1 April 2008

Ms Karen Ellingford
Executive Officer
Education and Training Committee
Parliament House
Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Ms Ellingford

Parliamentary Inquiry into Geographical Differences in the Rate in which Victorian Students Participate in Higher Education

Thank you for the opportunity to submit to the above Inquiry.

Please find attached a copy of a submission from the Shire of Yarra Ranges to the Inquiry.

Also attached are a range of reports which illustrate many of the points made within the submission.

The Shire would be very pleased to organise a public hearing should you wish to hold one in the municipality. We have organised like events in the municipality in the past which we believe have added value to the particular inquiry's tasks.

Should you have any queries regarding the submission, or wish to discuss a public hearing, please feel free to contact me on 92946205, or via email a.cran@yarraranges.vic.gov.au

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Alison Cran
Director Social and Economic Development
Education and Training Committee of the Parliament of Victoria

Inquiry into Geographical Differences in the Rate in which Victorian Students Participate in Higher Education

Submission prepared by
the Shire of Yarra Ranges
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1 INTRODUCTION

The Shire of Yarra Ranges welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to this Inquiry of the Education and Training Committee of the Parliament of Victoria into geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in higher education.

The Shire of Yarra Ranges is an Interface Council, lying at the interface of metropolitan Melbourne and rural Victoria, sharing aspects of both urban and rural communities. In an arc around Melbourne from the south-west to the south-east, the Interface municipalities are:

- Cardinia Shire Council;
- City of Casey;
- City of Whittlesea;
- Hume City Council;
- Melton Shire Council;
- Mornington Peninsula Shire Council;
- Nillumbik Shire Council;
- Shire of Yarra Ranges; and
- Wyndham City Council.

As with all Interface municipalities, the Shire's population dispersion is concentrated around urban areas, with significant numbers of people living in rural townships. Approximately 60 percent of the population lives within the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) and 40 percent lives in the 50 townships, small communities and rural areas which are unevenly dispersed across the Shire. The urban areas accounts for only 5 percent of the total land mass of the Shire.

The Shire has undertaken significant research over the past seven years into the social, economic and environmental aspects of the community. This has resulted in the development of a range of strategies focused on building a vibrant, safe, healthy and quality place to live. Our approach is predicated on a quadruple bottom-line to sustainability, building the social, economic, environmental; and cultural aspects of the community. We have developed a unique relationship with our community, developing strong partnerships in working towards achieving our vision of strong local communities, which are sustainable into the future.

This submission reflects our experience of working with business, education providers, community sector services and the community to develop strong communities, underpinned by a robust economy and a community that is committed to life-long learning. This submission addresses five of the seven Terms of Reference for the Inquiry – Terms of Reference b, c, d, f and g. The submission is organised around each of these areas, as well as providing contextual information about the Shire.
2 INFLUENCES OF SCHOOL RETENTION RATES, INCLUDING ENROLMENTS AND COMPLETIONS FOR VCE, VCAL AND VET IN SCHOOLS ON PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

2.1 WHOLE-OF-LIFE APPROACH

Factors which impact upon school retention for young people are complex and multi-faceted. Young people remain at school and succeed if they have confidence, have access to health services and maintain a healthy lifestyle and have emotional and economic support. Discussions with service providers and community houses which provide alternative VCAL programs outside of the school system indicate the importance of a whole-of-life approach to supporting families and young people.

To understand the needs of young people living in Interface municipalities and how to address them, it is important to understand the factors which contribute to young people living successfully in their communities. Middle childhood through to adolescence is a time of significant emotional, physical and intellectual change, with potential for fluctuations in health and wellbeing (Centre for Adolescent Health, 2005). Parents, peers, school and the community generally are important for all young people and play a significant role in young people’s perception of themselves and their healthy development. For young people living in Interface municipalities, staying connected with their local communities is vital. This enables young people to be involved in their communities and to remain connected to their family, peers and other relationships.

A number of factors have been identified as critical for healthy development in young people and a robust and coherent service system. These are:

1. A positive, healthy start to life (from birth).
2. Healthy physical, emotional, mental, intellectual and spiritual wellbeing and development.
3. Positive family and peer relationships.
4. Active participation in the community.
5. Strong communities which welcome and engage with young people, encouraging and promoting their participation.

