

# VERIFIED TRANSCRIPT

## PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into budget estimates 2006-07

Melbourne — 5 July 2006

#### Members

Mr W. R. Baxter  
Ms C. M. Campbell  
Mr R. W. Clark  
Mr B. Forwood  
Ms D. L. Green

Mr J. Merlino  
Mr G. K. Rich-Phillips  
Ms G. D. Romanes  
Mr A. Somyurek

Chair: Ms C. M. Campbell  
Deputy Chair: Mr B. Forwood

#### Staff

Executive Officer: Ms M. Cornwell

#### Witnesses

Ms J. Allan, Minister for Youth Affairs;  
Ms L. Healy, director, Office for Youth;  
Mr Y. Blacher, secretary; and  
Mr S. Gregory, chief financial officer, Department for Victorian Communities.

**The CHAIR** — We have joining us for the youth portfolio a new witness, Ms Lill Healy, director, Office for Youth, Department for Victorian Communities. Minister, it is over to you for a 5-minute presentation.

**Ms ALLAN** — Once again, thank you for the chance to present on a range of things we have been doing over the last 12 months in the youth affairs portfolio. I will start with some of the key achievements in this portfolio.

**Slides shown.**

**Ms ALLAN** — Similar to the employment portfolio, we have had another big year in the youth portfolio. We had a range of achievements around the area of helping young people to participate in greater numbers in their community. We launched at the end of last year the Strategic Framework on Mentoring Young People.

Young people were involved in a whole range of activities not just as part of Schoolies Week but in the planning for Schoolies Week at the end of 2005. Young people had a significant involvement in the very successful Commonwealth Games that were hosted here in Victoria in March, not just through their role as volunteers but also as part of the cultural festival that young people had a role in planning in our regional centres.

We saw the Youthcentral web site win an Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM) award for the best web site in 2005. Also, the very popular Advance program has continued to go very strongly. In 2005, along with the CFA, we won the 2005 Fire Awareness Community Service Award for the Advance program.

In terms of consultation and giving young people a real voice and a real say in decisions and policy discussions that are held, we have continued the community cabinet youth forums. We have held nine youth forums across the state, which has seen more than 90 young people directly involved in the community cabinet process through the youth forums. We have seen more than 1500 young people being able to have a say in the process of having a fresh look at youth policy and youth policy directions. Just one example of that is where we have been able to provide a forum for young people to have discussions with Connex and the public transport division and to have that interplay around some of the issues. We know transport is an issue of significant importance for young people. It is important that they were given that opportunity to be involved in that forum.

A range of new initiatives that were put in place in the last financial year include the Go for Your Life positive body image initiative. The budget has provided \$2.1 million over four years for a range of programs to promote positive body image amongst young people in our community. Funding has also been allocated for Southern Health and the Butterfly Foundation to establish a day centre program. The government is putting up \$750 000. That is being matched by the philanthropic sector to see a \$1.5 million centre set up over three years to support people with an eating disorder.

This is a centre that provides a step between the home and the hospital. Often young people with an eating disorder have to be really sick to get into hospital but are too sick to stay at home, so that is providing that support at that point. It was also a great budget for young people in a whole lot of different ways which I might get the chance to talk about more during the hearing.

We have also seen across government a range of activities that the Office for Youth has been involved in including the release of the Youth Focus in Victoria 2004–05 report, which is our annual report against the respective milestones, and I have a copy of the report if the committee wishes to see it.

The youth affairs task force is a committee that involves all government departments that has been set up to monitor youth policy. With the community we have 15 regional youth affairs networks (RYANs) across the state where we are working in collaborative partnerships with local government, community organisations and local area employment networks to provide an opportunity for communities to come together around a range of issues that are relevant to their local communities. There is an ongoing role for our youth liaison officers and a range of stakeholders in the community who we consult with.

On the next slide we have a snapshot of the range of programs that we have in the youth portfolio. Some members are very familiar with FReeZA central, mentoring, capacity building — they are new programs in the term of this government. I might stop there and allow members some questions.

**The CHAIR** — I take you to budget paper 3, page 265, which refers to regional youth affairs networks which you referred to in your presentation. Could you outline to the committee in a little more detail what those networks do and if you have any facts or figures relating to costs or people attendance or people performance indicators? That would be very useful.

