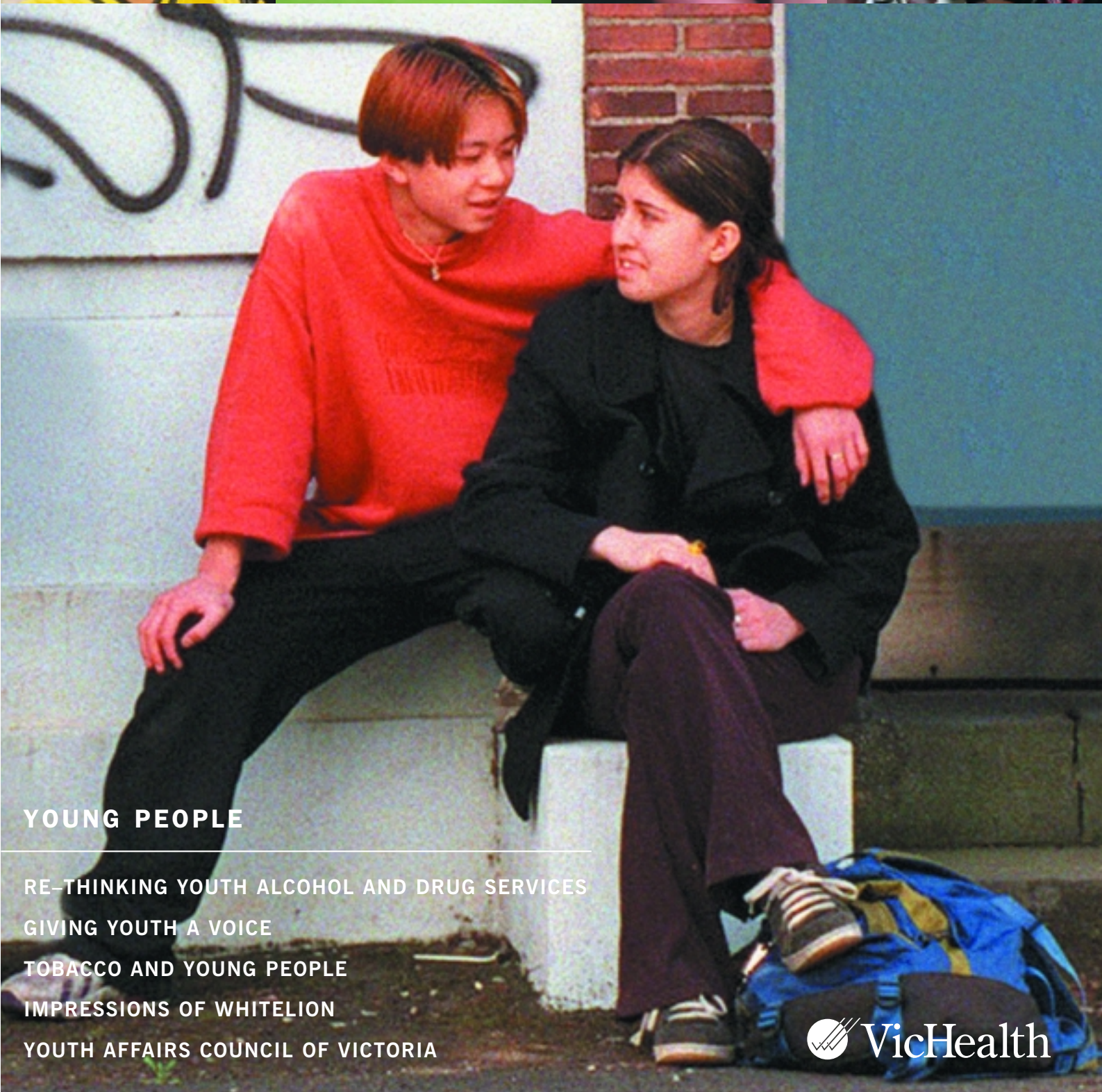
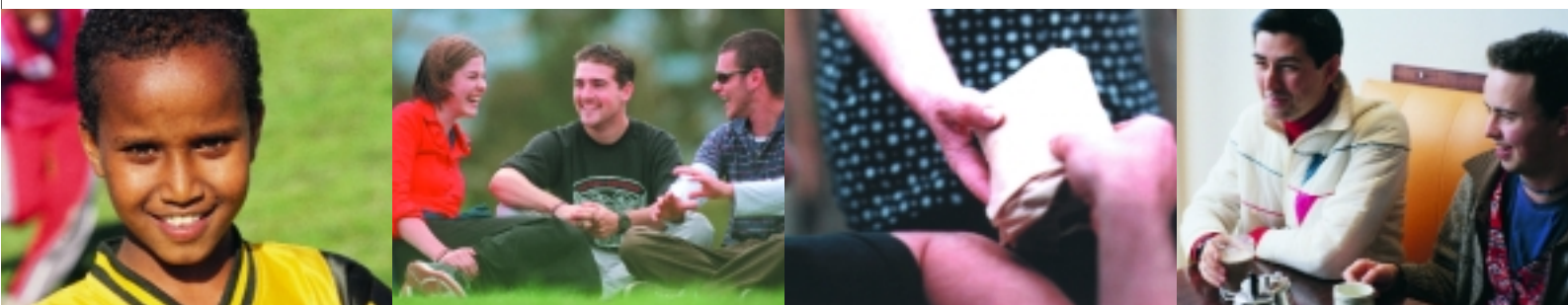


VIC HEALTH

L E T T E R



YOUNG PEOPLE

RE-THINKING YOUTH ALCOHOL AND DRUG SERVICES

GIVING YOUTH A VOICE

TOBACCO AND YOUNG PEOPLE

IMPRESSIONS OF WHITELION

YOUTH AFFAIRS COUNCIL OF VICTORIA



Young People

Can you remember back to the time you were a teenager? Or maybe you're a teenager now? Perhaps it was difficult fitting in. You may have had problems at school, and you couldn't talk to your parents because you didn't think they would understand. There were so many pressures and you were just trying to figure out who you were. Remember not being

seen as cool enough because you didn't wear the right clothes? Maybe you didn't smoke or drink, then again maybe you did. Maybe you didn't hang out with the right crowd. Remember the pressure that people put on you to get high exam results?

It is easy to forget what it was like to be a young person. How challenging, but exciting, those times were, and I think we need to remember. Many of us have distanced ourselves from that period and have become disconnected with the lives of young people. This disconnection is troubling.

It is important to consider youth in the context of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, one of the most comprehensive international human rights agreements ever adopted which provides an important context for considering youth issues. VicHealth is committed to working within the Convention's framework, which sets out the basic requirements for ensuring that children and young people aged 0–18 reach their full potential. Young people have basic rights to food, shelter and clean water as well as leisure, education, health care and protection from exploitation and abuse. More importantly, within this context young people have a right to speak and be heard, regardless of their age or experience.

Our young people are a powerhouse of creativity, strength and talent to be applauded. They have opinions that should be heard and ideas that adults need to acknowledge. Too often the positives get lost in a sea of negative messages. Unfortunately, today's young people suffer from bad media and negative stereotypes. Sensationalist headlines link young people with 'the heroin problem', unemployment and crime. In this light, young people are used to measure the deterioration of community values. As young people make the often difficult transition from childhood to adulthood in a rapidly changing and sometimes unforgiving environment these images can have a profound effect on their health.

We are witnessing widespread concern about our young people and increases in problem behaviours such as substance misuse, bullying, homelessness, violence and suicide. Research from the Centre for Adolescent Health reinforces that connection within one's community, family, peer group, school or workplace is a powerful protective factor against these problem behaviours.¹ This same research also identifies factors that protect against the development of these outcomes in young people. Along with positive attachment to family and peer groups, schools play a highly significant role in influencing young people's behaviour.

Some young people are becoming increasingly isolated and disconnected from society. Social connectedness is about having a sense of belonging, feeling supported by a social group or community and feeling secure in your environment. Strong social relationships can have a positive contribution to health. By belonging to a social network, and through communication and mutual obligation, people feel cared for, loved, esteemed and valued. The World Health Organization says this has a powerful effect on health.²

It is important to also take a longer-term view and focus on creating environments that nurture and build confident and competent young people who are less inclined to develop problems in the first place. We need to develop the structures in our communities and our schools to ensure that we build a sense of security and trust, enhance skills and opportunities for good communication and build positive healthy attachments between students, teachers, families, peers and the entire community.

A recent *Herald Sun* Newspann survey shows that one in two adults think the future of Australia is not in good hands—that today's young people are not well-equipped to run the nation.³ What makes our generation so much more equipped? Perhaps we are 'dumping' on our young people because of our own fears for the future. We must stop a single focus on individual behaviour that overlooks the social and environmental context. It is important we recognise that the health of young people is profoundly affected by the social, economic and physical environments in which they live.

If we continue to focus on specific issues in isolation we won't get anywhere. We must remember that in many instances adult behaviour is a powerful determinant of young people's behaviour. Consider that research shows that children whose parents smoke are two times as likely to take up the habit themselves.⁴ Adults need to be positive role models for young people. Lecturing anyone—young or old—about the benefits of physical activity while loafing on a sofa, remote control in hand, in front of the TV is not an effective way to encourage someone else to become more active. If we want to improve the health of our young people, perhaps we adults should take a better look at our own health.

Adults have a responsibility to our young people. Young people also have to take responsibility for their own lives and their own actions. It is important to focus on our young people. Young people are the foundation of the future, but they are also a crucial part of today. We need strong youth policy—policy that includes young people and does not leave them feeling marginalised. Partnerships between young people and parents, teachers and the community are crucial in achieving this end. It is important that all governments, the youth sector and the community recognise young people as a valuable resource now and into the future. Without youth voices which take into consideration the diversity of Victoria's young people, things will not improve. VicHealth is working to find ways to give young people a voice. This youth edition of the VicHealth Letter is one small step in that direction.

Dr Rob Moodie
Chief Executive Officer

¹ Centre for Adolescent Health (CAH), *Improving the Lives of Young Victorians: A Survey of Risk and Protective Factors*, CAH, Melbourne, 1999.

² R Wilkinson & M Marmot (eds), *Social Determinants of Health: The Solid Facts*, World Health Organisation, 1998.

³ Herald Sun, Nation's adults tell teenagers: We don't trust you, *Herald Sun*, 10 January 2001, p. 3. Available from: <http://heraldsun.com.au>

⁴ Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer, Anti-Cancer Council of Victoria, *Prevalence of Smoking Behaviours Among Victorian Secondary Students in 1999*, ACCV, Melbourne, 2000.

Young People

Overview

Defining youth

Most young people, an estimated 90%, live healthy, happy lives and make the transition into adulthood smoothly.¹ Evidence also suggests that two-thirds of young people between 15 and 24 years of age rate their health as excellent or very good.² The health of young people is improving: between 1979 and 1992 death rates for people aged 12–24 years fell by 24% (due largely to a decrease in motor vehicle accident deaths).³

When interpreting any statistics in this area, it is important to be aware that definitions of ‘young people’ or ‘youth’ vary depending on sociocultural, institutional, economic and political factors.⁴ The United Nations defines ‘youth’ as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years. This category is further divided into ‘teenagers’ (13–19 years) and ‘young adults’ (20–24 years). For monitoring and reporting purposes, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare defines young people as those who are aged between 12 and 24 years.⁵ ‘Children’ are defined as aged between 0 and 14 years. The overlap reflects the fact that the transition and development from childhood to adulthood is different for each individual.⁶ The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) defines ‘young people’ as those individuals who are aged between 12 and 25 years.⁷

Whatever the definition used, this period of a person’s life can best be described as a period of transition, when the individual is moving from childhood to adulthood. During this time, young people experience both physical and emotional changes. It is also a time characterised by experimentation and risk-taking behaviour.

