

Find below the responses to the questions taken on notice by Mr Wayne GATT, Secretary of the Police Association of Victoria, during evidence provided to the Inquiry into Youth Justice.

1. How many police have been working with youth since the 80s?

Provision of the quantitative representation for police who have been operating in youth-focused positions since the 1980s is a matter for Victoria Police. The Association can however advise that Victorian police have been working directly with youth since the 1976 trial of the Blue Light Disco in Mooroolbark, Victoria. In 1988, Victorian Police were also involved in the Police/Schools Involvement Program (cf. the submission by The Police Association of Victoria).

History demonstrates that Victoria Police has gradually moved away from a proactive approach to youth engagement. In 2005, Victoria Police discontinued the Police/Schools Involvement Program which had had over 80 police operating as School Resource Officers. In 2014, Victoria Police withdrew funding for the Blue Light Disco, finding that frontline operations required priority. This program ran until 2005, when the School Resource Officers assigned to the program were transitioned into Youth Resource Officers, who are the current contact between youth and Victoria Police. More recently, 49 Youth Resource Officers responded to our Proactive Policing Survey conducted in October 2016. They advised us that they are frequently removed from their core proactive duties to address either taskforce or general duties policing, due to an overall lack in resources and a focus on reactive policing. This has a detrimental effect on their ability to interact with young people and maintain positive and beneficial relationships with youth in the community.

2. How many and what sort of work does Victoria Police do with youth engagement now?

Engagement between youth and Victoria Police is now limited to those members in the role of Youth Resource Officer (YRO). The role of a YRO is to provide support for youth who are at risk of engaging in criminal behaviours or who are recidivist offenders. As at May 2017, force data indicates that there are currently 57 YROs operating within Victoria Police.