# Southern Metropolitan Regional Youth Affairs Network

## Survey Report 2010

Victoria
The Place To Be

Southern Metropolitan
RYAN
REGIONAL YOUTH AFFAIRS NETWORK

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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

The Southern Metropolitan Regional Youth Affairs Network (RYAN) brings together youth service providers, all levels of government, community representatives and young people with an interest in improving outcomes for young people across the southern region of Melbourne. The Southern Metropolitan RYAN covers the City of Casey; Cardinia Shire; City of Greater Dandenong; City of Bayside; City of Kingston; Glen Eira Council; City of Port Phillip; City of Frankston; City of Stonnington and Mornington Peninsula Shire.

The Southern Metropolitan RYAN 2010 Youth Services Survey Report research took place in February, March and April of 2010. The data utilised in the development of this report has been entirely drawn from primary sources, through an online survey distributed to hundreds of youth service organisations across the region. The survey questions were developed by representatives of the Southern Metropolitan RYAN (Cardinia Shire Council, Southern Health, Mission Australia and South East LLEN. The online survey was administered by the South East LLEN and the final research report was written by the Bayside Glen Eira Kingston LLEN.

The aim of the 2010 Youth Services Survey Report was to collect quantitative and qualitative data about the youth sectors' needs in the Southern Metropolitan region of Melbourne. The data represents a snap shot of perspectives pertaining to the state of service delivery and issues for young people across the region. As respondents were not equally represented across the ten regional municipalities within; all data, comments and suggestions should not be taken as a direct reflection of the entire region, rather they should be considered regionally (or collectively) indicative. This data has the potential to be useful for organisations in areas such as: submission writing, reporting, informing practice, service delivery and program development, identifying service gaps, informing policy and making recommendations to government. More specifically, the Southern Metropolitan RYAN will be presenting this report to the 'Victorian Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC) on Youth' and as part of an ongoing consultative research strategy to be undertaken over the coming years.

## Respondent Demography, Regional / Sector Overview and Youth Sector Specialisation

The online survey distributed by the Southern Metropolitan RYAN was the first piece of consultative research undertaken by this network within the region. Within a short space of time in early 2010 this survey achieved a significant response rate from respondents in managerial, service delivery or combined roles in a diverse range of organisations providing programs and services in ten different municipalities. While services offered were variously provided to 0 – 25 year olds, the majority of respondents provided services to those aged 15 – 19 years and although over 18 different youth sector specialisations were noted by respondents the majority of respondents represented the 'education and training', 'housing / homelessness', 'health' and 'local government' specialisations.

## Organisational Capacity and Capacity Management

An assessment of current levels of organisational capacity, mechanisms for managing capacity and referral arrangements when capacity was reached was ascertained via the survey research. An overwhelming 82.2% of respondents felt that their organisation was, in the first quarter of 2010, already working at or above capacity. 'Education and training', 'housing / homelessness' and 'mental health' appeared as specialisations in both the highest levels of 'at capacity' and 'over capacity' levels. In terms of managing excess demand and capacity, almost half of respondents indicated that clients were 'placed on a waiting list' and a fifth said they would 'refer to another program'. Pleasingly only a handful said they would turn a client away. The remainder gave a variety of other responses, with the bulk of these being that they had no choice but to work at 'more than' over capacity. In other words, decrease service provision across their client base in order to take on additional clients. Where referrals were indicated respondents were asked to elaborate further in order to provide some information about the scale of referral either in, or out, of the region. Not particularly surprisingly, an overwhelming number of respondents, at 81.6%, indicated that they referred within the region, largely because of existing referral arrangements and/or to accommodate the transport needs of the client.

## Organisational Partnership Participation

With the concept of 'partnerships' increasingly entering the lexicon of community organisations, partnerships and consortiums becoming a requirement in funding applications, and partnership/network approaches increasingly becoming a necessity in order to meet service demands; the nature of partnership participation was considered an integral part of this

network-driven research. An overwhelming 93.2% of respondents indicated that they do work in partnership with other organisations in order to deliver services and/or to achieve organisational outcomes, something that was not overly surprising given the large number of respondents who identified 'referral' as a mechanism for managing service excess. Respondents were then asked about the nature of their partnerships, to test the level of cross-sectoral collaboration and also identify the types of organisations they are likely to partner with. The research indicates that cross-sectoral collaboration amongst respondents is something they are familiar with, with just over 94% indicating that they 'always' or 'sometimes' do engage in partnerships. The vast majority of partnerships are made with 'community agencies', 'welfare agencies', 'education providers' and 'local government' and are least likely to be made with 'private industry'.

**Organisation and Sector Communication**

Communication within the sector is an important factor for all organisations, especially in relation to keeping informed and up to date with sector and service changes. An overwhelming 95.5% of respondents use 'local network meetings' to receive (and presumably share) service and sector information. This was followed by 62.4% of respondents who indicated 'websites', 19.7% who utilise YACVic and 18.5% who indicated 'other'. A further interrogation of those who indicated 'other' revealed that the communication tools they used included Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN) newsletters, state and federal government policy announcement, publications, research and other staff.

**Regional Priority Youth Sector Issues – Youth Needs, Structural Barriers, Service Gaps**

An important aspect of this research was to identify the key issues affecting the organisations and professionals working within the youth sector in the Southern Metropolitan region, in particular the respondent identified youth needs, structural barriers and service delivery gaps. The purpose of collecting such data was to inform the RYAN and its members so that the RYAN can provide support and information at a regional level, engage in systemic advocacy activities through consultation with the Victorian Government and through promotion of this resource to local organisations that may choose to use it as a funding, planning or policy tool.

The 18 most significant issues for youth as identified by workers within the Southern Metropolitan RYAN region were (in order of importance) were:

1. 'housing'
2. 'education'
3. 'mental health'
4. 'family conflict'
5. 'violence'
6. 'alcohol'
7. 'transport'
8. 'financial'
9. 'drugs'
10. 'bullying'
11. 'cyber bullying'
12. 'body image'
13. 'health'
14. 'grief / loss'
15. 'settlement'
16. 'sexuality'
17. 'environment'
18. 'other' (eg. social isolation, lack of personal respect, lack of recreational programs).

The seven most significant structural barriers for youth sector workers and organisations within the Southern Metropolitan RYAN region were (in order of importance):

1. 'resourcing / funding'
2. 'staffing'
3. 'lack of consultation'
4. 'policy'
5. 'partnerships'
6. 'advocacy'
7. 'other'

The eight most significant service gaps within the Southern Metropolitan RYAN region were (in order of importance):

- Emergency housing and accommodation for young people
- Education and training service provision
- Early intervention programs within schools to prevent early disengagement
- Funding and resource provision for service providers

- Transport access for clients
- Development of a directory of regional services and providers
- Mental health services for young people
- Increased cultural awareness programs and services in recognition of the regional cultural diversity.

## Systemic Advocacy Messages

The final aspect of the survey sought respondent advice regarding the key messages that the Southern Metropolitan RYAN should convey to the Victorian Government on behalf of the organisations and young people who service and utilise the youth sector in our region. Respondents were provided with an opportunity to highlight the key issues that they believed should be brought to the attention of the Victorian Government. Much of what was stated had already been highlighted in earlier responses, so this section tended reinforced those key and pressing issues which had been a feature of previous comments. What also became apparent in this section was that respondents also wanted the Victorian Government to recognise that this high growth region is a geographically, culturally, historically and economically diverse one and, as such, is facing many changing pressures and needs from its clients, funders and the broader community.

The ten key messages respondents wanted conveyed to the Victorian Government by the Southern Metropolitan RYAN (in no particular order):

- **Communication** - clear, regular and responsive communication within the sector and between the sector and the Victorian Government (eg. more opportunities to participate in consultations, policy advice prior to implementation etc)
- **Housing** – there appears to be a severe shortage of affordable housing (rental, government, emergency, transitional housing types) which is reflected in homelessness issues amongst young people (and their families)
- **Improved Youth Sector Wages** – a high turn-over of staff within some segments of youth sector due to wage limitations (related to funding limitations)
- **New Funding Models** – increase funding periods, reduce the pressures on services to source and retain funding which ultimately reduce the capacity to service clients and lead to competition between providers (who could otherwise potentially be partners)
- **New Service Models** – increasing need for 'joined-up' services and 'one-stop-shops' which are staffed by professionals and appropriately funded (particularly in areas with limited services and/or transport availability). This is in addition to the need for more support for existing service models such as 'outreach'
- **Youth Mental Health Issues** – young people presenting with mental health issues, including complex issues and co-existing issues, seem to be on the rise, resulting in an increased need for more mental health and related services across the region
- **Flexible / Alternative Learning Options** – greater provision of flexible and alternative learning options for young people disengaging and/or disengaged from mainstream education and more availability of flexible learning programs within mainstream school settings
- **Transport Infrastructure and Access** – sufficient and affordable transport is a significant barrier for young people in the region which impedes access to education, training, support services, community engagement activities and health and wellbeing facilities
- **Early Intervention Funding** – providing greater levels of funding for early intervention programs and services for young people in recognition that these are designed to prevent youth or reduce youth issues within the community, and in doing so also potentially represent a longer-term cost saving to society through a reduced need for later stage or adult programs for those participating young people
- **Youth Participation** – greater opportunities for youth voice and youth participation at regional and government consultative levels
- *It is also worth noting that a number of participants indicated a need to promote and learn about the RYAN, something which correlates with the response given at Question 1 where a significant 41.6% of respondents advised that they had not previously heard of the RYAN.*

On behalf of all members of the Southern Metropolitan RYAN we would like to extend a huge thanks to all those individuals and organisations who took the time to take part in this research, recognising that this shows their ongoing commitment to wanting young people across the region to reach their full potential. The Southern Metropolitan RYAN is committed to using this research to effect positive change and improvement in the region for our services, our sector and (most importantly) for our young people.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Southern Metropolitan Regional Youth Affairs Network (RYAN) Background

The Southern Metropolitan Regional Youth Affairs Network (RYAN) brings together youth service providers, all levels of government, community representatives and young people with an interest in improving outcomes for young people across the southern region of Melbourne. The Southern Metropolitan RYAN covers the City of Casey; Cardinia Shire; City of Greater Dandenong; City of Bayside; City of Kingston; Glen Eira Council; City of Port Phillip; City of Frankston; City of Stonnington and Mornington Peninsula Shire.

The Southern Metropolitan RYAN provides strategic advice to Government on key issues for young people in Victoria, and is one of 15 RYANs across Victoria. The network provides a key means for communicating and consulting between the youth sector, young people and Government. The aims of Southern Metropolitan RYAN are to:

1. Provide strategic advice to Government on key issues for young people in Victoria (with a focus on the five outcome areas in Future Directions)
2. Provide a key means for communication and consultation between the youth sector, young people and the Victorian Government
3. Be an advocate for the needs of young people in local and regional strategy development, community strengthening activity and government policy
4. Engage young people where appropriate, or consolidate information from youth engagement activity across the region
5. Promote information sharing and collaboration amongst youth service providers.

## 1.2 2010 Youth Services Survey Report Methodology

The Southern Metropolitan RYAN *2010 Survey Report* research took place in February, March and April of 2010. The data utilised in the development of this report has been entirely drawn from primary sources, through an online survey distributed to hundreds of youth service organisations across the region. The survey was distributed to potential respondents via Southern Metropolitan RYAN members through their networks. Organisations were asked to encourage a cross-section of employees within their service to complete the survey, so as to gain a wide range of operational, managerial, strategic and regional views. The survey questions were developed by representatives of the Southern Metropolitan RYAN (Cardinia Shire Council, Southern Health, Mission Australia and South East LLEN). The online survey was administered by the South East LLEN and the final research report was written by the Bayside Glen Eira Kingston LLEN.

## 1.3 Research Purpose

The aim of the *2010 Youth Services Survey Report* was to collect quantitative and qualitative data about the youth sectors' needs in the Southern Metropolitan region of Melbourne. The data contained herein represents a snap shot of perspectives pertaining to the state of service delivery and issues for young people in the Southern Metropolitan region in early 2010. Respondents were not equally represented across the ten municipalities within the Southern Metropolitan RYAN region. As a consequence, research data, comments and suggestions should not be taken as a direct reflection of the entire region, rather they should be considered regionally indicative. The collective responses, however, have been able to highlight common issues and challenges across the region which are outlined in the summary of findings within this report. This data has the potential to be useful for organisations in areas such as: submission writing, reporting, informing practice, service delivery and program development, identifying service gaps, informing policy and making recommendations to government.

More specifically, the Southern Metropolitan RYAN will be presenting this report to the 'Victorian Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC) on Youth' about the needs of young people and services in the Southern Metropolitan region during 2010 and also intends using this research as the commencement of an ongoing consultative research strategy to be undertaken over the coming years.

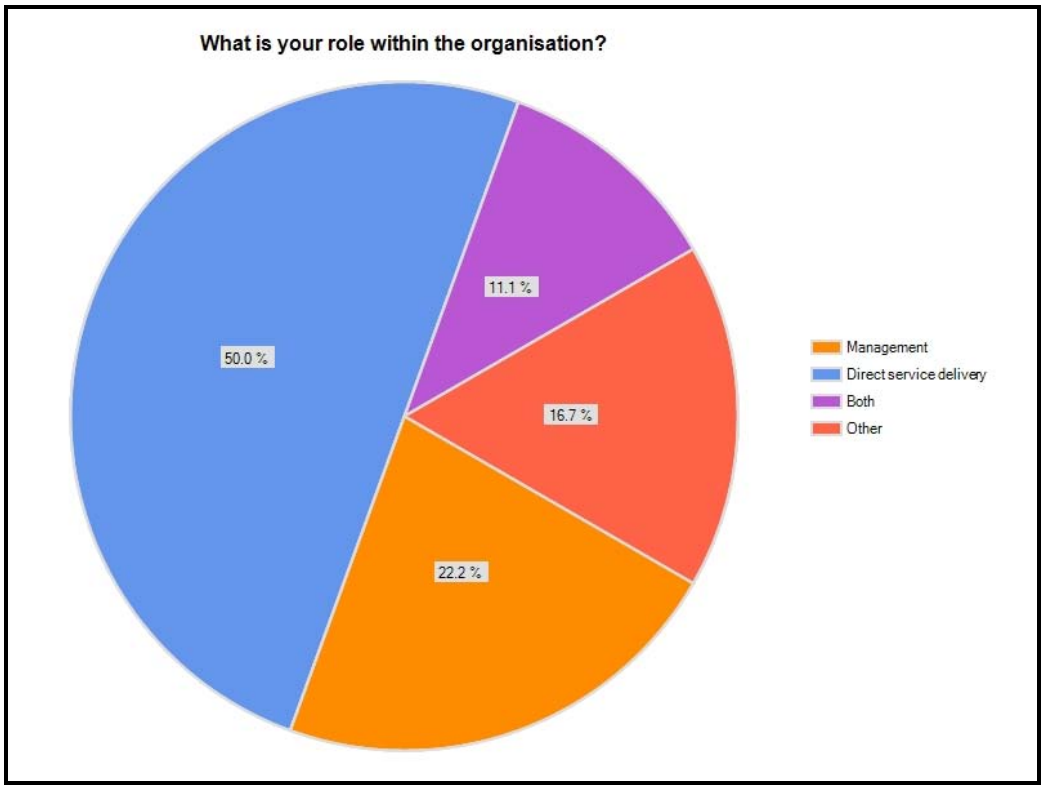
# 2 Respondent Demography

## 2.1 Survey Respondents

Because the online survey invitation was circulated by Southern Metropolitan RYAN members to their network members it is difficult to provide an accurate measurement of the number of organisations who received the request. However, in the three months that the online survey was open, 250 persons responded to it. Of those who responded to the confidential survey, 116 (or 46.4%) elected to provide the name of their organisation in Question 2 (*"Name of agency? (optional)"*).

