A response to the Rural and Regional Committee Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Disadvantage and Inequity in Rural and Regional Victoria

Victorian Rural Youth Services
30 April 2010

Dear Committee

Re: Submission Response to the Inquiry into Extent and Nature of Disadvantage and Inequity in Rural and Regional Victoria

It is with pleasure that we present to you a joint submission in response to the above inquiry from the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria and Rural Youth Services Victoria.

Should you have any queries regarding the content of this submission please do not hesitate to contact Jen Rose, Manager Policy and Projects, Youth Affairs Council of Victoria on 9267 3722, or Gavan Thomson, Chair, VRYS Steering Committee on 5421 1624.

Regards,

Georgie Ferrari       Gavan Thomson
CEO          Chair
Youth Affairs Council of Victoria.     Victorian Rural Youth Services
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Introduction

Youth Affairs Council of Victoria

The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) is the peak body representing the youth sector in Victoria. YACVic provides a means through which the youth sector and young people voice their opinions and concerns in regards to policy issues affecting them. YACVic works with and makes representations to government and serves as an advocate for the interests of young people, workers with young people and organisations that provide direct services to young people. YACVic also promotes and supports the participation of young people in debate and policy development areas that most affect them. YACVic’s resources are primarily directed towards policy analysis and development, research and consultation and to meeting the information, networking, education and training needs of our constituency.

Victorian Rural Youth Services

Victorian Rural Youth Services (VRYS) is an initiative developed by representatives from rural youth services in partnership with the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria. The VRYS is steered by a committee of representatives from a range of rural youth services and is seeking to address the clear need for improved information, support and advocacy for rural young people and youth services. The initiative is concerned with bringing a specific policy advocacy and sector development focus to issues impacting on young people and youth services in Rural Victoria.

Addressing the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry

YACVic and Victorian Rural Youth Services will address the terms of reference of the Inquiry of most relevance to disadvantage experienced by young people in rural and regional Victoria.

Examine current evidence of disadvantage in rural and regional Victoria with a view to identifying the social groups most affected by disadvantage:

That young people in rural communities around Victoria face specific disadvantage in relation to a broad range of wellbeing indicators and in terms of accessing important opportunities in education, employment and support is well documented. Previous inquiries conducted by this Parliamentary Committee (formerly the Rural and Regional Services
Development Committee) have provided detailed information illustrating this experience of disadvantage.

This Committee’s 2006 *Inquiry into Retaining Young People in Rural Towns and Communities* resulted in a thorough final report examining a range of factors influencing the decision of young people to leave rural communities. The report highlights disadvantage experienced by rural young people in relation to:

- access to post secondary education and training (including the issue of disproportionately high deferral rates for higher education);¹
- employment opportunities; ²
- access to housing; ³
- access to public transport; ⁴
- access to health and wellbeing services; ⁵
- experiences of discrimination and exclusion on the basis of difference (for example, experiences of homophobic or racist bullying).⁶

Disadvantage experienced by young people in rural and regional Victoria was also noted by the Committee’s 2009 *Inquiry into Regional Centres of the Future*. The report of this Inquiry notes a number of concerns raised by YACVic to the Committee, including:

‘the impact of drought on access by young people to education; health issues; deferral rates for higher education; the impact of poor public transport networks on young people’s quality of life; and gaps in services for young people, for example in relation to counselling, peer support programs, outreach services and confidentiality.’¹¹

The report of the *Inquiry into Regional Centres of the Future* stressed that addressing disadvantage that compromised the liveability of rural areas for young people was central to the viability of these communities: ‘the issue of developing regional centres into places where young people want to live, must be an important facet of any efforts towards regional strategic planning.’¹²

In identifying those social groups most affected by disadvantage in rural Victoria, the Committee needs to closely consider the needs and experiences of young people. This is essential not only in terms of improving the health, wellbeing, educational and economic outcomes for young people in rural areas, but key to ensuring the sustainability of these communities into the future.

Identify any gaps and weaknesses in methods for measuring, recording and capturing information on disadvantage and inequity in rural and regional Victoria

This submission argues that there is currently a significant gap in the capturing, recording and dissemination of information on disadvantage and inequity for young people in rural and regional Victoria. This gap has arisen primarily because for the last thirteen years there has been no funding available, for advocacy specifically focussed on the circumstances of rural young people and for the support and advocacy needs of rural youth services to be mapped, analysed and met. It is important to note that this period of inactivity is in direct contrast to the period from 1984 to 1997.

The history of rural youth advocacy and support organisations in Victoria is patchy. In the period 1984 to 1997 there was considerable government support for the rural youth sector at the advocacy and organisational development level. Rural youth service information, support and advocacy services were provided across rural Victoria first by the Rural Sector Unit, which sat within YACVic. This then became the Victorian Country Youth Affairs Network, finally becoming incorporated as the Victorian Country Youth Service. In the mid 1990s this organisation had an annual budget of $400,000 (in then dollars), and employed workers in all rural regions of the state. It also published a regular newsletter “The Bush Telegraph” and a journal; “The Journal”.

During this period these advocacy organisations were able to provide an invaluable service to rural young people, rural youth services and to government in gathering and providing information about the status and needs of rural young people and in supporting rural youth services, agencies and workers. In 1997 the Victorian Country Youth Service (VCYS) ceased to be funded by the state government and with no other resources had to disband. Since 1997 there has not been a specific rural youth sector organisation to do this work.3

In 2008 rural youth service workers began meeting to address the clear need for improved information, support and advocacy for rural youth services. These workers were able to point to the invaluable work undertaken by youth advocacy and support organizations working for young people in the Indigenous, Disability, Same Sex Attracted and Migrant areas and saw a clear need to support rural young people and rural youth services as a specific group with clear and distinct circumstances, challenges and needs.

In late 2009 rural youth services and workers in partnership with YACVic, re-established a rural support and advocacy initiative, called Victorian Rural Youth Services (VRYS). VRYS aims to advocate for and support rural youth and rural youth services through gathering

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3 A comprehensive archive of Victorian Country Youth Service documents and resources is available on the website http://uob-community.ballarat.edu.au/~iwright/vcys/
up-to-date information, to then use in policy advocacy and sector development activities. Currently VRYS, through its auspicing organisation YACVic, is seeking funding from the Department of Regional Development to employ a worker to re-commence this important role.

