

Youthlaw Regional, Rural and Remote (RRR) Project 2009 – Yarra Valley, Mornington and Hastings.

Upper Yarra Region including Warburton and Yarra Junction

Foundation/Step Ahead program in Warburton

The Step Ahead program at Warburton is a 12 month for students under 15 who are at risk of being an early school leaver. The Foundation program targets students dropping out of school and is equivalent to Year 10.

Graffiti

- Lot more in area
- More police searches since the new laws came in
- No place to do legal graffiti

Transport

- Little public transport and high cost – makes it hard to get around
- Some bus drivers let you travel for free if you don't have the money but others don't. Also stop you getting on the bus if they think you are a trouble-maker

Centrelink

- Office too far away (Lilydale is the closest)
- Often tell you to come to their office for little or no reason and don't consider the time and money to get there.

Access to justice

- Don't know where to get free legal advice
- Some know about the duty lawyer at court in Ringwood
- Getting an intervention order not worth it as getting to court too expensive/difficult/intimidating, even though need it because of stalking/family violence

Police

- Not taken seriously if report being a victim if police view you being from a 'bad family'
- Not enough police around. Local station should be open 24 hours. Closest 24 hour station is in Lilydale and it takes police too long to get to urgent situation after hours
- Have seen and heard about bad treatment by police. Eg. sexually harassing young women or singling out young people because of the car they drive or the family they belong to.

Education

- Most had experience of being suspended and/or expelled from school
- Discipline in mainstream schools is not always fair or consistent
- Schools often show little interest in finding out reasons behind why some students behave badly at school like ongoing bullying or problems at home
- Not enough support /counselling early on.
- One person reported one school he went to did help a lot with his problems and that was the one school he wasn't expelled from

Personal relationships

- Confused and want to know more about age of consent for sex

- Some had been through child protection system and had bad experiences decisions made by DHS about their care
- Most had left home for brief periods before age 15 and main concern was where they could stay

Discrimination

- Going to an alternative school we are assumed to be 'bad kids'
- Police are often dismissive and treat you badly if you're seen to be from a 'bad family'. Eg .If you make a report to police and also more likely to target them for investigation/searches

Public space and safety

- Limited public transport means you can't get about.
- Mostly safe to walk around at night
- See older people going around drinking or on drugs and targeting passersby with violence or threats of violence
- Reports of graffiti of swastikas in the area
- Lilydale station very unsafe - lots of drinking and fights going on with no security/police presence/safety cameras

Drugs & alcohol

- Some alcohol violence at parties
- Some drug and alcohol use at night when groups walk around the streets because there's nothing to do
- Problems with alcohol/drug use and violence in the Upper Yarra region but it's problem everywhere not just here.

Social inclusion

- Boredom and lack of things to do result in lots of drinking, drug use and welfare dependency among young people in the area
- Boredom is linked to drug and alcohol abuse, more violence and fights between 'metros' and 'skaters/lads', more graffiti/vandalism
- Want more shopping centres around so there is more to do
- Need more public transport to get to places like Ringwood where more options for entertainment
- Want more activities here for young people
- Good living in small communities when become homeless or in trouble but negative aspect is that if you were a trouble maker once you are always seen as that by the community even if you try to change
- Difficulties for young people from families stigmatised as being 'bad'– harder to get jobs and more likely to be targeted by police
- Going down the line and moving closer to metro area inevitable if want to get work/more education but would like to stay in the local area

Senior VCAL group (Warburton)

The Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) Certificate is an accredited educational certificate equivalent to VCE offered in mainstream schooling. Upper Yarra Community House offers this VCAL program that focuses on applied learning through projects and community activities.

Family law

- Want to know what you can do to express your preference to family court or

start your own proceedings

Public transport

- One driver treats young people unfairly. Lack of regularity in service means don't get to class on time and can't be given points for attendance

Public safety

- Violent attacks sometimes happen at night in the local area

Drugs / alcohol

- Alcohol the main reason for unprovoked violent attacks

Police

- Perception that police unhelpful. If called out tend to target wrong people as trouble makers

School

- Lack of fairness in expulsions/suspensions/school discipline

Young Mum's program

The Yarra Junction Young Mum's VCAL group is a group of young student mothers completing their VCAL certificate where they can have their children in the classroom.

