 the Mornington Peninsula sample showed significantly higher rates of tobacco use and binge drinking across all year levels in 2002. Tobacco and alcohol remained the most prevalent drugs used by young people. Rates of marijuana and other illicit drug use were proportionately much higher for Mornington Peninsula students compared to the 1999 Victoria state figures across all year levels.<sup>84</sup>

The Whittlesea Youth Network Youth Needs Analysis, 2003 used focus group and survey data to report that the overwhelming number of young and adult respondents felt that the use of drugs and alcohol was a problem for young people in the area. Access to and availability of illicit drugs and alcohol, together with boredom and lack of activity, were contributing factors to the widespread nature of their use.<sup>85</sup>

It is of particular concern, given these higher incidences of risk taking behaviour, that service providers in these areas are commonly reporting service gaps in mental health and homelessness services.

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<sup>81</sup> Bond, L, Thomas, L, Toumbourou, J, Patton, G and Catalano, R. *Improving the Lives of Young Victorians in Our Community: a survey of risk and protective factors*. Centre for Adolescent Health, 2000. For a detailed breakdown of data see table 11a of the report.

<sup>82</sup> Bond, L, Thomas, L, Toumbourou, J, Patton, G and Catalano, R. *op.cit.* See table 13a for details.

<sup>83</sup> Bond, L, Thomas, L, Toumbourou, J, Patton, G and Catalano, R. *op.cit.* See table 22 for details.

<sup>84</sup> Centre for Adolescent Health. *Improving the Lives of Young Victorians in the Mornington Peninsula Shire: a survey of risk and protective factors*. Mornington Peninsula Communities That Care Board. 2003. p.10.

<sup>85</sup> Estridge, O. and Cornell, N. *Whittlesea Youth Network Youth Needs Analysis 2003*. Praxis Consulting, 2003. p.45.

# THE ACCESSIBILITY OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

The provision of mental health services to young people on the Interface relies on accessible locally based services being available to young people within their own communities. In each of the eight local government areas consulted by YACVic for this report, youth service providers expressed concern with the accessibility of mental health services to young people in their area.

## SETTING THE SCENE: MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mental health is an increasingly important issue for Victorian young people. The incidence of mental illness in young people is well documented and the highest of any age group. The DHS 2002 review of service provision and policy strategy *New Directions for Victoria's Mental Health Services: The Next Five Years* reports that the 'need for improved service responses for young people (aged approximately 16-25 years) emerged as a prominent theme in recent mental health consultations. This age range represents a peak period for the onset of psychiatric symptoms. Unresolved mental health problems in these years can seriously damage young people's psychosocial development and future life opportunities.<sup>186</sup> It does not however, recognise a unique disadvantage for young people in accessing mental health services on the urban fringe.

The report found that challenges for the service system were increasing:

An increase in the number of consumers—particularly teenagers and young adults—who have severe and complex social, behavioural and emotional problems has been noted by other health service providers, and by education, welfare, justice and police and emergency services.<sup>87</sup>

*A Fairer Victoria* places a focus on increasing support for mental health services, including an expansion of community - based mental health services and 'a new program for intensive treatment at an earlier stage for young people aged 16-25 years who present with emerging mental health problems for the first time.'<sup>88</sup> The 05-06 State Budget committed \$70 million over four years to 'continue the strategic reform of Victoria's mental health system. The focus will be on strengthening early intervention and preventative measures. Additional funds were also allocated to redeveloping and expanding existing mental health facilities in order to improve access to care. This expenditure is welcomed, however much higher expenditure is needed, and focus needs to be placed on youth specific mental health services. Whilst improving existing facilities may help to alleviate waiting times, a lack of locally based services will continue to be a problem for young people on the urban fringe.

Young people's mental health is a broadly held concern. Frustration at the lack of resources in mental health services shared by providers, consumers and community members was evident at a Youth Mental Health Public Forum hosted in Melbourne Town Hall in June 2004. Approximately 700 participants from mental health services, youth services, government and the community gathered in response to a call to action to 'generate real responses to the hidden epidemic of youth mental health problems in Australia.'<sup>89</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Department of Human Services, Metropolitan Health and Aged Care Services Division. *New Directions for Victoria's Mental Health Services: The Next Five Years*. 2002. p. 18.

<sup>87</sup> Department of Human Services, Metropolitan Health and Aged Care Services Division. *op.cit.* p 6.

<sup>88</sup> Department of Premier and Cabinet. *op.cit.* p. 47.

<sup>89</sup> The forum, Call to Action: Youth Mental Health, was held on June 29, 2004. Supporting organisations included Orygen Youth Health, Mental Health Council of Australia, Beyondblue, Sane Australia, Our Community, VicHealth, Centre for Adolescent Health, Mental Illness Fellowship Victoria, YACVic and the Alcohol and Other Drugs Council of Australia.

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Mental health issues are commonly related to a range of other issues impacting on a person's life. For young people living in urban fringe areas lacking adequate support services, and for whom access to services outside their area is compounded by poor public transport networks, the risk of not receiving adequate support or treatment is greatly increased as is the risk of their mental health condition worsening.

## **WHAT DID YACVIC'S CONSULTATIONS REVEAL?**

Anecdotal evidence from YACVic's consultations identified some key concerns of youth service providers on the urban fringe with regard to young people's access to mental health services. They were:

- waiting lists for access to regional mental health services
- the challenges of meeting the needs of young people in vast Interface councils for regional and local services and
- the need for more local counselling services

Each will be explored in more detail below.

Young people also raised concerns around mental health issues in YACVic's consultations, commonly stating that they needed more information on ways to access help if they needed it for themselves or for friends. For example, young people attending the Sunbury Youth Forum raised concerns about high levels of depression experienced by peers and a lack of information about where to go to access help. School counsellors were cited as the only way they were aware of gaining help, with some young people raising concerns about privacy in school and local settings. A solution some members of the forum had found effective was a school based buddy system, through which students were matched with another student to look out for them and received some basic training in identifying depression and other mental health problems in peers. The State Government needs to work with local government to ensure that adequate services are accessible and that young people are aware of the services available to them.

### **Waiting lists for access to regional mental health services**

Regionally based mental health services, funded through the Mental Health Branch of the Victorian Department of Human Services provide a range of crucial services to both young people and adults experiencing mental health issues within a particular regional boundary. These include Community Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, Intensive mobile Youth Outreach Services and Acute Inpatient Services. Demands on these services mean that youth service providers are reporting very long waiting lists for access to them.

YACVic understands from anecdotal evidence that limited resources mean that Regional Mental Health Service can usually only provide assistance to young people in acute need. In communities lacking local mental health services, young people may not get assistance until their condition worsens and they are at that acute level. Regional services are not designed to work alone to meet the needs of young people across the region. Strong local community service networks play an essential role in providing for the mental health needs of young people in their area. Again the State Government needs to ensure that regional services are adequately resourced and that local services are available.

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## **The challenge of meeting the needs of young people in Interface councils for regional services**

For regional mental health services, like any regional service model, there are particular challenges in accessing young people on the geographic fringes of those regions. As was discussed in part one of this report, regional service models commonly raise particular concerns for fringe communities, with local service providers suggesting that regional models are not necessarily able to cater for the unique needs of the Interface. This concern has been raised in regard to mental health services with particular concern for young people's access in smaller townships further out on the fringe. Some service providers raised concerns about the effectiveness of outreach mental health service models where the worker was unable to understand in much detail the social context from which the young person comes and the broader community picture. However, it was also reported that in some cases young people prefer to seek help outside of their local community, finding access to outside services beneficial for privacy reasons.

YACVic's discussions with both local youth service providers and regional mental health service providers suggest that efforts need to be made to ensure a common understanding of the roles of the two service models and the experiences of each in providing services is understood and shared across the service system.

A lack of resources has been identified as a key challenge for regional service providers in being able to meet the needs of Interface communities. Whilst regional mental health services are working to capacity to meet the needs of their client base, including young people in urban fringe areas, services are clearly in need of more funding resources so that waiting lists can be reduced and services made accessible to young people in the more remote fringe areas falling within regional service model boundaries.

