



**JESUIT SOCIAL SERVICES POLICY UNIT**

## **POLICY PAPER**

### **A bridge that leads the way to many other bridges**

**Jesuit Social Services submission to the Parliament of Victoria  
Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee 'Inquiry into Strategies to  
Prevent High Volume Offending by Young People'**

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## Introduction – About Jesuit Social Services

At Jesuit Social Services we work to build a just society by advocating for social change and promoting the health and wellbeing of disadvantaged young people, families and communities. Beginning with *'Four Flats'* in 1977, our service has its origins in working with disadvantaged young people involved with the youth and adult justice systems in Victoria. Today our services provide support in a range of areas encompassing employment and training, substance abuse, mental health, suicide bereavement, parenting, local community development and support for refugees and newly arrived families.

Through Brosnan Youth Services we provide a holistic support service for young people engaged with the justice system, or exiting adult prisons or Youth Justice centres, who are assessed as high risk/need, with limited social and family networks, limited accommodation and post release support options and who are experiencing multiple and complex health problems. Brosnan programs are delivered in a manner that reflects the social justice principles of participation, equity, access and respect. Services include: intensive outreach support, case management, supported accommodation, drug and alcohol counselling, recreation programs, employment/training programs, 24/7 after hours emergency assistance and duty work and referral service. Specific programs of Brosnan Youth Services include:

➤ *Youth Justice Community Support Program (YJCSP)*

Our new YJCSP is an intensive support program for young people aged 10-21 engaged with the justice system. Our approach brings together a number of key agencies currently providing services to Youth Justice clients to work alongside Department of Human Service (DHS) Youth Justice Case Managers to: achieve a reduction in the rate, severity and frequency of reoffending; enable young people to make an effective transition to adulthood; develop young people's capacity for economic, social and cultural participation. YJCSP Service delivery is based around two levels of support pathway; intensive support (including assertive engagement and outreach and provision of after-hours response where appropriate) and supported referral. By offering these two distinct pathways, there is capacity to provide a service to the most high needs young people on Youth Justice Orders and also take advantage of the enhanced networks developed by the consortium of organisations involved in the YJCSP to facilitate appropriate referral to the broader service system for other young people.

➤ *Start Over*

The *Start Over* crime prevention program provides case management and other support for young people aged 10-18 years who have engaged in 'early offending' or other anti-social behaviour.

➤ *Community Justice Group Conferencing*

*Community Justice* is a group conferencing program that brings together a young person who has offended, the victim and their respective support networks to discuss ways for the young person to make amends for the harm done by their offending behaviour. The program provides the Children's Court with an alternative pre-sentencing option that aims to divert young people from further offending.

Other Brosnan Youth Services programs include: *XLR8 Mentoring; Koori Liaison; Link Out; Women's Integrated Support Program (WISP); Konnect; Transitional Assistance Information Links Service (TAILS); Nicholson Street; and Perry House*. Further information about these programs is included in Attachment 1.

## Introduction – About Jesuit Social Services (continued)

Our Gateway program provides pathways to education, training and employment for young people with complex needs. Through our status as a Registered Training Organisation, Gateway programs include accredited training. Approximately 60% of participants in Gateway have a history of offending. Gateway programs include:

- The *Gateway Kitchen* a 'social enterprise' incorporating Abbotsford Biscuits, where young people gain paid work experience and skills development in a commercial kitchen environment;
- *Artful Dodgers Studios*, see [artfuldodgers.tv](http://artfuldodgers.tv) offering a range of art, music and multimedia programs;
- *Computer building* and information technology skills;
- *The Outdoor Experience (TOE)* a targeted outdoor adventure intervention program providing adventure and wilderness experiences for young people;
- Other individual and group programs aimed at enhancing health and wellbeing and identifying pathways to mainstream education, training and employment.

In 1995 we established Connexions, the first 'dual diagnosis' counselling and outreach service for young people in Victoria experiencing mental health issues and problematic drug/alcohol use. The focus of the Connexions counselling service is on long-term, intensive engagement with young people who typically present with significant histories of trauma and are frequently at risk of suicide and/or self-harm. Connexions also provides intensive outreach services, assisting young people with immediate needs such as: attaining stable accommodation and income, attending court, stabilising personal and family relationships, and creating referral pathways to education, training and employment. The Connexions team also provides training, secondary consultation, support and supervision to workers engaged in working with young people who experience both mental illness and problematic drug/alcohol use.

Our other services include:

- *Strong Bonds – Building family connections*, [www.strongbonds.jss.org.au](http://www.strongbonds.jss.org.au) provides practical information to help parents and workers build supportive family relationships for young people.
- Our *Support After Suicide* program provides support to individuals and families who are bereaved by suicide. See [www.supportaftersuicide.org.au](http://www.supportaftersuicide.org.au)

We are also involved in local communities in various parts of Victoria and Western Sydney and have longstanding partnerships with the Vietnamese and African communities. Our work with the African community includes a Homework Club for young Africans living on the Flemington Public Housing Estate. Our community work in the City of Yarra includes a very popular soccer program, the Collingwood Soccer Allstars, for disadvantaged young people living in the Collingwood Public Housing Estate.

Our experience of engaging with disadvantaged people informs the work of our Policy Unit to identify areas of unmet need, conduct research and use our findings to advocate for change. This includes the recent study '*Dropping off the edge: the distribution of disadvantage in Australia*' (Vinson 2007) published in collaboration with Catholic Social Services Australia.

## Introduction – About Jesuit Social Services (continued)

One of the distinguishing features of our work is a commitment to forming relationships and working *in partnership with* disadvantaged people, families and communities, to build people's capacity to form relationships with others and to participate in their local community and the broader society. For example, our work with African communities includes a focus on working *with* the community to enhance the leadership capabilities within each of the communities represented.

In the context of the current Inquiry, it is worth noting that our services span a wide range of the program types outlined in the Discussion Paper, including: 'parenting/family'; 'whole community preventative' (youth leisure and school/education based); 'diversionary' (Start Over and Community Justice Group Conferencing) and various other short, medium and long term support programs, including our intensive support and case management services.

On page 58 of the Discussion Paper, the question is asked:

- "What balance should be struck at prevention approaches aimed at the whole community (such as youth leisure activities) and remedial approaches aimed specifically at youth offenders?"

Elsewhere, on page 40, the Discussion Paper correctly identifies links between youth offending and the following factors: economic disadvantage; unemployment; family background; child maltreatment, including physical and sexual violence; schooling and education; general and mental health issues; alcohol and other drug abuse; and asks the question:

- "If criminal behaviour is multiply determined, what 'spheres of influence' (e.g. family, school and community) should be the focus of intervention to address it? How can a co-ordinated approach best link up these 'spheres of influence'?"

Our experience is that there is no one single solution that works best to prevent youth crime, be it of the 'high volume' variety or other types of offending.

Our vision of a just society is one that is prepared to make a range of sustained investments to support children, young people, families and communities. In the discussion that follows, we advocate for improvements across a wide range of program types and 'spheres of influence'. We need better parenting and family support services. Economic injustice needs to be addressed at the highest levels of government. We need better resourcing of 'whole community preventative' approaches such as the Collingwood Soccer Allstars and the African Homework Club at Flemington. Schools must get better at 'seeing the person' beyond the behaviours and engaging and supporting young people with behavioural difficulties to remain at school and achieve to the best of their potential. Successful diversionary programs such as Start Over and Group Conferencing should be expanded. Post-release programs and other targeted interventions can be improved.

We recognise that most of the initiatives we propose will involve additional expenditure from taxpayers, at least in terms of initial outlay. However, over the long term, we are confident that the initiatives we propose will provide a substantial return on investment for taxpayers, not just in terms of reduced crime, but the broader human benefits of a more just society.

Finally by way of introduction, we would like to take the time to pause and reflect on the essential human nature of the work we do with young people and their families, with help from a man named George who recently contacted us to say thank-you, some 30 years after we worked with him at our original *Four Flats* service.

## Introduction – About Jesuit Social Services (continued)

We strongly agree with the Inquiry Discussion Paper when it notes the paucity of rigorous evaluation of programs and strategies designed to counter recidivism amongst young people, including the Australian Institute of Criminology observation that: “Currently there is a lack of evaluations that provide long-term follow-up of effectiveness” (page 56).

We are keen to build rigorous evaluation processes into all our programs, although as noted in the Discussion Paper, for a community agency such as ours this is often “easier said than done” (page 56) in part due to systematic underestimations by government and other funding bodies of the time and cost involved in doing evaluations properly. Also, it must be acknowledged that some programs are harder to evaluate than others due to difficulties in measuring components and quantifying outcomes. For example, due to the nature of some programs and/or ethical considerations, it is rarely possible to conduct randomised studies (with control groups) along the lines of conventional medical research.

Nevertheless, our sector has much practice wisdom to draw on to inform future developments. George’s story reinforces the value of learning from experience. We learnt about the essential ingredient of ‘what worked’ for George 30 years later. It is unclear whether any formal evaluation would have picked up the key intervention. It was something one of our workers did in 1977 with a guitar. In the words of George, it was “one of those life lessons that don’t seem to mean much at the time – but in hindsight provide a bridge that leads the way to many other bridges”.