Victoria’s young people at a glance

Victoria’s young people are not a homogenous group. The 1996 census data provide the following snapshot:

- Young people represent just over 20% of the Victorian population (of the 4.35 million people in Victoria on census night in 1996, 891 624 were aged between 12 and 25 years).
- The majority of young people aged 12–25 live in Melbourne (approximately 73%, or 651 943, in 1996).
- The gender breakdown of this age group is approximately 50.7% male and 49.3% female.
- Approximately 82% of those in this age group were born in Australia.
- Approximately 1% indicate they are of Indigenous origin (8916 in 1996).
- Of those young people who were born in Australia, approximately 38% have at least one parent who was born overseas; 16% report having both parents born in a non-English speaking country.
- Approximately 180 000 young Victorians speak a language other than English at home.⁸



Youth—a period of transition

As suggested earlier, experimentation and risk-taking behaviour are a ‘normal’ part of life during this period. The Health Development Agency in the United Kingdom (formerly the Health Education Authority), and other adolescent health professionals, point out that young people need support during this transition period, as unsolved problems may carry through to adulthood and develop into more serious problems later in life.⁹

Of particular concern is that 10–20% of the population between the ages of 12 and 18 engage in one or more serious problem behaviours. Research presented in the report *Improving the Lives of Young Victorians: A Survey of Risk and Protective Factors*, which studied year nine school students, identified risk and protective factors within peer groups, families, schools and the community. It defined a risk factor as a negative within a young person’s environment that increases the chances of problems developing or becoming worse. On the other end of the scale, protective factors, or the positives within a young person’s environment, help a person deal with their problems more effectively.¹⁰ The report identifies a strong link between the number of risk and protective factors to which young people are exposed and their involvement in problem behaviours.¹¹

KEY DEFINITIONS

Risk factor—a factor in a young person’s environment which increases susceptibility to social, behavioural and health problems.

Protective factor—a factor in a young person’s environment which promotes positive social development and decreases susceptibility to social, behavioural and health problems.

Elevated factor—individuals scoring in the top third for a risk or protective factor, or areas having a significantly higher score than the state mean on a risk or protective factor.

Problem behaviours—behaviours with the potential to harm the social development and health of young people.

Figure 1: Risk and protective factors are linked with problem behaviours

Figure 1 illustrates how risk and protective factors increase or decrease the chances that a young person will face problems. To illustrate this idea, if a young person has a history of family conflict or low neighbourhood attachment, this could predict drug use, delinquency or crime. Protective factors may reduce the likelihood of these problems even where a young person is exposed to risk factors.¹²

Risk and protective factors	drug abuse	delinquency/ crime
Community		
Low neighbourhood attachment	✓	✓
Community disorganisation	✓	✓
Personal transitions and mobility	✓	✓
Community transitions and mobility	✓	✓
Laws and norms favourable to drug use	✓	✓
Perceived availability of drugs	✓	✓
■ Opportunities for pro-social involvement	✓	✓
■ Rewards for pro-social involvement	✓	✓
Family		
Poor family management	✓	✓
Poor discipline	✓	✓
Family conduct	✓	✓
Family history of anti-social behaviour	✓	✓
Parental attitudes favourable toward drug use	✓	✓
Parental attitudes favourable to anti-social behaviour	✓	✓
■ Attachment	✓	✓
■ Opportunities for pro-social involvement	✓	✓
■ Rewards for social involvement	✓	✓
School		
Academic failure	✓	✓
Low commitment to school	✓	✓
■ Opportunities for pro-social involvement	✓	✓
■ Rewards for pro-social involvement	✓	✓
Peer/Individual		
Rebelliousness	✓	✓
Early initiation of problem behaviour	✓	✓
Impulsiveness	✓	✓
Anti-social behaviour	✓	✓
Favourable attitudes toward anti-social behaviour	✓	✓
Favourable attitudes toward drug use	✓	✓
Perceived risks of drug use	✓	✓
Interaction with anti-social peers	✓	✓
Friends' use drugs	✓	✓
Sensation seeking	✓	✓
Rewards for anti-social involvement	✓	✓
■ Religiosity	✓	✓
■ Social skills	✓	✓
■ Belief in the moral order	✓	✓

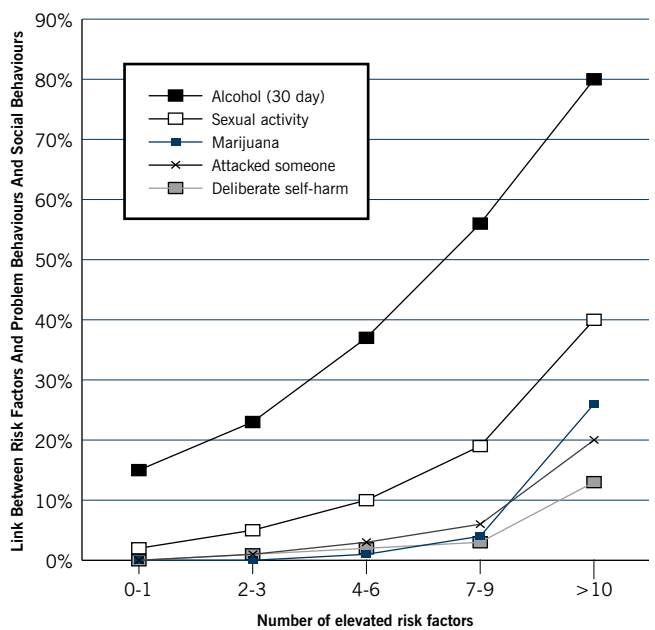
■ = protective factors highlighted in green

Link between risk factors and problem behaviours and social behaviours.

If a number of problems have common risk and protective factors, intervention may be effective across factors and may therefore help reduce several problem behaviours.¹³ Problem behaviours of particular concern include mental health problems, drug abuse, homelessness and criminal activity.

Figure 2 shows the link between risk and protective factors and problem behaviours.¹⁴ The more elevated risk factors there are present in a young person's life, the higher the prevalence of alcohol use, sexual activity, marijuana use, physical violence (attacking another person) and deliberate self harm.¹⁵

Figure 2: How risk factors are linked with problem behaviours and social behaviours



Youth homelessness

According to the 1997 *Youth Homelessness Study of Victorian Youth*, 14% of secondary school students in Victoria are at risk of becoming homeless.¹⁶ Leaving home and homelessness is ranked as the sixth most common reason young Victorians call the Kids Help Line.¹⁷

Mental health and wellbeing

Mental health problems are reported to be the major burden of disease for Australia's young people.¹⁸ According to a 1999 survey, one in five young Victorians report emotional problems.¹⁹ This is consistent with young people throughout Australia. Bullying is also a concern, with 33% of young people reporting they have been bullied recently.²⁰ This has implications for the mental health of young people, as evidence suggests young people who are victimised are three times more likely to experience depressive symptoms.²¹

Australia's young people have been the focus of federal and state government mental health initiatives as a consequence of concern over the increasing numbers of young people committing suicide.²² Although overall death rates for Australian young people aged between 12 and 24 years have decreased, the suicide rate has increased: between 1979 and 1998 the suicide rate for young people in this age group rose by 40%. The male suicide rate is four times the female rate.²³

The 1998 *National Stocktake of Early Intervention Programs* identifies a number of factors that impact on a young person's mental health, including violence, school problems, homelessness, unemployment, a sense of hopelessness and stressful life events.²⁴ Research shows that connection within one's community, family, peer group, school or workplace are powerful protective factors against problem behaviours such as substance misuse, violence, school problems, depression, binge drinking, teen pregnancy, homelessness, bullying and even unprotected sex. Along with positive attachment to family and peer groups, schools play a highly significant role in influencing young people's behaviour.²⁵

Education

According to the 1996 census figures, just over 57% of Victorians aged 12–26 years were attending an educational institution; this compares with 53% in 1991. Education participation rates decline with age, however. In 1996, 57% of those aged 18–19, compared with 27% of those aged 20–25 remained in education. Of those aged 15–25 who attended an educational institution, 38% were employed (27% part-time and 10% full-time).²⁶

Employment

It is interesting to note that in 1996, 450 427 young Victorians were part of the total labour force which represents those either employed or looking for work. In 1996, young Victorians made up 22% of the total labour force which consisted of 2 081 069 people, and 85% of these young people were employed.²⁷

Employment is a socioeconomic contributor to good health²⁸ and is therefore an important determinant of positive health and wellbeing. According to the UN World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, unemployment is linked to a range of social problems for young people, including lack of skills, low self-esteem, marginalisation, poverty and wasted human resources.²⁹

Youth unemployment is certainly a problem in Victoria. In 1996, the overall unemployment rate in Victoria was 8.4%. During this time, the unemployment rate for young people aged 15–19 was nearly double the overall rate.³⁰ During that same year, of the total population, 57 800 people were unemployed in Victoria for 52 weeks or more; 25% of this group were aged between 15 and 24 years.³¹ It is also important to note that data for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people show significantly higher rates of unemployment.

Substance misuse

Substance use is common among Victoria's young people, who report using cigarettes, alcohol and illicit drugs. Findings of the 1996 *Victorian Secondary School Students and Drug Use Survey*, which surveyed over 4700 secondary school students, show:

- 80% had consumed alcohol at some time in their life;
- cannabis was the mostly widely used illicit drug, with one-third of the students reporting having used cannabis; and
- fewer students reported using hallucinogens (5%), amphetamines (4%), cocaine (3%), ecstasy (3%) and opiates including heroin (3%).³²

According to research from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, between 1995 and 1998 the proportion of young people aged between 14 and 24 years reporting using illicit drugs increased (see figure 3).

Figure 3: Recent illicit drug use by young people aged 14–24 years, 1995 and 1998 (per cent)³³

Drug	1995	1998
Marijuana/cannabis	32.8	37.9
Heroin	0.6	1.3
Amphetamines	5.6	9.8
Cocaine	1.8	1.9
Ecstasy	2.0	6.5

According to findings of a 1999 survey of 4288 Victorian students in years 7–12 undertaken by the Anti-Cancer Council of Victoria's Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer:

- in just under a week, 73 800 students smoked over 2 million cigarettes;
- approximately 25% of students aged 15 were current smokers (had smoked in the week before the survey);
- the proportion of current smokers increased with age; and
- among 17-year-olds, 34% of boys and 36% of girls had smoked in the past week.

This same study showed a decrease in smoking prevalence among 12–15 year olds between 1996 and 1999. Within this age group, there were more students who had never smoked in 1999 than at any time since 1984.³⁴

¹ Department of Human Services (DHS), *Improving the Lives of Young Victorians in Our Community—A Summary Report*, DHS, Melbourne, May 2000.

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), *Australia's Health 2000*, AIHW, Canberra, 2000, p. 184.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ United Nations Division for Social Policy and Development, available at: URL: <http://www.un.org/events/youth2000/def2.htm>.

⁵ AIHW, *op. cit.*

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), *Victoria's Young People*, ABS, Canberra, 1998.

⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census 1996*, ABS, Canberra, 1996

⁹ Health Education Authority, *The Effects of Discrimination on Mental Health—Survey of Mental Health Professionals*, HEA, September 1998.

¹⁰ Bond, L Thomas, J Tombourou, G Patton & R Catalano, *Improving the Lives of Young Victorians: A Survey of Risk and Protective Factors*, Centre for Adolescent Health, Melbourne, 2000.

¹¹ DHS, *op. cit.*

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ C Chamberlain & D McKenzie, *Youth Homelessness: Towards Early Intervention and Prevention*, A Report for the Commonwealth–State Youth Coordination Committee, Victoria, Australia, 1997.

¹⁷ DHS, *The Health of Young Victorians*, DHS, Melbourne, 1998, p. 30.

¹⁸ AIHW, *op. cit.*

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ S Glover, J Burns, H Butler & B Patten 'Social environments and the emotional wellbeing of young people', *Family Matters*, no. 49, 1998, pp. 11–17.

²² Victorian Task Force Report, *Suicide Prevention*, Impact Printing, Melbourne, 1997.

²³ AIHW, *op. cit.*

²⁴ National Stocktake of Early Intervention Programs, 1998, available at <http://auseinet.fiinders.edu.au/stocktake/stoc0058.htm>.

²⁵ Bond, Thomas, Tombourou, Patton & Catalano, *op. cit.*

²⁶ ABS, *Victoria's Young People*, ABS, 1996.

²⁷ *ibid.*

²⁸ L Moon, P Meyer & J Grau, *Australia's Young People—Their Health and Wellbeing 1999*, AIHW, Canberra, 1999.

²⁹ United Nations (UN), *The World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond; Guiding the Future of Humanity: Strengthening United Nations' Commitment to Youth*, United Nations, 1995.

³⁰ DHS, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

³¹ *ibid.*

³² Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer (CBRC), Anti-Cancer Council of Victoria, *Victorian Secondary School Students and Drug Use in 1996*. DHS, Melbourne, 1999..

³³ Moon, Meyer & Grau, *op. cit.*

³⁴ Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer (CBRC), Anti-Cancer Council of Victoria, *Prevalence of smoking behaviours among Victorian Secondary Students in 1999—Executive Summary*, ACCV, Melbourne, 2000.