**Ms ALLAN** — There are 15 regional youth affairs networks across Victoria that provide for me a great wealth of information from a local level on the range of issues that are impacting on young people in the local communities. When you consider that you have a lot of people sitting around a table at the local level I have regular meetings with the chairs who come together three times a year. They meet together, and I meet with them at other times as well.

They really provide valuable input not just in terms of what I am directly working on with my portfolio but as great input for the government as a whole because the issues they are interested in, whether it is transport, health or housing, go across a number of ministers portfolios so they are really great input into policy and programs right across government.

A great example of the work the RYANs have done that has assisted enormously across government was with the first-ever government inquiry into body image among young people. With this inquiry the Family and Community Development Committee handed down its report in August 2005 and the government responded earlier this year. The committee was given the terms of reference for this inquiry because body image, the impact of dieting and negative body image have a range of serious health impacts on young people. It has links to a range of eating disorder issues and mental health issues and can impact on a young person's education and their place in the community.

One statistic that I think is really interesting and which tells a story is that 68 per cent of 15 year old young girls in Australia at any one time are on a diet. Diet is a significant issue and anorexia nervosa is the third most chronic illness amongst young women in this country. It is a big issue and certainly the feedback we got through the committee inquiry and from the work the government has been doing has been overwhelming as has the feedback from the people who put in submissions to the committee. That is where RYANs played a role as well in convening forums in their local communities, with young people, families and organisations so they had the opportunity to have input into the committee's report.

Following on from the report I am very pleased to say and I mentioned in my presentation that \$2.1 million has been allocated for the positive body image strategy as well as other things, like the butterfly day centre funded through the Department of Human Services, doing more work and putting more resources into programs in schools and community health services.

One of the recommendations that has been adopted is undertaking a mapping exercise of the services that are available in the community, again to help show us what is there but where the gaps are as well, and also wanting to work a bit with the federal government particularly in the role it plays through the National Health and Medical Research Council. It is a very positive outcome. Also the role of the RYANs has been very positive through the course of that inquiry.

**Mr SOMYUREK** — Minister, you quoted a statistic of, I think, 60 per cent of young females —

**Ms ALLAN** — Sixty-eight.

**Mr SOMYUREK** — Sixty-eight per cent of young females had some form of eating disorder, or were they dieting?

**Ms ALLAN** — That was dieting.

**Mr SOMYUREK** — Okay. Do you have comparable figures for males as well?

**Ms ALLAN** — The statistics for males are interesting, and it is touched on in the parliamentary committee's report, but the statistics are probably not as comprehensive for a couple of reasons. One is more girls have been affected for a longer period of time, but we are seeing evidence that, I think, it is around 10 per cent of boys are reporting — I am just trying to remember. It is in the report.

**Ms HEALY** — I would need to have the report to refer to.

**Ms ALLAN** — We would have to check the report, but there are stats around. There is a figure that one in four new cases of anorexia nervosa are male, for example, so we do have some figures on it.

**Mr SOMYUREK** — It is trending up?

**Ms HEALY** — It is trending up, yes.

**Ms ALLAN** — It is trending up. The rise of the metrosexual look for blokes is something that is having undoubtedly a bit of an impact on young boys. For boys it is not a matter of wanting to be thin; it is a matter of wanting to bulk up and be a strong man.

**Mr SOMYUREK** — Therefore there is steroid abuse and things like that?

**Ms ALLAN** — Yes, and I guess something that has come out of the parliamentary inquiry is the need to do more research for both genders but I guess in terms of how it affects the issue for boys is undoubtedly an issue that affects more women, but it is, as you said, trending upwards as an issue, and it impacts on young men. The spotlight is brought on it more when people like Daniel Johns from *Silverchair* and Mark Harvey — Mark Thompson? Who is the Essendon footballer who —

**Mr MERLINO** — Harvey.

**Ms ALLAN** — Mark Harvey, who spoke about his bulimia as well. They are examples of men who have been very brave and have said this is an issue and it is an issue that cannot be swept under the carpet.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — Minister, the Office for Youth regards young people as 12 to 25?

**Ms ALLAN** — Yes.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — Can you tell the committee, please, how many people work for the Office for Youth and how many of them are young people, by your definition?

