

## **What's Important to YOUth?**

### **A response to the Victorian Government's Discussion Paper**

**November 2015**

City of Whittlesea

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#### About Baseline:

The core business of the City of Whittlesea, Baseline for Young People is concerned with all aspects of young people's development. The service focus is a prevention, early intervention and capacity building service for young people aged 10 to 25 years.

Council is committed to contributing to the best outcomes for all young people. This work is informed by City of Whittlesea *YouthPlan2030* and *Connect: A municipal plan for children, young people and their families in the City of Whittlesea 2013 to 2018*

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## 1. Introduction

This document is in response to the discussion paper - *What's Important to YOUth*.

City of Whittlesea applauds the State Government for developing policy for young people based on the voice of young people, and committing to engage them in the design and implementation of cross-government policies and programs. This is a significant opportunity to strengthen outcomes for all young people. Council looks forward to enabling local young people to contribute, and to participating in the ongoing development of this work.

City of Whittlesea, Baseline for Young People, has participated in the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) and the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) consultations with the sector in preparation for their submissions. As such we endorse the contents of the submission and recommendations.

The following is a response to the discussion paper with particular reference to the City of Whittlesea and priorities for young people in our municipality.

## 2. A State government policy for young people

Elements for consideration in the development of a State government policy for young people are:

**Role:** The State government's role should be articulated; including its responsibility and commitment to/for young people. This needs to be located in the context of the role of families, schools, the other levels of government, the sector; including peaks and NGOs. It should articulate the Office for Youth's role (and authority) in relation to cross government functions. It would be beneficial for the State government to demonstrate vision, leadership and best practices in relation to young people.

**Vision:** The vision should be rights based and recognise all young people, of all ages and diversity, as valued in their current state, not only as future adults.

**Definition of Young People:** City of Whittlesea defines young people as 10 to 25 years.

### Right and strengths based:

- Language should be aspirational and human rights based speaking to 'dignity' and 'pride'
- Fundamentally policy should be strengths based, whilst recognising points of transition and vulnerability
- The focus should prioritise prevention and early intervention, and
- Building the capacity of young people.

The Code of Ethical Practice for the Victorian Youth Sector<sup>1</sup> sets out principles for ethical practice when working with young people including:

- Recognising the impact of oppression, racism and other social forces on young people
- Promoting equality of opportunity and break down the barriers that restrict young people's opportunities
- Encouraging young people to respect and celebrate their own and others' cultural backgrounds, identities and choices

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<sup>1</sup> Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) 2007 Code of Ethical Practice – A First Step for the Victorian Youth Sector, Melbourne

- Working in a non-discriminatory way, and challenging racism, sexism, ageism, homophobia and all forms of discrimination

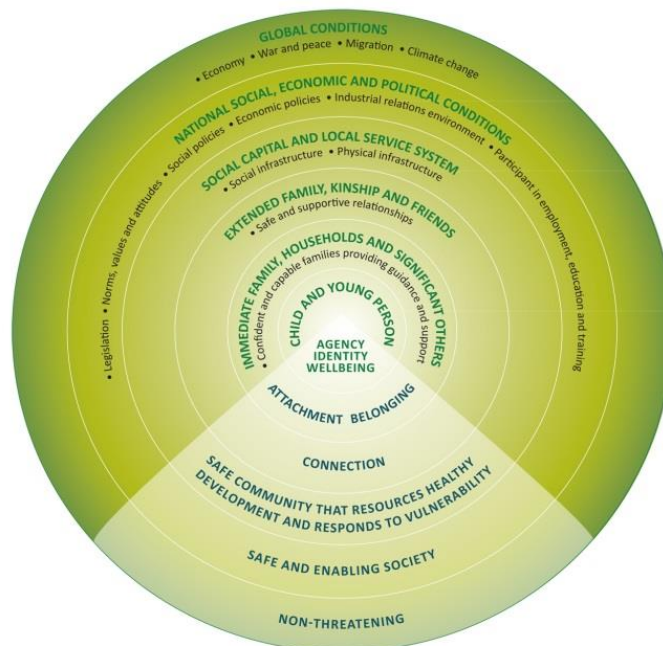
**Life course:** City of Whittlesea recognises whole life course including the different developmental stages from childhood to adulthood; the physical, social, emotional and neurological development and the implications of these for policy, program and practice.

