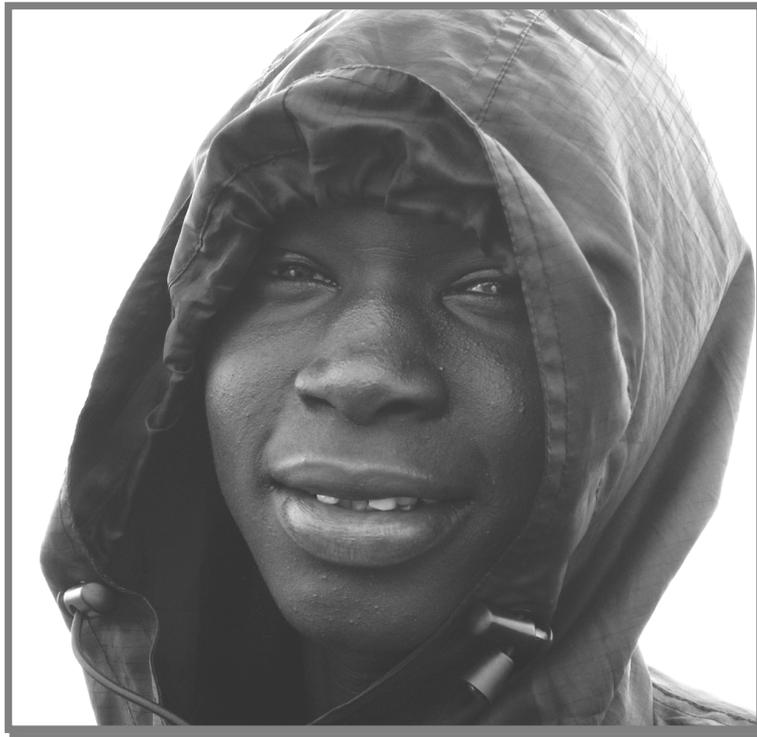


Evaluation of the Brimbank Young Men's Project

Final Report: June 2011



For the Centre for Multicultural Youth

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Organisation: Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne

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Executive Summary

Context

The **Brimbank Young Men's Project** has been a two year pilot initiative of the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY), funded by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). The project has targeted young men of African backgrounds who are: disengaged (or at high risk of being disengaged) from education, training and employment; have had contact with the police; and are experiencing other difficulties with settlement. Geographical perimeters of the project were defined as Brimbank LGA "and surrounds". The project has drawn on multiple partnerships within North-western region youth and welfare sectors, notably the Victoria Police Multicultural Liaison Centre.

Delivery of the BYMP has been informed by findings of the Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission report *Rights of Passage: the Experiences of Australian-Sudanese Young People* (2008); key priorities of the Victorian Government's *Vulnerable Youth Framework*, the *Victoria Police Child & Youth Strategy 2009-2013* and Brimbank City Council's *Youth Policy & Action Plan 2008-2013*. Staffed by a CMY Project Officer and Peer Facilitator (p-t), the project has been guided by an Advisory Committee. At micro-level, a Working Group (comprised of key stakeholders and participants) has determined the program's direction.

The BYMP has comprised assertive outreach, group work (per an Engagement Tool), 'Celebration' activities, social functions, a camp, mentoring, information provision and action research. In the first year of operation, Group work took the form of weekly Youhtube Activities and a Celebration concert/BIG EVENT, funded by VicPol and mounted at the Kensington Community Youth Centre with assistance from Brimbank Youth Services. These activities were designed to address the young men's social isolation and to assist them in building peer and community connections. In the second year of the project, Group Work has encompassed preparation of fortnightly Friday afternoon Social EVENTS, a Soccer match, a camp and planning for a concert/celebration.

Staff indicate that voluntary involvement in the program by other young people (including their attendance at fortnightly EVENTS), the employment of one program participant as a Peer Facilitator in the second year, and participation of several young men in the working group, have gone some way toward meeting the BYMP's Mentoring objectives. The program's Action research component has taken the form of delivery and response to a participant survey, results of which are detailed in this **Report**.

While it is inevitable that an outreach initiative of this kind will involve ongoing informal counselling exchanges and elements of case management, the BYMP has had an explicit and primary **engagement** focus. Where the emphasis of most Government-funded projects of this nature is on facilitating pathways for young people to employment, training and further education, CMY staff note that the BYMP has had an intentional **pre-Pathways** focus. The program has proceeded on the understanding that, once trust must be established with Program staff before effective case management can be implemented.

Research Design

In 2009 the CMY invited the Youth Research Centre at the University of Melbourne to undertake a two-stage formal evaluation of the program An **Interim report**, delivered in August 2010, examined delivery of the program in its first year and initial outcomes, drawing primarily on interviews with Program staff and key stakeholders. Supporting data was drawn from program documentation and relevant literature.

The current **Final report** incorporates data subsequently generated by a survey of program participants and is informed by further input from staff and key stakeholders.

Findings

Interviews with program staff and stakeholders indicate that a number of themes and issues highlighted by the Literature have been replicated in the settlement experiences of the program's target population. For instance, they cite frustration with the education system as a key **determinant of young men from refugee backgrounds becoming disengaged from education, training and employment**. Other factors can include (a) a clash between the young person's aspirations and the reality of life, education and opportunity in Australia; (b) the young person's level of education prior to arrival; and (c) the refugee community's tendency to highly value success at school and sometimes assume this guarantees access to university and success in a white collar (higher status) job.

In identifying **determinants that lead to young men becoming disconnected from family and community**, interviewees (a) highlighted instances of familial role-reversal within the target group for whom home and the wider community sometimes seem to exist in separate worlds; (b) recognised that the long-term impact of the refugee experience can adversely affect individuals' capacity to parent. Youth frustration can be compounded by intergenerational conflicts such as pressure to maintain traditional cultural mores or achieve educationally versus peer pressure to conform to the new environment. Tensions between a young man and family typically reach crisis point at age 16 when Centrelink provides him with Youth Allowance (paid directly to the young person).

In terms of **education, training and employment**, interviewees highlighted challenges faced by young men in regard to contextual factors (specifically, racial, ethnic or religious discrimination), blocked economic opportunities within the labour market, alcohol and substance abuse, lack of an established African community able to supply employment or rehabilitation options in Australia, inadequate or inaccessible information - both before and after arrival, the complexity of the service system, accommodation problems, resistance to counselling, etc, etc. Above all, program staff cites lack of trust/hope as the primary barrier to be surmounted by young men who feel (a) that the system has let them down, (b) that nobody cares; and (c) that there are few positives available to them within either their own or the larger community. As regards **barriers to re-engagement with family and community**, staff note that some of the young men have been identified by their community as trouble-makers and have been rejected by more than just parents. In some cases, the relationship is so damaged that the young men are unable to contact family members. Even so, a number of young men have expressed a strong desire to reconnect with family/community, and that this desire is reportedly quite common after three or four years away from home.

Staff cites personal contact and help with service access as important **strategies in reconnecting young men to education or employment** while there is general recognition in the literature that the best means of combating barriers to acculturation and/or reconnection come from strong families and supportive co-ethnic communities. In this regard, interviewees cite the **strategic value of engaging and talking with community elders** and taking advantage of their willingness to attend project meetings.