Identify the key factors of disadvantage and inequity in rural and regional Victoria, such as access to education, health care, employment opportunities, housing affordability and transport;

Many of the factors relating to disadvantage and inequity for rural young people in Victoria were examined by the 2006 Inquiry into Retaining Young People in Rural Towns and Communities and are covered extensively in the report of this inquiry. (Ref 3.) Disadvantage and inequity exist for rural young people relating to each of the factors referred to in this question. This submission also identifies two additional factors leading to disadvantage; discrimination and exclusion, and locational poverty and isolation. The circumstances relating to each of these factors are summarised below.

i) Access to education
There is considerable evidence of rural and regional disadvantage for young people in access to education and training. Generally fewer rural students are retained in school in comparison to metropolitan students. The Australian Clearing House for Youth Studies found that in 2001 the proportions of 16-year-olds in full-time education in Australia were:

- In remote areas: 62.1%
- In populated inland areas: 85%
- In populated coastal areas: 83%
- In regional cities: 84%
- In non-metropolitan areas Australia-wide: 82.7%
- In metropolitan areas Australia-wide: 87.4%
- In Australia as a whole: 84.2%.  

The State of Victoria’s Young People report released in 2008 by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development also recorded the stark difference between destinations of year 12 completers in metropolitan versus rural settings:

‘There were considerable differences in destinations of Year 12 completers by place of residence. For example, 66.1 per cent of completers from inner east Melbourne went on to university while only 31 per cent of completers in Gippsland did so. Young

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4 The Australian Clearing House for Youth Studies, accessed Sep 2008, Youth Facts and Stats, Rural and Isolated Youth,
http://www.acys.info/youth_facts_and_stats/design_extras/focus/rural_and_isolated_youth.
people in rural Victoria were more likely to commence apprenticeships and traineeships (e.g. 15.2 per cent of Gippsland leavers) while metropolitan young people were less likely to do this (e.g. 1.1 per cent inner Melbourne). Rates of completers seeking employment were higher in rural Victoria than metropolitan Victoria.\(^5\)

YACVic and a selection of the non-metropolitan Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) across Victoria have funded a longitudinal study being conducted by the Centre for Post-Compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning at the University of Melbourne surveying regional school completers who had deferred a university place. The report *Deferring a University Offer in Regional Victoria* released in May 2009, reported that:

‘[a] trend of increasing regional disadvantage is evident in the pattern of rising rates of deferral amongst regional school completers, not just in Victoria but in other Australian states. In 2007, 15.7% of regional Victorian school completers deferred a place at university, two and a half times the rate of deferral found amongst metropolitan students. Moreover, cost-related factors and financial barriers are prominent in the reasons given by these young people for deferring a place at university.’\(^6\)

**ii) Access to health care and health status**

Rurality is identified in many western countries as being associated with poorer health status for young people. In Victoria, the School Focused Youth Service, funded by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, lists “rurality” as a risk factor for youth wellbeing.\(^7\)

Although there does not appear to be any detailed information available on the health status of Victorian rural young people, the Australian Clearing House for Youth Studies identified that young people living in rural and remote areas in Australia tend to have poorer health and mental health than young people living in metropolitan areas. This is due to a combination of cultural, lifestyle and service access factors.


\(^6\) Polesel, J., (2009). *Deferring a University Offer in Regional Victoria*. Centre for Post-Compulsory Education and Lifelong Learning, University of Melbourne, Local Learning and Employment Network and Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, p.3.

Amongst the many indicators of poorer health status for rural youth, the following data from a 2008 report by the Australian Clearing House for Youth Studies is revealing:

- Young people from rural and remote areas have higher rates of regular smoking than young people in metropolitan areas.
- Levels of teenage motherhood are much higher in rural areas as indicated by the rates of hospitalisation for pregnancy and childbirth amongst young women (per 100,000): inner regional: 9,363, outer regional and remote areas: 14,173, major cities: 6,466.
- Youth death rates due to external causes of injury and poisoning (per 100,000): rural areas: 57.4, remote areas: 99.4, metropolitan: 37.6.
- The rate of hospitalisations for external causes of injury (per 100,000): inner regional: 5,716, outer regional and remote areas: 8,780, major cities: 4,198.
- Rural youth were: 1.7 times more likely to die from alcohol consumption than urban youths, 1.9 times as likely to be admitted to hospital as a result of an alcohol-fuelled assault, and 1.5 times as likely to be the victim of alcohol-caused violence than urban youths. Causes of death due to high-risk drinking included car crashes, violent assaults, falls and suicide.
- Rural young people visit dentists less frequently, have higher levels of extractions but fewer fillings than metropolitan youth.
- Youth suicide rates are higher in rural and remote areas compared to metropolitan (per 100,000): rural: 8.8, remote: 24.1, metropolitan: 6.4.  

The Inquiry into Retaining Young People in Rural Towns and Communities also found that there was a service gap in rural Victoria in the provision and suitability of health services for younger people.  

Access to health services in general and mental health services in particular was also identified in The State of Victoria’s Young People report as problematic for rural young people.  

With regard to mental health services, the report stated that: 

‘research suggests there is a lack of access to, and availability of, mental health services, especially specialist services, in rural areas. The ability of young people in rural communities to access services is limited by many factors, including: stigma, lack of anonymity, logistical difficulties (cost, unavailability of

service in local area, limited availability of transport), lack of acknowledgment of mental health issues, self-reliance and myths indicating that mental illness is a form of insanity.'

This report goes on to examine further one of the key access issues for rural young people; the risk of being stigmatised:

'Concerns about confidentiality and 'being known' are particularly important for young people living in rural areas, particularly for services that may be stigmatised such as sexual health or mental health services. Social visibility is higher in rural communities and the lack of anonymity also means that any social stigma follows a young person in all aspects of community life.'

iii) Employment opportunities

Before the impact of the global financial crisis, which has increased the levels of youth unemployment in rural Victoria, it had already been identified that rural young people were disadvantaged in the areas of employment and income. The State of Victoria’s Young People report stated that:

'Rural residents aged 15–25 earn $22 less per week, on average, than their urban counterparts. There is general agreement that employment opportunities are fewer in rural areas and the types of work are more restricted. As a result of a range of factors, including economic restructuring, population decline in small towns and new technology, rural jobs have declined in recent decades, especially for young people. There is also significant underemployment among rural youth due to casualisation. The lack of employment opportunities and casualisation of the rural workforce has direct impacts on young people’s income. Incomes are lower in rural areas and poverty rates are higher. In addition, rural young people have reported that financial assistance for them is severely lacking.'

iv) Housing affordability

The Inquiry into Retaining Young People in Rural Towns and Communities found that:

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12 Department of Education and Early Childhood Development & Department of Planning and Community Development, (2008), op.cit. p.53.
13 Department of Education and Early Childhood Development & Department of Planning and Community Development, (2008), op.cit. p.89
'There were serious concerns regarding the availability and affordability of accommodation for young people in rural areas.'\textsuperscript{14}

From this finding it was recommended that:

‘The State Government undertake a detailed assessment of the private rental accommodation market for rural young people as a matter of priority to determine what action, if any, should be taken to address concerns regarding housing availability for rural young people.’\textsuperscript{15}

These circumstances were also recognised in \textit{The State of Victoria’s Young People}:

‘Recent research has identified that young people in rural areas of Australia have very different experiences of homelessness when compared with young people in metropolitan areas. Young people in rural areas are particularly affected by difficulties in finding employment and, often expensive, rental housing markets that offer sub-standard housing. The research suggests that there are limited support services for young people in rural areas. However, many young homeless people have a strong sense of community, with valued friendships and support networks, and considerable priority is placed on staying in a familiar environment rather than moving to metropolitan regions.’\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{v) Transport}

Lack of transport for rural young people clearly places them at a disadvantage across the board in terms of social, community, educational, training and employment opportunities. \textit{The State of Victoria’s Young People} report describes the transport situation facing young people in rural Victoria.

