



***‘A Generation
Lost Unless...’***

**Youth Affairs Council of
Western Australia**

Pre Budget Submission 2007/08

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The Youth Affairs Council of WA

The Youth Affairs Council of WA (hereafter referred to as YACWA) is the Peak Body representing the non-Government youth sector in Western Australia. It is a membership based organisation with over 140 members throughout the State including agencies such as Mission Australia, Anglicare and MercyCare, Local Government Authorities such as the City of Cockburn, and a range of other organisations working with and for young people, including PICYS (Perth Inner City Youth Service) Northcliffe Youth Voice and Newman YMCA.

YACWA's mission is to strengthen the trust, cooperation, collaboration, professionalism and voice of the non-Government youth service sector so it can serve the young people of Western Australia. The Council's vision is that of a united, independent and active advocate for the non-Government youth sector that is both supported and respected by the sector and the wider community. The Council believes in and actively promotes equity, equality, access and participation for all young people in the Western Australian community.

These aims are achieved through developing and co-coordinating policies, facilitating programme responses, preparing resources for the sector and distributing information about young people's needs.

YACWA defines young people as 12-25 years and children as up to 12 years of age.

Executive Summary

The Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia (YACWA) 2007/2008 Pre-Budget Submission '*A Generation Lost Unless...*' contains the concerns and suggestions of the youth sector for consideration by the State Government, relevant government departments and agencies.

The State Governments current ability and capacity to rectify the immediate resource needs of the youth sector and to ensure a safe and secure future for generations of young people is, perhaps, unprecedented.

Hardly a day goes by without shining new examples of the State's abundance and prosperity¹ however, an all-too often heard statement of resignation from our membership and their constituents -young people, is that the State's prosperity is '*not for me*'.

Indeed, a country as prosperous as Australia should not find 100,000 of its citizens homeless (48% are under the age of 24 and almost 50% of these young people are women²) when it is estimated that 2.4% of Australia's Gross Domestic Product could eradicate the problem.³

It is well-known that an unaddressed 'gap' between high income earners and the disadvantaged is a useful indicator of existing, or looming, social disharmony and conflict; a recognised 'wake up' indicator for public officials and policy makers. Australia in general and Western Australia in particular has this 'indicator' and the fabric of social cohesion is unraveling as we watch it grow!

¹ *WA economy booming: report*, ABC News Online, Monday, October 23, 2006. www.abc.net.au/news

² Hanover for our Homeless, www.hanover.org.au.

³ Social Policy Research Centre, www.sprc.unsw.edu.au.

From the perspective of YACWA's membership, the health and wellbeing of a society that 'get's along', respects one another and is able to live life to the full is a society wherein every one of its members; wealthy, poor, male, female or intersexed, abled, disabled, recent migrant, homeless, drug user, old or young intuitively understand that they are equally valued and will be cared for to the best of the community's ability no matter what.

Sadly the current state of existing services, despite the extraordinary effort of those working within a resource poor sector, is delivering a standard of care that is hardening hearts and minds against the State apparatus and 'society' in general. It is our opinion that the outcome of the current situation, should it remain unchanged, will result in *a generation lost*.

While 'times are good' we think it represents an excellent opportunity to address the gaps, resource the needs, rethink policy and develop a plan that takes Western Australia and West Australian's forward; forward in opportunity and health.

With this in mind we submit the following recommendations for Government commitment in 2007/08 with an understanding that these reflect the tip of the iceberg. As the reader will discern, YACWA received 82 submissions to our online survey (Appendix 1). Those participants willing to include their details are listed on page 39 however much more needs to be done to comprehensively understand, discern and detail the needs of the youth sector.

This submission has arranged expenditure priorities across the following public policy areas;

- Education,
- Employment and training,
- Health and wellbeing,
- Housing,

- Legal and justice and,
- Youth services.

YACWA has aimed to provide a snap-shot of both general ‘big picture’ issues and localised ‘micro’ issues that are confronting the youth sector of Western Australia. In some instances, solutions recommended pertain to particular issues impacting across the state; in other instances they are issues being experienced in specific regional or metropolitan areas. The report does not, and cannot, cover all outstanding areas of need.

Many of YACWA’s recommendations fit into more than one of the six categories – for example, the overlap between comorbidity, mental health, housing and homelessness is acute as is the relationship between all of these issues and public space. It is important to stress that while general categories help to conceptualise the issue, they are inadequate in dealing with the problem as a whole; each category has interdependent qualities and therefore we suggest that *A generation lost unless....* is read in its entirety so that related recommendations are not missed.

Many of the recommendations that follow have been proposed numerous times by YACWA and individually by our members, often independently of one another.

A generation lost unless... could not have been prepared without the ideas and recommendations of the Western Australian youth sector who work tirelessly with limited resources to improve outcomes for young people.

Sincere thanks is extended to everyone, youth workers, young people, youth worker networks, those who work with young people and all who contributed to YACWA’s consultative process, provided written responses and discussed their ideas with us.



Sections of *A generation lost unless...* can be reproduced provided that YACWA is acknowledged and it is not edited in a way that alters its meaning or intent.

Education

In general, the youth sector reports that funding and resource spending favours private schools to the detriment of public schools located in lower socio economic areas. As education is recognised as a key human development indicator and a fundamental economic social and cultural human right YACWA urges government to consider issues of parity and equity with regards to the funding of education.

A youth worker in every West Australian school

Rationale

In 2005 a WACOSS study investigating the role of NGOs in diverting young people from crime confirmed that youth workers who have built positive and trusting relationships with young people play a major role in preventing criminal behavior.⁴

Current research, similar programmes in other state jurisdictions and YACWA's own compilation of youth worker case studies confirm that the same is true for reducing suicide and drug abuse, promoting healthy living practices and acting as an early intervention mechanism in detecting mental health problems and referring services.

**‘Youth Workers...reduce
crime, suicide and drug
abuse...’**

Youth Worker testimonies indicate that young people ‘perceive the youth worker differently’. Because of this the youth worker is able to access, build relationships with and serve young people in ways that many school councilors, psychologists and chaplains can not; pointing young people to services like counseling, health and employment services, other NGOs, accommodation and financial services and much more.