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1 These factors have been developed from an analysis of relevant literature and draw on the work of several researchers including the Centre for Adolescent Health (1999 and 2005), Centre for Youth Development and Policy Research (2006), Resnick (2005), Fuller (2004) and DHS (2000).
6. A coherent, supportive and responsive service system, which promotes and sustains partnerships with service providers, young people, their families and the community.

7. Approaches to service delivery which operate within a risk and protective factor framework, based on evidence of best practice and focussed on the needs of individual communities.

8. A range of interventions and services which operate across the spectrum from prevention, early intervention and tertiary levels, delivering a range of universal and targeted responses.

9. A positive, integrated policy environment, which is sensitive to adolescent development and the individual needs of young people (n.l.t. consulting, 2006).

Research undertaken by the Interface Councils and within the Shire has consistently indicated that there is a lack of adequate infrastructure and resources to provide the integrated service responses which are required to meet the complex needs of the more vulnerable children and young people in the community (Marston, et al, 2003, n.l.t. consulting, 2006, Shire of Yarra Ranges, 2006c). This spans the spectrum of factors which impact on education participation and retention – socio-economic resources, educational options, access to a range of support services, including health, counselling and more specialist services such as drug and alcohol services and access to public transport.

2.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SHIRE

The characteristics of the Shire, both physical and socio-demographic, influence school retention rates and participation of the population in higher education. The nature of the Shire, as both urban and rural, its dispersed population and areas of high socio-economic disadvantage, impact significantly on access to education and commitment to complete training and education.

2.2.1 PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS

With an area of almost 2,500 square kilometres, the Shire is the largest of any metropolitan or ‘interface’ local government area in Victoria. It is the sixth largest municipality in the metropolitan area and the seventh largest in the State in terms of population.

The Shire has some of the most significant natural reserves in the State, including the Dandenong Ranges and the Yarra Valley National Parks. Public land accounts for 65% of the total land mass and rural land for a further 30%, while the remaining five percent is urban.

The Shire is a mixture of urban and rural communities. Approximately 60% of the Shire’s population lives within the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) and 20% live in the 50 townships and small communities which are unevenly dispersed across the Shire. The remaining 20% live in areas classified as rural. In the more rural areas, encompassing towns such as Healesville, Yarra Glen and those along the Warburton Highway, the population is approximately 17 people per square kilometre, which is comparable to most rural shires.
The topography of the Shire presents challenges to economic development and provision of services. Significant geographic divisions and physical barriers exist between townships. This compounds the effects of the overall scale of the Shire, as does the limited availability of public transport in many areas.

The Shire faces a number of challenges in relation to developing a sustainable community, providing the same opportunities to residents as other municipalities in metropolitan Melbourne. These challenges include:

- Dispersed population living in over 50 rural townships across the Shire;
- Topography which divides the Shire into three distinct areas, with significant divisions and physical barriers existing between townships;
- Limited public transport from the central areas of metropolitan Melbourne to the Shire and across the Shire;
- Areas of high socio-economic disadvantage; and
- Limited service infrastructure, including education and training, health services and employment.

### 2.2.2 POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

Young people living in the Shire of Yarra Ranges share many characteristics with their counterparts in other Interface municipalities. At the same time, the unique characteristics of the Shire exacerbate the barriers to accessing higher education. These characteristics include:

- There are high numbers of young people aged 10 – 24 years living the Shire of Yarra Ranges and this can be expected to continue for the next five years, although the number and proportion of the population of young people will decrease over time. This means that there is ongoing demand for high quality secondary and higher education within the municipality;

- There are areas of significant disadvantage in the Shire. These are concentrated primarily in the rural areas of the Shire, with pockets of disadvantage within the urban areas of Mooroolbark and Kilsyth. These localities had SEIFA index scores below the national, state and Shire average on the advantage/disadvantage scale;

- Compared to the metropolitan Melbourne, there are a smaller proportion of people with Bachelor or higher degrees in the Shire and a higher proportion of people with vocational qualifications (ID Consulting, based on ABS Census 2006);

- Healesville Secondary College has one of the highest proportions of indigenous students of any secondary school in Victoria. The levels of disadvantage in the indigenous community are well documented. The level of achievement of these young people is significantly lower than for other young people in the Shire;
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Submission prepared by the Shire of Yarra Ranges

- Overall, young people who live in Interface Councils have significantly lower educational achievements than their counterparts in metropolitan Melbourne. Achievements are likely to be lower across all indicators. Compared to metropolitan Melbourne, young people living in the Shire of Yarra Ranges:
  - Are more likely to leave school earlier;
  - Are less likely to complete Year 12 – lower than the State average;
  - Have lower TER scores;
  - Are less likely to attend post secondary education; and
  - Are more likely to disengage from school and employment (n.i.t. consulting, 2006).

