Dear DHHS,

Thank you for distributing the ‘What’s important to youth’ discussion paper.

We had hoped to get together a group of young people to respond to the questions at the end of the paper regarding ‘What’s important to young people’ however we unfortunately were not able to do so in a timely enough manner. If there are future consultations regarding a new youth policy we would love the opportunity to be involved, and to facilitate consultation with interested regional young people.

Cobaw Community Health has offices in Kyneton and Woodend in the Macedon Ranges. We offer a variety of services to young people including: counselling (both generalist and AOD), homelessness case work, WayOut (for LGBTI young people), L2P and we also have a School Focused Youth Services Coordinator based with Cobaw.

As such we had specific feedback related to young people from regional communities, and also LGBTI young people.

**Re page 13: Young People from Rural and Regional Locations**

You have stated here that ‘a small number of Victorian communities in regional Victoria experience a web of disadvantage and structural barriers that make it very difficult for residents to overcome economic and social disadvantage’. We would like to argue that there are particular challenges faced by all rural communities that make addressing disadvantage and structural barriers complex.   For young people living in regional and rural areas issues associated with social isolation are compounded for a range of reasons.  Lack of public transport, living outside of town boundaries, less local opportunities for further education, employment and social activities, little or no flexible learning options all add to the unique challenges for all Rural and Regional youth.

In addition, it is worth highlighting that there is a historical reluctance by state and federal government to commit to (and fund) ongoing youth work positions which provide the expertise to engage and connect young people to opportunities. The impact of this gap is especially evident in rural and regional areas where local governments have less revenue (due to less rate payers and newly introduced rate capping) to fund youth worker roles and community organisations are then unable to meet the obvious need.

**Re page 10: Marginalisation, belonging and identity and page 13: GBTI young people.**

It is important to look at the experiences of young people in the context of our heteronormative world view, not just on experiences of discrimination. There may not be an intention to discriminate based on gender or sexual identity, however the belief that all people fall into two genders and one main sexual orientation can directly and indirectly effect opportunities and pathways of young people with ongoing impact on mental health, wellbeing and livelihoods.

I am sorry again that we were unable to answer your questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch in future if there is further consultation regarding a Youth Policy.

All the best,

Kristen

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