**Ms ALLAN** — Twenty-one people work in the Office for Youth. Lill Healy, how many are under the age of 25? We have got a YES trainee, have we not, in the office?

**Ms HEALY** — We do have. We prioritise YES trainees.

**Ms ALLAN** — We will have to come back to you — —

**The CHAIR** — Sorry; can we be clear who is answering the question, to assist?

**Ms ALLAN** — We do have a YES trainee in the Office for Youth, and by definition that YES trainee is a young person — we have two of those.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — Slightly under 5 per cent?

**Ms ALLAN** — We have two of those.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — Approaching 10 per cent?

**Ms ALLAN** — It is two more YES traineeships than were there under the previous government, because it did not exist under the previous government.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — I just thought you would not run an office for women without women, and I assume you would not run an Office for Youth without youth.

**Ms ALLAN** — No; you are right. But through our consultative mechanisms that we have put in place we make sure that young people have a role in assessing our National Youth Week grants and young people have a role in assessing the FReeZA grants as well. I consult directly with young people during the community cabinet forums and other mechanisms. Young people certainly have a voice and are at the table. Through Youth Central they have a direct communication mechanism to government as well. Also we would not have this discussion under the previous government because it did not have an Office for Youth. It is great that we can talk about the

number of young people we are employing in the Office for Youth, because that is something that we established after the 1999 election.

**The CHAIR** — So let me be clear. There is no need to take anything on notice, or you have taken something on notice?

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — As to the two trainees.

**The CHAIR** — Is two the answer, and then there is no need to take it on notice?

**Ms ALLAN** — Two is off the top of my head. We can check. I am not sure if there are any privacy issues that we might need to consider. Can we get back to the committee on that?

**The CHAIR** — All right. So you will take that on notice?

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — It was an issue that came up with your predecessor, Minister Madden, five years ago, and at that stage there was nobody. I was just wondering if any progress had been made.

**The CHAIR** — There you go — the minister has made great progress.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — I would not call two trainees 'great progress', Chair.

**Mr MERLINO** — Minister, on page 265 of budget paper 3 there is reference to the Youthcentral web site. You mentioned in your slide presentation the ATOM award for the web site, which is very encouraging and an indication that it is a good web site. I would be interested if you could elaborate on how you evaluate the performance of Youthcentral and what benefits the web site has for young people in Victoria.

**Ms ALLAN** — Youthcentral has been going very, very strongly since we launched it over 18 months ago. We have talked about it a couple of times at the committee and we have demonstrated over the years how we have massively overhauled the way we communicate online with young people and provide, as I said before, young people with a direct communication tool into government and also a whole wealth of information they can access online. It was great to receive the award, and Lill Healy represented the office at the award presentation, which was very exciting.

When talking about how it is performing against some of our budget targets, Youthcentral has exceeded the targets for 2005–06. The target was 90 000 to 110 000 web site page impressions. We have exceeded that target.

**Mr MERLINO** — Significantly.

**Ms ALLAN** — We have exceeded the target to the point that we have had to rewrite it this year to go to 250 000 to 300 000 page impressions. I think that demonstrates we have done the right thing here and that it is resonating with young people. Young people would not be visiting the site if it meant nothing to them.

Going back to the previous question about young people, we engage young people directly as roving reporters on the Youthcentral web site in 15 areas across the state, in line with our regional youth affairs networks boundaries. We have a young person who is the editor responsible for each area who draws in other young people to write content for the site that is relevant to the local community and also has some relevance for young people across Victoria. It is also proving very successful as a place where young people can go to find out information about what is on in their local communities.

It is quite a comprehensive web site that really does provide a first-stop-shop for access to government and to youth-based services and resources, and it also gives a voice to young people and a voice to their creativity as evidenced through the engagement of young people as roving reporters.

More than 3280 young people from all over the state have participated, whether it be through providing content and design or taking part in the workshops and consultation, because we are constantly going out there and talking to young people about the content, the look and feel of the web site to make sure it remains relevant. As the committee will appreciate, technology changes pretty quickly, and things like pod casting is becoming more and more popular, and other sorts of animation to do with technology are becoming really, really interesting.