**A Framework:** A framework can illustrate the lives of young people as articulated by young people, their diversity, circumstances, complexity, ages and stages, challenges, transitions etc.

The framework might include:

- Strengths, challenges and vulnerabilities
- Acknowledges structural tensions and their impact on young people
- Illustrate how aspects interact
- Indicate intervention points and solutions with a focus on transitions.

The City of Whittlesea has adopted and developed an Ecological framework to contextualise the circumstances that impact on children and young people. This is reported in *Connect: A municipal plan for Children young people and their families in the City of Whittlesea, 2013 to 2018*.



A previous state cross-government policy provided a practice framework to support vulnerable youth<sup>2</sup>

**Data:** State level data on indicators agreed to by/with young people and the sector (e.g. ARACY NEST framework) is essential. A three yearly report on 'How Victorian young people are faring' would support planning for all stakeholders, including local government who are significant

<sup>2</sup> Victorian Department of Human Services 2010 Positive pathways for Victoria's vulnerable young people : a policy framework to support vulnerable youth

providers of services for and with young people. To inform this, there needs to be an agreed approach to collecting data across government departments and with the sector.

City of Whittlesea has worked with Whittlesea Youth Commitment, Victorian Department of Education and Training and South Australian Department for Education and Child Development to implement the Middle Years Development Index (MDI) <sup>3</sup> with schools in the municipality. Replication of this in other areas could assist in measuring the wellbeing of young people in the middle years with indicators as to how they are faring. This will highlight vulnerabilities and areas for intervention.

**Sector expertise:** Extensive knowledge is available from all levels of the sector including peaks, academics and youth worker practitioners.

A number of reports relating to youth policy in Victoria have been commissioned including:

- VCOSS & YACVic – Building the Scaffold<sup>4</sup>
- State Government – Vulnerable Youth Framework<sup>5</sup>
- Interface Councils - Staying Connected<sup>6</sup>
- KPMG report on the Victorian Youth Services System<sup>7</sup>

**Evaluation, monitoring and measures:** There is a need for agreed indicators to track the circumstances of Victorian young people. Program measures need to capture - what makes a difference.

**Location:** Alongside metropolitan, rural and regional, state policy needs to recognise the specific characteristics, challenges and nuances of interface and growth municipalities.

**Mechanism for all young people to contribute** through continuous engagement, monitoring and evaluation: Most Local Governments, schools and agencies have governance, participatory or civic structures engaging young people. There is an opportunity to harvest the extensive voices of young people through these existing structures throughout the state. This would assist in achieving diverse representation.

**Service system:** Articulating the State governments approach to developing the service system includes:

- Importance of the perspective of young people as an essential element of a State level policy
- Coordination between the many sectors and government departments that impact on positive outcomes for young people
- Strengthening Schools as a universal platform to support the development of young people and their families

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<sup>3</sup> Middle Years Development Index <http://www.mdi.sa.edu.au/pages/default/MDISurvey/?reFlag=1>

<sup>4</sup> Victorian Council of Social Services and the Youth affairs Council of Victoria 2013 Building the Scaffold: Strengthening support for young people in Victoria

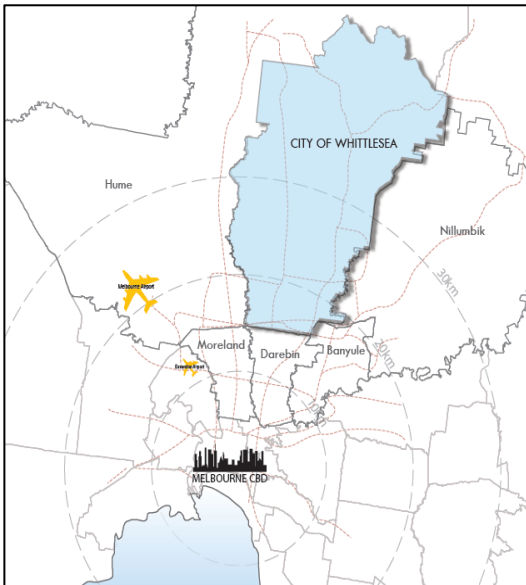
<sup>5</sup> Victorian Department of Human Services 2010 Positive Pathways for Victoria's Vulnerable Young People : a policy framework to support vulnerable youth