Program Outcomes

Positive outcomes attained during the BYMP's short duration include:

- *Participants reportedly exhibited interest in the activities and were keen to participate. The number of registered participants in 2010 increased from 20 to 35 in 2011. Regular attendees increased from around 10 to 20 over the two year period.*
- *Referrals for case management have reportedly received an "instant response".*

- *Approximately half the program participants have been referred to service providers and have been able to address pressing needs such as homelessness and legal assistance.*
- *Seven young men were reconnected with training providers and educational institutions in the BYMP's first year, and a further 13 during the subsequent year.*
- *There was also interest expressed by some young men in short term courses (such as Certificate III in Construction)*
- *Three young men have reconnected with families through mediation facilitated by the program staff.*
- *The BYMP has enjoyed some success in (a) changing the young men's perceptions of police, and (b) bringing police and the young people together. This has been facilitated – in part - by pro-active policing.*
- *Tangible outcomes of the Police meeting with the young men have been:*
 - *the establishment of a collaborative BYMP-based Working Group*
 - *Mounting of the CELEBRATION component of the BYMP, a 'Big Event' (concert) at Kensington Community Youth Centre.*
 - *Fortnightly social EVENTS at Visy-Cares Hub, attended by Police.*
 - *A successful three-day Leadership camp attended by 13 young men, 8 police members and six agency representatives.*
- *Eight productive Working group meetings have been held since the Group's inception and the connections have reached a point where uniformed police can be represented at meetings.*
- *Program staff also highlighted the goodwill and enthusiasm for the initiative of the participating and associated agencies and services, noting that interagency collaboration has increased over the program's lifetime.*

Data from a survey of the young participants, delivered by BYMP staff, reinforced interview feedback regarding the overall success of the BYMP in effecting both Vocational and Social-Interpersonal outcomes. Survey results indicate, for instance, that:

- 69% of respondents had been reconnected to education and training
- 92% of respondents now had a better idea of what they wanted to do in future.
- 92% of respondents now felt they had someone they could contact/talk to about problems
- 92% of respondents felt they were getting on with people quite a bit or "lots" better
- 84% of respondents felt that their relationships with family or community had improved (on a continuum)
- 77% of respondents now felt a lot or quite a bit better about themselves
- 69% of respondents now felt differently about police.

Barriers and Facilitators of Program Success

Barriers highlighted by Program staff and clients include:

- Difficulties in "getting industry to participate"
- the **short-term nature of the program**
- ongoing difficulties in accessing appropriate and affordable accommodation;
- lack of funding;
- the ongoing undermining effect of drugs and alcohol
- The need for more contact hours with programs

Conversely, factors identified as having facilitated success (i.e. making the BYMP special) include:

- the generalist (rather than specialist) nature of the program

- the capacity and commitment of program staff. Particular reference was made repeatedly to the skills and input of the Project Officer. (92% of survey respondents were either very satisfied or quite satisfied with the way they were treated by program staff).
- the capacity and skill within the BYMP's partnerships
- the flexibility and consistency of the program
- its strong relationship with other organisations
- outreach that has been ongoing

92% of respondents felt that the program had assisted them (to varying degrees) in dealing with problems. 83% indicated they would strongly or quite strongly recommend the program to other young people.

Conclusion

Given limited resources and the challenges faced by the workers, the fact that developing relationships with the young people has taken longer than expected, and the uncertainties of being a Pilot program, there is need for flexibility of approach and delivery and consideration needs to be given to the BYMP's sustainability. More positively, while it is anticipated that quantifiable change in the young participants' lives is still "at a distance", it is apparent that a range of small-scale outcomes have resulted from the initiative. Project and agency staff feel that some inroads have been made to date in "*rebuilding trust*" with a number of young men and that the message of "*It's not all doom and gloom ... there are people who care about you*" is being heard.

Recommendations

Feedback from program staff and stakeholders indicates that CMY and its staff have successfully met the central aim of the project, i.e. in identifying and trialling a service response for newly arrived young men from African backgrounds, with a view to enhancing their capacity of engagement in education, training and employment and to helping them rebuild their lives through supportive family, peer and community relations. In view of that success, the authors have made a number of initial recommendations. These are:

1. *That CMY maintain and develop its current assertive outreach, engagement and referral activities, as detailed in project guidelines.*
2. *That the BYMP Advisory Group endorse and support CMY in actively seeking funding to extend the delivery of the program*
3. *That the BYMP Advisory committee actively explore the possibility of expanding and extending the service and providing additional resources for the program*
4. *That Program staff continue to develop (and expand) relevant networks and partnerships within the youth and welfare sector*
5. *In order to assess both the durability of the outcomes and the portability of the model, that the Advisory committee explore the feasibility of follow-up studies at suitable intervals.*

2. Introduction and Background

The **Brimbank Young Men's Project** has been an outreach initiative of the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY). A two year pilot program, funded by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), the BYMP has been described as *"a youth-led project for young African men who want to make positive work and life changes"*.

The project has targeted young men of African backgrounds who are:

- disengaged (or at high risk of being disengaged) from education, training and employment;
- have had contact with the police; and
- experiencing other difficulties with settlement.

Geographical perimeters of the project were defined as Brimbank LGA *"and surrounds"*. In practice, and because of the transience of the target population, some of the program's deliverables *"sat outside"* the immediate geographical area. It is noted, for instance that a number of the young participants spend significant time in the Footscray area. The program has operated out of the Visy Cares Hub in Harvester Road, Sunshine.

The BYMP was launched, following extensive interagency dialogue and the formation of a service-based advisory committee, in late 2009. Delivered and administered by CMY workers, it has drawn on multiple community and service partnerships and linkages. For instance: Advisory committee meetings have brought together representatives of government instrumentalities (Victoria Police, Centrelink, the Department of Human Services, VCAL, AMES), refugee and migrant organisations (the New Hope Foundation, the Horn of African Communities Network, African Holistic Social Services), educational bodies (Victoria University, Brimbank/Melton LLEN) and generic youth and community bodies (Melbourne City Mission, the Good Shepherd Foundation, the YMCA, the Western Bulldogs and the Longhorn Basketball Association). Delivery of the program articulates the relationship between CMY and the New Hope Foundation, Brimbank Youth Services, VicPol, African Holistic Social Services, Djerriwarrh, and other agencies.

While it is inevitable that an outreach initiative of this kind will involve ongoing informal counselling exchanges and a degree of individualised support on occasion, the BYMP was **not** developed as a Case management program *per se*. Rather, it had an explicit Engagement focus based on the perception that trust needs to be developed with program staff before case management intervention can be effective. (Accordingly, the first year of the program focused centrally on outreach and group work, with the emphasis shifting more to referral, etc in the second year. However, where one-to-one case management was seen as advisable, the BYMP program manager has been able to make an internal referral to CMY's Reconnect service. The Footscray-based DAS-West has provided support for drug and alcohol-related issues).

The emphasis of most Government-funded projects of this nature is on facilitating pathways for young people to employment, training and further education. By contrast, CMY staff note that the BYMP has had an intentional pre-Pathways focus.

"We're looking at what comes before Pathways, the 'bit in the middle' ... we're working to a social inclusion agenda of supporting and resourcing social, family and community connections ... preparing the young men for VCAL, perhaps, Melbourne City Mission Driver Ed [etc] .. Providing them with Service system information ... We're dealing with CALD young men with interrupted education, challenged literacy in their own language ... and [a history of] trauma and the after-effects of active engagement in conflict" [CMY spokesperson]

During the planning and consultation phase of the program, CMY invited the Youth Research Centre at the University of Melbourne to undertake an evaluation of the program. An **Interim report**, based on data drawn from interviews with staff, stakeholders and relevant literature, examines delivery of the program to date and outcomes to August 2010. The current (**Final**) **report** incorporates data from a survey of program participants and is informed by further input from staff and key stakeholders.