## 2.2 Respondent's Organisational Role

Question 3 *("What is your role in the organisation?")* required respondents to indicate what role they held within their youth service organisation, with four options provided – 'management', 'direct service delivery', 'both' or 'other'. 216, or 86.4% of all survey respondents, answered this question.



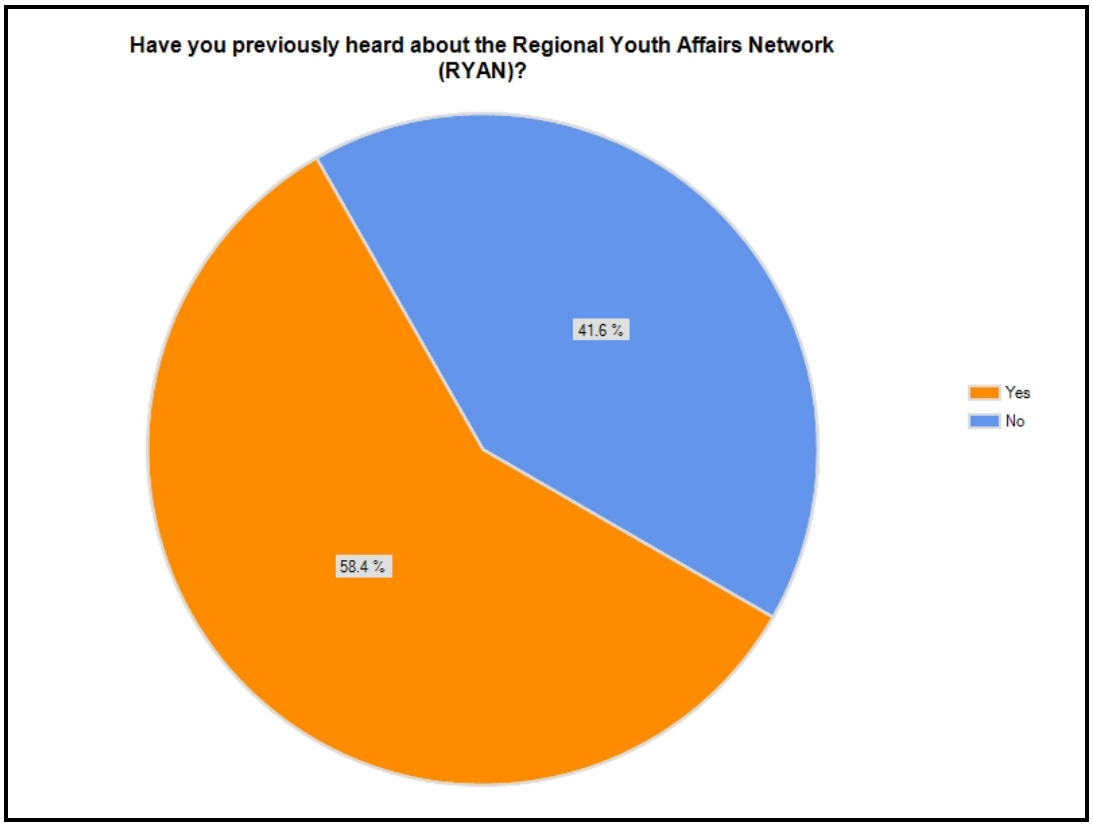

**Graph 1: Respondent's Organisational Role**

Graph 1 shows that 50% of the respondents were in a 'direct service delivery' role within their organisation, 22.2% of respondents were in a 'management' role while 11.1% of respondents were in 'both' a management and a service delivery role. 16.7% of respondents were in the 'other' category, which generally included persons employed in project development, project officer and partnership brokerage roles.

The most represented respondents were those in the 'direct service delivery' category, who totalled approx. 61%. These respondents provided information about the issues facing their clients, organisational capacity issues, communication and partnership needs and opportunities, and key priorities facing both clients and services within their sector from an 'on the ground' perspective. Approximately one third of all respondents were in 'management' roles within their organisations and, as such, could be presumed to have an influential role within their organisation and potentially at a regional level. They also provided the same input as their 'direct service delivery' colleagues, but from a managerial and governance perspective.

## 2.3 RYAN Awareness

Question 1 *("Have you previously heard about the Regional Youth Affairs Network (RYAN)?")* required respondents to indicate whether they were aware of the RYAN, with two options provided – 'yes' and 'no'. One hundred percent of respondents answered this question.




**Graph 2: Respondent's RYAN Awareness**

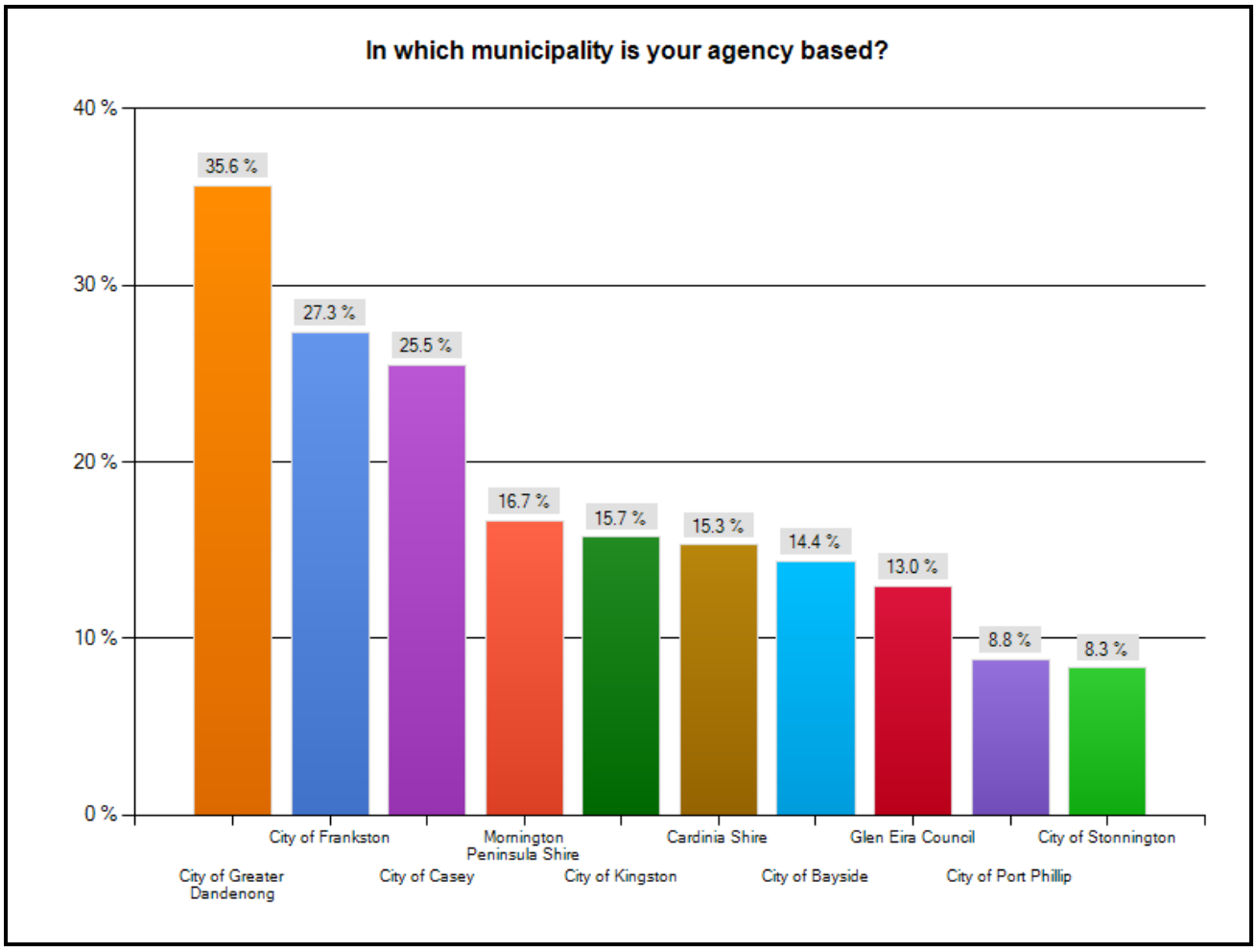
Graph 2 shows that 58.4% of respondents were familiar with the RYAN, while 41.6% of the respondents were not. This response indicates that the Southern Metropolitan RYAN, while somewhat known within the youth services sector in the region, has some way to go in terms of promoting its aims, purpose and capacity to provide strategic support to the sector.

# 3 Regional and Sector Overview

The Southern Metropolitan RYAN covers a significant portion of the south-east of Melbourne including a mix of metropolitan and shire councils. The region includes the local government areas of: the City of Casey; Cardinia Shire; City of Greater Dandenong; City of Bayside; City of Kingston; Glen Eira Council; City of Port Phillip; City of Frankston; City of Stonnington and Mornington Peninsula Shire. A series of questions designed to ascertain the physical location of respondent organisations and their service coverage area were developed to assist in learning about the nature of organisational coverage in the region and to assist in exploring the data pertaining to sector specialisation, organisational capacity, partnership participation, sector communication and priority youth sector issues.

## 3.1 Organisation Location

Question 5 *("In which municipality is your agency based?")* required respondents to identify which municipality, from the ten local government areas the Southern Metropolitan RYAN covers, their organisation was located in. 216, or 86.4% of all survey respondents, answered this question.



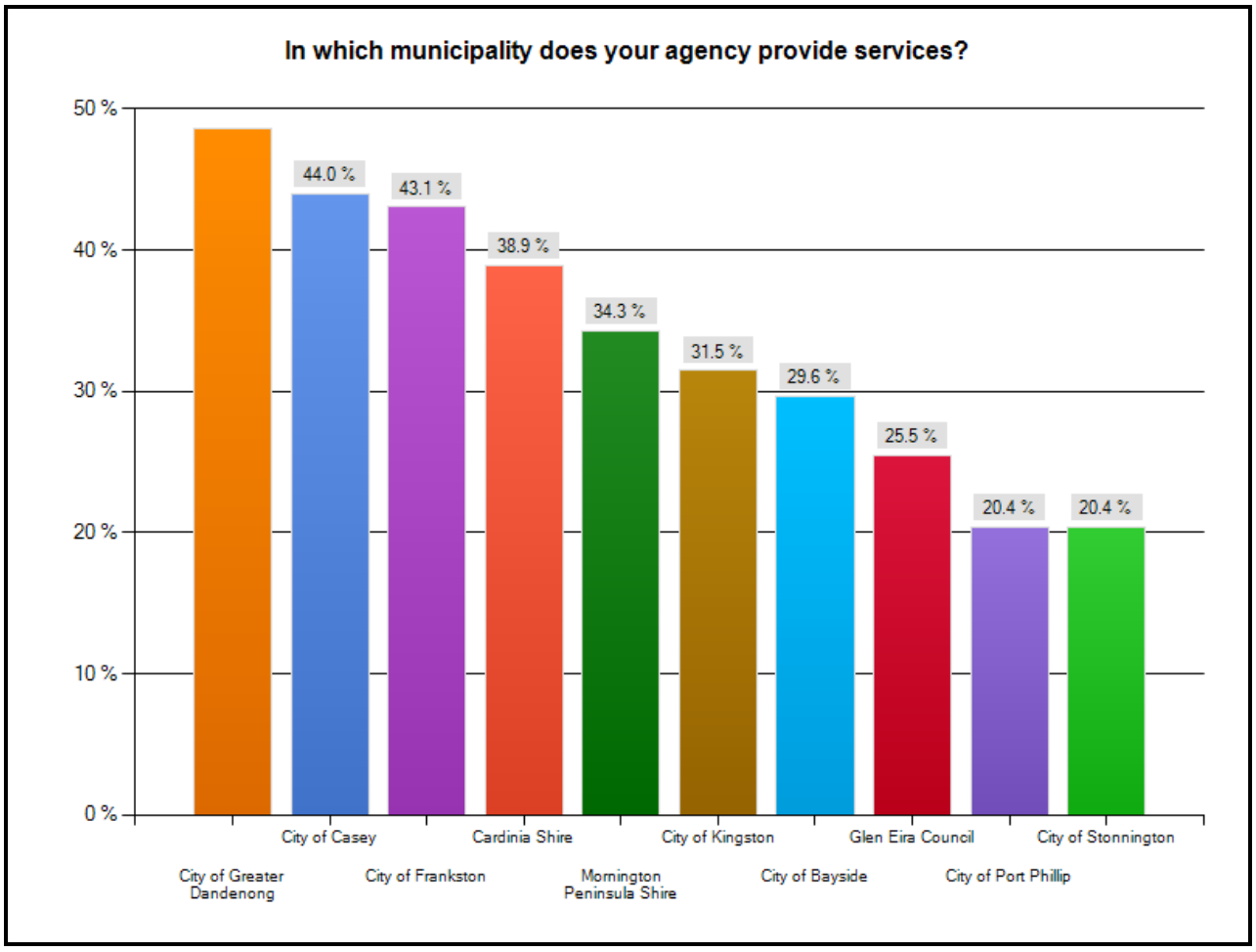

**Graph 3: Organisational Location**

Graph 3 shows that the greatest number of respondent' organisations were based in the local government areas of the City of Greater Dandenong (35.6%), the City of Frankston (27.3%) and the City of Casey (25.5%). The least represented local government areas, in terms of respondent organisation location, were the City of Stonnington (8.3%), the City of Port Phillip (8.8%) and the City of Glen Eira (13%).