Having spent 18 months in the Langi Kal Kal Youth Training Centre, George was invited to help adjust to a post-release life through a 3 month stay at our then *Four Flats* service in Hawthorn. Speaking to an audience of Jesuit Social Services staff and supporters earlier this year, George’s story is a lesson for everybody concerned with the current Inquiry:

### George’s story, 31 years later

*“Next week it will be 31 years to the day, since I first set foot inside the “Four Flats” halfway house at Hawthorn, which I’ve recently come to learn was the very beginnings of Jesuit Social Services.*

*I didn’t know it then, but those initial steps were the impetus leading to some profound lasting changes in my life. Changes that over time stopped me from slipping through the cracks and helped turn what faint hopes I had back then into the learned optimism I proudly carry with me to this day.*

*Having come from Gippsland with a history of extreme neglect, physical abuse and eventual abandonment by my parents, I had nowhere to go or no-one I could turn to and ended up at the mercy of the welfare system. A system which certainly had its shortcomings, but one with enough foresight to align itself, and thankfully me, with the “Four Flats” project.*

*Being at Four Flats was exceptionally valuable on a number of levels. Prior to that, I’d only experienced an enormously stifled life in the country, so it was a safe buffer zone, helping me adjust to the very different realities of the city.*

*The staff went all out to help me find work, supported and encouraged me to freely express myself in regard to personal issues and ultimately fostered my awareness of new possibilities.*

*I could give many anecdotes from those 3 months back in 1977 - yet, probably the most significant in terms of my perpetual growth, is when Alex (one of the workers) gave me one of those life lessons that don’t seem to mean much at the time – but in hindsight provide a bridge that leads the way to many other bridges.*

*Well... I never forgot those words, eventually heeding his advice by practicing diligently as if to make up for lost time.*

## **Introduction – About Jesuit Social Services (continued)**

*And although the guitar has since been very kind to me, (it has taken me places and put me in touch with people I could never have dreamed of) the most valuable lesson Alex unwittingly instilled in me that day, was the concept of “discipline as freedom” or more simply, our efforts will produce results if we keep at them. I’ve since been able to apply this philosophy to many other areas of my life, including further education, business, and personal relationships and by generally trying to evolve into the best person I can be.*

*A few months ago a staff member from Jesuit Social Services kindly arranged for me to meet up with Alex after 30 years. He had no idea of the impact that gesture of sharing his passion had on my life. For him, it was just another day at the office, trying his best to get me and the other guys motivated.*

*And I guess this is the key point I’d like to make here..... Often we say and do things totally unaware of the long term effect they can have on another’s life. I feel very fortunate to have met quite a few people like Alex along the way, who have inspired me with a few confidence building words here or some positive actions there.*

*To those of us growing up in less than desirable environments, there are rarely any positive role models whereby we can acquire the fundamental life skills that are a given in most regular family situations. Nurturing can take a back seat to a minefield of issues, whereby dignity and self esteem get lost in a haze of anger, confusion, frustration, envy, resentment and blame – all of which can lead to a loss of hope. And I think we all know that without hope there’s no hope!*

*I believe what organisations such as Jesuit Social Services do is fill some of the gaps, providing other, more positive frames of reference which enable those of us left behind, to find, restore and develop the essence of who we are. We live in a world with a multitude of different personalities and disparate characters, but the one universal truth is the fundamental right as human beings to develop the essence of who we are regardless of race, wealth, status or circumstances.*

*Individual accountability is very important as well, and in the broader sense, so too is a collective consciousness. We are not in this world alone. In varying degrees we essentially all want the same things out of life..... to be respected and valued for who we are – ongoing happiness, love, a sense of purpose and fairness..... and the feeling of being connected to something meaningful, substantial, lasting and secure.*

*When I was a young boy I remember hearing bandied about quite a lot..... the phrase “you’re put on this earth to help others” and although it seems somewhat funny to me now..... for quite some time through the quagmire of difficulties I was facing back then I’d wonder “what are the others put here for?” Today I’m happy to say my cynicism has long since subsided..... thanks to the likes of all of you - whose moral compass point in directions far beyond just self interest.*

*It’s an honour for me to be given this opportunity to express my gratitude. And to know that from those mutually shared first steps 31 years ago, Jesuit Social Services has established itself as a multifaceted organisation assisting many others to develop the essence of who they are beyond mere day to day survival.*

*I thank each and every one of you for opening your hearts and minds, and for your ongoing commitment to making the world..... (our world) a more just place.*

*Thankyou.*

## Key Themes and Recommendations

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Parliament of Victoria on the following terms of reference of the current Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee 'Inquiry into Strategies to Prevent High Volume Offending by Young People':

- (a) causal factors that may influence patterns of high volume crime, with particular emphasis on repeat offences committed by young people; and
- (b) strategies that may be effective in addressing the underlying causal factors or recidivist patterns of offending."

We'd like to begin by congratulating the Committee and the staff involved in the preparation of the Inquiry Discussion Paper. The Discussion Paper is thorough, well written and a most helpful tool for those of us striving to improve the support provided to young people and families experiencing difficulties involving the youth justice system. Our submission is based on discussion of fifteen key themes and includes twenty-eight recommendations.

### 1. Depth of disadvantage and childhood trauma requires long-term commitment of support

The successes of our Youth Justice intensive support and case management service illustrates that it is never too late to invest in young people. With the right support, most young people considered to be 'serious repeat offenders' are capable of working through the difficult issues associated with their criminal behaviour to lead productive adult lives free of crime. We should never give up on young people, no matter how serious or seemingly intractable their criminal behaviours appear to be.

Many of the young people we work with have minimal or no family or community supports. These young people tend to feel disconnected from society, culture, family and friends. They have deep feelings of isolation and loneliness not just precipitated by a single incident or period of misfortune, but frequently defined by many years of childhood abuse and neglect, interrupted schooling, an extreme lack of trust in adults, limited literacy, numeracy and vocational skills, learning difficulties and/or disability, no positive experiences of employment and poor physical and mental health (See Attachment 2).

Staff in Jesuit Social Services programs assist young people to overcome the legacy of negative experiences in their lives by affirming their value and worth as individuals. Our approach emphasises empowerment as a key principle when engaging young people. We give attention to their skills and strengths rather than deficits, and to self-determination and responsibility rather than dependency. Wherever possible, we encourage positive relationships between young people and their immediate and extended family.

In our experience, the impact of childhood trauma and disadvantage experienced by young people is often profound and long-lasting. It is unrealistic to expect that such trauma and disadvantage can be addressed and 'overcome' through short-term interventions of twelve months or less. In many instances we find that young people require intensive support over long periods of time. Some of our successes in working with young people have come after more than five years of intensive support, with many ups and downs along the way.

#### *Recommendation*

1. *Models of funding to provide intensive support for young people involved with the Youth Justice system should include recognition of the depth of disadvantage and childhood trauma experienced by many young people and the consequent need for long term intensive support to be available for periods well beyond 12 months when required.*

## 2. Funding for non-government provision of intensive support and case management

The Inquiry's Discussion Paper correctly identifies the key issue of how to achieve best practice in 'throughcare': "the co-ordinated, continuous and integrated management of (young people) prior to and once released from detention" (page 53).

Recently, through Brosnan Youth Services, we have re-written our youth justice services delivery model and, in partnership with a range of other agencies, have successfully tendered to provide these services in all three metropolitan regions of the Department of Human Services (DHS). See Attachment 1. We will continue providing our services to young people living in rural Victoria, and we are looking forward to the forthcoming opportunity to consider improved Youth Justice service arrangements in all five DHS rural regions.

Together with our other services and programs, our approach to Youth Justice service delivery aims to assist young people whenever they may intersect with the justice system. Our work is underpinned by restorative justice principles. We aim to ensure that young people are provided with a suitable response depending on their circumstances and need, enabling them to re-connect with the community in a supported manner. Specifically our programs include preventative, diversionary, short term, medium term and long term support responses. Each response aims to offer a comprehensive approach to 'throughcare' appropriate to each individual young person's circumstances.

Our youth justice service delivery model builds on our 30 years of experience in working with young people engaged with the justice system. Our approach integrates a range of service responses through partnerships with other agencies. This approach exemplifies the type of holistic, 'joined-up', multi-agency approach discussed on pages 53-54 of the Inquiry's Discussion Paper.

Also of note is that our approach includes a specific focus on gender that acknowledges the different experiences of young women and young men. We also pay particular attention to cultural imperatives and consequential contributory disadvantage that is experienced by Aboriginal young people. In addition, our approach incorporates a focus on developmental needs including all types of disabilities, Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) and developmental fissure that might be the result of debilitating disadvantage as a child. Young people who experience these latter circumstances are often undiagnosed and therefore not considered eligible for disability related support, an issue discussed in greater detail below on page 9.

While we are confident that the new arrangements for Youth Justice service delivery will deliver improvements for young people who are Youth Justice clients, including better 'throughcare', we remain concerned that the overall level of funding allocated to non-government service delivery is significantly below the level required to optimise outcomes for young people. In particular, while the current funding model quite rightly focuses on the 'most high needs' young people, the 'next level' of young people involved with the Youth Justice system may miss out on access to the support they need. We are also concerned that the notional average level of funding allocated per Youth Justice client will not be sufficient to provide the level of intensive and longer term support required by the 'most high needs' group of young people.

### *Recommendation*

2. *The overall level of funding for non-government provision of intensive support and case management for young people involved with the Youth Justice system should be increased to provide (1) more intensive and longer term support for the current target group of the 'most high needs' young people and (2) increased availability of intensive support and case management for the 'next level' of young people in need.*

### 3. The importance of well-designed 'holistic/wrap-around' pre-employment programs

As noted in the Inquiry Discussion Paper, the link between unemployment and crime remains a topic of some controversy (pages 30-31). Our experience is consistent with the Inquiry Discussion Paper's suggestions that "providing young people with paid employment opportunities or vocational training may reduce recidivism" and "certainly there is evidence that young people would prefer to be in legitimate paid employment" (page 30).

The vast majority of the young people we support are keen to work in paid employment. However, many lack basic skills and have little or no positive experience of working in a co-operative environment with adults. Many have also had negative experiences of school and do not respond well to a traditional 'classroom' model of learning.

In our experience, bridging the gap between a negative school experience and employment requires careful consideration of each young person's strengths, abilities and preferred learning styles, along with a commitment to provide other 'whole-of-life' health and welfare support as required for each individual (see Attachment 3). We note that the Inquiry's Discussion Paper recognises that the limitations of some employment programs in reducing re-offending may be due to these programs being offered *in isolation* from other interventions (page 52). The learnings from our Gateway program are instructive.

