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| Consultation questions – youth policy | Response |
| Organisation name/s: Organisation purpose :  | Banyule City Council Youth ServicesLocal Government |
| 500 words maximum per question, no attachments please. |  |
| **Draft vision**Q. What do you think of the draft vision?To maximise the opportunities and remove barriers for all young people aged 12 to 24 years to realise their potential, including those who are disadvantaged, disengaged or face particular challenges. | Banyule Youth Services feels that the draft Vision statement does not fully reflect young people’s voices. We feel that the wording around young people ‘realising their potential’ implies that young people are not valued in their current life stage. We also note the emphasis on young people who are experiencing disadvantage or facing challenges. While we support a policy to address the needs of young people who require additional supports, we feel that this should be a separate policy supported by a rigorous framework and that this policy should be an overarching policy which covers how the State will engage with and support all young people. Ideally, the Policy should focus on positive and strengths based language that celebrates young people’s achievements and rich contributions while also removing barriers to support/participation and providing equitable access. Lastly, we note that the defined age range for the policy is 12 – 24 when the previous age range for young people has been 12 – 25 years. We feel that rather than narrowing the age range, the policy should define young people as 10 – 25 years. The Youth Work sector has for a number of years identified an emerging area of need within the ‘middle years’ of childhood and youth services are increasingly being asked to respond to young people from 10 years upwards. Indeed many generalist services are now providing dedicated services to address the needs of young people aged 10 - 14 years as a specific area of youth work support. We would like to see an acknowledgement of this area of need within the proposed policy.  |
| **Draft objectives**Q. What do you think of the draft objectives? | Banyule Youth Services are a bit concerned that the draft objectives are broad with little detail about how they will be delivered. For example, exactly how will the department engage with and listen to young people? We are also concerned that language around young people being provided with the ‘opportunity’ to engage in education, training and employment seems to place the onus of responsibility on the individual without potentially looking at the barriers that individuals may face to participation and addressing these. Again, we would like to see an emphasis here on equitable access and removing barriers to participation. Lastly, we feel that the wording of the final objective is very vague and provides very little information on the framework within which young people from all backgrounds, experiences and diversity will be supported to achieve their goals. The phrase ‘given a fair go’ is not very youth friendly language, lacks clarity and we feel it is not able to be operationalised and measured. We would again like to see language around rights, equitable access and the removal of barriers.  |
| **What’s important to young people?**Young people have identified the following issues as important to youth. Please respond only to those questions of interest to you. |  |
| Q. What do you think should be done to improve educational opportunities for young people? | Young people have told us that they would like their educational experience to have more practical elements including life skills, more work experience linked with industries that they are interested in. Education needs to increasingly be linked with the employment market and have opportunities for young people to achieve curriculum outcomes through targeted workplace/industry experiences. Increasingly young people need to be aware of the changing jobs market and be able to assess whether a chosen course has good employment outcomes. There needs to be more monitoring and assessment of the teaching quality of independent tertiary colleges as we have had a number of experiences of young people enrolling in a course that has a very low quality of teaching and upon course completion, the young person does not have the skills required to be job ready and is no longer eligible for further government funding for another course.  |
| Q. What do you think should be done to improve training opportunities for young people? | Through feedback from young people, we feel that there needs to be better regulation of training providers. A huge influx of private training providers in the market has meant dodgy operators are still profiting from vulnerable young people. There also needs to be greater support for young people with barriers to stay in training and education, this needs to be holistic support and have flexibility to respond to the barriers faced by the individual.  |
| Q. What do you think should be done to increase employment opportunities for young people? | Young people have told us that they find it incredible difficult to find employment as there are fewer and fewer entry level positions available. There is a significant need for the creation of more entry level positions. The employment market needs incentives to provide entry level positions for young people. Young people also need more support around soft upskilling – the basics of creating a resume, communication skills, resilience, workplace behaviours and expectation. Increasingly young people need to be developing practical business start-up and entrepreneurial skills to be able to respond to the changing employment market and to be ‘future ready’. Projects at schools which promote the development of entrepreneurial skills and have real linkages with local businesses would be valuable.  |
| Q. What do you think should be done to improve the mental health of young people? | Banyule Youth Services would like to see further investment in high prevalence and emerging issues such as increasing anxiety, self-harm, negative attitudes towards women, young people being overly exposed to sexual imagery at a young age and over sexualisation at a younger age. Our early intervention services need to be flexible, more accessible to where young people are and need to be proactive around emerging trends in young people’s personal relationships and how this impacts on health and wellbeing. Services need to have a better understanding of how young people want to seek support – mix modes of engagement with a mixture of face-to-face and online support. The youth support sector more broadly needs significant up-skilling in how to assist young people through e-support platforms. We also believe that there needs to be further peer-based support models as young people’s first help-seeking attempts are likely to be through friends/family. Lastly, Banyule Youth Services are concerned with the move towards central intake services in which young people are triaged via phone based interviews. Intake processes for these services are complex and phone based interviews are not necessarily an effective or safe way to engage with and triage a young person’s mental wellbeing and level of risk.   |
