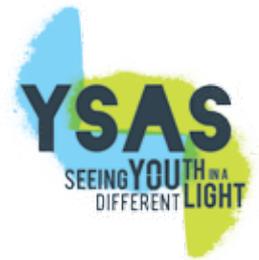


# YSAS YOUTH SUPPORT SERVICE: A CASE FOR CONTINUING VICTORIA'S SUCCESSFUL YOUTH DIVERSION SERVICE



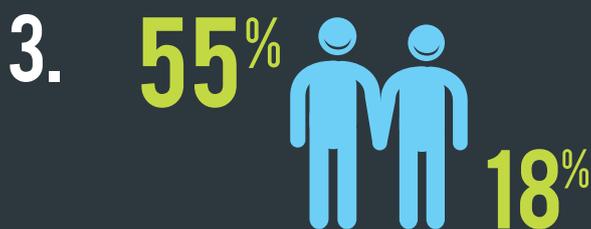
## KEY OUTCOMES OF THE YSAS YOUTH SUPPORT SERVICE:



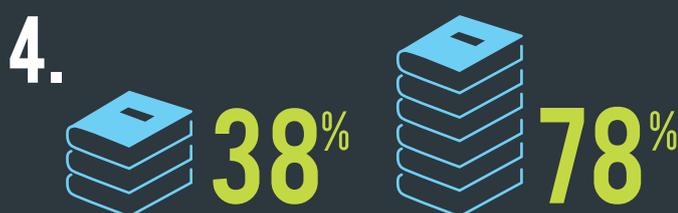
A total of 3,952 young people have been referred<sup>1</sup> to the Youth Support Service provided by YSAS since its inception in April 2011.



of young people who completed the service had no further or only positive contact with the police.



Young people experiencing family conflict often or very often reduced from 55% to 18% at service completion.



Engagement in education, employment or training increased from 38% to 78% at service completion.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Continuation of the Youth Support Service beyond June 30th 2014 to continue its work with police, communities, young people and families sustainably into the future.
- Further investment in the Youth Support Service to meet the needs of CALD, Indigenous communities and growth suburbs.
- Respond to young people identified by the courts. Legislated youth diversion option for the Children's Court.



## OVERVIEW

The Youth Support Service is a police diversion initiative that effectively stops the trajectory into youth crime. The service is funded by the Department of Human Services as part of the government's broader 'Youth Crime Initiative', with the objective of addressing significant community concern over rates of youth offending, particularly violence and perceptions of public safety. The Youth Support + Advocacy Service (YSAS) is the provider of the Youth Support Service in metropolitan Melbourne and the Latrobe Valley.

The Youth Support Service is funded until 30th June 2014.

This report outlines key outcomes of the Youth Support Service provided by YSAS. The model delivers results, effectively breaking the cycle of recidivism. Strong engagement skills combined with systematic assessment and therapeutic case management ensure young people are accountable for their actions, make amends with their community and family and are kept out of police cells and courts.

### About YSAS

The Youth Support + Advocacy Service (YSAS) is a leading youth health agency that enables highly vulnerable young people with substance dependence and misuse, mental illness and social disconnection, to take control of their health and wellbeing. Visit [ysas.org.au](http://ysas.org.au).

## ABOUT THE YOUTH SUPPORT SERVICE

The Youth Support Service targets:

- Young people aged 10-17 engaged in anti-social and criminal activity or those using public space inappropriately.
- Young people with first or recurrent contact with Victoria Police.

The metropolitan Melbourne and Latrobe Valley Youth Support Service are delivered by YSAS in partnership with Victoria Police, the sole referrers to the service. The YSAS Youth Support Service employs 23 specialist, highly skilled youth and family workers.

When a first time young offender comes into contact with or is apprehended by Victoria Police, the police member can make an online referral to the Youth Support Service.

Within 48 hours of the referral the young person and their family receive advice on how to tackle the causes of the young person's offending and are engaged to develop an individualised action plan to:

- Address antisocial behaviour and find positive alternatives.
- Link them back into school, training or employment.
- Access mental health referrals.
- Manage alcohol or other drug misuse.
- Improve family relationships.

The Youth Support Service comprehensively assesses each young person, taking into account family support and individual circumstances. Young people are provided access to services to meet individual goals and needs as part of addressing the underlying causes of offending behaviour.

The Youth Support Service adopts the principles of:

- Early intervention; reaching young people at the earliest possible point of contact with police.
- Family inclusive practice.
- Following up with and engaging young people and families resistant to interventions.
- Outreach based model: visiting homes, schools, and crime 'hotspots' as part of an early intervention and engagement approach.
- Goal oriented, individualised action plans.
- Evidence informed practice: using world's best practice and proven therapeutic frameworks.
- Place based, proactive, localised responses.