- Young people in the Shire were less likely to complete secondary school, attend university or post secondary education than other young people in metropolitan Melbourne;

- Young people in the Shire engaged in more high risk behaviours than their counterparts in metropolitan Melbourne.

2.3 EDUCATIONAL OPTIONS

2.3.1 SECONDARY SCHOOL – VCE, VCAL AND VET

There is a lack of options for secondary education in the Shire. For young people who are experiencing difficulties in the school system, there are very limited accessible alternatives. This contributes to the high level of non-completion, as evidenced by the data. This perception is supported by research into a comparative assessment of the availability of Vocational Education and Training (VET) within the Shire and elsewhere in Victoria. This study found that there was a significantly lower proportion of schools offering such courses within the Eastern Region when compared to rest of the State (Langworthy, et al, 2005).

A compounding factor is the lack of access to a range of schools. If students have “burnt their bridges” within a school, either through poor behaviour, negative peer relationships or disputes with teachers, there are few options. This results in disengagement from education for many young people.

Service providers also reported that there appears that some schools are reluctant to offer VCAL and VET programs. These are seen as being of lower standing than VCE subjects and there is concern that the school will be perceived by parents as not as good as others. This in turn, is viewed as a threat to student numbers and thus to funding for the school.
2.3.2 HIGHER EDUCATION

Access to higher education is limited within the Shire. Swinburne University has a campus in Lilydale. However, the range of courses available is limited. Access is also a difficulty for residents who do not live in Lilydale or within close proximity.

2.4 PUBLIC TRANSPORT ACCESS

Young people are dependent upon public transport for travel in and out of the Shire and within the Shire. Lack of public transport has impacts for young people in many areas of their lives, which often results in increased levels of risk taking behaviour and disengagement from education and training. This includes:

- Limited access to employment and education opportunities, contributing to disengagement from education and the workforce;
- Limited capacity for community and social connections, contributing to mental health issues;
- Limited access to entertainment, resulting in local parties, with high levels of alcohol consumption;
- Limited capacity to access support services independently from parents who are required to provide private transport. For young people living in families with high levels of family conflict, reliance on parents or other family members for transportation to close or alternative school programs often results in high levels of non-attendance and disengagement.

Buses are very infrequent. There are three buses in the morning and four in the afternoon from Warburton. If a young person needs to go to Lilydale, or Ferntree Gully, to access VCAL programs outside of the municipality, they need to leave at 6.30 in the morning. This is a major disincentive to participation. – a VCAL teacher at a community house

2.5 HEALTH AND WELLBEING

To achieve at school, young people need to remain healthy – emotionally and physically, and access appropriate support to assist. General practitioners play a critical role in supporting young people and independent, affordable and “youth friendly” primary health services are critical. There is limited access to primary health services across the whole of the community – general practitioners, health promotion, prevention and screening. There are also few bulk billing practices, with these practices often limiting bulk billing to health care card holders, thus restricting independent access for young people.
Availability to specialist mental health services and drug and alcohol support services is also limited. This in part is due to the part-time nature of these services and the high waiting lists for services. This is compounded by the lack of availability of locally-based services. The current system of providing outreach services results in limited service availability, confusion and unmet demand.

Some schools have attempted to fill the gap for young people, with one school providing a school nursing service, in partnership with a local general practice, every Monday morning. This service provides general consultations, assistance, direct referral to GPs when necessary and health screening. This not only provides access to an independent primary health service, but offers an affordable service for young people.

2.6 AFFORDABLE ACCOMMODATION

There is a need for local accommodation services, including crisis and transitional accommodation, public housing and private, affordable rental accommodation (Shire of Yarra Ranges, 2006c.). This is particularly important for students. With limited access to transport, the need for accommodation closer to educational facilities is critical.
3 INFLUENCES OF PARTICIPATION IN OTHER POST-SCHOOL PATHWAYS, INCLUDING TAFE ENROLMENTS AND TAKE-UP OF APPRENTICESHIPS OR OTHER EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES, ON PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

3.1 ACCESS TO TAFE

Access to TAFE is limited for Shire residents. Swinburne University has two TAFE campuses, located in Healesville and Lilydale. The Healesville campus is small, with limited course options available. The Lilydale TAFE campus provides a wider range of courses, with an emphasis on technology.