Research suggests that a lack of transport for rural and regional young people impacts on their opportunities to work, access to education and training, access to health and other services and their ability to participate in sport, social and community activities. The lack of public transport in rural areas means that private vehicles are the most common form of transportation. However, young people who cannot drive, or who do not have access to a vehicle, are dependent on others. For young people of legal driving age, the increased cost of petrol,


\textsuperscript{15} Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee (2006). \textit{Inquiry into Retaining Young People in Rural Towns and Communities: Final Report}. Recommendation 42. p.236.

\textsuperscript{16} Department of Education and Early Childhood Development & Department of Planning and Community Development, (2008), \textit{op.cit.} p.93.
together with the cost of owning a car and the higher insurance premiums can make car ownership unaffordable. Rural young people may need to travel further and therefore use more fuel. The cost of petrol is also usually higher in most rural areas.\footnote{Department of Education and Early Childhood Development & Department of Planning and Community Development, (2008), \textit{op.cit.} pp. 173-174.}

The report then also notes the following impacts of lack of transport on the social and community activities of rural young people.

A Wellington and East Gippsland rural youth transport survey received over 800 responses from young people in East Gippsland and Wellington shires. Nearly two-thirds (63.2 per cent) of the respondents claimed that lack of transport stopped them from doing something that they would like to do. For example, approximately 50 per cent said lack of transport stopped them from going out i.e. to town or parties, to the beach or out of town, 21 per cent said it stopped them from visiting friends, 13 per cent from shopping and approximately 12 per cent from sport and recreation activities.\footnote{Ibid.}

The impacts on rural young people of poor access to transport on education, training and work, is also noted in this report:

`A study of transport in Warrnambool found that young people had difficulty undertaking education and employment opportunities. Students found getting to work placements difficult and their options for relevant work experience were limited. A lack of transport often stopped young people from taking up apprenticeships. For university students, the lack of frequent public transport and services that aligned with university hours meant the only form of transport was driving or getting lifts with others.` \cite{19}

\textbf{vi) Discrimination and exclusion - a further factor related to disadvantage and inequity for rural young people.}

Although social cohesion is often a feature and enhancing factor in rural communities the other side of the coin can be discrimination and exclusion. A number of analyses and commentaries point to the negative impact that discrimination and exclusion can have on vulnerable young people in rural settings. For example, "social stigma" is identified in The

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Disadvantage and Inequity in Rural and Regional Victoria} March 2010 | Page 12 of 36
**State of Victoria’s Young People** as a risk for rural young people who need to access sexual health or mental health services in the following terms:

’Social visibility is higher in rural communities and the lack of anonymity also means that any social stigma follows a young person in all aspects of community life.’

Of course it must be noted that there is no causal relationship between social visibility and lack of anonymity, and stigma.

The *Inquiry into Retaining Young People in Rural Towns and Communities* also identified the sometimes unhappy experiences of young people growing up in rural communities as a factor and barrier in retaining young people in rural Victoria. The final report of the Inquiry noted that:

‘Given the tendency for rural communities to be less heterogeneous in their composition than other parts of Australia, these communities can be conservative and promote cultural values that can exclude people. In particular, the Committee heard evidence that there are significant issues of personal acceptance and perceptions of physical safety for:

- Indigenous people;
- homosexual, bisexual and same-sex attracted young people;
- immigrants (particularly from non-English speaking backgrounds) and refugees; and
- people with obvious visible differences, such as other lifestyle choices or variations in personal presentation.’

The report also stressed the need to address the, ‘(p)rejudices that exist in rural communities with regard to the value of youth as community contributors.’

The detrimental effects of cultures that may not be inclusive or accepting of young people in general and young people who are “different” include:

- Considerable intolerance and disrespect shown to young people in general and particularly to young people who have the need to show that they are different or

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20 Department of Education and Early Childhood Development & Department of Planning and Community Development, (2008), *op.cit.* p.53


rebellious. This can result in young people being excluded from public life and branded mainly as troublemakers or nuisances.

- Little understanding of young people’s needs, circumstances, issues, or interests in the provision of general health and welfare services through generic community health, hospital, general medical practice and other health and welfare services and an inadequate provision if any of youth specific health and wellbeing services, programs, and support groups.

- Educational settings with entrenched cultures and practices which provide unsafe, unsupportive and often hostile environments where bullying and harassment are unchecked resulting in negative and traumatic experiences for young people, in particular those who are “different” to the dominant culture.

- Little attempt made by the business sector, local governments or other authorities to promote shires and communities as desirable destinations for people in their late teens or twenties to move to and live. Such promotions tend to be directed at older age groups.

- Discriminatory practices towards young people applying for rental accommodation.

A number of studies point to the particular impact that discriminating and excluding cultures can have on same-sex-attracted young people growing up in rural settings. Rural same-sex-attracted and other young people exposed to rural homophobic, racist or other discrimination and bullying have increased risks of self harm, suicide, alcohol and substance abuse and mental health problems.

The Australian Government report *Mental Health in Rural and Remote Communities* states that:

> ‘Same-sex-attracted youth in rural and remote communities may face additional challenges through a lack of acceptance, support and information about safe-sex and gay relationships, as well as through social and geographic isolation. For some individuals, such factors may contribute to depression, substance use and suicidal behaviour. Some young people may feel the need to ‘escape’ to a more supportive and less isolated community, or seek support and information via the Internet.’

Another report, *The Rural Mural: Sexuality and Diversity in Rural Youth* also highlighted that:

> ‘A national survey of same-sex-attracted young people found in 2005 that rural same-sex-attracted young people felt less

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23 Commonwealth of Australia, Responsibility, (2005), *Mental Health in Rural and Remote Communities*
safe at social events and found it more difficult to access information about safe sex and they expressed greater feelings of isolation and a need to be more secret about their sexuality than metropolitan same-sex-attracted young people."24

It is important to note that adverse health and wellbeing impacts are not the result of young people’s sexual orientation *per se*. Rather they are the result of life experiences of two kinds:

- The damaging psychological and emotional effects on individuals of what can sometimes be daily experiences of discrimination and isolation.
- The additional difficulties young people perceive and/or actually face in gaining access to mental health and other services in rural areas that fully understand and can respond to their needs and issues.