Centrelink

- Inconsistent information about benefits leading to overpayments being made and debts causing financial hardship
- Being penalised for being 'upfront' when moving in together with de facto. Financial disincentive to get back together.
- Difficulty in getting to offices. Outreach in Yarra Junction ineffective/staff never there/inconsistent /unattended without notice
- Bushfire payment - Attempted to notify of change of address/rent payments but they claim no record and raised debt for overpayments

Employment

- Common for young mums to resort to cash in hand to supplement Centrelink income as not enough to pay rent/bills
- Cash in hand workplaces more likely to have unsafe/discriminatory practices –eg. inappropriate comments about female staff, preferential treatment based on looks – Feel like cannot complain or seek redress because working illegally
- Lack of employment opportunities in local area

Housing

- Tenancy a big problem - Lack of rentals in local area and lack of emergency/refuge housing

Alcohol/drug abuse

- Alcohol and marijuana the main problem in the area_ Often because 'not much to do'
- Little knowledge of drug and alcohol counselling available in the local area. if young person in crisis unlikely to go to services in Ringwood and Lilydale

Public safety

- Don't go out at night alone but view was this is the same anywhere

Social inclusion / access to services

- Stigma against young mums in the area
- Transport a problem – can't access leisure activities to avoid boredom and also lack of safety – must catch a bus to Lilydale and then wait 20 mins approx for train, safety issues at train station at Lilydale and also Ringwood
- Boredom - A major problem leading to problems like increased drug/alcohol use, violence and antisocial behaviour and also teen pregnancy
- Lack of support services for young mums in local area
- Lack of contraceptive/family planning services in local area
- Frustration that government is encouraging walking to work, using public transport and less car usage but impossible to get around without a car in local area – many roads and bridges even do not even have a footpath, have to just walk in the middle of the road and quite dangerous, feel excluded as a pedestrian.

Family violence & family law

- Police responded quickly/well when contacted
- Court process of intervention orders bewildering, sense of not knowing 'where to go from here' after orders in place
- Not sure where to go for further advice about family law – fear that other partner will take child away if don't comply with their demands eg. driving children long distance to see father/putting child in environments where unsure about safety
- Most were aware of free legal advice clinic for family law at Ringwood Victoria Legal Aid but difficult to access this service because no appointments can be made and if not at the office by 9am a lawyer may not see them – difficult to get to Ringwood by 9am due to limited public transport
- None were aware of other free legal services.

Police

- Positive views on police but feel there are not enough police and stations are not open for long enough hours
- Respond well when family violence at crisis point
- Polite/respectful when pull over driving

Fines

- Report partners getting fines not knowing what to do about them. Unaware of Civic Compliance/how to set up payment plans
-

Oona Pathways Group, Healesville

Oonah Pathways is a program for indigenous young people based in Healesville. Students study the Certificate of General Education for Adults or Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning which are year 8-12 equivalents

Police

- Improper use of OC spray/excessive force Eg. of police OC spray as girls left party 'mouthing off' at them
- When police called to brawls often assume young people are the cause of the violence and arrest them

Discrimination

- Still an issue but has improved in some areas (eg schools)

Schooling

- Koori students face expulsion/suspension more than others, but has improved with local schools hiring more Koori staff

Public safety

- Drinking on streets in groups/at parks leads often to violence
- Groups pick fights because there's nothing else to do
- Assumption is that it's always young people causing violence but it's also adults

Alcohol/drugs

- A problem in area because of lack of other activities.
- Not enough drug and alcohol rehabilitation services in the area
- Might be good to have bus at night to pick up young people who might be out/drunken, vulnerable to attack or arrest similar to one in Shepparton

Mornington Peninsula

Rosebud Y-lounge

Y-lounge is a youth 'drop in' centre based in Rosebud Plaza with internet access, digital TV and computer games. The centre has a visiting mental health service and young people can access free legal advice online by webcam from a Youthlaw lawyer. The young people who drop in during the day are usually young adults who are no longer in mainstream school and some young parents.

