



Submission

In response to the 'Stronger futures for all young Victorians: discussion paper on the youth transition system'.

On behalf of the [Yarra Ranges Transitions Project](#) Steering Committee.

June 2010

## Introduction

The Yarra Ranges Council is pleased to make this submission to the Victorian Government on behalf of the Yarra Ranges Transitions Project Steering Committee in response to the *Stronger futures for all young Victorians: discussion paper on the youth transition system*.

The Yarra Ranges Transitions Project welcomes the opportunity to share its perspectives in relation to how young Victorians can be better supported to continue on to further education and training and to make a successful transition to working life and how this can be best done.

The Yarra Ranges Transitions Project Steering Committee comprises representatives from:

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| § Yarra Ranges Council  | § Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD)   |
| § Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) | § Outer East Local Learning and Employment Network (OELLEN) |
| § Eastern Access Community Health (EACH)                          |   |

The Steering Committee is supported by a wider Project Team comprised of a broad range of organisations committed to improving Youth Transitions in the outer eastern region, and in particular throughout the Yarra Ranges.

The Yarra Ranges Transitions Project is a key leadership initiative being undertaken in the Yarra Ranges municipality in the outer eastern region of metropolitan Melbourne. The project is focussed on identifying opportunities and strategies to strengthen services and systems across the key phases of transition for children and young people in the Yarra Ranges, to ensure every person aged 0-25 years is well prepared and supported for learning, education, training and employment.

The project aims to identify the key needs, issues and opportunities to better support children and young people within the Yarra Ranges to successfully make the transition into and participate in learning, education, training and employment activities over the course of their journey towards adulthood and independence.

Improving children and youth transitions in the Yarra Ranges region is of paramount importance for the wellbeing of children, young people, their families, the wider community and the local economy. The significance of this project being undertaken in the Yarra Ranges is evidenced by the following characteristics of the area:

- § Localities of high social disadvantage;
- § High levels of early school departure;
- § Low levels of Year 12 or equivalent attainment;
- § High levels of young people departing secondary school in Years 10, 11 and 12 and not continuing on with any education or training; and
- § Lower than average levels of school leavers enrolled in university courses.

While the project is focussed on identifying issues and barriers that currently prevent or impede successful transitions, it is also strongly founded on a recognition of the positive work that continues to be undertaken across the early years, youth, education, training and employment sectors and the opportunity to further build on the positive initiatives in place.

The project is being undertaken over the period December 2009 to August 2010 and will culminate in a Yarra Ranges Transitions Strategy. This strategy will identify a range of practical initiatives in response to priority transitions issues identified across the municipality.

Implementation of the strategy over coming years will require a committed partnership of organisations that play a key role in learning, education, training and employment for children and young people aged 0-25 in the Yarra Ranges and beyond. This work undertaken locally will support and complement the state-wide efforts of the Victorian Government in the area of youth transitions.

## Submission Focus

The Yarra Ranges Transitions Project has focussed on the journey and transitions of children and young people from early childhood through to adulthood, spanning the ages 0-25 years. Across this age spectrum, the project has focused on a number of key transition phases, including:

- § Early Childhood through to Kindergarten
- § Primary School
- § Secondary School
- § Post Compulsory Schooling

While the *Stronger Futures* report focuses principally on the transition phase from compulsory schooling to work and life as independent adults, the Yarra Ranges Transitions Project believes that the success of young people in making this transition is informed by their collective learning and development experience from birth to the end of secondary school.

Correspondingly, the Yarra Ranges Transitions Project's input to the *Stronger Futures* conversation draws upon all four of these key transition phases, as they all have a bearing on the capacity and likelihood of a young person to make a positive transition from secondary school on to further education, training, employment and independence.

This submission presents a brief summary of some of the key transition issues identified by participants in the project consultation processes. These issues, and others identified through the project to-date, will be further explored through the Yarra Ranges Transitions Project, including cross-referencing the anecdotal feedback received with available data and research findings. The issues identified are presented in the context of recognising that the majority of children and young people successfully move through early childhood, kindergarten, schooling and on to further education and employment.

A complete analysis of opportunities and priorities to improve transitions for children and young people in the Yarra Ranges, incorporating documented evidence findings, will be included in the final project outcomes.