2.1 Rationale for Project

The Pilot responded to issues identified by CMY and services in the Brimbank region to do with the resettlement experiences of young African men in Melbourne's western suburbs. These issues, highlighted through case work, research and community engagement, include

- High rates of early school leaving
- High rates of unemployment
- Lack of engagement with education & training
- 'Problem behaviour', including violence
- Social isolation of some young people
- Disengagement from family and community
- Strained relationships between some young people and the police

CMY staff note that preliminary consultation with spokespersons for Brimbank's African communities highlighted particular need to facilitate opportunities and support for young African men in the areas of:

- Education, training and employment pathways
- Information provision regarding Australian legal, welfare and service systems
- Recreation and social engagement

2.2 Geographical and Social Context

The City of Brimbank incorporates one of the largest industrial areas in Melbourne. 123 km in area, it encompasses 25 new and established western suburbs (including Keilor, Kealba, Sunshine, St Albans, Deer Park, Sydenham, Taylor's Lakes and Calder Park) and is the second largest municipality in Melbourne.¹

Home to approximately 175,000 residents, Brimbank has been described as the most culturally diverse municipality in the region. According to census figures, less than half its population was born in Australia. 31% of residents are from non-English speaking countries, including India, Philippines, Vietnam, Sudan, Burma and China. 15% of the population falls into the 15-24 age category. Of 1548 persons who settled in the district in 2007/8, 180 (i.e. approximately 8.5%) were refugees. (Department of Immigration data indicates that primary areas of first settlement for Sudanese refugees are the Cities of Greater Dandenong and Brimbank).²

Brimbank currently confronts significant social challenges, including high recorded levels of socio-economic disadvantage and unemployment rates above the State average. The most recent SEIFA Index ranks it as the third most disadvantaged LGA (out of 80) in Victoria, and

¹ Brimbank Wellbeing Report, http://www.communityindicators.net.au/wellbeing_reports/brimbank

² Migrant Resource Centre North West Region (2006) Community Profiles: Sudan Born Community, p. 4-6

the second most disadvantaged LGA (out of 31) in the Melbourne metropolitan area. The Brimbank City Council Youth Policy and Action Plan (2008) records:

- a higher percentage of early school leavers than the Melbourne metropolitan norm;
- a higher percentage of youth unemployment than is average across all age groups in Brimbank
- a higher percentage of youth unemployment than the metropolitan norm
- a higher percentage of young people (ages 15-24) defined as “disengaged” (from employment or education) than the metropolitan norm.³

Brimbank also faces strong community concern at criminal or antisocial behaviours demonstrated by sectors of the local youth population and the perceived impact of these behaviours on public safety. In 2004 Crime Prevention Victoria research demonstrated widespread perceptions (a) that Brimbank was less safe than other areas of metropolitan Melbourne, and (b) that levels of crime had increased visibly at train stations, underpasses and other public places. CMY research (2005) has suggested that young men of CALD background have been perceived/identified as antisocial gangs when gathering in groups.⁴

2.3 Target Population

The BYMP has targeted young African men aged between 16 and 25 years, who have been in Australia for more than 12 months but less than seven years, and who are residing in the Brimbank area. The program has specifically targeted young men who:

- Are from families that have experienced severe disruption and dislocation
- Are disengaged or at high risk of becoming disengaged from positive support structures and environments, including education, training and employment.
- Are experiencing conflict with family
- Are at risk of homelessness
- Have come into contact with police and the justice system
-

2.4 Program Model

The BYMP has comprised five components:

1. Group Work
2. Information Provision
3. Mentoring
4. Celebration
5. Action Research

Group Work (i.e. weekly Youth tube activities in Year 1 and fortnightly EVENTS in Year 2) aimed to facilitate the participants’ social skills development and peer connections, and to provide them with psycho-social support. Activities were designed to address the young men’s social isolation, assist them in building peer and community connections, ‘creatively engage’ them (through music, sport, dance, etc), focus on their strengths and capacities, and provide outlets for stress and anxiety and opportunities for self-reflection.

The **Information Provision** component of the project aimed (a) to equip the young men with practical understandings of the Australian legal, welfare, health and service systems (including Centrelink) and education and employment options; and (b) to facilitate their access to education, training and employment pathways. (Staff indicate that, in practice, information provision was largely individualised and *ad hoc*).

³ Brimbank City Council (2008) Youth Policy & Action Plan 2008-2013, p.8, 9.

⁴ Ibid., p.12.

In terms of **MENTORING**, it was anticipated that the program would offer individual participants' opportunities to develop leadership skills that could, in time, (a) determine the future direction of the project, and (b) offer opportunities for them to mentor other participants in teamwork and work skills. (Staff indicates that the program did enjoy some success in this regard, attracting additional young people to provide support to the participants, and enabling several participants to take on leadership roles within the BYMP working group).

The **Action Research** component of the BYMP, designed to integrate research into development of the program, has been undertaken by the YRC at the University of Melbourne. The Final Report draws on a Survey of participants in the program (see below).

2.5 Partners & Stakeholders

Development and implementation of the BYMP have been guided by meetings of an Advisory Committee comprised of representatives of multiple support services, agencies and educational and sporting bodies operating within Brimbank's LGA and surrounds. Its role has encompassed provision of input and support and strategic planning of the project's future direction. Membership has encompassed delegates from the Department of Immigration & Citizenship (DIAC), the Department of Human Services (DHS), the Victorian Co-operative on Children's Services for Ethnic Groups (VICSEG), Brimbank Youth Services, the Youth Junction Inc, Victoria Police, City Mission, and elsewhere. The Advisory Group has met quarterly at Visy Cares Hub.

At grassroots level, program content has been monitored and determined by a Working Group. The product of a series of meetings convened to help create better understanding between young people and police, the Working Group has comprised representatives of the target group and Project staff, together with representatives of Victoria Police (including a New and Emerging Communities Liaison Officer), Brimbank Youth Services, the New Hope Foundation, Migrant Resource Centre North West and African Holistic Social Services.

The Working Group's initial focus was on co-ordinating the project's first youth-led Celebration component, i.e. the BIG EVENT held on July 3, 2010. Subsequently, its role became one of ongoing support for activities and involvement strategies, including fortnightly EVENTS in 2010-2011, a Soccer match and projected camp. The Working Group meets on a needs basis.

2.6 Theoretical and Policy Context of the Program

The BYMP has responded to key current findings in the literature, as well as experience in the field, that highlight (a) settlement and integration challenges shared by members of the African migrant cohort in common with other migrant groups, and (b) challenges related to particular (youth) refugee experiences. Relevant issues are summarised in the Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission report *Rights of Passage: the Experiences of Australian-Sudanese Young People* (2008). While the report deals specifically with African communities within the City of Greater Dandenong, there is strong agreement that its findings and concerns are replicated within the Brimbank LGA.

The report argues, for instance, that the Australian legal system can be confusing and intimidating to people who have "vastly different experiences of what 'justice' is", and that lack of knowledge can impact on such standard processes as obtaining a driver's license or signing consumer contracts. In the area of health, it is noted that culturally-specific programs are often heavily used or over-taxed and therefore difficult to access. Anecdotal evidence suggests that high levels of unemployment within African communities may be compounded by discriminatory employment practices in the Brimbank LGA. Discrimination has also been reported in the areas of rental accommodation and opportunities to participate in sports and

recreation to such an extent that the report sees “*addressing systemic discrimination*” as critical to reducing disadvantage for young African Australians.⁵

Development and delivery of the pilot program also actively endorse the visions, policies and ideologies of the participating organisations. For example, **The Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY)** seeks to enhance the life opportunities of young people from culturally diverse backgrounds through training, delivering client services, building community capacity, documenting best practice and developing relevant policy. Its agenda includes helping young people and families to address factors such as homelessness, family conflict, isolation, and training/employment, health and financial inequities. **The New Hope Foundation** assists newly arrived refugees through statewide services such as the Settlement Grants Program, New Hope Employment & Training Services, or the self-help South Sudanese Women’s Network.⁶ The **Migrant Resource Centre North West** provides settlement services across the North-western region.