Youth alcohol and drug services must have a continuing dynamism. Interventions are still relatively new and we do not completely understand how to respond to young people with substance problems. This area requires significant review, reflection and, importantly, further risk taking.

Re-thinking

Youth Alcohol and Drug Services

Paul McDonald, Executive Officer, Youth Substance Abuse Service (YSAS)



Photo courtesy of Dr John Fitzgerald.

The number of young people presenting with drug problems, and in particular those who are heroin dependent, has staggered even the most experienced observers of youth issues. The recent injection of resources to develop the youth alcohol and drug service sector is the most significant resource shift since the introduction of youth refuge programs in the seventies. It puts Australia at the forefront of drug treatment for young people, and Victoria as a beacon, nationally and internationally, for pioneering approaches.

This is a new sector, with new approaches. We need to learn from the past, however, as well as to experiment and be innovative. Manning Clarke often discussed how history can inform the future.

Australian youth work as a discipline predominantly rose out of work in the United Kingdom. Early approaches recognised that youth was a life stage like no other—a paradox of dependence and independence. Programs focused on providing young people with access for participation. Youth was seen as a time to be celebrated.

Early programs offered constant challenges, asking what opportunities could be created, what gatherings could be formed and what sites of identity could be established. Intervention programs were based on experiences and pathways, and relationships, good times and gatherings. Issues were addressed in the context of the overall needs of young people to help guarantee program sustainability. Today this is often the sole function of a service.

Youth issues are high on the public agenda, crossing most sectors. It is therefore important that we all work together to address issues that affect Victoria's youth.

The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria

Brigid Henley, Policy Officer, YACVic

In August 2000, after almost 12 months with no peak youth organisation in Victoria, the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) was awarded the State youth peak tender. YACVic was officially re-launched by the Hon. Justin Madden, Minister for Youth Affairs. Here is a brief profile of Victoria's peak body within the youth affairs sector and a look at its future directions.

The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) is the peak body for the Victorian youth affairs sector, advocating on young people's issues in Victoria. YACVic aims to promote young people's status and participation in the community, including those young people considered most disadvantaged.

By facilitating professional development, coordinating policy and programmatic responses and disseminating appropriate information in relation to young people's needs, YACVic aims to increase community awareness of youth issues, the needs and aspirations of young people and the contributions of young people to the community. Ultimately, YACVic's vision is of a Victorian community that values and provides opportunity, participation, justice and equity for all young people.

The views of young people and youth-related service providers are vital to the development of relevant policies and programs. YACVic therefore represents the youth voice to the Minister for Youth Affairs, the Office for Youth and other relevant areas of government. It also plays a key role in supporting the development of agencies providing services for young people and their families, identifying relevant social trends and youth needs, coordinating youth-related sector responses in metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria, increasing community awareness and understanding of youth issues, promoting positive images of young people, and establishing effective partnerships with regional youth committees and other relevant networks.

Youth issues are high on the public agenda, crossing most sectors. It is therefore important that we all work together to address issues that affect Victoria's youth. YACVic's membership stands at around 400, although it is expanding all the time. Our members come from a range of different organisations that work with young people, including those involved with education and training, drug and alcohol services, housing, health, criminal justice, arts, recreation and leisure, rural and Indigenous young people and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Youth participation is key feature of YACVic's philosophy. With this in mind we are in the process of implementing a number of strategies to increase the role of young people in the development of YACVic policy. This provides the opportunity for young people to contribute to policy formulation at the State Government level. A youth reference group has been set up to respond to Government policy, work with other youth organisations, liaise with community groups and contribute to forums on various community issues.

Current projects

Overview of State Government policy

YACVic is focusing on a number of State Government Bills, Committees and Discussion Papers as the Labor Government undertakes a major review of current legislation and policy.

The Victorian Homelessness Strategy

YACVic has contributed to a number of community consultation processes being undertaken by the State Government, including the Victorian Homelessness Strategy (VHS). Recognising that a large number of young homeless people are clients of a range of departments and programs, YACVic has suggested that models for cross-departmental collaboration that allow for more holistic support of young people with complex needs be explored. Workers commonly cite the need for models of long-term support for homeless young people which are linked to affordable accommodation. The special needs of young people in accommodation programs in relation to long-term support also require attention.

YACVic's submission also acknowledges the high incidence of homeless young people who have experienced family violence. While the VHS recognises the strong interrelationship between family violence and homelessness, it limits its focus to women experiencing violence in relationships. In response, the YACVic submission highlights that both young women and men approach SAAP services because of experiences of violence. YACVic supports the VHS suggestion of a rights-based approach to homelessness. Services need to put a significant amount of time and energy into worker training and policy development to ensure an agency culture where young people are genuinely informed of their rights.



Photo courtesy of The Age.

The Community Correctional Services Review

YACVic also contributed to the review of Victorian community correctional services. YACVic's submission outlined that despite acknowledgement of the over-representation of young people aged 17–25 years in the criminal justice system, discussion of the specific service needs of young people in community correctional services was lacking. There was also no mention in the Review of the Government's commitment to minimising incarceration rates of young people. Further consultation and discussion on the specific service needs of these young people is required. It was suggested that a forum with YACVic and other youth organisations be convened to facilitate this process.

The Victorian Government Youth Strategy

In early 2001, the Victorian Government will release its youth strategy for the first round of consultation. Respondents will be given nine weeks to respond to the document, which is intended to explore ways the Government can work with young people in a more coordinated manner. The strategy will provide a focus for Government when planning the delivery of services to young Victorians. The strategy will rely on collaboration and commitment from all levels of government, the youth sector, the community and young people for its ultimate success.

Welfare reform

YACVic has also joined with a number of community and welfare groups in opposition to the Federal Government's response to the Final Report of the Reference Group on Welfare Reform (the McClure Report). Given that the unemployment rate for those aged 15–24 years is two and a half times that of people aged 25–54 years, YACVic has expressed some serious concerns about a number of features in the Government's welfare reform strategy. These include the strong emphasis on punishing welfare recipients under mutual obligation and the lack of strategic initiatives to encourage 'community building', particularly in regional areas. Although the report has a significant focus on reducing the jobless, there is no explanation given as to where jobs will come from.

Future directions

At the YACVic State Council meeting in December, employment, education and training were identified as three policy priority areas for YACVic over the next six months. Extensive consultation with members and key stakeholders, including young people, will take place around these issues in the first half of 2001. This will further enable YACVic to be pro-active in raising the concerns of young people and the youth sector.

If you are interested in becoming a member of YACVic or you would like further information, contact YACVic on (03) 9612 8919. Or check out the YACVic website at www.yacvic.org.au.

'No wonder we're confused—half of society are telling young people to find themselves and the other half are telling us to get lost'. It's hard not to succumb to negative stereotypes—we're corrupted by violent video games we didn't create, we're alienated by either two-income families or divorce, and we're forced into archaic education systems.

Giving Youth a Voice

Emily McPherson, National Youth Roundtable member, age 17, Victoria



Photo courtesy of The Age.

When we are asked to nominate pressing issues for our future, the problems seem similar to those of 60 years ago—the environment, suicide, minority rights, injustice and drugs. To make any progress, however, a crucial goal needs to be improving the involvement of young people in their communities and giving us a genuine voice.

Society wants us to become adults who are good citizens and leaders, but in effect is encouraging us to be neither. The term 'youth' generally connotes images of being amoral, drug-addicted and aimless, with a low self-esteem. Despite the importance people place on fixing these ills, they overlook the value of including youth in their processes. We're too often talked about but seldom consulted.

A fellow member of the National Youth Roundtable commented, 'No wonder we're confused—half of society are telling young people to find themselves and the other half are telling us to get lost'. It's hard not to succumb to negative stereotypes—we're corrupted by violent video games we didn't create, we're alienated by either two-income families or divorce, and we're forced into archaic education systems. Young people are both the victims and scapegoats of our changing society.

Yet there's much in our favour—we will potentially be the best-educated and healthiest generation in history. Young people are energetic, creative and inquisitive, and we want to leave our mark on the world. Technology and the speed of life are incredibly exciting, providing opportunities for youth activism, global friendships and responsibilities that none before us have enjoyed.

But these massive technological advances can also deepen societal divides, creating even more instability. People aren't taking the time to do things at a realistic pace—our advances haven't solved the simple problems of local young people slipping through the cracks, let alone international problems of hunger, disease and aggression. It's also fitting to realise that the majority of youth in the world will live and die in poverty having never even seen a computer.

Although it's not properly acknowledged, there's definitely been a growing trend for young Victorians to discuss ideas and work towards solutions for these concerns. This is driven by our own energy, idealism and deep interest in becoming involved. Personally, I find this a lot of fun—but sometimes it's frustratingly tokenistic. There are tonnes of forums out there for show, without much substance. In many ways, this increases adversity within youth already feeling alienated.

Increasingly, too, youth-oriented service organisations are inviting young people to serve on their boards and giving them fantastic opportunities to share their talents. I would like to see society providing more avenues like this for young people to engage in their communities and contribute meaningfully. The Federal Government's National Youth Register for Boards, Committees and Taskforces is an initiative which does just that. This could easily be adopted in other environments, including schools, local councils, clubs and companies.

Improving the capacity of youth to feel empowered and to interact with the rest of society is a keystone in strengthening our health and wellbeing, and in encouraging us to become democratic citizens. We might not always be able to bring experience, but our ideas are fresh, unique ... and definitely vital.

Youth Working to Make a Difference



Pauline Truong, university student

My name is Pauline Truong. When I was three years old, my family and I came to Australia as refugees in 1978. As one of the first Vietnamese migrants in Melbourne, I used to watch my friends being beaten, being slashed with knives by bullies, and generally being discriminated against in our daily lives solely because we were 'different':

we were Vietnamese migrants new to the country and unable to fight back. As a result of observing and experiencing these physical and emotional discriminations I became angry, and determined at an early age to make a difference.

For example, as a teenager I used to commit much of my spare time to charity groups, assisting with the administration and packing and delivering Christmas hampers for disadvantaged people and families. I also assisted in giving advice and transcultural counselling to new migrants and underprivileged people. I found it very rewarding to make a small difference to the lives of disadvantaged people.

When I was in Law School at the University of Melbourne, I realized that there were very few courses that pertained to Asian perspectives in the law and I believed that this was a clear social injustice. I took my case to the Administration and urged them to modify the curriculum and address the needs of their Asian students—and they did so! As a result of my efforts and those of other students, the university added to the curriculum Asian Law courses such as Law and Society in South East Asia and Commercial Law in Asia. The Law School Society also added an Equality Officer position to review and address equality and social justice issues in the Law School. I felt I had made a difference to legal education—an important step for the future of the legal profession.

As a student I was not only actively involved in the legal-politics of the Vietnamese community but also that of the mainstream community. In 1999, I was the co-convenor of the Cultural Collective at Melbourne University—an advocacy group for multiculturalism and cultural diversity. I have also been very involved in various committees of the Victorian Multicultural Commission, the Equal Opportunity Commission Victoria, the Ethnic Communities Council Victoria and the Asialink Centre. My involvement in the community and at the policy level has given me an opportunity to voice my opinions and provide suggestions for reform at many conferences, forums and other public speaking and public affairs engagements—a great avenue to advocate multiculturalism and equality!

In 2000, I had the honour of being chosen to represent Australia in Vanuatu as an Australian Youth Ambassador (AYA). My primary role was to work on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), evaluating whether Vanuatu was keeping to its international commitments, drafting constitutions for the Provincial Councils, reviewing legislation and providing some gender training. I also assisted with the drafting of equal opportunity laws once we obtained the go-ahead from the Council of Chiefs. (For further information, refer to <http://ausaid.gov.au/youtham/ayad/intake4/truong.htm>.)

The work in Vanuatu was quite a challenge. Unfortunately it was difficult to address women's legal issues there. Approximately 48% of the population is under 20 years old because of the large number of casual relationships. There is also a high incidence of (hidden) domestic violence, rape and incest. Yet there are very few resources allocated to addressing these issues.

In September 2000, I had the privilege of being part of a government delegation to the Torba Arts Festival in Sola. During my stay in Sola I participated in an investigation into a case of attempted rape of a six-year-old girl. My involvement in this case provided me with insight into the investigation process of the police, the flaws within the Vanuatu system of justice, its attempt to enforce the law and seek justice for the people of Vanuatu and the general failure of the system to provide family protection.