Gateway is a Registered Training Organisation that increases young people's capacity for social connection, safety and economic participation, through the delivery of pre-employment and individual and group support programs that provide managed and supported pathways to mainstream education, training and employment opportunities. Gateway includes *Artful Dodgers Studios*, which offers a range of art, music and multimedia programs and *The Gateway Kitchen* a 'social enterprise' incorporating Abbotsford Biscuits, where young people gain paid work experience and skills development in a commercial kitchen environment. These and other Gateway programs are delivered in a flexible, 'youth friendly' learning environment that *is integrated with* other whole-of-life support, including mental health and drug and alcohol counselling through our Connexions program. Our experience with Gateway suggests that the following program ingredients are essential in the delivery of effective pre-employment training programs for highly disadvantaged young people:

- a broad range of structured and unstructured program activities that include creative, expressive programs;
- social enterprise activities that provide opportunities for 'hands-on, real world' paid work experience;
- community cultural development projects;
- flexible, multiple entry-points allowing young people to exit and re-enter programs as required;
- a flexible, 'youth friendly' non-formal learning environment;
- inclusion of strategies to address basic literacy and numeracy difficulties;
- accreditation of the skills young people acquire;
- a holistic 'wrap-around' approach that includes generalist youth work support and easy access to mental health and drug and alcohol services.

#### *Recommendation*

3. *The Victorian Government should increase the availability of suitably designed 'holistic/wrap-around' pre-employment, training and work experience programs for highly disadvantaged young people, through more flexible approaches to funding for Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE), New Workforce Partnerships (NWP) of the Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development (DIIRD) and the development of new 'across government' funding mechanisms.*

#### 4. Addressing the disability gap

We are concerned that the Inquiry Discussion Paper didn't include sustained analysis of the need to provide better support for young people with a disability.

Many of the young people we assist through our Brosnan Youth Services programs have a disability, an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) and/or a significant learning difficulty. While some of these young people have been formally assessed as having an intellectual disability (and are therefore eligible for assistance through the state funded Disability Services system) others have either not been formally assessed or are considered to be in the 'grey area' just outside the eligibility criteria for support from the Disability Services system.

In our experience, many young people with a disability and/or learning difficulty 'fall between the gaps' of existing systems and miss out on getting support at critical points in their development, increasing their susceptibility to becoming involved in a cycle of crime and homelessness.

This includes some young people whose disability/learning difficulties involve developmental fissure that can be linked to debilitating disadvantage as a child. Others have an ABI linked to violence or other trauma experienced during childhood or early adolescence. Another significant group is young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder, a diagnosis that includes Asperger Syndrome. We remain hopeful that the Victorian Government's Autism State Plan being developed in partnership with Autism Victoria will lead to significant improvements for the next generation of children and young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder, including better approaches to early intervention, schooling and family support.

In many instances, young people have significant learning or language processing difficulties that have not been properly assessed. Often, this lack of understanding of a young person's specific learning/language difficulties appears to have been a significant factor in their negative experience of school. Through measures such as improved early identification, intervention and individualised planning for vulnerable students as outlined in the Victorian Government's Vulnerable Youth Framework (DHS, DPCD and DEECD 2008: 21-24) it is hoped that future generations will benefit from a more systematic approach to early identification of language/learning difficulties and better adaption of school environments to cater for different styles of learning.

Meanwhile, the current generation of young people with a disability who have come into contact with the justice system require greater support. As noted in recent Annual Reports of the Youth Parole Board, this includes the need for substantial improvements in accommodation support for young people with an intellectual disability exiting Youth Justice facilities (Youth Parole Board and Youth Residential Board 2006 and 2007). Our experience of providing support to young people with a disability - including Perry House, a program to support young people with an intellectual disability who have come in contact with the justice system - suggests that the Youth Parole Board is correct in suggesting that additional targeted support for this group is urgently required.

#### *Recommendations*

4. *Building on the experience of Jesuit Social Services 'Perry House' service and recommendations from the Youth Parole Board, the range of accommodation support services for young people with a disability involved with the justice system should be expanded in all regions of Victoria.*
5. *A research-based audit of Youth Justice clients experience of disability, acquired brain injury and learning/language difficulties should be undertaken to inform further service enhancements within Youth Justice and related service support systems.*

## 5. Working better together for improved mental health outcomes

While the Inquiry Discussion Paper quite rightly warns against making “simplistic causal analyses” about the relationship between mental illness and crime (page 37) it is clear from our experience and the work of the Youth Parole Board (Youth Parole Board and Youth Residential Report 2007) that a large proportion of young people involved with the Youth Justice system have significant mental health difficulties.

Through the provision of our Brosnan Youth Services programs, and our links to further support through Connexions and Gateway, we believe our services are an example of ‘best practice’ in holistic support incorporating mental health interventions for people involved in the justice system. Our approach is to work in partnership with people to build a ‘whole-of-life’ approach to the way services and supports are provided. In many instances, this approach relies on working co-operatively with a range of specialist mental health agencies.

We believe that substantial improvements can be made to the way that public and community mental health services work in co-operation with services for young people involved with the Youth Justice system. Specialist mental health services at times seek to ‘take-over’ and insist on a ‘sole-care’ arrangement when much better outcomes could be achieved through working together. We also encounter situations where mental health services have attempted to abrogate their responsibility to work with ‘offenders’ on the basis that this population should be our responsibility. Again, the solution is a commitment from the mental health sector to work together collaboratively with other agencies.

Increased collaboration from the mental health sector is also crucial to achieving improvements in mental health ‘throughcare’ for young people who spend time in Youth Justice facilities. In our experience, there is a systemic problem with lack of co-operation and ‘continuity of care’ between public mental health services and arrangements for mental health care within Youth Justice facilities. In particular, problems often seem to occur when there is uncertainty about the geographic ‘home’ of a young person, with unhelpful confusion and/or ‘buck-passing’ about which regionally based public/community mental health service should take responsibility for mental health care post detention. Some focussed attention is required by decision makers in both systems to build the funding and co-operative service structures required to achieve ‘best practice’ in mental health throughcare for all young people with mental health difficulties involved with the Youth Justice system.

Also of note is the prospect of reform to the age related structure of Victoria’s mental health system. The Victorian Government’s ‘Because mental health matters’ discussion paper (Department of Human Services 2008) correctly identified that the current mental health system does not work well for young people aged 16–25 years. The current use of 18 as the transitional age to adult mental health services is clearly problematic. We prefer the model of an independent specialist mental health service system for young people aged 15-25 years. Apart from other benefits, this age related reform would assist in encouraging better co-operation between mental health and Youth Justice services.

### *Recommendations*

6. *Reforms to Victoria’s mental health service system should include new funding and service arrangements to implement ‘best practice’ in co-operation between mental health and Youth Justice services, including the provision of high quality mental health ‘throughcare’ for young people who spend time in Youth Justice facilities. This should include specific arrangements to ensure that the quality of mental health ‘throughcare’ is not adversely affected by geographic uncertainties about a young person’s place of residence post-detention.*
7. *The current age related structure of Victoria’s mental health system should be reformed to provide a specific focus on the mental health needs of young people aged 15-25 years.*

## 6. Centrelink payments for young people: a recipe for instant poverty

As noted in the Inquiry Discussion Paper, the nature of links between material deprivation and crime is “contentious” (page 30). Whilst having some sympathy with critics who argue that analysis of crime tends to focus disproportionately on ‘the poor’ thereby ignoring the significance of crimes committed by wealthier members of our society (Watts, Bessant and Hil 2008: 187-206) our experience tends to support what the Inquiry Discussion Paper refers to as: “a large body of research knowledge that makes at least tentative associations between economic disadvantage and in particular property crime” (page 30).

Much of the work exploring crime and economic disadvantage focuses on the impact of childhood experiences of poverty, such as the Queensland based report noted in the Inquiry Discussion Paper (page 30): “Evidence exists that children raised in socio-economically disadvantaged regions have an increased probability of negative outcomes such as school failure, delinquency, drug use, juvenile crime” (Manning, Homel & Smith 2006: 99). Later in this paper we explore locational disadvantage and family poverty in the context of what has been referred to as ‘Australian Society’s Bermuda Triangle’ (Vinson 2008).

In this section we are focussed on the ‘here and now’ of poverty for young people living without family support. Unfortunately, many of the young people we work with do not have the opportunity to live in a supportive family environment, nor do they receive any financial support from their families. Unlike other young people who may have had an element of choice in pursuing life as an independent young adult outside the family home, most of the young people we work with have had to confront the realities of independent living at a time, and in circumstances, not of their own choosing.

Without further research, it is difficult to be definitive about the extent to which ‘youth poverty’ contributes to the rate of crimes committed by young people. However, when consideration is given to the income and cost of living realities for young people who are reliant on Centrelink’s Independent rate of Youth Allowance, it is not difficult to see why some young people may contemplate committing crimes to make ends meet.

Currently, the base rate of payment for the Independent rate of Youth Allowance for unemployed young people aged under 21 (and students aged 16-24) is \$177.70 per week (\$9,240 per year). By way of comparison, this is \$103.35 per week less than the single rate of the Age Pension. The comparative disadvantage of single people on Youth Allowance (Independent) is even greater (another \$20 pw+) when the calculation includes the Seniors Concession and Utilities Allowances (now \$514 annually each) and other concessions that pensioners are eligible for but which aren’t available to those on Youth Allowance.

We believe the Victorian Government has a role to play in advocating to the Australian Government for substantial rises in the rate of payment and concession entitlements for Youth Allowance recipients (and related payments such as Newstart and Sickness Allowance) as well as substantial rises in the rate of payment for pensions. Meanwhile, there are significant measures the Victorian Government can undertake to alleviate youth poverty in Victoria, especially in relation to the availability and cost of housing and public transport. These are discussed in more detail in the following section.

### *Recommendations*

8. *In addition to advocating to the Australian Government for substantial improvements in the Centrelink payment system for young people, the Victorian Government should implement a youth poverty prevention strategy focussed on (1) a substantial increase in the supply of public and community housing available to young people and (2) new measures to reduce the cost of public transport for young people living on low incomes.*

## 7. Housing and transport: A Victorian youth poverty prevention strategy

We were disappointed that the Inquiry Discussion Paper did not include a focus on the importance of affordable and suitable quality housing for young people. Likewise, the importance of public transport was not discussed in any detail in the Discussion Paper.