<sup>6</sup> Melbourne Interface Councils 2007 Staying Connected: solutions for addressing services and gaps for young people living at the Interface. A report of the Melbourne Interface Councils. & Access Economics 2008 Staying Connected. A cost benefit analysis of early intervention

<sup>7</sup> KPMG, 2007, Improving Youth Service Responses in Victoria, Melbourne

- Investment and a strong commitment to professional Youth Workers as central to the delivery of services to young people
- The importance of early intervention, building resilience, prevention and protective factors
- The role of the community service sector and local government as providers of Youth Services and allocation of resources to achieve outcomes for young people
- Supporting the Youth Sector; with peak agencies such as the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) and the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) provided with secure funding

### 3. City of Whittlesea



- The City of Whittlesea is on Melbourne’s metropolitan fringe, approximately 20km north of the CBD. Covering 490 square kilometres, it includes rural, established, growing and new growth areas. The City is the third fastest growing municipality in Victoria, and the seventh largest growing municipality in Australia.
- City of Whittlesea has been identified by the Victorian Government as a growth area of significance. Averages of 161 people are moving into the municipality each week. The majority of these are families with children and adolescents<sup>8</sup>.
- The City has the fourth highest Aboriginal population in metropolitan Melbourne, increasing by 33% between 2006 and 2011<sup>9</sup>. The City has residents from over 140 countries.

#### Young people

- Currently 39,568 young people aged 10 to 24, live in the municipality (22% of total population). The population is expected to reach to over 66,700 young people by 2036, an increase of 26,000 in 21 years.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> City of Whittlesea *Growing Pains: Living in New Growth Areas background report* July 2015

<sup>9</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 and 2011 Census of Population and Housing Whittlesea C (LGA 27070) [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)

<sup>10</sup> City of Whittlesea *Growing Pains: Living in New Growth Areas background report* July 2015

- The median age of ATSI residents is 19 years old. Over half (57.7%) of ATSI residents are aged 0 to 25 years.<sup>11</sup>
- Recent settlement figures show Whittlesea has significant numbers of newly arrived young people aged 10-19.

Concerns for our young people, their families and communities include:

- The highest incidents of family violence in the northern region, (these include incidents with children and young people present)
- Significant levels of mental ill health
- Unacceptable numbers of young people disengaged from education and employment
- Unemployment, including youth unemployment is increasing
- Adolescents reported being bullied
- Not enough employment opportunities within the municipality<sup>12</sup>
- Very high losses through gambling, largely on poker machines<sup>13</sup>

### **Vulnerabilities in the community: limited social and physical infrastructure**

Alongside metropolitan, rural and regional areas, state policy needs to recognise the specific characteristics, challenges and nuances of interface and growth municipalities. City of Whittlesea does not have the bedrock of established services and physical infrastructure found in Melbourne's inner city suburbs. In addition, newer areas of the municipality lack the social and community networks characteristic of established areas. Rapid growth means that there is increasing pressure on the existing resources and services.

Young people in the municipality are particularly vulnerable as assessed across a range of social, participation, health and wellbeing indicators.<sup>14</sup>

Our young people and their families find it difficult to identify and navigate services available in the municipality, or those funded to cover the City of Whittlesea. There is concern that the current organisation and operation of the system creates additional risk for young people, particularly for those who have trouble accessing services and for those receiving services from multiple providers or transitioning from one service to another.

Many agencies are based outside of the municipality and the limited local services providers are already stretched, particularly in provision to families and young people with complex needs. Agencies reported difficulty referring clients to appropriate services due to a lack of service availability and inability of other services to accommodate demand<sup>15</sup>

Transport has consistently been identified by residents as a barrier for in their ability to access services and participate in the community. Young people rely on public and community transport to

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<sup>11</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006 and 2011 Census of Population and Housing Whittlesea C (LGA 27070) [www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)

<sup>12</sup> City of Whittlesea, May 2014, Place Profiles

<sup>13</sup> City of Whittlesea, Gambling Strategy and Action plan 2014 to 2024

<sup>14</sup> Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2010, Adolescent Profile, City of Whittlesea

<sup>15</sup> City of Whittlesea 2013 Human Services Needs Analysis,



conduct their daily lives without dependence on their parents; to access educational, employment, sporting and social commitments.

There are concerning vulnerabilities emerging in the community that impact on young people including family violence, and households under pressure experiencing financial and other stresses. Unacceptable numbers of young people are disengaging from education and employment. Local agencies are reporting young people presenting with complex interrelated issues<sup>16</sup>.