**vi) Locational Poverty and isolation - a further factor related to disadvantage and inequity for rural young people.**

In general, rural Victorians are more socio-economically disadvantaged than metropolitan Victorians and, as mentioned above, poverty rates for rural young people are higher than for metropolitan young people. Across all rural regions in Victoria socio-economic mapping shows that many geographic localities (shires, towns and communities) exist with the highest levels of socio-economic disadvantage. In Victoria, 13 of the 20 postcodes with the highest disadvantage according to the Jesuit Social Services’ 2004 mapping were in rural Victoria.25 Locational disadvantage clearly affects many rural young people adversely. Within poor localities the impact of poverty, reduced opportunities, poor access to services, poor access to transport, training and participatory opportunities clearly leads to young people leading isolated and impoverished existences. Additional stressors on isolated rural young people in recent years include the persistent drought, the impact of the global financial collapse, the decline of many smaller rural towns and the mass exodus of other rural young people to regional and capital cities.

Identify the Geographical locations in rural and regional Victoria where disadvantage is most severe with a view to prioritising these areas for future action by Government

In 2007, Jesuit Social Services and Catholic Social Services Australia released the report *Dropping off the edge: the distribution of disadvantage in Australia*. Authored by Professor


Tony Vinson, the report identified the most disadvantaged areas in each State and Territory in Australia, according to a range of available indicators as listed below:

- Social distress:
  - Low family income
  - Rental stress
  - Home purchase stress
  - Lone person households

- Health:
  - Low birth-weight
  - Childhood injuries
  - Deficient immunisation
  - Disability/sickness support
  - Mortality/(life expectancy)
  - Mental health patients treated in hospitals/the community
  - Suicide

- Community safety:
  - Confirmed child maltreatment
  - Criminal convictions
  - Prison admissions
  - Domestic violence

- Economic indicators:
  - Unskilled workers
  - Unemployment
  - Long-term unemployment
  - Dependency ratio
  - Low mean taxable income
  - Computer use / access to internet

- Education:
  - Non-attendance at preschool
  - Incomplete education (17-24 year olds)
  - Early school leaving of local population
  - Post-schooling qualifications

Two approaches were taken in measuring the disadvantage of communities. Here we will focus on the outcomes of the first approach. The first approach identified those localities
with consistently high scores on the indicators. An analysis on this basis revealed ‘a very considerable degree of concentration of the State’s social disadvantage within a limited number of Victorian localities’. In relation to Victoria, 13 of the 20 most disadvantaged areas identified using this approach were in rural/regional Victoria. Eight of the ten most disadvantaged areas were also in rural or regional Victoria and are listed below:

- Berriwillock, approximately 350 km’s North West of Melbourne (Post Code 3531).
- Cabbage Tree Creek, approximately 400 km’s East of Melbourne, near Orbost (Post Code 3889).
- Korong Vale, approximately 230 km’s North West of Melbourne, near Wedderburn (Post Code 3520).
- Nowa Nowa, approximately 330 km’s East of Melbourne, between Bairnsdale and Orbost (Post Code 3887).
- Nyah West, approximately 370 km’s North West of Melbourne, near Mildura (Post Code 3595).
- Port Welshpool, Coastal town approximately 200kms South East of Melbourne (Post Code 3965).
- Thorpdale, approximately 140km’s South East of Melbourne, near Moe (Post Code 3835).
- Ultima, approximately 340 km’s North West of Melbourne, near Swan Hill (Post Code 3544).

This approach of identifying areas of disadvantage points to two ‘hot spots’ in rural Victoria experiencing significant disadvantage; areas in the North West and areas in East Gippsland. Of particular note is that 4 of the top 10 sites of disadvantage are in the North West area of Victoria. Nyah West and Ultima are both within the Swan Hill Shire. Berriwillock is in the neighbouring Buloke Shire and Korong Vale sits within Loddon Shire.

Whilst some of these areas do not have a high youth population compared to other townships, ensuring that young people have the support and opportunities they need to improve the retention of young people within these communities is still a significant issue. For example, the Loddon Shire Council Plan 2009-13 describes the demographic challenges they face. The Loddon Shire has a population of approximately 8,000 residents, and a median age 7 years higher than the state average. It also has a population gap in the 24 to 49 year age range which is underrepresented compared to state and regional averages. For this reason, Loddon Council ‘wishes to explore a

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number of strategies to improve the retention and development of young people within the municipality. (and) sees the retention and development of youth as critical to the future growth of social structures within the Loddon community.  

Service access in disadvantaged areas

Young people living in the North West of the State may have access to Local Government Youth Services; services run from local Community Health, Employment or Housing agencies; and in theory should have support through state-wide youth service models like Youth Connections or the School Focussed Youth Service. However, there are a range of youth services that do not appear at all in that region. Several of the more specialised youth mental health, homelessness and drug and alcohol services, which do not operate on a state-wide basis, are not available at all in the North West. For example, there is no provision of Reconnect, headspace, the Youth Substance Abuse Service or Youth Transitions services in the North West. A listing of these services can be found in Appendix B.

Shifts in disadvantage over time

The *Dropping off the edge* report also provides three maps, which illustrate disadvantaged areas as identified in three studies: ‘Unequal in Life’ (1999), ‘Community Adversity and Resilience’ (2004) and ‘Dropping off the edge: the distribution of disadvantage in Australia’ (2007). The maps reveal a significant shift over time, involving an increase in the total amount of areas of disadvantage and a marked increase in disadvantage over time in parts of the North West of the state. A copy of these maps is attached as Appendix A. It would seem a fair presumption that a key factor in this shift has been the impact of drought in Victoria.

Identify rural and regional areas of significant disadvantage and inequity that may be masked by the comparative prosperity of surrounding areas

Young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds (and with high needs) within rural local government areas which have on average medium or higher socio-economic status, are often unable to access services because they are not provided in their shire. These services are only available in local government areas of lower average socio-economic status. Three such government funded services are the Reconnect program (Federal) and the Youth Transitions and Best Start programs (State).

An example of the inequity and disadvantage that this causes comes from the Macedon Ranges Shire, which does not rate as socio-economically disadvantaged due to a preponderance of high income families in Mount Macedon and other parts of the shire.