Without further interrogation at either a primary and/or secondary research level it is impossible to say whether the difference in responses across the local government areas is as a result of varying numbers of organisations in each municipality or different approaches in the marketing of the online survey which has led to higher survey response levels in some municipalities than in others.

## 3.2 Service Provision Area

Question 6 *("In which municipality does your agency provide services?")* required respondents to identify which municipality, from the ten local government areas the Southern Metropolitan RYAN covers, their organisation provided services in. 216, or 86.4% of all survey respondents, answered this question.




**Graph 4: Service Provision Location**

Graph 4 shows that the greatest number of respondent organisations provide services within the City of Greater Dandenong (48.6%), the City of Casey (44%) and the City of Frankston (43.1%). The local government areas with the least amount of provision, in terms of respondent notification, were the City of Stonnington and the City of Port Phillip at 20.4% respectively.

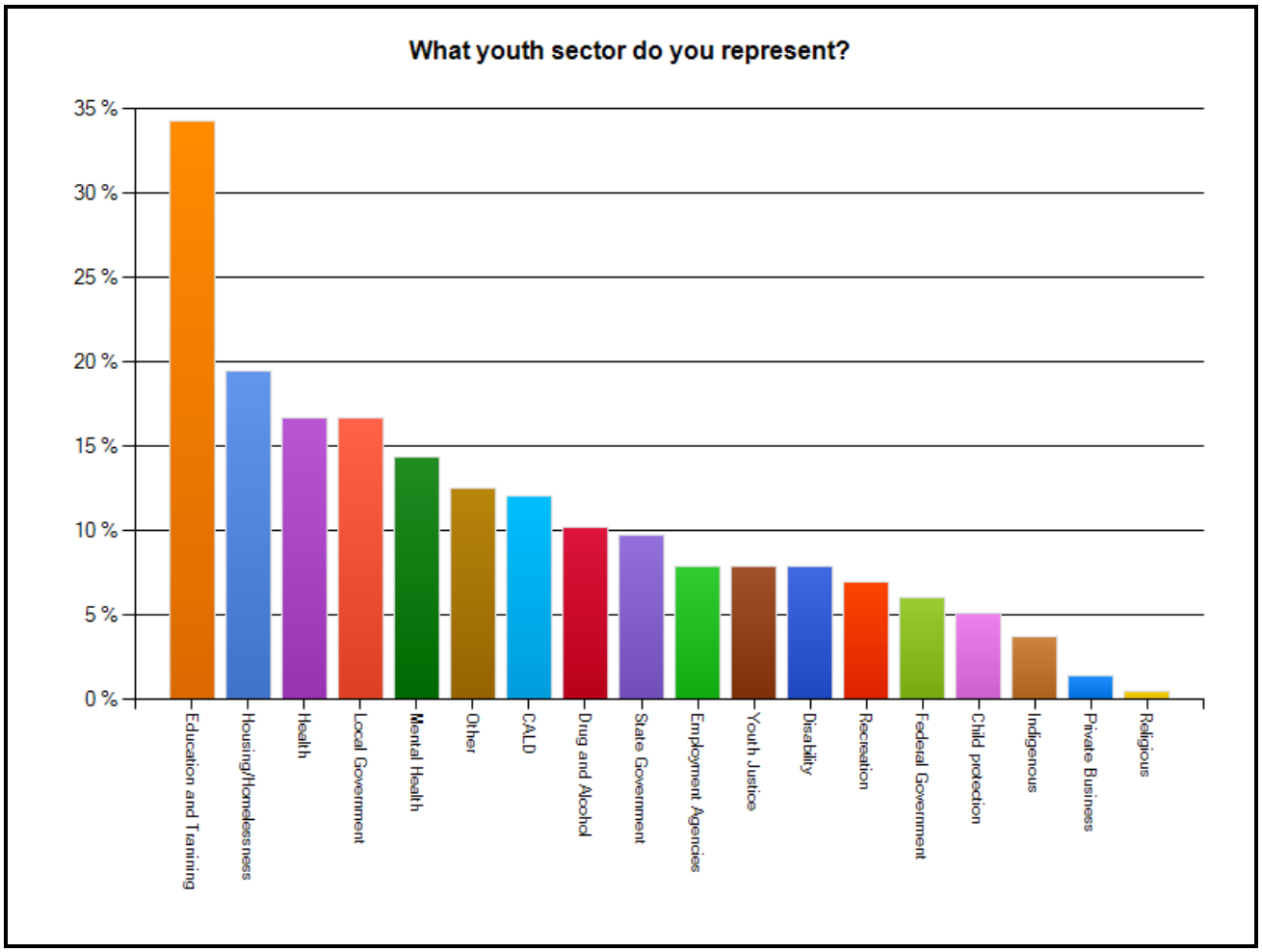
It must be noted, of course, that the response to this question directly correlates to the responses noted in 3.1 above. As such, without further research interrogation it is impossible to say whether the difference in service provision across the local government areas, noted in the responses to this question, is as a result of varying levels of services in each municipality or due to higher survey response levels in some areas than in others.

# 4 Youth Sector Specialisation Overview

Although this research was aimed at organisations operating within the youth sector, it is important to recognise that within the youth sector there are many different specialisations. Some organisations focus entirely in one area, while others have multiple specialisations. Similarly, it is also important to recognise that many organisations support children and young people across a range of ages so it was equally important to ascertain what client age ranges the respondent organisations work within. A series of questions designed to assess both sectoral specialisation and client age range were thus included in the survey.

## 4.1 Youth Service Specialisation

While, broadly speaking, all respondents worked within the youth services sector, Question 4 *("What youth sector do you represent?")* required respondents to indicate what aspect of (or specialisation within) the youth sector they represented. This question was designed to learn more about the client groups and services provided by the respondent organisations within the region. A closed question, respondents were given a choice of 18 potential options including 'other' and could choose as many options as were provided. 216, or 86.4% of all survey respondents, answered this question.




**Graph 5: Youth Services Representation**

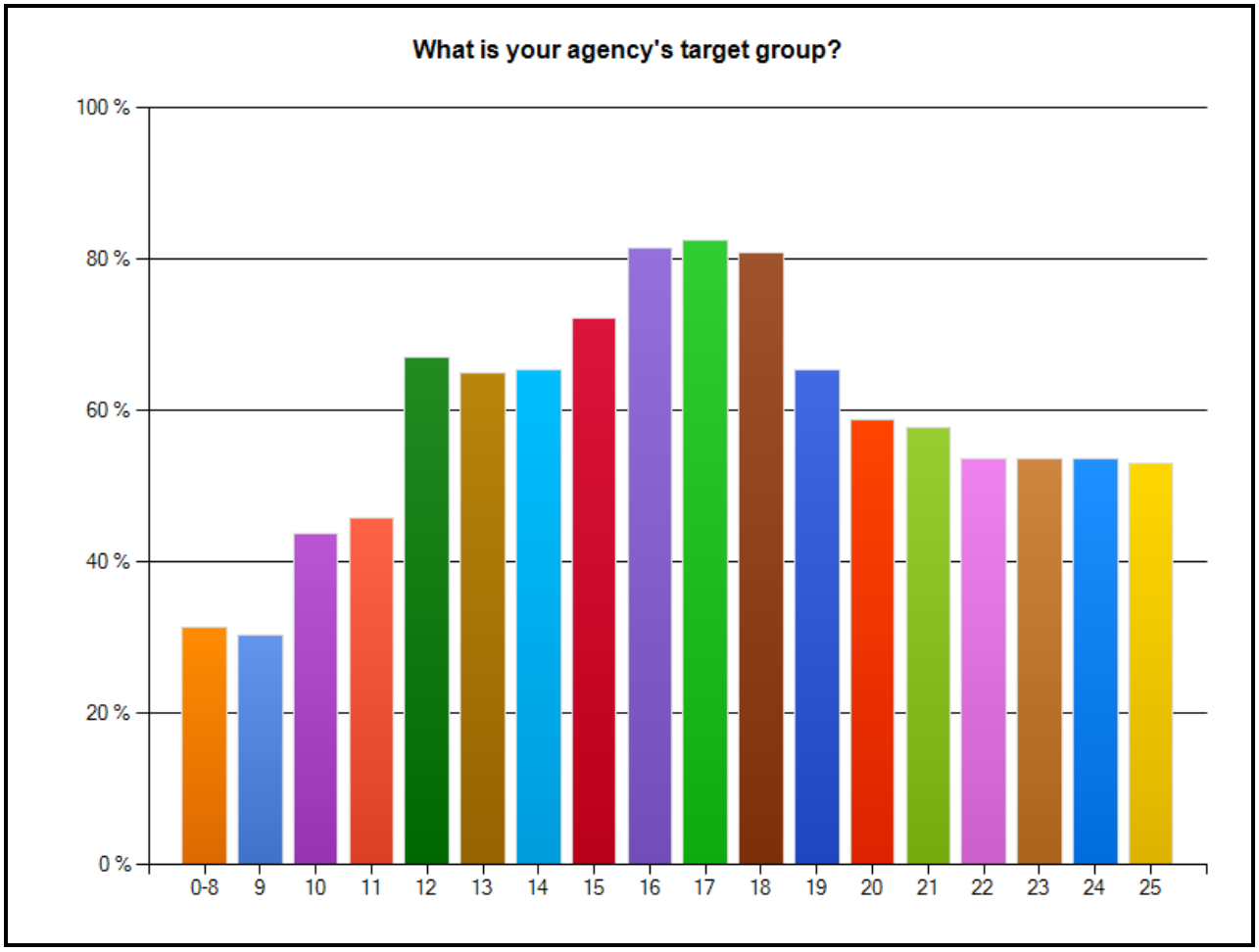
Graph 5 shows that the greatest number of respondent organisations provide services within the 'education and training' part of youth services sector, at 34.3%. The next largest was those providing 'housing / homelessness'

services (19.4%), 'health' (16.7%), 'local government' (16.7%), 'mental health' (14.4%) and 'Cultural and Linguistically Diverse (CALD)' services at 12.2%. The most under-represented were those who most closely aligned with 'religious' (0.5%) and 'private business' (1.4%).

In terms of the over 10% who indicated 'other', the predominate number were in the area of 'family support', while the remainder were in areas such as 'emergency relief', 'family violence' and 'sexual assault'. Interestingly, while 'youth justice' was listed as one of the 18 potential options, nine respondents (4%) working within the police, corrections, legal or youth justice field nominated 'other'.

## 4.2 Organisation's Client Age Range

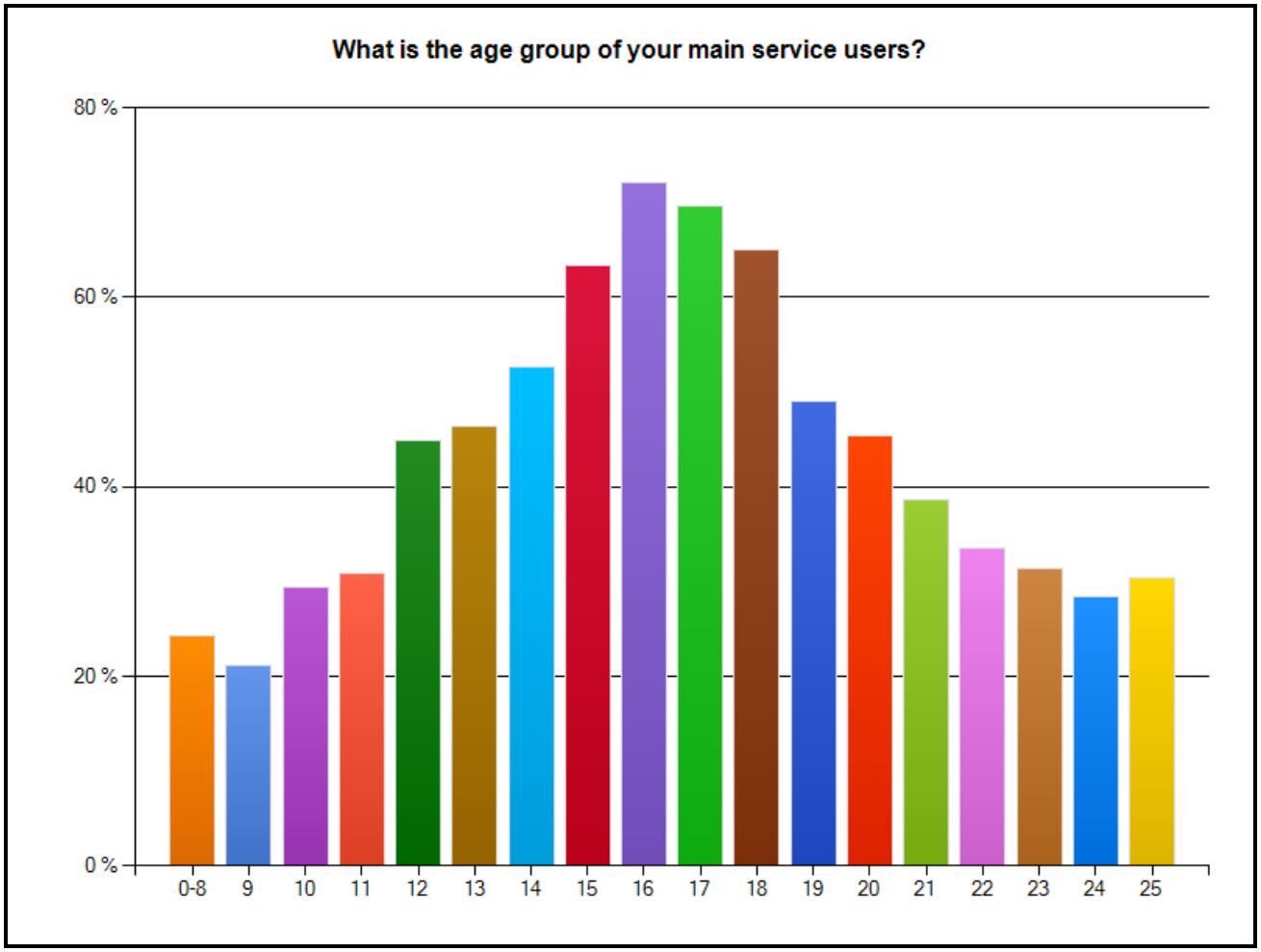
Question 7 *("What is your agency's target group?")* required respondents to identify the target age of their organisation's youth client group within the range of 0 – 25 years. As organisations generally work across a wide span of ages, respondents were encouraged to nominate any number of the age options provided to them. 194, or 77.6% of all survey respondents, answered this question.