Another campus of Swinburne TAFE is located in Croydon. This campus offers TAFE programs in the areas of social sciences, business, community services, children's services, computing, building, recreation and a large variety of short courses. This campus also has a particular focus on youth, offering VCAL, VCE and VET in the VCE programs, as well as a range of apprenticeships and First Stop. International projects management and English language training are also available. However, access to campus is difficult for young people who are reliant on public transport.

3.2 PERCEPTIONS OF OTHER POST-SCHOOL PATHWAYS

Anecdotal evidence, based on discussions with young people, indicates that TAFE or other pathways to training and employment are often not considered by young people or their parents as an option for higher education. A study of the aspirations of year 10 students in the region\(^2\) (Outer East, including the municipalities of Yarra Ranges, Knox and Maroondah) in 2007 indicated:

- A high proportion of students planned to complete year 12 (80%);
- Of these, 59% planned to study VCE, 17% a mix of VCE and VET in Years 11 & 12. Just 4.3% were considering VCAL and 4.6% a mix of apprenticeship and VET;
- Overall, 80% were planning to return to study with the majority of students surveyed planning university study (68%), 20% TAFE and 12% some other form of study;
- Expectations of parents are focussed primarily on higher education attainment for their children. Young people surveyed indicated the expectations of their parents as:
  - 58% expected them to go to university;
  - 12.5% to gain employment as an apprentice or trainee;
  - 8% to study at TAFE;

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\(^2\) This study, conducted in 2007, is based on a survey of 425 Year 10 students in 21 Catholic, Government and Independent schools in the Outer Eastern Region – see References
➢ 10% to look for work or get a job; and
➢ 4% to do some other form of study or training; and 1% to start their own business (Langworthy, et al, 2006)

The data indicate that these expectations and aspirations are not fulfilled within the area. For many young people, aspirations to attend university is either unrealistic or not achievable due to the many barriers related to access.

### 3.3 ACCESS TO ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS

#### 3.3.1 COMMUNITY HOUSE PROGRAMS

The delivery of VCAL and VET programs through community houses has been a particularly successful strategy within the Shire. Both the Upper Yarra Community House in Yarra Junction and Morrison House in Mt Evelyn provide VCAL programs and a range of alternative courses, access to apprenticeships and employment opportunities for young people who have disengaged from the school system\(^3\). The young people who are accessing these programs do so after failure in the school system. Many have struggled for years at school, a consequence of bullying, lack of support from family and/or high levels of family dysfunction. Staff at these programs indicated that all their students have poor self esteem, lack confidence to achieve and see themselves as failures. The majority also have poor numeracy and literacy skills.

Despite this, these programs have been highly successful in supporting young people to achieve and to assist them to gain skills to aid their employability and participation in appropriate training. The success if attributed to the intense nature of the programs, the flexibility of the setting and the small number of students.

In 2007, the VCAL program at Morrison House in Mt Evelyn worked with 12 students aged 15 – 17 years, all of whom had been expelled from their schools. All passed the VCAL program, which focussed on literacy, numeracy, work-related skills and personal development. Eight of these young people are now working and four returned to schools to complete Year 11.

\(^3\) Morrison House in Mt Evelyn provides a VCAL program 2.5 days per week to 30 students (2 groups). Upper Yarra Community House provides 5 programs – for students up to 14 years (school refusers), pre-CAL program for students up to Year 10, VCAL for years 11 & 12 and an indigenous program.
However, access to these programs is limited. Public transport is unavailable or difficult to access. One staff member drives three of her students to the program herself each day because it is too difficult for these young people to travel by public transport and their families are either unwilling or unable to take them.

“A ‘one-size’ fits all model does not necessarily work for those young people with significant social, economic and emotional barriers that affect their capacity to learn. For these students, continuous assessment or a program similar to the VCAL model with less of a focus on exams is worth considering for young people wishing to participate in higher education.” – (Upper Yarra Community House submission to this Inquiry, see attached)

### 3.3.2 ACCESSING EMPLOYMENT OPTIONS

Staff in these programs reported that it is difficult to gain employment opportunities for the students in their programs. Employers are reportedly unwilling to provide work-based training opportunities. There is no doubt that these young people can be difficult. However, with the support of program staff, these young people can and do succeed and can be valuable employees.

