

CORRECTED VERSION

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into 2003–04 budget estimates

Melbourne–16 May 2003

Members

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Witnesses

Ms J. Allan, Minister for Employment and Youth Affairs;

Mr Y. Blacher, Secretary;

Mr T. Healy, Deputy Secretary;

Mr S. Mather, Corporate Finance; and

Mr P. Lyons, Director, Department for Victorian Communities.

The CHAIR — At this point, I welcome the Minister for Employment and Youth Affairs and her departmental personnel, most of whom we have already met at some stage today. We have not met Patrick Lyons, who is director of Youth Affairs. Thank you, Minister, for keeping to time, and I encourage you to keep to that record in youth affairs.

Ms ALLAN — Everyone will have received a copy of the overheads for the third and final presentation of my portfolios, youth affairs. In my presentation this afternoon I will briefly outline to the committee the government's vision for young people, the role and purpose of the Office for Youth, and the programs that are administered by the Office for Youth.

Overheads shown.

Ms ALLAN — As you can see, the key driver of the vision for the government for young people is Respect — the government's vision for young people. This was released in August last year by the former Minister for Youth Affairs, Monica Gould. In this document the government's vision for young people is outlined: we have a Victoria where young people are valued and respected; supported through social, educational, cultural and employment opportunities; are able to live healthy and satisfying lives; and are able to reach their full potential. Respect outlines the government's key achievements, the focus for future achievements and the ways to realise progress in these areas. Respect is organised around the four themes of involvement: learning, working, supporting and celebrating young people.

The objective of the Office for Youth is to develop and lead whole-of-government initiatives. You can see from what I have mentioned about Respect, the Office for Youth has a broad approach and leads whole-of-government initiatives to ensure those positive outcomes for all young Victorians. The Office for Youth was established in January 2000 where previously there was no office for youth although there was a small group located in the Department of Human Services. The office provides leadership right across government to ensure the policies and programmes reflect the themes in Respect and deliver effective outcomes for young people. With the release of Respect the Office for Youth has been provided with a clear direction for policy approaches with regard to young people.

I note that in December last year the Office for Youth, as with the employment programs division, was transferred from the Department of Education and Training to the Department for Victorian Communities, and it sits in the people for community advocacy section within the department. This demonstrates our commitment to integrating activities for young people in a joined-up whole-of-government approach.

In 2002–03 there were a number of key achievements in the portfolio of youth affairs. I have already discussed Respect which was a major achievement. Through the Youth Services program there were 111 projects funded to agencies right across the state. There was also further ongoing funding to the Freeza program. Many members will know of the Freeza program — a very successful program that a lot of young people get involved in through their local communities. During 2002–03, 69 Freeza providers were funded.

National Youth Week is also a key program of the Office for Youth Affairs. For 2003 it ran from 5 April to 13 April. Through the Office for Youth Affairs, the government funded 125 events from the total funding allocation of \$122 000. Over 57 per cent of National Youth Week grants went to programs in country Victoria and it is a great way of demonstrating the government's commitment to celebrating the achievements of young people right across Victoria.

Finally, the Office for Youth affairs is involved in a joint project with Yacvic, which is the Youth Affairs Council for Victoria, to deliver the Participation in Practice project. Three booklets will be published as part of this project to provide practical information to young people and not-so-young people on how to increase participation of young people in local communities.

The next slide shows the functions of the Office for Youth which are reasonably self-explanatory and noting the time I will leave them.

Next are the youth programs that are administered by the Office for Youth. We have the Victorian Youth Development program which has been in place since 1997 and is delivered through 176 government schools to 5900 participants. We have the Freeza program which I have already touched on, and the Youth Services program which, as I said earlier, consists of 111 programs, and National Youth Week.

I ask the committee to note that following the budget we have a couple of new initiatives in the Office for Youth. There is Freeza Central and Advance which is a youth development program. I will possibly get the chance to expand on those two programs through the course of questions.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much, Minister. I particularly want to refer you to the ministerial youth round tables. I notice in the outputs listed on page 406 of budget paper 3 that they are reduced from four to none. What were the major issues that led you to change those outputs? I am also interested in what were the major issues and outcomes arising from ministerial youth round tables conducted in 2002–03. How have these issues impacted on the government's policies and its strategic directions? Do you have any initiatives for 2003–04 that have been planned in response to the outcomes of the ministerial round tables?

