

What's Important to YOUTH

Scouts Victoria - Final Report

Organisation

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Overview

Scouts Victoria provides young people aged 6 to 25 with fun and challenging opportunities to grow through adventure. Scouts Victoria has around 22,000 members, making it the largest youth movement in the state. No other organisation offers such a variety of activities for young people across such a wide range of ages.

The Scouts Australia educational youth program incorporates contemporary issues such as youth health, 'responsible risk-taking', vocational skills, and issues pertinent to Indigenous Australians. A curriculum is offered that scaffolds and encourages participation in the full range of age-appropriate developmental activities available, providing recognition of individual achievement and ability. This is underpinned by a 'learning by doing' method.

Scouts engage in a variety of outdoor activities, from outdoor recreation units of competency such as camping and bushcraft, through to more challenging training opportunities in abseiling, overnight hiking, rafting, canoeing, canyoning, snow activities, rock climbing, sailing and even flying. Scouting affords young people the opportunity to participate in personal development activities in the performing arts, leadership development programs, amateur radio operation, environmental projects, large-scale Australian events such as Cuborees, Jamborees and Ventures, international events, and community service at a local, state, national and international level. Scouts also learn valuable practical skills such as first aid and cooking. Every activity is a learning opportunity that develops the leadership capacity and connectedness of young people.

The program's ongoing success is due to enthusiastic and committed adult volunteers from all walks of life who take great pride in encouraging young people to reach their full potential. Our leaders are trained to a basic level in supporting young people through crises and difficulties. This training includes an understanding of the limitations of non-professional counsellors and where to find additional support, for both the young person and the supporting adult. Accredited teams who provide first aid services at major Scouting events are required to undertake mental health first aid training. Mental health first aid training has also been made available on a short term basis in recent years with State Government funding.

Scouting provides all of its leaders with accredited adult training through the Scouts Australia Institute of Training. Increasingly the youth program is also being accredited, which has been recognised in the rest of the education sector through growing demand for school-based Scout programs. Scouting is seen as valuable contribution to the formal education of young people, as the use of the 'Patrol System' involving youth leadership of small teams is seen to build resilience, self-esteem, self-reliance, independence and connectedness to community. It is seen in the sector as an important contributor to the social, intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical development, underpinned by a code of ethics.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn directly from consultations with young people and adult volunteers. A separate submission will be made that states Scouts Victoria's position on the key focus areas.

Vision and Objectives

The draft Vision and Objectives are supported

Recommendations for Government from Key Focus Areas – What is important to young people

1. Improve education to youth and teachers about mental health and discrimination, extending mental health programs to younger students, including through buddy programs.
2. Promote and provide greater access to drug and alcohol counselling services, mental health services and general medical services.
3. Update employment policies to recognise the importance of mental health as well as physical health
4. Provide a range of equitable and affordable transport options that link young people to the destinations they wish to travel to, particularly for young people who are disadvantaged.
5. Improve the quality of teaching, and provide a curriculum that is relevant and delivered in a manner suitable to a range of learning styles, including through practical 'hands-on' methods.

Recommendations for Government from coordination and realignment of new and existing services

6. Resource the service system adequately so that families are not waiting in queues for services while the problem worsens
7. Harness the 'first response' capacity of volunteer organisations by providing support and training to volunteers, or by outposting support workers to these organisations, to ensure proactive and timely support.
8. Acknowledge the potential role of programs like Scouting in supporting and delivering Victorian Government initiatives to improve the wellbeing of young people in areas such as mental health, mentoring and leadership.
9. Assist voluntary youth organisations to overcome barriers to full participation. Small initiatives could be the provision of public transport passes, or small grants programs for equipment, which can be used by Scout Groups and like organisations offering program to disadvantaged youth. Relatively small investments to overcome these barriers ensure that volunteers trained to deliver program are not concentrating disproportionately on raising funds to offer the program.
10. Introduce employment/support/housing programs to school students so they know what's available after/outside school.