You also talked about measuring its success. Another measure of the success of Youthcentral is that we are seeing a range of different government departments recognising it as a useful mechanism for communicating with young people. Privacy Victoria has used it to deliver an online questionnaire to find out about privacy issues from young people here in the state. VicRoads used it when it undertook its consultation on the graduated licensing forums. The Department of Justice used it for a logo competition for Crime Stoppers, and it was heavily used as part of the Commonwealth Games to recruit volunteers and to provide daily updates about the games directly to young people from our roving reporters who were there.

As I said, we have talked about the web site a couple of years in a row, and I am pleased to report to the committee that it is going very strongly, because we have made it a high priority within the office to put the resources and the people behind it.

**Mr CLARK** — My question also relates to Youthcentral. It is certainly a much better web site than its predecessors.

**Ms ALLAN** — Thank you.

**Mr CLARK** — I want to ask you specifically about the way the web site refers to its ATOM award. The web site says ‘The ATOM awards are Australia’s most prestigious awards for achievements in multimedia, and incorporate web design, short film, documentary, animation and educational resources’.

When you go to the ATOM web site to see the category of finalists in which the Youthcentral award was made, one finds that you were up against the *Dog and Cat News* from the ABC, *Strange Attractors* from the ABC, new media and digital services, *Hype Interactive* from Swinburne University National Institute of Design, and *I Fall* from Victoria University.

Then when you look at how ATOM describes itself, it says:

The Atom awards for film, television and multimedia are the premier awards in Australia for celebrating student talent and promoting the educational screen culture industry.

In other words they are much more limited awards than a general award for, as the Youthcentral web site describes it, Australia’s most prestigious awards for achievements in multimedia et cetera. Would you agree that the Youthcentral description is a bit overstated and perhaps could be considered as misleading and deceptive and perhaps ought to be modified somewhat?

**Ms ALLAN** — I think that is being a bit nitpicky. I might get Ms Healy to supplement my comments, but the awards are all about showcasing young people’s talent. I do not think it is correct in terms of promoting young people’s talent to say it is misleading or deceptive. It is not deceptive or misleading at all to promote either the achievements of young Victorians through their involvement in the Youthcentral web site or the way that the ATOM awards promote young people’s talents right across the country.

**Ms HEALY** — From within the industry’s point of view the ATOM awards are regarded really highly from universities and from secondary colleges that are in this field of national awards. They regard profiling young people’s talent as very important, and the award has prestige. We have just reflected that on the web site.

**Mr CLARK** — If you had branded it as ATOM itself does then I do not think there could be any quarrel with it. I think you might have overspun the achievement a bit.

**Mr SOMYUREK** — If we can go to the FReeZA program, at page 265 of budget paper 3 there is a range of performance measures for the FReeZA program. I digress for a second to say that the FReeZA people in Dandenong do a very good job working out of Cleeland Secondary College. Could you advise the committee of key events that the FReeZA program has delivered and how they have benefited young people?

**The CHAIR** — Minister, if you could also add, because I will be using it as a supplementary, any detail in terms of facts and figures — that would be handy.

**Ms ALLAN** — I might start with the facts and figures and then get into some of the examples. We know FReeZA is funded \$2 million every year by the Bracks government to provide events and activities for young people, organised by young people for young people in their local communities. As I mentioned before, young

people are involved in not just the events and the attendance at those events in their local communities, they are involved in the assessment process of the applications as well to provide advice directly to me on the applications.

Our targets for 2005–06 have been achieved, and we have seen 370 youth music and cultural events being delivered through the FReeZA program right across Victoria, and around 160 000 young people attended and participated in a whole range of the different performances and community events.

Another interesting statistic is also that we see the FReeZA program running over 90 per cent of our local government areas in the state, so it has nearly statewide coverage in terms of events that are organised by and for young people, and gives a great opportunity for young people to attend youth events, drug and alcohol-free events, in their own communities which, as we all know, is really important — to provide young people with those opportunities.

To mention a couple of examples, there are many FReeZA events that are run. There are great examples of the different activities. A couple that are interesting — one is in the Colac Otway Shire with the Apollo Bay music festival, which is a very popular music festival that is held in Apollo Bay. We saw young people in the Colac Otway FReeZA community for the first time this year actively involved in organising and staging youth events to run as part of the Apollo Bay music festival.