It is YACWA's view that an independent youth worker working in collaboration with existing student service teams will have a considerable impact on reducing harm in young people. Furthermore, without this form of independent assistance young people within the school environment are at risk of falling behind and leaving formal education in order to deal with (or not to deal with) more pressing issues and social problems, a situation exacerbated by the raising of the school leaving age.

⁴ West Australian Council of Social Services, *The Role of Non-Government Organisations in Diverting Young People from Crime*, www.wacoss.org.au.

Recommendation

- A pilot programme be developed to deploy *independent* school based youth workers to work in collaboration with existing members of student service teams such as school counselors, psychologists and chaplains.
- The programme should be subject to general review and evaluation processes.

Alternative education programmes for young mothers

Rationale

Teenage women whose secondary education is interrupted by pregnancy and parenting need to be able to continue their education in a supportive environment that includes on-site care for their children (0 - 2 years). It is widely recognised that the higher the education level of the mother, the better education and social outcomes for the child. Teenage mothers are at risk of becoming socially isolated, developing mental health problems or at risk of being caught in a poverty trap through lack of education and training for employment. The 'flow on' effects of this predicament to their children is acute.

Recommendation

Fund programmes targeted at young mothers to keep them in the formal education system.

Balancing vocational and non-vocational educational outcomes

Rationale

In recent years an emphasis has been placed on diversifying the school environment to allow for young people to secure pathways into tertiary learning centres and the workplace. With current industry needs viewed as a high priority this expansion of the school mandate has resulted in a strong vocational and industry-centric focus. Feedback from the youth sector suggests that this transformation of the school learning environment is ignoring non-vocational areas of a young person's education.

The school environment remains a place of *formation and learning* and the youth sector is concerned that an emphasis on short term 'industry' needs to the exclusion of non-vocational skills is a step in the wrong direction.

The sector advises that non-vocational ‘life skills’ such as anger management, general ‘worldly’ knowledge, social and ethical learning and personal development skills be included within the curriculum to allow young people to develop resilience and autonomy as well as locate their lives within a wider social ‘picture’ in order to balance the educational mandate of securing pathways to the workplace and further education.

Recommendation

Ensure that vocational and non-vocational areas of education are covered within the school curriculum.

Regional tutor shortage

Rationale

Within the Kalgoorlie Boulder Region in particular and rural and remote areas in general there is a shortage of tutors and/or a shortage of funds for non-indigenous young people (particular young people 18 years and younger) to access tutors.

Recent changes to the leaving age is not only requiring young people to stay in school longer, it is bringing back young people to the school environment who have left for various reasons including learning difficulties.

‘...without access to tutors the new system is setting young people up to fail’.

Without tutoring services it is unreasonable to expect young people who have not learnt the ‘basics’ first time around to ‘catch-up’ on this knowledge as well as learn and retain information required for their age and grade.

YACWA suggests that without access to tutors the new system is ‘setting young people up to fail’.

Recommendation

Indigenous and non-indigenous youth in rural and remote areas be provided with the means (financial assistance) to access tutors.

Employment and Training

Employment advocacy, information and advice for young people

Rationale

Young people remain one of the most exploited and, in Western Australia, least protected demographics of the labor force. The Youth Legal Service is the only young person's legal service in WA and this organisation defers most industrial relations questions to the Employment Law Service. In turn, the Employment Law Service, despite heroic efforts, appears to be under considerable financial and resource stress such that it is unable to effectively deal with the needs of young people in the labour market; especially when one considers the added dimension of new industrial relations laws.

A NSW 2005 survey of young people revealed that in the workforce;

- 48% of young people aged between 12-16 experienced verbal harassment;
- 23% experience physical harassment;
- Young people are less likely to negotiate on matters of substance (leave arrangements, pay and conditions); and,
- more likely 'to put up with poor pay and conditions (77.2%) than to simply quit and look for another job (22%)'.⁵

YACWA's own survey revealed that young people were overwhelmingly represented in sales, retail, low level clerical and service occupations. ABS statistics confirm this.⁶ YACWA compared the award minimum for this sector with the ages of those surveyed and discovered;

- 40% of those surveyed aged between 15-17 years were receiving less than the minimum award;
- over half (66%) of employees 21-25yrs were also receiving less than the award minimum.

In order to bring Western Australia in line with other state jurisdictions there is an urgent need to provide advice, services and resources to adequately protect young West Australian workers.

⁵ Ferguson, J., *Not a young person's choice: young people, industrial relations & workplace negotiations*, YAPRap Vol 16 No 6 June 2006, Youth Action and Policy Association NSW Inc.

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Social Trends, 2004, Catalogued Number, 4102.0*.

Recommendation

- Create a government funded community organisation to provide workplace information, advocacy, referrals and advice to young workers (under twenty five) about employment/industrial relations concerns. Services provided should include: advice on individual employment contracts and work conditions, assistance in responding to warning letters, grievances or dismissals, assistance with sexual harassment and/or discrimination claims, work place bullying, representation at the West Australian Industrial Relations Commission and Anti-Discrimination Commission as well as information sessions and school talks about workplace rights and obligations.
- There is also scope within existing industrial relations laws to guarantee conditions and benefits and exempt young people eighteen years and younger from having to independently negotiate individual agreements. YACWA recommends this option, especially in the absence of any other initiative designed to protect the health, wellbeing and rights of young workers.

Youth workers and affordable professional development

Rationale

The unique role of the Youth Worker is widely recognised. Predominantly due to young peoples perceptions of the youth worker, youth wokers are better able to build trusting realtionship with young people than counsellors, psychologists and other clinical staff and chaplains allowing the youth worker to play a critical early intervention role in the lives of young people.

Arguments made in favour of providing a youth worker in every West Australian school (See, *Education: School Based Youth Workers in every School*) apply equally to the deployment of youth workers within communities across the state. The deployment of more youth workers also carries with it the added benefit of helping reduce case loads and increase the quality of service delivery.

In order to fulfill duty of care obligations and perform the role of youth workers to the best of their ability there is an express need for youth workers to access quality training and development.

Recommendation

- Formal recognition and promotion of the unique services and activities of the youth worker.

- Provision of affordable training and professional development opportunities.
- Deployment of youth workers within communities, particularly regional and rural areas and priority 'at risk' locations.

