**Submission by YMCA Victoria in response to the Government Discussion Paper “What’s important to Youth?”**

6 November 2015

**Who compiled this submission?** The submission reflects the views of the **Young People Strategic Development Team** and the **Youth Services Strategic Team at YMCA Victoria.** The Young People Strategic Development Team is a cross organisational committee (including representatives of young staff) responsible for advocacy for empowering young people both within and beyond the organisation. The Youth Services Strategic Team comprises senior managers within Youth Services. The Discussion Paper was circulated to all members of both teams and discussed at length. (Young staff and volunteers have also been encouraged to respond individually to the youth survey on Youth Central.)

**General response to the Discussion Paper:**

We applaud the opening words of the Minister about every young person getting the opportunities and support they need to reach their potential.

However the bulk of the discussion paper then focuseslargelyon a range of issues and challenges that young people face and runs the risk of implying that young people themselves are “issues and challenges” and “problems to be fixed up”, thus perpetuating prevalent negative perceptions of young people. (Even the majority of visual images used in the booklet have a negative feel.) While each of the issues and challenges identified are undeniably valid and worthy of action, we do not see a strong enough emphasis on a policy for **all** young people, building on their natural strengths and depicting them as assets rather than issues. We would like to see a stronger focus on **empowering all young people** to discover what is possible for them (rather than just focusing on specific young people facing challenges). Our younger staff in particular felt strongly about this.

The sections on the Draft Vision and Draft Objectives are much better in this respect, but the language needs to be strengthened to ensure that the principles of consultation, collaboration, and empowerment, along with the importance of resilience, are well articulated. This is in line with the principles of asset-based community strengthening, rather than a focus on needs.

**Specific response to the section on the “Adult Justice System”**

We are puzzled that there is no specific reference to the **Youth** Justice System and the need to support young people who have been involved in it to prepare to integrate back into the community and avoid the high risk of drifting back into patterns of crime. The issue here is not just mental health but the significant difficulties of young people who have been involved in the criminal justice system finding gainful employment and breaking out of patterns of crime. Programs to support this transition are essential.

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