School

Bullying

- Most had experienced bullying
- Many had been bullied in primary school
- Some did not tell parents. Most told teachers to try and deal with it
- Hands on approach from by schools works – eg Principal visiting parents of bullies get to cause of problem (local primary school)
- All agreed big problem is when schools don't do anything or little. eg. young woman bullied by boys of same age in early secondary school relocated to live with mother other side of the state because school did nothing— She felt school could have intervened/talked to the boys more and punished.
- Young man spoke of being bullied and being a bully both at primary & secondary school because of anger/depression issues. Only just got diagnosed/ treated. School did not pick up on mental health issues – anger management intervention earlier would have helped
- Young woman reported having more problems with bullying in primary school than high school – because she is blind some kids would try to steal money off her.– Secondary school response was much more positive.

Discrimination

- One young person felt treated less favourably by school because of her disability – transferred from a special school– also had problems with teacher's aide she was assigned and couldn't do much about it

Public space and safety

- Most feel safe most of the time. Safer if carry mobile phone

- Many don't feel safe at night because lots of drunk people are hanging around in the streets
- Drunk people hanging around at night are older in their 30s and 40s and not locals. Know of young people bashed by drunk people hanging around at night.
- Common for friends/peers to vandalise and graffiti
- Violence more of a problem in summer, people from out of town come in and cause the fights
- Drink driving common in the area because of limited public transport options at night
- Lots of fights in 1st/2nd/3rd avenue at night, mainly involving people in their 20s from out of town

Interactions with police

- Enough police
- They issue too many fines
- There are a lot of police around and they listen
- Police don't follow up on criminal damage to home much
- One young person recalled having to make a statement as a witness and found police unpleasant, not very understanding of how he felt and remembered crying (12 year old)
- Friends/other young people knew have tried to report violent altercations/threats from people they know to police but police would ignore, not believe them, then when escalated and person got hurt police believe them

Legal needs and access to justice/legal system

- Want more information on bullying and driving
- Understanding family law – one young person gave example of interview with 'someone – 'maybe a family law report writer' -found it a bit weird talking to strangers about which parent they argue more with
- Another in similar position reported feeling pressure to choose which parent to live with , feels unsure about what to say to psychologist during appointments and what bearing it has on the case
- Would like to know more about what is going on in the family court – Difficult because not allowed into the courtroom – would be good if had lawyer they could ask for
- Would like more info on drinking and drug use
- Many said would ask parents where to go if need to see a lawyer
- Parent family law cases – young people think it's good that keeping kids out of court but that what's going on is not explained

Debts/consumer issues

- One young woman was sent a bill from Reader's Digest because they told her she had signed up for books she never signed up for – may've been from a phone call she answered (only 12 year olds)

Drugs/alcohol

- Is a problem in the area but feel like it's not made public enough

Hastings Shed 11

Shed 11 is a youth drop-in centre in Hastings that runs lots of programs, has activities and equipment.

School

Bullying and violence

- 11 out of 17 students had been a victim of bullying
- Some schools don't have a bullying policy/position/set approach
- Suspending bullies without any further intervention doesn't work. Bullying continues
- One had experienced cyber bullying on msn – in that case the person stopped after a while
- Female student verbally bullied by another told school but school did nothing and things got bad over following week leading to physical altercation. Resulted in her being suspended and other girl got detention. She felt mediation would have helped prevent things escalating
- Young woman had experience of bullying at primary school and high school. Verbal bullying mainly by other girls. School responded and helped out by telling her about options she had including talking to those involved which she did.
- One secondary school now has policy of encouraging parents to talk to police if allegations of physical violence made
- A response to bullying by a group of girls at one secondary was to get 2 ringleaders to do mediation but felt that one group unfairly got into more trouble than the other
- School doesn't seem to care about physical violence/fights occurring
- Young person bullied verbally for 1-2 days. No intervention and ended up getting into a physical fight and got into more trouble than person who started bullying. Felt school could've done more to intervene early or at least find out how the fight started
- Verbal bullying in primary school – school approached problem well, had process of bringing bully and person bullying together and try to talk/work out how to make it stop

Discipline

- Suspensions aren't always fair - school often doesn't listen to students side and sides with teachers version
- School response often kneejerk – eg. suspend both students for fighting
- Some reported that teachers yell too much
- Don't agree with suspensions for getting a piercing and uniform issues
- Schools often treat you badly if known to be from a bad family and if siblings have been expelled. Positive feedback on one secondary principal who makes an effort to get teachers to avoid stigmatising kids and accept them as individuals
- Young person reported deliberately trying to get expelled by starting fights. Mother intervened by getting him involved in sport – school didn't really think of anything
- Some teachers over-discipline students. Suspensions & expulsions are not always fair.