Methodology

Demographic summary

	Method	Total number participants	Age range	Gender	Cultural background Description	Location
Focus group	1	5	Adult and young adult	2 – F 3 - M	Representing CALD and Australian-born communities	M - 5
Youth workshop - metropolitan	1	70	12-25	M - 54 F - 16		M – 35 G – 19 R - 18
Youth workshop - regional	1	56	12-25	M – 30 F - 26		M- 22 G – 5 R - 29

Focus group for volunteers working with disadvantaged and disengaged young people

The NGO Consultation Guide for Community Leaders was the basis of discussion.

The focus group was advertised to all adult members through an email bulletin. The invitation was also targeted at those delivering programs to vulnerable communities. Participants included:

- Scout Leader delivering program in Fitzroy housing commission, foster parent
- Scout Leader, also a teacher in a school serving a low socio-economic community.
- Scout Leader tasked with ensuring Scouts address issues important to young people
- Scout Leader responsible for diversity and inclusion in Scouting, including responsibility for supporting Scouts who are disabled, from CALD backgrounds, same sex-attracted and gender diverse, and others
- Scout Leader with experiences of the youth service sector

Participants brought a diverse range of experiences to bear on the discussion that included their time supporting young people through Scouting, but also as parents and through experiences of the youth services and education sectors.

The format of the consultation was a fairly open discussion on the material provided by DHHS. Chairmanship or facilitation of the material rotated among participants, and all had the opportunity to contribute to each question.

Full-day workshops with young people

The methodology was a focus group of young people who elected to be involved. It was advertised through social media (in an effort to engage directly with young people), email and direct conversation. It was also promoted through adult networks – adult leaders who could promote the event directly to young people. It was also promoted through youth networks such as State Youth Council with peers encourages other peers to attend.

The focus groups were facilitated by a mix of 18-25 year old Rover Scouts (45%), younger adult Leaders (22%) and some experienced Leaders (33%). These people also have a varied professional skill set including three teachers, a youth worker and a trainee nurse. 66% of these people hold the highest available training for their Scout role.

Young people were invited to participate in one of two conferences – one held in Sydenham and the other in Trafalgar from 10am – 4pm on either day. Both conferences were held at neutral venues with no cost to participants and transport assistance available for those travelling a long distance.

Materials and activities use included:

- Yes/No questions (requiring participants to move into different spaces)
- Matching activities
- Simple surveys
- Ranking exercises
- Collaborative decision making
- Games
- Creative drawing
- Group discussions
- Graffiti boards
- Y charts

Our major support mechanism was our teaching method of working in small groups (patrols), hence providing a familiar structure with a Patrol Leader (more experienced youth member) and supporting adults. We provided a warm up activity to meet new people and a chill out space for anyone concerned with the topics discussed. The activities were structured in such a way as to encourage group conversation and allow all participants a chance to share their opinion.

List of questions used as part of workshop activities

1. Do you believe alcohol and drugs are an issue for young people?	1. What activities will make up the majority of your week?
2. Which substances present the biggest issue for young people?	2. Identify which of those needs fit into education/training/employment/transport
3. Do you believe mental health is an issue for young people?	3. Is there more the government can do to support those needs?
4. Rate how big an issue mental health is for young people.	4. What are the facilities of an ideal school?
5. Do you believe discrimination is an issue for young people?	5. How would an ideal school assist you with your education?
6. What does discrimination look like, feel like and sound like?	6. How would an ideal school assist you with further education?
7. Which issue do you think is the biggest issue facing young people?	7. What are the transport needs of your community?
8. What are your top three recommendations on how the State Government can improve this issue?	

Outcomes – Key findings

Key focus areas – What is important to young people

Transport

What are the transport needs of you and your community?