Brimbank City Council likewise has a strong community engagement profile. Brimbank Youth Services is committed to promoting and supporting the health and well-being of young people 12-25 years who live, work or study within the municipality. Its **Youth Policy & Action Plan 2008-2013** acknowledges the heterogeneous nature of the youth community and recognises the importance of collaborations with agencies such as CMY and the Migrant Resource Centre. The Youth Policy makes specific reference to the pressures on young migrants and refugees to (a) surmount disrupted or limited educational histories, (b) to integrate more quickly than adults into the host society, and (c) to negotiate cultural cleavages between their families and the wider community.⁷

Underpinning CMY and Brimbank’s work with young people is a fundamental commitment to the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. Other policy factors which bear direct relevance to the project include the Victorian Vulnerable Youth Framework. The VVYF endorses a ‘Whole of Government’ approach (i.e. connecting policy and service delivery across departments) to prevention and early identification of vulnerability; engagement in education, training and employment; local planning for youth services; tailored (i.e. individualised) responses for particular groups (based on recognition that a ‘one size fits all’ approach is not necessarily productive); and fostering access to effective services run by capable people. (8)

African Holistic Social Services, formerly East & Central African Communities of Victoria (**EACACOV**), is one of a range of support organisations or collectives in the western suburbs with specific outreach to immigrants from Sudan and Ethiopia. Funded by the Department of Immigration (under the SGP), AHSS offers holistic social services to assist newcomers in the settlement and integration processes. The bulk of clients are humanitarian entrants to this country. In this context, ‘newcomer’ is defined as an immigrant who has been in Australia for up to five years. (There is concern that this five year limit may not be sufficiently flexible and that some individuals and families need more than five years to ‘settle’ and participate effectively in the community). While an estimated 70% of AHSS’s outreach is case management, the organisation plays a vital role in information provision on the law, utilities, family relationships, health and mental health. It also works closely with schools in supporting non-English-speaking families.

⁵ Rights of Passage, p.8-9.

⁶ ‘About the New Hope Foundation’, <http://www.newhope.asn.au/about-the-nhf>

⁷ Brimbank City Council (2008) Youth Policy and Action Plan 2008-2013, p.6-7

⁸ Victorian Government, Department of Human Services (2008) , *Vulnerable Youth Framework Discussion Paper: Development of a Policy Framework for Victoria’s Vulnerable Young People*, p.1-2, 10-12.

Police support for the BYMP articulates current national and international trends, policies and priorities within community policing. The **Victoria Police Child and Youth Policy (2006-2008)**, for instance, embraces the principles of early intervention, social cohesion and diversion through referral, and active utilisation of community partnerships that address risk factors facing vulnerable youth through maximisation of community resources. Policy acknowledges that policing needs to be relevant and guided by recognition that partnerships between police and other community and government groups and agencies have the potential to make a difference in the lives of the state's most vulnerable young people. The **Victoria Police Child and Youth Strategy 2009-2013** enshrines youth participation as "a key factor in youth engagement" on the understanding that "young people who are connected to decision making processes are less likely to experience disengagement [and] less likely to participate in antisocial and criminal behaviour".⁽⁹⁾ VicPol's five-year Business Plan, **The Way Ahead 2008-2013**, acknowledges the linkages between disengagement/ disconnection and risk taking or antisocial behaviour within the youth cohort, and has prioritised engaging with local communities in working with young people 'at risk'. Specific reference is made to fostering young people's social development, building their self-esteem, and helping them "better connect".¹⁰ The Attorney-General's Justice Statement commits itself to programs "that seek to reconnect people, especially young people, with their families, communities and learning environments".⁽¹¹⁾

3. Research design and Evaluation Context

Development and delivery of the Brimbank Young Men's Project (BYMP) has been guided by a central aim:

- ❖ *To identify and trial a service response for newly arrived young men from African backgrounds, to enhance their capacity of engagement in education, training and employment and to help them rebuild their lives through supportive family, peer and community relations.*

Evaluation of the program has been a two-stage process, aimed at assessing program outcomes at both a midway point and at the conclusion of the Pilot. Stage 1 of the process informed the Interim Report. Stage 2 informs compilation of this Final Report.

Based on the Evaluation Brief, the Interim Report:

1. Examined factors influencing disengagement of young men of African backgrounds from education & training, employment, family and community.
2. Examined the success of the BYMP Pilot, in its first year of operation, in achieving its aim of increasing engagement.
3. Identified outcomes of the first year of delivery
4. Assessed strengths and constraints of the program to that point

The Final Report:

1. Examines overall delivery of the BYMP Pilot
2. Assesses the overall success of the Pilot in achieving its aim of increasing engagement.
3. Identifies outcomes of the full period of delivery
4. Assesses overall strengths and constraints of the Pilot.

⁹ *Victoria Police Child and Youth Strategy 2009-2013*

¹⁰ *Victoria Police Business Plan: 'The Way Ahead 2008-2013'*, p.14.

¹¹ *New Directions for the Victorian Justice System 2004-2024: Attorney-General's Justice Statement*, p.59.

Timeline

- Stage 1 of the evaluation was conducted in July-August 2010 with an interim report presented in August 2010.
- Stage 2 evaluation activities were undertaken in March-April 2011 with a Final report delivered in June 2011.

Evaluation Activities – Stage One

1. Desktop Review of available administrative information
2. Review of other program documentation and descriptive material

Interviews

Data was generated by a sequence of Interviews and Focus groups with Program staff and Stakeholders, i.e. members of the program's Working Group. These were:

- ❖ Girma Seid, Project Officer, CMY
- ❖ Bernadette Marantelli, North West Coordinator, CMY NW Region
- ❖ Duku Wolikare, Representative of Eastern and Central African Communities of Victoria (EACACOV), now African Holistic & Social Services.
- ❖ Moses Lado, New & Emerging Communities Liaison Officer, Victoria Police
- ❖ Lual Lual, Peer Facilitator, CMY
- ❖ Peter Pal, Cultural Support Officer, Victoria University of Technology

Evaluation Activities – Stage Two

Data was generated by:

1. Follow-up interviews with:
 - ❖ Girma Seid, Project Officer, CMY
 - ❖ Bernadette Marantelli, North West Coordinator, CMY
 - ❖ Mary Danckert, Manager, Youth Support and Development, CMY
 - ❖ Jessie Roberts, Youth Services Coordinator, Youth Junctions Inc.
2. Survey of participants in the BYMP Pilot (survey produced by the YRC and conducted by BYMP staff). Approximately 25 young men were approached; 13 completed surveys were returned. The respondents were young men aged 17 to 25. Ten (i.e.) described themselves as of Sudanese origin; two as Dinka; one as Ethiopian. Length of time in Australia varied from 2 to 8 years. Five respondents were "living in the family home"; one described himself as homeless.

4. Evaluation findings

4.1 Program History

Development of the BYMP was informed by

- ❖ Identification by CMY, through case work, community engagement and research, of the need for a program that would address barriers and problems faced by young African men in the Brimbank LGA
- ❖ Preliminary consultation with services and African communities within Brimbank, confirming the need for such an initiative.
- ❖ Confirmation of the need for such an initiative in the findings of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Report *Rights of Passage: the Experiences of Australian-Sudanese Young People* (2008) and allied research.
- ❖ Assignment of a CMY Project Officer to research and implement the initiative with a core group of young men
- ❖ Consultation by the CMY Project Officer with regional agencies, community groups and individuals in order to develop partnerships and inform future directions of the project.