Our experience suggests that access to safe, secure, affordable housing is a fundamental building block for any young person seeking to rebuild their life free of crime. Also, for young people who need to use public transport regularly to attend school, appointments, training or work, the cost of public transport can create 'transport poverty' by absorbing such a significant proportion of their income that they do not have enough money for the other essentials of life such as food and energy bills.

The Victorian Government's housing initiatives for young people include those documented in 'Creating Connections - Youth Homelessness Action Plan Stage 2: 2006-2010' (Department of Human Services 2006). These include the Youth Justice Housing Pathways Program that provides Transitional Housing for twelve months for a proportion of young people exiting Youth Justice facilities. Our experience of Transitional Housing is that it has worked well for the initial twelve month period for those young people allocated a place. However two major problems remain (1) insufficient 'exit points' to long term accommodation after the twelve months tenure of Transition Housing is completed and (2) not enough Transitional Housing places to support all young people in need.

Regarding transport policy, we are encouraged by recent commitments to consider the increased provision of free public transport tickets to young people who are homeless (Kosky 2008) along with making public transport free for people who are unemployed (Outer Suburban/Interface Services and Development Committee 2008: 305-306). We are keen to see the development of an integrated approach to public and community transport access for young people, including specific strategies for our most 'transport disadvantaged' young people living in outer suburban and rural areas.

Finally, it is of note that 'theft of bicycle' appears in the crime statistics quoted in the Inquiry Discussion paper (page 12). We contend that if every Victorian young person owned a bicycle (and had the skills necessary to undertake routine maintenance to keep the bike on the road) the rate of 'theft of bicycle' would decline. Moreover, as a 'growth industry' with known skills shortages, bike building and maintenance is an endeavour where some young people involved with the Youth Justice system might find some employment opportunities.

### *Recommendations*

9. *Building on initiatives arising from the Youth Homelessness Action Plan, the Victorian Government should provide additional Transitional Housing places for young people involved with the Youth Justice system, along with improvements in the supply of suitable long-term accommodation to assist young people with 'exit options' from Transitional Housing.*
10. *Initiatives to provide disadvantaged young people with access to free (or reduced cost) public transport should be carefully designed to ensure that all disadvantaged young people involved with the Youth Justice system are eligible and included.*
11. *The Victorian Government should implement an integrated approach to public and community transport access for young people, including specific strategies to assist young people living in outer suburban and rural areas.*
12. *Creative strategies should be considered to ensure that all Victorian young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have access to a bicycle for everyday use and the opportunities to develop the skills required to undertake basic bicycle maintenance.*

## 8. Diversionary programs and other targeted intervention strategies

Under the heading 'Secondary crime prevention programs and strategies' the Inquiry Discussion Paper provides a helpful summary of the definition of 'diversion' along with discussion of the benefits of Cautioning, Juvenile conferencing and Remand and bail programs (pages 46-50). Citing a review of diversion processes and programs in the youth justice systems of Australia's states and territories (page 46), the Inquiry Discussion Paper summarises diversion as: "programs and practices which are employed for young people who have had initial contact with police, but are diverted from the traditional juvenile justice processes before children's court adjudication" (Commonwealth of Australia 2003, p.vii).

The Inquiry Discussion Paper notes that the extent to which diversionary programs act to reduce recidivism has not been conclusively proven (page 47) and that, in part, this is due to a "paucity of rigorous evaluations" (page 55) including "a lack of evaluations that provide long-term follow up of effectiveness" (page 56). Nonetheless, despite the acknowledged difficulties in relation to evaluations, we are heartened to see the Inquiry Discussion Paper recognise the conclusions of the New South Wales Auditor General that, overall, "research indicates that...for the vast majority of young offenders, diversion from the formal court processes will reduce the likelihood of re-offending" (Auditor General NSW 2007: 8).

In our experience, well designed diversionary and targeted intervention programs such as our 'Start Over' program (funded by Victoria Police and linked to police cautioning) 'Group Conferencing' (a pre-sentencing option) and 'The Outdoor Experience' (outdoor adventure interventions) do have a positive effect in reducing recidivism (See Attachments 4, 5 and 6). These types of programs deserve greater recognition and support from government. In addition, there is an urgent need to expand other types of diversionary programs. The success of the Victoria Police Ropes Program has led to its' expansion into more regions in recent years, but there is still a long way to go before statewide coverage is achieved. Currently, magistrates can find themselves in the heartbreaking position of wanting to refer a young person to a diversionary program but there being no option available.

We would welcome further opportunities to work with Victoria Police, Magistrates and other stakeholders to review and improve the availability of youth justice related diversionary and targeted intervention programs. We note that the Inquiry Discussion Paper draws on the 'what works' research of the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC 2002) to emphasise the importance of "multi-agency models where government and other agencies work together to address youth offending and re-offending" (page 53). Fortunately, a strong culture of co-operation already exists between Victoria Police and government and community agencies. This can be further strengthened through our combined efforts in designing and implementing a full range of suitable and high quality diversionary programs.

### *Recommendations*

13. *The Start Over program (funded by Victoria Police and operating in the City of Ballarat by Centacare Ballarat and the Cities of Yarra and Darebin by Jesuit Social Services) should be expanded to other local government areas, beginning with identified high need areas.*
14. *Funding for Youth Justice Group Conferencing should be expanded, and also extended to be included as a 'post-sentencing' option.*
15. *Funding for outdoor adventure based intensive intervention programs such as The Outdoor Experience should be expanded.*
16. *The range of Youth Justice related diversionary programs should be expanded to ensure that a suitable program is available in all instances where a sentencing magistrate believes it would be appropriate for a young person.*

## 9. Adult Community Education (ACE) and the Youth Transition Support Initiative (YTSI)

As identified in Inquiry Discussion Paper, schooling and education has a strong influence on youth offending (page 35-37). We also concur with the sentiments of the South Australian Commissioner for Social Inclusion, David Cappo in relation to the belief that “the mainstream approach to schooling is (often) not the most effective way to encourage young offenders to participate in learning ... through the use of more flexible learning approaches we can engage these young people in learning and have an effect on their involvement in offending” (Cappo 2007 quoted on page 37 of the Inquiry Discussion Paper).

In addition to improved approaches to retaining and re-engaging young people in school based education (see following section) we believe it is important to acknowledge that in some circumstances it is sensible to conclude that mainstream schooling isn't working for the young person and that an alternative education pathway would be more beneficial.

Through various initiatives such as the Youth Pathways Program (YPP in ACE) Victoria's Adult Community Education (ACE) sector has a proud history of being prepared to adapt and accommodate the learning needs of early school leavers. The current priorities of the Adult, Community and Further Education (ACFE) Board formally recognises that “the needs of some young people who have left school or require pathways into school, TAFE or other educational institutions may be best met through participation in ACE” (ACFE 2008: 10). Various research reports have also highlighted the benefits of ACE provision for young people (PhillipsKPA 2006; Volkoff, Keating, Walstab and Marr 2006).

Another important program to assist young people in Victoria who are 'disengaged from school' is the Youth Transition Support Initiative (YTSI) sponsored by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and run by various community organisations in co-operation with Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs). YTSI currently has coverage across 33 of Victoria's 79 local government areas through 12 funded services. The recently published 'Formative Evaluation' of the first year of YTSI operation concluded, amongst other things, that “The need to maintain an intensive case management approach with the target group was viewed as critical to the ability to successfully sustain the level of engagement required” (Australian Youth Research Centre 2008: 6-8 and 43):

Drawing on data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) the Victorian Government's Vulnerable Youth Framework discussion paper indicates that 5.5% of Victorian 15-19 year olds and 10.7% of 20-24 year olds are not in education, training or employment (DHS, DPCD and DEECD 2008: 15). Based on the most recent ABS population data, this translates to 19,413 young Victorian aged 15-19 and 40,169 aged 20-24 (calculations done from data for June 2007 published in ABS 2008: Catalogue 3201.0). When you compare this data with the current capacity of YTSI and ACE to assist 15-24 year olds, it appears there is considerable need to expand both YTSI and ACE provision for Victorian 15-24 year olds who are not currently engaged in education, training or employment.

### *Recommendations*

- 17. Funding for the provision of Adult Community Education (ACE) for 15-24 year olds in Victoria should be given a significant boost.*
- 18. The Youth Transition Support Initiative (YTSI) should be expanded to broaden geographic coverage and increase the capacity for YTSI workers to provide the level of intensive case management support required by highly disadvantaged young people.*
- 19. Effective models of cooperation between schools, ACE providers, LLENs, YTSI and other services should be documented and disseminated to inform new service development.*

## 10. A more positive approach to school retention and re-engagement

We applaud the Inquiry Discussion Paper's noting that "problems associated with learning, schooling and truancy are not necessarily, or at least not only, problems attributable to the individual child. Structural and other factors peculiar to individual schools and/or the organisation of schools generally (both state and private) may also contribute to the problem. Weak supervision, unimaginative teaching and a lack of alternatives to punitive policies such as suspension or expulsion to deal with difficult students may also be to blame" (page 36).

One of the more notable aspects of the plethora of 'data to illustrate vulnerability' published in the Victorian Government's Vulnerable Youth Framework discussion paper (DHS, DPCD and DEECD 2008: 15) is the complete absence of data on the number of young people suspended or expelled from school. Nor is there any data published regarding prolonged absences from school (and/or irregular attendance) by some young people who, while they may be 'enrolled', cannot be considered to be truly 'at school' in the conventional sense.

While we are not in a position to be sure about the state of data collection systems within the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) we suspect that some data is collected on the above matters, but that it isn't compiled and made available in a format for ready public access. We also suspect that existing data systems are not sufficiently well designed or implemented to capture the required data with appropriate degrees of accuracy, and that some redesign of data systems may prove beneficial.