Aggregated ranking of transport needs for your community	Aggregated ranking of transport needs for yourself
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Private car/Walking2. Town bus3. Metro Train4. School Bus5. Tram6. Regional VLine Train7. Cycling/Taxi	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Private car2. Walking3. School bus4. Metro train5. Town bus6. Regional V Line train7. Tram8. Cycling9. Taxi

Suggestions to improve transport:

- More affordable transport for disadvantaged & disabled people
- Invest in public transport over roads
- More carriages on existing services – especially when big events – football, big day scout
- Rural shuttle trains- eg: Warragul to Dandenong
- Bike paths/ bike lanes
- Bike/road safety in schools
- Underground rail to the airport
- Fenced bike lanes
- Better training on how to use public transport – currently done by Metro but not well.
- 24 hour public transport
- Fair transport fares, low cost fares for regional or outer suburb locations

Education

How can the government better support your education?

- Scholarships for different experiences
- Lowering costs of experiences such as camps and excursions
- Improve teacher training
- Equitable distribution of funding
- Support public schools with grants and facilities
- More hands on learning experiences
- Include real life learning – banking, loans, credit cards etc
- Change the culture of learning and values of Australians in regards to education, so that education is seen as an essential building block of future prosperity of the individual and society.

Facilities of an ideal school

- Welcoming and appropriate spaces.
- Gyms
- Music Centre
- Library
- Appropriate curriculum including offering a variety of experiences (dance, outdoor ed, etc.)

- Appropriate support for medical and mental health issues
- Better access to technology including wifi
- Better funding across all aspects of education
- More experiences such as excursions, camps etc
- Better teacher education – ensuring that they are positive, knowledgeable and approachable.
- Better teacher education in different learning styles.
- More time in the curriculum for core values of society – respect, resilience, body image, sex education etc
- Greater student independence
- Personalised learning opportunities

Employment

- Work experience is very important
- Include work education such as business skills, understanding of law and legal issues, planning and event management, self-organisation skills, maths, negotiation, people/relationship skills, practical & physical skills (skills to do tasks that would fit under those terms), leadership, emotional intelligence.
- Lower the start of working age
- More funding to schools, so young people enter the work force better educated
- Invest in youth employment
- Pay students to study so not distracted by work and have the time to study- especially Tertiary education
- Ensure fair pay and wages – enforce with more inspections
- Remove the aged based pay gap- especially between 18 and 20 year olds
- Protect penalty rates
- Young people expect to hold between 3 and 25 jobs in their lifetimes
- Discussion on wages- wage based on skill level rather than age, discussion on wages during apprenticeship- too low to maintain a living while trying to gain skills needed.
- 12 to 18 year olds are charged adult admission to events but if they were working at that event, they wouldn't be paid an adult wage
- Moving from the country to the city for education or apprenticeship – higher living costs- can't stay with parents, wages, make this hard
- Remove name and gender from job application forms so employers pick based on skills
- Subsidised training for career changes
- Recognise volunteer service
- More specialised universities/ trade schools/ tech schools/ TAFES.
- Flexible work/study balance

Housing

What type of housing is needed for young people in the community?

- Secure
- Individual housing / personal space
- Housing supporting special needs
- Increase density of housing
- Hostels for temporary accommodation
- Loving and caring environment
- Clean and power available
- Issues for young people losing social networks/personal contacts when moving
- availability of housing in areas when young people need it e.g: near uni, near tafe, near public transport
- choice of housing type can be limited
- need housing with good it access WiFi or NBN

Alcohol & drugs

79% of young people think that alcohol and drugs are an issue.

- Not the most important issue facing young people today.
- Peer pressure plays a huge role
- More an Over 18 problem
- Easy to access
- Financially damaging
- Can lead to violence
- Parental education and role modelling is key

Ranking of issues (based on an average of data collected):

1. Ice
2. Alcohol
3. Nicotine
4. Heroin/Marijuana
5. Ecstasy

Mental health

99% described mental health as an issue for young people.