Health and Wellbeing

Specialist domestic violence services, especially for young women

Rationale

Young women under the age of eighteen and who are fleeing family and domestic violence are currently unable to access women's refuge accommodation. In addition, if they have children they are also unable to access any crisis accommodation forcing them to return to their abuser and placing them in unacceptable danger. Youth Hostels are mixed gender and unable to effectively deal with the complexity of Domestic and Family Violence; being housed with young people of the opposite sex often leads to young women going from one bad relationship straight into another.

'It is only a matter of time before one of these young women and/or their children are murdered by their partner despite their attempts to escape the situation.'

YACWA Survey Participant

Young women with children are unable to access youth crisis hostels due to the inability of hostels to provide facilities for children. Refuges will only accept them if they agree to Department of Community Development (DCD) intervention and support; a criterion that is not required of other women accessing refuges. DCD are unable to support these young women as their stated priority focus is children 0 - 5 yrs.

Recommendation

- Fund the establishment of specialist domestic violence services in a range of areas, in particular, a refuge for young women.
- With this, it is recommended that a specialist counselling service for men who are victims of violence, and a specialist service for CaLD communities who are experiencing domestic and family violence be established.

Complex health needs of young people

Rationale

Mental health disorders will affect between 10% and 15% of young people in any one year⁷ and 75% of mental illnesses onset before the age of 25. More importantly, 63% of people with mental health disorders do not use services predominantly due to stigma and fear and *‘people living with a mental illness are at an increased risk of developing problematic alcohol or drug use especially those aged between 18 and 25 years.’*⁸ Simply put, the health needs of young people are complex!

YACWA, The WA Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies (WANADA) and the WA Association for Mental Health (WAAMH) have jointly identified the need to address the issue of dual diagnosis or co-morbidity⁹ in young people, bringing together the areas of alcohol and other drug, mental health, Aboriginal health, women’s health, youth, housing, education, justice, GP and other sectors.

**‘75% of mental illnesses
onset before the age of 25’.**

Currently, services geared towards treating ‘customers’ with a drug or alcohol problem will often ‘refer on’ a dual diagnosis patient with a mental illness. The same occurs for services that deal specifically with mental illness. It is a situation that is resulting in an increasing amount of young people being ‘bounced’ from service to service until they end up on the streets, detained or worse.

Mental disorders account for 55% of the burden of disease among those aged 15-24. A fact which, when matched alongside the reality of comorbidity means that youth services have to be well resourced and more creative in dealing with young people and mental illness. The link between mental illness and alcohol and other drug abuse must be taken seriously.

Given the changing nature of drug use and misuse and the potential impact on the health and social services of young people with complex health needs, it is important that a strategy be developed to address multiple issues (such as alcohol and other drug, mental health, housing, education and so on) in a coordinated way. A coordinated preventative approach has the potential to deliver significant cost savings for services and the community in the short and long term (See *Education: a youth worker in every West Australian school*). This strategic approach should be a coordinated workforce

⁷ Mental Health Fellowship of Western Australia Inc.

⁸ Mental Health Promotion and Prevention National Action Plan 1999.

⁹ Co-morbidity refers to the presence of one or more disorders (or diseases) in addition to a primary disease or disorder, and the effect of such additional disorders or diseases.

development and capacity building process (including training) in all of the sectors mentioned above, focusing on:

- Enhancing assessment of co-morbidity;
- Service matching and referral;
- Case management, and evaluation; and
- Development of regional support networks that link the different sectors together.

Recommendation

- Develop a strategic approach to addressing complex health needs (or co-morbidity) in young people. Fund workforce development and capacity building in alcohol and other drug sector, mental health sector and youth sector to address these issues.
- Be supportive of the joint submission generated by the partnership of YACWA, Western Australian Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies (AWANADA) and Western Australian Association of Mental Health (WAAMH).

Complex health needs: young people *and accommodation*

Rationale

Exacerbating the existing issue of a lack of affordable housing and accommodation (See *Housing*) is the issue of at risk, marginalised and homeless young people requiring accommodation who present with a mental illness and/or an alcohol and other drug misuse concern.

Young people who are presenting themselves to agencies that cater for young people with alcohol and other drug misuse concerns, mental illness, diverse sexuality and/or gender diversity are in desperate need of safe short to long term accommodation.

‘Generations of young people are being lost to a preventable circumstance’.

YACWA survey participant

Accommodation of all kinds remain beyond –many say ‘impossible’, the reach of many young people, in particular young people with mental health problems and/or alcohol and other drug misuse concerns.

The ability of Department of Community Development in attempting to support young people, particularly those aged 15-16 years is reduced due to their level of available resources and workloads. This problem also extends to Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) services.

Young people dealing with multiple issues can not begin to address their wellbeing, take care of the day-to-day, find employment or plan for the future while they are homeless. The result of this is that young people are not coping, their 'street presence' is increasing (See *Housing*) and 'generations of young people are being lost to a preventable circumstance'.

Recommendation

- An immediate increase of youth specific accommodation including crisis accommodation, transitional/supported accommodation and the development of a long term sustainable accommodation plan to substantially increase public housing stock.
- An immediate injection of funds allocated to existing services who are serving the needs of young people presenting with multiple issues.
- Department of Housing and Works commence a community education campaign utilising Real Estate Stakeholders to encourage the private housing markets to assist and encourage the provision of affordable housing to young people. Thereby promoting the Commonwealth Rent Assistance Scheme (CRA) through a whole of community approach to the lack of housing services for homeless young people.
- Provide specialised training on comorbidity to services that traditionally deal with single issues in order to educate and streamline referral pathways and ensure that young people access the right service in a timely manner (See *Health and Wellbeing, Complex health needs of young people*).

Creative strategies for drug abuse reduction

Rationale

To date we have failed to understand the realities faced by young people with relation to drug use. According to several youth sector organisations, drug use is often used as a coping tool for emotional pain.

Personal accounts and anecdotal evidence suggest that many young people are using drugs to cope with mental illness and manage how they feel inside as a form of self medication for emotional pain. It is becoming apparent that a young person's use of

illegal substances is not dissimilar to using prescribed medication for depression and anxieties, or the use of pain killers for physical pain; however, a young persons use of illicit substances occurs without the safety and support networks that come with prescription medication.