Other significant issues impacting on young people and families in the municipality include social isolation and large parts of the population from historically vulnerable groups, including culturally and linguistically diverse and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

New Growth Area (NGA) residents, community services practitioners, and research findings, all indicate that place activation practices, access to services, community facilities and transport, need to be in place as people move into NGAs. This will generate social capital and strengthen community resilience through facilitating community connections, enabling residents to conduct their basic needs as local as possible, and provide links to services.

## 4. Priorities to support young people in the City of Whittlesea

### Service system for young people

Council's Youth Service (Baseline) and Whittlesea Youth Commitment are working to strengthening the development of young people in their transition to adulthood, to prevent problems escalating, and respond to vulnerabilities and complexities. The vision is to build a strengths based system of care for young people in partnership with agencies (NGOs), and State and Federal governments.

### Youth sector development

- Increase the capacity of peak organisations, including VCOSS, YACVic, CMY and MAV to deliver strategic direction in policy, planning and practice, to strengthen the sector that supports the development of young people
- Funding and efforts to secure Generalist Youth Workers within local governments
- State Government developing a policy, practice and funding framework to support young people in the middle years (10 to 12 years); including supporting transition from primary to secondary school
- Re-introduce a state level framework for supporting vulnerable young people, with an emphasis on prevention and early intervention
- Develop an evidence base for youth homelessness and affordable housing for young people
- Fairer funding for growth councils
- Secure / reinstate State government funding for:
  - ✓ SFYS – helps schools work with partner agencies to support young people funding lapses in December, no further funding has been committed<sup>17</sup>.
  - ✓ Disengaged Young People – supporting the right of young people to access education
  - ✓ LLEN – Council acknowledges that the State government has committed to funding in

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<sup>16</sup> City of Whittlesea 2014 Understanding the Mental Health System in the City of Whittlesea

<sup>17</sup> YACVic Media Release: *A strong budget for young Victorians*, 5 May 2015

the next four year. However the local capacity and funding of Hume/Whittlesea LLEN needs to be increased

- ✓ Well supported, evidence based training and employment programs

### Schools: strengthening support for young people and their families

Council acknowledges the 2015/16 Victorian State Budget provision of additional funding for schools in the municipality. The timely and continued provision of Primary and Secondary schools is essential to accommodate the rapidly growing number of young people living in new growth areas. Schools are vital community building blocks and sit at the heart of communities<sup>18</sup>.

Council and partners are seeking State government to provide a permanent base for the Pavilion School in the City of Whittlesea. The Pavilion School aims to re-engage young people who are currently disengaged from any form of education, by providing students with a relevant and individually tailored education program.

‘Schools as hubs’ are schools in partnership with agencies delivering comprehensive support to young people and their families through youth workers, mental health and other support services including a suite of family strengthening services. They offer the opportunity to support vulnerable families and vulnerable young people through early detection and comprehensive responses to the causes of distress and vulnerability in young people. Through co-location and partnerships with schools and links to the wider service system, this setting offers the opportunity to respond to emerging issues in relation to mental health, family violence, bullying, disengagement and homelessness.

### Young people and mental health and wellbeing

Council and partners seek support to establish a suite of mental health services across the prevention, early intervention and tertiary services spectrum This includes a Headspace within the City of Whittlesea, to increase access to for local young people experiencing mental health issues.

Council acknowledges the commitment of the State Government in the provision of programs that support the mental health and wellbeing of same sex attracted and sex/gender diverse young people<sup>19</sup>.

### Middle years

Research shows that young people in the middle years are in a developmentally critical stage<sup>20</sup>. Challenges and vulnerabilities can have significant lifelong effects. Opportunities for early detection and intervention through school and transition programs can improve outcomes.

City of Whittlesea has worked with the Whittlesea Youth Commitment, the Victorian Department of Education and Training and the South Australian Department for Education and Child Development to implement the Middle Years Development Index <sup>21</sup> with schools in the municipality.

