

Submission to the Victorian Youth Strategy

December 2020

Submission: *Victorian Youth Strategy*

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (the Centre) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Department of Premier and Cabinet on the development of a *Victorian Youth Strategy*.

The Centre is the peak body for child and family services in Victoria. For over 100 years we have advocated for the rights of children and young people to be heard, to be safe, to access education and to remain connected to family, community and culture. We represent over 150 community service organisations, students and individuals throughout Victoria working across the continuum of child and family services, from prevention and early intervention to the provision of out-of-home care.

This submission has been informed by consultations with our member organisations and young people with lived experience of out-of-home care from our Young Leaders Collective alumni.

We welcome the Victorian Government's intent, outlined in the discussion paper, to develop a youth strategy 'to make our state the best place to be for young people' (p. 6). Our submission highlights those areas we believe should be prioritised in the implementation of the strategy to enable its success.

Our submission is structured according to the following themes. We have also incorporated a Summary document (Appendix A), to address the specific questions raised in the discussion paper:

- Governance, implementation and accountability
- Vision
- Priorities
- Gaps
- Strategy focus
- Conclusion

Governance, implementation, and accountability

This strategy provides Victoria with a genuine opportunity to deliver on the state's responsibilities to all young people. The Centre would like to see a youth strategy that is strengths-based and supports the talents and abilities of all young people, providing them with opportunities to be engaged in society regardless of their circumstances or postcode. The strategy should promote the individual agency of young people while also acknowledging the structural inequities that exist in our society which mean some young people face additional challenges.

The Centre would also like to see a clear set of indicators to measure the extent to which outcomes are met. To achieve meaningful change the strategy needs a whole-of-state, whole-of-government,

shared outcomes framework with key performance indicators and regular reporting to track action and progress.

To assist accountability, we recommend that the Victorian Government enshrines the strategy in legislation and appoints a Minister with responsibility for delivering the strategy and reporting on progress. This role would require them to liaise with government Ministers to align intersecting strategies, engage non-government services and the community, track key performance indicators across portfolios, and report progress annually to Parliament.

We also recommend that the strategy include guiding principles, informed by consultation. These principles include self-determination, the best interests of the child, and the interconnectedness of young people's wellbeing with family and carer wellbeing.

Young people's leadership and voice

Young people often express frustration that they are consulted but do not see change. While the intent to design the strategy with input from young people and other stakeholders and advice from the Victorian Youth Congress is a good start in the design of a youth-focused strategy, many young people want more than to be merely consulted with; they want opportunities to lead policy and program design and influence key decision making.

Our young leaders proposed that the state government could hire young people to strengthen the development and delivery of the strategy, and the strategy itself could then create further opportunities for young people's leadership within government. For example, a key performance indicator could be the number of young people aged 18 to 25 years employed across the public service in policy and program development, implementation and evaluation roles.

Throughout our consultations, there was consensus that the case studies included in the discussion paper are a powerful way to incorporate the voice of young people. It is important that there are clear links between the themes in the case studies and the final content of the strategy.

Vision

The discussion paper proposes the following vision for Victorian young people:

We are committed to creating a Victoria where all young people are healthy and safe, and empowered to contribute to the issues that affect them. We want every single young person to have equitable access to opportunities and support to participate fully in the social, economic and civic life of our state (p. 8).

Our consultations indicated general support for the vision and suggested it could be expanded to incorporate connection and belonging, and resources. To survive and thrive young people need access to food, housing, health and responsive relationships.

Young people also need to have a voice and be empowered to contribute on *all* issues, not only those that directly affect them. They have important contributions to make to policy and program development based on their experiences as members of families, communities, and society at large. We also suggest substituting the word 'community' for 'civic' on the grounds that 'civic' sounds more bureaucratic than community and may not resonate with some young people.

The Centre supports the phrase 'equitable access to opportunities' in the vision as it recognises that young people are not starting from the same place and need different levels and types of supports to achieve the same access to opportunities. However, we recognise that this must also translate to equitable outcomes to achieve the goals of the strategy and meet our responsibilities to young people, and this needs to be reflected in the vision.