‘young people are using drugs to manage how they feel inside as a form of self medication.’

YACWA Survey Participant

To make matters worse, drug use is consistently portrayed as ‘criminal behaviour’ while mental health problems are viewed as ‘illnesses’. This difference in perspective solicits vastly different responses namely, we ‘treat’ illnesses and ‘arrest’ drug users. More importantly, this difference in perspective has created the conditions wherein young people who are in need of help are not accessing services.

Because of these perceptions and an emphasis on abstinence there is an acute absence of services where young people who are using drugs can do so safely while they accesses education programmes on blood borne viruses, liver health, housing, STI's, as well as detox, mental health, counseling, referral services and other services within a peer worker framework. These services are urgently required.

Given that mental health disorders will affect between 10% and 15% of young people in any one year¹⁰ and ‘rates of substance abuse issues in mental health settings have been consistently reported at between 30 and 80 percent’¹¹ we must confront the realities of young peoples drug use honestly so that a young person’s alcohol and other drug misuse concern and potential mental health issue can be dealt with effectively.

Recommendation

- Implementation of youth specific programmes and services that focus on a young persons health and wellness, can adequately deal with comorbidity and where ‘safe’ drug use can occur while accessing rehabilitation services.
- In tandem with this service a website should be developed that brings together information and services suitable for dissemination as fact sheets or as lesson plans through the school network.

¹⁰ Mental Health Fellowship of Western Australia Inc.

¹¹ Todd, F.C., Sellman, D. & Robertson, P.J. (2002) *Barriers to optimal care for patients with coexisting substance use and mental health disorders. Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry.* 36: 792-799.

Housing

At the invitation of the Government of Australia the United Nations Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, Miloon Kothair, visited Australia in July 2006 to examine and report on the status of the realisation of the right to adequate housing and identify practical solutions and best practices in the realisation of this and other related rights.

In conclusion he wrote, ‘... *there is a serious hidden housing crisis in Australia...in some cases[it] could be qualified as a humanitarian crisis.*’¹² He expressed dismay that a housing problem persisted in a wealthy developed country with a comparatively low population; failed to understand why it was not a ‘national priority’ and was troubled that the issue was not adequately acknowledged by authorities.¹³

Mr Kothair’s assessment has been welcomed by the NGO community. In some cases Mr Kothair has understated the case. NGOs, academics, research centres and universities have raised the issue on numerous occasions and the hard evidence of the reality of homelessness in Australia is represented daily on our streets and flooding NGO services.

‘...in Western Australia 39% of the total homeless population are aged 12-24 years.’

Nationally, SAAP figures report servicing 157,200 homeless people between 2004-05; a figure representative of 14-20% of the total homeless. For WA, the latest census data used to compile the *Counting the Homeless Report: Western Australian* presents a stark picture.

In 2001, of the 11,697 homeless West Australians 15% utilised boarding homes 58% were lucky enough to source temporary shelter with friends and family and only 8% were served by SAAP accommodation. This left 2,242 citizens -19% of the total homeless, ‘living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting in derelict buildings, or using cars or railway carriages for temporary shelter’ – a group categorised in the census as ‘improvised dwellings or sleeping rough.’¹⁴ (See, *Legal and justice: Creative responses to public space*).

¹² UN expert on adequate housing concludes his visit to Australia, 23rd August 2006.

<http://www.unhcr.ch/hurricane/hurricane.nsf/view01/E20042F78905BBC9C12571D30055899B?opendocument>

¹³ United Nations Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, Miloon Kothari, Mission to Australia, 31st July-15th August 2006, Preliminary observations,

http://www.ohchr.org/english/issues/housing/docs/preliminary_observations_230806.doc

¹⁴ Chris Chamberlain, *Counting the Homeless 2001: Western Australia*.

Of great concern to YACWA is that in Western Australia 39% of the total homeless population are aged between 12-24 years.¹⁵

The majority of participants surveyed raised the issue of housing and its many complex components. Given the duplication of issues revealed by the survey, it is safe to say that Western Australia is experiencing the *housing crisis* Mr Kothair has identified.

The reader will note that several recommendations listed below overlap and intersect. YACWA elected not to compress participant recommendations in order to reflect the complexity of the whole.

Supported accommodation options for young people aged eighteen years and younger with a mental illness

Rationale

There is a lack of medium to long term supported accommodation options for young people under eighteen years who also have a mental illness. Crisis accommodation provides only limited support. Feedback from the SAAP sector indicates a large number of people are unable to access SAAP services because they have a mental illness, in particular many young people.

YACWA is aware of recent investment in building accommodation in Fremantle but hastens to add that this initiative, while laudable, must be replicated. A number of supported housing models for people with a mental illness, especially young people, should be funded. These models need to range from 24-hour crisis accommodation and long term support through to semi and independent housing options.

Recommendation:

Provide more appropriate housing (i.e. group units) for young people under eighteen years old with mental health problems. Funding should be provided to support residents with experienced staff and independent living skills programmes.

¹⁵ Counting the Homeless 2001, *ibid*.

Short to medium-term accommodation

This recommendation is inclusive of public housing stock, private housing and community housing options.

‘...young people with mental health issues are listed on the ‘Priority Waiting List’ for up to five years!’

Rationale

Lack of affordable, *secure* housing for young people. Young people are leaving abusive or unsafe family homes and are unable to find a safe place to live. This situation is finding young people being incorporated into ‘street culture’ with its associated instability, drug use, relational conflict, sexual activity etc. Many of these young people have not yet had the opportunity to develop skills in setting firm social / physical / emotional boundaries and are in definite need of secure, lockable, private accommodation in order to ‘sort themselves out’.

It is difficult to impossible to secure crisis accommodation for young people and almost impossible to find affordable private rentals. Homeswest housing waiting lists are so long that many young people do not see the point in being on them. **Young families and young people with mental health issues are listed on the ‘Priority Waiting List’ for up to five years!**

Concurrent issues that arise from homelessness include limited accessibility to employment options, poverty, health related issues including mental health issues (See, *Supported accommodation for young people aged eighteen years and younger with a mental health problem*), reduced access to education opportunities and services. Furthermore, homeless people are marginalised from the greater community and are often not made to feel welcome in their city, town or suburb.