Despite our attempts at redrafting the Family Protection Bill and strategically compromising with the Government on a number of issues, we were not able to obtain passage of the Bill in Parliament. Why? One reason is that there are no female representatives in parliament or politics in Vanuatu, and very few in high responsibility or decision-making positions. There are some very vocal young women but their voices are seldom heard at the policy level. Additionally, Vanuatu is a male-dominated society where women are considered to be the property of their husbands. Needless to say, social injustice exists at all levels in Vanuatu. Although as an AYA I was well received at the political level, the men in government have strong intentions to protect their rights in the long-term and prevent social justice change in the country.

Upon my return to Australia, I have continued to be actively involved in advocating and promoting rights for minority and disadvantaged groups. I have found that at the policy level, as well as at the grass roots level, the voices of ethnic and gender minorities and disadvantaged groups are often not heard. I believe that through active participation, promotion, advocacy, education and training we can contribute to the inclusion of minority groups, and hence make Australia a more tolerant country—living multiculturalism.

You can contact Pauline on truong_pauline@hotmail.com.



Todd Harper, Executive Director of Victoria's Quit Campaign, reports on the extensive lengths tobacco companies will go to in their efforts to recruit young people.

Photo courtesy of Dean Martin, Adelaide Advertiser.

For tobacco companies, events are an opportunity to promote their products through displays, typically at glamorous party or club settings, often at adult venues, and always where young people are present in large numbers.

Tobacco and Young People

Following recent initiatives by the State Government to reduce youth smoking rates, the tobacco industry has been on the offensive with creative new marketing tactics aimed at young people.

While the tobacco industry maintain their flimsy assertions that they do not want children to smoke,¹ the reality is that 80% of smokers start before the age of 18 years.²

Predictably, the industry's assertions do not match with reality. As the *Herald Sun* and *Quit* revealed recently, the tobacco industry will exploit any marketing opportunity not covered by existing tobacco legislation.³

There is currently a broad industry strategy involving aggressive marketing using the Internet, leverage from non-tobacco brands, gifts with purchases of tobacco and event-based marketing. This comes at a time when data released by the Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer shows a mixed picture of young people's smoking in Victoria. While smoking rates among 16- to 17-year-olds remains unchanged (boys 30%, girls 33%), among 12- to 15-year-olds there has been an encouraging fall (boys 16%, girls 17%).³

For tobacco companies, events are an opportunity to promote their products through displays, typically at glamorous party or club settings, often at adult venues, and always where young people are present in large numbers. Wavesnet, a \$2 shelf company, was set up to market Alpine cigarettes (a Philip Morris brand) through various means, including supporting a young fashion designers award, for example. According to a consultant who has worked on these initiatives, it is part of an attempt by Philip Morris to reach young people. 'This is a pilot program to see if they [advertisers] can get their clients, which include Philip Morris, affiliated with a youth culture'.⁴

This form of marketing can often be difficult to detect because it appeals directly to individuals, avoiding the broad-spectrum approach of traditional mass media outlets. However, the imperative is always the same: 'To maintain cigarette brand name/imagery communication for as long as possible in the face of increasingly hostile legislation'.⁵

Under the trademark 'Waves', Philip Morris used magazines to offer a catalogue of trendy gift ideas aimed at a younger female market. A consumer database was steadily built up via the catalogue, as well as other avenues such as gift offers with tobacco purchases at point of sale outlets. Typical gifts included cosmetic pouches, cosmetic mirrors, lip liners, diaries and cigarette packs.

In October 2000, Philip Morris officially registered Wavesnet as a company. It then leased the Wavesnet trademark to Wavesnet's parent company, Publicis. A new Wavesnet website,⁶ was established by Mojo, the advertising agency that manages the Alpine account for Philip Morris.⁷ (Coincidentally, the directors of Wavesnet are also directors of Mojo.) Wavesnet advertising material describes Philip Morris as a supporter along with several other corporate entities. There is nothing to suggest Philip Morris controls the operation.

Wavesnet has a funky website that is about fashion, events and hip accessories available for purchase. The site offers free passes and drinks to online subscribers who enter personal details including name, address, telephone number and email address into the compulsory fields of the online registration form. Subscribers are immediately sent an email message, even those aged under 18 years, stating:

O in _wavesnet_ your member no. is _u_ and friend now have _free entry_ 2 your state's fashion's future designer awards_ on the night _u get vip status_ free drinks _a bag_ full of free stuff _ u get 2 _rub shoulders with australia's top designers_ all u have 2 do is rock up _and your name will b @ the door_ check out _your state's details @ wavesnet.net_ c u there_

A key element of the strategy is affinity marketing—leveraging the power of iconic youth brands with the target market (in this case young people). Wavesnet developed close links with strong youth brands, including producers of compact discs, confectionery, lingerie and clothing, and provided free samples to attendees at the fashion shows. By masquerading under the Wavesnet guise and name, however, Philip Morris was able to keep these companies in the dark about its connection. When the companies learned of the link, they expressed outrage at the deception and withdrew their support.⁸

Wavesnet has confirmed that building up a database of members' likes and dislikes was a key reason for the development of the Wavesnet website, and that it plans to hold dance parties as well as fashion awards nights in the future.⁹

At one event in 2000, only Alpine cigarettes were sold at the venue. They sold for \$7 a pack, about \$1.50 below the recommended retail price. The venue featured decorations in Alpine colours, while various high profile fashion models were in attendance. An unattended Alpine cigarette display was

prominent throughout the night from which several patrons were observed taking packets, although staff assured attendees that they were not free samples.

An organiser for other events has revealed that in return for handing over sponsorship dollars for an event on 15 December 2000, Philip Morris wanted 'its corporate colours to be evident at the rave, and for cigarette sellers in fetching outfits to roam the dance floors looking for customers'.¹⁰ This is not an isolated occurrence—'one promoter who has enjoyed British American Tobacco sponsorship for several events, says cigarette company involvement in raves keeps the punters' tickets low and the dance party scene flourishing'.¹¹

When you consider customers of tobacco companies either quit or die, and that 80% of new customers are teenagers, it's not hard to imagine why huge effort goes into finding loopholes within current tobacco legislation to find new ways of appealing to potential young smokers. Vigilance therefore remains critical to monitor those activities that escape the scrutiny of traditional media. There is a need for legislative reforms to stem such practices. Bans on mobile retailing and a broader definition of 'tobacco advertisement' are essential. To avoid the proliferation of initiatives such as Wavesnet, restrictions need to be broadened to include colours and imagery that evoke connections with tobacco brands, and electronic and audio messages. Further restrictions are also needed on the display of tobacco products—ultimately banning tobacco packs from public display.

¹ 2CC radio interview, Nerida White, Philip Morris, 5 January 2001.

² 1989 Surgeon General's Report, http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/sgr_1989.htm

³ Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer, Anti-Cancer Council of Victoria, *Prevalence of Smoking Behaviours among Victorian Secondary Students*, 1999, p. 12.

⁴ Nui Te Koha, Tobacco giants stake out raves, *Herald Sun*, 11 December 2000, p. 14, available at: <http://heraldsun.com.au/>

⁵ BATCo Document for the Province of British Columbia, 26 October 1999, no. 502594957.

⁶ <http://www.wavesnet.net>

⁷ AC Nielson Top 100, *Retail World*, 6–17 November 2000, p. 13.

⁸ K Moor, Sponsors fume at subterfuge, *Herald Sun*, 11 December 2000, p. 15. Net Secret Teenage fun bankrolled by tobacco giant, *Herald Sun*, 11 December 2000, p. 1, available at: <http://www.heraldsun.com.au>

⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰ Nui Te Koha, Keep the suits off the floor, *Herald Sun*, 14 December 2000, p. 18, available at <http://www.heraldsun.com.au>

¹¹ *ibid.*



Photo courtesy of Dr John Fitzgerald.

Dragon Whispers

Peer-based Recreation for Young Heroin Users of Vietnamese Ethnicity

Peter Higgs, Centre for Harm Reduction, together with Chi Vu and Loc Pham

The project

Dragon Whispers is a recreation project with a difference. It incorporates developmental writing and peer education, and involves a year-long series of documentation workshops to produce stories for the development of a bilingual website. The project, which targets young heroin users aged 14–24 years of Vietnamese ethnicity, is auspiced by the Australian Vietnamese Women's Welfare Association, with the support and collaboration of the Centre for Harm Reduction, Footscray Community Arts Centre and the Centre for Arts and Culture at the North Richmond Community Health Centre.

The recognition of an emerging street-based heroin scene, which became more prominent in the early to mid 1990s, led to the idea for the Dragon Whispers project. Vietnamese welfare groups, the justice sector, youth-based organisations and health and welfare agencies began expressing increased concern about drug use and blood borne virus (BBV) transmission. In response to this, a small number of research-based projects in Sydney and Melbourne were funded focusing on Vietnamese heroin users. Workers in the field saw a great need to do more than just casework with their 'clients'.

The location

The project is based in Footscray, which is located in Melbourne's inner west. About 15% of Footscray's population is of Vietnamese ethnicity. More than half of the neighborhood businesses are Vietnamese owned and/or run. There is also a very large and active street-based heroin market. The State Government funds a busy primary needle and syringe program which averages 6000 contacts per month.

Why we use story telling

It is our belief that there is a need to build on preliminary peer education skills which have been developed among some of the young Vietnamese users we have been working with. We also believe there is a need for a different type of education strategy, as traditional ways of educating people are not always the best for getting messages across. We believe a project that builds on the skills that these young people have begun developing is one way to nurture more supportive relationships among them. The Dragon Whispers project is a fun and flexible way of delivering some important education in a non-threatening way—in fact much of the time we are not doing education at all.

Some of the stories

Dao Trinh, 20-year-old male, intravenous drug user (IDU)

...The first hit I had was with a male Aussie friend and I OD'd the first time on some new gear—the dealer reckons it was from Cabra—I had a bit of a blasting binge after that but I didn't really know what I was doing and still even now I have some vein scarring as a result...

Nha Nuong, 36-year-old male, IDU

On prison:

...I have had to share in the gaol it wasn't a brand new syringe I use with one other person but who knows how many others before. Right now I am scared but when I am using I never thought about that. It was very hard you know even you haven't been using for four or five months and you could keep going for another four or five months but once you see someone using in front of you or someone just offer you then straight away you back using...

Linh Tinh, 22-year-old female, IDU

Experiences of risk taking:

...I have shared a couple of times when you're hanging out you don't think of anything you know just say you and me we got the gear and we only got the one fit and we're hanging out so we got the gear we hanging out we just want to use. [How do you decide who goes first?] Just anyone would go first just luck of the draw but I don't share anymore I always got the whole box of needles at home...

Thuong Doan, 26-year-old male, IDU

...I've been pretty good at not sharing fits and stuff like that—but there was one time when we played together and I wasn't blasting I was smoking with my friends. I had been egging for the past week or two and I just didn't feel like shooting...After he went home we partied on for a few more days and then I picked up his fit with all mine and I was going to throw them out—like there was about half a dozen of these fits which had all been used before—then I just got some gear—like out of the blue and I had these fits and I didn't know which was his like they were all in together...I had a one in six chance of sharing his fit oh well—it wouldn't be the worst thing to happen to me if I got Hep. C anyway.

Lien My, 20-year-old female, burner

On knowledge:

...I hear the customers talk you know, oh they go hey have you got a spare fit and one goes nah but I have got four of my own and the one guy goes oh just let me have one and the other guy goes no way man I got Hep. A or something Hep. B or something. And the other guy goes oh I've got it too everybody's got it you know just let me use the needle but the other guy goes look I'll take you to a place...

Vi Tuong, 20-year-old female, IDU

...I've got Hep. C. I found out early this year probably by the spoon from this girl. The first time that I used this was like years before you know when I never knew that you could contract it from putting the same needle in the same water you know or spoon and I think that's how I got it but I'm not sure...

Luong Ngoc, 28-year-old male, IDU

On testing for BBVs:

...When I was in gaol in 1992 I was tested but they say nothing and I haven't had a test since. They didn't say anything at all, I have heard about it because you know like when I was in there I did some course about hepatitis and HIV and this and that, I don't think I have it because I don't see any sign of it you know or maybe I have but I don't know...

Lan Minh, 21-year-old female, IDU

I dunno, I think I might get a test because so many people say they have never shared but they have Hep. C...I had an HIV test about a year ago I have only had one I am bit unsure if I have had a test for Hep. C or not. Like the last check I am clean and that was like about three months ago...