### **A need for more local counselling services**

Another typical concern of youth service providers was a lack of locally based counselling services. The need for young people to be able to access local support options as an alternative to, or whilst waiting for regional services, is essential. YACVic's consultations revealed that for locally based counselling services, demand was often greater than could be met. For example, in the City of Wyndham a lack of local counselling services was reported by both Werribee Youth Law and Wyndham Youth Services. Anecdotal evidence collected at the time of YACVic's consultations said waiting lists can reach 10 weeks and over. Locally accessible counselling and support services are essential in meeting the needs of young people who are not classified as in need of acute intervention and in providing an early intervention response to their needs.

The Ranges Community Health Service, in the Shire of Yarra Ranges, reported that General Practitioners were commonly the first point of consultation in which a young person's mental health needs were identified. A lack of available bulk billing doctors in the area, however, was reported as a barrier to young people's access. *The Bulk Billing Crisis A Victorian Perspective*, 2004, a collaborative research report between local government and community agencies, reported that the Federal electorates of Latrobe and Casey, both of which fall within the Yarra Ranges, were amongst the ten Federal electorates to have experienced the greatest reduction in bulk billing rates from June 2002 to June 2003 due to changes in Federal legislation in implementing *MedicarePlus*.<sup>90</sup> Reduced availability of bulk billing doctors clearly can impact on young people's access to assistance for mental health issues, particularly in remote areas where alternative services are not available. Concerns about a lack of bulk billing

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<sup>90</sup> Griggs, D. & Atkins, C. *The Bulk Billing Crisis: A Victorian Perspective*. Victorian Council of Social Services. Victoria, 2004. p.26.

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doctors for young people to access locally were also specifically raised by youth service providers in Whittlesea, and Melton during YACVic's consultations.

This example highlights the importance of ensuring that generalist health services are accessible to young people and able to meet their needs. Training for General Practitioners in working with young people and recognising when a young person may be in need of mental health support is an important part of this process.

YACVic recognises the very important role that schools play in the provision of mental health services to young people in their communities. Mental health support that young people may access through Student Wellbeing Coordinators, Secondary School Nurses, School Counsellors or Student Support Services staff play a crucial role in the delivery of mental health programs and case management of young people, and helping those young people to stay engaged in the education system.

However, the capacity of school based mental health service providers to effectively case manage young people is dependant on strong community agency support in terms of referral options and secondary consultation opportunities.

It is also particularly important that fringe communities have a strong base of mental health services outside of the school system within community agency networks given the higher rates of disengagement from secondary school education in many fringe areas. For young people outside of the school system, locally available visible mental health support services are essential.

Clearly the issue of the accessibility and availability of mental health services on the urban fringe needs further investigating. The Department of Human Services needs to ensure that gaps in availability of mental health services on the fringe are identified, and are addressed in both the context of regional and local service provision.

The Victorian Government needs also to work in partnership with Local Government and existing youth and mental health service providers to devise local solutions to service gaps. Adequate local services are essential in the provision of mental health services to young people, particularly in early intervention. Local services can also provide a holding mechanism for young people needing to wait to access regional services. Solutions may involve the establishment of new services, the skilling up of existing services or agencies that have prominent contact with young people in the community such as General Practitioners, or recreation providers to ensure they are able to identify a young person in need of mental health intervention and have the capacity to refer appropriately. The Victorian Government also needs to work with generalist health and mental health service providers to assist them to be more accessible and user friendly, ensuring young people have equitable access to those resources.

Whilst YACVic acknowledges the funding directed at continuing reform of the Victorian mental health system and redeveloping and expanding some existing facilities, YACVic strongly urges the Government to substantially increase funding for mental health services and that a focus is placed on funding youth specific mental health services.

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# HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS

Young people's access to homelessness services was of particular concern to service providers in many of the urban fringe areas, with youth service providers identifying this as a key service gap in their area. Of particular concern was a lack of locally based accommodation services, creating continuing concern around keeping young people experiencing homelessness connected with local community supports. Whilst there is not conclusive evidence about the extent of gaps in homelessness services on the urban fringe, research into homelessness in Victoria discussed below supports the argument that there are gaps in homelessness services on the fringe. It is timely that YACVic highlight these concerns within the sector given that Youth Homelessness has been a focus of Victorian Government Policy in the *Youth Homelessness Action Plan*, the first stage of which was released by the Office of Housing Department of Human Services in February 2004. YACVic commends the Government's focus on youth homelessness, however calls on the State Government to explore in more detail these concerns stemming from the sector, and ensure that the Interface areas are adequately resourced with homelessness services accessible to young people.

## SETTING THE SCENE: DEFINING HOMELESSNESS

Many people think of a homeless person as an older male sleeping on the streets in the Central Business district - homelessness data and anecdotal evidence tells us that this is not reflective of the full picture today. The Council to Homeless Persons provides a useful breakdown of some key information we know about homelessness:

Homelessness:

- affects all age groups and a diversity of household types
- is present on the urban fringe and regional and rural Australia as well as the inner city
- is largely hidden from public view with most people who are homeless living with friends and relatives, in homelessness assistance accommodation, in private boarding houses and in caravan parks, and
- occurs because of a range of structural, family and community network and individual issues, which act as both a trigger for and arise as a consequence of, homelessness. These issues include the lack of long term affordable housing, unemployment, lack of sufficient income, breakdown in family relationships, domestic violence, mental health and drug use.<sup>91</sup>

Three definitions of homelessness are utilised by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to understand its various forms. Briefly;

- *primary homelessness* includes people without accommodation, such as people sleeping rough in the streets or in squats;
- *secondary homelessness* defines those who are moving frequently from one accommodation source to another, such as those utilising hostels, shelters and refuges, those staying temporarily in boarding houses and those who are staying with other households as they have no address of their own;

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<sup>91</sup> David Wright-Howie. 'Data Regarding People Who Are Homeless: We Have a Good Base But We Need To Know More'. *Parity*. Vol 17, Issue 6. p.17.

- *tertiary homelessness* refers to people living in boarding houses for 13 weeks or longer as this level of accommodation 'does not have the characteristics identified in the minimum community standard.'<sup>92</sup>

The program that provides crisis and transitional support and accommodation to people who are homeless in Australia is called the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). The SAAP program is a joint Commonwealth–State funded program. The Fifth SAAP funding agreement has been negotiated with a 2.2 percent per annum increase in funds for Victoria over the next five years. This is considerably less than the recommendation made in the SAAP IV National Evaluation report which stated that an increase of 15 percent of current funds was required to sustain service viability.<sup>93</sup>

## How many young people are homeless?

*Youth Homelessness 2001* reported that at the time of the 2001 Census an estimated 4,663 young people in Victoria aged between 12 - 18 years were homeless, that is estimated at 10 per 1,000 young people. This rate is lower than the national average of 14 per 1000.<sup>94</sup> In Victoria, 35% of the homeless population on census night were aged 12 - 24 and 13% were children under 12 accompanying adults.<sup>95</sup>

## Homelessness on the urban fringe

Statistics that illustrate the rates of homelessness on the urban fringe are not currently available. Statistical collection and analysis tends to be on a national, state-wide or regional basis. *Counting the Homeless 2001: Victoria* however, tells us how many homeless people in Victoria were in the outer suburbs on census night. In the report Chamberlain and McKenzie provide an analysis of homelessness by the 16 subdivisions of the Melbourne statistical division grouped into four areas—the 'City Core', the 'Inner City Ring', the 'Outer City Ring' and the 'Frankston–Dandenong Corridor'. The 'Outer City Ring' covers the statistical divisions of 'Melton–Wyndham, Hume, Northern Outer Melbourne, Eastern Middle Melbourne, Eastern Outer Melbourne, the Yarra Ranges and South Eastern Outer Melbourne. The Mornington Peninsula is included in the 'Frankston–Dandenong Corridor' along with Greater Dandenong and Frankston City.<sup>96</sup>

Whilst the number of homeless persons in the Inner City Ring was much higher than the others, at 149 per 10,000 people, the rate in the Outer City Ring was 29 per 10,000 and 44 per 10,000 in the Frankston–Dandenong Corridor.<sup>97</sup> As these figures are based on Census data, they provide us with a snapshot of where people experiencing homelessness were located on Census night. Given that people experiencing homelessness may move around to access services or opportunities, this data does not paint a picture necessarily of where people are located when they first experience homelessness and therefore where early intervention and accommodation services may be most needed to keep people able to access the support networks of their own communities. Whilst these figures are not young people specific, we might assume that patterns in the data will be reflected in youth homelessness figures.