Parameters of the BYMP were negotiated at a preliminary meeting in July 2009, attended by representatives of the Good Shepherd Foundation, Brimbank Youth Services, Melbourne City Mission, DHS and DIAC. Several months of program mapping via further consultation with young people, Victoria Police, the Migrant Resource Centre, VICSEG, the Horn of Africa Communities Network, and other relevant organisations, informed the establishment of a Program Advisory Group. Face to face outreach with young people commenced in December 2009.

4.2 Program Participation

Program Participants have been defined as Young men from African Communities (mostly of Sudanese or Ethiopian background) identified as disengaged or at 'high risk' of disengagement on the basis of antisocial behaviours, drug and alcohol use, unemployment, unsettled accommodation, or contact with the Criminal Justice system. While all speak some English, most prefer to communicate in Arabic.

Participants have been recruited to the program by a mix of referral and assertive street outreach. Most of the participants have had involvement with regional police. While the majority have undertaken or completed Year 9 at secondary school, refugee experiences and pre-arrival living conditions have impacted on their education and they generally have poor literacy and numeracy skills. Finding consistent accommodation is seen as a pressing issue in most cases.

During the BYMP's first year, had outreach contact with between 40 and 50 young men, 23 of whom "connected" with the project officer. Of these, around 10 became "regulars". (At the time, staff emphasised the fluidity of the group: "*some come and stay ... some go*"). Outreach figures remained constant in the second year, presumably because of the transience of the population; however, the number of registered participants increased to 40, with around 20 regarded as "regulars".

4.3 Program Delivery

The BYMP has been delivered as a fluid sequence comprised of initial engagement; facilitation of social skills development and peer connection through Group work and regular social events; and information provision. Young participants have been selected on the basis of (a) referral by agencies or families; or (b) through Assertive outreach by program staff.

Program Co-ordination

The program has been co-ordinated and delivered by CMY Project officer Girma Seid, under the direction of senior personnel at CMY. (Prior to July 2010, Mr Seid combined his work on the BYMP with other CMY projects. He currently works full-time on the BYMP). He has been supported, two days a week, by a Peer Facilitator (Lual Lual in 2010, Dominic Matiang in 2010-2011, one day per week). Over its lifetime, aspects of the program have involved representatives of an increasing number of other organisations and services. VicPol NECLO Moses Lado, for instance, has contributed to street outreach activity while, at other times, facilitation of the BYMP has been achieved through active collaboration between CMY and organisations as diverse as the Brotherhood of St Laurence, Jesuit Social Services, the YMCA, Norwood Health, Brimbank Youth Services, Youth Junction and the Maribyrnong City Council. Strong linkages have likewise been maintained between the program and CMY's own Reconnect service.

Assertive Outreach 2010-2011

Aimed at initial engagement with a view to building up trust with young people who believe the system has failed them, Assertive outreach shifts (three days a week, including some weekends) have comprised program staff meeting with and talking with young people about their lives, on their own "turf". Most of the activity has concentrated on parks in Footscray and St Albans. The parks in question are common meeting ground for a number of disengaged groups, including Anglo-Celtic cohorts that has gathered there informally for the past 20 years. While there has reportedly been conflict at times between different factions, there is currently a tacit understanding over territory and agreement to co-exist. Some young African men reportedly sleep in the parks but, in general, they are over 25 and fall outside the target population's age range.

Group Work – 'Youthtube' activity 2010

The next level of interaction comprised agreement by young men to access the group work component of the BYMP, an engagement tool titled 'Youthtube'. Funding from the Besen Family Foundation facilitated purchase of cameras and training of group members in video editing techniques, content creation, web streaming and the experience of making short films to be downloaded onto computers (at VisyCares Hub). Numbers were limited to ten. While attendance was erratic (resulting in the project stretching from ten to eighteen weeks), program staff noted that the activity aroused interest within the target group, and a DVD was produced from the program due to be launched in June 2011.

Establishment of Working Group 2010

Collaboration between program staff and police representatives (including a Police NECLO, i.e. Newly Emerging Communities Liaison Officer) resulted in a meeting between police and representatives of the young men with a view to airing respective views and concerns. As a result of that meeting, a program WORKING GROUP was formed comprised of delegates from the New Hope Foundation, NW Migrant Resource Centre, Brimbank City Council Youth Services, Victoria Police (including the NECLO) and African Holistic Services.

In the program's first year, the WORKING GROUP facilitated an initial stage of the proposed CELEBRATION component. Devised and staged by the young men, with funding by Victoria Police and support from agencies on the Working Group, the BIG EVENT was staged on a

July Saturday afternoon and brought together a line-up of bands, a D.J. and spokespersons for VicPol, CMY, etc. While the turn-out was less than expected (disappointing the young organisers), interest was expressed at reprising the exercise in the future (and with better promotion).

Group Work 2011

Interviewed towards the end of the Pilot's second year, program staff indicated that Working Group planning was proceeding for a second BIG EVENT/CELEBRATION at the conclusion of the project). They noted that the chief Group Work focus of the second year of the program has been organisation of a series of 12 fortnightly Music/BBQ/Social events and a SOCCER match. A three day Leadership Camp, attended by 13 young men, eight police members and six services staff, was a marked success.

Mentoring

Given that it took longer to develop the young men's trust than was initially expected, development of the MENTORING component of the BYMP was somewhat delayed. However, there have been some developments in this area. It is noted, for instance, that eight young people who were not part of the project (and not, by definition, disengaged) have volunteered support in the program's second year, largely as a result of contact with Mr Seid. At a day to day level, it is noted also that the staff role of Peer Facilitator has been filled, in 2011, by a former program participant. According to program staff:

"The Mentoring [component] has not gone the way originally planned. It's not formal. But young people have come forward to participate and act as mentors and it has filled some gaps ... Look at the situation of young men being released from detention without any plan in place. At least this project provides them with a point of contact. Success depends on who the Mentor is and his knowledge of the system".

It is anticipated that the partnership with African Holistic Social Services will further facilitate the **INFORMATION PROVISION** component of the project. Program staff is able to collect extensive information re individual participants using a data base developed by the YRC.

4.4 Discussion

(a) Determinants of Disengagement

Interviews with program staff and stakeholders indicate that a number of themes and issues highlighted by the Literature (specifically the Rights of Passage Report) are replicated in the settlement experiences of the program's target population. For instance, they cite frustration with the education system as a key **determinant of young men from refugee backgrounds becoming disengaged from education, training and employment**. Often as a result of geographical dislocation or family trauma, many young people arrive having experienced disrupted or very limited formal education.

"They may never be able to compensate for their lack of educational background ... the Australian school system is geared towards age groups ... a two or three year gap is significant enough for kids not to be able to [bridge] it... Support mechanisms are usually insufficient ... a bit of extra tutoring for an hour or half an hour once a week is often not enough ... Plus support tends to be centred only on the level the young person is placed in ... it doesn't address the problem of gaps. Accordingly young people find themselves unable to cope. At home, their parents don't have the English to follow up ... and the process of decay starts. Loss of self-esteem kicks in around Year 9". [CMY Project Officer]

One interviewee pointed to a clash between the young person's aspirations and the reality of life, education and opportunity in Australia. In part, this can be due to a lack of information, and/or a limited and traditional view of educational pathways, pre-arrival in Australia.