The Middle Years Development Index (MDI) is a population level, self-reported survey for students around their wellbeing and connectedness. Now in its third year the next MDI survey is to be

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<sup>18</sup> City of Whittlesea *Submission to Metropolitan Planning Strategy*, March 2013

<sup>19</sup> YACVic Media Release: *A strong budget for young Victorians*, 5 May 2015

<sup>20</sup> City of Whittlesea, 2013, *Connect background paper: Ages and Stages*

<sup>21</sup> Middle Years Development Index <http://www.mdi.sa.edu.au/pages/default/MDISurvey/?reFlag=1>

undertaken in September 2015. Each year the interest and participation of schools has increased, with acknowledgement of the importance of the data.

### **Data and funding**

There is a high level of service fragmentation in an ever changing policy and funding environment. There is no framework or consistently agreed approach to how and where services are delivered and evaluated. Accessing accurate information about service levels and service demand is hampered by inadequate and inconsistent information management systems.

The funding of services for young people and their families has presented a challenge to growth areas like the City of Whittlesea. The lack of services based in the municipality restricts the collection of local data. An example of this is with no emergency Youth Housing Service in the municipality, there is little data around Youth homelessness which in turn has ramifications for building an evidence base for funding and advocacy. A similar situation has occurred with the allocation of a number of Headspace being funded in neighbouring municipalities, despite our population projections and current need.

### **A response to youth homelessness**

The full local extent of young people's homelessness cannot be currently determined. However specialist Homelessness Services report that they cannot keep up with demand for housing and support services for young people in the municipality. Local housing for young people is difficult to obtain in the private rental market due to a lack of affordable housing and high competition for rental properties. Young people who are homeless are usually living below the poverty line on benefits. Longer term housing and support models are required to reduce reliance on the service system into adulthood. Council and partners are seeking State and Federal Government support to help alleviate local youth homelessness by providing funding for emergency, supported and long term housing options in our municipality, including a Youth Foyer Project.

### **Family violence and its impact on young people**

There is an urgent need to understand the nature, prevalence, and impact of family violence on young people, and for the development of a solutions framework with evidence-informed actions to guide primary prevention and early intervention work; including program's for young people built on a foundation of young people's rights and gender equality, to be delivered in settings where there are opportunities for interventions i.e. schools, GPs, and sporting clubs, and guided by appropriate protocols and systems for detecting, reporting and responding to notifications of suspected violence, and disclosed violence.

Council emphasises the need to understand the nature, prevalence, and impact of family violence on young people, and for the development of responses and solutions for young people.

## **5. Local Government and the development of a Service System for Young people**

There is a need for the State Government to Increase the resources available to Local Government Youth Services. Local Government invests substantial resources to create generalist youth support to provide age-appropriate early intervention for young people and strengthen local service systems.

## What do we mean by a Youth Service System?

A coherent, universally accessible system of opportunities, environments and supports for young people, 10 to 25 years old, that enables them in their transition from childhood to adulthood. This service system is made up of local agencies, schools and stakeholders working in collaboration towards the healthy development and wellbeing of young people.

This system should include the capacity to respond promptly and competently to complexities, challenges and trauma that young people may experience, and ensure that appropriate and high quality support is available to all young people where, and when they are in need of it.

The service system must have a full range of opportunities, services and interventions available to all young people

A service system is inclusive of all young people and provides opportunities that recognises, enables and supports the tasks and challenges of adolescence.

## Why we need a new approach

The current Service System for young people is largely makeshift, deficit focussed, and undermined by short-term funding and piecemeal policies.

- There is a need for universal service platform to build a comprehensive service system upon
- Schools and generalist youth services should be recognised as key stakeholders in mental health reform, and articulate how the Victorian Government will engage with them to reach large populations of young people in universal settings
- There are no official population trigger points or planning benchmarks for resource allocation for resources to young people
- There are no minimum standards to guide service levels, and no formally adopted indicators that measure youth wellbeing, progress or decline
- The youth services sector is often overshadowed by other sectors
- Youth Work is poorly understood and undervalued

## Local solutions

Local solutions ensure community infrastructure and services are designed and delivered in the context unique to that area.

## Involvement in consultations in preparing a response to the Victorian Government's discussion paper

City of Whittlesea, Baseline for Young People, has participated in the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) and the Victorian Council of Social Service | VCOSS consultations with the sector in preparation for their submissions. As such we endorse the contents of the submission and recommendations.

City of Whittlesea, Baseline for Young People would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues further. Please contact Fran Linardi or Vicki Cooper at [baseline@whittlesea.vic.gov.au](mailto:baseline@whittlesea.vic.gov.au) or phone 9404 8800.