> It takes a whole of community approach to support these young people – they need to feel valued. If employers in the local area are not prepared to give these young people a go, then they get the message again that they are not valued. – a VCAL teacher in a community house

### 3.4 PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND OTHER PROGRAMS

Partnerships between schools and alternative programs such as the community house programs are difficult to establish and maintain. Many of the young people using these programs would have more positive outcomes if they had accessed the programs earlier in their school life. However, current funding arrangements, perceptions of the programs and perceptions within some schools that only schools can provide education has resulted in the potential for cooperative programming across sectors being unfulfilled.
4 POTENTIAL GEOGRAPHIC, ECONOMIC, SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND OTHER INFLUENCES ON UNIVERSITY APPLICATIONS, OFFERS, ACCEPTANCES AND COMPLETIONS ACROSS VICTORIAN COMMUNITIES

4.1 CHARACTERISTICS OF RESIDENTS WORKERS

Resident workers in the Outer Eastern Region (including the Shire of Yarra Ranges and the Cities of Knox and Maroondah) have:

- Low levels of education qualifications;
- Low participation rates in higher education;
- Lower than the Victorian average school retention;
- Fewer year 12 graduates go to university than the Victorian average; and
- Fewer students take up university or TAFE offers compared to students in the state.

4.2 ACCESSING UNIVERSITY

To access university education which meets the full range of individuals' needs, interests and aspirations, it is necessary for students to move away from home. Despite the rural nature of the Shire and the constraints of access across the municipality even for those living in urban areas, there is a failure to recognise that young people face similar issues are those living in rural areas. The implications of this include:

- Potential students are not eligible for the university subsidies for rural students;
- The cost of living away from home is such that young people are dissuaded from applying for university places and/or accepting them;
- For many young people without family support or those living in families with high levels of disadvantage, they do not perceive themselves as achievers or even aspire to attend university, regardless of potential; and
- For Indigenous students, the cultural and socio-economic barriers potentially inhibit access to university.
5 POTENTIAL EFFECTS OF GEOGRAPHICAL DIFFERENCES IN PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION ON SKILLS SHORTAGES AND THE VICTORIAN ECONOMY

5.1 LABOUR MARKET CHARACTERISTICS

Similar to other regions, the Outer Eastern region has experienced significant skill mismatches between employees and employers or jobs with persistent levels of skill shortages in many occupations and particular industries (Langworthy, et al, 2007, sourcing OECD data). The characteristics of the Outer Eastern Region and the Shire of Yarra Ranges in particular, illustrate the underlying issues in relation to these shortages (Langworthy et al, 2007:1). These include:

- High levels of socio-economic disadvantage in parts of the area;
- A dominance of small and micro business rather than large industry;
- Net migration for work – 65% of the workforce in the Shire travel out of the Shire for work;
- Unemployment rates average 5% but 56% of the unemployed are long term unemployed;
- Unemployment figures do not provide a true picture – under-employment and casual employment are not evident in the figures, particularly for young people;
- Labour force participation rates of young people have improved but remain at approximately 69%;
- A high proportion of process and manufacturing workers – these jobs are diminishing with increasing automation and thus the prospects for employment for these workers are also diminishing. Workers who have the capacity to re-train and participate in emerging and new jobs (the “knowledge economy”) are becoming increasingly in demand. The Outer Eastern Melbourne knowledge economy indicator was at 40.1, well below the Victorian average of 59 (Langworthy and Brunt, 2005).

A study of the current skills and knowledge in the Outer Eastern Region (Langworthy at al, 2007) found that the Shire of Yarra Ranges experienced a sharp decline in the total skill intensity of residents’ jobs from 1991 to 2006, which is contrary to global trends. Lower skill levels of workers results in these workers being employed in lower paid jobs, which in turn contributes to low socio-economic status and potential disadvantage.