Interviewees cited a tendency within the community to equate white collar work with status, and to romanticise the ideal of success at school leading automatically to university and success in a white collar (higher status) job. There appears to be little understanding of the possibility of pathways through VCAL, TAFE, etc, or that trades can be well-paid and respected in Australia

In identifying **determinants that lead to young men becoming disconnected from family and community**, Portes & Rumbaut (2001) and Boyle (2009) highlight the phenomenon of 'dissonant acculturation', whereby the young person's knowledge of a new culture and language outstrips that of the parents, thus impacting on the family dynamic as the parents become dependent on the child in dealing with social and welfare sectors.¹² Interviewees highlighted instances of familial role-reversal within the target group for whom home and the wider community sometimes seem to exist in separate worlds. It is also recognised that the long-term impact of the refugee experience (i.e. historical trauma) can impact adversely on individuals' capacity to parent.

Youth frustration can be compounded by integrational conflicts such as pressure from parents to maintain traditional cultural mores (including dress) or achieve educationally versus peer pressure to conform to the new environment. On their part, parents may find the young man's adaptation to the new environment threatening. (Used to disputes being settled by community elders or extended family, Parents may also find it difficult to understand interventionist Australian welfare and service systems and protocols. Intervention by DHS, for instance, can compound problems at home). Interviewees noted that tensions between a young man and family typically reach crisis point at age 16 when Centrelink directly pays him Youth Allowance. Peer pressure again can fuel the young person's "ambition" for independence as parents expect him to contribute to the home.

While it is emphasised that young African women face a range of settlement difficulties, there is feeling among the interviewees that young men's acculturation problems are more visible (due to the tendency for young men to gather in public places) and that disruption to traditional roles is generally greater for males. Traditional male occupations, such as cultivation, minor construction or caring animal husbandry, are not likely options in Australia. On the other hand, traditional women's duties such as cooking and home maintenance remain constant. With mother unable to communicate in English, girls tend on to take on greater home responsibility.

(b) Barriers to re-connection

While there is general agreement that desired long-term outcomes for the young men in the program include reconnection with family and community and reconnection with pathways, interviewees realistically recognise that some young men need to overcome multiple **barriers** to do so. In terms of **education, training and employment**, they highlight challenges faced by young men in regard to:

- Contextual factors (specifically, racial, ethnic or religious discrimination)
- Blocked economic opportunities within the labour market.
- The need to deal with alcohol and substance abuse and other self-harming behaviour
- Lack of an established African community, able to supply employment or rehabilitation options in Australia
- Adoption by some young men of a resistance-based counter-culture perspective on their place in Australian society¹³

¹² Portes, A. & Rumbaut, R. (2001) *Legacies : the Story of the Immigrant Second Generation*, Berkeley CA: University of California Press, cited by Boyle, E.H. (2009). 'Young Refugees', in *Handbook of Youth and Young Adulthood: New perspectives and agendas*, ed. A. Furlong, London: Routledge, p.93.

¹³ Boyle, p.93

- Inadequate or inaccessible information - both before and after arrival. (Interviewees stressed the need for constant reinforcement of information, including enlightenment on legal processes, support service access, rights and responsibilities)
- The complexity and overlapping nature of the service system. (Interviewees note that the system is difficult even for professionals to navigate).
- Resistance to counselling because of stigma associated with clinical intervention. (Counselling is seen by some Africans, more used to family arbitration of problems, as a very Western and unfamiliar concept).
- Mixed responses from schools to reconnecting young people to education. (In some cases, schools may be cautious because of past experiences with the young person. In other cases, classes may already be full or it may be too late in the year for the young man to have any likelihood in succeeding in a subject).
- Difficulties in finding stable accommodation. (It is noted that accommodation is an issue for all program participants – and an ongoing problem for the BYMP. Affordable Public housing is usually not an option for the target population).
- Possible health issues (including drug and alcohol issues).

Above all, program staff cites lack of trust/hope as the primary barrier to be surmounted by young men who feel (a) that the system has let them down, (b) that nobody cares; and (c) that there are few positives available to them within either their own or the larger community. In some cases, they may have been on an organisation's books for 2 or 3 years and, inevitably, this leads to disillusionment. Interviewees concede that, with the best will in the world, resource limitations mean that there are inevitably situations in which they are unable to provide tangible outcomes (eg. employment or housing).

As regards **barriers to re-engagement with family and community**, staff notes that some of the young men have been identified by their community as trouble-makers and have been rejected by more than just parents. In some cases, the relationship is so damaged that the young men are unable to contact family members. Some young men have suggested that the service system itself can be a factor in ongoing alienation. One young man is quoted as having observed: *"There's a lot of support when you split from your family but not when you want to go back"*. Even so, program staff record that a number of young men have expressed a strong desire to reconnect with family/community, and that this desire is quite common after three or four years away from home.

Staff cites personal contact and help with service access as important **strategies in reconnecting young men to education or employment** while there is general recognition in the literature that the best means of combating barriers to acculturation and/or reconnection come from strong families and supportive co-ethnic communities.¹⁴ In this regard, interviewees cite the **strategic value of engaging and talking with community elders** and taking advantage of their willingness to attend project meetings. A good relationship has already reportedly developed with a Sudanese women's group, "very keen to have their boys back", and the program reports that three young men to date have been reconnected to their families as a result of mediation through elders.

It should be noted that one purpose of the BIG EVENT presentation in July 2010, and of the series of fortnightly EVENTS in 2010-11, was to demonstrate to families and the African community that the young men are able to come together in a positive way.

¹⁴ Boyle, p.93.

4.5 Program Outcomes- as reported by staff :

(1) First Year

The interim report examined the success of the program, in its first year, in engaging the young men as a step towards reconnection with services, education & training, employment and family/community. While the project officer conceded that the process of developing trust and building relationships with the target population had taken longer than expected, he was able to report that the project had produced a number of positive outcomes during its short duration. Specifically:

- The YOUNG MEN 'on the record' (i.e. those registered as part of the BYMP) reportedly exhibited interest in the activities (albeit their attendance on Thursdays has been sporadic) and were keen to participate.
- Thanks to strong internal links between the BYMP and CMY's Reconnect casework team, referrals for case management had received an "*instant response*". Given some young men's frustration at lengthy waiting times or delays in accessing services, this promptness (and the fact that Reconnect allows flexible timelines) was welcomed and a number of "positives were apparent" as a result.
- Approximately half the program participants were referred to service providers (including CMY Reconnect) and were able to address pressing needs such as homelessness and legal assistance.
- Seven young men were reconnected with training providers and educational institutions. (In August 2010, one young man was undertaking Year 11, another attending English class at VUT. One young man had accessed a carpentry apprenticeship).
- Interest had also been expressed by some young men in short term courses at the Ashley Institute of Training and other facilities.
- Three young men had reconnected with families through mediation facilitated by the program staff.
- The BYMP had enjoyed some success in (a) changing the young men's perceptions of police, and (b) bringing police and the young people together. This had been facilitated – in part - by pro-active policing, i.e. through a visit by a New and Emerging Communities Liaison Officer (NECLO) and other police members to talk with one group of "*antisocial young men*", as well as meeting with community elders and workers of African background, in an "*attempt to create understanding ... [and] get to know the young people better*". The meeting provided the young people with a forum for airing their views.
- Tangible outcomes of the Police meeting with the young men were:
 - the establishment of a collaborative BYMP-based Working Group (including plain-clothes representatives of Police, key agencies and youth delegates), and
 - mounting of the CELEBRATION component of the BYMP , a 'Big Event' (concert) at Kensington Community Youth Centre, funded by VicPol, and led by the working group in an attempt to enable the young people to present themselves in a more

positive light to families and community. Lack of promotion resulted in limited attendance (about 80 people in all) but was recognised as a learning experience by some of the young men. Workers cited the preparedness of the participants to commit themselves to the event and to be involved as the most important outcome.