**Graph 6: Client Age Range**

Graph 6 indicated that the largest level of service provision is evidenced in the 15 – 19 year age range. Indeed, an average of approx. 79% of all respondents indicated that their organisations provided services to young people within that age group. This was followed by the 12 – 14 years age range, of which an average of just over 65% of respondents indicated they worked within these ages. The 20 – 25 year age range followed next, with an average of just over 52% of all respondents working with this target client group. The lowest target client age range was the 0 – 11 years age range, with an average of just over 37.5% of all respondents indicating that they work somewhere within this age grouping.

Question 8 *("What is the age group of your main service users?")* required respondents to identify the age of service users predominately serviced by their organisation. 194, or 77.6% of all survey respondents, answered this question. Not surprisingly, given the response to Question 7, most respondents indicated the 15 – 19 year old age range as the most serviced cohort as indicated in Graph 7 below.




**Graph 7: Client Service Users**

It must be noted, however, that there may be a correlation between the response to the Questions 7 and 8, and the response to Question 4 (as noted in section 4.1 above). The response to Question 4 indicated that over 34% of all respondents represented the 'education and training' part of the youth services sector. As such, the large amount of client service provision identified within the student age range (ie. approx. 15 – 19 years) in the responses to Questions 7 and 8 may be as a direct result of a large number of respondents representing the education and training sector.

## 4.3 Issues or Limitations Affecting 'Youth Sector Specialisation' Section

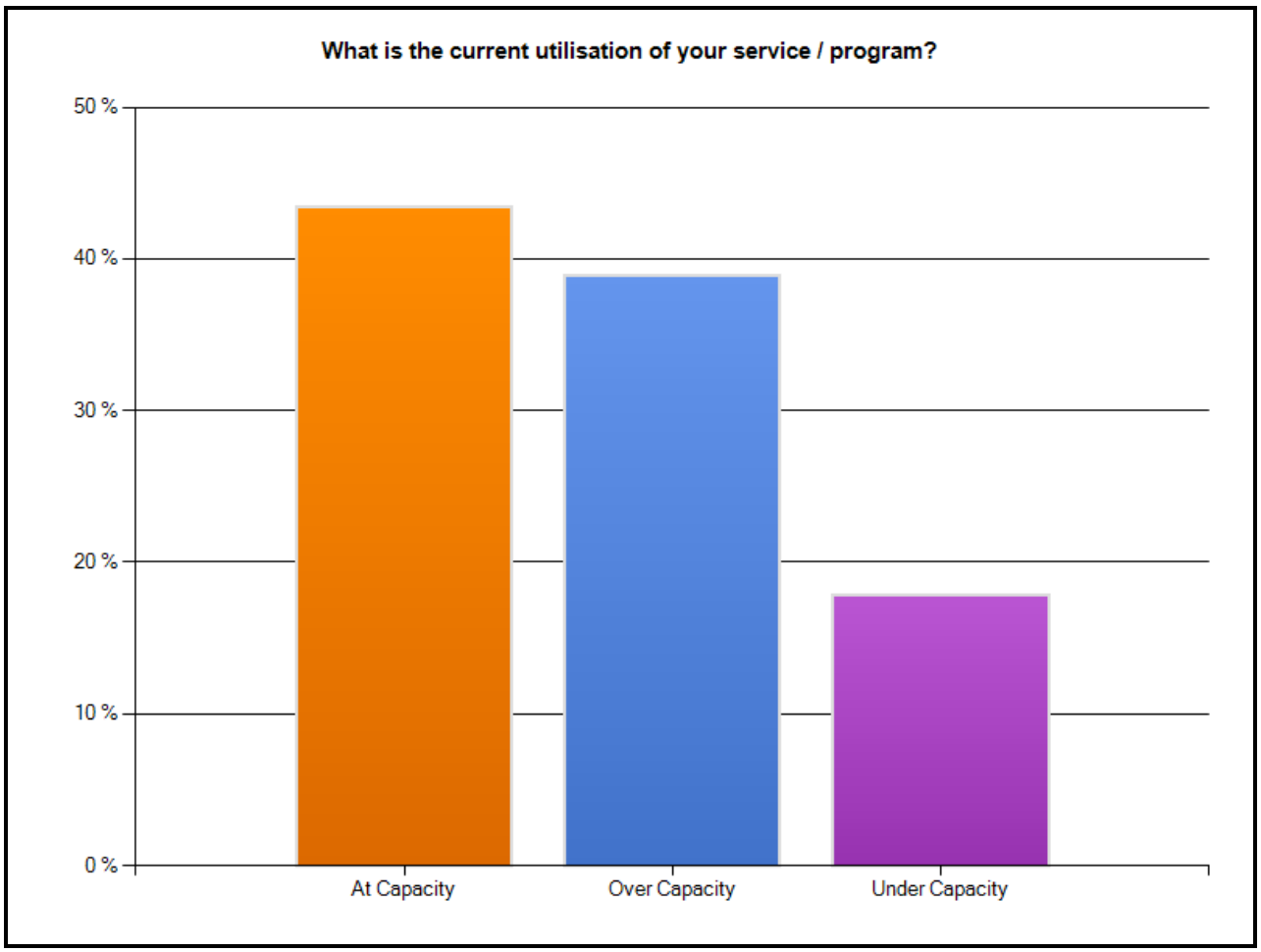
- Definitions of each of the youth sector specialisations were not provided, and may have accounted for some of the respondents nominating their organisation within the 'other' category when it could have been aligned with one of the specialisations provided. In future research it would be advisable to provide definitions to ensure that all respondents have a common understanding and share a common language when identifying which aspect of the youth sector they work within.
- Although the majority of respondents indicated that they provided services across multiple youth services areas, in future research it would be useful to enquire as to the benefit of 'joined-up' or co-located services. This is particularly pertinent given that the Southern Metropolitan RYAN covers the southern growth corridor region of Melbourne and an area that has been identified, both in this research and anecdotally, as one that is suffering from both youth service and transport deficiencies.

# 5 Organisational Capacity and Capacity Management Overview

Anecdotally, the Southern Metropolitan RYAN is aware that many youth services are often unable to meet the levels of demand placed on them by client and regional needs. In order to gain a picture of what was happening within the sector within early 2010, the survey included a number of questions aimed at assessing current levels of organisational capacity, mechanisms for managing capacity and referral arrangements when capacity was reached.

## 5.1 Organisational Capacity

Question 15 *("What is the current utilisation of your service/program?")* required respondents to indicate their current level of organisational capacity, with three options provided – 'under capacity', 'at capacity' and 'over capacity'. This question was designed to determined whether there were sufficient services available to young people within the Southern Metropolitan region. 152, or 60.8% of all survey respondents, answered this question.




**Graph 8: Organisational Capacity**

Graph 8 indicated that 43.4% of respondent organisations were working 'at capacity', 38.8% were working 'above capacity' and 17.8% of respondents felt that their organisation was working 'under capacity'. This means that 82.2% of all respondents felt that their organisation was, in the first quarter of 2010, already working at or above capacity.

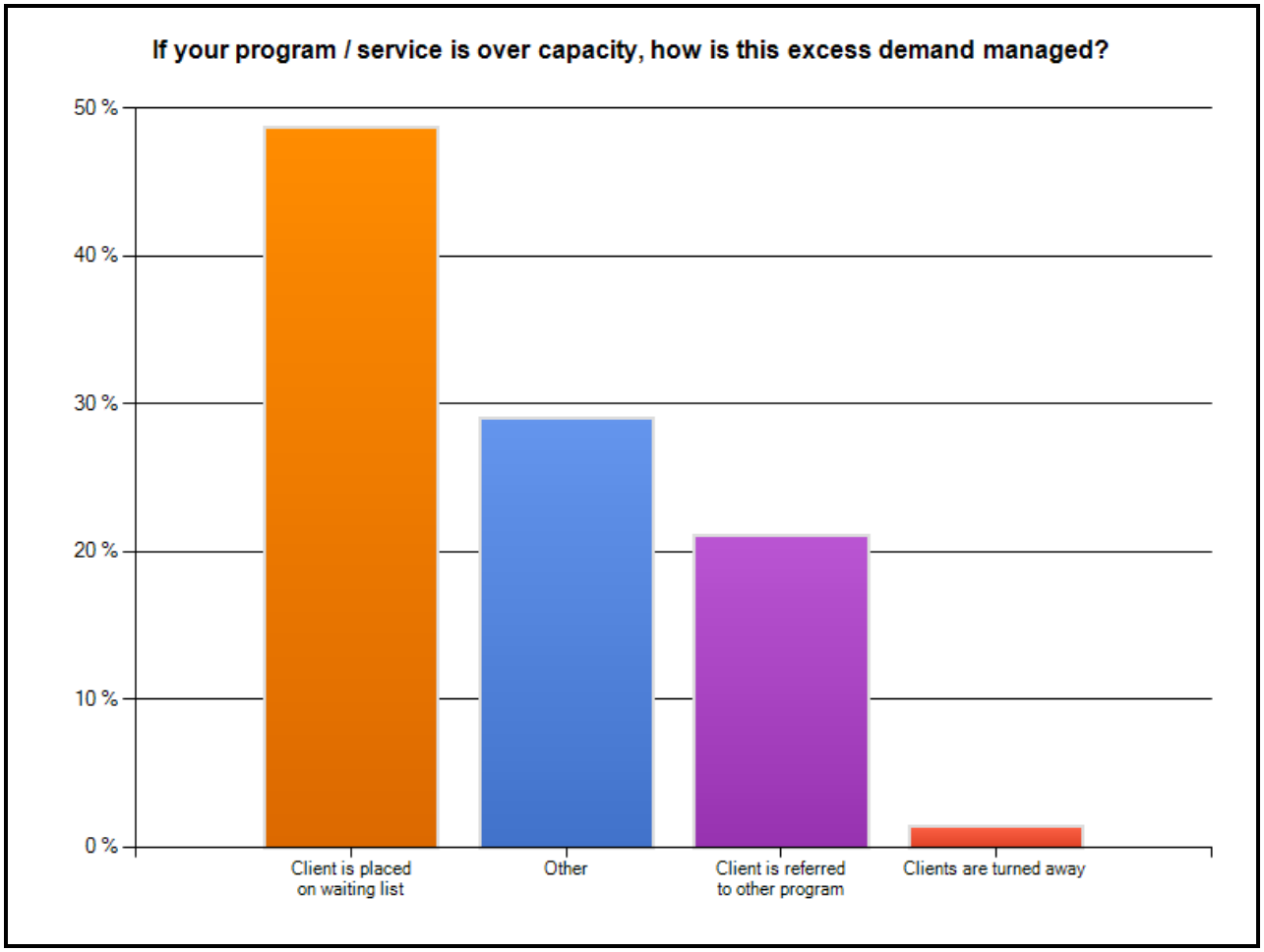
In relation to those organisations who indicated that they were working 'at capacity', the highest were those working within the 'education and training' (20.5%), 'local government' (13.4%), 'mental health' (10.7%) and 'housing / homelessness' (8.9%) areas.

In relation to those organisations who indicated that they were working 'over capacity', the highest were those working within 'housing / homelessness' (17.1%), 'education and training' (16.2%), 'mental health' (10.8%) services, with 'drug and alcohol' and 'CALD' service areas both at 6.3%.

In relation to those organisations who indicated that they were working 'under capacity', the spread was fairly equal across the most representative areas and thus not particularly significant from a research perspective. Given that the research was conducted in early 2010, it would be interesting to conduct follow-up evaluations in the latter part of the year to assess whether a change in capacity levels had a direct correlation to time of year.

## 5.2 Organisational Capacity Management

Question 16 *("If your program / service is over capacity, how is this excess demand managed?")* required respondents to indicate how their organisation managed excess service demand, if current levels were 'at capacity' or 'over capacity'. Respondents were given four possible answers to this question – 'clients are turned away', 'client is placed on a waiting list', 'client is referred to other program' or 'other'. 152, or 60.8% of all survey respondents, answered to this question.




**Graph 9: Organisational Capacity Management**

Graph 9 indicated that 48.7% of respondent organisations place a client on a waiting list if the service is over capacity, 21.1% advised that they referred clients to another program and only 1.3% said they would turn clients away. Almost 29% of respondents to this question indicated 'other' and upon review of their more detailed comments it became evident that for the majority of these respondents they had no choice but to work at 'more than' over capacity. In other words, decrease service provision across their client base in order to take on additional clients.