Priorities

While the strategy is broad and intended to cover all domains of life, the Centre and our members believe that there are some key areas that should take priority. These are focused on meeting basic needs, which provide a foundation for other life domains and are a prerequisite for improvements in other outcome areas. Unfortunately, too many Victorian young people go without the basic resources they need.¹

Addressing poverty

For Victoria to be the best place for young people to live, we need to make sure that every young person's most basic needs can be met. As noted in the discussion paper, 15.6 per cent of young people aged 15-24 in Victoria live in poverty. The recently released Mission Australia Youth Survey Report 2020 found that 'equity and discrimination rose steeply to become the most important national issue according to young people, increasing substantially by more than 60% between 2019 and 2020'.² While the Victorian Youth Strategy Discussion Paper recognises that income support and insecurity about access to basic necessities are major concerns of young people, there is no outcome area that adequately captures these concerns.

Poverty presents a range of risks to young people, such as food insecurity, housing instability, limited opportunities, and social exclusion. These risk factors can lead to poorer physical health, mental health, academic achievement, and overall wellbeing.³

Poverty is also self-perpetuating and presents barriers to improving one's circumstances, such as engaging in education and gaining employment. The science of scarcity tells us that poverty creates barriers by occupying a person's mental bandwidth with thoughts of immediate survival that do not leave room for longer-term priorities.⁴

The COVID-19 pandemic has put a spotlight on poverty, disadvantage and structural inequality and has shown us the power of government intervention. It has shown how choices about public spending can drastically improve people's lives and decrease demand on community services. With many more individuals and families suddenly at risk due to COVID-19, the Australian Government provided a much needed, albeit temporary, boost to social security payments of \$550 per fortnight. This lifted the incomes of hundreds of thousands of people across the country above the poverty

¹ Tiller, E, Fildes, J, Hall, S, Hicking, V, Greenland, N, Liyanarachchi, D & Di Nicola, K 2020, Youth survey report 2020, Missions Australia, Sydney.

² Tiller et al. 2020, p. 2.

³ National Scientific Council on the Developing Child 2020, *Connecting the brain to the rest of the body*, In Brief, Center on the Developing Child, Cambridge, MA.

⁴ Feinberg, C 2015, 'The science of scarcity: a behavioral economist's fresh perspectives on poverty', *Harvard Magazine*, May-June, <<https://harvardmagazine.com/2015/05/the-science-of-scarcity>>.

line and prevented many more from falling into poverty due to job losses. Because young people are overrepresented in casualised work and the gig economy, they have been significantly impacted by COVID-19 job losses. The Labour Force data from April shows an estimated 213,000 young people aged 15-24 lost their jobs (seasonally adjusted estimates) in one month alone.⁵

Unfortunately, the Commonwealth support is being gradually scaled back despite the inadequacy of payment rates. Many young people will be plunged into poverty when the Coronavirus Supplement ends and achieving the outcomes of the Victorian youth strategy will be very difficult in this context. While the Victorian Government has a role to play in meeting basic needs through job creation and other measures aimed at reducing hardship, social security policy, which is the responsibility of the Australian Government, has the largest influence on poverty rates. We recommend that the strategy recognises this and commits to continually advocating through National Cabinet and other mechanisms for poverty reduction measures, including a permanent and adequate increase to social security payments sufficient to lift incomes above the poverty line so that young people have their basic needs met.

Addressing homelessness and housing challenges

Young people are overrepresented in homelessness rates compared to other age groups.⁶ The young leaders who participated in our consultations questioned the limited focus on housing in the discussion paper. They highlighted the difficulty of studying or getting a job when young people have nowhere to live.

The Centre welcomed the recent announcement by the state government of a record investment in social housing. However, housing supply and affordability measures need to be accompanied by support to access and maintain housing. The recently released report by the Victorian Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP) found that at least one in three young people leaving statutory care in Victoria will experience homelessness within three years of leaving care.⁷

Young care leavers would benefit from practical support to complete housing applications and from having a key worker or contact person who knows the young person and can offer support over the longer term with other challenges that might arise, such as isolation or maintaining a tenancy. In combination with new investment in housing supply, the youth strategy has the potential to play an important role in improving housing outcomes for young people.

⁵ Atkins, M, Callis, Z, Flatau, P & Kaleveld, L 2020, *COVID-19 and youth unemployment*, Centre for Social Impact, Melbourne.

⁶ Melbourne City Mission (MCM) 2020, *Submission to the inquiry into homelessness in Victoria*, MCM, Melbourne.

⁷ Commission for Children and Young People (CCYP) 2020, *Keep caring: systemic inquiry into services for young people transitioning from out-of-home care*, CCYP, Melbourne.

