Moonee Valley City Council submission to Stronger futures of all young Victorians – Discussion paper on the youth transitions system

Introduction

Moonee Valley City Council values this opportunity to have input into this discussion on the youth transitions system. We believe that local government can, and in many areas already does, play a crucial role in supporting young people’s transitions to the world of work. Local government contributes through identifying local community and business needs and trends, building and facilitating important local level partnerships and through our provision of services for young people. However we believe that councils also have a role as major employers. Therefore we have approached our responses from a number of different perspectives – as employer, as leader and partnership builder, and as service provider.

General comments

The discussion paper correctly identifies that educational outcomes strongly correlate with low socio-economic disadvantage and that strategies must be targeted to places of high need and low educational attainment. What we do need to understand and examine however, are the pockets of disadvantage with high levels of youth unemployment and low educational attainment within local government areas. We know from examining suburb level data within our own municipality that there are pockets of disadvantage where specific strategies are required. For example, the City of Moonee Valley as a whole has a high year 12 or equivalent attainment rate and relatively moderate youth unemployment rate in comparison with many other local government areas. However this obscures the diversity of employment and education outcomes within Moonee Valley. Council is currently working with a range of stakeholders to provide employment opportunities to young people living in public housing in the suburbs of Flemington and Ascot Vale.

It is important that when prioritising funding and implementing strategies that the State Government work with local government to identify these places of need and not rely solely on local government data level data. The risk is that pockets of extreme disadvantage remain hidden. We know from the data that there is a need for specific strategies in these areas – at the 2006 Census the youth unemployment rates (aged 15-
24 years) on the Flemington and Ascot Vale housing estate were 32.3 percent and 57.3 percent respectively. This compared to the youth unemployment rate in the City of Moonee Valley of 9.9 percent.

Since March 2009 Council has worked with a diverse range of stakeholders to implement the Sustainable Employment and Economic Development (SEED) project, funded through the Department of Industry, Innovation and Regional Development. The project has focussed on young people living in public housing in the suburbs of Flemington and Ascot Vale, involving a large percentage of young people from refugee and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

The SEED project has registered over 70 young people looking for work placement opportunities and case management support to explore career and work pathways. As of February 2010, 20 young people had been placed into work placements (minimum of 16 weeks) with employers including Council, Convenience Advertising, Doutta Galla Community Health Service, YMCA and Australian Boxing Company. Some 86 percent of these 20 young people have been engaged in ongoing work after their 16-week placement either with the same employer or a new employer. Through this project we are working closely with the Victorian Trades Hall Council, Transport Workers Union and the Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union to put strategies in place ensure that young people are placed within supportive workplace environments.

We know that many of these young people have faced barriers to gaining employment, many of whom had been out of work despite completing Year 12 or equivalent and post-compulsory qualifications. There is a need for community wide responses to address these barriers – many of these young people are not afforded the same access to opportunities as other young people in the community, for example they do not have access to the same social networks and work experience opportunities which are often as important as qualifications for young people to ‘get a foot in the door’ to start their career.

We support the development of the National Partnership on Low SES Communities in the acknowledgement of the range of barriers faced by young people from these backgrounds. We would like to stress here how important community partnerships are in this context and the need for more programs to engage young people, families and communities. We would however like to hear further detail from State Government on how this National Partnership will be implemented and funded on a local level.
**Response to specific sections**

*Support for making informed education and training choices*

Local government has a crucial role to play in support young people engage with career choices. Council is the largest employer in Moonee Valley, employing a wide variety of professions and occupations. Council already involves local young people in work experience opportunities and can provide an avenue for young people to explore the variety of professions and occupations Council employs and that working in local government can provide a rewarding career. As mentioned previously Council plays an important role in connecting individuals, organisations and networks from across the community, facilitating opportunities for partnership development. The SEED project is a great example of how Council can bring a range of stakeholders together from trade unions, youth service providers, employers in addition to facilitating relationships between council departments. We advocate that the State Government work with the Municipal Association of Victoria to work with all local governments around supporting young people’s career pathways and transitions and to put forward how we can best work as a sector to do this.

Council acknowledges the importance of working across departments to achieve positive outcomes for young people. Increasingly local governments are developing and implementing whole-of-government youth strategies. The strategies we implement are guided by our Youth Engagement Strategy (2009-2013). One of our five strategic objectives is ‘Education and Employment’ which we identified through our strategic planning process as being an important area of work for Council and crucial in achieving our overall vision of ensuring the inclusion of all young people in the social, economic and civic life of our community. The objectives and strategies set out in the Youth Engagement Strategy are an acknowledgement of the diverse role Council has in achieving positive outcomes for young people and the community beyond the work of our Youth Services unit. We advocate that the State Government work with the MAV regarding the development and implementation of a whole-of-government approach to youth issues.

*Opportunities for young people to re-engage with education and training*

Council plays an important role in the provision of services for young people. Our generalist services and programs provide young people with opportunities to develop skills and this is crucially important for young people who have or who are at risk of disengaging from education. We run a range of programs that assist young people to develop generic skills that employers demand – for example communication and interpersonal skills, conflict resolution, team work and problem solving. Development of these skills are just as important as occupation or trade specific skills.
The important role that youth work has to play in supporting young people and in the development of community wide responses must be acknowledged and supported by all levels of government. Youth work has a positive role to play in the building of relationships with young people, particularly young people have disengaged from education or employment. This need was identified as an important part of the Youth Connections model. From our perspective there needs to be consistency across Victoria in the way that Type 3 services are delivered. Youth Connections providers and local government must work closely to ensure that services are not duplicated and that Type 3 services are delivered in areas of highest need. Additionally, from our perspective there is great urgency for Type 3 services to start operating. The engagement of young people through Type 3 services will be crucial to ensuring that young people access Type 1 and 2 services and to the success of Youth Connections as a whole.

As also identified in the Youth Connections model and also in the Vulnerable Youth Framework discussion paper released by the State Government, strong referral systems are required to ensure that all young people receive the support they need and that young people do not fall through gaps in service provision. We have also identified the need for strong local service systems for young people. In our Youth Engagement Strategy the last of our five key strategic objectives is ‘Network and Service Coordination’. We look forward to the release of the Vulnerable Youth Framework and would like to see the links made between different State Government policies and frameworks. Councils are often at the centre of referral systems – we will most certainly use the release of the Vulnerable Youth Framework to discuss with local service providers, schools, education and employment services and other key stakeholders in the community such as the Maribyrnong and Moonee Valley Local Learning and Employment Network and School Focused Youth Service about how we can strengthen service provision, referral processes and partnerships that are already in place.

Conclusion

We look forward to working with the State Government regarding young people’s transitions to the world of work. We value this opportunity to contribute to this discussion paper. We are happy to provide further information or to discuss in more detail our responses to the discussion paper. A copy of our Youth Engagement Strategy is attached with this submission. We are forwarding our submission to key stakeholders including the Victorian Trades Hall Council, the Co-ordinator of the School Principal Network for our region, M&MV LLEN and the MAV to continue this discussion in our local area on how we ensure that all young people are able to reach their goals.