- High levels of depression in schools.
- Discrimination a huge problem.
- Mental Health issues are harder to see.
- Not enough education
- Can lead into alcohol and drug issues.
- Mental health isn't the issue – it's about how other people deal with it.
- Still very taboo

Many young people identified depression and anxiety as mental health issues but very few identified other mental health conditions.

On average, mental health was rated in importance as 7.9 out of 10.

Discrimination

79% of young people think that discrimination is an issue.

- Not an issue in Scouting but more in schools.
- Younger generation are more accepting.
- Ongoing cycle.
- Not just a youth issue.
- Can lead into mental health issues.
- People who haven't been discriminated against don't believe it's an issue.

Young people identified discrimination as:

- Not being wanted
- Feeling left out or excluded
- Can be loud or silent.
- Can include discrimination of race, gender, age, sexuality and physical features
- Can lead to mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, self-harm or suicide.

Other themes identified by young people

The following comments summarise images drawn by the young people to represent their needs in the upcoming week:

- school appeared in the majority
- Indoor and electronic based activities were high in appearance frequency but the youth members didn't identify a role current or future for government in this
- Sporting activities were identified. Discussion included the role of government to fund and maintain facilities; they felt this was currently well done.
- Discussed the role of the government to provide transport to these sporting facilities, this included that most travel to sport is by private car hence roads funding was important and that sport facilities in the west suburbs were often a long way from public transport.
- Music was a common theme and the government role of transport to gigs and education to support study was identified
- Eating and food related drawings were recorded – the link to government was seen by employment, leading to money for purchase
- Lots of people identified transport activities they would be undertaking in the coming week from taking the train to work to cycling to school
- Lastly the most common image representation was Scouting, to be expected given the audience, but a demonstration of the value of these sorts of programs to those who participate.

Recommendations for Government from Key Focus Areas – What is important to young people

- Improve education about mental health and discrimination.
- Improve teacher education about recognising mental health issues in young people
- Extend mental health programs to younger students.
- Address discrimination such as the wage gap, gender inequality in sport and marriage equality.
- Promote more awareness campaigns in schools on mental health, drug and alcohol use.
- Provide more access to drug and alcohol counselling services
- Promote mental health programs such as HeadSpace better.
- Provide more accessibility to medical health services for young people
- Update fair work policy to recognise the importance of mental health as well as physical health
- Provide a range of equitable and affordable transport options that link young people to the destinations they wish to travel to, particularly for young people who are disadvantaged.
- Improve the quality of teaching, and provide a curriculum that is relevant and delivered in a manner suitable to a range of learning styles, including through practical 'hands-on' methods.

Actions for the new whole-of-government youth policy, and

Existing government youth-related policies and programs and service provision for young people

The following comments are derived from a focus group of adult volunteers who support disengaged and disadvantaged youth. The NGO Consultation Guide for Community Leaders was the basis of discussion.

Improved Coordination

Following are some actions to improve coordination and better leverage youth-related policies and programs:

Better connect schools and community services, including youth and mental health services

Agreed.

- The lack of 'first response' services was noted, particularly psychologists in schools and the need for greater preventative services across a range of service needs
- The role that Scouting and like programs play as a protective factor, through a social network and confidence building, was noted, and yet reliable quantitative research to properly define the benefits has not been resourced.

Strengthen connections between services for families, parents and carers with youth services to support young people early to address emerging challenges

Agreed.

- It was identified that differing approaches to services facilitated by local governments can create a patchwork service provision that is difficult for clients to navigate. It was recommended that a framework for consistency and legibility of services could be developed.

Strengthen partnerships between the education, training and industry sectors to increase workforce participation and improve the liveability of regional and rural communities

Agreed.

Leverage government contracting to prioritise the employment of young people, in particular disadvantaged and disengaged youth

Agreed.

Facilitate a coordinated approach to philanthropic investment

Agreed.