Highest priority for those with the highest level of need

We welcome the Victorian Government's acknowledgement that:

some young people face discrimination and lack access to basic social and family supports – at no fault of their own. They are left vulnerable and disengaged from education and community, and this can go on to affect them for their entire lives (p. 7).

Building on this, the strategy should explicitly acknowledge the inequality experienced by many young people, coming from differing circumstances and backgrounds with significant variations in resources, capital and support. Some young people live with carers or in residential care homes. There are distinct issues for young people from a migrant background who face barriers to participation in the labour market.⁸ For young people with a disability, these barriers are even greater.⁹ Consideration could be given in the youth strategy to paid internships, which would enable the young person to have the benefits of work experience in an area of interest while having an income to meet basic needs.

Our young leaders noted that while the strategy is intended to be broad and apply to all young people, there needs to be a stronger focus on those who most need assistance. The Centre strongly recommends that the strategy focus on young people experiencing the most disadvantage, such as those suffering harm, trauma, marginalisation, systemic racism, discrimination and other hardships. This cohort of young people should be prioritised in funding decisions under the strategy and receive a proportionate response to their disproportionate disadvantage. This response should also include place-based investments that target the communities with the greatest levels of disadvantage.

Young people who find themselves caught up in the youth justice system are particularly vulnerable. In Victoria, children as young as ten years old can be charged with a crime and sent to prison. During 2018-19, 34 Victorian children aged 10-13 years were in detention and all were unsentenced. Of these children, 14.7 per cent were Aboriginal, a significant overrepresentation.¹⁰ While the total number of children and young people is low, the costs of incarceration for these young people, their families, their communities and society are high. The lower the age that a child or young person is imprisoned, the higher the rates of reoffending.¹¹ Among all children and young people in detention during the year in Victoria, 17 per cent were aged 10-13 years at first conviction.¹² Victoria must raise the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to at least 14 years of age, keeping young people out of prison and providing them with the support they deserve.

⁸ Select Committee on the Future of Work and Workers 2018, *Hope is not a strategy: our shared responsibility for the future of work and workers*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, p. 16.

⁹ Ibid, p. 26.

¹⁰ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2020, *Youth justice in Australia 2018-19*, Cat. no. JUV 132, AIHW, Canberra.

¹¹ Sentencing Advisory Council 2016, *Reoffending by children and young people in Victoria*, Sentencing Advisory Council, Melbourne.

¹² AIHW 2020.

The discussion paper states that young people are calling for changes that will reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal young people in the justice system; raising the age would go a long way towards achieving this.

Gaps

We note that 'the discussion paper does not detail every group, issue or need experienced by young people ... Instead, it seeks to support your engagement with the youth strategy' (p. 7). With this in mind, we wish to highlight several issues that should be reflected in the final strategy.

Systemic impacts on young people's outcomes and action to overcome them

There needs to be a clear and upfront acknowledgement of the systemic and structural barriers to the achievement of outcomes for young people, and how this strategy will seek to address them. As discussed earlier in relation to poverty and housing, structural change can drive significant improvements in outcomes by breaking down barriers and providing an enabling environment in which children and young people can thrive.

Supporting young people in the context of family

A key aspect missing from the discussion paper is the importance of family, and support for young people in the context of their family. The discussion paper states that '9,879 children in Victoria were living with carers in 2018' (p. 10) but does not discuss the importance of having a stable home and a supportive, nurturing adult to rely on, particularly during the transitions that occur in adolescence and early adulthood.

The number of children and young people in out-of-home care in Victoria continues to rise, and without significant investment, could increase by 27,500 by 2026.¹³ According to a recent report from Social Ventures Australia, 'early intervention prevents progression to further disadvantage and high-cost interventions, including residential services, homelessness, and the youth justice system'.¹⁴

Increased investment in evidence-based early intervention programs would contribute to improved outcomes for young people by:

- Providing family strengthening support to prevent family breakdown
- Reducing the incidence of child abuse and neglect
- Addressing the concerns that result in children and young people being reported to statutory child protection
- reducing entries into out-of-home care, and
- securing a better future for children and young people who cannot live safely at home.

Supporting young people using family violence

¹³ Social Ventures Australia (SVA) 2020, [Keeping families together through COVID-19: the strengthened case for early intervention in Victoria's child protection and out-of-home care system](#), SVA, Melbourne.

¹⁴ Social Ventures Australia (SVA) 2019, [The economic case for early intervention in the child protection and out-of-home care system in Victoria](#), SVA Consulting, Melbourne.