<sup>92</sup> Chris Chamberlain & David McKenzie. *Counting the Homeless 2001: Victoria*. Swinburne University and RMIT University. Victoria, 2004. p.6.

<sup>93</sup> Council to Homeless Persons. *Information Sheet: SAAP V Funding in Victoria*. June 2005.

<sup>94</sup> Office of Housing. *Youth Homelessness Action Plan first stage report*. 2004. P.8-9.

<sup>95</sup> Chris Chamberlain & David McKenzie. *op.cit.* p.6.

<sup>96</sup> Chris Chamberlain & David McKenzie. *op.cit.* See chapter 7 for a detailed analysis of these regions.

<sup>97</sup> Chris Chamberlain & David McKenzie. *op.cit.* p.8.

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The Council to Homeless Persons reported at the YACVic 2004 conference *Fringe benefits? Young people on the edge of policy and place* that:

- people who are homeless are mobile particularly young people
- we do not have evidence at this point about the community of origin of people who are homeless
- however, we do know where young people are living and likely to live in the future.<sup>98</sup>

Given that homelessness occurs throughout Victoria, and is relatively evenly spread across the different regions, it is fair to assume that youth homelessness will be a problem in urban fringe areas. This is made more probable as some of these Local Government areas are amongst the fastest growing in Victoria, coupled with the largest numbers of young people these areas. The Council for Homeless Persons highlights the importance of considering the need for youth homelessness services in planning for services, asserting that:

- Local Services need to be available for vulnerable young people, at risk of homelessness, to ensure they are not forced to leave their community
- Governments of all levels must ensure services for young people are resourced and planned for.
- Local government, whilst the least resourced, can be an advocate for young people, especially those with high youth populations.<sup>99</sup>

Research from the Council to Homeless Persons and the tenants Union of Victoria which focussed on outer suburban and regional areas, has revealed that accessing the rental market is particularly difficult for young people. A March 2005 Media release regarding the research explains:

The research looked at levels of Income Support and housing assistance for young people on 4 different types of income and then looked at the availability of housing in 4 affordable areas (Greater Dandenong, Sunshine, Geelong and Ballarat) and found that those under 21 on Youth Allowance or those on Austudy would not have been able to find a single rental property.<sup>100</sup>

The Research showed the dramatic vulnerability of young people with regards to the housing market, resulting in homelessness for some young people:

Put simply, for a young person on income support, trainee wages or the minimum wage, and relying on the private rental market, the options are extremely limited. Even marginal accommodation such as rooming houses and caravan parks are often beyond the reach of young people, with rents averaging \$120 to \$200 per week. Cheap share housing is limited, often in poor condition and poorly located relative to employment and educational centres. Young people on the margins of the private rental market commonly resort to couch surfing in a bid to sustain a roof over their heads.<sup>101</sup>

This research suggests that the issue of accessibility of affordable housing for young people in urban fringe areas needs further exploring, particularly with regard to exploring housing accessibility and potentially implementing a youth housing strategy.

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<sup>98</sup> David Wright-Howie. *Young People who are Homeless: the importance of location and space*. Council for Homeless Persons. Conference paper delivered at YACVic conference *Fringe benefits? Young people on the edge of policy and place*. October 7th, 2004.

<sup>99</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>100</sup> Tenants Union of Victoria & Council to Homeless Persons. *Young People Shut Out of Private Rental*. Media Release, 3rd March 2005.

<sup>101</sup> Tenants Union of Victoria & Council to Homeless Persons. *Young Persons' Housing Affordability Bulletin*. March 2005.

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The Victorian Government is focusing on youth homelessness through the *Youth Homelessness Action Plan*. The Plan's first stage report was released in February 2004 recognises gaps in the homelessness service system:

Young people between 12 and 25 are the single largest group assisted by the homelessness service system in Victoria. The Victorian Homelessness Strategy (VHS) clearly identified that, while the profile of homeless service clients has changed over time, the service system has not kept up with these changes.<sup>102</sup>

It outlines the Department of Housing's key strategies for action to reduce youth homelessness and improve the homelessness service system and young people's access to housing in Victoria. The report identifies four key areas for improvement. These are:

- Developing preventative approaches
- Strengthening pathways to independence
- Developing the homelessness service system, and
- Responding effectively to client needs.<sup>103</sup>

The Government's commitment to the *Youth Homelessness Action Plan* was reiterated in *A Fairer Victoria: Creating Opportunity and Addressing Disadvantage*.<sup>104</sup>

Whilst YACVic commends the Victorian Government for its commitment to reducing homelessness in the state, we note that none of the immediate actions outlined in the Action Plan first stage report focus on ensuring the provision of more local homelessness services on the urban fringe.

The Action Plan is based on consultations with young people experiencing homelessness, service providers and other information collection activities such as the 'Crisis Accommodation and Support Mapping exercise'.<sup>105</sup> Whilst this will reveal valuable information about young people's access to, and experiences of crisis accommodation, YACVic would recommend that the mapping exercise be expanded to provide information based on geographic location to establish where young people are located when they first become homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless, and to assess if the number of locally available services can cater for that need. A comparison between the availability of services in proportion to the level of need, between the outer suburbs and those closer to the city would reveal if young people on the urban fringe are locationally disadvantaged when it comes to accessing services as anecdotal evidence collected by YACVic suggests.

In the absence of this data, the anecdotal evidence of youth service providers in urban fringe areas and information collected locally by services on this issue are very important source of information in understanding levels of need and service gaps in these areas.

## WHAT DID YACVIC'S CONSULTATIONS REVEAL?

Concern over gaps in accommodation for young people experiencing homelessness was voiced by youth service providers, rather than young people themselves. This may be because the young people who participated in YACVic's consultations may not have

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<sup>102</sup> Office of Housing. *op.cit.* p. 3.

<sup>103</sup> Office of Housing, Victorian Government Department of Human Services. *Youth Homelessness Action Plan* first stage report. Feb 2004.

<sup>104</sup> See Strategy 7, *A Fairer Victoria: Creating opportunity and addressing disadvantage*. Pp 34 - 36.

<sup>105</sup> Office of Housing, Victorian Government Department of Human Services. *Youth Homelessness Action Plan* first stage report. Feb 2004. See Part One of the report for more details on how the Action Plan was developed.

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had any personal experience in trying to access these services.

Generally, youth service providers reported concerns about levels on homelessness in their area, and a lack of services to cater for that need. Below are details of what was reported to YACVic:

- The Yarra Ranges Youth Services and the Ranges Community Health service reported high numbers of "couch surfing"<sup>106</sup> amongst local young people, and a lack of local services to provide alternative accommodation for homeless young people wanting to stay in the area.
- Hume Youth Services reported a lack of crisis accommodation options for young people, with referrals needing to be made to services in Moreland.
- In Wyndham, Anglicare Werribee reported a large number of young people staying with friends because of a lack of crisis accommodation or affordable housing options for young people locally, particularly for young people under the age of 18. Werribee Youth Law also raised concerns about a lack of accommodation.

Whilst this issue was raised by service providers, YACVic's consultations with young people also revealed relevant information. Whilst young people were typically not happy with elements of living in their area, such as access to public transport or recreation opportunities, when asked if they would choose to live in their area if they were financially independent, the majority of young people said yes. This highlighted the need for affordable and appropriate local housing options for young people. Many young people participating in YACVic's consultations enjoyed characteristics of their local area and were also suspicious of the city. The city was often described as dangerous, polluted and too busy. If however, a young person doesn't have a local accommodation option, such as a service or a friend/relatives place to stay at, then their search for assistance can force them into the city.

## **The importance of locally based accommodation and homelessness support services**

Strong locally based service networks are essential to a local community's capacity to respond to the needs of young people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness. Services such as Reconnect, JPET and School Focussed Youth Services which have all had an important role to play in improving local community responses to young people at risk, are models based on building community connectedness.