Ms ALLAN — Since the youth round tables commenced in April 2000, 11 youth round tables have been held right around Victoria — in metropolitan Melbourne and in country Victoria. They started under the Honourable Justin Madden and continued with the Honourable Monica Gould. They involved large numbers of young people in different parts of the state. I was fortunate enough to be involved in the youth round table in Bendigo in November 2001 which talked about youth perception and identity in rural and regional Victoria. In August last year I attended the youth round table in Ararat that looked at health issues for young people living in country area.

The youth round tables provided a mechanism whereby young people in certain areas could come together and discuss with the minister and representatives from the Office for Youth a certain topic that was decided on prior to the round table and look at actions in their local communities. It provided that direct contact with the Minister for Youth Affairs. Out of each round table a report was published and those reports are available on the Office for Youth web site if any member of the committee would like to have access to them.

Coming to the portfolio and the location of the Office for Youth in the Department for Victorian Communities provided me with an opportunity to look at how we have conducted our consultation with young people in Victoria and look at some ways of improving it. The youth round tables were incredibly successful and attracted a large number of young people, but I wanted to take the opportunity to review them and look at how we could put in place some sustainable youth participation mechanisms within local communities. I have had the Office for Youth looking at interstate initiatives and how other states have dialogue and continue to talk to the young people in those communities and put in place some longer lasting things. Anyone who has had some experience with local government would know that a number of local governments have in place a junior local government council or a junior committee or some way of engaging with young people. We want to look at some of those experiences and see what we can learn about putting in place something that is more sustainable in local communities to give young people a voice in their local communities. That is what we are wanting to achieve. It goes back to the themes of Respect — the government's vision for young people.

The CHAIR — Given that it is all on the web site we could perhaps do our own work, but you might like to take this on notice as you have probably already got it on hand. Given that you had those round tables, what were the initiatives that really had their origins in the round tables? That would be really helpful for our committee so we are able to see any outcomes that are a direct result of that. That would be helpful. You may need to take that on notice.

Ms ALLAN — We will come back to you on that.

Mr FORWOOD — I must say it is not often that governments scrap 'incredibly successful' programs, just to quote you from a moment ago. My question goes to your slide which says the functions of the Office for Youth will be delivered through a single budget output and includes four items: youth policy coordination, youth consultation, youth participation and youth programs. Page 407 of budget paper 3 shows that the total output cost is \$12 million, so I guess if we got four numbers we could add them up to \$12 million. Do you know how much goes to each of those to get to the \$12 million?

Ms ALLAN — Which overhead was it?

The CHAIR — Functions of the Office for Youth.

Ms ALLAN — I might ask Patrick to go through the breakdown of those four output areas.

Mr LYONS — We have the youth services program which is \$4.1 million in budget year 2003–04. National Youth Week is funded through the Freeza program and the Freeza program has funding of \$2 million for

2003–04. The Freeza Central program is a new program and will receive \$500 000 in 2003–04. We have funding for the secretariat — basically the policy operations of the Office for Youth — which is \$1.9 million. That includes funding for staffing and regional youth liaison officers and regional youth committees.

Mr FORWOOD — I am up to \$8.5 million.

Mr LYONS — What have I missed out? The Victorian youth development program which is \$3 million.

Mr FORWOOD — I am up to \$11.5 million — you have \$500 000 left somewhere.

Ms ALLAN — Freeza Central is \$500 000, a new initiative starting from the next financial year.

Mr FORWOOD — I have \$1.9 million, \$4.1 million, \$2 million, \$500 000 and \$3 million.

Ms ALLAN — There are two Freeza programs.

Mr FORWOOD — And they are both \$500 000.

Ms ALLAN — No. Freeza Central is \$500 000 and Freeza is \$1.5 million.

Mr BLACHER — We can give you the details of that.