The discussion paper notes the negative impacts of family violence on young people, including 'a higher likelihood for future relationships to involve family violence' (p. 32). The Centre has been working in the area of adolescents who use violence in the home, contributing to the evidence base by consulting extensively with professionals, reviewing evidence-based programs and approaches, and hosting a cross-sectoral forum to showcase promising models. This is a complex area of practice that intersects with multiple workforces and sectors and requires nuanced, evidence-based approaches. It also requires a developmentally-informed approach that recognises the need for different strategies for different ages and stages of development and to prevent escalation of violence into adolescence and young adulthood.

Transitions

We note that the discussion paper does not explicitly include transition to independent living or moving out of the family home in its representation of the 'transition points in young people's lives'. The recent budget decision to extend support for young people in care to 21 years of age is welcome but needs to be legislated to make sure this transition support is available to every young person leaving care.

Technology

Technology is largely unmentioned in the discussion paper despite its significant role and influence in young people's lives, both positive and negative. The Centre recommends that the strategy includes an outcome related to technology that covers record keeping, transparency, access, privacy, consent, ownership, and control. It should consider the benefits and risks of engagement with technology and its role in accessing information, services, learning, schooling, employment and social relationships. Indicators under the strategy must consider equitable access to technology in the areas of digital literacy and access to internet, hardware and software. All young people should be able to access information to guide safe use of the internet and technology apps and platforms.

Outcomes

The discussion paper contains the following outcomes:

- Victorian young people are healthy and well, mentally and physically
- Victorian young people actively participate in learning, education and training
- Victorian young people are economically active and contribute to the economy
- Victorian young people are connected to culture, community and civic life
- Victorian young people are safe, experience equality of opportunity and are treated fairly
- Government, community services and the youth sector are accessible, appropriate and coordinated, and respond to young people's evolving needs.

Our members suggested that while the intent and focus of many of these outcomes is appropriate, they could be reframed to reflect societal responsibility rather than implying the onus is on individuals to achieve these. Responsibility for action lies with government, the services sector and the broader community, not with individual young people who are still learning to navigate their transition into adulthood, and the strategy needs to reflect this.

The Centre would like to see the outcome area 'Victorian young people are economically active and contribute to the economy' reworded to reflect a broader interpretation of economic value to the community. As currently framed, this outcome measure suggests that participation in the formal workforce is the only valid economic contribution a young person can make; it has too much focus on the 'formal' economy and excludes young people who contribute productively in other ways. 'Economic' contributions should be better defined and more inclusive of contributions outside of formal work, including volunteering. Caring responsibilities and parenting are also important economic contributions that should be moved from 'Victorian young people are safe, experience equality of opportunity and are treated fairly' to this outcome area.

The outcome 'Victorian young people actively participate in learning, education and training' is also narrowly conceived and could be expanded to include play and recreation. Education is not only about a career or employment, but about learning and pursuing areas of interest. Children, young people and even adults learn through play. Recreation and hobbies connect people to community and provide opportunities for personal development. Having a place and space to develop and connect for creative expression is important to wellbeing.

We recommend an additional outcome that focuses on meeting basic needs and an adequate standard of living. The emphasis on employment in the discussion paper should be reframed around financial security and building the foundations for independent life, whether that be through connection to employment or otherwise.

As previously mentioned, there is a need for an outcome related to support for young people within the context of their family and home environment. In the discussion paper, the section on young people in out-of-home care is included alongside homelessness at the end of the document. The voices and experiences of young people in out-of-home care, and a focus on efforts to reduce the number of children entering care, need to be more prominent in the strategy, with relevant outcome measures against which progress can be tracked.

The CCYP has identified that Victorian care leavers have high rates of disability and many are not supported to access the NDIS and support packages. Health outcomes for young people leaving care are of concern – 80 per cent of young people who left care between 2006 and 2014 were admitted or presented to hospital and 52 per cent presented to acute mental health services. It is completely unacceptable to have 44 per cent of young people aged 16 to 18, on the verge of leaving care, not engaged in education.¹⁵

The discussion paper notes the shared responsibility for improving young people's outcomes and asks how we can work together to better meet their needs. It also notes that services are often not accessible. A key aspect that is missing from the discussion paper is adequate and sustainable resourcing of services to enable them to do their work in supporting young people effectively.