The *Youth Homelessness Action Plan* first stage report recognises the value of early intervention support for young people and that in most cases young people benefit from being supported within their local community, but that the current service system has gaps:

Young people who are newly homeless or at risk of homelessness require early intervention responses to prevent them from entering the homelessness service system, and to keep them within their communities, if appropriate. Current service configurations and waiting times mean that some young people do not receive an appropriate early intervention response in the critical first few weeks out of home.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> "Couch Surfing" is a term used to describe staying at a friend/acquaintances house due to a lack of accommodation options.

Effective early intervention responses for young people experiencing homelessness are generated from that young person's community, either through school or local services.<sup>108</sup> Chamberlain and McKenzie suggest then that early intervention for those young people post or outside of the school system involves 'putting services in the 'right' geographical location.'<sup>109</sup> YACVic asserts that, given reports of service gaps on the urban fringe, the Government needs to investigate putting more services in these areas.

## Gaps on the urban fringe

Service providers are concerned to keep young people experiencing homelessness within their local communities, but a lack of resources can make this difficult. For example, the *Whittlesea Youth Network Youth Needs Analysis 2003*, reported that

The lack of emergency housing for young people was a concern as was the lack of housing options generally. The respondents commented positively on their interactions with housing workers but felt that responses were limited by a lack of resources. The respondents from the Whittlesea Youth Network (WYN) agreed with this and added that "pulling" young people from their community (for accommodation when they were in crisis) often did not lead to the best outcomes for the individual.<sup>110</sup>

The Council to Homeless Persons, in their response to the Victorian Homelessness Strategy, prepared in March 2003, recorded large gaps in accommodation options for young people in rural and regional areas, including areas on the urban fringe. Specifically it reported 'scarce public housing, few private rental options and little or no crisis accommodation in rural and regional areas'<sup>111</sup> with a lack of supported crisis housing in the Hume region, very limited Transitional Housing Management options in Broadmeadows, very little public housing stock in the outer Northern Metro area and gaps in general crisis services in Whittlesea including housing, drug and alcohol and mental health services for young people.<sup>112</sup>

Chamberlain and McKenzie highlight the importance of locally based services in the outer suburbs:

There were 10,500 homeless people in suburban Melbourne compared with 3,550 in the City Core. The rate of homelessness was lower in the suburbs, but the number of homeless people was substantial. People often become homeless in country areas or outer suburbs, but they migrate to the inner city where services for the homeless have traditionally been located. The provision on services for the homeless in suburban areas assists people in the early stages of homelessness, including those at risk, and reduces the move to the inner city.<sup>113</sup>

Analysis of data from each of these regions tells us that generally people in the inner city access homelessness services more effectively than those in the outer ring or the Frankston–Dandenong Corridor. In the inner city ring 34% of people were in SAAP/THM (define) accommodation, compared to 21% in Dandenong–Frankston Corridor and 29% in the Outer City Ring. The highest proportion of homeless people sleeping rough were located in the Frankston–Dandenong Corridor (10%), followed by

<sup>107</sup> Office of Housing, Victorian Government Department of Human Services. *op.cit.* p.21.

<sup>108</sup> Chris Chamberlain & David McKenzie. *Counting the Homeless 2001: Victoria*. Swinburne University and RMIT University. Victoria, 2004. Further information about this can found in the Executive Summary 'Location of Early Intervention Programs' p.11.

<sup>109</sup> Chris Chamberlain & David McKenzie. *op.cit.* p.63.

<sup>110</sup> Estridge, O. and Cornell, N. *Whittlesea Youth Network Youth Needs Analysis 2003*. Praxis Consulting, 2003. p.50.

<sup>111</sup> Meg Mundell. *Condensed Summary Youth Component of submissions to the Victorian Homelessness Strategy*. Council to Homeless Persons, March 2003.

<sup>112</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> Chris Chamberlain & David McKenzie. *op.cit.* p.40.

the Outer City Ring (5%) and then the Inner City Ring (4%).<sup>114</sup> The Brotherhood of St Lawrence study, *Poverty on the Metropolitan Fringe*, reported anecdotal evidence to suggest that amongst those people sleeping rough in the Frankston area were high numbers of young people, findings that '(i)n Frankston, people were angry about the lack of supported housing to accommodate young people who were sleeping rough, under bridges and in abandoned buildings.'<sup>115</sup>

As was mentioned earlier, some service providers on the urban fringe have reported to YACVic large numbers of young people couch surfing or staying with friends in their areas. ABS data reported a substantially larger amount of homeless people in the Outer Ring statistical region (52 per cent) staying at other households, compared with 30% in the inner city and 39% in the Dandenong–Frankston corridor.<sup>116</sup>

In response to findings produced through the Victorian Homelessness Strategy from 2000 onwards, the importance of assisting people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to stay connected to their local communities or with their support network was recognised, as was a shortfall in crisis accommodation away from the city. As such the Victorian Government provided an additional \$3.15 million for crisis services, including new responses in Greater Dandenong, the eastern and western suburbs, Geelong and a new youth crisis service in Wodonga.<sup>117</sup> Despite this additional funding, service providers in urban fringe areas are still reporting gaps in services in their areas.

Strategies to enhance young people's access to homelessness services which place value on young people being able to stay connected with their community supports, need to consider the unique characteristics of urban fringe communities. YACVic believes that a lack of locally based accommodation options on the urban fringe presents a barrier to keeping young people in their local communities in those early stages and recommends that the *Youth Homelessness Action Plan* consider the specific needs of the urban fringe in examining the ways in which service system can be improved. The unique characteristics of Interface municipalities, incorporating both urban and rural communities, needs to be considered by the Youth Homelessness Action Plan. The Action plan recognises that:

Lack of short and long term accommodation options is a critical issue in many rural areas. Changing demographics and tourist demands have led to a decline in emergency and private rental accommodation.<sup>118</sup>

YACVic asserts that these same issues are problems in some Interface communities, particularly those that encompass rural townships. For example, service providers along the Mornington Peninsula identify the issue of changing demographics and tourist demands, particularly with a rise in property value and rental costs in the areas as impacting on young people's access to accommodation in their region.

Service providers have told YACVic that it is particularly difficult for young people to stay engaged with school if they are reliant on emergency accommodation outside of their local area. Chamberlain and McKenzie have highlighted the central role that schools play in identifying youth homelessness and in assisting young homeless people:

We know that most young people have their first experience of homelessness when they are at school. If schools are unaware of these students – or do not provide assistance – then they drop through the early intervention net. Most join the ranks of the homeless unemployed and some make the 'transition to chronicity.'<sup>119</sup>

As is the case in providing mental health support to young people through schools, the level of effectiveness is dependant on community agency support. If a young person is

<sup>114</sup> Chamberlain C & McKenzie D. *op.cit.* p.41.

<sup>115</sup> Jope, S., and Tayler, J. *op.cit.* p.25.

<sup>116</sup> Chamberlain C & McKenzie D. *op.cit.* p.41.

<sup>117</sup> Advice provided from Department of Human Services via email, 7 December 2004

<sup>118</sup> Office of Housing. *op.cit.* p.27.

<sup>119</sup> Chamberlain C & McKenzie D. *Youth Homelessness 2001*. RMIT University, 2002. p.26.

unable to stay in their local area while experiencing homelessness, then they are further dislocated from their support networks.

The *Youth Homelessness Action Plan* recognises the importance of staying in education reporting that:

Participating in education, employment and training offers young people a pathway out of homelessness and improves their ability to find and keep long-term housing. However, the homelessness service system does not have strong linkages to education, employment and training.<sup>120</sup>

### **Catering for young people's diverse needs**

Young people access the homelessness service system from a range of experiences, so that within the population of young people accessing services there are various client groups. The *Youth Homelessness Action Plan* identifies four key challenging client groups of young people for specific focus in setting goals for the Plan. These are:

young people with substance abuse issues, mental health issues and dual diagnosis; young people and families; unattached young people; young people leaving care of the State for both Child Protection and Juvenile Justice' and first time home leavers.<sup>121</sup>

The report also recognises that culturally and linguistically diverse, same sex attracted and Indigenous young people have unique needs when accessing the homelessness services system. It reported too, that 20% of young people accessing SAAP services were young people with children, couples, or other family groupings.<sup>122</sup>

In some cases, existing locally based services are unable to cater for the diverse needs of all young people who require assistance. Early findings emerging from the YHAP Crisis Mapping exercise reveal that '(m)any agencies have developed a specialised target group, which contributes to a lack of options for some groups, notably young men over 18 and young parents.'<sup>123</sup> Service providers in some areas, have reported frustration at not being able to cater for young people's specific needs within their service, recognising that there are no other local service options for those young people. Where the availability of local services is limited, these restrictions can force young people to find assistance outside of their local community or may result in them slipping through the gaps and not receiving assistance at all.