**Organisational Capacity Management - Selection of Respondent Comments**

**'Client Placed on Waiting List' Comments**

*"As housing is a major issue, many people are either put into crisis accom or put on waiting list as staff shortages are a problem."*

*"We lack the resources to do much more than help a few kids. Generally, students are made to wait for weeks at a time if their problems are not immediate."*

*"Our programs could be duplicated across the shire if we had the funding and the staffing."*

*"Waitlists are utilised with alternatives given to the client."*

*"Sometimes we refer on however our services are unique and that means we are the only ones able to deliver such programs."*

*"We regularly phone people to check on their mental health."*

*"Our programs could be duplicated across the shire if we had the funding and the staffing."*

*"We work in family dispute resolution as well as with families/individuals in conflict, there is a high demand for services but a limited number of service providers."*

**'Client Referred to Another Program' Comments**

*"We are building up our client load after having to restructure our services in line with govt funding decisions."*

*"Location and transportation is also a barrier for clients."*

*"Community contributions and volunteers help fund additional activities not funded by state or federal government."*

*"Lack of public transport means that they (clients) cannot get to appointments."*

*"Location and transportation is also a barrier."*

**'Other' Comments**

*"Work harder!"*

*"We work way over capacity."*

*"Staff suffering burnout."*

*"We work over capacity"*

*"Can't turn people away as they are court ordered but unable to spend the time needed with them."*

*"Staff case loads increase and a more intensive service delivery decreases due to higher demands."*

*"We don't have formal waiting lists but we monitor timeliness and now can no longer meet our own bench mark for appointments within two to three weeks…"*

*"Youth clients are allocated to a specialist youth case worker at the service, however if over capacity will be allocated to a generalist support worker."*

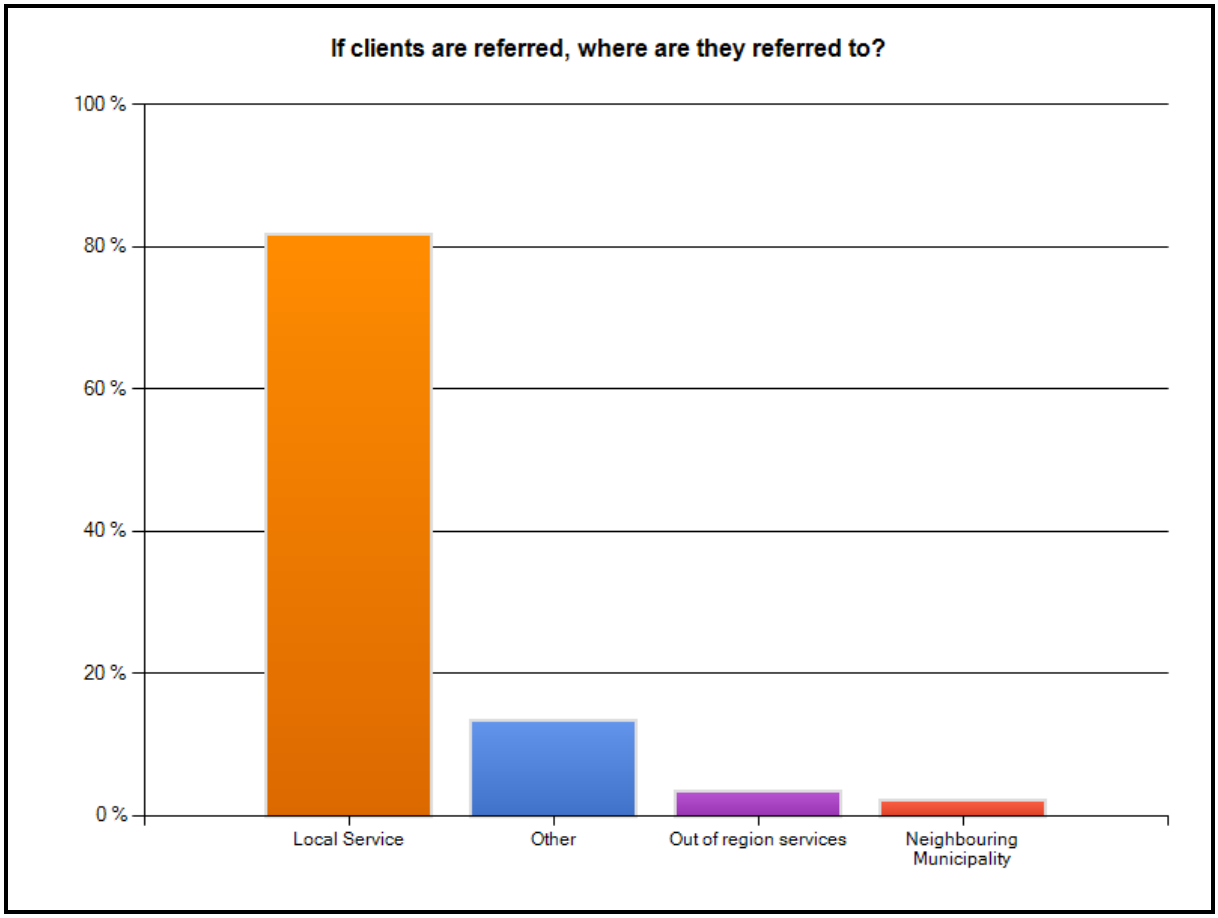
*"We are a grassroots community development organisation. Need more involvement from and by general community members."*

*"We are allowed to increase our caseloads to 130% of capacity and at which point they can still be registered with our service."*

**Figure 1: Organisational Capacity Management - Selection of Comments**

## 5.3 Organisational Referral Arrangements

Question 17 *("If clients are referred, where are they referred to?")* required respondents to indicate how their organisation managed referrals, if that was part of their 'at capacity' or 'over capacity' management strategy. Respondents were given four possible answers to this question – 'local service', 'neighbouring municipality', 'out of region service' or 'other'. This question was designed to assess the level of referral within the Southern Metropolitan region amongst youth service organisations. 152, or 60.8% of all survey respondents, answered this question.




**Graph 10: Organisational Referral Arrangements**

Graph 10 indicated that 81.6% of respondent organisations made their referrals to a 'local service', 3.3% to an 'out of region service' or 2% to a 'neighbouring municipality'. While 13.2% of those who responded to this question indicated 'other', no further detail was provided. In an interrogation of further comments, the rationale for referral to local services was generally because existing referral arrangements are already in place and/or to accommodate the transport needs of the client.

**Organisational Referral Arrangements - Selection of Respondent Comments**

**'Local Service' Comments**

*"Our clients are generally referred within our local area as that complies with client need for a service close to home. However, is there is a service that better caters for a particular need we will definitely refer to outside local area?"*

*"Mostly local services as transport can be a difficulty for families."*

*"We will always refer a client to another service where we do not have the expertise."*

*"It is better if the service comes to us as client will not go to the service."*

*"We have signed referral protocols with local welfare services where we refer YPs as appropriate. These protocols are under constant review and evaluations to see if they are still meeting the intended needs of YPs as envisaged."*

*"Our clients will generally not travel out of the area and rarely turn up at local services when referred."*

**'Out of Region Service' Comments**

*"We refer to local services where available and then to out of region services if the client is able to access them."*

*"Depends on what the client's needs are."*

**'Other' Comments**

*"Many different places depending on needs and service location."*

*"Any service that can meet their needs that is able to support them."*

**Figure 2: Organisational Referral Arrangements - Selection of Comments**

## 5.4 Issues and Limitations Affecting 'Organisational Capacity and Services' Section

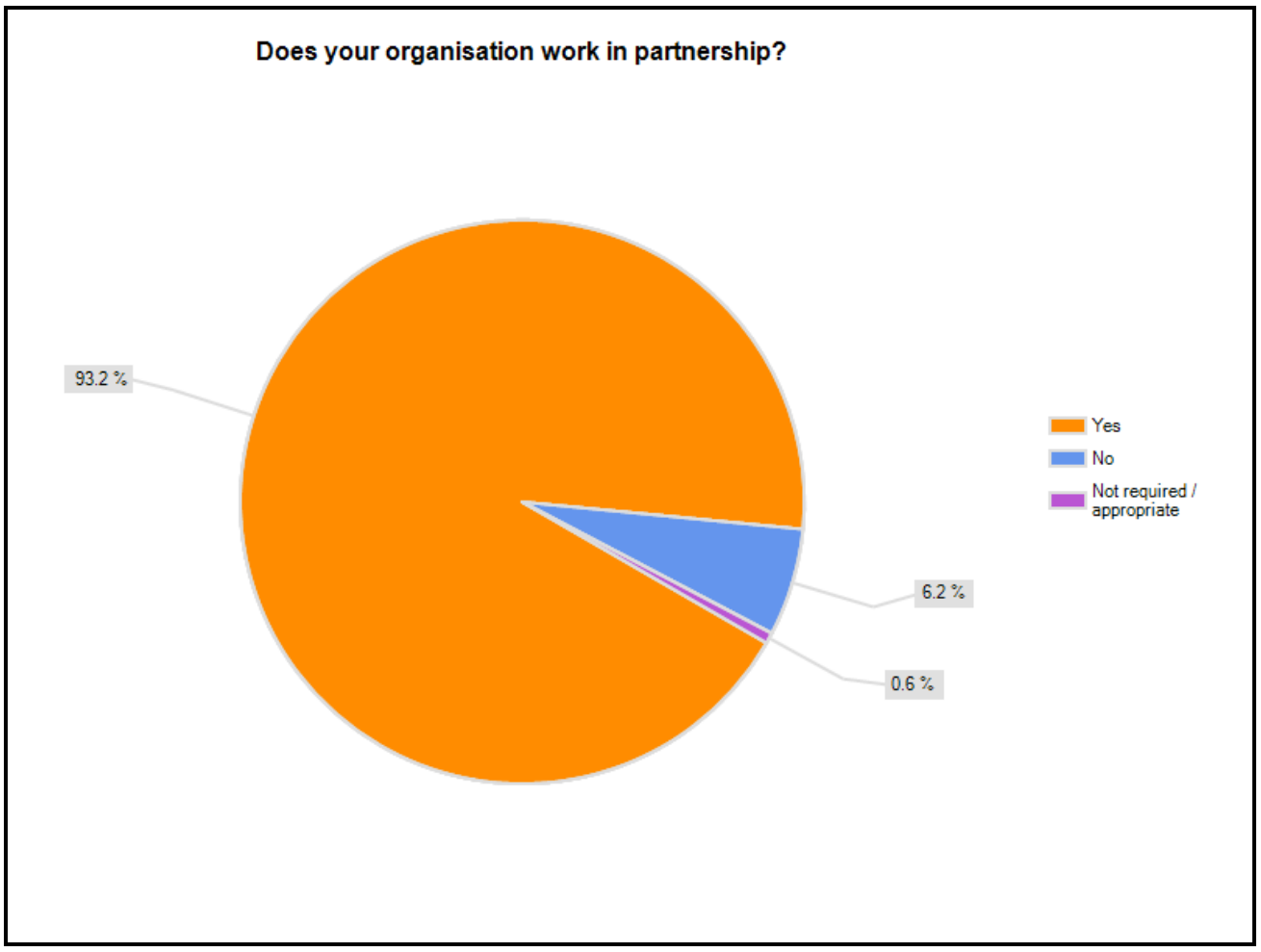
- Conduct follow-up evaluations in the latter part of the year to assess whether a change in capacity levels had a direct correlation to the time of year in which research was undertaken.
- With nearly 30% of respondents indicating 'other' in response to questions regarding service capacity levels, in any future research in this area it will be important to provide other options. Based on high levels of respondent comments, one potential further option would be 'work at over capacity, through a decrease in service provision to current client base'.
- In any future research into capacity management it would be interesting and important to assess the impact of capacity levels on staffing (morale and turn-over), client services, contract outcomes and use of volunteers etc.
- In an examination of the commentary surrounding referral arrangements only one respondent noted the existence of a dedicated referral protocol in place for their service/clients. Whilst this does not mean that there are not other 'referral teams/protocols/processes' across the region, it does suggest that they are limited and/or are not well known. In future research, an investigation into the level of referral arrangements in place across the region and their success in supporting young people to transition between programs and services is advisable.

# 6 Organisational Partnership Participation Overview

With concept of 'partnerships' increasingly entering the lexicon of community organisations, partnerships and consortiums increasingly becoming a requirement in funding applications and submissions, and partnership approaches increasingly becoming a necessity in order to meet service demands; a series of questions designed to assess the nature of partnership participation amongst youth service organisations in the Southern Metropolitan region were developed as part of the survey research.

## 6.1 Partnership Participation

Question 10 *("Does your organisation work in partnership?")* required respondents to indicate whether or not their organisation collaborated with other organisations. Unfortunately, a definition of partnerships was not provided so respondents may have had very different understandings about what being in a 'partnership' actually means. 162, or 64.8% of all survey respondents, answered this question.

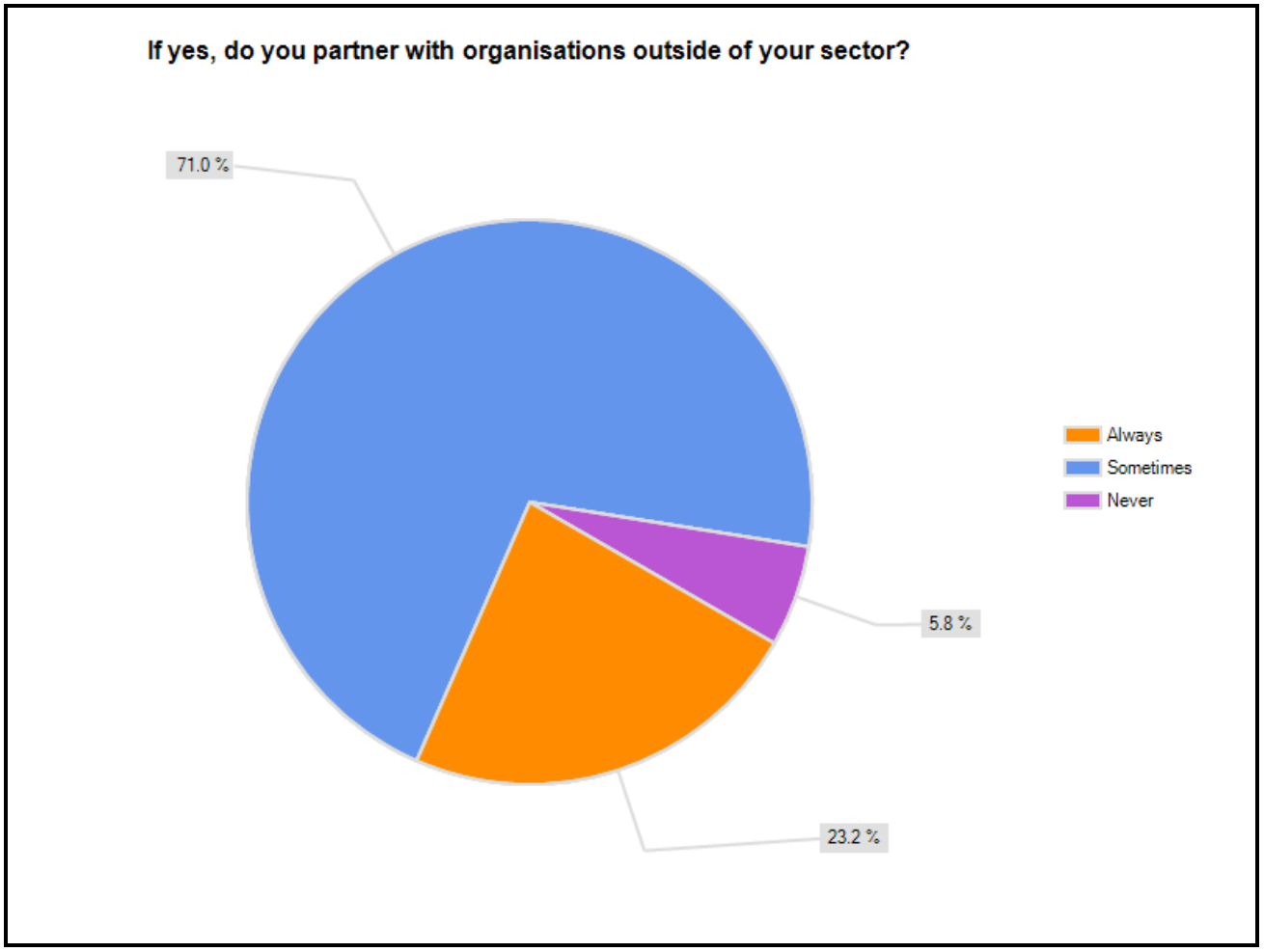



**Graph 11: Partnership Participation**

Graph 11 indicated that an overwhelming number (93.2%) of respondent organisations do work in partnership with other organisations in order to deliver services and/or to achieve organisational outcomes. This is not particularly surprising giving the large number of organisations who, in Section 5, indicated that when managing excess capacity would refer clients to other programs or local services. A mere 6.2% said they did not work in partnership, while only 0.6% answered 'not applicable'. Of those that said they do not work in partnership, the most significant and

concentrated amount (44.4%) were 'education and training providers' while the remaining were spread diversely across the wide range of other youth service specialisations.