In our experience, far too many young people in Victoria are suspended or expelled from school and/or do not attend school regularly. For secondary schools, we believe these difficulties can often be traced to inadequate approaches to planning for the transition from primary school and the lack of individualised attention to young people's education and social difficulties during the crucial first two years of secondary school in Years 7 and 8.

We believe that the Victorian school system needs to implement a major cultural shift in the way it approaches support for disadvantaged young people with behavioural and/or learning difficulties - a more positive rather than punitive approach is required, including more focused individualised attention on the range of preferred learning styles of young people.

We are heartened by the Victorian Government's identification of a range of positive school related 'Actions for change' in the Vulnerable Youth Framework discussion paper, including: "Secondary schools will be encouraged to explore and implement new strategies to maintain student engagement, and to reduce early school leaving ... Particular attention will be paid to identifying children in primary school who may face difficulties in the transition to secondary school ... When a student is identified as being at risk of disengaging, schools will intervene quickly and ensure that appropriate supports are put in place" (DHS, DPCD and DEECD 2008: 24). Along with other community agencies, we are looking forward to working with schools to implement positive changes for disadvantaged young people in the future.

### *Recommendations*

- 20. DEECD should make publicly available any data it currently collects regarding school suspensions and expulsions, along with data on prolonged absences and/or irregular attendance at school. Existing data collection systems should be reviewed to ensure accurate and useful data on school suspensions, expulsions and absences is available in future.*
- 21. Sufficient additional resources should be provided to schools and related community based support services to ensure that the positive 'Actions for change' relating to school retention and re-engagement arising from the Victorian Government's Vulnerable Youth Framework can be fully implemented.*

## 11. Parenting help for struggling families during the early adolescent 'middle years'

The Inquiry Discussion Paper quite rightly notes that the relationship between family experiences and crimes committed by young people "is a complex one" and that widely contested views on this topic are evident in the research literature (pages 32-33). Through our 'Strong Bonds – Building family connections' website, [www.strongbonds.jss.org.au](http://www.strongbonds.jss.org.au) and our approach to 'family aware' youth work practice, we are committed to some very practical action that is consistent with the Inquiry Discussion Paper's noting that "positive, stable and strong family relationships act as a protective factor mitigating against youth involvement in criminal or antisocial activity" (page 32).

As noted above in the context of discussion about the inadequacies of Centrelink's Youth Allowance, many of the young people we work with do not have the opportunity to live in a supportive family environment. Unlike other young people who may have had an element of choice in pursuing life as an independent young adult outside the family home - and with some family support during the transition - most of the young people we work with have had to confront the realities of independent living at a time, and in circumstances, not of their own choosing, without access to reliable and sustained family support. Tragically, for many of these young people it is too late, or for other reasons, not possible to contemplate strengthened family relationships as a crime prevention strategy, although wherever possible we continue to promote positive relationships between young people and their immediate and extended family.

A key audience for 'Strong Bonds' is parents, including a particular focus on parents with children of an early adolescent age (referred to in 'school language' as 'the middle years' from Grade 5 through to Year 8 or ages 10-14 years). In developing and updating the material for Strong Bonds we have drawn on a wide range of evidenced based research about parenting and family relationships, including that available from well known Australian sources such as the Parenting Research Centre, [www.parentingrc.org.au](http://www.parentingrc.org.au) and the Raising Children Network, <http://raisingchildren.net.au>.

The key challenges for everybody involved in providing advice to parents regarding young people include ensuring that (1) the advice is relevant and presented in an accessible format for all sorts of families, including those where parents have limited capacity to read or converse in English and (2) creative strategies are used to maximise the chances of the advice actually reaching the families who need it most.

We are acutely aware of the limitations of our Strong Bonds material being concentrated in an 'English only' website. Apart from parents who have difficulties reading English, access is limited for families who cannot afford a computer and Internet access and/or do not have the time to acquire the skills necessary to use computers and the Internet. Through the development of additional material drawing on further consultation with families from different ethnic backgrounds, together with opportunities to disseminate Strong Bonds information through a range of additional 'non-Internet' methodologies, we are committed to ensuring that all parents will be in a position to benefit from our Strong Bonds material. In the context of the parenting skills 'Actions for change' identified under the heading 'Positive family relationships' in the Victorian Government's Vulnerable Youth Framework discussion paper (DHS, DPCD and DEECD 2008: 19) we are committed to working collaboratively with schools, the Parenting Research Centre and other parenting and family organisations to ensure that the best available advice reaches the parents and families who need it most.

### *Recommendations*

22. *Government should support the development of further targeted strategies to improve the extent to which parenting advice reaches the parents and families who need it most, including a specific strategy for co-operation between schools and the parenting/community sector to provide information and advice to parents of 'middle years' young people aged 10-14 years.*

## 12. Homework support and soccer show the way to value through community participation

Under the heading 'Preventative programs to address possible future offending' the Inquiry Discussion Paper notes the suggestion of the Auditor-General of New South Wales (Auditor General NSW 2007) that "ideally programs and interventions that address youth needs and risk factors should be put in place long before the child commits an offence" (page 44). More generally, the Inquiry Discussion paper draws on other research (for example, Lynch, Buckman & Krenske 2003) to highlight the importance of "early interventions that address the precursors to juvenile offending before they give rise to attitudes and behaviours that will ultimately bring individuals into conflict with the criminal justice system" (page 44).

Through our community programs operating in the City of Yarra (Fitzroy, Richmond and Collingwood) and the Flemington Public Housing Estate, we have long-standing partnerships with local residents, including the Vietnamese and African communities.

Through these partnerships, we work with residents to identify and implement a range of community programs based on identified community priorities.

Current programs include:

- Homework clubs run at the Fitzroy Public Housing Estate (primary school age) and Flemington Public Housing Estate (African community primary and secondary school age). See Attachment 7.
- The Collingwood Soccer Allstars, a program operating from a base within the Collingwood Public Housing Estate (see Attachment 8) along with a range of soccer programs at the Flemington Public Housing Estate.

It should be noted that these programs have not been established within a 'crime prevention' framework. Nonetheless, amongst other benefits, we believe these programs do contribute to crime prevention outcomes and illustrate the benefits of well targeted 'whole community' preventative programs.

We believe government should find an appropriate mechanism to provide these sorts of programs with sustained support to ensure they can continue to operate with certainty into the future.

### *Recommendation*

23. *Based on learnings from the successful operation of the homework groups and soccer programs operating at the Flemington, Collingwood and Fitzroy Public Housing Estates, the Victorian Government should develop new funding mechanisms to ensure that such well targeted and successful 'whole community preventative' programs are provided with appropriate long-term funding support.*

### 13. Family poverty, locational disadvantage, family violence and childhood trauma

Under the heading 'Family background' the Inquiry Discussion Paper provides a helpful summary of the research relating to what is referred to as "dysfunctional parenting and criminogenic family environments" (pages 32-33) along with child maltreatment and its possible relationship to youth offending (pages 34-35). As referenced earlier, the Inquiry Discussion Paper also provides a summary of what the research literature tells us about the links between economic disadvantage and crime (pages 30-31). As with so many of the areas relevant to this Inquiry, there appears to be considerable controversy and debate about various research 'findings' and the implications for policy makers.

If you were able to go back in time into the childhood of the most disadvantaged young people we support through our Youth Justice intensive support and case management services, you would invariably find a history of severe family poverty, disruption, violence and various other forms of childhood trauma (See, for example, Sam's story in Attachment 2).

These observations about the impact of childhood experiences of disadvantage have been reinforced by our research on locational disadvantage, including the recent study 'Dropping off the edge: the distribution of disadvantage in Australia' (Vinson 2007) published in collaboration with Catholic Social Services Australia.

In summarising his thoughts about the relationship between economic disadvantage and crime, Professor Vinson refers to what he calls Australian society's Bermuda Triangle: "For more than thirty-five years as a researcher and administrator I have traversed the social equivalent of Australia's Bermuda Triangle. The three tips of that triangle are crime, social disadvantage and limited education....I have come face-to-face with four year olds from disadvantaged backgrounds whose vocabulary stretches to a few words, whose articulation of sounds is sometimes incomprehensible, whose experience of the world is confined to their suburb, and who have no idea of the nature of a book or the use of a pencil or a brush....These realities take one to the very springs of social deprivation, the point of origin of that cumulative disadvantage which, unless seriously combated, will lead inevitably to the downward spiral of lives reflected in the disadvantage studies" (Vinson 2008). Vinson then goes on to make the case not only for substantial improvements in pre-school for all four-year olds, but also a systematic approach to early education and other support for disadvantaged three year-olds.

In addition to Vinson's focus on pre-school education (and a broader focus on the importance of education throughout a child's life) our experience also concurs with the research findings that suggest that children who suffer from physical abuse and neglect are more likely to become involved in crime later in life, especially where young people are still being subjected to maltreatment during the adolescent years (see, for example, Stewart, Dennison and Waterson 2002 as quoted on page 34 of the Inquiry Discussion Paper). Elsewhere, the Inquiry Discussion Paper refers to British research indicating that exposure to domestic violence is a particular form of child maltreatment that increases the risk of children later becoming involved in property related crime (Swanston et al. 2003 quoted on page 34). Again, our experience suggests that children's exposure to domestic violence can have a severe and long-lasting adverse impact on their development and behaviour.

#### *Recommendations*

24. *The Victorian Government should continue to seek co-operative arrangements with the Australian Government to ensure that all four-year olds receive a full year of high quality pre-school education. In addition, both levels of government should combine to promote further expansion of early education, childcare and other support for disadvantaged three-year olds.*
25. *The Victorian Government and the Australian Government should co-operate in the development and implementation of improved strategies to reduce the level of child maltreatment and domestic violence.*

#### 14. Police culture and attitudes, especially re 'best practice' in cautioning

Police attitudes and behaviour towards young people can be an important influence on young people's approach to crime. For example, in our experience, old-style 'harsh' policing rarely works as a crime deterrent. Much of our work relies on good relations with police and mostly we experience very positive relationships. For example, through the implementation of our Start Over program (see page 13 and Attachment 4) we routinely have involvement with Police Youth Resource Officers and other police involved in the cautioning process.