| Q. What do you think should be done to tackle alcohol and drug issues for young people? | We believe that a lot of the media campaigns around drug issues are overly emotive and have the potential to do harm through stigmatising issues and thereby making support more difficult to access. In particular, we are concerned that government media campaigns around Methamphetamine are ineffective and harmful. Media campaigns should provide a balance of information on the potential risks of drug use with practical information on how to access further information and support – and highlight that recovery is possible. Ensure that schools and parents are up-skilled with practical information on how to have supportive and practical age-appropriate conversations with children/young people and how to access reliable and practical information and support with a focus on harm minimisation.  |
| Q. What do you think should be done to improve housing for young people? | The vast majority of young people who have experiences of homelessness will initially have periods of living informally with friends/family (couch-surfing). The majority of these young people will be able to eventually return home with some support provided during the period while they are living out of home. However, if supports are not provided, young people who are couch surfing risk also disengaging from education/training/employment and further increasing their risk of extended homelessness and exclusion from the employment market. Expansion of programs such as Reconnect and FRMP so that support is also able to be offered to informal ‘host’ families would prevent young people from having extended and disruptive couch surfing experiences and would enable earlier family reunification. For those young people who are unable to return home and do have to enter the homelessness system, the expansion of wrap around housing/education/employment /health support services will see young people in support for shorter periods of time. Foyer models are a good example of non-stigmatising and effective homelessness support services and we would like to see these expanded. There are very limited housing support options in Melbourne’s northern suburbs and many young people who are homeless are forced to move away from their supports to access crisis or stable housing. We would like to see an investment in crisis and supported housing in the northern suburbs.  |
| Q. What do you think should be done to tackle discrimination of young people? | Banyule Youth Services would like to see further localised investment in programs that showcase the positive contributions young people from diverse backgrounds make to the community. We would like to see further programs that provide inclusive spaces that meets the needs of young people’s active participation in community life and provides platforms for young people to have a voice of diversity of stories. We would like to see programs where young people from diverse backgrounds are able to consult of the development of training to organisations on diversity and inclusive practices. Lastly, we would like to see that young people from diverse backgrounds have clear local and state advocacy and consultation pathways so that their voice is recognised in all local and state planning and policy initiatives.  |
| Q. What do you think should be done to improve public transport for young people? | Young people have told us that safety on public transport is a major concern. Young people have requested more access to after hours public transport – and we acknowledge the home safe public transport initiative which is able to commence in January. We would like to see this expanded to outlying suburbs and paired with a more accessible journey planner as the app function is currently very difficult to use. We would also like to see an expansion of real time timetable information across bus and tram networks so that young people are better able to plan their journey safely. Banyule Youth Services would like to see further investment in lighting and infrastructure around bus stops, particularly in outer suburbs or North Eltham and St Helena, Lastly, Banyule Youth Services would like to see an acknowledgement of the financial constrains young people face and how this impacts on their access to public transport and in turn access to community participation.  |
| Q. What else do you think should be done to improve the lives of young people in Victoria? | Banyule Youth Services would like to see a youth policy that reflects a vision that Victoria is a place that values and cherishes all young people. In turn we would like to see such a policy translate to real investment in more accessible and flexible services around education/training/employment/health/community access and participation which meets individuals needs and addresses the barriers to participation. We would like to see more investment in a diverse range of opportunities for young people to have a voice, celebrate their collective and individual experiences and be active within their communities and interest areas. Young people often find it difficult to balance competing responsibilities of study/work/home/friends. It can be difficult for young people to commit to ongoing involvement in clubs and activities – especially sporting activities. We would like to see more investment in discrete, social community and sporting activities which does not require a significant and ongoing financial, time and travel commitment from young people and their families. Banyule Youth Services also believe that we need to better include young people in educating other young people on issues of concern – allowing for discussions and open & honest conversations from young people with ranging life experiences.Young people are passionate about topics that affect them and that affect their broader communities, allow them to be the drivers behind changes we see.Further investment in pathways to training experiences is also needed. Through actively trying out practical work experiences through programs such as FreeZa which allows for practical entertainment/event management skills development, young people get to decide on whether they enjoy a particular career path before enrolling in a formal course. Funding for such initiatives needs to be expanded. Lastly, significant investment in ongoing workforce development across the sector is needed to ensure that the workforce is up-to-date with emerging technologies and how these impact on young people, their relationships and their health and wellbeing.  |
| Q. Any other comments? | Banyule Youth Services has found it difficult to provide comprehensive feedback on the proposed policy as outlined in the discussion paper in the absence on information about the proposed evaluation framework and the alignment with key milestones and reporting requirements. Banyule Youth Services would like to see these areas of the policy also open to a sector consultation period. Banyule Youth Services acknowledges that much of the feedback provided is outside of the department’s direct areas of responsibility. We would be keen for the policy to articulate how the department will work across government to advocate for young people in areas outside of the departments responsibility.   |
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