Employers interviewed in this study indicated that there is some inadequacy in the capacity of education and training providers to meet the needs of their businesses and employees. This is despite the fact that institutions of higher education are located in the area - university and TAFE. While this study did not draw conclusions or make recommendations for action, the impact of access to adequate education resources is again evident – the presence of institutions alone does not equate with opportunities for skill development. Access relates to the cost of education as well as capacity to physically access facilities, i.e., the issue of lack of public transport is an enduring concern.
6 STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS ANY BARRIERS CONTRIBUTING TO GEOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES IN PARTICIPATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

6.1 VISION 2020

The Shire of Yarra Ranges has worked proactively with business, education providers, State and Federal Government, other service providers and the community to develop and implement a range of strategies to address the issues facing the community.

The Shire of Yarra Ranges is committed to a strategic framework underpinned by the principles of sustainability. This relates to the total quality of life and well being of the community in which the economic, social, cultural and environmental systems that impact the community are considered holistically and operate in harmony. Sustainability is fundamental to all the Shire’s actions and activities and necessarily involves looking at the long term, while-of-community implications of Council’s policies, actions and programs. Council also recognises that short-term gains must be achieved, but not at the cost of long term detriment.

The overall vision for the Shire in the year 2020 is:

"The Shire of Yarra Ranges will be a vibrant and dynamic Shire based on strong local communities living in a place of great natural beauty. Our world class Shire will be sustained by a strong local economy and a rich social fabric that is consistent with and supports its environmental values."

The vision is structured around seven key themes that meet the goals of a sustainable community:

1. The social fabric and quality of life of the Shire.
2. Environmental stewardship.
3. The built environment.
4. The local economy.
5. A tourism and cultural icon.
6. A living and learning community.
7. A safe and accessible Shire.

Four Sustainability Principles have been developed by Council to guide decisions and actions in every area of Council’s operations and underpin all decisions and strategic actions of Council:
Long term rather than short-term actions;
Strengthening communities;
Developing local solutions in response to wider issues;
Working together.

6.2 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF LEARNING COMMUNITIES

The Shire has developed a range of strategies which are focussed on achieving our vision. Our strategies are integrated, recognising the links between all aspects of community and individual life. Council recognises that sustainable, healthy communities are those where the economy of the community is strong, and that this occurs within a context of building on the values and cultural heritage of the communities, developing the strengths and capacities of businesses and individuals, and protecting and respecting the natural environment for future generations. This includes an Economic Development Strategy and a Learning Communities Strategy. These two strategies are central to developing a strong economy which promotes local enterprise and life-long learning (see Attachment 1). The key areas of focus for these action plans are:

- Business development, attraction and retention;
- Infrastructure and natural resources;
- Tourism and cultural development;
- Skilled workforce and local employment;
- Vibrant and thriving townships; and
- Youth enterprise and opportunities.

Significant research underpins the strategic approach of Council and have resulted in a number of major initiatives. These include:

- Development of a strong working relationship with Swinburne University, which has a campus in Lilydale. This has included contributing to the funding of research, support for the development of specific training to meet regional needs and partnering with the university in the development of the Centre for Regional Development. Significantly, there is insufficient funding within the university for this centre to continue;

- Development of regional partnerships with the Cities of Knox and Maroondah, to develop an integrated approach to improving the skill and knowledge base in the area;
• Partnering with other Interface Councils in Melbourne to research and develop achievable and affordable strategies to address the needs of children, young people and their families who live in Interface communities;

• Development of a Learning Communities Strategy, which provides a wide range of strategies to support a living and learning community within the Shire. Some significant achievements include:
  o implementation of the VISTA program, which trains and supports young people to develop leadership skills;
  o Career Development Plan, which supports residents across a wide age range to access information and support to further their skills;
  o Establishment of Community Links across the whole municipality, which enable residents to access a range of information at strategic venues;
  o Establishment of links across all aspects of Council’s work, including early childhood development, youth services and aged and disability services.

6.3 KEYS TO SUCCESS

We have identified a number strategies and approaches which have been the most successful in beginning to address the issues which face the community. These include:

• **Understanding and recognising the importance of investing in the early years:** Our experience in the Best Start partnership in the Upper Yarra and Healesville areas has resulted in positive engagement with a number of vulnerable and disengaged families. Positive outcomes have been achieved - increased participation in kindergarten and primary school and attendance at maternal and child health and improved literacy in primary school. However, the long-term and entrenched nature of disadvantage in our community means that to achieve changes in the education and skill levels of current and future generations is a long term task and requires long term adequate resources from all levels of government. Our Best Start program now receives just $40,000 per year, which is simply insufficient.