In the context of discussion about diversionary programs, the Inquiry Discussion Paper notes that Victoria is the only state where cautioning and its administration are not governed by legislation and legislative guidelines (page 48). Rather, in Victoria, formal cautioning is done subsequent to Police Operating Procedures. According to one recent evaluation, the lack of legislative guidance can result in the administration of cautioning being "ad hoc and capricious" (Holland 2008, forthcoming as quoted on page 48 of the Inquiry Discussion Paper).

Our experience of the police approach to the cautioning process does vary from case to case and area to area. Building on our existing positive experience with Start Over and our other programs, we consider that further efforts should be made to educate police about 'best practice' in policing young people. In particular, we believe that improved crime prevention outcomes would be achieved through more consistent statewide implementation of 'best practice' approaches to police cautioning. We are not convinced that new legislation is required, although it may ultimately prove of benefit. A more important immediate priority is better training and support for front-line police about 'best practice' in cautioning.

##### *Recommendation*

26. *Drawing on existing experience of 'best practice', Victoria Police should institute new training and support arrangements to improve the statewide implementation of a 'best practice' approach to police cautioning of young people. Legislation to support the operation of police cautioning should also be considered.*

#### 15. Listening to the voices of young people about crime prevention

We note with interest that the Victorian Auditor-General's recent report on 'Services to Young Offenders' (Victorian Auditor-General 2008) included a recommendation relating to the value of including structured client feedback mechanisms that provide young offenders with the opportunity to provide input into the delivery of community-based services and supervision.

A key untapped information source about better crime prevention strategies for the next generation of children, young people and families is today's young people, including those involved with the youth and/or adult justice systems. Many of the young people we work with would welcome an opportunity to share their experiences and ideas about what would work to improve crime prevention outcomes for the next generation. As part of the drive to achieve considerably better youth justice related data (as identified in Chapter 2 of the Inquiry Discussion Paper) the rich vein of information available from talking with young people should be explored through some new 'youth friendly' research and consultation strategies. It may well be that the most effective crime prevention strategies will come from the ideas of young people themselves.

##### *Recommendation*

27. *The Victorian Government should support the creation of new 'youth friendly' research and consultation strategies to provide opportunities for young people to share their ideas and experiences about what would work to improve crime prevention outcomes for the next generation.*

## Conclusion

*“It all just got too much. Everyone was talking at me, and nobody seemed to have time to listen to what I wanted to say. At one stage I had five different workers (from five different organisations) trying to look after me, one for housing, one for psych stuff, one for court stuff, one for drugs, and then the employment people. They didn’t seem to co-ordinate with each other much and in the end I just gave up on all of them and stopped turning up” (Jesuit Social Services, 2008a: 3).*

In the preceding discussion we have reflected on the Inquiry’s terms of reference: (a) causal factors that may influence patterns of high volume crime, with particular emphasis on repeat offences committed by young people; and (b) strategies that may be effective in addressing the underlying causal factors or recidivist patterns of offending; and made a total of twenty-seven recommendations covering a range of ‘spheres of influence’, including schools, family support, early childhood education, diversionary and ‘whole community preventative’ approaches such as the soccer and homework club programs we run in partnership with local communities.

We began by discussing what we referred to as the ‘depth of disadvantage’ experienced by many of the young people we work with. Sam’s story (Attachment 2) is one example of such disadvantage. In this conclusion, we’d like to reflect further on the structure of government funded support for young people like Sam, with a particular reference to what the Victorian Auditor-General recently referred to as the need to develop “a more whole-of-government or ‘joined up’ approach to planning, co-ordination, data collection and performance measurement in Victoria’s youth justice system” (Victorian Auditor-General 2008: 5). This call from the Auditor-General echoes a key finding of a 2001 youth offenders pilot program evaluation (ARTD Management & Research Consultants 2001) cited in the Inquiry Discussion Paper: “The problems are joined up but our responses are not” (page 54).

Our approach to working with people experiencing disadvantage includes a commitment to understanding and appreciating the totality of every individual. Rather than thinking about support from the perspective of separate issue ‘silos’ e.g. mental health, disability, drug and alcohol misuse, employment, housing, health, etc. we work in partnership with people to build a ‘whole-of-life’ approach to the way support is provided. This holistic approach to supporting people is sometimes referred to as a ‘joined-up’ or ‘wrap around’ approach. In the Inquiry Discussion Paper and other documents such as the Victorian Government’s Vulnerable Youth Framework discussion paper (DHS, DPCD & DEECD 2008) we are heartened by references to the importance of joined-up/holistic approaches. However, there appears to be very little discussion of options to develop new ‘across departmental/across silo’ funding mechanisms to assist government and community service providers to organise and implement their services in a holistic manner.

In Recommendation 3 above (page 8) we suggest that the Victorian Government should increase the availability of ‘holistic/wrap-around’ pre-employment, training and work experience programs for highly disadvantaged young people, through more flexible approaches to existing funding structures and the development of new ‘across government’ funding mechanisms. There is no reason why such ‘joined-up’ funding mechanisms couldn’t be extended to encompass a range of other areas such as mental health, housing, youth justice, health and drug and alcohol misuse. We would welcome any opportunities to be involved in a trial of new approaches to ‘joined-up’ funding and support for young people and their families. We are also confident that young people and their families would enthusiastically embrace a more joined-up approach from government.

### *Recommendation*

28. *The Victorian Government should develop new joined-up, across government funding mechanisms to encourage and support the delivery of joined-up, holistic support to disadvantaged young people and their families.*

## **Attachment 1. Brosnan Youth Services: A Summary**

Brosnan Youth Services is a holistic support service for young people engaged with the justice system, or exiting adult prisons and/or Youth Justice centres, who are assessed as high risk/need, with limited social and family networks, limited accommodation and post release support options and experiencing multiple and complex health problems.

Brosnan programs are delivered in a manner that reflects the social justice principles of participation, equity, access and respect. Services include: intensive outreach support, case management, supported accommodation, drug and alcohol counselling, recreation programs, employment/training programs, 24/7 after hours emergency assistance and duty work and referral service.

Specific programs of Brosnan Youth Services include;

### ➤ *Youth Justice Community Support Program (YJCSP)*

Our new YJCSP is an intensive support program for young people aged 10-21 engaged with the justice system. It recognises that “interventions that focus on reducing the likelihood of juveniles escalating to adult offenders will have significant benefits for the whole of the Australian community” and “young people who come to the attention of criminal justice agencies have multiple problems and experience high levels of need across all areas of functioning” (Day, Howells and Rickwood 2004). Our approach brings together a number of key agencies currently providing services to Youth Justice clients to work alongside DHS YJ Case Managers to:

- Achieve a reduction in the rate, severity and frequency of reoffending
- Enable young people to make an effective transition to adulthood
- Develop young people’s capacity for economic, social and cultural participation

The YJCSP is grounded in strong theory, evidenced based practice and key government policies focuses on broad imperatives in a young person’s life such as social and economic inclusion, health and wellbeing, gender, developmental needs and the individual’s dreams and aspirations. By addressing these imperatives we seek to facilitate outcomes in each of these areas such as; social and economic participation and connectedness, strong sense of self identity, resilience, wellness and self determination. Such outcomes equip a young person with the skills and knowledge to make informed choices regarding their future and the means to participate more fully in their community.

Service delivery is based around two levels of support pathway; intensive support (including assertive engagement and outreach and provision of afterhours response where appropriate) and supported referral. By offering these two distinct pathways, there is capacity to provide a service to the most high needs young people on Youth Justice Orders but also take advantage of the enhanced networks developed by a Consortium to facilitate appropriate referral to the broader service system for other young people.

### ➤ *Youth Justice Housing Pathways Program*

Provision of intensive housing support and outreach to six Transitional Housing properties in the outer Southern Metropolitan Region as part of the Youth Justice Housing Pathways Program.

## Attachment 1. Brosnan Youth Services: A Summary (continued)

Specific programs of Brosnan Youth Services include;

➤ *Start Over*

Provision of case management and/or supported referral to young people aged 10 – 18 years residing or connected to the City of Yarra and the City of Darebin who have received a police caution. This program is a crime prevention program funded by Victoria Police and has a strong community development focus.

➤ *Community Justice*

A Restorative Justice program which takes referrals through the Children's Court system. The program convenes group conferences between the victim, offender and their respective support networks. The Community Justice program is now embedded in the Child Youth and Families Act as a recognised intervention.

➤ *XLR8 Mentoring*

Which connects young people (12-20 years old) who are involved with Youth Justice or leaving the statutory care and protective system with adult role models to support, guide and assist young people to transition more smoothly into community life and enhance pathways to education, training and employment opportunities.

➤ *Koori Liaison Program*

A position developed in 2006 to inform the work of Brosnan Youth Services and ensure culturally sensitive policy and practice. The role also works closely with the Broadmeadows Koori Court and liaises with indigenous services, programs and peak bodies.

➤ *Link Out Program*

Provision of pre-release assessment and planning, intensive support and case management for males in the prison system. Support is holistic and is provided predominately on an outreach basis. We deliver this program as part of a consortium with Australian Community Support Organisation (ACSO), Victorian Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (VACRO) and the Salvation Army. Link Out targets all eligible males in the prison system however Brosnan Youth Services focuses on the 18 to 25 age group.

➤ *Women's Integrated Support Program (WISP)*

Provision of pre-release assessment and planning, intensive support and case management for females in the prison system. Support is holistic and is provided predominately on an outreach basis. We deliver this program as part of a Consortium with Melbourne City Mission and VACRO. WISP targets all eligible females in the prison system however Brosnan Youth Services focuses on the 18 to 25 age group.

## **Attachment 1. Brosnan Youth Services: A Summary (continued)**

Specific programs of Brosnan Youth Services include;

➤ *Konnect*

The Konnect program provides pre-release assessment and planning, and post release support to Aboriginal men and women aged between 18 and 30 years. Support is based on culturally competent best practice, a holistic approach and is provided predominantly on an outreach basis with a community focus. The program also aims to build the capacity of mainstream organisations through strong links to Aboriginal organisations to better meet the needs of Aboriginal men and women exiting prisons

➤ *Transitional Assistance, Information, Links Service (TAILS)*

Provision of short-term (up to 12 weeks) supported referral for 18 – 25 year olds being released from prison or involved with Community Correctional Services.