The events that they organised and the way they were able to showcase the talents of young people in their community involved a series of art and dance workshops that were targeting young people but also gave an opportunity for the general public to come along and see what young people were up to.

They had the winners of the 2005 regional Battle of the Bands performing as part of the support acts for the headline artists who were at the music festival. Through that opportunity young people learnt how to be involved in event management on quite a large scale when you consider the size of the Apollo Bay music festival. They also learnt how to work with a whole range of different organisations and regulations that you need to organise these events. Also, a number of young people can get involved as volunteers so they also gain an appreciation and understanding of the real rewards you can get through being a volunteer.

Another really interesting one is at Moonee Valley City Council. They call this the Ghet-Go FReeZA program, which was initiated by young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. It reflects the Moonee Valley area, including people from the Horn of Africa and those of Middle Eastern background as well. Through their committee, they have organised a whole range of different dance parties and hip-hop events that attract large audiences of around 500 young people per event, which are, as I said, quite safe and drug and alcohol-free environments. It also means that young DJs and young performers get a chance to perform in front of these crowds at these venues and that young people learn important skills in marketing and promotion as well. They are just a couple of examples.

One thing I think the Chair might be interested in is that the Banyule City Council ran a special needs disco as one of its FReeZA events for young people with a disability. I think this shows how through FReeZA we can provide events for a whole range of young people. It can also target different groups of young people who do not always get the opportunity to participate in these sorts of activities.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — You spoke earlier about the positive body image work that the office is doing. On the broader issue of youth depression, is the office undertaking any work in that area and is there any funding provided for the office, either in terms of research or specific programs, to address that issue?

**Ms ALLAN** — I think this question might possibly be more a DHS — —

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — And I guess youth suicide as well.

**Ms ALLAN** — There is no doubt that youth suicide, depression and mental health issues are a significant concern to the community, but they are also a significant concern to young people. If I can make a passing comment, we have been doing a lot of work in talking to young people about a new youth policy and future directions around that and, as part of the consultations, not surprisingly, transport, recreation and something to do came up as high priorities, but also mental health issues came up as one of the top five issues of concern for young people, through those consultations, which shows that the young people themselves are seeing the impact it has on their friends, their peers or family members.

In terms of service delivery, obviously the service delivery responsibility for those sorts of issues does rest with DHS. Through our youth participation and access program, we can fund a range of programs that are more at the preventive end of the spectrum in terms of support through organisations for young people in different communities, but I think the role that the Office for Youth has to play through this is taking the information we get through policy consultations or through the regional youth affairs networks and others, and then we work collaboratively with the big departments like DHS to provide both the intelligence, if you like, in terms of what young people are telling us and then helping them to shape their responses with a focus on young people. Lill, I am not sure if you wanted to make a comment about that in general because, through the youth affairs task force, you have a lot of contact.

**Ms HEALY** — Sure.

**Ms ALLAN** — We do make this a priority and, as the director for the Office for Youth — and I am not sure if Yehudi wants to make a comment, too, as secretary — we make sure that we are constantly working closely with the key people in those other departments.

**Ms HEALY** — I could perhaps add an example of where the consultation and the feedback from young people about the design of mental health services — and this is 12 months ago — has fed into some of the planning around how young people in early psychosis services actually get a say in the program themselves. ORYGEN Youth Services, which receives support from the government, now has a thing called the youth platform team where post-users of the service come back and help other young people in it. That is just a way we feed in from a young person's perspective. The new psychosis services that have been funded by the government will build on that sort of work.

**The CHAIR** — I would like to continue with that same theme in my question. It relates to budget paper 3, page 265, where reference is made to developing targeted programs and services for young people. You also make reference to that in your third slide. Could you inform the committee of any of the initiatives the Office for Youth has contributed to developing? And perhaps again of any facts and figures you have on the number of staff who might be involved in that kind of whole-of-government work.

**Ms ALLAN** — I mentioned in my opening remarks around the presentation that it was a very good budget for young people, and it was — I am not just saying that, there is evidence there to back it up. There is a range of new initiatives coming online as part of the budget, whether it is through the transport statement — the *Meeting Our Transport Challenges* document — or the *A Fairer Victoria* document that really are particularly relevant and will make a real difference for young people in our communities. A key one to draw to the committee's attention is the transition support for disengaged young people, for which the budget provided \$10 million over four years. While Victoria has the highest number of young people of any state going on to complete year 12 or its equivalent, we know there is a group of young people who, for a whole range of reasons, are disengaging from school and are not going on to sustainable employment, to a job.