- Government involvement as a coordinator of investment would be welcome, while ensuring that investment decisions are made independently on a needs basis

Expand models that link education and housing support and linking these to youth justice diversion

Neither agreed nor disagreed

- It was noted that in the absence of parental support, there is a history of volunteers in Scouting taking on a disproportionate responsibility for assisting Scouts as they fall between education, housing, justice, and particularly mental health services. While it would preferable if this wasn't necessary, in acknowledging that volunteers will be placed in this position from time to time a greater access to support is desirable.

Link employment initiatives for young people leaving residential care, with broader training initiatives to maximise outcomes.

No comment.

List up to three other actions you think the government should take.

- Assist voluntary youth organisations to more formally link to the service system. This could be through outposted youth workers or by building the capacity of volunteers in areas such as mental health first aid.
- Assist voluntary youth organisations to overcome barriers to full participation. Small initiatives could be the provision of public transport passes, or small grants programs for program equipment, that can be used by Scout Groups and like organisations offering program to disadvantaged youth. Relatively small investments to overcome these barriers ensure that volunteers trained to deliver program are not concentrating disproportionately on raising funds to offer the program.
- Introduce employment/support/housing programs to school students so they know what's available after/outside school. Add some training within schools – for example, half day workshops to cover things like managing housing (paying rent, utilities, notice periods, etc), employment options (understanding contracts, superannuation, leave, notice periods, where to get help for missed pay, etc). Have a central website that youth can use to find numerous resources – link to headspace, housing info, Centrelink, job sites, VTAC, moneysmart, legal aid, and so on.

Realignment of existing funding / new initiatives

Following are some actions to improve coordination and better leverage youth-related policies and programs:

Youth leadership and mentoring linked to education, training and employment for Aboriginal and multicultural communities, and for young people in the youth justice and out of home care systems

Agreed.

- Scouting could contribute further to this.

Youth homelessness advocacy

Agreed.

- It was noted that in the absence of parental support, there is a history of volunteers in Scouting taking on a disproportionate responsibility for assisting Scouts as they fall between education, housing, justice, and particularly mental health services. While it would preferable if this wasn't necessary, in acknowledging that volunteers will be placed in this position from time to time a greater access to support is desirable.

Preventing online sexual exploitation

Agreed.

- Scouting could assist in the delivery of sector-wide programs, coordinated by government. It would be important to ensure a diversity of youth and adult input to ensure effectiveness of messaging.

Facilitating employment pathways and network building

Agreed.

- It will be necessary to actively prepare young people for *future* job markets
- Programs like Scouting provide young people with a wide informal intergenerational network. It also provides a platform where young people demonstrate work skills in a low-risk environment. Together this has resulted in Scouting contributing to fulfilling careers for countless young people, many of whom may have struggled to demonstrate employability otherwise. While this will be a common experience across the organisation, two particular areas where Scouts have started careers have been as vehicle mechanics (as a result of Scout motorsport) and performing arts (as a result of on-stage and off-stage contribution to shows alongside skilled professionals).
- Scouting assists in the development of a range of 'soft skills' in young adults that contribute to employability and would be well-placed to further assist in programs on:
 - Enterprise literacy
 - Tenant rights
 - Use of credit cards
 - Insurance
 - Supporting others with difficulties

Creating more corporate and philanthropic partnerships

Agreed.

- There is a particular need for partnerships that are willing to support projects with longer term pay-offs. In particular, undertaking research that demonstrates the psychological or educational or social benefits of programs like Scouting is something that has been difficult to attract external resources, in spite of the long term benefits of this work as it contributes to these programs' reach. Government could assist in coordinating complementary programs that could benefit from this sort of work.

Initiatives to address body image

Agreed.

- This should begin with young children.
- It was observed that, anecdotally, this is not as prevalent an issue for Scouting youth members as the general population, which suggests the value of strong and accepting social networks.

Initiatives to address bullying

Agreed.

- Programs like Scouting can offer an alternative social network and an accepting refuge from bullying experienced elsewhere.
- Scouting also has its own programs to educate young people about bullying.

Promoting young people's voices within their own communities, including Aboriginal and multicultural communities.

Agreed.