➤ *Nicholson Street*

Short-term supported, staffed residential program. Targets young people up to 25 years who lack skills to reside in independent accommodation or who exhibit behaviour (i.e. high risk drug use) which would place them at risk in independent accommodation. Focus on support and development of independent living skills.

➤ *Perry House*

24 hour staffed residential program for young people with intellectual disability who have had contact with the justice system. Perry House is a long-term program which assists young people to develop living skills, access appropriate program and/or employment and secure appropriate long-term housing.

## **Attachment 2. Sam's depth of disadvantage: A youth justice case study**

*Sam was born drug-dependent due to his mother's drug use and he required specialist medical care for some months after birth. Before he turned one, Sam was removed from his mother's care after intervention from Child Protection and placed with his grandparents. While in the care of his grandparents, Sam was sexually abused by a family member. By the age of seven when he returned to live with his mother he was exhibiting severe behavioural difficulties at both home and school.*

*Sam's mother had continuing difficulties with drug use. Workers also reported concerns about Sam's exposure to "highly sexualised behaviour" on the part of his mother and her numerous partners. Sam also recalls incidents of extreme violence between his mother and several of her partners, along with his own experience of being subject to physical violence from his mother's partners.*

*Over the course of his primary school years, Sam's mother moved house on five occasions, including several periods of homelessness and involvement with domestic violence and/or homelessness services, and he was enrolled in three different schools. On two occasions during this period, Sam's mother spent time in prison for drug related offences. Sam periodically returned to live with his grandparents, although this was usually for relatively short periods of time (a month or two) before returning to his mother's care. At age 12, Sam's biological father died of a drug overdose.*

*Sam's interrupted schooling continued with his early secondary school years where he was enrolled in three different schools from years 7-9. His attendance record at school was very patchy and his level of academic achievement was summarised in one report as "low level/borderline disability". Sam's first recorded offence was at age 14. At this stage he was already a heavy user of cannabis and alcohol and had experimented with heroin and amphetamines and later, inhalants. Subsequent offences over the next three years included burglary, theft, a series of driving offences and serious assault. At age 17 he received a lengthy Youth Training Order.*

*Whilst in custody, after encouragement from custodial staff, Sam referred himself to Brosnan Youth Services around five months before he was due for release. After accepting the referral, the allocated Brosnan Youth Services case manager undertook weekly visits to the facility to establish a relationship with Sam. The case manager also engaged in extensive discussions with staff at the custodial facility and with the allocated Parole case manager to establish a support plan for Sam.*

*While Sam's grandparents were considered a key source of positive family support, it was not an option for Sam to live with them. Sam's mother was still heavily drug dependent and living with her was also not considered possible or desirable. Sam appeared to have very few independent living skills. Amongst the range of challenges facing Sam and his support team, in addition to the difficulties of securing suitable long-term housing, the development of independent living skills sufficient to maintain that housing was identified as an area that would require intensive support.*

*Other key challenges included Sam's long term dependence on drugs and alcohol and what options might be available for him to engage with education, training or employment. Sam appeared to have very low levels of literacy and numeracy, along with other learning difficulties, but had never had a formal assessment of these. Such an assessment was now considered a priority to help consider Sam's future options for education, training and employment. There were also concerns about Sam's mental health. Sam had a history of self harm and suicidal ideation, but had not previously had any periods of sustained support from public or community based mental health support services.*

*Sam's identified strengths included some considerable natural talent as an athlete, including ball sports such as basketball, football and soccer. He also indicated an interest in tennis, saying that before he was sent into custody he had only ever had the chance to play it once and really enjoyed it. At the time of writing, Sam was continuing to work with his case manager and other support workers and had not re-offended. Having obtained access to housing for a 12 month period (through Transitional Housing) Sam was making progress, albeit slow, with the development of independent living skills.*

For more information about the range of Youth Justice related services run by Jesuit Social Services, contact Brosnan Youth Services on 03 9387 1233 or [brosnan@jss.org.au](mailto:brosnan@jss.org.au).

### **Attachment 3: John's access to education, training and employment pathways through Gateway**

*In the context of a chaotic family environment and drug using parents, John commenced using cannabis at age 11. By age 13 he was using cannabis and alcohol daily. At age 14 he commenced heroin use and later was also a regular user of amphetamines.*

*John received his first Youth Justice order at 14 years of age and had many other contacts with the youth justice system over the following five years including various drug related offences such as burglary, theft, criminal damage etc. During this time he was in and out of hospitals and drug treatment centres on more than six occasions, including some psychiatric admissions as a result of suicidal behaviour. Some of these psychiatric admissions had coincided with an inconsistent approach to taking his medication.*

*After being referred to the Jesuit Social Services Gateway program, John took some time to adjust to regular involvement and participation in the various programs on offer. He gravitated towards the art, music and multimedia programs available through the Artful Dodgers Studios and began attending on a regular basis two to three times per week.*

*Through his participation in Gateway John was subsequently offered an opportunity to become involved in a community arts project that included some short-term paid employment on a casual part-time basis. The success of his involvement in this project subsequently led to further short stints of part-time paid work in the community arts field.*

*Throughout his time at Gateway, staff assisted John with obtaining stable housing and income support from Centrelink. He also accessed counselling from the Jesuit Social Services Connexions program to assist with management of his mental health and drug and alcohol issues. John is planning to continue his involvement with Gateway while he and others assess opportunities for further paid work and/or training, including accredited training on offer from Gateway and other providers.*

*At the time of writing, John had not committed any offences since his involvement with Gateway; his drug and alcohol use had reduced significantly and he had been taking medication as prescribed for his mental health difficulties and remained engaged in counselling and other support services.*

The Gateway program of Jesuit Social Services provides pathways to education, training and employment for young people with complex needs. Through status as a Registered Training Organisation, Gateway programs include accredited training. Approximately 60% of participants in Gateway have a history of offending. Gateway programs include:

- *The Gateway Kitchen* a 'social enterprise' incorporating Abbotsford Biscuits, where young people gain paid work experience and skills development in a commercial kitchen environment;
- *Artful Dodgers Studios*, see [artfuldodgers.tv](http://artfuldodgers.tv) offering a range of art, music and multimedia programs;
- *Computer building* and information technology skills;
- *The Outdoor Experience (TOE)* a targeted outdoor intervention program providing adventure and wilderness experiences for young people (see also Attachment 6);
- Other individual and group programs aimed at enhancing health and wellbeing and identifying pathways to mainstream education, training and employment.

Gateway is based at the Collingwood (Langridge st) office of Jesuit Social Services and can be contacted on 03 9415 8700 or [gateway@jss.org.au](mailto:gateway@jss.org.au)

#### **Attachment 4: Jay back to school with help from the Start Over program**

*Jay is a 14 year old young man who has been in Australia for 4 years. His mother is currently experiencing some serious health difficulties and she has been in and out of hospital several times during the past year. Depending on his mother's wellbeing, Jay moves between the home of his parents where his 5 other siblings reside, and a relative's house.*

*Jay was referred to the Start Over Program by a Victoria Police Youth Resource Officer after coming to their attention for a minor assault. His apparent lack of positive peer interaction and his aggressive behaviour had become concerning. Jay had few friends and his interaction with peers was characterised by anger and violence.*

*Jay was feeling angry and frustrated, and was also experiencing learning difficulties at school. Start Over worked with Jay to ease his transition to secondary school by advocating for him and supporting him in making links with appropriate educational contacts at his new school.*

*A year later Jay's school now reports that he is happily keeping up with his school work with the assistance of a learning aid and support staff.*

*Start Over was able to assist Jay in engaging with a local sporting club and support this with the purchase of the required equipment his family was unable to afford. Involvement in the club has enabled Jay to further develop positive peer relationships, team work skills and healthy self esteem.*

*With the support and assistance of Start Over, Jay has also worked hard to develop and implement anger management strategies that work for him and angry outbursts are now only a rare occurrence.*

Start Over is a youth crime prevention program funded by Victoria Police. Start Over's objectives are:

- To identify and respond to young people at risk of becoming persistent offenders before their offending becomes entrenched;
- To reduce the rate and/or severity of re-offending by young people;
- To reconnect young people to educational, vocational and employment training environments;
- To reconnect young people to families, community and social supports.

Start Over is a voluntary support service for young people aged 10-18 years, who:

- Are truanting, school refusing or have poor educational outcomes;
- Engage in anti-social behaviours: drug taking, violence and/or other offending;
- Have come to the attention of police, but have no previous convictions or involvement with youth justice; and/or;
- Are experiencing family and relationship problems.

Start Over currently operates in the local government areas of Yarra and Darebin (Jesuit Social Services through Brosnan Youth Services) and Ballarat (Centacare Ballarat). Start Over is implemented in co-operation with local police. For more information, contact Brosnan Youth Services on 03 9387 1233 or [startover@jss.org.au](mailto:startover@jss.org.au) and Centacare Ballarat on 03 5337 8999 or [centacare@centacareballarat.org.au](mailto:centacare@centacareballarat.org.au).

## **Attachment 5: Community Justice Group Conferencing Program**

Community Justice is a Group Conferencing Program based on restorative justice principles. The aim is to bring together the young person who has offended, the family, community members and the victim of the crime to discuss ways for the young person to make amends for the harm done by the offending behaviour. The program provides the Children's Court with an alternative pre-sentencing option that aims to divert young people from further or more serious offending. It operates across the Melbourne and Metropolitan Children's Courts.