Recommendation

- Place a moratorium on the sale of public housing to the private market.
- Restock public housing in the form of affordable Homeswest accommodation, transitional/supported accommodation appropriate for young people. *It is recommend that properties be managed by a community housing organisation that can act as a beneficent landlord for young people under eighteen who are rejected by private rental agencies due to their age. Properties need to be allocated to young people under-twenty-five years, with a proportion allocated to those aged eighteen years or younger.*

- Department of Housing and Works commence a community education campaign utilising Real Estate Stakeholders to encourage the private housing markets to assist and encourage the provision of affordable housing to young people. Thereby promoting the Commonwealth Rent Assistance Scheme (CRA) through a whole of community approach to the lack of housing services for homeless young people.
- Revisit the WA State Homelessness Strategy in order to reenergise and remodel the process within a human rights based framework. (See *Legal and Justice: WA human Rights Bill that recognises the priority of children and young people and the interdependence of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.*)
- Provide a range of funding options to the non-government youth sector to provide crisis accommodation, medium and long-term accommodation options.
- Training to educate and inform the private rental sector of the issues confronting young people.
- Provide additional support for young people with a mental illness and/or alcohol and other drug misuse concerns.

Youth housing in Broome

Rationale

Lack of youth housing in Broome. Currently there is no short to medium-term crisis accommodation service in Broome. Homeswest waiting lists are approximately five years long and there is very little affordable long-term accommodation.

This is a major problem because young people who are constantly homeless putting themselves in even more dangerous situations by staying with inappropriate friends and unsafe environments. There are few avenues for services to refer young people to for respite from family violence and extremely limited options for young people to set up their own long term accommodation.

Stable safe accommodation for young people at risk is absolutely key to supporting a young person; if young people do not have a safe place to stay it is very difficult to support them to engage in education, training, employment, sport and recreation, community and family.

Recommendation

- A short term crisis accommodation facility needs to be built in the town of Broome for young people aged between thirteen – twenty years.
- Increase provision of services in regional and remote areas.

Affordable housing, a housing crisis and WA's own human rights problem

Rationale

The affordability of housing in Western Australian is an issue of such great concern that YACWA believes it must be raised as a state priority. National figures reveal that of the 943,877 individuals receiving rent assistance, '35% (330,360) spend more than 30% of their income on rent, and 9% (85,000) more than 50%.'¹⁶

There is considerable evidence to indicate that a growing proportion of the population who do not receive state benefits and/or assistance are also spending up to 50% of their revenue on rent; a situation that is creating the conditions for generating a new population of 'working poor'.

'The problem of housing could be solved with a human rights based approach.'

Western Australia is currently experiencing a housing shortage/crisis. Available rentals are less accessible thereby increasing demand and leading to high rental rates. Real estate agencies and private renters are becoming 'selective' as to who they rent to.

Many young people are unable to secure a rental property in the private sector as real estate agents are reluctant to rent houses to young people; especially young people with alcohol and other drug problems, a mental illness, diverse sexuality and domestic violence issues. As a result many young people are, quite literally, *camping* wherever they can and have no fixed address. (See *Housing: Short to medium term accommodation* and *Justice and legal: Creative responses to public space*)

The following recommendations have been adapted from preliminary recommendations detailed in the report tabled by the UN Special Rapportuer on adequate housing in Australia.

The interest by the Special Rapportuer in the Australian's situation must be commended given his 'mandate' encompasses the planet! Furthermore, Mr Kothair's suggestion of tackling the problem of housing and homeless with a human rights based approach represents a fresh option to tackling a prolonged and complex issue. As such, the recommendations of the Special Rapportuer have provided a useful framework and foundation upon which to reinvigorate existing efforts and solve the current housing and homelessness problem.

¹⁶ United Nations Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, *ibid*.

Recommendations

- Increase state funding and increase the pressure on Federal Government to match and extend funding for existing agencies already funded through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program Five (SAAP 5),
- Housing and homelessness and its causes be listed as a State priority,
- The issue of housing and homeless be considered through a human rights based approach with the primary task of meeting the needs of the most vulnerable,
- A state based housing and homelessness policy based on human rights be put into place. The State Government may wish to consider increasing the scope and resources made available to the WA State Homelessness Strategy Monitoring Committee and revising the WA State Homelessness Strategy.
- At risk groups –Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, children and young people, CaLDB, women, people with disabilities, people with mental illness and people released from prisons should be given a genuine participatory role in their affairs through an independent, well-resourced body representing all communities.
- The current home-ownership model and its possible negative impact on low-income housing options should be seriously reflected upon,
- All concerned parties should be genuinely consulted in designing policies, strategies and planning in housing,
- The Government should engage in a constructive manner with the civil and advocacy groups.

WA's Human Rights Bill and the issue of housing and homelessness

This topic is taken up in greater detail in the next chapter however, given the gravity of the issue of housing and homeless YACWA wishes to acknowledge the commitment by the Attorney General Hon J McGinty to begin discussion on a WA Human Rights Bill.

YACWA affirms the need to incorporate human rights concepts, recognised as international best practice, into Western Australia and encourages the Attorney General to include the full spectrum of rights within the Bill.

YACWA believes that the possibility of interpreting and modeling government, non-government and community behaviour, policy development and legislative initiatives according to a human rights based approach is an exciting prospect. We affirm that confronting the conundrum of housing and homelessness with a human rights based



approach would play a valuable role in solving this complex problem (See *Legal and Justice: WA human Rights Bill that recognises the priority of children and young people and the interdependence of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights*).

Legal and justice

WA Human Rights Bill that recognises the priority of children and young people and the interdependence of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights

Australia remains the **only** Western democracy that does not have a human rights act or equivalent. ACT took the lead in 2004 to redress this inadequacy and Victoria followed in 2006. Tasmania and New South Wales have also engaged in the process and WA has recently joined the discussion.

It is also true that the Victorian *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities* builds upon the ACT model affording greater protection by including effective ‘compliance’ mechanisms. While this an excellent step in promoting and protecting human rights the Bill itself has many flaws. For example, the exclusion of economic cultural and social rights.

The introduction of human rights has always been an incremental one, for this reason each new bill should improve upon those that precede it. WA’s human rights bill should take the lead.