The child and family services sector and the broader community services sector work hard to provide the best possible support to every child, young person and family in Victoria in need of services. However, there is a range of challenges and barriers that affect service delivery and the ability to

¹⁵ CCYP 2020.

work together with the broader service system. A strategy must acknowledge and address these challenges, and the outcome 'Government, community services and the youth sector are accessible, appropriate and coordinated, and respond to young people's evolving needs' could be adapted to reflect this.

Our young leaders noted the impact of high caseloads on service quality for young people; when the workforce is overloaded, staff burn out and often leave, which has implications for continuity of care and support. Insecurity of funding also places limitations on the recruitment and retention of staff. While local government contributes funding to support youth engagement, this can present challenges due to LGA boundaries that restrict service delivery and create disparities between communities, particularly in rural and regional areas. Funding models that facilitate collaboration rather than competition, and promote program flexibility and certainty, enable services to be inclusive and innovative in meeting the needs of children and young people.

Our members noted the importance of avoiding a strategy that is city-centric, and the Centre would like to see indicators that show how many communities have the services they need. This could drive further investment in rural and regional areas which too often miss out.

Our young leaders called for additional workforce training and support to deliver therapeutic and trauma-informed services and to embed policy intent in practice. Service delivery could also be improved through the creation of peer support and mentoring roles for people with lived experience of care that incorporate on-the-job support to study and upskill.

Purpose and focus of the strategy

The Centre welcomes the question posed in the discussion paper as to whether a strategy that applies to young people aged 12 to 25 is the best approach. The key point of difference between a young person and an adult is a young person's continuing development and the need for support to manage various transitions. These characteristics are also shared with children, and we know that many of the challenges that young people face begin in infancy and childhood. We are concerned that focusing the strategy on young people aged 12 and over misses the critical period in middle childhood in which puberty begins, and when mental health challenges and school disengagement often emerge.¹⁶ Adequately addressing these challenges requires increased focus and investment in prevention and early intervention. The Centre suggests that the Victorian Government consider a strategy that includes children and young people.

¹⁶ Munday, L 2020, 'The missing middle: puberty is a critical time at school, so why aren't we investing in it more?', *The Conversation*, 1 December, <<https://theconversation.com/the-missing-middle-puberty-is-a-critical-time-at-school-so-why-arent-we-investing-in-it-more-150071>>.

A child and youth wellbeing strategy would focus on:

- The common needs of children and young people at all ages
- Targeted responses in infancy, early childhood, middle childhood, adolescence and young adulthood
- Upholding children's rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.¹⁷

The young people we consulted were clear that some of the most significant challenges faced by young people are also experienced by people of all ages, for example, access to safe, secure and suitable housing. The Centre notes that the Victorian Treasurer, Tim Pallas, is considering a wellbeing budget.¹⁸ We believe that this approach to resource allocation will result in better lives for all Victorians by clearly linking investment to desired wellbeing outcomes. Indicators developed to implement a child and youth wellbeing strategy could directly feed into a wellbeing budget process.

We recommend that the Victorian Government create a new ministry – the Minister for Children and Young People – with responsibility for delivering the child and youth wellbeing strategy. A ministry with responsibility for all stages of development from infancy through to young adulthood could help ensure consistency across policy areas to meet the developmental needs of children and young people.

Conclusion

Improving outcomes for young people requires coordinated action across government and the wider service sector. In this response the Centre has identified the outcomes and areas needing to be addressed as the youth strategy is further developed. We look forward to continuing our engagement with government in the development and delivery of the Victorian Youth Strategy.

¹⁷ See, for example: New Zealand Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 2020, Child and youth wellbeing strategy, viewed 4 December 2020, <<https://dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/child-and-youth-wellbeing-strategy>>.

¹⁸ Michael, L 2020, "It's a no-brainer": Momentum grows for Victoria to deliver a wellbeing budget', *ProBono*, 30 November, <<https://probonoaustralia.com.au/news/2020/11/its-a-no-brainer-momentum-grows-for-victoria-to-deliver-a-wellbeing-budget/>>.

Appendix A

Responses to questions in the discussion paper

1. Does this statement capture your vision and aspirations for young Victorians? Why or why not?

The statement captures our vision and aspirations partially. We have identified some gaps in the discussion paper, notably around structural inequalities, developmental approaches, and specific cohorts of young people who experience vulnerability and disadvantage.

2. Do you think the discussion paper captures the key challenges facing young Victorians and the priorities and issues of most importance to them? Is there anything missing or that needs to be changed?