• **Partnerships with business, education sector, community sector and the community:** The LLN has the potential to work across these sectors. However, to achieve the positive outcomes for young people that are required, adequate resources are necessary.

• **Development of alternative and flexible education programs:** The experience of the community houses in the Shire, particularly the Upper Yarra Community House and Morrison House, has indicated that the flexible approach to working with disengaged young people in non-institutional environments and small groups enables young people to achieve positive outcomes in education and employment. There is a need to address the barriers to effective partnering with schools to
better use these resources. These barriers include funding models for schools and the need to work with schools to assist them to recognise the value of alternative educational approaches.

Better use of technology is also important and can assist to improve flexibility in educational programs and training. Young people are competent in the use of technology – this is largely an untapped resource.

- **Understanding the importance of investing in preventive programs and primary care services for young people**: There is a lack of coordination in the planning, funding and delivery of integrated services for young people. Training and education are part of the range of needs of young people. As with the early years, an integrated approach to service delivery is required, to enable young people to develop and reach their potential. Local Government is committed to working with State and Federal Governments to address this issue.

- **Infrastructure**: Public transport is central for young people’s access to education, employment, training and social connectedness. Without an adequate system in the Shire, we cannot address the barriers to higher education.
7 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

These recommendations for action have emerged from our experience within the Shire over the past eight years, consultation with local schools and education providers, other service providers, business, parents and young people. They are consistent with the feedback and submissions which Council has made to the State and Federal Governments through the Interface Councils.

Recommendation One

That the State Government provide additional resources to neighbourhood houses and other adult education providers based in community settings to provide VCAL and other alternative courses for vulnerable young people and others who are at risk of disengagement or have already disengaged from the school system. This includes:

- support for transporting young people to these programs;
- incorporating these programs into the planning and delivery of education programs in the Region; and
- providing specialist counselling support for young people and their families to support them in participating in these programs.

Recommendation Two

That the State Government review funding of schools with a view to improving resources for vulnerable young people and their families.

Recommendation Three

That the State Government, in partnership with the Federal Government, fund youth enterprises on a recurrent basis. This enterprises need to be linked with traineeships and apprenticeships and promote and support innovation, skill development, training and participation in employment.

Recommendation Four

That the State Government provide resources for transport, including meeting the cost of and access to public transport, to disadvantaged young people who are experiencing difficulties within a traditional school setting.
Recommendation Five

That the State Government implement the recommendations of the Interface Councils in relation to young people, presented in 2006. (These are included here as separate recommendations).

Recommendation Six

That the State Government supports and funds generalist youth support and counselling services for young people in Interface municipalities, on the basis of 1 EFT per 3,000 young people aged 10 – 24 years. These resources need to be recurrent and focussed on universal services and early intervention.

Estimated cost of implementation: $10,244,864 (over four years)

Recommendation Seven

That the State Government funds Adolescent Health Teams to be located in Interface municipalities. These teams would provide primary health services and comprise, at a minimum, the following:

- Family and youth counselling;
- Youth worker;
- Community health nurse, with specialist skills in working with adolescents;
- Health promotion and prevention strategies and programs;
- Case management capacity to work with young people with complex care needs; and
- After hours services provision.

Estimated cost of implementation: $9,447,796 (over four years)

Recommendation Eight

That the State Government adequately funds a range of prevention and early intervention strategies to support young people to remain engaged at school and to improve the educational achievements of young people who live in Interface areas. These strategies need to:

- Focus on all young people within Interface schools, but particularly those in Years 5 – 9;
- Be located within Interface municipalities;
- Provide alternative curriculum options;
- Provide case work support and counselling for young people;
• Engage with parents, providing individual and parenting support, as well as linking parents to the school community;

• Build community capacity, acknowledging that when communities, families and schools work together with young people, young people are more likely to stay connected with their community and their education;

• Provide subsidies to meet the costs of attending school;

• Develop and monitor a fund to meet the costs of post-secondary education for young people who cannot afford it; and

• Develop young people’s participation in schools, in areas such as a negotiated curriculum, activity in governance and accreditation for student involvement in community projects.

*Estimated cost of implementation:* $15,331,164 (over four years)

**Recommendation Nine**

That the State Government resources the provision of locally-based, youth-specific mental health services, including:

• Crisis outreach;

• Multi-disciplinary staff, including youth-friendly GPs, case workers, psychologists and consultant psychiatrists; and

• Youth-specific intake services in each region.