There is a group of people who fall into that gap and we know that if there was an intervention, if they were given some extra support at the point at which they have left school or are disengaging from school, we can help them stay at school, find an alternative training setting that might be more appropriate for them or help them to find a job. This amount of funding will provide funding for transition workers in 11 regions across the state.

We have deliberately targeted this program to focus on those areas where there are high numbers of young people who are not at school — we are talking about 15 to 19-year-old people here — so high numbers of young people who are not at school, where there are higher levels of unemployment and really focusing on those areas as our top priority. Obviously this is something many people across the state would like to see in their local communities, but to make a difference we really want to work on those areas where we know there are high numbers of young people who are disengaged from school, who do not have their year 12 completion and are not in the labour market. That is in the budget. We are working at the moment in terms of implementing and rolling this program out across the state. It is the sort of program where we will only see the difference a couple of years down the track as those young people have successfully either connected with education and training or employment.

Very briefly, because I know I have probably spoken for a little while already, there is a whole range of different things in the budget. I have mentioned the body image — the \$2.1 million for body image, the transport statement the Minister for Transport released before the budget. Transport is the no. 1 issue for young people — they are such



high users of public transport. Whether it is providing safer public transport with the 30 authorised officers for late-night train services on Friday and Saturday nights — that is obviously going to benefit young people; converting seven metropolitan stations into premium stations that will be staffed from first to last train seven days a week — that will help young people feel safe using public transport; or extending the bus routes — that will obviously also tremendously support young people, as will providing more late-night bus services. I think members who represent our outer suburban areas know how important it is to have those late-night services.

It is raised with me constantly by young people in those communities, as it is I am sure with you as well. That will really benefit young people as well, as will the youth referral and independent person project, which is through the Department of Justice. It is expanding this service to 101 police stations to help place volunteers in those areas to help support young people who have come into the justice system and need some support.

**The CHAIR** — So that I am clear, would all people in the Office of Youth be involved in this kind of work in one form or another over the 12 months? You would not have a dedicated team, I presume, to this kind of work.

**Ms ALLAN** — It is more an advocacy role in terms of working with governments, but again perhaps Ms Healy would like to comment.

**Ms HEALY** — It is everyone's job in the office to work across government, because young people are across communities. Within the office there are a couple of teams that would focus more, but essentially it is everyone's role.

**Mr CLARK** — Could you tell the committee what the budget is for the regional youth affairs networks? I want to know what the breakdown of that budget is, and do the youth liaison officers work full-time for the regional youth affairs networks or do they do other work as well?

**Ms ALLAN** — As I said before, the RYANs are a really important part of our collaborative approach that we have to working with local communities. They keep in touch with a whole range of different issues and work that they do. Our youth liaison officers do play a critical support role for the regional youth affairs networks.

It was interesting to see some not quite accurate comments that were made about our RYANs in the Parliament a couple of months ago about the support from this government. We have supported these committees very, very strongly. As we have mentioned, the youth liaison officers provide support to the regional youth affairs networks and the work that they do. We provide funding for the RYANs to engage; when they have their consultations with young people, we provide funding to support those activities. We provide funding to help them to meet the costs with meetings and holding those meetings and also for volunteer expenses such as travel. We also provide support for them to come together as part of those quarterly statewide convener forums that are held every year.

So we do provide a strong level of administrative support to our regional youth affairs network. I think that is very much recognising that they have an important role to play in the policy development process and in terms of giving a voice not just for young people in their local communities but youth organisations that work with young people in their communities, and it gives us a chance also to come together and see where there is a consistency of issues right across the state of Victoria. I have already spoken about the role they played in the body image parliamentary inquiry and the policy work that has come out of that.

**Mr CLARK** — Could you give us some figures, either now or on notice, to go with those different categories of assistance that you listed; and also, are the youth liaison officers full time for the networks or do they do other work?