Mr FORWOOD — Just do us a table.

Ms GREEN — He is old.

The CHAIR — No ageist comments.

Mr MERLINO — Minister, I refer to page 406 of budget paper 3 and specifically youth programs and the Advance youth program. Can you explain that program for the committee and how it will benefit young Victorians?

Ms ALLAN — The Advance youth program was one of the new initiatives in the Office for Youth. It will provide young people with some opportunities to develop life skills which, while being useful to them, may also be useful to them and encourage them to participate in community life. This was another commitment that was detailed in our Labor financial statement from the end of 2002. The Advance youth program builds on a program that was previously known as the Victorian Youth Development Program (VYDP) which delivers outcomes in the areas of building leadership, team building skills and improving young people's self-confidence, connecting them with the community and building initiative skills. I saw a good example of this type of program recently when I was in Bairnsdale as part of our community cabinet visit to that part of the world. I had the opportunity to meet young people who came up to Bairnsdale from the Orbost Secondary College. Young boys and girls were involved in working with the local brigades of the Country Fire Authority as part of the VYDP, and they were incredibly enthusiastic. In partnership with the CFA they were getting trained in all aspects of the work that the CFA does. A number of those involved had also unfortunately had some experience working with the CFA during the bushfires in that part of the world at the start of this year.

I guess it is a great example of how the CFA is a well-known and very important part of community life in country areas, and it gives young people the opportunity to get some experience with the CFA. Obviously the CFA benefits as well, because it gets potential new recruits out of the program as well. Talking with the teachers and the team leaders of the program from the Orbost Secondary College I heard how they saw young people change through the course of the program — young people who may have been a bit withdrawn, not participating in either their school or community life. It really provided some benefits. I see Bill looking at me quizzically. It is about building confidence, about giving young people some skills and connecting them back into their community, so it is a great program.

In 2002, 13 organisations and their providers partnered with 176 schools. These included the Australian Red Cross, Surf Lifesaving Victoria, the CFA, guides and scouts, Parks Victoria, St Johns Ambulance, the Royal Lifesaving Society Australia, Victoria Police, the navy, the army, the Volunteer Coast Guard and the SES. As I said, the Advance youth program will build on the work of the VYDP, and the government has committed over \$5 million over the next four years to the Advance youth development program to build on this partnership model. Advance will also work with local schools and links in with the Victorian certificate of applied learning, which also provides young people with practical skills and knowledge to allow them to progress into further studies or employment. A

huge range of benefits to both the schools, the students and the communities comes out of the VYDP and the expanded Advance program.

Mr FORWOOD — One hundred and seventy-six schools?

Ms ALLAN — In July 2002, yes.

Mr FORWOOD — Have you an estimate of the number of participants?

Ms ALLAN — Yes, 5900.

The CHAIR — Building on that, how do we as a government and as a Parliament ensure that all that training is not lost? With boards and committees that government sets up, it seems to me there is quite a resource there. Has a mechanism been set up as yet to tap into the training and the youth development that occurred?

Ms ALLAN — I will ask Patrick to comment further, but certainly the organisations we have partnered with have been fantastic in this project because it provides them with those practical skills as you indicated. I guess it also goes into what I was saying earlier about having young people connected into their local community, having their voice heard and being active participants.

The CHAIR — But can we measure how many of those 5900 are picked up on committees or boards of local government or government, Red Cross or surf lifesaving organisations?

Mr LYONS — We do not measure post the program. Two of the things that we are looking at, because that is an important aspect of what we are looking at — the participation and practice work that we are working on with the Youth Council of Victoria will provide a range of tools to enable community groups, government and non-profit organisations, business groups and young people themselves to start looking at how we can get young people involved in boards and committees and community groups et cetera. It will also give young people some information about what are the benefits for young people to get involved. With the Advance Youth Development program one of the things we are looking at linking into is greater volunteering, particularly with the Commonwealth Games. We are working with some smaller organisations, particularly as Advance is really an expansion of the whole VYDP and it will need to have a whole lot more service providers to provide that community engagement. We will be looking at broadening that base of surf lifesaving, et cetera, to perhaps some smaller more local community-based organisations:

Ms ROMANES — I have a further supplementary. You mentioned how the youth development program can link into the Victorian certificate of applied learning. How does it do that? Does it mean that students can do some units within this program that they can get credit for? What is that connection?