Lessons for the future

It is important for us to remember that much of what we are doing is really just a drop in the ocean for the young people we are working with. Often they drop in and out. The project certainly isn't all easy going—we will (and do) make mistakes. But it is also necessary for us to keep on trying new ways of educating people. It is obvious that no one thing works for everyone. There is a need to keep pushing the boundaries, not only of the organisations we work for but also of the funding bodies. Most importantly, we need to accept that people will come and go and that 'our' expectations are not the same as participant expectations. If we are to deliver the best possible outcomes for these people, then they need to feel like the project is 'theirs' and that they have as much control over the direction of it as they require.

Social Meanings of

Inhalant Misuse in Victoria

Sarah MacLean from the Australian Youth Research Centre at the University of Melbourne is currently undertaking research into inhalant misuse in Victoria. We asked her to tell us about her research project, 'Implications for the Development of Policy and Intervention'.

What is your research about and what do you hope to achieve?

Inhalant misuse (IM) is the deliberate inhalation of vapours to achieve intoxication. A range of household products may be inhaled to this effect. In Victoria, inhalation of aerosol paints (often called 'chroming') appears to be the most common form of IM. IM is most common among early adolescents.

A number of factors differentiate IM policy development from that addressing other drug use. Inhalants are readily available and used for a range of household purposes, consequently it is not possible to legislate against possession. Further, the age of users is young in comparison with that of other drug users. How to respond to IM is often a vexed issue for policy makers. In some instances, educational and legislative responses have either encouraged the practice or had the effect of moving people from inhaling less dangerous to more dangerous substances. Policy development needs to balance responding to the health threats posed by IM, and the community and parental alarm that it generates, with the risk of increasing prevalence through intervention.

IM is highly socially embedded. For instance, fads have been reported in Victoria where different coloured paints enjoy waves of popularity among peer groups who are involved in chroming. While there have been some studies of IM such as petrol sniffing in other parts of Australia, little research has been undertaken into IM in Victoria.

The aim of my study is to document and critically analyse the social meanings surrounding IM in Victoria. This will entail determining the prevalence and distribution of IM in Victoria; investigating the social construction of IM as a 'problem'; and documenting past and present policy, interventions and cultures of use in Victoria. I plan to relate this analysis to the development of policy and effective intervention. To do this, I hope to look closely at three localities where IM is an issue, interviewing young people, their families and service providers about their perceptions of IM.

Why is there a need for this kind of study?

Inhalant misuse in Victoria is an under-researched yet common form of drug use among young people. Evidence suggests that IM is a marker for other forms of risk. We currently know little about the dynamics of IM in Victoria, what cultures of use serve to sustain or limit the practice, or how it differentially affects rural and urban communities and people of different cultures. This information will be useful to inform policy development and the design of appropriate programs for young people.

What is your personal interest in issues relating to young people and inhalants?

I became interested in inhalants when I worked on drug and alcohol policy in the Northern Territory. When I returned to Melbourne, I worked part-time researching an Australia-wide review of interventions addressing petrol sniffing by young people in Aboriginal communities with Dr. Peter d'Abbs, who now works at Queensland University. The Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal and Tropical Health in Darwin published the review last year.

Working as a researcher at Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre, I heard various reports of IM in Victoria. I find IM interesting, in part because it is such a hidden activity, and also because I wonder whether it provides young people with a symbolic way to express difficulty in living in a society where commodities are highly valued. Whether this is the case is one of the things I hope to find out over the next three years.

Sarah is keen to speak with anyone with an interest in IM. She can be contacted on (03) 8344 9633.



Problems of Refugee Students

Abdulkadir Muse, university student



My name is Abdulkadir Muse and I come from Somalia. I have been in Australia for seven years and came here as a refugee under Australia's humanitarian program with my mother, brothers and sister. I am currently studying for a Bachelor of Arts in Community Development at Victoria University of Technology.

Last year I was doing a fieldwork placement among young people from Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia in Melbourne's western suburbs. There I became interested in the question of why some young Horn of Africa students in Melbourne schools are not completing their secondary education. I saw many of them dropping out of school at an early stage, even though I thought they were doing well. They had arrived in Australia with great expectations that their life would be prosperous and free, but major differences in culture and a lack of knowledge about the realities of life here had led to frequent disappointments.

Most refugees from the Horn of Africa have lived in refugee camps in Ethiopia or Kenya for at least three years before coming to Australia. Many would have lived for five to eight years in the camps. Some of the young people now in Australia were even born there. Refugees from all three countries, Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia, have experienced devastating wars, civil conflicts, dislocation and human rights violations, as well as famine, drought and floods. Somalia, in particular, has had no central government since 1991, and thus no government infrastructure, such as schools and hospitals. This means that many Horn of Africa students in Victorian schools have had little or no formal schooling. Some may have completed the first one or two years of primary school but missed more than five years of schooling before arriving in Australia. Others have had even less schooling and remain pre-literate or semi-literate in their own language, without the basic knowledge that could be useful in understanding the Australian education system. Some may never have been to school and are illiterate and have very limited numeracy skills.

When these students start attending secondary school in Australia, they encounter expectations from teachers, fellow students and the community at large that they will have the kind of skills and knowledge that Australian students usually have after at least six years of primary and possibly one or two years of secondary schooling. For many, the difficulties of mastering the basics and, at the same time, acquiring new skills and knowledge considered appropriate to their year level in school are overwhelming, and some simply give up the struggle.

Another difficulty that these students have in Victoria is that secondary schools offer courses with a mostly academic emphasis, rather than practical courses with an emphasis on manual skills, where their limited literacy and numeracy skills would be less of a disadvantage. Lack of curriculum choice is another factor causing students to drop out of secondary school. This problem is, of course, by no means restricted to non-English speaking background students.

Home life is a third common problem area. Quite a number of young refugees from the Horn of Africa arrive in Australia without immediate family. Usually they go to live with more distant relatives, but these arrangements may break down for a number of reasons. The relatives may have unrealistic expectations of the young person's ability to cope with school and put undue pressure on achieving high marks. Young people are expected by their families to respect and value their cultural heritage, but they are often torn between this and the desire to fit into Australian society. In some cases, girls are expected to put domestic work ahead of study commitments. Boys may be expected to earn money to help support their families in the refugee camps, which means that they may not be able to devote enough time to study. This in turn leads to conflict at home and they are forced to move out. However, having no stable accommodation, they find it impossible to study consistently and far too frequently drop out of school. There is also the reverse problem—students may drop out of school because of the problems with literacy and numeracy. This causes conflict with their families about not achieving academic success or getting a job. These young people then may leave home to escape these conflicts or be thrown out of home because they are bad role models for younger relatives. Such relationship breakdowns are common and occur in families where the young person is living with one or both parents.

In such a brief discussion it is only possible to present some of the most common problems facing students from the Horn of Africa in the Victorian education system. Their problems are similar to those of any group of young people of non-English speaking background. However, their experience as refugees can make it even more difficult to adjust to a different way of life with its many disappointments.

Through Whitelion, participants have a wide range of opportunities to participate and connect with members of the broader community. Whitelion has four components—music and media, recreation/sport, employment and mentoring. High profile sporting and music personalities are involved in each component.

Impressions of Whitelion



Whitelion is an exciting and challenging organisation that was formed in recognition of gaps in services available to young people within the juvenile justice system. Recent proactive efforts helped address the needs of young offenders; however, there were still significant issues linked to the lack of connection many of them had to families, peers and the community in general.

With support from VicHealth and the Department of Human Services, Whitelion has had a huge impact on a large number of young people in juvenile justice centres. Through Whitelion, participants have a wide range of opportunities to participate and connect with members of the broader community. Whitelion has four components—music and media, recreation/sport, employment and mentoring. High profile sporting and music personalities are involved in each component. These individuals offer their personal and professional time to engage, support and motivate young people in custody to look for alternative and positive ways of living. The employment program currently has 12 participants involved in a range of high profile organisations and businesses. A network of employers meets regularly and is aware of the circumstances of these young people. This helps negate the potential for young offenders to be discriminated against on the basis of their prior criminal history.

Glenn Manton, President of Whitelion, reflects on the benefits of being involved in the project.

What do you get out of working with kids in custody?

I take away a satisfaction that I have made a difference. People talk about not wanting to be role models—not considering themselves to be role models—and to a certain extent that's correct: at the end of the day, it's what they do for their family

that counts. But these kids don't even have that much to start with. So if I can provide a small building block so they can generate their own successes through life, then obviously I can take away a lot of self pride in those interactions with these kids. It is not only what I do but also what I hear other people working with Whitelion are doing. It gives me a bit of a buoy up, encouraging me to continue my involvement.

What does it do for the clients? What do they get out of it?

That's a very difficult question for me to give a definitive answer to. I know in my own life things that don't mean anything to me one day, pop up in a week's time or in certain situations. For me to answer that in a black and white fashion is difficult. But at the end of the day, to have the experiences and opportunities that some of the kids have been able to access through Whitelion certainly adds more strings to their bow. So for me to answer is difficult, but I'd like to think it allows them to add to their resources that they store away and use.

How do you define success for Whitelion? What's success?

That's the grayest area of all. I think success for Whitelion would be if we were still going in 10 years time: if I walked away, and others involved walked away, and other people picked it up and kept it running; if the kids were still interested; if the community was still interested; if different programs were running and the finances remained under control. I think there are still these levels that it has to reach, like a ladder that's raised up. We are doing nicely but I don't think this ladder has an end point. I think once we get complacent and say 'we've reached our goals—we've reached what we want to achieve', then you start going backwards. To go forward, we need to keep putting good people in positions



where they can take over if something does or doesn't happen—I can't predict the future. I guess the same goes for the kids: if they can continuously be engaged by the program and there are always different kids coming through the door. The benefits for them are going to be many and varied too. It's a long-term deal and to try and judge its success and effects right now would be pretty premature.

Do many of the clients talk to you about their life history and their personal experiences?

Some of them. I'd say for every 10, maybe one or two do, off their own bat. Another one or two probably do because I ask them and I have an interest. Often it's useful to know a little bit about what they've done and why, just so I can sort of get my head around what they are doing in here. Some kids seem like angels—what the hell are they doing in here? This is especially true for some of the girls. As far as the others go, I really wouldn't want to know. There are some in here I thought were angels. I wouldn't want to treat them any differently because I found out they did something terribly callous and malicious. And other kids seem so aggressive I have to ask. For some it turns out they have done very little. Overall I don't ask. I might ask a staff member so I have got a little background and so I know what things to talk about or not to talk about. One kid I got close to was in for murder and he made my head spin on more than one occasion. At the end of the day, I think the people that have the most responsibility are in the judiciary system. I think it just stinks that there are two similar cases and one of them gets locked up for a year and the next person only gets 10 weeks. Someone has got to look at that and find some middle ground so people are appropriately sentenced for what they do.

Nicole Cranny, a program participant, talks about her involvement with Whitelion.

Where do you start with a story like this one?

Things were starting to get really bad with how I was choosing to live my life. So often I would daydream about the nights when I would be in my nice warm bed at my Mum's house. How did life get so bad—oh, that's right, it all started with 'I'll just try it once'.

Well, the inevitable happened next. I had been sent to jail for six months. It's only when something this dramatic happens that you now know how serious everything has become and how much you wish you had never moved out of home. However, you're there now—you don't know how to take the news, what's going to happen in there or what the other girls will be like. There's nothing I can do to change things now, but I can do something to avoid it again.

Anyway, I was sent to Parkville Youth Residential Centre (PYRC), which was nothing like I imagined. I was definitely expecting barred cells and well ... like what I've seen on TV. But it was very different. Here they actually tried to help you. I was given a counsellor and I had people around who genuinely seemed to care. The girls were as I expected.

After a month, I was moved into a community house, which again changed everything. I could get a job and start leading a more normal life. It turned out to be the best I've ever lived.

This is how I heard of Whitelion. We had a dinner which Whitelion members attended. Those members were the President, Glen Manton, a Carlton football player, Brady, a North Melbourne player and Sandra Zlatanovski, a national handball player. I was shocked to see the people who were interested in trying to help. Through Mark Watt (Vice President of Whitelion), I got a job at a Nike outlet working mainly on weekends, which was great. It felt good to be able to save some money.

During this time, I was invited to go to Parliament House with Cole, Mariah, Brady, Sandy and Mark Watt to meet Christine Campbell, the Minister for Community Services. We all had our photos taken, media asked us all questions and we even had an amazing breakfast there. We were also given the chance to go to the Olympics! But plans changed.