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29 *Loddon Shire Council Plan 2009-2013.* p.3.
Young people from the socio-economically disadvantaged communities within the shire, of Lancefield, Romsey and Kyneton, have no access to the three programs named above which are not provided in the shire. It is worth noting here that one collection district (that is, areas in which ABS data is collected) within the Kyneton township is ranked socio-economically on the first decile, or most disadvantaged, in the state. In situations like this, where severely disadvantaged young people are missing out on services because their disadvantage is masked, there is a clear case of inequity.

It is obvious that even in the most affluent of rural communities there is a gradient of social advantage such that service access inequities exist when services are unavailable to any geographic population of young people. Where services are not provided on a needs basis or a means basis across all of rural Victoria then inequity and disadvantage will ensue in the areas of no service provision. The current mosaic of youth services clearly results in pockets of disadvantage and inequity.

A further gradient of disadvantage and inequity is in access to health and social services as well as access to education, employment and training opportunities for more remote young people. This gradient exists along the scale of rural remoteness. With the high numbers and proportions of young people in regional centres services and opportunities for young people which are in short supply or are provided on a regional or sub-regional basis must be located in the regional centres. Distance, lack of transport, population decline, lack of outreach, restricted availability, limited resources, lack of awareness and social isolation can all, individually or collectively, greatly reduce opportunities for young people living away from regional centres. Examples of this include:
- access to TAFE and VET courses;
- access to child and adolescent mental health services;
- access to student re-engagement and alternative setting courses;
- access to wellbeing programs and groups; and
- access to local government youth services.

**Examine current Government responses to rural and regional disadvantage**

A key factor influencing the level of inequity and disadvantage experienced by young people in some rural and regional areas of Victoria is the poor level of access they have to important services and opportunities. The provision of youth services in Victoria is ‘patchy’ and inconsistent. There is currently no over-arching policy framework relating to the provision of youth services in Victoria.

Whilst not specifically a response to rural and regional disadvantage, the *Vulnerable Youth Framework Discussion Paper (VYF)*, prepared by the Department of Human Services, the Department of Planning and Community Development and the Department of Education...
and Early Childhood Development, provides a significant opportunity to improve the way
youth services are planned and delivered in Victoria and enable young people to better
access locally based supports in a timely way.

YACVic has long called for a more coordinated youth services system that provides
seamless transitions along the service continuum from prevention and early intervention
through to secondary and tertiary responses. The development of the service system
along with a significant investment of resources in that system will ensure that youth
services are more responsive and can better meet the needs of vulnerable young people
across the State.

The VYF provides an exciting opportunity to address the fragmentation of the youth service
system and ensure better inter-departmental collaboration at a government level. The VYF
promotes a more integrated and coordinated generalist youth services system by:

- strengthening partnerships between community services and schools;
- promoting multidisciplinary approaches to address young people’s need
  holistically; and
- investing in workforce development and addressing gaps in the service
  system.

This will undoubtedly improve outcomes for young people in rural and regional Victoria.

The need for investment in the youth sector through the VYF

YACVic and Victorian Rural Youth Services supports the recommendations made by
KPMG, which was commissioned by the Department of Human Services and the then
Department for Victorian Communities to provide advice about the development of a more
integrated and coordinated generalist youth services system.30 KPMG recognised the
importance of further investment in the following areas to ensure young people could
receive timely support where youth services infrastructure is limited:

- Further investment in short-term counselling and support and school-linked
  supports;
- Improving the identification of young people with emerging needs and prioritising
  access of those young people to generalist youth services;

30 KPMG, (2006). Department of Human Services and Department for Victorian Communities Improving
Youth Service Responses in Victoria: Final Report. p.3.
Developing the skills of the [generalist youth services] workforce.\textsuperscript{31}

The key role of youth workers and youth services

Youth services are best described as ‘multi-dimensional’. Their critical value is in their capacity to engage young people and implement timely, strategic interventions at critical times to realise potential.\textsuperscript{32} Such critical times are not necessarily the onset of a problem or difficulty. They can be times where there is opportunity to develop skills, experiences and connections or to pursue personal or artistic expression. As such, the role of a youth worker can be preventative, it can be in providing an early intervention response to a young person or it can be in assisting a young person to navigate the service system or access a tertiary (crisis) response or support they may need.

Youth services play a critical role in coordinating and delivering prevention and early intervention strategies. As YACVic and the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) described in their 2006 report \textit{Who’s Carrying the Can? A report into youth service gaps in Victoria}:

‘Youth workers provide formal and informal services for young people, in groups or as individuals. These include advocacy, community development, referral, social education, health education, rehabilitation, participation programs, skills development (such as leadership skills)...and correctional services. Youth service providers also provide important advice to other organisations, agencies and different levels of government on the needs of young people.

Youth workers work directly with young people as their primary clients. They can act as managers of premises and services for government and non-government agencies. They also work in the areas of social policy formation, systemic advocacy, coordination and implementation, as well as in professional education, training and research. They also work to facilitate and advocate for stronger links between young people and their communities, for the voices of young people to be heard and to enhance young people’s civic engagement.

In Victoria, youth workers work in a variety of settings with young people. These include (but are not limited to) local governments, youth services and centres, family services, recreational services,

schools, juvenile justice centres, community health centres and churches. In addition to this type of generalist youth service provision, youth workers also work in secondary and tertiary services such as residential care units, homelessness services, drug and alcohol services, mental health services and employment assistance services."33

Investment in generalist youth support and youth worker roles is critical to ‘the development of coordinated and effective youth services that assist all vulnerable young Victorians at the time they most need support.’34

**Strengthening the relevance of the VYF for rural and regional youth services**

There are unique challenges and characteristics to service delivery in rural and regional Victoria. Whilst some regional areas are well serviced, in other areas services are sparse. Access to support can be hampered by distance and poor public transport networks, if any exist at all. The following are excerpts from *Who’s Carrying the Can? A report into youth service gaps in Victoria* relating to issues raised by rural and regional youth service providers:

- ‘The issue of access to generalist youth counselling is compounded for some rural and regional communities by geographic isolation. Some communities stated that there was no counsellor available to young people in their community at all. For example, one regional youth service provider explained that ‘there are no generalist youth workers in most of the region’”35

- ‘Service providers in rural and regional Victoria described the frustration of young people missing out on opportunities and important services because of a lack of transport options and a lack of funding to be able to arrange alternative transport options.”36

- ‘Access to health services in rural and regional Victoria was of particular concern in communities that

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34 Department of Human Services, Department of Planning and Community Development, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, (2008). *Vulnerable Youth Framework discussion paper*. p.iii
36 Ibid.
experienced high levels of sexual risk taking behaviour and teenage pregnancy.\textsuperscript{37}

- ‘Access to peer support programs can be more difficult in rural and regional Victoria.’\textsuperscript{38}

- ‘The majority of youth service providers in rural and regional Victoria who responded to the survey or participated in a forum raised a concern that outreach services were insufficiently resources and that more were urgently needed.’\textsuperscript{39}

It is critical that the Vulnerable Youth Framework clearly acknowledge the specific challenges and gaps in service availability in rural and regional Victoria. In order for the framework to have relevance in these communities, it must outline specific responses and initiatives to meet the needs of rural and regional communities in relation to service infrastructure, funding, supporting service coordination in geographically large areas and ensure rural young people can access alternative education and training options.