The Yarra Ranges Transitions Project hopes that both this initial summary of project findings and the comprehensive analysis available later in 2010 will be considered in shaping the outcomes from the *Stronger futures* discussion.

The partnership also supports the submissions made by individual members of the project. This submission is consistent with and complementary to the submission made by the Outer East Local Learning and Employment Network (OELLEN).

## Early Childhood through to Kindergarten

Research evidence strongly indicates that the experience of children in their early years, from birth through to kindergarten age, has a substantial influence on their ability and likelihood to successfully transition into school, secondary school and beyond. Many participants in the project identified that those children experiencing transition difficulties in primary and secondary school often had challenges that extended back to kindergarten and their early childhood.

Participants in the project consultation process identified the following as key transition issues for children of this age in the Yarra Ranges, which require further examination:

- § The extent to which children in their early years are exposed to a rich environment involving a diversity of places, people and first-hand experiences.
- § Experiencing socialisation with children outside of the family environment prior to attending kindergarten.
- § The level of engagement of families with young children with the formal service system and social infrastructure. Concern for 'hard to reach' families who may be at risk of being vulnerable and isolated.

- § Expanded high-support services for families with young children, such as supported playgroups.
- § The extent to which young children acquire pre-literacy skills, which are a necessary foundation for formal learning, prior to attending kindergarten.
- § The impact of low adult literacy on children's exposure to books, words, numbers, reading and sound development.
- § Barriers for children attending preschool.
- § Promoting the value and importance of kindergarten as well as supports provided to families to assist with planning for and enrolling in a kindergarten program.
- § Promoting the concept of life-long learning and how this may be supported in the home environment.
- § Early identification and response to emerging learning, developmental or behavioural difficulties in children prior to, and during, the kindergarten years.
- § Assisting families to provide a safe, healthy and stable home environment.

## Primary School

Research evidence indicates that the experience of children in their first two years at primary school has a substantial influence on their ability and likelihood to successfully engage in learning throughout the primary years and transition into secondary school and beyond.

Participants in the project consultation process identified the following as key transition issues for children of this age in the Yarra Ranges, which require further examination:

- § Support for the ongoing use of Transition Learning and Development Statements and the need to ensure these are prepared by all kindergartens and childcare centres.
- § In addition to the Transition Learning and Development Statements, the need for a direct conversation between every prep teacher the kindergarten teacher or child-carer who was the principal educator / carer for the child in the year before starting school.
- § Creating maximum opportunity to engage parents in the school community and school activities, throughout all years at primary school.
- § The ability for primary schools to be flexible and responsive to children's interests and needs in order to keep children interested and engaged in learning.
- § Early identification and response to learning, developmental or behavioural difficulties in primary school children.
- § The ability to provide flexible and responsive assistance for children with identified significant additional needs, though needs not at a high enough level to qualify for funding for aide assistance in the classroom. This was identified as an issue both for the children with additional needs and the others in the classroom, who can be significantly disrupted by a child with such needs.
- § Exposure of primary school students to positive role models and mentors.

## Secondary School

It was confirmed through the project that the experience of children in all years at secondary school has a significant influence on their ability to plan and make informed decisions about post-compulsory education, training and employment pathways.

Participants in the project consultation process identified the following as key transition issues for young people of this age in the Yarra Ranges, which require further examination:

- § The dramatic difference of learning environments and structure between primary and secondary school.
- § The ability for primary school students (in grades 4-6) to experience learning in a secondary school environment.
- § The sharing of resources between primary and secondary schools.
- § The heightened risk of disengagement of secondary school students in Years 8 and 9. The ability for secondary schools to engage students of this age in varied and flexible ways, which respond to their needs and interests, including learning experiences outside of the classroom and formal curriculum-based activities.
- § Literacy and numeracy skills, which were identified as a critical factor in the success of students remaining engaged at secondary school and their subsequent transition into further education, training and employment.
- § The ability and capacity of schools to identify early any learning and behavioural difficulties experienced by students and intervene with appropriate and tailored assistance.
- § The quality of relationship between student and their teacher(s), which was identified as another key factor for disengagement of young people from school identified.
- § Exposure of secondary school students to positive role models and mentors.
- § Recognition that many young people at risk of or actually disengaging from learning and the school environment in their teenage years often have a long and complex history of experiences and challenges (at home, socially and at school) that have led them to where they are, rather than a single issue occurring in secondary school.
- § The culture within the home environment and value placed on attending school and the importance of education.
- § Concerns relating to the perception by students, families and teachers of some VCAL programs.
- § The extent of life experience of young people in the Yarra Ranges, particularly those in the more remote and isolated areas of the Yarra Valley and Upper Yarra, and corresponding breadth of perspective of career options and learning pathways. The need to broaden horizons and understanding of the learning and employment possibilities that exist, both within the local region and beyond.
- § The re-identification of risk, where some children are identified as being vulnerable or at risk at multiple points throughout their childhood and adolescence, ranging from early childhood, preschool, primary school and at secondary school.