- Engaging young people with their local communities and wider society is crucial.
- There are a number of important social issues that are intergenerational in scope, meaning that the input of young people on issues like climate and housing is not just tokenism, it's one of the most important perspectives.
- Leadership skills developed through these experiences will contribute to future professional and community leadership.

List up to three other actions you think the government should take.

- General resourcing of the service system so that families are not waiting in queues for services while the problem worsens
- Harness the 'first response' capacity of volunteer organisations by providing support and training
- Support 'buddy' programs that address isolation and bullying inside and outside of schools.

Recommendations for Government from coordination and realignment of new and existing services

- Resource the service system adequately so that families are not waiting in queues for services while the problem worsens
- Harness the 'first response' capacity of volunteer organisations by providing support and training to volunteers, or by outposting support workers to these organisations, to ensure proactive and timely support.
- Acknowledge the potential role of programs like Scouting in supporting and delivering Victorian Government initiatives to improve the wellbeing of young people in areas such as mental health, mentoring and leadership.
- Support 'buddy' programs that address isolation and bullying inside and outside of schools.
- Assist voluntary youth organisations to overcome barriers to full participation. Small initiatives could be the provision of public transport passes, or small grants programs for program equipment, that can be used by Scout Groups and like organisations offering program to disadvantaged youth. Relatively small investments to overcome these barriers ensure that volunteers trained to deliver program are not concentrating disproportionately on raising funds to offer the program.
- Introduce employment/support/housing programs to school students so they know what's available after/outside school.

Conclusion

What's important to young people

According to participants, the key focus areas identified in the discussion paper were all relevant to young people and requiring government support. In particular, alcohol and other drugs, discrimination and mental health were rated very highly as relevant to participants, with 99% of participants regarding mental health as an issue for young people. These issues, and their interdependencies, require particular attention.

In addition, young people identified that opportunities in sport, music and Scouting were very important to them. While government may have a limited role in direct delivery of these programs, it may consider the importance of ensuring that all young Victorians have equitable access to a range of recreational and non-formal educational opportunities as part of a full, balanced and happy life. This was highlighted in comments about the role of Scouting and other programs in providing social networks that supported young people as they encounter the challenges of mental health, alcohol and other drugs, and discrimination.

Participants proved themselves interested in a range of issues not strictly limited to young people such as gender equity and employment conditions. Young people, and perhaps Scouting young people in particular, are interested in and engaged with the adult world that they are entering.

Coordination and realignment of new and existing services

Participants were concerned about the general level of service available to young people, particularly in mental health.

A range of opportunities were identified to better prepare young people for challenges in their post-schooling life through programs delivered in schools, but also through organisations such as Scouting.

Participants were naturally committed advocates of the value of Scouting, but nevertheless were able to report instances where Scouting had prevented or supported young people through most of the issues identified in the key focus areas. The current value of non-Government programs not typically regarded as 'service-delivery', and their potential to better support young people is worthy of focussed investigation.

The process

Scouts Victoria thanks the Victorian Government for the opportunity to assist in collecting the views and perspectives of young people and would be pleased to assist in the future.

Volunteers report that young people participating in consultations enjoyed the experience and felt that their contribution was valued. A formal feedback form is yet to be distributed.

There were minimal support needs identified at any of the events. Efforts were made to enable the full participation of a young person with autism.

The main challenge in completing consultations was the timing. In an effort to develop the best possible consultation events and provide potential participants as much notice as possible, we opted to hold the events later in the relatively short consultation period. This unfortunately coincided with school assessments for a number of age-groups, which constrained participation. While there is no perfect response to this, a longer lead time would have allowed us to combine these consultations with existing events on our calendar, which would have greatly reduced the amount of volunteer resources needed to promote the consultations and attract a diverse pool of participants.

Scouts Victoria gratefully acknowledges the volunteer team who planned and executed these consultations, the Scouts Victoria staff that provided support, and to Department of Health and Human Services staff for their assistance.