# OUTCOMES

YSAS data indicated statistically significant improvements for young people in relation to police contact, family conflict, education and employment at the end of Youth Support Service involvement.

## 1. REFERRALS

A total of 3,952 young people have been referred<sup>i</sup> to the Youth Support Service provided by YSAS since its inception in April 2011.

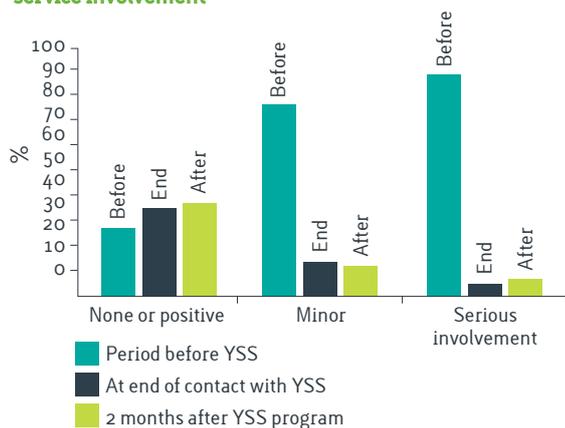
63% of those referrals were male. The average age of young people engaged in the service was 14.8 years. The top three referral reasons included:

- Criminal offences, such as assaults and thefts.
- Mental health and welfare issues.
- High risk taking behaviour (for example, risky substance use, absconding after hours (not missing persons), associating with older or peer offenders, loitering in public places, multiple minor infringements, passenger in vehicle involved in an offence).

## 2. CONTACT WITH POLICE AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

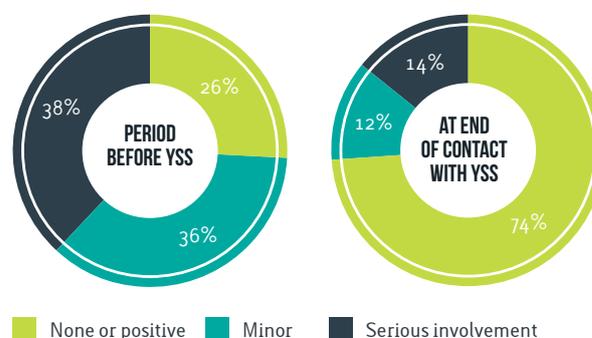
Positive results achieved during involvement in the Youth Support Service provided by YSAS were maintained two months after service completion. 89% of young people had not offended and had only positive engagement with the police. Prior to service involvement, this fact was only true for 26% of young people.

History of contact with police 2 months post end of service involvement<sup>ii</sup>



Serious involvement with the criminal justice system reduced from 38% in the six months prior to the service, to 14% at the end service involvement. Serious involvement is defined as youth justice supervision, non-supervision orders, court proceedings or serious charges. Minor involvement relates to some contact with police but where it does not progress to formal involvement.

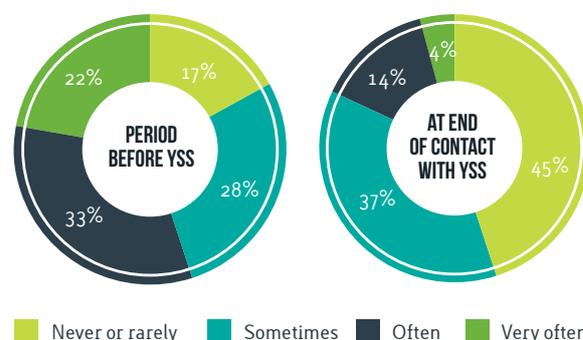
History of contact with police 6 months before and at the end of service involvement<sup>iii</sup>



## 3. FAMILY CONFLICT

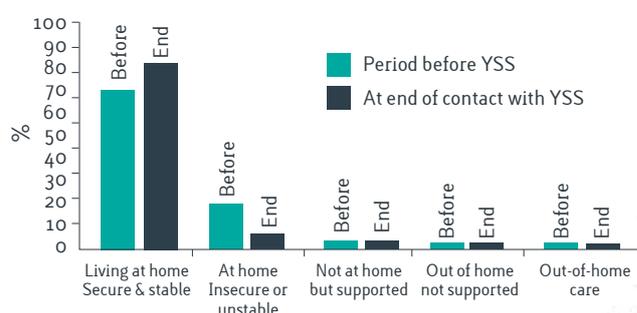
Young people experiencing family conflict either 'often' or 'very often' reduced from 55% before Youth Support Service involvement to 18% by the end of contact with the service.

History of family conflict 6 months before and at the end of service involvement<sup>iv</sup>



The Youth Support Service had the greatest impact in improving the housing security of young people whose living arrangements were precarious. 18% of young people were living at home, however effectively at risk of being kicked out. After service involvement, this figure reduced to 7%. The active engagement of families is a significant feature of the Youth Support Service model and is credited to improving the living arrangements of young people involved in the service.