Mr LYONS — I can respond to that. We will need to work closely with the Department of Education and Training in the rolling out of the VCAL, et cetera. Currently we are looking at linking in particular units that the schools run in their leadership component of Advance and VYPD with the VCAL. That will be an optional facility for students at the schools. It will not be for everyone. We are trying to say that due recognition of some sort does not necessarily have to be a VCE-type of equivalent recognition, it is really up to the school and the student. We are working further, and with Advance we will be working towards strengthening those relationships.

Mr CLARK — I refer to the performance measure on the top of page 407 of budget paper 3, 'Youth web sites total page impressions'. First of all, what does that refer to? Does it refer to visits to youth.vic.gov.au? Because I have to say that web site, although probably functional, is also boring and unattractive. I cannot imagine people flocking to it in droves. Secondly, in the target versus outcomes you were looking for 330 000 page impressions and the expected outcome is 2288. What is the reason for the discrepancy there?

Ms ALLAN — Thank you for that question. I will rise to the defence of our web site just briefly and make the comment that I have asked the Office for Youth, not in the last 30 seconds, to do some work on revamping our web site and making it a bit more hip, to use one word, exciting to use another, and cool and funky are another two. I think we will look at remodelling that but, as I am sure committee members would appreciate, the Office for Youth has been focused on budget preparation in the last little while, so that is something we will look at as well. We might be able to report back a bit further at next year's committee.

The budget target for the page impressions was an unmet target. It was overestimated and it may be, as you have identified, something to do with the format of the page. There are other government web sites and other entries to government information. The target that has been set for 2003–04 is a more realistic measure for hits on the Office

for Youth web site. As I said, a redevelopment plan for the web site is currently being undertaken and there will be some consultation with stakeholders on what they would like to see on the web site. I briefly had a look at the way the New South Wales government structures its Office for Youth web site and it certainly provides a bit more information than ours. We could look at some other comparisons interstate as well on the sorts of information they provide, particularly if we want to use it as a gateway for young people into government, and we will also look at what the Department for Victorian Communities wants to achieve as well.

Ms GREEN — I also refer you to budget paper 3, page 407, and the outputs in relation to Freeza rural and regional agencies. Can you elaborate on the reason for the greater than expected target achieved in the number of agencies in rural and regional Victoria funded under the program?

Ms ALLAN — This is a success story where we have overachieved our target. As I said in the introduction, I think 57 per cent of Freeza providers are from country Victoria. It certainly shows that Freeza is a very popular program for both agencies and for young people. It provides the opportunity for young people to interact with their communities and also gives communities the opportunity to celebrate youth culture in their local areas, whether it is through music events, which has been mostly the way Freeza events have been held, or other events. They have mostly been drug and alcohol-free music events where local bands have been supported. More recently we are encouraging Freeza providers to consider cultural and art events to celebrate the diversity across the art and culture of young people.

You were referring to the performance targets in rural and regional agencies. The target was 33, but the actual number of programs funded was 37. I also note that in metropolitan Melbourne 32 agencies were funded, which also exceeded the target of 27 as was previously indicated. It was possible for the Office for Youth to maintain these enhanced levels of service delivery, the extra programs that were delivered, within the funding commitment for the Freeza program. In the past year Freeza committees have run over 400 events which were attended by 100 000 young people, so it really provides some great opportunities. As I said, it is also a stepping stone for young musicians. I am sure committee members will be familiar with bands such as 28 Days, Frankenbok and Motor Ace which have all gone on to greater success. Freeza has been a great program which is why we have continued our funding commitment to it.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — Minister, when your predecessor — the Honourable Justin Madden in his capacity as Minister for Youth Affairs — appeared before this committee, he had all the rhetoric that went with the Office for Youth: listening to young people, valuing young people, respecting young people. But when he answered a question about employment in the Office for Youth he revealed that at that time there was not one young person employed in the Office for Youth, despite the government saying at the time that it was listening to youth.