There are two ‘next steps’ in the development of WA’s human rights bill:

- 1. Recognition of the priority of children and young people and.**
- 2. The inclusion of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.**

1. Priority of children and young people

The need to make special mention of the protection and promotion of the human rights of children and young people is self-evident. Since the adoption of the Convention of the Rights of the Child in 1989, this document has been ratified by more governments (all except Somalia and the United States of America), and at a faster pace than any other human rights instrument.

WA also recognised the special status of children and young people by creating the position of *Commissioner for Children and Young People*; a remarkable position that needs to be informed and inspired by the large body of human rights knowledge and precedent surrounding children and young people.

Finally, children and young people are excluded from the political process and remain the most vulnerable demographic in our community; they are also the most precious

component in our community. As the Hon Minister Templeman so eloquently described it at the recent Youth Affairs Council of WA 2006 Conference, children and young people are our, *'past, present and future'*.

2. Civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights.

The argument and debate surround the necessity of promoting and protecting civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights as an interdependent and intrinsic collective is a debate that has concluded. Today, any Bill that fails to recognise this also fails to adequately afford its citizenry a comprehensive framework of human rights protection.

The original Universal Declaration of Human Rights produced in 1948 was one integrated, comprehensive statement of human rights. It developed into two covenants due to the complexities involved during the Cold War (USA v USSR). These issues are long-gone and as such the legacy of two covenants must be consigned to the past.

'Today, the treatment of rights as a selection of items that can be 'chosen from' is no longer acceptable.'

There is universal acceptance of the indivisibility of all human rights, civil, cultural, economic, political and social. The most definitive statement of this first appears in the Vienna Declaration 1993 paragraph 5:

*'All human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent and interrelated. The international community must treat human rights globally in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing, and with the same emphasis. While the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind, it is the duty of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms.'*¹⁷

The most recent statement of this appears within the General Assembly resolution in March 2006 that established the new Human Rights Council.

'...the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, and recalling the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and other human rights instruments... all human rights are universal, indivisible, interrelated, interdependent and mutually reinforcing, and...all human

¹⁷ World Conference of Human Rights, Vienna, 14-25 June 1993, Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action.

*rights must be treated in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing and with the same emphasis,*¹⁸

Today, the treatment of rights as a selection of items that can be ‘chosen from’ is no longer acceptable. There are numerous examples that can be rallied to reinforce this position; the following are two poignant examples that directly affect young West Australians.

Example 1

The connection between right to education, health, participation and expression: It is well established that the right to health and the right to education are direct correlates. We also know that the better the education level the better the health status. For example, young children, in particular those living in indigenous communities who cannot hear (‘glue-ear’) cannot learn! Plus, a full education improves the chances of young people finding fulfilling work *-the right to work*. Finally, equally telling, education and good health enables the effective exercise of a young person’s *right to vote and political participation, the freedom of expression and the freedom of thought and belief*.

Example 2:

Housing: Despite public sentiment that considers homelessness the ‘fault of the homeless person’¹⁹ or that an *adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing* is a ‘privilege’²⁰ equating housing is not to be dismissed as a luxury for a fortunate minority. These sentiments are perhaps more reflective of a public ignorance regarding human rights and the impact of 50 years of privatisation than an accurate statement of fact.

Housing is central to the survival and healthy development of all young people, and has consistently been recognised and reaffirmed as a human right by the international community. The right to a home is not peripheral to the full realisation of a young person’s rights; they are pivotal to it. Housing is inextricably linked to a young person’s inherent right to life, freedom from fear as well as physical and mental health.

Recommendations

¹⁸ Resolution adopted by the General Assembly, A/RES/60/251.

¹⁹ Hanover for our homeless, www.hanover.org.au.

²⁰ *Rights, Responsibilities and Respect, The Report of the Human Rights Consultation Committee*, Victoria. 41% of those consulted thought it necessary to include economic social and cultural rights within the bill. YACWA laments that the concerns and suggestions of this constituency were not included in the final Bill.

- Inclusion of the recognition of the rights of children and young people as well as specific reference to the large body of international knowledge and precedent relevant to the promotion and protection of the rights of children and young people.
- Vision and leadership with regards to the creation of WA's human rights bill in order to create an instrument that builds upon the efforts of others and is informed by contemporary understandings of human rights; in particular the interconnectedness and mutually reinforcing nature of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights.
- That WA's human rights bill focus on the importance it will play as an educative tool.
- That WA's Human Rights Bill be inclusive of and relate to all forms of government and governance, Parliament, interdepartmental agencies, the executive and the courts.

Food programmes to prevent juvenile offending

Rationale

Some young people, especially those in regional areas are stealing to feed themselves because parents and/or guardians who are also suffering from a gambling, alcohol and other drug problem and/or a mental illness are unable or unwilling to feed them properly.

Young people who are unable to secure adequate food are experiencing a range of disastrous 'flow on' effects;

- malnutrition and related health problems;
- an inability to concentrate during class including falling asleep during class – children who 'fall behind' experience a sense of failure often leading to truant behaviour; and worst of all,
- crime: stealing food to feed themselves.

Dealing strictly with the issue of crime, it estimated that the cost of providing a food programme that includes the ability to refer to essential services far outweigh the cost of the crime itself –including the cost of judicial process, incarceration and further community impacts.

Recommendation

- Food programmes implemented to provide up to three meals per day.
- This service should include the capacity to provide culturally appropriate referral pathways and links to essential services.

Creative responses to public space, an end to Move-On powers

Rationale

Why do some many people, especially young people ‘hang-out’ in Forrest Chase? The answer to this question necessarily includes issues of homelessness, alcohol and other drug issues, mental illness and human rights, as well as a sense of identity and belonging.

This submission has already raised the issue of homelessness (11,697 West Australian citizens), and drawn attention to the largest homeless demographic (48% under 25 years). Taking Perth as a case example, it has 9% of Perth’s population, 37% of boarding house residents, 41% of those accommodated by SAAP and 44% of people in ‘improvised dwellings or sleeping rough’.

Perth is home to numerous essential services for young people including young people with alcohol and other drug related problems and/or mental illnesses. Perth is where street present young people can source a free feed and, more importantly, it is where young people connect with other street present people.