The following example from Melton highlights the ways in which young people can miss out on crisis accommodation services if they are not available in their local community:

The Melton Youth advisory Network (MYAN) is a body that meets monthly to discuss youth issues pertinent to the Melton township and Shire. MYAN is made up of representatives from local schools, social and community services, community members and young people.

At the beginning of 2004 MYAN members agreed that one of the most pressing issues for young people in Melton was the glaring lack of housing available to them. In particular, the complete lack of a crisis accommodation services in this area.

A sub-committee was formed and a plan to research the need for youth crisis accommodation devised. The research conducted (over a 3 month period) took the form of a survey concentrating on young people in need of crisis accommodation.

During the period 1/4/2004 - 30/6/2004, five community services surveyed 48 (21 male, 27 female) young people presenting as homeless or at risk of homelessness and in need of crisis accommodation. The age range was 14 - 21 years

<sup>120</sup> Office of Housing. *op.cit.* p.12.

<sup>121</sup> Office of Housing. *op.cit.* p. 3.

<sup>122</sup> Office of Housing. *op.cit.* p.34.

<sup>123</sup> Office of Housing. *op.cit.* p.23.

old. Most young people surveyed fell into the 16 - 19 year old range.

The main reason sighted for needing crisis accommodation was 'Family Breakdown'. Nearly all respondents stated that they believed they would require eventual permanent housing. For most respondents, this was their first request for crisis accommodation.

The survey found that 26 out of 48 respondents opted for a short term stay with friends (couch-surfing) rather than a referral to crisis accommodation in Melbourne. Only nine accepted a referral (not all of these young people actually went on to stay in the accommodation offered to them). This reluctance to use Melbourne's crisis services stems from a fear of the unknown (Melbourne is perceived as a big, scary city), the distance between Melbourne and Melton and the lack of adequate public transport is another factor.<sup>124</sup>

The *Youth Homelessness Action Plan* also reports that 50% of assistance provided to young people is by non-youth specific services so that 'it is important that the needs of these young people are integrated into this broader service system change.'<sup>125</sup>

In response to a lack of government funded accommodation services for young people, youth service networks in some areas are exploring the possibility of local solutions based on alternative funding arrangements.

The following case study illustrates how this process has been unfolding in the Yarra Ranges.

#### **Youth Homelessness in the Yarra Ranges—a community response**

*In mid 2003, members of the Yarra Ranges Youth Services Providers Network identified youth homelessness as a growing problem in the area. Anecdotal evidence suggested that the numbers of young people reported to be homeless or at risk of homelessness was rising.*

*In 2000, a Centre for Adolescent Health Study Improving the Lives of Young Victorians, which measured risk and protective factors for young people in each Local Government Area in Victoria found that the risk of homelessness for young people in the Eastern Metropolitan region was highest in the Yarra ranges and at 17.4% (CI 12-23) and that this figure was the second highest average recorded in the state, second only to Glen Eira.<sup>126</sup>*

*Centrelink Social Work Data revealed a sharp increase this year in the number of 15 - 25 year olds applying for the Unreasonable to Live at home rate of Youth Allowance (UTLAH), reporting that '(t)hese claims now represent the greatest referral group to Social Work services at Lilydale Centrelink and appears to be in the 15 - 17 year old age range.'<sup>127</sup> The total number of contacts for the UTLAH was 357 in 2003. In only the second quarter of 2003 the rate for 2004 has already exceeded that total at 404 contacts. In the second quarter of 2003, Centrelink recorded only 61 contacts for the UTLAH, whilst comparably in the second quarter of 2004, 244 were recorded.*

*Anchor Community Care data reveals that whilst the largest number of persons assisted by their service are female across all age ranges, and that whilst the largest group of people assisted are females over 30, the second largest groups are men over 30 and young women between 19 and 24. The data also reveals a sharp increase in the numbers of young people presenting for assistance, from the 15 - 18 age range (81 males and 158 females) to the 19-24 age range (125 males and 236 females).<sup>128</sup>*

<sup>124</sup> Case study submitted by Melton youth Advisory Network to YACVic 6/12/2004.

<sup>125</sup> Office of Housing. *op.cit.* p.19.

<sup>126</sup> Centre for Adolescent Health. *Improving the Lives of Young Victorians in Our Community: a survey of risk and protective factors.* Table 20m 'Risk of homelessness by metropolitan LGA' p.173.

<sup>127</sup> Centrelink Social Work Information System Data. Lilydale Customer Service Centre. Received September 2004.

<sup>128</sup> Anchor Community Care Client Referral Summary form 'Number of Persons Assisted'. Received September 2004

*Housing Young People Action Team, a working party made up of local workers from the Shire of Yarra Ranges Youth Services, Anchor Community Care, Centrelink, Eastern Access Community Health - Youth Homeless Outreach Team, Community Housing Limited and Upper Yarra Community House to take action about housing and homelessness in the Shire. Through working collaboratively with local government, schools, community organisations, health services and churches the Housing Young People Action Team hope to identify options for young people who are homeless, including generating more affordable housing choices.*

*Whilst Anchor Community Care does run a lead tenant youth housing program there is no crisis accommodation or youth housing available to young people in the Yarra Valley. In a letter to schools and services in the region, the Action Team expressed their concern that a lack of local services meant that 'a young person experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness must move out of the Shire or remain in inappropriate accommodation (as) the closest crisis accommodation is Ringwood and if there are no places available there, the next option is Box Hill or the City.'*<sup>129</sup>

*After having contacted the Department of Human Services, and being made aware that no new youth housing services were to be opened in the Shire, the committee decided to put together a report on youth homelessness in the Yarra Ranges, in order to reveal more information about the issue and to lobby for more homelessness services in the region, particularly crisis accommodation for young people.*

*Collecting data has been a central part of producing the report. A three month data collection process began in July through which youth homelessness statistics are being collected from both organisations within the Yarra Ranges and schools, with the support of the Department of Education. Information is being collected to identify how many young people are experiencing homelessness, where young people experiencing homelessness are currently living and where they would like to live within the Shire. The statistics will also reveal how many of these young people would be prepared to return to home, if supported to do so. The data collection process will be complete at the end of September 2004.*

*The next step will be to identify and consider different models of youth housing services for their appropriateness and viability in the Yarra Ranges, given resources available and the needs of young people in the community.*

*The committee is aware that service gaps compound young people's disadvantage, and is concerned that poor public transport networks in the Shire impact profoundly on young people's capacity to access services and will continue to impact on young people's access to housing services if not improved. The need for more accommodation services near schools, so that young people are able to continue their education and stay linked in with support networks through their schools is also of concern to both youth services and schools in the area.*

Evidence suggests that homelessness is relatively evenly spread across Victoria, and anecdotal evidence suggests that it is possible that increasing numbers of young people are experiencing homelessness in some Interface communities. The viability of SAAP services is under question with current levels of funding and service providers are reporting a need for more youth specific services and for assistance to provide local responses to homelessness on the urban fringe. YACVic recommends that the State Government explore the issue of youth homelessness on the urban fringe in response to claims that it is increasing, and that they work with local communities to produce appropriate service responses to enable young people to remain connected to their communities if homeless.

<sup>129</sup> Letter produced by the "Housing Young people action team" to schools and youth services in the Shire July 2004.

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# EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Young people's education and employment are key concerns for all Victorian communities. Young people's access to education is a central concern of the Victorian Government's policy platform *Growing Victoria Together*.