**Ms ALLAN** — The youth liaison officers are not full time on the RYANs. They have a role right across as part of the DVC community engagement teams that are set up in our eight regions of the state. Youth liaison officers play an important role as part of those teams. As part of their role they look after the regional youth affairs networks.

In terms of funding, I can come back to you, but we do not say necessarily, 'Every year this is the amount of money we will spend on RYANs'. It is very much on an as-needs basis that we support their activities and functions. We have encouraged very much the RYANs to be very proactive in what they do. We have encouraged them, whether through the parliamentary inquiry or other government policy issues like the graduated driver scheme, to be

proactive so that if they know the government is seeking responses on something in a certain area we encourage them to have those forums. As I have indicated, we provide the support for that to happen.

**The CHAIR** — So that I am clear, are you taking it on notice, or is it not possible to quantify?

**Mr CLARK** — If the numbers vary from year to year, perhaps you could tell us what the actuals were for the year just completed rather than just a paper on what is going to be spent this year.

**Ms ALLAN** — I am just looking at my notes here. I think in the financial year just gone we have seen that around \$30 000 has been provided to RYANs to cover these costs. But, as I said, I do not want it to be interpreted that that is the money that they have; it is really supporting them as they need to be supported. Really the strong message is 'We do support you', and we encourage them to be very proactive in their range of activities across the state.

**The CHAIR** — So that is clear to us now. Thank you.

**Mr MERLINO** — I think my question builds on the previous question. I refer you to page 265 of budget paper 3, which outlines responsibility for development and coordination of whole-of-government information and advice on issues of youth policy. You talked about the regional networks. Can you inform the committee of any other progress that has been made in the area of youth policy?

**Ms ALLAN** — Sure, and I have mentioned a couple of the initiatives that were funded in the budget. There is a whole range of different things as I think Lill Healy has just mentioned. The role of the office is to have that whole-of-government — all the work we do is whole-of-government, whether it is just looking at our own youth policy work that we have been undertaking more recently or the youth focus reports that we have to provide every year in terms of the achievements of young people in the state.

To give some other examples of where the Office for Youth has been involved in some of the whole-of-government work, there has been the Frankston partnership work. I am not sure whether the Minister for Victorian Communities mentioned this to the committee when it came up yesterday.

**The CHAIR** — He did mention it in passing.

**Ms ALLAN** — That is an example of where the Office for Youth is involved in supporting the work of the Frankston partnership and the role of government in that partnership.

**The CHAIR** — I know one of our research officers was very interested in it, so if you want to expand on that, feel free.

**Ms ALLAN** — I am not sure what the committee might already know. I might be repeating.

**The CHAIR** — Not a lot.

**Ms ALLAN** — It is an initiative that has come out of Frankston, and it involves the Frankston City Council and the Brotherhood of St Laurence. They are the two agencies that are leading the work down there, along with the support from DHS, the Education and Training, of course, and the Department for Victorian Communities. Support for the partnership was announced as part of A Fairer Victoria last year when it was released, because they are looking at a local level at how to bring all the people around the table and look at a new approach around building stronger communities and making it easier for communities to work with government.

They have been meeting for about 12 months now, and they are focusing, not surprisingly, on young people. They have put a priority on young people in the community, whether it is in terms of looking at issues around education, employment or where there might be some gaps in services for young people in their local community.

The Minister for Victorian Communities and I went down and met with members of the Frankston partnership in early May and were briefed on their activities and actions — things like seeing where there are linkages with government programs, like the community facilities fund which is run in the department of education where there might be opportunities for support through a program like that to help build school community infrastructure that can be shared by the entire community. That is pretty much the partnership, and as I said that is where the Office

for Youth has a role in supporting the work that is going on. People like our youth liaison officer for that region has a role in supporting that work as well.

I have mentioned before the driver safety graduated licensing system. We have been informed through youth consultations we have been involved in, along with the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria. I think I have mentioned some of the other activities that have been going on in transport — things like the review of under-18 events in the CBD of Melbourne, which was quite an issue a few months ago around supporting activities for young people in those venues. We have done work with the Premier's drug prevention council on schoolies week; also broader work on the Victorian drug strategy 2006-09. So that is just a snapshot of a whole range of things that keeps the office here very busy on a whole-of-government focus.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — This committee has been critical of the performance measures listed for youth affairs in both its 2005-06 report and the prior year. The measures that are listed in this year's budget are basically similar with only one change from previous years. What action are you going to take on the recommendations and comments of this committee with respect to the performance measures, given they are focused on process rather than outcome?