Accommodation status 6 months prior to entering the Youth Support Service and then at the end of service involvement<sup>v</sup>

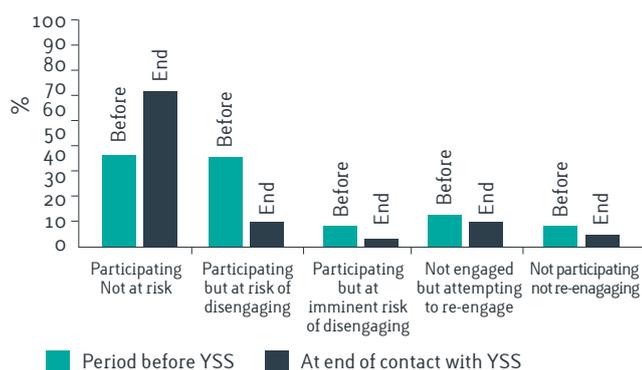


i YSAS provides a central intake function for metropolitan Melbourne with referrals for Moonee Valley, Maribyrnong & Hobson's Bay being triaged to the 20th Man Fund per contractual obligations with DHS. All referrals 28th April 2011 - 20th Feb 2014.  
 ii History of contact with police 2 months post end of service involvement (n= 141 young people)  
 iii History of contact with police 6 months before and at end of service involvement (n=301 young people)  
 iv History of contact of family conflict 6 months before and at end of service involvement (n=301 young people)  
 v Accommodation status 6 months prior to entering service and at end of service involvement (n=301 young people)

## 4. EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING

Young people engaged in education, employment or training increased from 38% to 78% at service completion.

### Participation in education / employment / training 6 months before and at the end of service involvement<sup>vi</sup>



### CONSIDERATIONS

YSAS is concerned the cessation of the Youth Support Service could result in:

- No systematic early intervention response to youth crime for police.
- Increased strain on police officers, court and statutory systems to process young offenders.
- Increased service gap, particularly for those aged 10 – 12 years. The Youth Support Service comprehensive assessment means young people are triaged early into the right service type.

The international experience is unequivocal; Washington State<sup>vii</sup> has produced strong cost benefit analysis of early intervention crime prevention programs, and is reaping the rewards through a 60% reduction in youth crime over the past decade.

Australian research shows that 46% of all children alleged to have offended in 2010-11 were first processed by police at the age of 13 or younger<sup>viii</sup> indicating strong need for early intervention police diversion initiatives such as the Youth Support Service.

At a community level, the Youth Support Service is agile and responsive to local youth crime issues. It has proven capacity to work in partnership with police to effectively respond to community safety concerns. Victoria Police acknowledge the Youth Support Service affords police more time for front line duties. The Youth Support Service web based referral system accessible by all police (not just youth resource officers) ensures consistency and quality in responses to police, families and young people.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The YSAS Youth Support Service model is now well developed through four years of service delivery, backed by 15 years of YSAS evidence informed practice.

The continuation of the Youth Support Service beyond June 30th 2014 will allow YSAS and other providers to continue working with police, communities, young people and families sustainably into the future.

### Targeted response to meet the needs of CALD, Indigenous communities and growth suburbs

Ongoing investment is required to allow Police and services to identify and respond to the early needs of young people from newly arrived communities. The Youth Support Service model can be adapted to support police in engaging with these communities.

Currently the Youth Support Service operates in metropolitan Melbourne and some regional centres. Extending the Youth Support Service to state-wide coverage would provide communities such as Bacchus Marsh, Seymour, Colac and Horsham access to a police initiated youth diversion option.

### Respond to young people identified by the courts

There is no legislated youth diversion option for either police or the Children's Court. YSAS supports the Youth Law led Smart Justice for Young People youth diversion campaign, calling for diversion options to be available to all young people in the justice system, just as these options are available to adults.

### Further Information:

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vi History of education and employment 6 months before and at end of service involvement (n=301 young people)

vii, viii Aos, S., Lieb, R., Mayfield, J., Miller, M., & Pennucci A. (2004). Benefits and costs of prevention and early intervention programs for youth (Document No. 04-07-3901).

See also: Stephanie Lee, Steve Aos, and Marna Miller. (2008). Evidence-based programs to prevent children from entering and remaining in the child welfare system: Benefits and costs for Washington. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, Document No. 08-07-3901.

S. Aos, R. Lieb, J. Mayfield, M. Miller, & A. Pennucci. (2004). Benefits and costs of prevention and early intervention programs for youth. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, Document No. 04-07-3901. Available at: <http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/pub.asp?docid=04-07-3901>.