South West RYAN

1. Who are the South West RYAN?

The South West Regional Youth Affairs Network represents the youth sector of the five shires of Glenelg, Southern Grampians, Moyne, Corangamite and Warrnambool City. Members include representatives from local government, youth networks, LLENs and PCPs, state government departments and Victoria Police, as well as key youth organisations and educational institutions.

2. Purpose and aims of the SW RYAN:

The key priorities established by the SW RYAN over the past year include:

- Ensure youth perspectives are included in consultations and in project development of Transport Connections
- Advocate that homelessness remains on the government agenda and support local initiatives
- Support educational opportunities for young people (under 16) who are disengaged from school
- Encourage local government to recognise the value and importance of youth
- Advocate for the delivery of accessible and appropriate youth services across all regions of the South West
- Focus on developing effective and meaningful youth engagement and participation

3. Collective overview of issues regarding "geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in Higher Education"

- Economic
  i. Youth Allowance requirements
  ii. Transport access and costs
  iii. Cost of accommodation

- Educational
  iv. Limited options for further study in regional university campuses
  v. Lack of subjects available in VCE limiting options
  vi. Lack of recognition of VCAL for university entry
  vii. Lower parental aspirations

- Social
  viii. Isolation from family and friends
  ix. Adjustment to metropolitan culture

- Career opportunities
  x. Limited understanding of career development options or pathways eg. from TAFE

4. Ways forward?

- Lobby Federal Government for logical and sustainable changes to the Youth and Accommodation Allowance (e.g. immediate access to an unmeans tested Youth Allowance where study is undertaken >100km from home)
• Subsidies for transport costs and access where relevant to school bus systems for post school students as of right rather than only where excess capacity is available

• A study of student housing models internationally — in the context of increased costs, diverse student groups, and safety concerns

• Career education programs in schools that focus not just on career outcomes but on individual realistic pathways (e.g. via TAFE - some models exist but not universally applied)

• Support structures embedded into metropolitan higher education institutions similar to that for international students (“Rural Student Office”)
Parliamentary Inquiry into "geographical differences in the rate in which Victorian students participate in Higher Education"

Actual Case Study for presentation by the SWRYAN

My name is Daniel. I am nineteen years old. I finished year twelve in 2006, and deferred for a year so I could have a break from studying, but also mainly to earn enough money to qualify for independent Youth Allowance. I had to take the year off to qualify as independent because if I applied for non-independent Youth Allowance, my claim would have been denied as, based on my parents income I would be ineligible. I worked in the local supermarket, serving customers, stocking shelves and so on, and by the end of my time there I had earned the approximately $18,000 required to be counted as independent. In February 2008 I shifted to Melbourne from Port Fairy, moving out of the family home where I had lived with my mother, father, and two sisters. Port Fairy makes for about a four hour drive from Melbourne, and in today’s climate of high petrol prices, heading home for a weekend is rare for a university student. My two (twin) sisters have just completed School in 2007 and got into university places, one in Melbourne and one in a close regional university at Warrnambool. They have both deferred and are both currently at home working 2 to 3 jobs to save for University next year.

Currently, my parents assist me by paying the rent. Rent here costs a lot, especially for students without any income. The rent on my share house is $650 a month, and I tend to spend between $60 and $70 a week on groceries. Because of the 18 month earning period, I am not able to apply for Youth Allowance until mid May 2008. I hope that, once I start getting Youth Allowance, along with supplementary income from a casual/part time job, I can be almost 100% independent. My savings dried up about four weeks ago, and since then my parents have been putting extra money in my account so I can get groceries, petrol and have a phone to keep in contact etc. I’m realistic, at the moment I don’t spend money or go out very much, I’m more focused on making ends meet at the moment. I am enjoying university although it is a big change from school in the country. I currently live in a share house, with three girls. It’s very close to university, which is great. I can save quite a bit on petrol, only driving to the supermarket, or to visit family and friends.

Looking for work has also appeared to be quite difficult. The Youth Allowance allows you to earn around $240 a fortnight as well, (before it is reduced) but for a casual job, that turns out to be around eight to twelve hours a week, and my experience so far has shown that to be a negative
to prospective employers. In comparison to the country, too, the workforce here seems to be a lot more competitive. I have applied for maybe around fifteen jobs, and only heard back from four, to be told that they didn’t have a place for me. I miss my family, and the things that just come with being at home. The most difficult things about moving to the city are probably learning to navigate your way around, being a long way from home, family and friends and also, currently, trying to find a job that’s accessible, and flexible with my studies.

I believe that life will get a bit easier when the Youth Allowance starts. It’s a good scheme but students should not have to wait 18 months to apply from the time they finish school. The costs at the beginning are huge with bond, rent, books, furniture etc. Maybe something like petrol vouchers or grocery vouchers would also help many struggling students get by. Rent and housing is a major issue, and something that I don’t look forward to having to do again at the end of this year. I think something needs to be done to make university more accessible to rural students, both in terms of ENTER scores and places, but also financial assistance.