- Young person who was removed from kinder later found to have ADHD. Once on medication behavioural problems improved but kinder didn't look into issue at the time
- Discipline often unfair – School doesn't listen/investigate fully – Eg. got suspended for 8 days once for play fighting on oval with friends. Was not a fight but teachers wouldn't listen
- Male was in physical fight with another male but he was only one suspended
- One male reported leaving local secondary halfway through yr 9 because felt harassed by teachers – ended up in VCAL course but quit when found apprenticeship – had good relationship/feedback about principal though

Family/Personal Relationships

- Some had thought about leaving home
- Tried to leave home but unsure about housing options/services available
- Stayed at friend's family home because not sure of other options
- Young woman experienced domestic violence from boyfriend – did not report to police because preferred to 'sort it out with his family',

Safety /Public Space

- Kids at park try to start fights – Few contact police about this
- Feel most threatened by people in 20s
- Got moved on from shopping centre by security guards for testing perfumes
- Would not go out at night by myself (female)
- Not safe for females after 6pm at night – sister had been stalked while walking in street
- Problem in smaller community is stigma means other people treat differently (eg if family members have a bad reputation)
- Heard of a stabbing in Hastings recently, feel less safe walking around at night but still feel safe during the day
- One reported culture of violence where kids aged 14-17 go around in packs trying to start fights – mostly kids who grew up here but some who moved nearby recently – generally drug & alcohol related but also about proving who is 'top dog'
- Fairly peaceful generally but not at night. Don't feel safe at night
- Violence in Hastings at night is a problem – there was a recent stabbing
- Stalking on the streets happens
- Assaults that occurred at night - all out of towners and drunk
- Got thrown out of mall by security for fighting – felt it was 'fair enough' was a bit rough
- House break-ins common
- Stabbings occur at parties -mainly mid 20s. Sometimes have weapons.
- Problem with ticketing is that can't buy Metcards anywhere in Hastings and told by DOT staff to go and buy a ticket once get to Stony Point. Get accosted by ticket inspectors – eg. twisting of arm behind back and pushed against wall
- At party in Hastings recently got punched by person in 20s, party got out of control, guy was drunk. Didn't report to police because didn't see any point
- One person cyber stalked by guy he knew from Frankston but stopped after a while – this guy pretended to be him on msn and harassed others

- Drunk adults and teenagers drink at night and verbally abuse people walking past on the street

Police

- Not acting professionally when arrest
- Police can be very heavy at parties – lots of police cars and use too much force
- Some get targeted by police because known to be from 'bad family' - felt unfair/heavy handed
- Police come to skate park not to say hi/build rapport but to yell and give out fines for not having helmets on
- Not enough police close to hot spots in West Park – takes them about 5-15 mins to get there if called in emergency, should have more police around
- Don't see police around much, not much of a presence
- Police are pretty good around here. Would feel comfortable calling police if felt had a problem but not for a 'one-off' incident
- Sometimes use too much force- eg. use OC spray and batons when not necessary
- When police attend a fight/brawl they OC spray/baton/try to restrain everyone in the area even people standing out of the way/trying to leave
- Enough police – 'always' see them around

Drugs/Drinking

- Drug use a problem at local schools
- Not uncommon for 14 year olds to do drugs & smoke. Parents don't seem to care
- Not sure of D&A support services around, how to access them
- Drinking not as much of a problem as drugs is in local area. Not sure why
- Local shops don't often ask to see ID
- Lots of drinking at parties on foreshore

Debts/Finances/Fines

- Mobile debts
- Casual work and lack of work
- Public transport fines