Identify priorities for action by Government to tackle key rural and regional disadvantage issues;

The following priorities are identified for action by Government to tackle key rural and regional disadvantages issues for young people.

i) Advocacy and Support for rural young people
As this submission seeks to highlight, there are many factors affecting rural young people that collectively make them a disadvantaged group. Advocacy and support for rural young people and rural youth services are presently under-resourced and underutilised. There is a pressing need for the government to resource the recently established Victorian Rural Youth Service within YACVic which has been established to act as an advocacy and support organisation for rural youth and rural youth services.

ii) Addressing health and wellbeing disadvantages

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{37} \textit{Ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{38} YACVic & VCOSS, (2006). \textit{op.cit.} p.20.
\item \textsuperscript{39} YACVic and VCOSS (2006). \textit{op.cit.} pp.19-21.
\end{itemize}
The marked health and wellbeing inequities between rural and metropolitan young people ought be a priority for government. Such inequities are best addressed through the provision of comprehensive community development, health promotion and primary health services that are rurally relevant, youth focused and locally available. Making rural youth health and mental health a priority would require a considerable investment in, and reform of, a rural youth services system that is currently tacked on to a number of government departments, programs and services and is poorly integrated, resourced and supported. Much of these priorities are taken up in the Vulnerable Youth Framework and the recommendation of the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Retaining Young People in Rural Towns and Communities. A comprehensive and well resourced adoption of the Vulnerable Youth Framework in rural Victoria would address many systemic problems and is a clear priority. Its adoption in rural settings in flexible and rurally sensitive ways needs the input and knowledge of rural service providers and rural young people.

Additionally there is a clear need for rural economic and social development and renewal strategies to be focused on the towns and communities in rural Victoria where poverty and isolation for young people is entrenched.

ii) Addressing service access and provision inequities
The shortage of health and welfare professionals and services in rural Australia is well known. Access for rural young people is clearly reduced by the undersupply of a range of key professionals, particularly the shortage of general medical practitioners, limits young people's access to a range of other services and programs, including such necessities as medical certificates and medical reports. This shortage combined with the general barriers young people face in accessing health and welfare services places rural young people at considerable disadvantage.

The Inquiry into Retaining Young People in Rural Towns and Communities thoroughly explored and made excellent recommendations in relation to, the service needs of rural young people. Of particular value are Recommendations 12 and 13 of the Report:

- Recommendation 12: ‘that the State Government systematically increase regional development initiatives in the following areas: Health service hubs; Mental health services; Rural youth workers; Childcare services; Transport; Education; and Youth-friendly public spaces and recreational activities,

- Recommendation 13: ‘that the State Government support the development of hubs for health and community services with the objective of enhancing service offerings, lowering the cost of provision and increasing user anonymity in order to
encourage young people to access services that are appropriate to them.’

Shortages in most health and welfare professions across rural Victoria impact negatively on young people and these shortages extend to youth services and youth service workers as well. The need for more generalist youth services in rural settings was recognised by the Inquiry into Retaining Young People in Rural Towns and Communities as a significant issue.\(^{40}\)

There are serious workforce issues that need addressing in rural youth services as a priority, including (but not limited to):

- recruitment and retention,
- skills development,
- career pathways, and
- employment terms and conditions.

A feature of the youth services provided by rural local governments is variability. The historic convention in Victoria is that local government is the sector that provides the majority of youth support, participation, access, cultural and recreational programs. This means that in rural settings (where local government resources can be limited, and the needs of local young people can go unrecognised) local youth services funded by local government or through local government funding submissions and auspicing can be minimal. With no established standard or level in place for local government youth service resourcing, young people in some rural local government areas have much less access to typical services than others. Addressing the need for youth services in rural areas is a priority in line with Recommendation 8 of the Inquiry into Retaining Young People in Rural Towns and Communities:

‘That the State Government addresses funding for youth oriented services in rural areas, through a model which reflects the higher cost of service delivery of youth programs in areas of low population density, with a view to ensuring continuity of service supply.’

iii) Addressing transport issues

In line with Recommendations 14 and 15 of the Inquiry into Retaining Young People in Rural Towns and Communities a priority for State Government is to renew and extend its commitment to improving public transport services and service interconnectivity in rural areas and, in conjunction with relevant Local Governments, investigate options for

\(^{40}\) Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee (2006). op.cit. S4.52,p.130.
increased use of community transport facilities for a full range of community needs so that young people can access education, training and leisure opportunities.

iv) Addressing education and training opportunities
The Inquiry into Retaining Young People in Rural Towns and Communities recognised the need for broad changes to increase the educational and training opportunities for rural young people. It made a detailed examination of the current educational and training situation in rural Victoria and made a total of 23 recommendations. The comprehensive and widespread scope of these recommendations indicates the possibilities for reform and improvement in these sectors. This raft of recommendations comprise no. 16, and nos 20 to 41 in the report. These recommendation include:

- increases to funding to expand services;
- improved flexibility, better clustering and coordination of services;
- increased awareness of options through more marketing, promotion and career events;
- enhanced career advice to young people and parents;
- improved relationships between career advisors and employers;
- improved data collection;
- better and earlier transition planning;
- more part-time employment opportunities through local public enterprises;
- more regional support staff;
- varied youth allowance for rural youth; and
- expansion of apprenticeship opportunities.

iv) Addressing discrimination and exclusion
Currently support programs for rural young people who are affected by discrimination and exclusion are inadequate or non-existent in rural settings. As mentioned earlier in this submission, such groups identified by the Inquiry into Retaining Young People in Rural Towns and Communities were:

- Indigenous people;
- homosexual, bisexual and same-sex attracted young people;
- immigrants (particularly from non-English speaking backgrounds) and refugees; and
- people with obvious visible differences, such as other lifestyle choices and variations in personal presentation.

There is a pressing priority to establish and resource local community programs that support rural young people whose wellbeing is affected by discrimination and exclusion. This priority is in line with Recommendation 7 of the Inquiry into Retaining Young People in Rural Towns and Communities:
‘That the State Government provides funding to expand the coverage of rural and regional programs aimed to address issues of discrimination and intolerance against people on the basis of race, gender, cultural differences or sexual practice.’

Investigate approaches in other jurisdictions to combat rural and regional disadvantage.

YACVic and VRYS would like to bring the following examples of approaches to combat disadvantage from other jurisdictions to the attention of the Committee.