‘53% of all Move On orders issued since 1st July 2005 were handed to young people (0-24).’

To answer the original question, ‘why do so many young people ‘hang out’ in Forrest Chase?’ First, it’s their right to frequent public space. Second, it’s close to public transport. Third, it is where many young people live and access services. Finally, it is where street present young people experience ‘community’ and Forrest Chase is one of the only free public places where people can gather in numbers.

The issue of public space is of critical importance to YACWA. Partly because 53% of all Move-on orders issued since 1st July 2005 were handed to young people (0-24)²¹ and partly because there is an emerging rhetoric surfacing around the idea of anti-social behaviour orders (ASBO’s) as an extension of move-on powers and a legitimate ‘next step’ to curbing anti-social behaviour.

YACWA considers move-on powers²² and ASBO’s inadequate to dealing with anti-social behaviour and an unhelpful distraction from dealing with the core issue of;

1. the right of access to and enjoyment of public space,

²¹ Statistics provided by Minister for Police, Emergency Services; Community safety.

²² *Aboriginal Customary Laws, Final Report: interaction of Western Australian Law with Aboriginal law and culture*. Project No. 94 September, 2006.

2. deeper systemic and complex societal changes,
3. radical changes in the transition to adulthood coupled with changes to how young people behave and,
4. the closure of legitimate spaces for young people to frequent,
5. public perceptions of young people and a rise in social paedophobia²³.

YACWA affirms that current move-on powers and ASBO's are,

- **Legal answers to social problems:** There is no evidence that move-on powers or ASBO's (on their own) contribute to behaviour modification. Move-on and ASBO powers do not deal with the underlying issues and defer the problem to another jurisdiction.
- **A breach of human rights:** Move-on powers and ASBO's violate the fundamental rights and freedoms of young people. Move-ons have been issued to young people on the basis of appearance alone; in several instances the young person receiving a move-on notice in the Perth CBD has also had a mental illness and was in Perth to access services.
- **Inflame tensions between young people and civil authorities:** Move-on powers are exacerbating tensions between young people and police, security guards, families and communities decreasing social cohesion, community harmony potentially resulting in increased anti-social behaviour.
- **'Criminalising' non-criminal behaviour by labelling it anti-social:** being drunk or noisy, sleeping rough, looking different or simply being a teenager 'hanging around' is considered anti-social and has proven reason enough to receive a move-on notice.

Recommendations

- Move-on powers should be repealed.
- Recognise the free and equal democratic right of young people to access and utilise public space.
- Creation of safe and attractive youth spaces in the CBD, metropolitan, rural and remote areas; youth friendly spaces should not impinge on young persons free and equal access to public space. This does not necessarily imply the building of new infrastructure, in some locations it simply means existing and or modifying existing resources. (See, *Youth Services, Youth friendly spaces*.)
- Commence a study into the causes behind anti-social behaviour and a host of non-punitive measures tabled. The study should include young people in the process.
- Make a serious undertaking to deal with the nexus of issues related to public space i.e., homelessness, alcohol and other drug problems and mental illness.

²³ Definition: a fear of children. Institute for Public Policy Research, *Childhood is changing, but 'paedophobia' makes things worse*, 22 October 2006, www.ippr.org.uk.

- Consideration of the provision of structured, purposeful and mentored extracurricular activities (like martial arts, drama clubs, sports etc) as an extension of the school day to promote inter-personal skills and friendships with non-deviant peers and reduce problem behaviour across adolescence and into young adulthood.
- Inclusion and participation: young people should be considered local stakeholders in relation to the development of recommendations that will effect them.

Youth Services

The youth sector as a whole has continuously called for recognition, support and resources. This submission does not deviate from these appeals.

‘The youth sector...is at breaking point’.

However, at this point in time the industry is at breaking point. Unsustainable case loads have led to high turnover rates of staff. The process of continual reapplication for essential funding of programmes and initiatives is deviating youth workers from their primary responsibility of servicing the needs of young people. A situation which all-too-frequently leads to the closure of effective programmes due to an agency’s inability to apply for and secure funding.

YACWA funding

Rationale

Early on the youth sector recognised the need to form an independent non-government entity to represent the voice of the non-government youth sector and young people. Hence, since 1981 the Youth Affairs Council of WA has been at the forefront of youth issues in Western Australia.

In order to maintain the existing levels professionalism, efficiency and delivery of services to government and non-government agencies YACWA, like most youth services, requires an increase in core funding.

It is estimated that a contribution of \$250,000 per annum recurrent funding would firmly establish YACWA’s ability to provide effective youth engagement capacities, continue to generate sound research and policy development and provide affordable training and professional development for the youth sector.

Increased funding and recognition of the youth sector

Rationale

Youth Services are severely under funded and as such have limited resources available to provide a holistic and comprehensive service to young people.

Youth Workers who are ‘time poor’ due to overwhelming case loads, are experiencing an increased level of personal distress. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that the youth sector is, on the whole, underpaid, has poor and often unsafe working conditions and lacks job security. Because of this the youth sector is experiencing high staff turn over, a reality that is detrimentally affecting the stability of relationships between youth workers and young people and the provision of effective services.

Funding options are reported to be ‘short term’ and the process of sourcing or securing recurrent funding has become a ‘battle’ that is detracting from core service delivery. It is also the experience of many service agencies that ongoing funding for existing, often successful programmes is rare. Services are often forced to rely on limited, intermittent funding from Local, State and Federal governments or charitable and corporate sources. The outcome of this is that many good services close only to be reopened in a new form by a new agency; a process that undermines effectiveness, creates massive problems for partnership activities and further detracts from the creation and maintenance of trusting/meaningful relationships between the agency and young people: the core aim of youth work.

While many areas of the youth sector are able to survive within a resource poor environment there are many more individuals and small organisations who, for a range of reasons (time constraints, lack of knowledge and or resources etc.) struggle to maintain quality services despite proven community sustainability. Anecdotal evidence and research suggest that services are often provided through community based management committees who may have a limited understanding of youth issues or organisational management. Affordable management and youth sector training programs must be afforded to this vulnerable component of the youth sector to ensure that WA does not lose valuable services and programmes for amendable reasons.