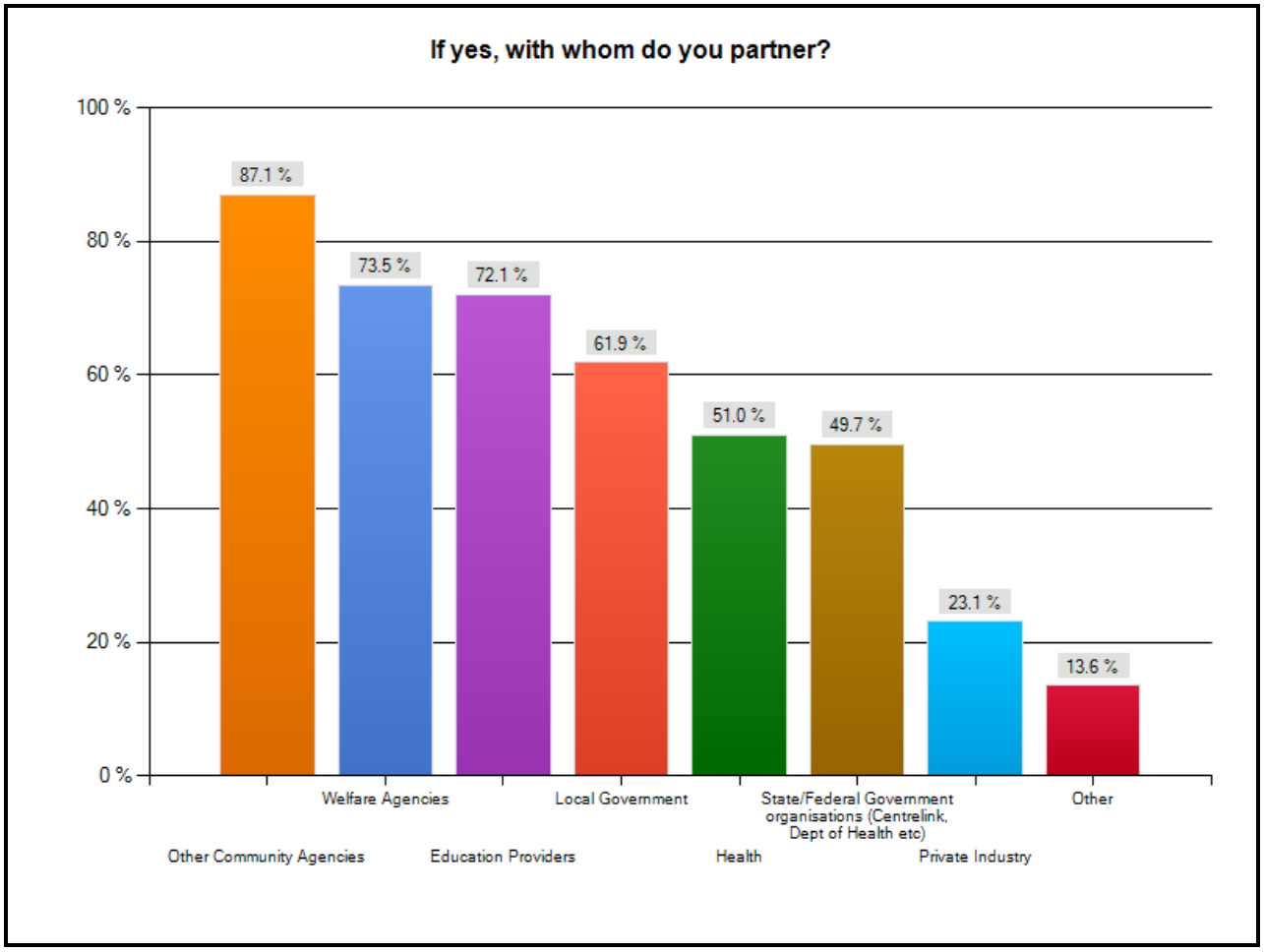
Building upon this initial partnership question, those respondents who answered in the affirmative were then asked, in Question 11 *("If yes, do you partner with organisations outside of your sector?"),* to indicate whether or not they partnered with organisations outside their sector. Respondents were provided with three possible answers to this question – 'always', 'sometimes' and 'never'. This question was designed to test cross-sectoral collaboration and joined-up service approaches that, anecdotally, we know many organisations aim to provide either formally or informally. 155, or 62% of all survey respondents, answered this question.




**Graph 12: Partnership Sector Choices**

Graph 12 indicated that of those organisations that work in partnership, 71% 'sometimes' partner with organisations outside of their sector, 23.2% 'always' do and a mere 5.8% 'never' partner cross-sectorally.

To gain a better understanding about partnership arrangements, those respondents who answered in the affirmative were then asked, in Question 12 *("If yes, with whom do you partner?"),* about the types of organisations they partner with. Respondents were provided with eight possible answers to this question, with the opportunity to nominate multiple options – 'education providers', 'private industry', other community agencies', 'state/federal government agencies', 'local government', 'welfare agencies', 'health agencies' and 'other'. 147, or 58.8% of all survey respondents, answered this question.




**Graph 13: Partner Organisations**

Not surprisingly Graph 13 indicates that an overwhelming number of partnerships are made with 'community agencies' (87.1%), 'welfare agencies' (73.5%), 'education providers' (72.1%) and 'local government' at just over 60%. 'Private industry' was the area with whom respondent organisations partnered the least, at 23.1%. While only a small number of respondents, at just over 10%, indicated 'other' as their response further commentary revealed that these collaborations included Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs), Youth Connections providers, Victoria Police, various charities and small church groups.

In an interrogation of further comments, the rationale for partnership participation seemed to mostly be for the benefit of the clients and to a lesser degree because of organisational or funding/contractual requirements. Respondents from local government organisations provided the most comments and seemed to recognise partnership as a means of variously providing client, region and opportunity gathering benefit. A similar level of partnership understanding and maturity was also evidenced in other respondent comments.

**Organisational Partnership Participation - Selection of Respondent Comments**

**Local Government Organisation Comments**

*"Where possible we partner with all projects."*

*"Our organisation regularly seeks out partnership opportunities. Organisations that we identify (and vice-versa) is dependant on the identified need for local young people and how they will be best benefited."*

*"We partner with neighbouring local governments, schools and education/training providers, LLEN, community health services, and a range of not-for-profit agencies."*

*"As a local government service we facilitate opportunities for partnership across all sectors of government and non government agencies and community groups and young people."*

*"General 'partnerships' which focus predominantly on networking, info share, cross agency promotion of services and programs and discussion - in some cases action orientated but with limitations on capacity for collaboration."*

**Education and Training Provider Comments**

*"Anyone that runs or delivers programs for the benefit of students at risk."*

*"State and Federal Govt for funding, Local Govt for grants, industry for sponsorships."*

*"Education department partners with many sectors to drive policy changes and broaden scope of provision."*

**Drug and Alcohol Service Provider Comments**

*"Mix - includes consortiums, sub contracting arrangements and informal partnerships"*

**Housing / Homelessness Service Provider Comments**

*"My program is part of a consortium of housing agencies. Other programs of the agency include Youth Justice and Leaving Care so are directly aligned with DHS. Other programs are in relation to education and employment and are managed by DEEWR"*

**Health Service Provider Comments**

*"My role is to enhance partnerships between schools and agencies so I try to establish links wherever possible, the aim is to address service gaps in the local community. Looking at the response options I do very little with private industry and I think there is certainly room to increase the involvement of this sector."*

*"… is a consortium of agencies with 12 members and another 10 extra partners who are working together to deliver youth acceptable/accessible and evidence based programs across the youth, welfare, mental health, vocational/educational, A & D, general/sexual health streams.*

*"Partner agencies may include local government or child focused agencies for particular health promotion work etc"*

**Figure 3: Organisational Partnership Participation - Selection of Comments**

## 6.2 Issues and Limitations Affecting 'Partnership Participation' Section

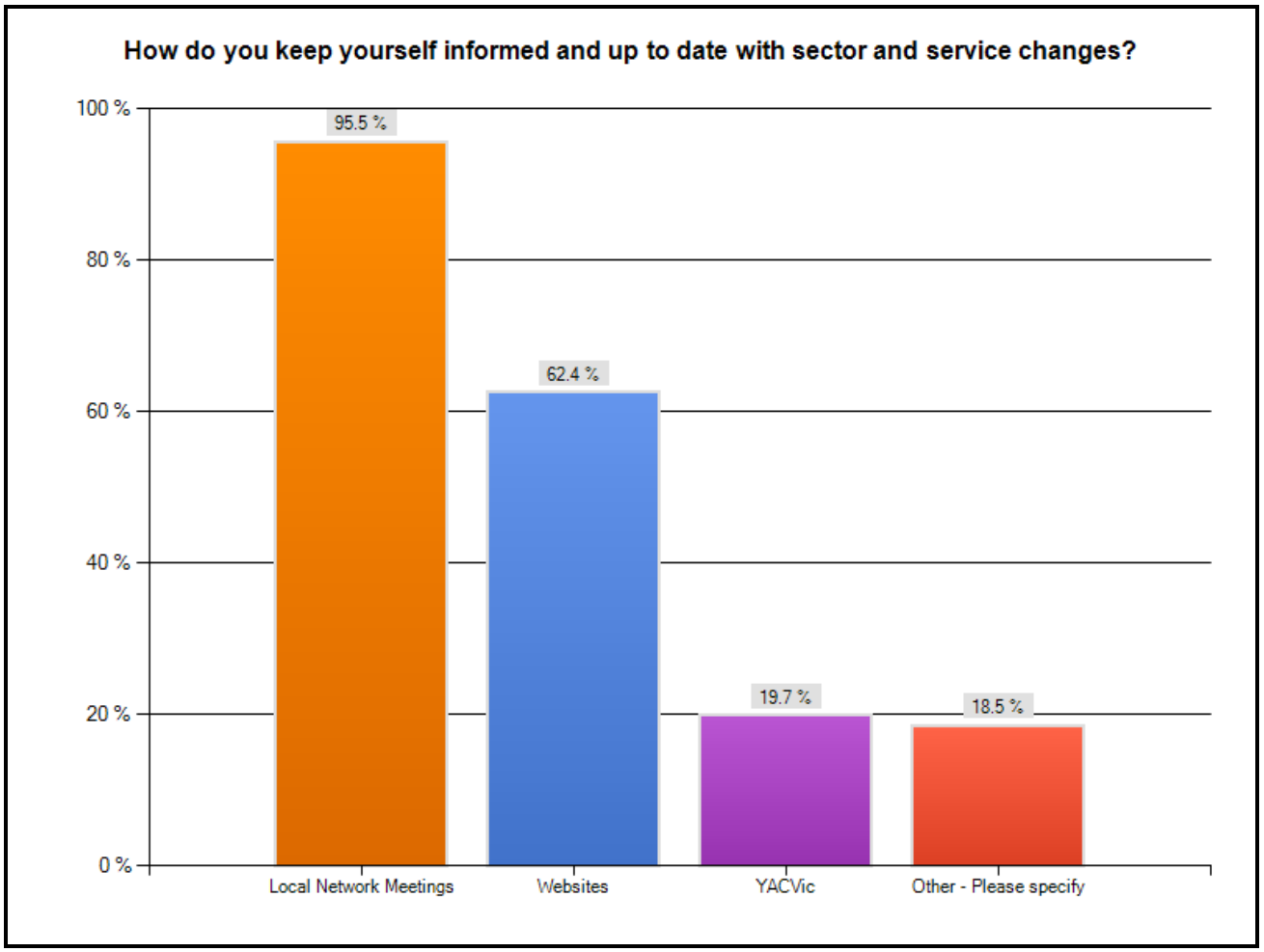
- Define 'partnerships' in any future research to ensure all respondents have a common understanding and share a common language.
- Whilst survey responses indicated a strong correlation between the amount of referrals when managing excess service capacity and the level of partnerships activity, without a question seeking a direct insight into why partnerships have evolved this way it can only remain a parallel. As such, in any future research into 'partnerships' it would be interesting and important to gain an insight into the motivating forces which drive partnership development.

# 7 Organisation and Sector Communication Overview

Communication within the sector is an important factor for all organisations, especially in relation to keeping informed and up to date with sector and service changes. In order to gain an understanding of how youth sector organisations within the Southern Metropolitan region source and share information, and remain abreast of sectoral changes a communication question was included as part of the survey.

## 7.1 Communication Methods

Question 14 *("How do you keep yourself informed and up to date with sector and service changes?")* required respondents to identify the methods they use to remain abreast of service and sectoral changes. Respondents were provided with four options and could choose as many as were applicable – 'local network meetings', 'websites', 'YACVic' and 'other'. 157, or 62.8% of all survey respondents, answered this question.