‘Rural Proofing’ government policy

‘Rural Proofing’ is a British Government commitment that ensures that all policy makers consider rurality in decision-making. It recognises that on occasion the policy process and implementation across any government jurisdiction can inadvertently fail in rural locations, and it puts in place measures to prevent such failures. Its adoption in Victoria as a government priority would be a considerable step forward for rural young people.

The need for an approach like ‘rural proofing’ is noted by the Inquiry into Retaining Young People in Rural Towns and Communities which highlighted policy failure in rural contexts: ‘Policy approaches to service provision in rural areas can not be based on the standardised approaches used for metropolitan areas. Rural areas face significant challenges with regard to service provision as a result of the geographical separation of rural communities and individuals. For that reason a metropolitan model is unlikely to serve rural needs appropriately. This is particularly true where the cost of delivery of services to rural areas is compared with areas of high population density.’

In light of this, the Inquiry made the following finding (Finding 13):

‘Rural areas of Victoria have distinct geographical, social and economic characteristics. These characteristics often mean general policy processes fail to consider issues of distance and low population density, with negative impacts on service delivery and public administration. Greater attention is needed in policy planning and administration, to the specific needs and requirements of rural and regional Victoria.’

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Advocacy and Support for rural young people.
Both in other jurisdictions and in the history of this state, there have existed strong and effective services that provide advocacy and support for rural young people and rural youth services. Earlier in this submission, we described the previous existence of an effective rural youth advocacy and support program in Victoria. This provides an example of an approach that was well recognised and supported by previous state governments. Such an approach should supported again by funding the VRYS, as proposed earlier in this submission.

Targeted Youth Support
Targeted Youth Support is a British program which recognises that many young people at risk of poor outcomes (young people with additional needs) do not have their needs met by mainstream or specialist services in isolation, and as they often do not meet eligibility criteria for statutory services, they frequently do not get the balance of support and challenge they need. They often have multiple issues and needs, including: disruptive or anti-social behaviour; parental conflict or lack of parental support; involvement in or risk of offending; poor attendance or exclusion from school; experiencing bullying; special educational needs; disabilities; disengagement from education, training or employment post-16; poor nutrition; ill-health; substance misuse; anxiety or depression; housing issues; pregnancy and parenthood.

Targeted youth support is delivered collaboratively through a range of services, including: education welfare, behaviour support, Connexions, youth services, social services, drugs and alcohol, sexual health, mental health, housing support, school nurses, youth offending services; and through Positive Activities for Young People, the Young People’s Development Programme, Positive Futures, youth inclusion programmes, and the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy.\(^{44}\)

Joined up Mental Health Services - Headspace
The Federal government’s ‘headspace’ mental health service model now operates in a number of locations in Victoria but cannot be accessed by a large number of rural young people. As an innovative model seeking to address barriers to accessing mental health and other services by young people it has much to recommend it in rural settings both as a source of much needed additional services and as a model of access.

Recommendations

1. That the final report of this inquiry clearly identify rural young people as a social group experiencing serious disadvantage.

2. That the gaps in information about the circumstances of rural young people, their needs and access to support services be addressed.

3. That the advocacy and support needs of rural young people be addressed.

4. That the support needs of rural youth services be addressed.

5. That Victorian Rural Youth Services be resourced by State Government so that it can begin to address recommendations two to four of this submission.

6. That the Committee expressly seek advice from Indigenous Community Controlled Organisations, particularly in rural Victoria, to inform the committee’s understanding of disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Communities and young people in rural Communities.

7. That the report of this inquiry identify, and make recommendations to address, the disadvantage that rural young people experience in the areas of:
   a. Access to education
   b. Access to health care and health status
   c. Employment opportunities
   d. Housing affordability
   e. Transport
   f. Discrimination and Exclusion
   g. Locational Poverty and Isolation

8. That issues of inequity in services provision and access for rural young people (whether that inequity of access is due to entrenched locational disadvantage or is masked by the comparative prosperity of surrounding areas) be acknowledged in the final report of this inquiry and that the Committee make recommendations to address this disadvantage in a targeted way.
9. Based on the evidence that ‘hot spots’ of significant disadvantage exist in rural Victoria, with limited access to specialist youth support services, the Committee recommend an analysis of the extent of population needs and service provision as a priority. This analysis should seek to improve equity of access to services for geographically isolated young people with severe disadvantage even though they may not represent large populations. Service models to address access and equity issues for such smaller rural populations need to be further explored and developed to ensure that these vulnerable populations are not overlooked in the service planning and provision at regional and sub-regional levels.

10. That the inquiry acknowledges the value of the joined up cross-departmental policy approach captured in the Vulnerable Youth Framework Discussion Paper and recommends investment in the actions it proposes. Currently, there is no overarching policy framework from State Government to consolidate and drive the delivery of a youth services system in Victoria, allowing for ad-hoc, ‘patchy’ service delivery to vulnerable or disadvantaged young people.

11. That the Vulnerable Youth Framework be further developed to outline specific responses and initiatives to meet the needs of rural and regional communities in relation to service infrastructure, funding, supporting service coordination in geographically large areas and ensure rural young people can access alternative education and training options.

12. That the inquiry recommends that priority action be taken by government to address the following key rural and regional disadvantage issues:
   a. A lack of resources in advocacy and support for rural young people:
      ➢ There is a pressing need for the government to resource the recently established Victorian Rural Youth Service within YACVic which has been established to act as an advocacy and support organisation for rural young people and youth services.
   b. The marked health and wellbeing inequities between rural and metropolitan young people:
      ➢ Such inequities are best addressed through the provisions of comprehensive community development, health promotion and primary health services that are rurally relevant, youth focused and locally available.
   c. Service access and provision inequities for rural young people:
      ➢ The undersupply of health and welfare professionals and services in rural areas, combined with the general barriers young people face in accessing health and welfare services places young people at considerable disadvantage.

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d. Transport disadvantage experienced by rural young people:
  ➢ Government must review and extend its commitments to improving
    public transport services and service interconnectivity in rural
    areas. It must also, along with relevant Local Governments,
    investigate options for increased use of community transport
    facilities to assist young people to access education, training and
    leisure opportunities.

e. Access to education and training opportunities:
  ➢ The Inquiry into Retaining Young People in Rural Towns and
    Communities Final Report made a total of 23 recommendations
    relating to education and training, indicating the possibilities for
    reform and improvement in these sectors. This inquiry should
    revisit those recommendations and reiterate those that have not
    yet been adopted by Government.

f. Discrimination and exclusion experienced by some rural young people:
  ➢ Currently support programs for rural young people who are
    affected by discrimination and exclusion are inadequate or non-
    existent, particularly in more geographically isolated areas. There
    is a pressing priority to establish and resource community based
    programs that support rural young people whose wellbeing is
    affected by discrimination and exclusion. In keeping with the
    recommendations made by the Inquiry into Retaining Young
    People in Rural Towns and Communities, a focus is needed on the
    following groups of young people:
      • Indigenous young people
      • Homosexual, bisexual and same-sex attracted young people;
      • Recently arrived young people (particularly from non-English
        speaking backgrounds) and refugees, and
      • Young people with obvious physical differences, such as other
        lifestyle choice and variations in personal presentation.