The Bracks Government believes that education is the key to our children's futures and Victoria's prosperity. Education opens doors to high quality jobs, to a full and creative life and a sense of common citizenship.<sup>130</sup>

Access to education, however, is not enjoyed equitably by all young people in Victoria. Whilst the Victorian Government's policy strategy to address disadvantage, *A Fairer Victoria*, has a focus on assisting young people to stay engaged in education through its 'Getting young people back on track' strategy, research suggests that efforts may need to be targeted at the urban fringe. The recently released study *School Performance in Australia: Results from analysis of school effectiveness*, commissioned by the Department of Premier and Cabinet found that '(r)esidential segregation and the sector organisation of schools into government and non-government work to segregate students in Australia along social and academic lines.'<sup>131</sup> The report also finds that '(t)here are many factors that affect performance in school including student background characteristics that are related to the families and communities in which students live.'<sup>132</sup>

Previous research tells us that one of the geographic factors that can influence a young person's access to education is living on the urban fringe. When compared with their inner city counterparts, young people on the urban fringe are:

- more likely to disengage with secondary school early
- less likely to engage with post-secondary education
- are more likely to be engaged in employment<sup>133</sup>

## SETTING THE SCENE: EDUCATION

The NYARS national study *Young People Living on the Urban Fringe* reported in 1995 that '(u)rban fringe young people are more likely than inner city young people to leave school before the completion of Year 12, and less likely to enter post-secondary education.'<sup>134</sup> It also found that the young people considered in the studies' sample group, when compared to young people in the inner city, were 'more likely to be in paid employment.'<sup>135</sup>

The study suggested that the higher incidence of employment it found on the fringe needed to be seen as the 'flip side' of a higher proportion of early school leavers and lower uptake of post-secondary school education on the fringe.<sup>136</sup> The report also questioned whether the reduced access to post secondary school education for young people on the fringe, may result in disparity in future income earning capacity between those young people and young people in the inner city.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Department of Premier and Cabinet. *op.cit.* p.8.

<sup>131</sup> Lamb, S., Rumberger, R., Jesson, D., Teese, R. *School performance in Australia: results from analyses of school effectiveness: Report for the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet*. Centre for Post-compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, University of Melbourne. 2004. p.vii.

<sup>132</sup> Lamb, S., Rumberger, R., Jesson, D., Teese, R. *op.cit.* p.vi.

<sup>133</sup> Winter, I. *op.cit.* (See chapter 3 for details.)

<sup>134</sup> Winter, I. *op.cit.* p.19

<sup>135</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>136</sup> *ibid.* (See chapter 3 for details.)

<sup>137</sup> Winter, I. *op.cit.* (See chapter 3 for details.)

The report suggests that this is in part related to the lack of post-secondary educational facilities in urban fringe areas, suggesting that needing to travel long distances to access facilities impacted on young people's engagement. Young people and workers in some of the Interface communities also raised this concern during YACVic's consultations. For example, Mornington Peninsula Youth Services and Peninsula Youth and Family Services reported concerns that young people were not receiving benefits from Centrelink to assist in travelling for the purposes of study, despite inadequate public transport to Universities or TAFEs.

More recently, and with a focus on Victoria, *Human Service Gaps at the Interface between Urban and Rural* found that 'the available data indicate some major disadvantages developing at the Interface when we examine the proportions of young people who do not go further than Year 10, those who complete secondary schooling, or those who go to university.'<sup>138</sup> By examining 2001 Census figures, the report finds that 'young people at the Interface, and especially young males, are completing secondary schooling less frequently than those in metropolitan Melbourne and Victoria in general.'<sup>139</sup> The census figures reveal that 76% of young women aged between 19-20 on the Interface had completed year 12, compared to 83% in Metropolitan Melbourne and 60% of males in that same age bracket on the interface had completed their year 12, compared to 72% of young people in Metropolitan Melbourne.

The report makes the important note that these trends reflect 2001 census reports and Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) have been established since then and have implemented programs on the local level to improve education and employment opportunities for young people. They will continue to receive Government support and funding as announced in *A Fairer Victoria: Creating Opportunity and Addressing Disadvantage*.<sup>140</sup> Similarly the Victorian Learning and Employment Skills Commission consultation report *Towards a Post Compulsory Framework for Education and Training (Young People 15-24)* released in August 2003 found, that Victorian Government initiatives that have made a difference to young people's employment and education status included:

- programs that promote range and flexibility of study options and qualifications available such as Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) and Vocational Education and Training in Schools (VET)
- programs aimed at creating and strengthening local networks of individuals, and groups related to young people's education, so as to produce local responses to specific local needs, such as LLENs and
- programs aimed at supporting individuals navigating transitions in education and employment, such as Managed Individual Pathways and On Track<sup>141</sup>

LLENs are an initiative that stemmed from the Victorian Department of Education, Employment and Training Ministerial *Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria*, known as the Kirby report. The Kirby report found regional differences with engagement in both secondary and post-secondary education. Interestingly, it found differences in the reasons behind early school leaving in urban and rural communities, commenting specifically on the unique situation in urban fringe areas that encompass both rural and suburban communities. It reported that:

Dropping out of school is influenced by socio-economic level...Within Melbourne, the regions where early leaving is generally high are also in general those in

<sup>138</sup> Marston, G., Morgan, L. & Murphy, J. *op.cit.* p.25.

<sup>139</sup> Marston, G., Morgan, L. & Murphy, J. *op.cit.* p. 26.

<sup>140</sup> Department of Premier and Cabinet. *op.cit.* p. 21.

<sup>141</sup> Victorian Learning and Employment Skills Commission. *Towards a Post Compulsory Framework for Education and Training (Young People 15-24)*, August 2003. p.7.

which student achievement is also relatively weak. For example, in the outer-western, north-western and south-eastern suburbs of Melbourne, students are much more likely to receive low grades in VCE English than in suburbs of middle to high socio-economic status, [and in the north-west and south-east of the city they also drop out of school more frequently....In contrast to regions where both low achievement and early leaving are found, there are regions in Victoria in which early leaving is not associated with low levels of scholastic achievement. This is the case in much of country Victoria and in some areas, on the outer-urban fringe of Melbourne, which have large rural segments, notably the outer-eastern suburbs and Mornington Peninsula.<sup>142</sup>

Following the Kirby report, *On Track* data, collected by surveying school leavers who exited Victorian schools from Years 10 to 12, has been collected over 2002 and 2003 to provide LLENs with 'a balanced and accurate view of outcomes for students in a range of settings.'<sup>143</sup> The data explored the regional difference for young people, and whilst Department of Education and Training regions are much broader than Interface municipalities, the conclusions drawn from the data reveal a picture that parallels previous data recording lower levels of school retention and engagement in tertiary education in Melbourne's outer suburbs than inner Melbourne. It also breaks down levels of transition to post secondary school education from high to low in different regional areas.

Regarding locational disadvantage on the fringe, the report found that:

- there is a marked difference between the engagement in both the attainment of year 12 and tertiary qualifications between the inner suburban regions of Melbourne and the outer regions. Transition to university was much higher amongst school leavers in inner Melbourne, southern and inner-eastern suburbs of Melbourne, than the other regions.<sup>144</sup>
- young people's transition into tertiary study can be broken down into four main regional groupings:

In the first grouping of regions - mainly upmarket suburbs of Melbourne - high university transition was augmented by average middle-level transition.

The second grouping comes close to the first, due to high rates of middle-level transition; but university transition was lower, and this pulled the group down. This second group takes in the north-east and outer-eastern suburbs of Melbourne and the broad expanse of the western suburbs.

The third grouping was close to the second in overall terms, but lower again in university transition. This group includes the working-class suburbs to the north-west and to the south-east of Melbourne, including the adjacent semi-rural Mornington Peninsula, where the transition was more like that of country Victoria.

Country regions - the fourth grouping - had the lowest rates of tertiary transition, due to both low university transfer and low middle-level transfer.<sup>145</sup>

<sup>142</sup> Department of Education, Employment and Training. *Ministerial Review of Post Compulsory Education and Training Pathways in Victoria: Final Report*. 2000. p.50.

<sup>143</sup> Teese, R., Polesel, J, Mason, K. *The destinations of school leavers in Victoria - On Track 2003: Report of the 2003 On Track project*. Centre for Post-compulsory education and lifelong learning, University of Melbourne. p. 1.

<sup>144</sup> Teese, R., Polesel, J, Mason, K. *op.cit.* p.27.

<sup>145</sup> Teese, R., Polesel, J, Mason, K. *op.cit.* p.28-29.