Not long after all this excitement, I went for an interview at Homewrap with Brady Anderson and got a job there. I have now been working with them for nearly five months and I really love my job and I am given more work and learn as time goes along. I am really trying my hardest there. For the first time in my life, I've been given a chance to really succeed and have a decent life. I've gone from having nothing and no hope, to having a great job, a two-storey place on my own and my family back. None of this would have been possible if people who care had not shown me what I was capable of. I've been clean from drugs for seven months now and will stay that way.

Thanks everyone at Parkville and Whitelion—you've helped me see that there is so much more to life.

...a few months ago the school began a soccer program in a bid to enhance social and physical skills. The program has made a big difference in the lives of participants.

Schools Seek Self-Esteem and Role Models on the Soccer Field



Imagine this scenario. After five years in a Kenyan refugee camp your mother gathers up a small bag of belongings and takes you away. You're going to Australia. The misery is behind you. Your father is not with you when you arrive in Melbourne—he died in a war you don't understand. Soon you're at Debney Meadows Primary School and there is still fighting in your life. But this time it's in the playground.

School principal David Ferris saw the fighting at lunchtime and heard about it from teachers. He recognised why it was happening but until recently was less certain of how to address it. However, a few months ago the school began a soccer program in a bid to enhance social and physical skills. The program has made a big difference in the lives of participants.

'Many children at our school have come from war-torn areas in the Horn of Africa and they have had dreadful lives in refugee camps. They have seen people beaten and killed. Their focus is survival,' Mr Ferris said.

'It seems they have missed the stage of play in their childhood where they learn things like sharing, waiting your turn—things many other children learn at kindergarten. In conflict they do what they have learned to do—pick up a stick and fight. We had to come to grips with this, and that was the idea behind the soccer program because the game is loved in the Horn of Africa.'

The 20-week after-school soccer program helped participants learn about cooperation, team play and limitations. It enhanced their skills, self-esteem and confidence, and provided an opportunity for childhood fun. Most importantly, it offered the 10- to 12-year-old Debney Meadows schoolboys a new group of role models—teenage boys from their own families and communities with similar backgrounds.

The five teenagers, who received Level 2 training accreditation, conducted training sessions each week for the 40 primary schoolboys, accompanied by professional coaches. Skills were developed and a round robin competition started. The program culminated in December with a presentation of medallions and certificates.

'The difference among the smaller boys is tremendous, but the impact of the program among the older boys is remarkable. It has turned these boys, some who had real behavioural problems, into leaders. They are insisting on teamwork and cooperation from the younger boys in order to make the competition work,' Mr Ferris said.

One of the desired outcomes of this project was to increase parental involvement. Some parents have come to watch sessions but their involvement has remained minimal. For many parents, survival, rather than soccer, is still their main focus. One mum, whose son plays in a team, spoke to Mr Ferris last week about her efforts to try to get her two remaining children out of an African refugee camp. She no longer has a husband. Here in Melbourne there's just her and her son, who is now playing good soccer, adapting to life in the playground and coping better in class.

For more information about the program, contact David Ferris at Debney Meadows Primary School on (03) 9376 1570.

‘These sorts of programs are really important because they nurture pride in Indigenous children, understanding in non-Indigenous children and a sense of reconciliation in the broader community.’



School Revives Indigenous Games in Victoria

A few hundred primary school students gathered at Warrnambool's Friendly Society Sports Oval before the end of term to play sports and games that once dominated the country. The 500 children from eight primary schools in the area tried their hand at Buroinjin, and put their strength into Gorri and their hearts into Battendi.

The games, all traditional Indigenous games, have been revived in the Warrnambool area as part the Warrnambool Alternative School Program (WASP). WASP is an intensive 10- or 20-week intervention program for students experiencing significant difficulty in participating in a regular school education program. Under the pilot program, students from WASP visited other schools in the district and taught children five games and their meaning within Aboriginal culture.

The coordinator of WASP, Michael Mance, says that through the program Indigenous children in the area developed an appreciation of their own cultural traditions and pride in their heritage.

‘It was also a great opportunity to teach non-Aboriginal children about Indigenous sporting traditions and the social and geographic context in which they were played. Some games were important for survival, escape, social interaction and hunting,’ said Michael.

Michael says descriptions of the games were put together using records from settlers, explorers and government officials in Australia in the nineteenth century, as well as consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The children were faithful to the traditions of the games, despite the use of less threatening equipment in most cases. For example, instead of spears, which were once used in Battendi in areas of South Australia, rods were substituted.

Gary Wingrove, the Indigenous Sports Development Officer in South West Victoria, and WASP students, including several Indigenous children, helped run the workshops in 15 primary and secondary schools. According to Michael, it was a great opportunity for young people to share their culture with a sense of pride. It also enhanced leadership skills in children who were having trouble at school.

The Department of Education, Employment and Training embraced the program, which is the first of its kind in Australia. The workshops and training sessions were incorporated into the schools' physical education or sporting program and the significance of the sports in Indigenous culture was covered in other parts of the curriculum. Once the workshops were over, the games also became a welcomed part of lunchtime recreation.

‘For some Indigenous children this project was the first chance they have had to publicly acclaim their culture in a way that is great fun. In the end-of-term carnival almost half of the children competing were Indigenous,’ Michael said.

‘These sorts of programs are really important because they nurture pride in Indigenous children, understanding in non-Indigenous children and a sense of reconciliation in the broader community.’

For information about the games, contact Michael Mance at the Warrnambool Alternative School Program on (03) 5561 7232.



Research tells us that same sex attracted young people are at significant risk of depression, mental health problems, discrimination, suicide, abuse and homelessness.

Life in the Country Not so Glam for Eva

Eva's story is not uncommon. She realises in her late teens that she is a lesbian. She leaves her country town and moves to the city. She lives a tense and sometimes uncomfortable double life. In the city she is a lesbian. When she heads home she reverts back to the girl who locals have come to know and like. On these weekends at home with her mum, she is definitely not gay. Then one day life changes and Eva's sexuality becomes known. Some people support her and others ostracise her.

Eva is the central character in a play set to tour rural Victoria next year. The play is part of a package that includes a series of workshops, training, performances and forums for youth workers, teachers, parents, young people and the broader community. This package has been designed in consultation with local youth workers in response to identified needs.

The show is auspiced by the Moreland Community Health Service as part of its Y-Glam Theatre and Video Project. Community artists Jemma Mead and Vicky Guglielmo, in conjunction with Diane Bradford, Police Youth Station Officer, set up the program in 1998. They are also behind the regional tour, which is planned for the end of first term in the Grampians Region and the Outer Northern Metropolitan Region.

Jemma says the latest Y-Glam production, *Which Way Out*, continues the vision of providing same sex attracted young people with an opportunity to be involved in a creative process, improving their general wellbeing, self-esteem and connections in the community. The show is written and will be performed by Y-Glam members aged 16 to 22 years.

'Research tells us that same sex attracted young people are at significant risk of depression, mental health problems, discrimination, suicide, abuse and homelessness,' Jemma said.

'Sometimes these problems are caused by a lack of understanding by their family and peers, and alienation at school.

'In rural areas, appropriate information and relevant support services can often be hard to access, or the young person is afraid to tell a local service worker they are gay. The show looks at a range of issues that might offer help to people going through a similar experience.

'We don't want to just blow into these towns and leave behind a lot of young people and families who want support and information. We are currently setting up working groups in the areas to help provide support,' Jemma said.

'As well as supporting same sex attracted people, we need to help their friends and family provide a safe and supportive environment for them and to try to understand the issues they are grappling with.'

Jemma says the play and program are about supporting young people who are questioning their sexuality by keeping them connected to their peers, families and communities in which they live.

For information about Y-Glam, contact Jemma Mead at the Moreland Community Health Service on (03) 9350 4000.



'There are a lot of young people who want to stay in Warrnambool after finishing school or university, but unfortunately there are limited opportunities in regional centres.'

Warrnambool's Youth are Open for Business

A group of enterprising young people and a committee of successful businesspeople have joined forces to create a youth enterprise cooperative in Warrnambool in an effort to kick start fledgling business ideas.

The cooperative, using the brand name Kulcha Shift, is in the early stages of development. So far it boasts a core group of 12 enthusiastic young people, a committee of mentors and a shopfront in the heart of Warrnambool's business district which has a range of office equipment available for use. The cooperative has earned the support and goodwill of key organisations in the town.

Auspiced by Brophy Family and Youth Services, the cooperative was spearheaded by a group of young people keen to stay in the area and create their own employment opportunities. The idea inspired key Warrnambool businesspeople and organisations to become involved and the plan received funding from VicHealth.

Karen Moore, of Brophy Family and Youth Services, says the cooperative hopes to be self-sustaining within the next few years—not just maintaining its operations, but possibly reinvesting money back into small business projects.

'There are a lot of young people who want to stay in Warrnambool after finishing school or university, but unfortunately there are limited opportunities in regional centres,' said Karen.

'The co-op is one way of harnessing their enthusiasm and generating sustainable career options and new skills.'

That's where the cooperative comes in, providing office space and use of equipment. Regular free advice from a committee of eight local business mentors is also available, as well as a professional advisory service in marketing and strategic planning.

The cooperative has already identified three key areas of interest among the young people involved—information technology, marketing and media, and event management.

Some of the people already involved in the cooperative include:

- two young students from Deakin University who are working to establish a media and marketing unit, using their familiarity with the youth market as a selling tool;
- two young men who are setting up their own home-based IT businesses and need support in the planning stages; and
- several young people who are keen to work as agents for musicians wanting to play in Warrnambool, as well as nurturing young local talent.

Karen says the level of support required by each business varies. Some want to use office equipment because they are unable to outlay money of their own. Others are keen to discuss ideas with mentors and be guided through the difficult early stages of building a business. Most are using the shopfront to promote their businesses.

'Already the mentors have been valuable because some young people were keen to start retailing merchandise through the cooperative. But the mentors worked through the plan with them and we have now returned to the planning stages of that idea,' Karen said.

The cooperative was not initiated to try to find employment for the long-term jobless, although several unemployed people are involved. Eventually, it will operate like other cooperatives and members will contribute to its operation.

For information about the cooperative, contact Karen Moore at Brophy Family and Youth Services in Warrnambool on (03) 5561 8888.



With the help of the artists and drama teachers, performances highlighted issues and problems that many children face and also explored solutions and the skills they need to cope.

Mental Health...

into the Classroom and on the Stage

Three years ago the Royal Children's Hospital's Mental Health Service set up the Festival for Healthy Living, an innovative and exciting program to promote mental health and emotional wellbeing. Two schools, keen to break down many of the stigmas around mental health and to foster skills that young people need to cope with life's problems, participated in the first festival.

In 2000, six schools were involved in activities culminating in a combined performance at the Darebin Arts and Entertainment Centre in October. Assisted by professional community artists, the schools created performances focusing on mental health and emotional wellbeing. Many of the performances involved script writing, dance, music and art.

The schools—Kurunjang Secondary College, Laverton Plains Primary School, Brimbank College, Sunbury Downs Secondary College, Northland Secondary College and Sunshine North Primary School—presented a diverse program in a bid to stimulate discussion among the audience and in the broader community about mental health.

With the help of the artists and drama teachers, performances highlighted issues and problems that many children face and also explored solutions and the skills they need to cope.

Sunshine North Primary School performed *The Circus of Highs and Lows*. Participants used a vibrant circus routine to illustrate different ways of coping with life's pressures and how to maintain a healthy attitude.

Festival Manager Harry Gelber says the schools selected were already engaged in the process of promoting emotional wellbeing in their school community, and involvement in the festival complemented existing programs.

'We hear a lot in the media about drugs, alcohol and suicide, but this project tries to address the underlying issues. Coping in a relationship, enhancing self-esteem and building self-confidence are fundamental challenges for children,' said Harry.

'Success in these skills provides children and adolescents with enhanced resilience to assist them to cope with future challenges.'

Schools were able to develop their own performance and were given suggestions about themes, including:

- developing a concept of mental fitness (how to get fit and keep fit);
- fostering positive peer relationships;
- developing problem solving skills;
- identifying when and how to get help with problems; and
- building on strengths.

Kurunjang Secondary College at Melton included the festival performance in a week of events which also included a healthy lunch for staff and library-based lunchtime activities emphasising a stay well and feel good message. The Year 10 students' performance focused on the importance of having supportive people in our lives.