Finally, there is much more to understand about the needs and services provided by the youth sector. A comprehensive analysis within the non-government human services sector by the state government or representatives of the sector should be undertaken to grasp the nature and range of services offered, understand its concerns and adjust funding criteria accordingly.

Recommendation

- Conduct an inventory of service delivery and organisations with an aim to streamline service provision, referral services and isolate gaps in service provision.
- Employment of more staff to reduce case loads and increase the effectiveness of service delivery.
- Funding cycles need to include the possibility of a minimum of four year cycle to ensure stability, promote effective partnerships, create the conditions for sustainability and ensure creation of trusting relationships between agencies and young people.

- Reducing overlap is also desirable.
- Funders need to become more engaged in the process and work closely with the funding recipients to ensure that programmes and projects that are financially viable.
- Affordable financial management training for funding recipients.

Community engagement opportunities for refugee and migrant youth

Rationale

Recently arrived refugee and migrant youth are experiencing barriers to engaging with the mainstream community which is delaying opportunities to socialise and develop leadership qualities.

Recommendation

Engage newly arrived refugee and migrant youth via Intensive English Centres located around the city; provide access to sport, recreation and cultural activities.

Public youth art spaces

Rationale

Each demographic learns in different ways, becomes engaged for different reasons, is inspired by different ideas and responds to information in different formats. The demographic of young people is no different.

Art is a universal form of individual and community expression and research and practical experience is overwhelmingly supportive of 'creative spaces' as a mode of promoting engagement and participation. Moreover, the 'creative arts' is widely recognised as a best practice medium for information transference, mapping community wellbeing, promoting inclusion, participation, cultural exchange and much more.

Despite the evidence there is a distinct lack of available 'legal' areas for youth art and a reticence to employ artists and arts workers to facilitate the growth and development of art and culture in community as a way of engaging young people.

Recommendation

- Recognition of the arts in creating community among young people.
- Creation/allocation of appropriate areas for youth art.

- Community spaces and places dedicated to growing and developing sustainable arts projects.
- An increase in community arts officers.

Youth friendly spaces

Rationale

Lack of safe and interesting/engaging ‘hang out’ or ‘chill out’ venues for underage persons to form community and develop mutual peer support networks. The lack of adequate facilities is forcing young people to use private spaces (such as Malls and fast food outlets) which in turn is causing young people to come into contact with policing authorities and security guards.

See also, *Legal and Justice: creative responses to public space, an end to Move-On powers*

Recommendation

- Creation of safe and attractive youth spaces in the CBD, metropolitan, rural and remote areas. This does not necessarily imply the building of new infrastructure, in some locations it simply means existing and or modifying existing resources.
- Training for security guards in ‘youth friendly’ negotiating skills.
- Recognise the free and equal democratic right of young people to access and utilise public space.

Regional youth ‘transition’ services

Rationale

A general lack of adequate support services for young people to help them make successful transitions through adolescence. This problem is especially acute in regional Western Australia where it is difficult to access;

- health services outside of the hospital or GP,
- housing and affordable rentals,
- mental health services and,
- simply ‘getting around’ as there is little public transport.

Recommendation

- Adequate funding for NGO's to provide a suite of services to young people.
- The provision of health services in a clinic setting where a nurse provider can refer young people to doctors for more serious matters.

Lowering the age of 'youth' for funding of service provision

Rationale

Traditional youth funding is for either twelve-eighteen years or twelve - twenty-five years however, it is becoming evident that the ten-twelve year age group are experiencing similar issues as their older counterparts.

Service provision agreements are mandated to provide services for the older bracket. Staff feel ill-equipped to work with the younger demographic but are doing so anyway due to the need for intervention.

This issue is particularly poignant in rural communities.

Recommendation

- Lowering the age of 'youth' and associated funding for service provision for the age demographic eight-twelve years while maintaining the existing age bracket funding.
- More funding/grants by state or federal bodies should be made available for early intervention and recreation programmes.

Survey Participants

There were 82 respondents to our online survey (Appendix 1) from the following categories;

- Non-government organisation or service (15)
- Local government agency or service (4)
- State government agency or service (3)
- Youth Worker Network (5)
- Individuals (6)
- Other, not specified (49)

Names of participating agencies willing to be listed

Those participants willing to be named are listed below;

- Albany Youth Support Association
- Anglicare WA
- Bridgetown-Greenbushes Youth Advisory Council
- Broome Youth Support Group
- Burdekin - Youth in Action Inc.
- Chesterfield House
- City of Wanneroo
- Claremont YAC
- Dungeon Youth Centre
- Hills Community Support Group inc
- Karratha Youth Theatre
- Kimberley District Information Support Centre, Western Australia Police
- Peel Youth Programme Inc.
- Salvation Army
- South Metropolitan Migrant Resource Centre- Refugee Youth Access Program
- Step One Street Work Program Anglicare WA
- Swan Emergency Accommodation
- The Samaritans
- Warren Blackwood Education Office
- Western Australian Substance Users' Association Inc.

Closing Comment

Commendations and thanks must be extended to the many individuals and organisations who contributed to this, YACWA's first pre-budget submission. To those who are experiencing time constrictions and fighting financial hardships, the effort taken to contribute to YACWA's pre-budget submission is a testament to the passion and enthusiasm that exists within the youth sector.

As mentioned in the Executive Summary, YACWA's contribution to Governments understanding of where it should focus its resources is the 'tip of the iceberg'. Much more needs to be done to comprehensively understand the role, contribution and range of services provided by WA's youth sector and appreciate its massive needs.

There are diverse calls for services, financial assistance, resources, recognition and much more detailed in this pre-budget submission. Despite the appearance of a categorised approach it is important to stress that issues and recommendations presented are inter-related. As such the document must be treated as a whole.

It is also imperative to note that some recommendations such as the need to address the crisis accommodation needs of young people, especially young mothers experiencing domestic violence is of immediate concern.

What remains certain is that it is time for WA to comprehensively and holistically 'build on the boom' by investing in social as well as physical infrastructure. A failure to do this will, as the title of our pre-budget submission suggests, result in '*a generation lost*'.

For more information please feel free to contact me at anytime.

Sincerely yours,



**MS. KARYN LISIGNOLI
EXECUTIVE OFFICER**

17th August 2006

Appendices

Appendix 1: YACWA Online Survey