*Estimated cost of implementation:* $22,905,138 (over four years)

**Recommendation Ten**

That the State Government resources local partnerships that focus on local service development, planning and collaboration, using Best Start as a model. These partnerships need to be facilitated by Local Government. Participation of State Government agencies, such as schools and mental health services, need to be mandated and incentives for participation provided to independent agencies, such as recreation services, community health, not-for-profit community agencies, local businesses and training institutions. The focus of these partnerships would be a collaborative approach between young people, their families, schools and services providers to:

• Develop a locally responsive service system;

• Develop Youth Plans for each municipality;

• Identify the gaps and duplications in service delivery;
• Develop an effective model for service coordination;
• Develop an integrated approach to managing entry points to the service system for young people;
• Agree on a common approach to information provision and dissemination for young people, in order to support them to negotiate the service system; and
• Develop programs and services which address identified needs.

Estimated cost of implementation: $7,200,000 (over four years)

Recommendation Eleven

That the State Government fully funds the development of integrated Youth Plans for each municipality. These plans would:

• Be developed with young people;
• Be developed in collaboration with State and Federal government agencies, other relevant service providers, local businesses, local communities and young people;
• Focus on the current and projected service infrastructure that is required to meet current and projected need;
• Acknowledge the need for a continuum of care from the early years through to adulthood; and
• Foster the development of a robust local service system, built on networks and partnerships.

Estimated cost of implementation: $450,000

Recommendation Twelve

That the State Government develops policy directions and strategies which include a focus on the middle years (pre-adolescence to adolescence) – young people aged 9 – 14 years. These need to acknowledge the importance of:

• The significant continuing brain development which occurs for young people;
• The long-term negative impact that risk-taking behaviour, such as alcohol abuse and drug taking, has on brain development and social skills;
• Providing a continuum of care for children and young people, particularly prevention and early intervention services;
• Providing and supporting healthy and positive relationships and connections for young people within the family, school and the community;
- Engaging with young people to participate in service development and community life;
  - Promoting a positive image of young people in the community; and
- Strong communities in fostering achievement for young people.

**Recommendation Thirteen**

That the State Government provides funding to house infrastructure for youth services and programs. This may be in the form of youth hubs or may be a component of a multi-purpose facility together with other uses.

*Estimated cost of implementation:* This component of the package has not been costed.

**Recommendation Fourteen**

That the State and Federal Governments provide adequate resources to meet the needs of the more disadvantaged young people in the community: ATSI, CALD, particularly refugee young people. These resources need to focus on:

- Identifying the specific needs of these young people; and
- Working with these young people, their families and specific communities to develop services and approaches which will address their particular needs.

*Estimated cost of implementation:* $2,001,604 (over four years)
8 LIST OF ATTACHMENTS

Marston, G., Morgan, I., Murphy, J., (2003), Human Service Gaps at the Interface between urban and rural, Centre for Applied Research, RMIT: Melbourne, Australia

n.l.t. consulting pty ltd (2006), Staying connected: solutions for addressing service gaps for young people living at the Interface, Interface Councils of Melbourne


Upper Yarra Community House (2008), Submission to the Education and Training Committee of the Parliament of Victoria, Inquiry into Geographical Differences in the Rate in which Victorian Students Participate in Higher Education, Upper Yarra Community House
REFERENCES

Centre for Adolescent Health (2005), *Investing in Young People Getting Back on Track*, a submission for funding prepared by Hume City Council, Dianella Community Health and Sunbury Community Health


Fuller, Andrew (2003), *Programs that Promote Resilience in Communities – at key developmental stages*, www.andrewfuller.com.au


Marston, G., Morgan, I., Murphy, J., (2003), *Human Service Gaps at the interface between urban and rural*, Centre for Applied Research, RMIT: Melbourne, Australia

n.l.t. consulting pty ltd (2006), *Staying connected: solutions for addressing service gaps for young people living at the Interface*, Interface Councils of Melbourne


Rogers, R. and Moore, T. (2003), *The Early Years Project: Refocussing community based services for young children and their families: A Literature Review*, Centre for Community Child Health, Royal Children’s Hospital, Melbourne in partnership with Good Beginnings Australia, funded by The R.E. Ross Trust