Principal Peter Blunden says participating in the festival has had a 'dramatic' impact on several students and gave some young people the opportunity to play out situations that were real in their lives. He believes the performance, *So This Is Your Life*, also inspired and informed many children in the festival audience and at other performances.

The festival was a partnership between the Department of Education, the Austin and Repatriation Medical Centre, the Centre for Adolescent Health and others.

For information about the Festival for Healthy Living, contact Harry Gelber on (03) 9345 6014.

'We believe that through this project Koori youth involved will find new levels of emotional wellbeing and raised self-esteem. They will explore issues that affect the holistic health of whole Aboriginal communities.'

Koori Students to Get Behind the Camera

Young Kooris from the Ballarat area have embarked on a six-month filmmaking adventure which will result in the production of a film for use by Koori and other young people and organisations across Australia.

The project was initiated by the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Cooperative and will be coordinated by actor and director Verity Higgins. A filmmaker will be appointed in January and production is scheduled to begin in March.

The film will feature a series of short stories researched and written by young Kooris. These stories reflect mental health issues that affect these young people and the people around them.

Sue Humphries, a youth worker with the cooperative, says the film project will explore issues that affect a young person's mental health, such as depression, suicide of friends and family, self-esteem and discrimination. Involvement in the project will also impact on participants' cultural pride, sense of belonging and place in the Aboriginal community.

'We believe that through this project Koori youth involved will find new levels of emotional wellbeing and raised self-esteem. They will explore issues that affect the holistic health of whole Aboriginal communities,' Sue said.

A Koori actor from Ballarat, Myles Walsh, has been employed in the early stages of the project to help the young people develop the acting skills required to portray the characters in their stories. The filmmaker will also be given the role of a mentor, teaching participants the technical skills of filmmaking, camera use and editing. Verity, a non-Aboriginal person, says Miles will also act as a mediator if culturally sensitive issues become a barrier in the process.

'It is important that the key people involved in this production are Kooris in order to be role models and mentors for the young people. It would be great if one, or a few, of the participants were really inspired and decided they wanted to pursue a career in the industry,' Verity said.



Verity says the project, while addressing crucial mental health issues, will also create new interests and possible career options for the 16 participants. The actual filming process will give enthusiastic participants a chance to take their interest further. The young people will be given access to a camera to film the making of the film and that material could be used at a later stage for a documentary.

The film, and the information gained from the project, will be disseminated as part of cultural awareness education throughout Koori communities and mainstream organisations in Victoria. Sue says the issues that are likely to be explored in the film could also have a great impact on non-Aborigines who have a limited understanding of some of the issues facing Koori young people.

'This film has the potential to be a model for other Koori communities,' Sue said.

For more information about the film, contact Verity Higgins on (03) 5331 5344.

'What we are doing is enriching their lives, empowering people, developing skills and highlighting career opportunities for artistic young people.'

Geelong's Old Courthouse Comes to Life



Geelong's old Supreme Court, where white wigs and sombre faces once presided, has established itself as a focal point for the city's artistic youth. They are coming to The Courthouse Project to learn how to sing, dance, act, design a set, film a movie and write scripts about life in the new millennium.

The culmination of their efforts in 2000 was *Underworld*, a performance staged as part of Melbourne's Next Wave Festival. It played to packed 'courthouses' during the seven performances and has spawned several dreams, new projects and a few job opportunities for some unemployed young people in the region.

Underworld was the first major performance produced by The Courthouse Project under general manager Natasha Phillips. She took on the job a couple of years ago and supported the board's view that the project could do more than hire out space and support other projects.

'It was always the vision of those young people behind The Courthouse Project to stage something like *Underworld* and it is fitting that the performance involved more than 60 young people from Geelong,' Natasha said.

Fitting, she says, because The Courthouse Project evolved after a group of local young people contacted youth workers, who together formed a collective in the early 1990s to determine the requirements for a youth-specific venue in Geelong. The City of Greater Geelong recognised the need and in November 1994 purchased the former Geelong Law Courts and Police Station Complex.

In her first months at The Courthouse, Natasha was approached by local artist Dave Kelman, who had been refining his concept for *Underworld*. *Underworld* is an innovative piece of multi-cultural dance theatre that explores youth issues such as eating disorders, love, betrayal, teenage pregnancy, depression and peer pressure through the modern re-telling of the Greek myth, Orpheus and Euridice.

The show was staged after five months of workshops involving more than 500 young people, ranging in age from 14 to 18 years. The show was the culmination of many months' work by Geelong's young people and the directorial team.

Dave and fellow artist Gerard Veltre recruited their own team of young artists who went into several Geelong schools to run workshops and discover the issues young people wanted to discuss. The workshops involved young people from different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, with several who were unemployed and eager to learn new skills.

'I remember walking into The Courthouse one Sunday afternoon and the place was alive. There were young people everywhere, participating and creating works under the guidance of Dave and Gerard. It was amazing to see, because it reflected the vision behind this place,' Natasha said.

'What we are doing is enriching their lives, empowering people, developing skills and highlighting career opportunities for artistic young people.'

One of the participants, Cherie Mills, is now working as a volunteer trainee community artist at The Courthouse. She wants to go to the National Institute of Dramatic Art and knows her work at The Courthouse will enhance her chances as her experience encompasses everything from running a script reading group to writing press releases and directing performances.

Many other young *Underworld* performers have also maintained their connection with The Courthouse through workshops and preparations for The Courthouse's next production, *Terra Nullius*.

For more information about productions at The Courthouse, contact Natasha Phillips on (03) 5227 0689.

Mums

Rank Alongside History's Greats

'Westside Circus tries to give young people, many from disadvantaged backgrounds, access to arts, particularly circus. And when we work with young people, we use circus as a tool for personal development. An emphasis in this show was about finding good in yourself.'



Forget sporting icons and superheroes—it's Mum, Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi who have made the greatest impression on some of Melbourne's aspiring young circus performers. And the many personal struggles, achievements and hopes of these three heroes were played out in an explosive circus performance, *Urban Heroes*, during the 2000 Fringe Festival.

Urban Heroes was initiated by the Westside Circus, which is based at North Melbourne Community Centre, to offer circus, drama and performance skills to teenagers living in the high-rise flats of North Melbourne and Kensington.

The artistic director of *Urban Heroes*, Debby Maziarz, says the original plan was to recruit young people to develop a performance looking at the impact of the urban landscape on their lives. After workshoping the idea, the circus recruits decided the focus should be on urban heroes and the people who influenced them.

'It was interesting that mums were heroes to so many of the young people. Sporting heroes didn't feature much at all,' Debby said.

Circus performance became the medium used to portray the ideas and themes of *Urban Heroes*. And for most of the 60 performers that meant learning skills such as fire breathing, trapeze, improvisation, tumbling, clowning, dance and music.

'Westside Circus tries to give young people, many from disadvantaged backgrounds, access to arts, particularly circus. And when we work with young people, we use circus as a tool for personal development. An emphasis in this show was about finding good in yourself,' Debby said.

'When we teach trapeze, it means a person has to take a risk and trust another person. We often work in schools where two cultural groups will not associate at all and we get them working together on pyramid building. It is a subtle and successful way of breaking down barriers and developing a sense of cooperation and trust.'

The performers were recruited at a community weekend workshop, through local networks and during workshops held at six schools in the area. Young people already involved with Westside Circus received further training and then planned and conducted the school workshops.

During months of workshops, the young people put together scrapbooks about heroes and issues that were important to them. They also learned circus skills, put together a band and developed a script. The 60 performers put on seven shows to near full houses at the North Melbourne Town Hall. At least 18 of the performers have continued their involvement in circus work.

'Our one disappointment was our inability to reach a lot of students who are newly arrived refugees. They could not participate because the demands of training and travel were too great. I think for a lot of these families, the issue of survival understandably overshadows most other things,' Debby said.

'However, we did manage to get a bus so we could take these young people to the shows. We are committed to making circus accessible to them, but we need to work out how that can happen.'

For information about the project, contact Debby Maziarz on (03) 9328 8022.

VicHealth News

Maxine Crouch 1947–2001



VicHealth pays tribute to Maxine Crouch, a valued and respected Board Member for nearly four years, who lost her battle with cancer in February. Maxine was a former Commissioner of the City of Greater Bendigo and served as a Director of the Victorian Institute of Sport and the Discovery Science and

Technology Centre. With a wealth of knowledge and experience in sport administration, Maxine made significant contributions to the evolution of VicHealth. Maxine will be remembered for her valuable words of encouragement and sense of humour.



VicHealth Recognises Outstanding Achievements in Health Promotion

Each year VicHealth presents awards to recognise and thank its partners who have provided valuable support and outstanding contributions to health promotion in Victoria. Recipients of the VicHealth Health Promotion Awards 2000 have made significant contributions to promoting the health of Victorians by providing new ways for increasing participation, providing value for money, generating new knowledge and targeting disadvantaged groups.

Three of the Awards in 2000 went to individuals or organisations in recognition of their work towards tobacco control. As was pointed out at the presentation, tobacco control is the *raison d'être* of VicHealth. It is therefore important not to forget that we have a tobacco industry that fights hard to continue marketing its product which, when used as intended, kills one in two of its lifetime users. The continued need for vigilance in tobacco control is evident, particularly in light of the recent revelations of Philip Morris' underground Internet marketing activities, which are obviously targeting young people.

The following awards were presented at VicHealth's Annual General Meeting and Awards presentation held at Government House on 21 December 2000.

VicHealth Outstanding Contribution to Health Promotion Award

The Hon. John Thwaites, Minister for Health in Victoria, and Dr Michael Wooldridge, Federal Minister for Health, received joint honours in recognition of their enormous commitment in the area of tobacco control initiatives.

Joint Winner: *The Hon. John Thwaites, Minister for Health, Victoria*

In his first six months of office, the Hon. John Thwaites has worked to bring Victoria back in line with the other states with respect to tobacco control. The push for legislative reform demonstrates continued interest and support for tobacco control initiatives. Recent changes which will help reduce the terrible toll that smoking inflicts on Victorians include the introduction of smoke-free dining, restrictions on point-of-sale advertising, increasing penalties for retailers who sell to minors and replacement teams.

Joint Winner: *Dr Michael Wooldridge, Federal Minister for Health*

A driving force behind the successful National Tobacco Campaign launched in 1997, Dr Wooldridge has kept the campaign momentum over the last three years as a federal, state and territory partnership involving government and non-government organisations. The campaign, which has motivated thousands of Australians to give up smoking and is associated with a sustained 2% decline in the prevalence of smoking, continues to be the flagship of Australia's anti-smoking movement. Australia is also at the forefront of international tobacco control by promoting legislation to completely ban tobacco advertising at international sporting and cultural events.

Leadership in Health Promotion Award

Winner: *Quit Campaign—Victorian Smoking and Health Program*

Recognised both nationally and internationally, Quit's work in Victoria has contributed significantly to increased public awareness and understanding of the health risks of exposure to environmental tobacco smoke (ETS). Quit has engaged all levels of government in this important public health area, advocating and supporting State Government initiatives to ban smoking in restaurants, working with local governments to incorporate responses to ETS into municipal public health plans and being involved with national initiatives.

Excellence in Health Promotion Award

Winner: *Victorian Foundation for the Survivors of Torture—Food and Nutrition Project for Recent Arrivals from Refugee Backgrounds*

There is significant potential to enhance both the physical and mental wellbeing of new arrivals by providing support and information on diet and lifestyle. Recognising the competing demands on new arrivals, and those working with them, this innovative project identified ways to deliver diet and lifestyle information that could be accessed while accomplishing other settlement tasks. Successful partnerships were forged to share the expertise of new arrival communities, health and settlement workers, and other community partners.

Innovation in Health Promotion Award

Winner: *Spanda Productions—My Bed is a Crocodile Tour*

This quality theatre production is based on the idea that 'culture is the best form of welfare'. The theatre tour successfully presented information on schizophrenia to a senior secondary audience in an engaging way to help increase their understanding of the illness. The idea came from an experience writer Pauline Hosking had while teaching Year 11 drama students. One group chose to research schizophrenia for a class performance. After the performance the other students asked, 'Schizophrenia affects people our age—why don't we know more about it?'

Health Promotion through Community Participation Award

Winner: *Barwon Health—Chronic Performance Project*

This project provided an opportunity for professional artists to work with young people living with a serious illness and/or disability to translate their profound and confronting personal stories into a drama production. Participants developed self-esteem and confidence to achieve what at first seemed impossible. Drama provided a medium through which these young people could have a voice and influence attitudes in schools and the wider community.