- Program staff noted that four productive Working group meetings were held up until August 2010, and that connections had reached a point where uniformed police could be represented at meetings. There was a view that *“some sort of trust has been created”* and that some program participants had begun to feel they might contact particular officers if necessary (for details of bail, etc).
- Program staff also highlighted the goodwill and enthusiasm for the initiative of the participating and associated agencies and services. Specific reference was made to support from Brimbank City Council (including loan of a sound system for the BIG EVENT). The project officer reported having established working partnerships/relationships with a range of service providers, notably DasWest, Djerriwarrh Youth Connection, Western Region Health Services and the VicPol Multicultural Unit.

(2) Second Year

Where the central focus of the first year of the project was on street outreach and pre-engagement of the young men, leading to participation in the weekly Youthtube activity, emphasis has been placed, in the second year, on Referrals (e.g. to Legal Aid and Counselling) or case management. (*“There has been continued emphasis on getting the young men to come forward and seek help”*).

Program staff notes that, as of the end of 2010:

- An additional eight young men were accessing training per Certificate II in Civil Construction. (13 young men, overall, have been referred to further education and training during the project’s second year).
- Contact had been made with several employers (in the construction industry) re employment of BYMP graduates
- 10 young men have been referred to the Reconnect service while referrals to Headspace and Alcohol/Drug Support services have also continued
- Some further outcomes have been achieved in the area of accommodation.

While the process of reconnecting the young men to their families is described as “a work in progress”, in regard to (a) reconnecting to community, and (b) dissemination of information, program staff report strong signs that the program’s initial cohort of disengaged young men has begun *“linking back to a more positive peer group”*. The staging of regular EVENTS appears to have been a key factor in this regard, as the fortnightly gatherings have attracted significant numbers of young people who are not disengaged. (On average, between 50-60 at each event).

Similarly, staff suggests that the project has had some PREVENTATIVE impact, noting that participants now have greater knowledge of local services and systems. (This point is amplified by survey responses which demonstrate that, as a result of the program ... of respondents

“An important aspect of the BYMP is its flexibility. Sometimes we don’t have an answer [BUT] we try to respond. Every door’s an open door ... The presence of outreach means there are a lot of young men who will now come and access CMY and some of the other services ...”. [CMY spokesperson]

Staff note continued progress in 2011 in meeting the objective of changing the young men's perception of police. It is noted that Police continue to meet with program representatives at Working Group meetings and to attend fortnightly events. It is noted that several young people have met with police members (generally for advice on fines, court appearances, etc) and that some have been invited to take part in consultation with DIAC, ViCPOL and Gerry Hand.

"Our activities have included visits by the Sheriff on Tuesday afternoons. The Police are coming down to take part in activities. In conjunction with their involvement, the boys are increasingly taking ownership of crimes committed when they were younger ... There has been extensive discussion regarding [VicPol's] role, including discussions with Girma. We've needed to strike a balance ... Our events need to be positive. Police need to be unarmed. At the same time we recognise that their job is to keep the community safe. The boys need social skills training ... in not swearing or drinking at events ... Some work has been done on this".

Arguably the most effective strategy in bringing the young men and police together has been a Leadership camp, organised by the Working Group, staffed by representatives of CMY, Jesuit Social Services, Brimbank Youth Services and YSAS, and attended by eight police members. 13 young men took part over three days (May 4-6) in an exercise which, it is anticipated, will help improve the police-youth relationship. According to the project Officer:

"The camp provided an opportunity for the young people to share information about Alcohol and Drugs and relationship(s) with the police. It was also an opportunity to participate in various activities including confidence and team-building with police members and service providers. The presence of the officer in charge from Footscray Police station to have an open discussion had an impact on the young people ... According to Footscray Police, since the camping program there [have been] no incidents reported in the Footscray area involving the young people ... they partly attributed [this] to ... the event".

Other positive outcomes of the camp include a positive account of the event (to be published in the Maribyrnong Weekly newspaper), and expressions of interest by young men to participate in similar future events.

It is noted also that a positive working relationship has been established between the program and the CISP (Court Integrated Services Program) at Sunshine Magistrates Court.

4.6 Program Outcomes – as reported by the Young Men

Survey responses by a representative sample of the young men (13 forms were returned) demonstrate that the BYMP has facilitated a range of both Vocational and Social & Interpersonal outcomes over its short lifetime. **Vocational Outcomes** might be defined as evidence of re-engagement, or interest in re-engagement, with education & training or employment. **Social & Interpersonal Outcomes** might be defined as decreases in risk factors, i.e. improvements to the young men's lifestyles, social skills, interpersonal skills, well-being and connectedness to community, including support services.

Vocational

The efficacy of the BYMP in assisting reconnection with education & training is demonstrated by survey data indicating that:

- Nine of 13 respondents (i.e. 69%) described themselves as either at school or undertaking education & training. (Training courses were described as construction, bricklaying, IT, transport and logistics, cleaning, carpentry, and 'Pathways planning')

As a result of the program:

- 12 out of 13 respondents (i.e. 92%) felt either *quite confident* or *very confident* that they had people they could talk to about getting further education, training or employment).
- 92% now felt (to varying degrees) that they had a better idea of what they wanted to do in the future

Social & Interpersonal

In terms of **improving young people's health & well-being**, survey responses indicate that:

- ◆ 92% now felt confident (to varying degrees) that there was someone they could talk to about problems
- ◆ 69% felt *quite confident* or *very confident* that they now had people they could contact to get help when they had problems. (Another 15% felt *somewhat confident*).
- ◆ 54% now felt they had *quite a bit* or *a lot* greater knowledge about accessing support services. 23% felt *somewhat* better equipped to access services.

In relation to **improving stability of client lifestyle** and **improving interpersonal relationships and connections to community**, survey data indicates that, as a result of the pilot program and contact with the workers:

- ◆ 92% of the young men felt they were getting on with people either *quite a bit better* or *lots better*.
- ◆ 46% felt their relationship with family or community was *quite a bit* or *a lot better* than it had been. 38% felt they now had a *somewhat better relationship* with their families or the community.
- ◆ 77% now felt either *a lot* or *quite a bit better* about themselves; and
- ◆ 38% felt that life in general was *a lot better*. 23% described it as either *somewhat better* or *quite a bit better*; (15% felt that life was *not at all better*)

In regard to the BYMP's capacity to improve the young men's perception of/ (or relationship with) Police, positive data from interviews is supported by survey findings that, as a result of the program:

- ◆ 69% of the young people now felt either *somewhat differently*, *a lot differently* or *quite a bit differently* about the Police; 31% indicated that their perception of police had not altered.
- ◆ 67% of respondents felt they now had either a *much better understanding* or *quite a bit better understanding* of laws in Australia; 31% felt that their understanding of laws was now *somewhat better*.

4.7 Perceived Barriers and Facilitators of Program Success

(a) Barriers

Program staff describe the process of contacting employers and "getting industry to participate" as a significant – possibly **the significant** – issue to be confronted. ("We've had several dead ends along the way ... we've really needed to persist in this area. It's all been down to us"). They note the impact of a lack of real employment options on the young men's morale and incentive to further train. "They fail to see outcomes, even when they participate".

Staff have uniformly highlighted problems associated with the **short-term nature of the program**. Given the complexity of issues faced by the young men, including employability and training criteria, limited job opportunities, the enduring impact of the refugee experience and its antecedents, and the deep-seatedness of family conflict in some cases, there has been strong agreement that the BYMP's two year duration is insufficient. (See Conclusion)

Other barriers cited by staff included:

- ongoing difficulties in accessing appropriate and affordable accommodation;
- lack of funding;
- the ongoing undermining effect of drugs and alcohol. (*"The young men themselves could be regarded to a barrier ... Their drug and alcohol use can be a safety issue for all staff. Even if [the young men] are working, still they struggle"* was one assessment).