**Ms ALLAN** — I have mentioned, whether it is the FReeZA grants or the Youth Central targets, that we are meeting our targets and are going very well against those. But in terms of your comments about making changes to them, yes, we welcome the advice and the feedback from the committee about how we can continually improve the performance targets; so if the committee has further comments to make this year, we would look toward to those and work on that.

**Mr RICH-PHILLIPS** — Having made them for the last two years, we had hoped that you would actually take them up.

**The CHAIR** — The minister has explained that there has been a variation.

**Ms ALLAN** — It is also that we have an ongoing process across DVC as well around how we review our performance targets. I mentioned how we have changed some of them significantly in employment, and in the Office for Youth we are continuing to review those as part of the process that is going on across the department.

**Mr SOMYUREK** — I would like to continue with the topic of performance targets and performance measures and the FReeZA program. I refer to page 265 of budget paper 3. With FReeZA rural and regional grants, we have a number of approved ones but we do not have a breakdown for event attendance. Can you possibly indicate what the participation rate was like, for young people in rural and regional areas given that transport is always a problem? What sort of steps have you taken to ensure that young people — —

**Ms ALLAN** — We will get back to you on the more detailed figure, because we will obviously have that information. FReeZA event attendance does have a global statewide figure, but you can see the grants for young people between metro and rural that are listed. Part of the support that goes to the FReeZA committees locally — because you mentioned transport in your comments — I know that some FReeZA committees choose to provide young people from outlying areas with transport support to come to the events. Going back a couple of years, I know down in Warrnambool the FReeZA committee there worked very hard to make sure it provided transport for young people from the outlying rural areas to come into Warrnambool for the event.

I think you will find a lot of our FReeZA committees in the rural and regional areas provide that transport support. I think it is also reflective of the priority that people in rural and regional areas have for the FReeZA program. You will see there is a higher number of grants provided in rural and regional rather than in metro. I think that is illustrative of the fact that people in regional Victoria obviously recognise that we need to work a little bit harder to make sure there is a suite of activities and events and things for young people to participate in in their own local communities.

**Mr CLARK** — I want to ask about the youth participation and access program grants which was an issue raised by Mr Forwood last year. I was wondering if you could tell the committee what the total dollar amount is that is expected to be allocated in the forthcoming financial year. I think you told us it was \$4.1 million last year. In your answer last year you also said this was a grants program that had been rolled over; it was an 18-month program that had been rolled over for a further 12 months. Does it follow that it has been rolled over further, and if so, to what point has it now been rolled over? Is it currently set to expire, and if so when?

**Ms ALLAN** — The annual allocation to the program is \$4.1 million and that is what is expended.

**Mr CLARK** — Again this year?

**Ms ALLAN** — Yes. That is totally on grants. The reference last year to the rolling over, that was when it was under the name of the youth services program. As part of the placement of the Office for Youth within the Department for Victorian Communities there was an opportunity to align the program more with the approach of the department in its community strengthening and community building role. Hence, the change of name to youth participation and access program. Previously organisations were funded for an 18-month period.

We rolled the last lot of the youth services program grants over for 12 months as we made the shift from the youth services program to the youth participation and access program, because the new program is funded on a three-year basis, which is consistent with the approach that is taken out of DHS in particular. It is well recognised that three years is a much better funding cycle for the funding of these sorts of organisations and grants than a 12 or 18-month cycle, because it provides for longer-term prevention or intervention strategies to be put in place. So the youth participation and access program was funded from 1 July 2005 for a three-year period and \$4.1 million is expended every year through those grants. There were 100 grants to 91 community and local government organisations to provide a range of different services over the three years.

**Mr CLARK** — Right, so just to clarify, both the program and the grants run for three years, so you are not making a fresh allocation this year; you have allocated them already?

**Ms ALLAN** — No, that is all completely allocated.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much, Minister, to your witnesses, to the advisers and departmental staff who have prepared for today for both your briefing folders and our questionnaire that went out. I thank them in advance also for the couple of follow-up questions that they will be attending to when we circulate those to you.

**Committee adjourned.**