**Graph 14: Communication Methods**

Graph 14 indicates that an overwhelming 95.5% of respondents use 'local network meetings' to receive (and presumably share) service and sector information. This was followed by 62.4% of respondents who indicated 'websites' and 19.7% who utilise YACVic, the peak body for Victorian youth service organisations. Of the 18.5% who indicated 'other', a further interrogation of their commentary showed that their communication mechanisms, vehicles and channels included Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN) Newsletters, state and federal government policy announcement, publications, research and other staff.

**Organisational and Sector Communication - Selection of Respondent Comments**

*"Government information sessions"*

*"Minutes, as I cannot leave classes to attend meetings."*
*"Being part of emailing networks."*

*"Communication with other workers in sector."*

*"State-wide network groups, personal networking and partnerships with other agencies."*

*"Whilst official networks are informative the informal networks are probably the most vital source of information."*

*"Publications and research as well as training/professional development."*

*"Emails and self guided research as issues arise."*

*"Local Youth Network meetings."*

*"Partnerships with other local services."*

*"RYANs, other networks."*

*"Newsletters from LLENs and updates from DEECD."*

**Figure 4: Organisational and Sector Communication - Selection of Comments**

## 7.2 Issues and Limitations Affecting 'Organisational and Sector Communication' Section

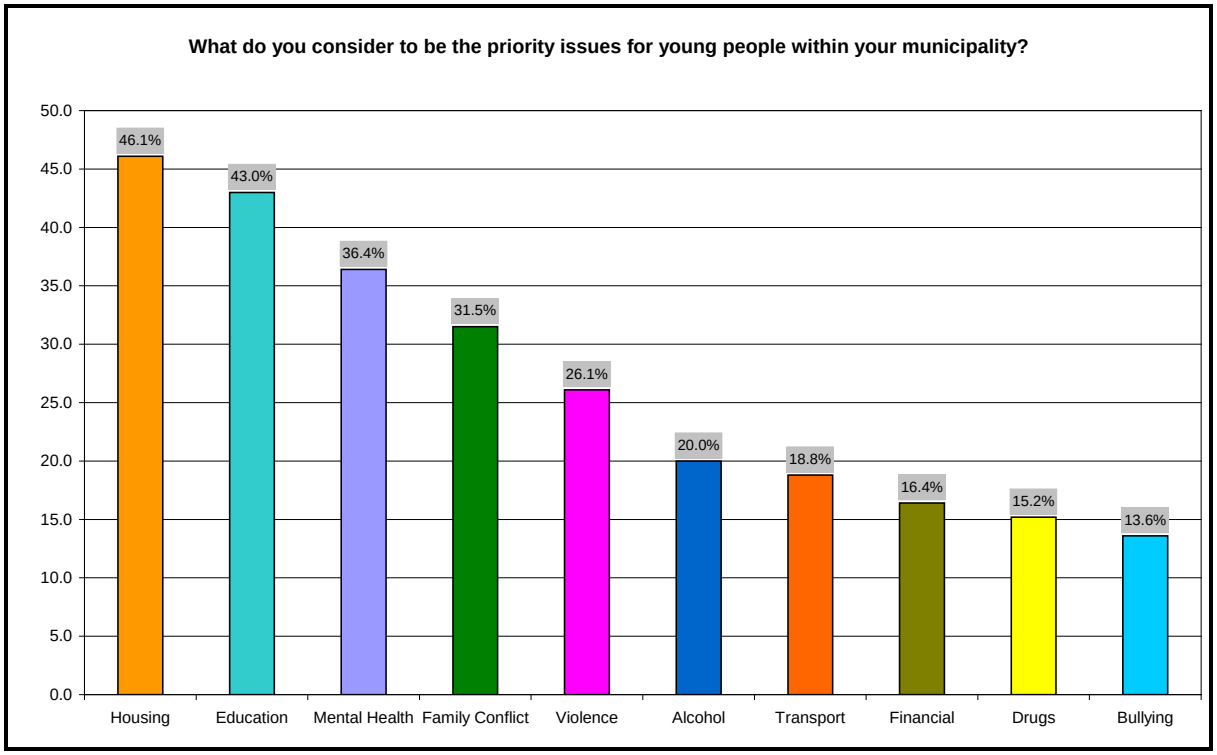
- Given the wide variety of communication vehicles and mechanisms now available, in any future research relating to communication will be important to include options for respondents to choose from.
- It was interesting to note that despite the fact that technology has led to the development of a range of new communication methods, respondents are still relying on traditional methods of communication (eg. face-to-face, networks). This not only validates the importance of meetings and networks (such as the RYAN and local Youth Networks) but also the dissemination of resulting minutes and resources from such meetings.
- In evaluating respondent commentary, it was also apparent that the non-traditional or technology-enabled methods (eg. email, social networking, websites) are also becoming increasingly important. This seemed to have particular validity for those conducting research, requiring up-to-the minute information and/or unable to attend regular meetings etc.
- It would be useful in future research, where communication was being investigated, to include a question about respondent ages to facilitate a better understanding about the uptake of communication technology in the youth sector workforce. This would help to inform workforce, professional development and regional planning strategies.

# 8 Regional Priority Youth Sector Issues

An important aspect of this research was to identify the key issues affecting the organisations and professionals working within the youth sector in the Southern Metropolitan region, in particular the youth needs, structural barriers impeding the sector and service delivery gaps. The purpose of collecting such data was to inform the RYAN and its members so that the RYAN can provide support and information at a regional level, through professional development activities, ongoing research and localised systemic advocacy. As a strategic advisor to the Victorian Government, through the Interdepartmental Committee on Youth, it was felt that this research could be influential in promoting and advocating for the youth sector and youth demographic needs of the region. In other words, clearly identify the needs and seek a government supported solution. At an organisational or service provider level, it was seen that this research could provide organisations operating within the youth services sector with some evidence to support submission writing, reporting, informing practice, service delivery and program development, identifying service gaps, informing policy and making recommendations to government.

## 8.1 Priority Issues Facing Young People

Question 9 *("What do you consider to be the priority issues for young people within your municipality?")* required respondents to identify the key issues currently facing young people in the Southern Metropolitan region of Melbourne. Respondents were provided with 18 wide ranging potential options including 'other' to choose from, and were asked to identify what they considered to be the 'top 3' issues facing young people in the region. 165, or 66% of all survey respondents, answered this question.




**Graph 15: Priority Issues for Young People**

Graph 15 indicates that the ten most significant issues for youth in the Southern Metropolitan region, as identified by respondents, were: 'housing' (46.1%), 'education' (43%), 'mental health' (36.4%), 'family conflict' (31.5%), 'violence' (26.1%), 'alcohol' (20%), 'transport' (18.8%), 'financial' (16.4%), 'drugs' (15.2%) and 'bullying' at 13.6%. Graph 15 actually only identifies 10 of the 18 issues that respondents could choose from. The remaining were: 'other' at 10.3%, 'cyber bullying' (9.7%), 'body image' (8.5%), 'health' (7.9%), 'grief/loss' (7.3%), 'settlement' (6.7%), 'sexuality' (5.5%) and 'environment' at 3.6%.

**Priority Issues Facing Young People - Selection of Respondent Comments**

**'Housing' Comments**

*"Lack of appropriate supported accommodation for young people (lead tenant, single bedroom units, high level of support)."*

*"Lack of stable, affordable housing for families and/or young people"*

*"Not many housing options, especially for those with significant disabilities."*

*"Lack of affordable rental or any other options."*

*"Leaving out-of-home care, accommodation is huge issue."*

*"Very limited emergency housing for young people."*

*"Housing huge issue for newly arrived refugees and also other disadvantaged groups in this region."*

**'Education' Comments**

*"Absenteeism, low importance at home."*

*"Engaging young people from CALD backgrounds in meaningful education is difficult."*

*"Early school leaving."*

*"Fair, equitable access to education and understanding of options available."*

*"Lack of alternative education providers, Community VCAL, CGEA etc."*

*"Lack of alternative education settings available. Lack of commitment in schools providing diverse range of educational programs including VCAL."*

*"Lack of alternative programs for disengaged students."*

*"Lack of integrated support for young carers."*

*"Limited opportunities outside mainstream education."*

*"Many young people disengaged with all education providers due to challenging behaviours."*

**'Mental Health' Comments**

*"Stigma - how do we normalise suffering from a mental health issue and normalise 'seeking help'"*

*"Access and availability of mental health services."*

*"Depression to anxiety to psychosis - increasing."*

*"Drug and alcohol related - increasing."*

*"Due to war related trauma."*

*"Clients presenting with quite significant mental health issues who have not been able to access appropriate services."*

*"High rates of mental health issues-can intervene better if we have a supportive network across prevention and early intervention services-connects to bullying, drugs, alcohol, grief, violence, family conflict and body image issues."*

*"Schools identify student/family wellbeing as a rising concern."*

*"Stress level elevated due to having to care for parent/grandparent/siblings."*

*"Young people in generalist pysch wards are an issue with contamination, bullying and sexual assault, inappropriate relationships and so on."*

*"Quite alot of young people are presenting with complex mental health issues."*

**'Family Conflict' Comments**

*"Adolescent violence to parents and carers."*

*"Adolescent/parental conflict usually resulting from mental health, D & A, and poverty/disadvantage."*

*"Family breakdown/ exposure to family violence."*

*"Family conflict and adolescent violence towards parents are emerging trend."*

*"Lack of awareness about support services for families of people with mental illness, drug and alcohol issues."*

*"Many of our young people have suffered traumatic childhoods due to family background and situations."*

*"Poor parenting skills – need for parenting training programs."*

**'Violence' Comments**

*"Adolescent violence towards parents an emerging trend."*

*"Anger management, violence prevention, violent offending behaviour."*

*"Both receiving it from within the home and using it as a means of dealing with situations/conflict."*

*"Cause of much homelessness, often created by frustration of settlement process."*

*"The increasing numbers of women and children escaping family violence."*

*"Young men and women using violence as conflict resolution or for social acceptance is incredibly high."*

**'Alcohol' Comments**

*"Addressing binge drinking and other alcohol related issues and educating teens on responsible drinking."*

*"Alcohol and its effects impacts significantly on families and family stability."*

*"Alcohol related violence, and related risk taking by young people."*

*"Binge drinking is still a significant issue for teens and young adults."*

*"Exposure to parental drug and alcohol misuse."*

*"Normalisation of excessive binge drinking and younger uptake of alcohol use."*

**'Transport' Comments**

*"Lack of access due to rurality and new housing estates."*

*"Lack of flexible transport options to isolated youth."*

*"Young people find it hard to access services outside of their immediate area. Lack of transport also impacts on ability to participate in recreation, cultural and learning opportunities."*

*"Not enough money to purchase tickets, then fines."*

*"Poor access to training and employment."*

**'Financial' Comments**

*"Financially stressed due to parents being on benefits as a result of poor health."*

*"Multi-generational poverty."*

*"High financial debt, lack of money management skills."*

*"Seeking emergency relief (i.e. met tickets, food vouchers, etc)"*

*"Budgeting skills needed."*

**'Drugs' Comments**

*"Drug education is a priority."*

*"Poly drug use & associated criminal activity, especially crimes against the person."*

*"Easy access to illicit drugs."*

*"Parent's substance use."*

**'Bullying' and 'Cyber-Bullying' Comments**

*"Bullying is an acceptable cultural behaviour that needs a sustained educational program and intervention."*

*"Fitting in/ transitions at school leading to bullying."*

*"Issues in regards to bullying via new media such as text & MySpace comes up regularly..."*

*"Our youth forum survey indicated that bullying was the number one issue for our municipality 11 – 14 year olds."*

*"We deal with issues around young people not going to school due to bullying."*

*"Cyber-bullying is heavily reported by schools we work with."*

*"Increasing incidence & lack of reporting due to fear that parents will remove the technology (phone, computers)."*

*"Lack of knowledge for parents, teachers and young people."*

**'Health' Comments**

*"Dental; hygiene; nutrition."*

*"Health services particularly for refugees can be difficult to access and have long waiting times. Many service providers in the community eg GPs and diagnostic imaging services do not use interpreters."*

**'Grief/Loss' Comments**

*"Huge problem especially for refugees."*

*"Losing family due to war and related trauma."*

*"Young Carers have many loss & grief issues due to terminally ill family member, loss of freedom due to caring for parents who are ill."*