Barriers highlighted by the young men (per survey) include:

- Continuing lack of access to accommodation
- "No transport help" or the need for "more travel tickets"
- The need for more contact hours with programs

(b) **Facilitators: What has made the BYMP special?**

There was general agreement among interviewees as to the success of the BYMP in meeting its aim of re-engaging disengaged young men and working towards their reconnection to the community. (One interviewee described it as a **"fantastic" example of both productive outreach and effective and well-coordinated interagency collaboration**). While it is acknowledged that a number of programs currently target young African men, there is feeling that there is a strong PICK and DROP OFF element in the delivery of these initiatives. While the BYMP is clearly strongly driven by the current project officer, it is clearly a generalist (rather than specialist) youth service that draws actively on other district services and partners.

According to interviewees, the specific outcomes cited above underline the BYMP's overall efficacy while testifying to:

- **the capacity and commitment of the program staff**
- **the capacity and skill within the BYMP's partnerships**
- **the flexibility and consistency of the program**
- **its strong relationship with other organisations**
- **outreach that has been ongoing**

Particular credit was paid by interviewees to the input and impact of the Program Officer. Comments included:

"You can't underestimate the influence of Girma's role and ability in that role. He has facilitated and enhanced the possibility of relationships ... increased the likelihood of engagement and consequently better outcomes. The knowledge and understanding of the experiences the young men have had has been very real ... From observation, Girma has been well situated to be able to take on the project, in his being able to be flexible, and his knowledge of the service system". [Program Manager CMY]

"If not for Girma's communication skills, outreach and engagement capabilities, I don't know how successful this program would have been. He went into the young men's safety nets, worked endlessly. Lots of unpaid hours. It's been a hard thing, backing up ideas with money. Activities have been costly to organise. We were able to get free BBQ time because Girma has such a strong relationship with Sunshine Lions ... In future we would need a very strategically planned handover if Girma went to work with

someone else ... it can't be just a case of 'See you later'. The whole project would go back to Square One". [Youth Services Coordinator, Youth Junction Inc].

There is agreement also that the program has been effective because of its different and generalist approach. While, at the outset, program staff stressed the **primary outreach and engagement foci** of the BYMP, there is now acknowledgement that the program's uniqueness lies in its case management component and the strength of its community connections. Its inherent flexibility was also noted:

"We can always change our approach ... be innovative. We generally don't have preconceived ideas about how we should proceed as a service. We need to be client-led, strengths-based. The presence of Outreach means that there are some young men who now come to access CMY and start using the other services ... As a result of one door opening ..."

Interview endorsement of the Program staff's capacity and commitment was echoed in survey responses by the young men. For instance:

- 92% of survey respondents indicated they were very satisfied or quite satisfied with the way they had been treated by program staff.
- 83% indicated (a) that they had felt quite comfortable or very comfortable dealing with the outreach workers, and (b) would feel comfortable re-contacting them.
- 67% indicated that the program had helped "lots" or "quite a bit" with their problems; another 25% indicated that the program had been "somewhat" helpful in this regard.
- 83% would strongly or quite strongly recommend the program "to other young people who have problems and need help".

Specific supporting comments included:

"Girma made sure that you have got help".

"They are very helpful and we could talk about my problems".

"Helped me a lot to do good and keep out of trouble".

"Helped with contacting police ... dealing with fines".

"[Girma] was comfortable with us ... First person ever to understand young man like myself".

"I real like this program ... It's a good program for young [men] ... Without Girma I can't get any help but Girma help with lots ... Thank you Girma ... you good man to work and take care understanding young people".

5. Conclusion

The program has (a) operated with limited resources and (b) as a two year pilot initiative. At the end of the first year strong sentiment was expressed by staff and agency representatives that, in view of the complexities and challenges being faced by workers, and the fact that developing relationships with the young people has taken longer than expected, reconnection outcomes may not be achievable in the short term. Given the core focus of the initiative on engagement and development of a therapeutic relationship over time, it was stressed that consideration needed to be given to the BYMP's sustainability.

This was re-emphasised and confirmed during follow-up interviews. It is clear that pathways back to education, training and employment, or reconnection with family and community will be

more complex for some young men than others Citing the example of needing to redefine the image of police within a new culture, the Project Officer stresses the need for flexibility of approach and delivery in any outreach program of this nature:

“You can’t have a one size fits all approach to all the young men ... Past experience has to be taken into account – experiences of police in Kenya or Ethiopia ... They’ve had to survive [extraordinary trauma]”.

It is anticipated, therefore, that quantifiable change in the lives of some young participants is still “at a distance”. *“There are still a small number of young men who remain very vulnerable and disengaged”*, observed one staff member.

“They need more ... and have taken longer to connect with [Girma and Dominic]. The services couldn’t deliver for these young people and they remain a challenge for CMY ...”.

Challenges for the Future

As implied above, the biggest challenge currently facing the BYMP is clearly that of Sustainability.

“There has to be a way to continue” [was one comment] “A lot of time has been spent building relationships, to start making referrals ... The groundwork has been done. Trust in services will go away if [the BYMP] doesn’t continue. MOST of the project’s life has been devoted to developing relationships and trust and we have strong, active relationships. Very, very active and supportive. [Representatives] attend our Advisory group meetings and support the program. There is a clear understanding of [respective] roles and the core group is very solid. We need to maintain the connections”.

Program staff are particularly gratified by the level of collaboration (and co-ordination) given the reportedly disjointed nature of the sector. *“There is over-servicing across the board, duplication still exists, and yet there are still gaps. New programs get funded without real consultation within the sector and no reference to what the current gaps really are ... There are so many things still to be addressed”*). The level of co-operation has perhaps been most eloquently demonstrated by active multi-agency involvement in the Celebration and social events and the May Leadership camp. (The last instance teamed workers from YSAS, JSS, CMY and Brimbank YS with members of VicPol).

Whether or not the BYMP initiative is able to attract further funding, staff stress the need for agencies and key stakeholders to meet together and assess “what’s really happening” calculate what has been learned from the program, determine “What doesn’t exist?” and identify “the gaps”. Specific reference was made to potential demands on the welfare sector with the release of young refugees from immigration detention centres, and to the imperative of fostering MENTORING partnerships with appropriate agencies. (One possible development might be a formal linkage between CMY and Jesuit Social Services which currently offers a Mentoring program to young people emerging from custody).

While in no way underplaying the complexity of the issues and problems being faced by a target population with no family or community connections and *“no supportive environment”*, project and agency staff feel that some inroads have been made to date in *“rebuilding trust”* with a significant number of young men within the target group. They feel that the message of *“It’s not all doom and gloom ... there are people who care about you”* is being heard.

6. Recommendations

Feedback from program staff, stakeholders and the young men indicates that CMY and its staff have successfully met the central aim of the project, i.e. in identifying and trialling a service response for newly arrived young men from African backgrounds, with a view to enhancing their capacity of engagement in education, training and employment and to helping them rebuild their lives through supportive family, peer and community relations. In view of that success, the authors have made a number of recommendations. These are:

Recommendation 1

That CMY seek to maintain and develop its current assertive outreach and engagement activities, as detailed in project guidelines.

Recommendation 2

That the BYMP Advisory Group endorse and support CMY in actively seeking funding, from appropriate Government departments, to enable continued delivery of the program.

Recommendation 3

That the BYMP Advisory committee actively explore the possibility of expanding and extending the service and providing additional resources for the program

Recommendation 4

That Program staff continue to develop (and expand) relevant networks and partnerships within the youth and welfare sectors

Recommendation 6

In order to assess both the durability of the outcomes and the portability of the model, that the Advisory committee explore the feasibility of follow-up studies at suitable intervals