The Community Justice Group Conferencing program is for young people aged between 10 to 17 years who have:

- Pled guilty or have been found guilty of offence(s) that do not include homicide, manslaughter, sex offences and generally do not include serious offences of violence; and
- Appeared in court on a previous occasion and have committed offence(s) serious enough to warrant a supervisory order (primarily a probation order); or
- Have committed offence(s) serious enough to warrant a supervisory order on their first appearance; and
- Have been referred to the group conference program within nine months of the offence(s) occurring or under exceptional circumstances at the discretion of the court; and
- Consented to participate; and
- Been assessed as suitable by a Department of Human Services Juvenile Justice Officer.

Group Conferences encourage young people to take responsibility for their offending behaviour and to:

- enhance the rights of victims;
- provide the young person with an opportunity to make amends to the victim and community;
- provide a voice for everyone who is involved and affected by an offence;
- strengthen support relationships for the young person and help prevent further offending;
- involve those most interested and affected by the offending in the decision making process and enhance their satisfaction with the criminal justice process;
- provide culturally appropriate intervention;
- develop an outcome plan that supports all of these objectives and aims.

The Community Justice Group Conferencing Program of Jesuit Social Services can be contacted through Brosnan Youth Services on 9387 7871 or [communityjustice@jss.org.au](mailto:communityjustice@jss.org.au).

## Attachment 6: Rory and The Outdoor Experience (TOE)

*At the beginning of the TOE program, Rory presented as a very angry young man. He wore the bravado of being 'tough', and often proudly relayed stories of his drug and alcohol use and risk taking behaviours. His early contact with TOE workers included the suggestion that "I don't give a shit ... fuck everything ... I am only doing this for court."*

*Rory viewed himself very much as a 'young offender' and his identity seemed to revolve around negative experiences and a very negative view of the world.*

*Throughout the 11 day wilderness adventure component of the TOE program, Rory was given the opportunity to be drug and alcohol free. After some difficult times in the first few days, Rory began to show interest in engaging in conversation and developing relationships with staff and other participants.*

*As the journey continued, through the good and bad times, Rory began to show some capacity and interest in adopting different means of behaving, including more positive ways of dealing with conflict and learning how to support other people and accept support from other people.*

*The length of time involved in the program also allowed some opportunities for Rory to be an 'ordinary' child/young person and enjoy some simple, pure, laughter and fun.*

*Rory also seemed to develop some respect for himself, and in particular, through the role modelling of a female TOE staff member, respect for women. Within this context he progressed significantly in thinking about the options to re-evaluate the relationship with his mother and his behaviour as part of that relationship.*

*Rory's feedback on completion of the program included the observation that "there are nice people in the world and not everybody is violent."*

The Outdoor Experience (TOE) provides adventure and wilderness programs for young people aged 15 – 25 who have issues with alcohol and substance misuse.

Currently TOE conducts 4 x 6-week therapeutic Wilderness Programs each year. The 6 week program incorporates an 11 day trip where a small group of participants (maximum 10) and 3 staff travel to a remote area and embark upon a physically, mentally and emotionally challenging journey. Additionally, TOE develops outdoors and adventure programs for community agencies on a fee for service 'at cost' basis. These programs may range from day activities to extended remote journeys.

TOE programs may involve bushwalking, rock climbing, rafting, canoeing or cross country skiing. TOE program outcomes for young people include:

- To experience a healthy lifestyle free from illicit drugs/ alcohol;
- To develop strategies to bring about desired change in life;
- To experience positive role models;
- To experience working, living and solving problems, both individually and as part of a team or group;
- To learn leadership skills and accept responsibility for self and others;
- To learn and practice the skills of reflection;
- To experience success and learn new life skills;
- To develop meaningful relationships with self, others and the environment;
- To transfer insights gained from the program experience to 'real life'.

TOE is based at the Jesuit Social Service 'Bush Hut' in the middle of Yarra Bend Park and can be contacted on 03 9855 2633 or [toe@jss.org.au](mailto:toe@jss.org.au).

## Attachment 7: The African Homework Club

*“Hi, my name is Hafsa. I’ve been coming to homework club as a young African knowing that I will get my work done with a little push from the tutors and some enthusiasm. Ever since Year 7 I’ve been coming here every Wednesday and Thursday hoping that I get a straight A (which I do). Also, another benefit of coming here is to get help from tutors who have been educated in this country because most of our parents can’t help us children with our work so we seek knowledge through tutors. Finally I would like to thank workers and tutors for supporting us and congratulate them on this successful club.”*

*Excerpt from a speech given by Hafsa to a group of Community Partners visiting the Homework Club on 14 August 2008 and reproduced in the Spring 08 Newsletter of Jesuit Social Services*

During 2003, from the base of their adjoining offices on the grounds of the Flemington Public Housing Estate, Somali community leader Abdurachman Osman and Vietnamese community leader Son Nguyen began talking and sharing ideas about their aspirations for the children, young people and families of their communities.

Osman was impressed to learn that Jesuit Social Services had provided some ongoing support for the Vietnamese community, including assistance with the operation of the Vietnamese Welfare Resource Centre (VWRC). He subsequently made enquiries about whether Jesuit Social Services might be in a position to lend some support to the Somali and other African communities.

In discussions about community needs, Osman and other community leaders identified a clear priority to provide assistance for young people with schooling and education. Based on previous experience with successful homework clubs for disadvantaged young people in the City of Yarra, Jesuit Social Services community workers and African community representatives developed a proposal to establish a homework club at Flemington.

Funding for an ‘African Youth Project’ was sought in 2004 from the Australian Government department now known as the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). With the success of that funding application, a Youth Worker was employed to undertake further community consultation to refine the model for the homework club, recruit the necessary volunteer tutors and get things started.

The African Homework Club was up and running before the end of 2004 and has continued to grow and strengthen in subsequent years. Classes now run every Wednesday and Thursday with around 60 regular participants including children and young people of both primary and secondary school age. A recent initiative has been the establishment of weekend sessions for young people in Years 11 and 12. This occurred after it was identified that Year 11 and 12 students required more support than what the Wednesday and Thursday sessions could provide. Significantly, the impetus for the Year 11 and 12 initiative came from young people who are ‘graduates’ of the original homework club and had completed Year 11 and 12 and are now at university. These university educated young people now volunteer their time at weekends to assist the younger members of their community.

The success of the African Homework Club is dependent on the skill and dedication of a range of volunteer tutors. We are lucky to have such a skilled and dedicated group of volunteers, but are always on the lookout for more.

For more information, contact: Asha Saleh, Youth Worker at the Flemington Public Housing Estate (African Project) on 03 9376 5747 or [asha.saleh@jss.org.au](mailto:asha.saleh@jss.org.au) or Cathy Guinness, Co-ordinator of the African Project and VWRC on 03 9376 2033 or [cathy.guinness@jss.org.au](mailto:cathy.guinness@jss.org.au).

## **Attachment 8: The Collingwood Soccer Allstars**

*In 2006, as part of the normal course of her work with the community who live in the Collingwood High Rise Public Housing Estate, a Jesuit Social Services Community Development Worker sat down with a group of young people to discuss their concerns about "being bored and having nothing to do". It was a lively discussion.*

*One of the things all the young people had in common was a love of the game that is called football in most parts of the world, but in Australia is known as soccer. After some discussion about logistics (for example it was discovered that none of the young people owned a soccer ball) it was decided to organise a regular time for the group to play on a small space of greenery within the estate grounds.*

*After further discussions with the local police and some other youth and community workers involved with the local community, including Council (City of Yarra) youth workers, some new soccer balls were purchased and a date was set for the first session of the new Collingwood soccer program.*

*With some shiny new balls being kicked around, word soon spread and within weeks the number of young people attending was more than 20. A few months later it was 30+ and the workers and volunteers supervising the weekly sessions began to worry that it was starting to grow to a level beyond their capacity. Also, without a 'proper' soccer skills coach, it was proving difficult to satisfy the young people's keenness to learn and develop their soccer skills, not to mention uncertainties in relation to the finer points of the rules governing those ever so crucial umpiring adjudications.*

*Luckily, the search for a volunteer with the right mix of soccer skills and the understanding necessary for coaching young people was a success. Paraic, a young Irishman with an impressive soccer pedigree, enthusiastically embraced the role of soccer skills coach for the group. Importantly, he focussed on improving the skills of all participants, not just the best players in the group.*

*Two years later, participation levels have settled to around 25-45 per week, including around 5-10 young women. Along the way there have been some ups and downs, including the need to develop rules relating to aggressive behaviour. In consultation with the young people involved, the group's behaviour rules are modelled on a variation of the 'yellow' and 'red' card rules of real soccer, and they are strictly enforced. Importantly though, the maximum penalty for a 'double yellow/red card' (expulsion from game) is for that week only, i.e. all double yellow/red carded young people are welcome back the following week. And they almost always do come back the next week and more often than not they get through the next session successfully without another yellow or red card.*

*At one stage some controversy erupted when police attempted to ban a young man who was facing court proceedings from attending the program. After discussions, it was agreed that the key criteria relating to the young man's participation should be his behaviour at the program. His court issues should be considered as a separate matter. As his behaviour was consistently within group rules, he was encouraged to continue to participate and did so on a regular basis. At the time his court related support worker noted that she often organised to catch up with the young man after the program finished each week as, "he is always in a good mood after the program and it gives us a great chance to talk about things and plan for the future in a positive way". It should also be noted that local police have been very supportive of the program and their support and participation has been a critical factor in the program's success.*

*The program is now known simply as The Collingwood Soccer Allstars and it is no longer thought about as a 'program', but rather just a natural and on-going part of local community life. In addition to continuing to organise the weekly sessions on the Estate, our Community Development staff facilitated a number of the participants and their families becoming involved with a mainstream soccer club in a neighbouring suburb. The Clifton Hill Soccer Club has been very welcoming to the Allstars players and their families, including a commitment to ensure that no players or their families are disadvantaged if they can't afford to pay the normal fees charged for player registration, insurance, uniforms etc. There have been considerable benefits for all involved, including many new friendships and the opportunity for Allstars players to travel and play in a range of different places throughout Victoria. There's also been a premiership won, with the Clifton Hill U/12's going through the season undefeated, in no small part due to the considerable skill of seven Allstars players on the team.*

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