Ms ALLAN — What is your definition of youth?

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — At the time I think the minister was referring to under 24, or up to 24 or 25.

Ms ALLAN — Twenty-five.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — The point is that all the rhetoric was there about young people being involved and about listening to young people, but literally there was not a single young person in the Office for Youth. I invite you to tell the committee the current level of staffing in the Office for Youth and how many are young people.

Ms ALLAN — I can get the director to respond, but I ask for some advice from the Chair on how this relates to our budget outcomes for 2003–04.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — It is relevant; if you are listening to young people it would be appropriate for you to employ some.

Ms ALLAN — The Office for Youth has a youth employment scheme trainee in its employ at the moment who has just turned 21. I could ask Patrick to reveal his age as well.

The CHAIR — That is not necessary.

Ms ALLAN — I might get Patrick to comment. He mentioned there are two other young people employed, which would make up 10 per cent of his staff.

Mr LYONS — It would be roughly 10 per cent. There are two other young people in the Office for Youth who are below the age of 25. They also occupy ongoing or contract positions, but once again the Office for Youth recruitment is not based on age specific, it is on merit.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — It is important to have some.

Ms ALLAN — No, I think it is also important to note the profile across the Victorian public sector and the qualifications for entry, and that young people do not finish university until they are 22 or 23, or they might be a little older than that. That is where the youth employment scheme has been successful and will continue to be successful, because when we came to government we recognised that the previous government had not invested in young people in the public sector, which is why YES was created and why we have committed another \$28 million to it.

Mr RICH-PHILLIPS — The total staffing is?

Mr LYONS — It is 21.8.

Mr DONNELLAN — I have heard a bit about Freeza in the rural and regional areas but I have not come across Freeza Central. Can you explain the program?

Ms ALLAN — Freeza Central is a new program that was announced in Labor's financial statement last year. It will be implemented in the next financial year. This is a bit of a spin-off or a benefit from the Freeza program as a whole, because the idea for this came from the Freeza program. The component of the Freeza Central initiative is around intensive workshops, and will also involve master classes. We want to provide young people with some practical high-level music industry experience as well as giving some young people training in music industry management. After the master classes and the intensive workshops there will be a Freeza tour, a statewide musical and cultural event that will tour Victoria profiling these musicians, but also high-profile Australian bands. The implementation of the Freeza Central initiatives has been worked on with the Office for Youth and will provide a great practical opportunity for up and coming musicians, giving them some exposure to the music industry. It is well known that the music industry is difficult to break into for an up and coming band, and it will be an exciting initiative. I think some work is being developed on that at the moment.

Mr DONNELLAN — Will it be run in the regions — when I say regions, places like Casey — and is there an expectation you will be bringing in specialist skills from the music industry, someone like Gudinski, people like that? Who do you expect to do it, or is that a bit far ahead?

Mr LYONS — The intention of the program is to build on the Freeza program. The Freeza program currently has Freeza committees with each program. The Freeza Central program will build on that so young people from the Freeza committees can actually attend intensive workshops. I think there is a performance indicator in the budget papers about young people attending those intensive workshops. Those workshops will be about event management, how to set up a gig, things like that. From the intensive workshops, young people who want to take it a bit further can attend a master class. It will have direct contact with people who are currently professionals in the industry. It may be Michael Gudinski or it may be someone else but those young people will be able to use the skills they have acquired, particularly in the master class, and they will be working with the Freeza statewide tour.

Mr FORWOOD — Minister, what personal staff do you have and which budget line item does it come from?

Ms ALLAN — As I understand it, my ministerial staff sit within the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

Mr FORWOOD — So none of them are allocated across?

Ms ALLAN — No.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much. I officially conclude this afternoon's session, and thank the minister and the departmental officers, particularly those who had to come back this afternoon. It has been extremely useful. Minister, Hansard will be providing the transcript for you around the middle of next week and you are welcome to make comment and get back to us. We will be following up various items in a letter to you.

Committee adjourned.