If Victoria is to prevent a trajectory of young people entering into the criminal justice system, including over-representation of Aboriginal young people, then the discussion paper needs to address the age of criminal responsibility, early intervention and support for families to prevent entry into child protection and care services. Given the profile of young people in youth justice – with concerning numbers of young people who have experienced abuse, trauma or neglect as children, are known to child protection, have been exposed to family violence, and have experienced mental health issues, AOD use and/or cognitive difficulties – there needs to be a strong focus on prevention and the earliest possible intervention in a child's life to support the development of a nurturing and safe environment.

3. What needs to change for all young people to be empowered in every aspects of Victorian life – civic, political, social and economic?

More recognition needs to be given to the drivers of poverty and to the earliest possible interventions when risk is first identified in a family so children can be nurtured and thrive and enter adolescence and young adulthood with equitable opportunities and the potential for more equitable outcomes. young people.

4. How can we work together to better meet the needs of young people?

Young people from diverse backgrounds and abilities need to be centrally involved in the development of policies and programs that are intended to meet their needs. Their voice and perspectives need to be embedded from the outset. Recruitment of young people to government policy and program areas, including evaluation of the impact of these, provides avenues for their multiple viewpoints to be incorporated and reflected.

5. If you could change one program, initiative or policy in Victoria, what would you change?

Based on the evidence, the Centre believes Victoria needs to lift the age of criminal responsibility as an urgent priority. There is broad consensus within the scientific community that the age of criminal responsibility should be increased to safeguard children who are unlikely to have the cognitive and moral capacity or emotional regulation to fully control their behaviour and comprehend its consequences. Criminalising children is inconsistent with the evidence on brain development and punishes them for experiencing disadvantage, adversity and trauma. An annual survey by the Victorian Youth Parole Board found that 67 per cent of children and young people detained on sentence and remand in Victoria have experienced trauma, abuse or neglect with a disproportionate number of Aboriginal children affected by the current laws.

Children with experiences in care are also overrepresented in the youth justice system. Studies of these 'crossover children' have shown a high likelihood of exposure to multiple adverse childhood experiences, familial disruption and childhood maltreatment, signalling significant levels of cumulative harm. Putting children with significant trauma into prison is doing further harm.

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has called for countries to have a minimum age of criminal responsibility set at 14 years or higher. Raising the age would be an important step in making Victoria the best place to be for our young people.

6. What is working well that the Victorian Government could build on to improve outcomes for young people?

The Centre welcomes the recent budget announcement of an extension of supports for children in care to 21 years. We would like to see this policy enshrined in legislation so no child in care in the future need live in fear of transitioning into homelessness, unsafe situations or disconnection from learning pathways and community supports.

The Centre manages the award-winning Raising Expectations program which supports young people in and leaving care to go on to further or higher education. The program was initially funded by philanthropy but is now funded by the Department of Education and Training and is in the process of expanding to all TAFEs and universities in Victoria. A recent Deloitte report on the economic and social benefits of the program found that for every dollar invested in it, Raising Expectations generates an estimated minimum of \$1.80 in economic and social benefits and that the social benefits of Raising Expectations substantially outweigh the costs. The program provides an excellent platform for increasing the educational engagement in, options for and academic performance of every young person in care across Victoria. Such a cost effective model needs to be further expanded and funded to reach every educational institution responsible for engaging children and young people who are in care in learning.

7. What role can you or your organisation play to improve the lives of young Victorians?

As the peak body for child and family services in Victoria, the Centre worked closely with community service organisations to drive the successful Homestretch campaign to extend care for young people until they turn 21. We are uniquely placed to work with our member organisations to advocate for improved service provision for young people, to draw on our Young Leaders Collective for advice and guidance about youth-led policy and programs, and to translate and disseminate evidence-informed approaches and programs supporting young people through Victoria's Outcomes, Evidence and Practice Network (OPEN). We have excellent relationships with other peaks representing young people and look forward to working with them and with government collaboratively on future strategic priorities for young people in Victoria.

8. Do you have anything else you would like to add to inform the youth strategy?

We would like to see an outcomes focus in the state youth strategy with clear indicators and a timeframe for tracking progress and outcomes.

We would like to see an integrated strategy that includes children and young people rather than focusing on young people in isolation. New Zealand's Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy is an example of a successful strategic approach.¹⁹

¹⁹ See <https://dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/child-and-youth-wellbeing-strategy>