VicHealth Encouragement Award

Winner: *North East Health Promotion Centre—Social Connectedness: What Matters to Older People*

This project provided a forum to hear the voices of older isolated adults and developed ways to increase the social connectedness of older people in the Cities of Darebin and Banyule. Six older men and women visited the homes of older, isolated people to share experiences and identify areas for action. From their experiences and visits, the peers have taken on an advocacy role, profiling the voices of the older people on issues of isolation. Belonging to a social network where a person feels cared for, loved and valued has a powerful protective effect on the health of older people.



Promoting Health through Sport and Recreation

VicHealth has for many years promoted health within sport and active recreation settings. The new Promoting Health through Sport and Recreation Program has been developed to ensure alignment with VicHealth's strategic directions. It builds

on the strengths of previous programs and responds to issues raised during extensive consultation with the sector.

VicHealth's niche in sport and recreation is to promote health and produce health gains, working within sport and active recreation settings. The new program places even greater emphasis on identifying opportunities that build on the synergies between outcomes for sport and recreation and those for health. Increased emphasis is placed on promoting participation in sport and active recreation.

The Promoting Health through Sport and Recreation Program is comprised of four funding schemes:

- Partnerships for Health;
- Community Participation in Sport and Recreation;
- Innovation for Health in Sport and Recreation; and
- Health Enhancing Clubs and Venues.

A social marketing component will also complement the National Tobacco Campaign and the Victorian Smoking and Health Program, linking smoking cessation with enhanced physical activity.

For more information, please visit our website at www.vichealth.vic.gov.au. Guidelines and applications will be available on this website as they become available.

Arts for Health Program

The closing date for the next Community Arts Participation Scheme and Community Festivals Scheme under VicHealth's Arts for Health Program is Wednesday 28 March 2001. Future closing dates are 30 August for Festivals and 20 December for Community Arts.

Guidelines can be obtained from VicHealth's website at www.vichealth.vic.gov.au or by contacting VicHealth on (03) 9345 3200.

Arts Funding Regional Information Sessions

Information sessions will be held throughout regional Victoria in the next few months. The first session will be in Bairnsdale on 3 April 2001. Sessions will also be held in Swan Hill, Horsham, Colac and Wangaratta.

To register your interest please phone Betty Bougas on (03) 9345 3203 or email bbougas@vichealth.vic.gov.au. Updated information will be available on the VicHealth website at www.vichealth.vic.gov.au.

Living Longer Living Stronger

On 15 December 2000, The Hon. Justin Madden, Minister for Sport and Recreation, officially launched 'Living Longer Living Stronger' (LLLS), a gym endorsement program to provide quality, safe and fun strength training opportunities for people over 50 years across Victoria. The program is an initiative of the Council on the Ageing, Sport and Recreation Victoria and VicHealth.

For more information, contact Sue Hendy on (03) 9655 2109.

Cochrane Health Promotion and Public Health Field

VicHealth has provided 3 years funding for the coordination and administration of the Cochrane Health Promotion and Public Health Field.

Visit www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/cochrane for more information.

Health Promoting Schools

On 13 November 2000, Professor Lawrence St Leger, Dean of Health Sciences for Deakin University, officially launched the education resource *Health Promoting Schools In Action: A Guide for Schools*. VicHealth together with Deakin University and the Department of Employment, Education and Training produced the resource to help strengthen the capacity of Victorian schools to be healthy places for learning, living and working.

For more information, contact Margaret Sheehan on (03) 9345 3252.

Stage One of the Older Women and Safety Project

On 12 December 2000, the Hon. Sherryl Garbutt, Minister for Women's Affairs, released results of the Older Women's Experience of Violence Project. The CASA House report, which received funding from VicHealth and the Department of Human Services, shows that older women face particular attitudinal barriers, including ageism and sexism, in gaining support in dealing with domestic or public violence.

For more information, contact Yvonne Pilatowicz on (03) 9347 3066.

Launch of the Oral Health Promotion Program for Older Migrant Adults

On 17 October 2000, the Hon. Bronwyn Pike, Minister for Housing and Aged Care, launched the study *Evaluation of the Community-Based Oral Health Promotion Program for Migrant Older Adults*. The VicHealth-funded study, a joint project between Dental Health Services Victoria and the University of New England in New South Wales, aims to present a comprehensive picture of the oral health needs of older migrants and the barriers they face in accessing good dental care.

For more information, contact Catherine Filer on (03) 9341 0282.

Carole Bailey Memorial Scholarship

The Carole Bailey Memorial Scholarship is awarded to a young person in the field of health promotion to provide encouragement and support. Carole Bailey was highly respected for her knowledge and work in health promotion at VicHealth, and we are still benefiting from her legacy and dedication to the physical activity strategy and the Active for Life campaign. The first Carole Bailey Memorial Scholarship in the undergraduate category was awarded to Lauren Cordwell of LaTrobe University. Lauren has dedicated a lot of time volunteering in the field of health promotion and spent 18 months at the North East Health Promotion Centre.

So You've Got a Good Idea ... How To Do Community Projects

The Council on the Ageing recently launched the handbook *So You've Got a Good Idea ... How To Do Community Projects*. The book documents the collective experiences of the 39 projects funded under the Positive Wellbeing for Older People Program as part of the International Year of the Older Person.

For more information, contact the Council on the Ageing on (03) 9654 4443.

Food and Nutrition Project for Recent Arrivals from Refugee Backgrounds

On 7 December 2000, the Hon. Bronwyn Pike, Minister for Housing and Aged Care, officially launched the Food and Nutrition Project for Recent Arrivals from Refugee Backgrounds. The VicHealth-funded project is an initiative of the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (VFST) in collaboration with Deakin University and the Darebin, Springvale and Western Region Community Health Centres.

For more information about the project, visit the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture website at www.survivorsvic.org.au/Projects or phone (03) 9388 0022.

Living Included Lives

On 6 December 2000, the Hon. Christine Campbell, Minister for Community Services, officially launched *A Strike and a Spare: Tenpin Bowling is Fun for Everyone*, a publication that evolved from the project Living Included Lives. The VicHealth-funded project, which was conducted by STAR Victoria with support from the Department of Human Services, seeks to actively promote, enable and evaluate the inclusion of older people with an intellectual disability in mainstream leisure activities.

For more information, contact Esther Harris on (03) 9650 2730.



VicHealth Launches Mental Health Promotion Projects

On 6 October 2000, the Hon. John Thwaites, Minister for Health, officially launched the 38 projects funded under the first year of VicHealth's Mental Health Promotion Plan. Speaking at the launch, the Minister noted that these projects reflected many of the Victorian Government's health policy commitments. He reinforced the value of adopting practical approaches to address social determinants of health such as social connectedness and economic participation.

The projects were funded under the Rural Partnerships in Mental Health and Wellbeing Program, the Social Development Program for new Arrivals and the Rural Same Sex Attracted Young People's Grants Program, which are jointly funded by The Department of Human Services Rural Health and Development.

The launch followed a Mental Health Promotion Forum, which included visiting guest Dr Benedetto Saraceno from the World Health Organization and Dermot Casey from the Commonwealth Mental Health Branch.

For more information, contact Irene Verins on (03) 9345 3255.

New Mental Health Promotion Plan Funding Programs

New funding programs for mental health promotion are being developed in the areas of youth economic participation, Koori emotional and spiritual wellbeing, economic participation for people who are newly arrived to Australia, and local government and the arts.

Funding guidelines and further details of these programs will be soon be available on the VicHealth website at www.vichealth.vic.gov.au.

World Federation for Mental Health Conference

In December 2000, a paper outlining VicHealth's Mental Health Promotion Plan and Program was presented at the World Federation for Mental Health's *Inaugural World Conference on the Promotion of Mental Health and Prevention of Mental and Behavioural Disorders* held in

Atlanta, Georgia. The ideas presented in the paper received much support in this international forum. This positive feedback helped reinforce that our work in mental health promotion, both at VicHealth and nationally, is at the cutting edge and well regarded on the international front.



Promoting Mental Health Kit

Response to our *Promoting Mental Health Kit* has been exceptionally positive. What was initially a resource to enable VicHealth-funded projects become better advocates in promoting mental health has become a resource which is being used by government and non-government organisations across Australia. A recent example is the development of the *Celebrating Diversity Kit: Promoting Safe and Inclusive Communities that Value Difference* by the Victorian Equal Opportunity Commission using the *Promoting Mental Health Kit* as a model.

For more information, please contact Irene Verins on (03) 9345 3255 or visit the VicHealth website at www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/publicat/mental.htm.



Twelfth National Health Promotion Conference

Health Inequalities—Reflecting Back, Stepping Forward

20 October–1 November 2000, Melbourne



The 12th National Health Promotion Conference was recently held in Melbourne, attracting nearly 600 delegates from Australia and the region. The conference was a collaboration between the Australian Health Promotion Association, VicHealth, the Victorian Department of Human Services, Deakin University, the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care and the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO).

The conference encouraged the health promotion field to be radically more effective in improving health and to look to creating positive change to redress social inequalities. Six themes were explored during the conference—promoting primary health care to reduce health inequalities, promoting work and health, intersectoral collaboration for health equity, promoting effective advocacy, reducing inequalities in Indigenous health, and global developments and inequalities in health.

Issues considered at a lively international roundtable discussion featuring several keynote speakers included building partnerships in the delivery of health assistance, the health gulf between the rich and poor, learning from the long experience of international health assistance, what makes health aid effective and sustainable, and the appropriateness of the 'project' approach to aid and the challenges of the 'sector wide' approach.

Plenary presentations of Dr Raj Arole and Dr Pamela Hartigan can be found at www.vichealth.vic.gov.au under the What's On/Conferences link.

Community Arts Mentorship Opportunities

La Mama Theatre, with funds from VicHealth's Community Arts Program, is offering five emerging community theatre artists from regional Victoria the chance to work with established community artists in Melbourne.

For application details, please contact Liz Jones or Mary Helen on (03) 9347 6948 or fax (03) 9349 2063.

COMING UP

National Youth Week 2001

1–8 April 2001

Get Into It

www.youthweek.com



For more information about National Youth Week in Victoria visit www.youth.vic.gov.au or contact Keryn Negri, Youth Culture and Communication Unit, Office for Youth, Department of Education Employment and Training, on (03) 9637 3161.

VicHealth Symposium, October 2001

From Margin to Mainstream—Intersectoral Approaches to Mental Health Promotion in Australia and the Region

This symposium will:

- explore current debates and innovation in mental health promotion;
- build alliances for mental health promotion activity; and
- showcase existing mental health promotion projects.

Attention will be paid to specific population groups, settings for action, intersectoral approaches, policy and advocacy, determinants of mental health and development of an evidence base for mental health promotion.

To register your interest, please complete the following:

Title: _____ Name: _____

Position: _____

Organisation: _____

Address: _____

Postcode: _____

Telephone: _____ Facsimile: _____

Email: _____

Send to VicHealth PO Box 154 Carlton South VIC 3053 or fax to VicHealth on (03) 9345 3222.

VECCI / VicHealth Partnerships with Healthy Industry

VicHealth is pleased to announce a new partnership with the Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VECCI). The partnership combines the strengths of both organisations to enrich the health prospects of Victorians. The alliance will enhance the provision of organisational health information to business and industry and provides an opportunity to expand organisational health initiatives. Members will continue to enjoy the popular Calendar of Events series.

Calendar of Events 2001 **March 14** Leadership and Organisational Performance **April 11** Occupational Stress **May 16** Links between Spirituality and Leadership in the Workplace **June 20** Work/life balance **July 18** Parenting **August 15** Business and Community Partnerships **September 19** Back care **October 17** Shift Work and Fatigue **November 21** Change Management

For more information, contact Carolyn Journeaux on (03) 8662 5379 or fax (03) 8662 5461, or email cjournea@vecci.org.au.

DISCLAIMER: Views and opinions expressed in the VicHealth Letter do not necessarily reflect those of VicHealth.

The VicHealth Letter is produced by the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation PO Box 154 Carlton South Vic 3053

Telephone: (03) 9345 3200 • Facsimile: (03) 9345 3222 • Email: vichealth@vichealth.vic.gov.au ISSN 1444-0563

Editors: Melissa Corkum (Media Coordinator) Kim Hutchinson (Publications Officer)

Trish Cotter (Director Communications and Marketing)