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Of relevance to those interface municipalities that take in townships that either are, or share characteristics with, rural communities such as Cardinia, the Mornington Peninsula and the Yarra Ranges, the data reveals a dramatic difference in educational engagement between suburban and country Victorian young people.

For communities that experience low socio-economic status the report found that '(t)here was a strong correlation between socio-economic status and achievement. A third of all low achievers came from low to very low socio-economic status backgrounds.'<sup>146</sup>

The 2004 *School Performance in Australia* review highlighted the regional differences between young people's access to independent education, reporting that 'over 50 per cent of Year 12 independent school students in Victoria live in high SES (socio-economic status) urban areas compared to only 20 per cent of government school students.'<sup>147</sup>

## WHAT DID YACVIC'S CONSULTATIONS REVEAL?

While concerns about education were not raised in all municipalities, it was a high priority in some. Key issues that influenced the different levels of concern included socio-economic status, distance from tertiary institutions and effectiveness of public transport networks.

Key concerns raised were:

- Young people having limited choices in secondary schools in some areas, a problem compounded by poor public transport networks. This issue was particularly relevant when young people had been unsuccessful or unhappy in their school environment, when opportunities to change schools would help that student stay engaged in the education system. For example, youth service providers in Wyndham and Whittlesea raised the issue of having difficulty in finding alternative school environments for young people who had disengaged or been expelled. In the Mornington Peninsula, service providers reported some communities without a local secondary school, making access more difficult for those young people.
- Young people's lower levels of retention in secondary education.
- Young people's post secondary education options being limited by the cost and time involved in travel to institutions. Whilst a common problem, this issue was of particular concern to youth services in the Mornington Peninsula and the Yarra Ranges.
- A need for more alternative education options for young people in the area. Service providers in Hume and Whittlesea raised this as of particular concern. In contrast, Ranges Community Health reported alternative education options as a benefit for young people living in the Yarra Ranges.

## SETTING THE SCENE: EMPLOYMENT

Using 2001 Census data, *Human Service Gaps at the Interface* reported that the 'Interface municipalities have higher participation rates and lower youth unemployment rates than metropolitan, rural and Victorian averages, although there are some significant variations across the Interface.'<sup>148</sup> Most interface municipalities had a lower unemployment rate to the state average of 12.8%, however higher than state average

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<sup>146</sup> Teese, R., Polesel, J, Mason, K. *op.cit.* p.2.

<sup>147</sup> Lamb, S., Rumberger, R., Jesson, D., Teese, R. *op.cit.* p.vii.

<sup>148</sup> Marston, G., Morgan, L. & Murphy, J. *op.cit.* p.27.

levels were recorded in Hume (15.7%) and Melton (13.9%). The lowest unemployment rates were recorded in Nillumbik (9.3%) and Cardinia (9.4%), followed by the Mornington Peninsula (10.5%) and the Yarra Ranges (10.5%).<sup>149</sup> This diversity led the report to stress that 'some of the Interface municipalities have a major problem to deal with in the immediate and longer-term consequences of youth unemployment, particularly where unemployment is combined with poor school completion rates and consequently lower educational opportunities.'<sup>150</sup>

## WHAT DID YACVIC'S CONSULTATIONS REVEAL?

YACVic's consultations reflected this, with unemployment being raised as a problem only in some communities. Specific issues raised by young people and service providers in our consultations relating to the issues in finding work on the urban fringe were:

- limited employment opportunities within their local community. For example, young people participating in the Sunbury Youth Forum reported limited work available, an issue which was also raised by Hume Youth Services.
- needing to travel to access work and the costs involved. Members of the Yarra Ranges Young Leaders reported relying on a car to get to work, with heavy petrol costs involved in travelling to and from work.
- whilst young people may be able to find work locally, they often felt restricted by the forms of work available and felt that to get a 'real job' in the field they were interested in they would need to travel closer to the city. For example, some young people participating in the Cardinia Youth Forum described being pretty hopeful of getting a job in their local areas after they leave school 'but not a good job.'<sup>151</sup>

Whilst we have provided here only a snap shot of the issues of access to education and employment opportunities for young people living on the urban fringe, what is clear is that this issue needs not only more research focus, but also policy responses from government. Stemming from the research completed, Minister Lyn Kosky launched in May 2003 the Department of Education Blueprint for Government schools, outlining the State Government's reform agenda for the state school system. The Blueprint provides details of how the Department for Education and Training will reform the state education system in order to provide a more equitable system for all students. However, it does not specifically target the well documented problems with school retention on the urban fringe. YACVic acknowledges that the problems behind these lower rates are varied and in some cases linked to systemic disadvantages and as such will take time to improve. However, specific focus needs to be placed on working with local governments, schools, and agencies in Interface municipalities to improve retention rates.

Urgent responses are required to address the problems faced by those Interface municipalities with high unemployment rates, given the lower levels of educational attainment on the fringe, such as Hume and Melton. Again these responses need to be locally focused and involve a partnership between State and local government and local schools, industry and services. The Commonwealth and State governments need both to respond to the lower levels of tertiary engagement on the Interface.

<sup>149</sup> Marston, G., Morgan, L. & Murphy, J. *op.cit.* p.87. The report draws on ABS statistics and the Economic Development Committee. Inquiry into the Incidence of Youth Unemployment in Victoria. Parliament of Victoria, October 2002. See Chapter 2 of the Inquiry for regional breakdowns.

<sup>150</sup> Marston, G., Morgan, L. & Murphy, J. *op.cit.* p. 28.

<sup>151</sup> YACVic workshop on sense of place, with members of the Cardinia Youth Forum. Conducted in Pakenham, 28th April, 2004.



# CONCLUSION

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The central concern of this issues paper is to highlight the fact that in some key service areas urban fringe communities are typically locationally disadvantaged, and that this has direct consequences on young people's wellbeing and opportunities. By exploring some areas of need, this report provides details of that disadvantage and asks that the Victorian Government explore in more detail the disadvantages on the fringe and respond to those needs in two key ways:

- in ensuring that the gaps in services currently experienced in urban fringe communities be directly addressed, and
- in ensuring that the unique circumstances of urban fringe communities and the challenges of delivering services in those areas be considered in general policy development around issues such as health, housing, education, employment and public transport.

YACVic finds that funding mechanisms and program development often don't take into account the specific needs of urban fringe communities. Services typically face the challenges of providing for a diverse range of isolated and sometimes dispersed communities, over large geographic spaces, sometimes with limited existing infrastructure, and with high levels of need.

By exploring the need for more public transport, general infrastructure and mental health and homelessness services, and the education and employment status of young people in these communities, YACVic paints a picture of some of the ways in which Government can improve services and opportunities for young people on the fringes.



# APPENDIX A

## WHAT DOES MELBOURNE'S URBAN FRINGE LOOK LIKE?



Below is information providing a snapshot of each of the Interface municipalities. The following statistics have been generated from the 2001 Census of Population and Housing (Australian Bureau of Statistics). All comparisons made are between the interface council and the Melbourne Statistical Division (SD), the geographical region that encompasses metropolitan and 'fringe' Melbourne, as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. (For more information see [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au) <<http://www.abs.gov.au>>). YACVic would like to highlight the fact that the populations of many of the Interface LGA's are changing rapidly which will have changed the demographic data since the last census.

### WYNDHAM

Wyndham is located south west of the CBD, sitting from the coast of the western port bay up to Melton Shire.

In 2001 19.3% of Wyndham's total population was aged between twelve and twenty-five years of age with the proportion of young people increasing. Wyndham has a relatively multicultural population with overseas residents largely coming from Europe and Asia.

In Wyndham the average income was mostly in the middle to low income groups. About 30% of the population noted some form of educational qualification. The largest occupations in Wyndham in 2001 included clerical, sales and service workers, tradespersons and professionals. This suggests that the area has a lower socio-economic status compared with other areas in Melbourne, with some of the largest occupations based on clerical and 'blue-collar' work.

The unemployment rate in Wyndham was similar to Melbourne more broadly in 2001 at about 6%. Although the labour force was stable, there was an increase in the percentage of part-time workers, which is in line with the greater casualisation of employment.

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## MELTON

In 2001 82.1% of the population in the Shire of Melton was aged 0-49, reflecting substantial residential development in the area over a number of decades.