**'Settlement' Comments**

*"Very unsettled due to family issues"*

*"Lots of new groups of refugees with own issues – cross-cultural issues."*

**'Sexuality' Comments**

*"Promiscuity, increase in STI's and unprotected sex."*

**'Environment' Comments**

*"Increasing levels of stress because of concerns for the environment."*

**'Other' Comments**

*"Social isolation is an issue."*

*"Lack of parent knowledge of transitional programs."*

*"Respect for self and other and anti-social behaviour."*

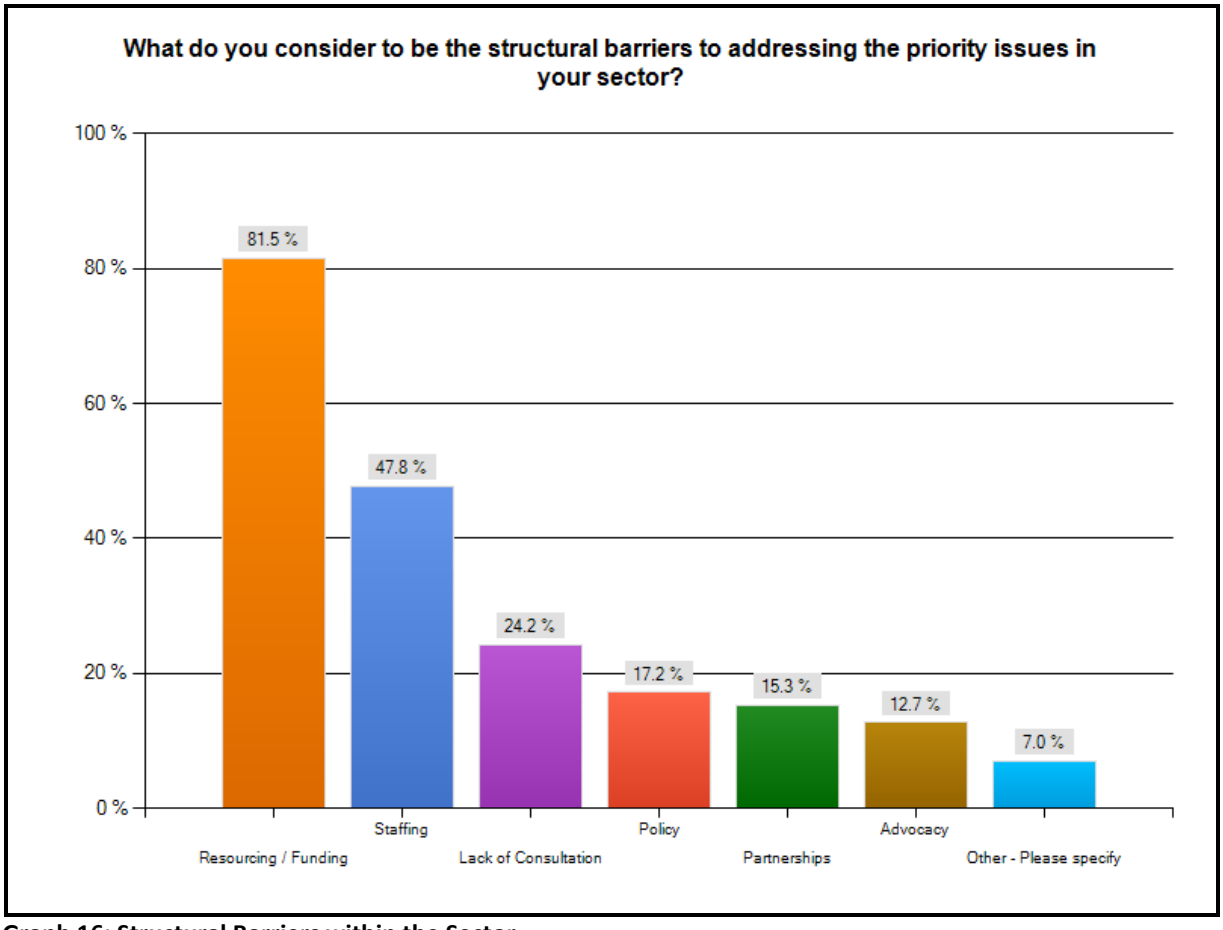
*"Unemployment."*

*"Lack of recreational facilities and programs."*

**Figure 5: Priority Issues for Young People - Selection of Comments**

## 8.2 Structural Barriers Facing the Sector

Question 13 *("What do you consider to be the structural barriers to addressing the priority issues in your sector?")* required respondents to identify the structural barriers that may be impeding the work and capacity of their sector. Respondents were provided with seven options including 'other' as a potential option, and respondents could choose multiple answers. 157, or 62.8% of all survey respondents, answered this question.




**Graph 16: Structural Barriers within the Sector**

Graph 16 indicates that an overwhelming 81.5% of respondents believed 'resourcing/funding' to be the most significant structural barrier within their youth services sector. 'Staffing' was identified as the next highest, but was almost 30% lower than 'resourcing/funding', although it is important to note that the two are inexorably tied. This may account for respondents choosing to place more significance on resourcing which, when increased, can lead to increased staffing levels and thus limit this structural barrier. 'Lack of consultation' was the third highest noted structural barrier at 24.2%. 'Policy', 'partnerships' and 'advocacy' were the fourth, fifth and sixth highest noted structural barriers noted by respondents at 17.2%, 15.3% and 12.7% respectively. However as none of these barriers were defined it will be important in any future research to assess exactly how organisations or individuals see these as barriers in order to put regional capacity building or systemic advocacy measures in place.

In terms of those 7% of respondents who nominated 'other' an interrogation of their comments revealed a range of barriers including poor communication within the sector, lack of community aspirations and language.

**Structural Barriers Facing the Sector - Selection of Respondent Comments**

**'Resourcing / Funding' Barrier Comments**

*"Funding is a constant battle … The time and energy that goes into applying for grants etc is out of proportion."*

*"Lack of suitably qualified staff due to poor paying conditions of the sector. Lack of funding to provide adequate housing for young people and programs."*

*"The identified demands are dependent on funding and staffing. We would be in a position to better address issues with increased resources."*

*"Lack of ongoing funding or recurrent funding. Grants not attracting CPI increases."*

*"The area of homelessness is definitely one of a lack of resources."*

*"Hard to achieve and maintain aims/objectives when funding is short term."*

**'Staffing' Barrier Comments**

*"High turnover of staff = lack of continuity in informal links made."*

**'Lack of Consultation' Barrier Comments**

*"Lack of consultation from government when changing priority areas."*

*"Organisations/regions work in silos."*

*"State and federal governments cost-shift to local government for programs once funded through State or Federal. For state government funding opportunities, the focus is usually on youth participation but there's limited consultation and such tight timelines with service providers to allow for true youth participation to occur"*

*"There is sometimes a duplication of effort or an inefficient strategy developed due to lack of consultation."*

*"Policy changes initiate changes in education not always practical or workable."*

**'Policy' Barrier Comments**

*"Conflicting online data collection systems make it difficult. "*

*"Need more cooperative funding policies across local, state and federal programs-often have senseless policy barriers re cross subsidising programs when this is exactly what we should be doing to ensure best use of resources to upscale effective programs to get better outcomes for young people."*

**'Partnerships' Barrier Comments**

*"Organisations/departments/services are in competition with each other and are not measuring 'collaboration' or working truly strategically together. Funding and resourcing dedicated to achieving the 'true integration approach' (which is recognised in research and policy time and time again) yet is undervalued in reality…"*

*"A whole community approach to addressing the risk factors. A coordinated and strategic approach is required."*

**'Advocacy' Barrier Comments**

*"Youth crosses so many State Departments. Never a clear voice. Fragmented sector. "*

**'Other' Comments**

*"Poor communication between agencies, workers placing rigid boundaries on service provision and failing to think outside the square limits our ability to assist."*

*"Lack of community aspirations."*

**Figure 6: Structural Barriers Facing the Sector - Selection of Comments**

## 8.3 Service Gaps

Question 19 *("What do you consider to be the service gaps within the Southern Metropolitan RYAN region?")* required respondents to identify the gaps in currently available services across the Southern Metropolitan region of Melbourne. An open-ended question, respondents could provide any response to this question and offered a wide range of responses that generally covered programs, services, structures, systems, products and personnel. 139, or 55.6% of all survey respondents, provided responses to this question.

In assessing the variety of responses, it became clear that the service gaps could be grouped into eight key areas (in no particular order):

- **Emergency housing and accommodation for young people** – increased funding and resources due to increased need
- **Education and training service provision** - particularly for those young people under 15 who are disengaged from mainstream education
- **Early intervention programs within schools to prevent early disengagement**
- **Funding and resource provision for service providers** – in particular an increase in funding, notification of funding opportunities, support with accessing funding and addressing funding competition issues
- **Transport access for clients** – particularly in growth corridor regions and in areas where 'joined-up' and co-located services do not exist
- **Development of a directory of regional services and providers** – ensuring that any such resource is funded and maintained in recognition that it will save workers and clients much time and energy and help to build partnerships
- **Mental health services for young people** - increased funding and resources due to increased need
- **Increased cultural awareness programs and services in recognition of the regional cultural diversity** – this is particularly needed in schools and in the broader community and could be mitigated through an increase in bilingual workers

## 8.4 Issues and Limitations Affecting 'Regional Priority Issues' Section

- The 18 most significant issues for youth within the Southern Metropolitan RYAN region were (in order of importance):
  1. 'housing'
  2. 'education'
  3. 'mental health'
  4. 'family conflict'
  5. 'violence'
  6. 'alcohol'
  7. 'transport'
  8. 'financial'
  9. 'drugs'
  10. 'bullying'
  11. 'cyber bullying'
  12. 'body image'
  13. 'health'
  14. 'grief/loss'
  15. 'settlement'
  16. 'sexuality'
  17. 'environment'
  18. 'other'
- The 7 most significant structural barriers for youth sector workers and organisations within the Southern Metropolitan RYAN region were (in order of importance):
  1. 'resourcing/funding'
  2. 'staffing'
  3. 'lack of consultation'
  4. 'policy'
  5. 'partnerships'
  6. 'advocacy'
  7. 'other'
- The 8 most significant service gaps within the Southern Metropolitan RYAN region were (in no particular order):
  - Emergency housing and accommodation for young people
  - Education and training service provision
  - Early intervention programs within schools to prevent early disengagement
  - Funding and resource provision for service providers
  - Transport access for clients

    - Development of a directory of regional services and providers
    - Mental health services for young people
    - Increased cultural awareness programs and services in recognition of the regional cultural diversity
- Define ‘policy’, ‘partnerships and ‘advocacy’ in any future research to ensure all respondents have a common understanding and share a common language.
- In any future research into service gaps ask respondents to prioritise the eight service gaps identified as part of the survey responses to assess whether these remain constant concerns.

# 9 Systemic Advocacy Messages

The final aspect of the survey sought respondent advice regarding the key messages that the Southern Metropolitan RYAN should convey to the Victorian Government on behalf of the organisations and young people who service and utilise the youth sector in our region.

Question 18 *("What do you consider to be the key messages that the Southern Metropolitan RYAN convey to the Victorian Government on behalf of young people and the youth services sector?")* gave respondents an opportunity to highlight the key issues they believed should be brought to the attention of the Victorian Government. An open-ended question, respondents could provide any response to this question and offered a wide range of responses that generally covered much that had already been highlighted in responses to earlier questions. As such, responses to this question tended to reinforce those key and pressing issues which had been a feature of the survey responses and results. What also became apparent was that respondents also wanted the Victorian Government to recognise that this high growth region is a geographically, culturally, historically and economically diverse one and, as such, is facing many changing pressures and needs from its clients, funders and broader community. 139, or 55.6% of all survey respondents, provided responses to this question.

In assessing the variety of responses, it became clear that the ten key messages that respondents wanted conveyed to the Victorian Government by the Southern Metropolitan RYAN were (in no particular order):

- **Communication** - clear, regular and responsive communication within the sector and between the sector and the Victorian Government (eg. more opportunities to participate in consultations, policy advice prior to implementation etc).
- **Housing** – there appears to be a severe shortage of affordable housing (rental, government, emergency, transitional housing types) which is reflected in homelessness issues amongst young people (and their families).
- **Improved Youth Sector Wages** – a high turn-over of staff within some segments of youth sector due to wage limitations (related to funding limitations).
- **New Funding Models** – increase funding periods, reduce the pressures on services to source and retain funding which ultimately reduces the capacity to service clients, lead to competition between providers (who could otherwise potentially be partners).
- **New Service Models** – increasing need for 'joined-up' services and 'one-stop-shops' which are staffed by professionals and appropriately funded (particularly in areas with limited services and/or transport availability). This is in addition to the need for more support for existing service models such as 'outreach'.
- **Youth Mental Health Issues** – young people presenting with mental health issues, including complex issues and co-existing issues, seem to be on the rise, resulting in an increased need for increased mental health and related services across the region.
- **Flexible/Alternative Learning Options** – greater provision of flexible and alternative learning options for young people disengaging and/or disengaged from mainstream education and more availability of flexible learning programs within mainstream school settings.
- **Transport Infrastructure and Access** – sufficient and affordable transport is a significant barrier for young people in the region which impedes access to education, training, support services, community engagement activities and health and wellbeing facilities.
- **Early Intervention Funding** – providing greater levels of funding for early intervention programs and services for young people in recognition that these are designed to prevent youth or reduce youth issues within the community, and in doing so also potentially represent a longer-term cost saving to society through a reduced need for later stage or adult programs for those participating young people.
- **Youth Participation** – greater opportunities for youth voice and youth participation at regional and government consultative levels.

- *It is also worth noting that a number of participants indicated a need to promote and learn about the RYAN, something which correlates with the response given at Question 1 where a significant 41.6% of respondents advised that they had not previously heard of the RYAN.*

**Systemic Advocacy Messages - Selection of Respondent Comments**

*"Access to funding that is fair and equitable, to enable Vocational training to young people, that do not fit into mainstream schooling."*

*"Additional Youth Sector funding without jumping through hoops existing service providers are already stretched and struggle to address with delivering services vs competing for community grants."*

*"An ever expanding region with large population growth which requires services to be able to keep up with the demand for support within this region."*

*"Consistent funding over 5 year periods to allow consistency of programs and services."*

*"Consult with the sector before making major changes."*

*"The State government also ought to consult a lot more with the organisations working at the grassroots where issues affecting young people do actually occur."*

*"Advocating for higher wages in the sector to attract suitably qualified staff."*

*"Increasing awareness that young people (adolescents) are often difficult to engage and they will require programs and services that provide a flexible delivery model - this will often mean outreach."*

*"An understanding that funding invested in youth intervention strategies add to future public savings."*

*"Money for partnerships and infrastructure."*

*"More funds need to be injected into preventative programs, as this is far more cost effective than trying to 'fix' problems."*

*"More resources need to be put into emergency and long term accommodation options for young people and families. Urgently! This is an issue about Human Rights."*

*"Focus on finding ways of empowering young people to feel they have a voice in the future."*

*"Identifying the expertise, assets and gaps in service provision to ensure that well planned out collaboration and integration occurs."*

*"More youth involvement in service delivery - let them have their say."*

**Figure 7: Systemic Advocacy Messages - Selection of Comments**

# 10 Conclusion

It is clear from this research with such a large number of wide ranging individuals and agencies across the Southern Metropolitan region of Melbourne that there are a number of issues, barriers and challenges that are impeding the work of youth sector organisations and preventing young people from accessing the support they need for their own wellbeing and development.

What the data also identified was a range of opportunities for agencies to work more collaboratively together in areas of need, share precious resources and communicate across the sector to maintain currency in information and service practice.

As a first phase research activity for the Southern Metropolitan RYAN it also identified a number of gaps, limitations and weaknesses in the initial research; something that is common in a first phase. This opens up many opportunities for further research with youth service providers that would assist the Southern Metropolitan RYAN in its strategic advocacy, consultative, engagement, professional development and collaboration role.

On behalf of all members of the Southern Metropolitan RYAN we would like to extend a huge thanks to all those individuals and organisations who took the time to take part in this important research. We, the members of the Southern Metropolitan RYAN, are committed to using this research to inform our ongoing RYAN activities and sharing the results with young people, colleagues and all levels of government to effect positive change and improvement in our region for the benefit of our services, our sector and (most importantly) our young people. We also hope that this research will prove useful to all those organisations that provide an enormous amount of support and assistance to young people within the region, because of a genuine commitment to wanting to support young people to reach their potential.