13. That the inquiry recommend that the government adopt a policy development
    process of 'rural proofing' to ensure that policy failure in rural settings is averted.
Appendix A: Maps indicating levels of disadvantage in Victoria

Appendix B: Listing of service referred to in this submission

The following list is not a comprehensive directory of youth services operating in Victoria. Instead it offers further information about the youth services referred to in this submission, for ease of reference for the Committee. The information that appears here has all been sourced from individual service websites.

**Youth Connections:**
Funded through the Federal Department of Education, Employment and Workforce Relations, the Youth Connections program provides a holistic approach to servicing young people at risk including support for individual young people and the broader community. The Youth Connections program is available to eligible young people who are most at risk of disengaging, or already disengaged from education, family and/or the community. Service delivery will be characterised by flexible and individualised case management to young people to remain engaged or re-engage them with education and/or further training, and to improve their ability to make positive life choices.

Youth Connections Providers will also work to strengthen and better coordinate services in their regions and build the capacity for key stakeholders.
For more information visit the Youth Connections web page: http://www.deewr.gov.au/Youth/YouthAttainmentandTransitions/Pages/YouthConnections.aspx

**School Focused Youth Service:**
Funded by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the School Focused Youth Service is a state-wide initiative supporting prevention and early intervention strategies for vulnerable young people between 10 to 18 years of age (with a focus on 10-16 years). This includes young people in all Government, Catholic and Independent Schools.

What does SFYS do?
- Strengthens partnerships between schools and community service organisations, to meet the needs of vulnerable children and young people.
- Identifies service gaps and develops strategies to respond to needs identified by schools and community service organisations.
- Provides brokerage funds to support projects in schools and the community that address service gaps.

To find out more, visit the School Focussed Youth Service website at http://www.sfys.infoxchange.net.au/
**Reconnect:**
Funded by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Reconnect program uses community-based early intervention services to assist young people aged 12 to 18 years who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, and their families. Reconnect assists young people stabilise their living situation and improve their level of engagement with family, work, education, training and their local community. From 1 July 2009, the Newly Arrived Youth Support Services (NAYSS) were incorporated into Reconnect as Newly Arrived Youth Specialists. As specialist Reconnect providers, these services will continue to support young people aged 12-21 years who have arrived in Australia in the previous five years, focussing on people entering Australia on humanitarian visas and family visas, and who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Reconnect breaks the cycle of homelessness by providing counselling, group work, mediation and practical support to the whole family. Reconnect providers also 'buy in' services to target individual needs of clients, such as specialised mental health services.

For further information visit the Reconnect web page on the FAHCSIA web page http://fahcsia.gov.au/sa/housing/progserv/homelessness/reconnect/Pages/default.aspx

**headspace:**
headspace provides mental and health wellbeing support, information and services to young people and their families across Australia.

Established and funded by the Commonwealth Government of Australia in 2006, headspace is the National Youth Mental Health Foundation. The people that work at headspace are providing solutions for young people aged 12 to 25 years.

headspace’s primary focus is the mental health and wellbeing of all Australians.

With 30 one-stop-shops, headspace has a range of youth friendly health professionals who can help you with:

- General health
- Mental health and counselling
- Education, employment and other services
- Alcohol and other drug services.

Further information about headspace can be found at http://www.headspace.org.au/home/

**Youth Substance Abuse Service:**
YSAS (The Youth Substance Abuse Service) is a state-wide community service providing a continuum of services for young people aged between 12 and 21 who are experiencing problems related to alcohol and other drugs.

YSAS provides a range of youth specific outreach, treatment, withdrawal, rehabilitation and support programs in 13 locations across Melbourne and regional Victoria.

YSAS was formed in 1997 by a consortium comprising the Centre for Adolescent Health,
the Royal Children’s Hospital, Jesuit Social Services, St Vincent’s Hospital and Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre.

Further information about YSAS can be found at http://www.ysas.org.au/

Youth Transitions
Funded by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the Youth Transition Support Initiative assists disengaged young people aged 15 to 19 to obtain a sustainable education, training or employment option. Twenty-four transition support workers are employed by funded organisations across twelve Local Learning and Employment Network areas within Victoria. These areas were selected based on rates of Year 12 or equivalent completion and numbers of young people who are not in education, training or full time employment. Transition support workers provide disengaged young people with tailored assistance to access support services and to re-engage in sustainable education, training or employment options. The Youth Transition Support Initiative began on 29 January 2007.

Further information about Youth Transitions can be found at http://www.education.vic.gov.au/sensecyouth/careertrans/youthtransition.htm

Endnotes


ii Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee (2006) op.cit. Chapter 7 of the report details the issues in relation to employment. The report found that employment opportunities were one of the most significant positive factors influencing the small percentage of young people who were migrating to rural areas. However, the changing nature of the employment market and issues of instability in that market, along with negative perceptions of employment in rural areas were factors driving young people to leave rural areas. See pp 241 – 277.

iii Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee (2006). op.cit. The report outlines a number of issues impacting on young people’s access to housing via the rental market, property market, or in terms of crisis accommodation in rural areas, finding that ‘there are serious concerns regarding the availability and affordability of accommodation for young people in rural areas.’ p. 236.

iv The report recognises that ‘access to transport by rural young people is a critical infrastructure in facilitating education and training, employment and social activities’ and that ‘the ability to access reliable, regular, flexible and inexpensive transport options can be a key enabler to positive relationships and experiences, breaking down social isolation and maximising the ability of younger Victorians to access services that are already in place.’ p. 134. However, the Committee found that ‘[t]he lack of a range of public transport options represents a significant barrier to the wellbeing of rural young people, and a disincentive for younger people to live and work in rural Victoria.’ p.136.
The report includes a discussion on the ‘Service Gaps in Rural Victoria’, including the need for age-appropriate health care (including mental health) services and the lack of generalist youth services in some areas. See pp116 – 132.

See the discussion pertaining to ‘Diversity in Rural Communities’ and Recommendation 7 made by the Committee ‘(t)hat the State Government provides funding to expand the coverage of rural and regional programs aimed to address issues of discrimination and intolerance against people on the basis of race, gender, cultural differences or sexual practice.’ pp. 106-108.