The population of the Shire of Melton was homogenous in character in 2001, with a fairly small proportion of the population born overseas and little diversity in the range of countries of birth.

Melton has an above average weekly income and about 29% of the population had some form of educational qualification. The occupations of residents in Melton were similar to that of Wyndham with high levels of residents in clerical and 'blue collar' work.

The unemployment rate in the Shire of Melton was similar to the average for Melbourne SD in 2001 at about 7%.

## MORNINGTON PENINSULA

Residents of the Mornington Peninsula Shire in 2001 were spread across most age groups. The largest age groups in the region included the 35-49 year olds and 50-59 year olds.

An analysis of the country of birth data for Mornington Peninsula Shire in 2001 reveals a great deal of uniformity, with less diversity in the range of countries of birth and a relatively smaller percentage of the population born overseas compared to the Melbourne SD.

Mornington Peninsula Shire's income was below average. About 35% of the population noted some form of educational qualification, with the most significant being those people with vocational qualifications. The largest occupations in Mornington Peninsula Shire in 2001 included clerical, sales and service workers, tradespersons and professionals.

The unemployment rate in Mornington Peninsula Shire was similar to the Melbourne SD in 2001 at about 6%.

## CASEY

The age structure of the City of Casey in 2001 was represented by large numbers of persons in both young and more mature family age groups, with 71.8% of the population aged 0-17 and 25-49, which is indicative of substantial residential development in the area over a number of decades.

There was a low percentage of the population born overseas in this area in 2001 and a relatively small amount of diversity in the range of countries, which indicates a more homogenous population.

The household income data also indicated that there was a similar distribution of incomes in the City of Casey and the Melbourne SD. About 31% of the population noted some form of educational qualification, with vocational qualifications the most significant. The largest occupations in the City of Casey in 2001 included clerical, sales and service workers, tradespersons and production and transport workers.

The unemployment rate in the City of Casey was similar to the Melbourne SD in 2001 at about 6%.

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## CARDINIA

The age structure of the Shire of Cardinia in 2001 was represented by large numbers of persons in both young and more mature family age groups.

The population of the Shire of Cardinia was homogenous in character in 2001, with a fairly small proportion of the population born overseas and less diversity in the range of countries of birth.

Cardinia had an above average income. In 2001, the proportion of the population with educational qualifications indicated a relatively skilled and educated workforce, with about 33% possessing some form of qualification. The largest occupation groups in the Shire of Cardinia in 2001 included clerical, sales and service workers, tradespersons and professionals.

The unemployment rate in the Shire of Cardinia was lower than the Melbourne SD in 2001 (4.9% compared to 6.6%).

## YARRA RANGES

There was a significant share of younger families in the Yarra Ranges Shire in 2001, most notably children in school age groups (5-17) and their parents in their thirties and forties.

There was a low percentage of the population born overseas in this area in 2001 and a relatively small amount of diversity in the range of countries, which indicates a more homogenous population.

Household income between the Yarra Ranges Shire and the Melbourne SD in 2001 was relatively similar. About 36% of the population noted some form of educational qualification, with the most significant being those people with vocational qualifications.

The unemployment rate in the Yarra Ranges Shire was lower than the Melbourne Statistical Division in 2001 (5.1% compared to 6.6%). The reason for the lower rate in the Yarra Ranges Shire includes a comparatively smaller share of the population aged 18-24, who often have higher unemployment rates than older workers (25-59).

The largest occupation groups in Yarra Ranges Shire in 2001 included clerical, sales and service workers, tradespersons and professionals. These patterns were also accompanied by an increase in the number of part-time workers, which is in line with the greater casualisation of employment.

## NILLUMBIK

Like the Yarra Ranges, there was a significant share of younger families in the Shire of Nillumbik in 2001, most notably children in school age groups (5-17) and their parents in their thirties and forties.

An analysis of the country of birth data for the Shire of Nillumbik in 2001 reveals a greater deal of uniformity compared to other areas in the Melbourne SD, with less diversity in the range of countries of birth and a relatively smaller percentage of the population born overseas.

Nillumbik's average weekly income was considerably more than Melbourne. In 2001, the share of the population in the Shire of Nillumbik with higher educational qualifications was indicative of a highly educated workforce, with significant skills, as indicated

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by the greater share of households in the high income quartile. The largest occupations in the Shire of Nillumbik in 2001 included clerical, sales and service workers, professionals and tradespersons.

The unemployment rate in the Shire of Nillumbik was lower than the Melbourne SD in 2001 (3.8% compared to 6.6%). The reason for the lower rate in the Shire of Nillumbik includes a comparatively smaller share of the population aged 18-24, who often have higher unemployment rates than older workers (25-59).

## HUME

In 2001, Hume City had a youthful age structure with a substantially large proportion of the population aged under 18 years and a small proportion in the post retirement (65+) age group.

Hume City is widely considered to be a culturally diverse municipality and the 2001 census data reflected this. Common overseas countries of birth included Turkey, the United Kingdom and Italy. New residents moving to Hume in 2000-01 have come from countries such as Iraq, Turkey and Lebanon.

An estimated 7% of Hume residents had a Bachelors degree or higher whilst, 20% had a certificate or a diploma. Hume City had a very strong industrial base, comprising motor vehicle manufacture, heavy engineering, freight handling, electronics and communications, paper and food manufacture and note printing.

In 2001, Hume City's unemployment rate was at 8.4% percent.

## WHITTLESEA

The municipality's population has grown at a rapid rate during the past 30 years, more than quadrupling from 27,000 in 1969 to approximately 120,000 in 2003. Whittlesea is also a relatively young local government area. In 2001, roughly 30% of their population was under 18 years of age.

Residents of the City come from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds, with a very high percentage of residents born in other countries, particularly Macedonia, Italy, and Greece. Demographically, over half of the residents were from non-English speaking backgrounds.

The median individual income was below the median for the Melbourne Statistical Division. In 2001, roughly 10% of Whittlesea's population had a Bachelors degree or higher, whilst for 15% their highest qualification was a certificate. The largest occupation groups in Whittlesea included professionals, tradespersons and related workers and clerical, sales and service workers.

The unemployment rate in Whittlesea was similar to that of the Melbourne statistical division at 6%. This is unusual, as Whittlesea had a comparatively large share of the population aged 18-24, who often have higher unemployment rates than older workers (25-59).

# APPENDIX B

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## **Schedule of consultations:**

### **Statewide:**

Interface Council's Network. June 2, 2004.

### **Nillumbik:**

Nillumbik Youth Services. May 18, 2004.

Nillumbik Community Health Service. May 18, 2004.

### **Whittlesea:**

Vicki Cooper, Team Leader Whittlesea Youth Services. April 26, 2004.

Anna and Joanna, Kildonan Youth Services, Whittlesea. April 26, 2004.

Lucy Thornton, RMIT Bundoora. April 27, 2004.

### **Hume:**

Hume City Council Youth Services. May 14, 2004.

Sunbury Youth Forum. August 26 2004.

### **Wyndham:**

Wyndham Youth Services. May 20, 2004.

Youth Law, Werribee. May 20, 2004.

Anglicare Werribee. June 10, 2004.

Youthlaw Werribee Forum. June 17, 2004.

### **Cardinia:**

Cardinia Youth Forum, Pakenham. April 28, 2004.

Cardinia Youth Services. September 2, 2004.

### **Mornington Peninsula:**

Mornington Peninsula Youth Services. May 3, 2004.

Southern Peninsula Youth Specific Services Meeting. May 3, 2004.

Peninsula Youth and Family Services. May 3, 2004.

### **Melton:**

Melton Youth Services. June 3, 2004.

Melton Youth Advisory Network Meeting. June 3, 2004.

### **Yarra Ranges:**

Martin Fidler, Yarra Ranges Youth Services. July 22, 2004.

Yarra Ranges Youth Leaders. July 22, 2004.



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David Wright-Howie. 'Data Regarding People Who Are Homeless: We Have a Good Base But We Need To Know More.' *Parity*. Vol 17, Issue 6. p.17.

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David Wright-Howie. *Young People who are Homeless: the importance of location and space*. Council for Homeless Persons. Conference paper delivered at YACVic conference Fringe benefits? Young People on the Edge of Policy and Place. October 7th, 2004.



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