## Post Compulsory School Options

The post-compulsory school years present a range of unique challenges in the Yarra Ranges, with key barriers to successful transition into further education, training or employment identified by participants as including:

- § Geographic barriers and limited transport options;
- § Financial barriers to engaging in further education courses and strong imperatives to gain employment as soon as possible – particularly in low income families;
- § Limited local employment options, particularly in popular vocational jobs;
- § Low aspiration levels;
- § Insufficient literacy and numeracy skills to access apprenticeships;
- § Poor understanding of what learning, training and employment opportunities exist, both locally and further afield.

It was identified through the project that a key factor in young people making a positive transition from compulsory schooling to post-compulsory options, including remaining at school to complete Year 12 or equivalent, was the quality of information and advice they receive about career options and pathways.

Participants in the project consultation process identified the following as key transition issues for young people of this age in the Yarra Ranges, which require further examination:

- § The careers advice and support provided in secondary schools throughout the Yarra Ranges.
- § The need for careers information, advice and the conversation with individual students about their interests, skills and possible career direction needs to occur much earlier in school than Year 10.
- § The extent to which an emphasis is placed on learning and career pathways involving university, and the impact this may have on (a) the provision of broader information about other, vocational based options; (b) the ability for young people to identify and transition into a field of education, training or employment which is suited to their interests and skills; and (c) young people's perception of what constitutes a 'successful' transition following secondary school.
- § Barriers to students from the Yarra Ranges attending university, including financial affordability (course fees, accommodation and travel expenses), travel options (if without a car) and the distance to travel and associated time.
- § The perception of VCAL as an alternative to VCE regarding the potential to lead to future learning and employment.
- § Secondary schools working closely with external employment and education service providers to further broaden their student's exposure to career options and pathway planning advice.
- § The extent to which the extensive knowledge, experience and network connections of external providers is capitalised upon to offer young people with more diverse and comprehensive careers advice and planning assistance.
- § The need for broader exposure of secondary school students to a diversity of industries, jobs and opportunities.
- § The opportunity to build stronger partnerships between businesses and industries and the secondary school sector.
- § The opportunity for secondary school students to participate in work experience, particularly in work environments that they are not used to, as a way to providing them with good life experiences and an insight to different work places and types of industries.
- § The barrier presented by limited transport options, which can limit access to post-secondary education, training and employment.
- § Achieving a closer match between existing skills shortages within the local region and the training courses offered and taken up by young people.
- § The provision of accurate information to young people in the earlier years of secondary school about different industries and the requirements to enter those industries.

- § Creating opportunities for young and older adults, from a wide range of backgrounds, to speak to students about their experience and different pathways to success to broaden young people's understanding of career options and what is involved.
- § Fostering of aspiration in young people, which is considered a key factor in how successfully young people will transition from compulsory schooling to further learning and employment.
- § Promotion of the importance and value of attaining Year 12 or equivalent. Ensuring that completing school is seen to be relevant to all young people.
- § Raising school completion rates.

## Future Directions

The *Yarra Ranges Transitions Project* is currently finalising the analysis of feedback received from key stakeholders and families of children aged 0-25 and identifying priority directions. The project will finalise the Yarra Ranges Transitions Strategy in August 2010 and will be looking to implement agreed priority initiatives over the following five year period.

In implementing the Yarra Ranges Transitions Strategy the project partners will be looking to forge strong relationships with a range of key organisations, including the Victorian Government, to ensure that all children and young people in the Yarra Ranges are supported to successfully make the transition into and participate in learning, education, training and employment activities over the course of their journey towards adulthood and independence.