



# **A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE VICTORIAN YOUTH WORKERS' ASSOCIATION**

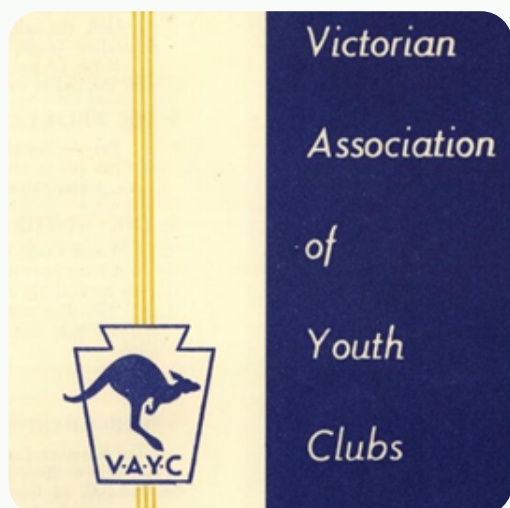
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# A Brief History of the Victorian Youth Workers' Association.

The Youth Workers Association (YWA) was first established in 1968, its success was enabled by the early work of a number of forerunner associations, the earliest established at the close of the Second World War in 1945. The current iteration of the YWA was established in 2008 following the launch of the Victorian Youth Sector Code of Ethics (Corney & Hoiles 2007) and urgings from the then Child Safety Commissioner Bernie Geary for youth work to “come out of the shadow of allied professions”(2006).

Although other Australian states have attempted to establish professional associations for youth workers, it has been Victoria who has had the longest established histories of both formal training and representative bodies for youth workers. Since the middle of last century, there have been both formal university-based training courses and representative organisations (Maunder 1999). Of the representative bodies, the earliest was The Victorian Association of Youth Leaders (VAYL) established as a training and development arm of the Victorian Association of Youth Clubs in 1945. The second attempt was the Institute of Professional Youth Leadership (IPYL) which was inaugurated in 1957. The IPYL included the aim of developing professional standards, however, it also faded away to be replaced by the Youth Workers Association (YWA) in the 1960s (Goodwin 1991).



**V.A.Y.C. Logo**

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### **V.A.Y.C. YOUTH CLUB Members Badge Victorian Collections**

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The first iteration of the Youth Workers Association (YWA) was established in Victoria at an inaugural meeting on the 19th of April 1968; its achievements were significant and included the development of university training and the establishment of award pay rates and industrial conditions. After consultations with the sector led by the YWA (Hamilton-Smith and Brownell 1973), the two-year Diploma of Youth Leadership run by the Victorian Government Department of Social Welfare was phased out and replaced by a three-year Diploma in Youth Work established at Coburg State College in 1977. Through further lobbying by the YWA, this course became the first Australian degree level course of youth work training in 1982 when it was upgraded to the BA Youth Affairs. Coburg College merged with Phillip Institute and later with Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology to form RMIT University in 1992, where the degree continues to be offered (Maunder 1999). The state industrial award for youth workers, long championed by the YWA, was formally recognised in 1978. It covered the salaries and working conditions as well as the qualification of youth workers. However, despite these significant achievements, the YWA lost direction (Goodwin 1991; Irving, Maunder & Sherington 1995).



### **Students in a tutorial in the 'Lisson Grove' Diploma of Youth Leadership course run by the Victorian State Government Welfare Training Council and the Institute of Social Welfare.**

This is a copy of an image published in the annual report of the Social Welfare Department for 1965-66.

Source:  
<https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/ref/vic/biogs/E000583b.htm>

## **Young people and youth worker in group discussion at Western Youth Welfare Service 1975**

This is a copy of an image published in the annual report for the Social Welfare Department for 1974-5.

Source:  
<https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/ref/vic/biogs/E000583b.htm>



From the 1980s onward, governments moved funding away from generalist youth work and began to fund specific issue-based programs such as youth employment and youth housing. Workers in these programs began to identify and organise around these issues, starting networks outside the YWA for local council youth workers, or youth housing or employment workers and moving their allegiances away from the generalist orientated youth work represented by the YWA (Goodwin 1991; Maunders 1999; Irving, Maunders & Sherington 1995). The work of the YWA was formally suspended in 1982 and the management of its finances and activities taken over by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria. The 1980s saw the emergence of a variety of loose networks such as the Victorian Workers with Youth and the Youth Development Workers, and also a national network known as The Nation Wide Workers with Youth. However, by the end of the 1980s, none of these informal networks had evolved into a formal professional association (Goodwin, 1991; Irving et al. 1995).



Pool receives concentrated attention at Ascot Vale.

**This is a copy of an image published in the annual report for the Social Welfare Department for 1974-5.**

Source:  
<https://www.findandconnect.gov.au/ref/vic/biogs/E000583b.htm>

The 1990s was a rocky period for the Victorian youth sector, with the election of the Kennett government in 1992 came the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering. This saw youth services and programs vying and competing against each other for decreasing amounts of public funding. During this period, the Youth Affairs Council was critical of the decisions of the sitting government, leading to the loss of core funding and the putting out to tender of its services in early 1999 prior to the state election. However, YACVIC was re-established shortly afterwards by the newly elected state Labor government in August 1999 (Ellis 2000). This led to the restoration of a YACVIC working group to explore anew the potential merits of professionalising youth work and establishing an independent professional body for youth workers.

The YACVIC working group on professionalisation was strongly influenced by one of its members, the then newly appointed Victorian Child Safety Commissioner Bernie Geary (2006), a former youth worker and member of the original YWA. The result was a focus on safe practice in youth work, particularly the safety of young people and workers and the rights of young people. The recommendations of this group were for a code of ethical practice to be drafted by one of the committee members, Dr Tim Corney, a long-time youth worker and youth work academic, and for a period of consultation to be undertaken on this draft by the youth sector. The result was the publication of the Victorian Youth Sector Code of Ethical Practice (2007).



**Youth Workers push young people in a wheelbarrow race at Heathmont Youth Club Victorian Collections**

Source: <https://victoriancollections.net.au/items/5c18301f6b785e0ebc9c6b3e>



# The Re-establishment of the Youth Workers' Association

The re-established Youth Workers Association (YWA) came into existence at a meeting of the sector in 2008. The association's membership was primarily drawn from degree qualified youth workers and was supported by youth work academics from the universities teaching youth work, particularly those from Victoria University and a number of longstanding senior youth workers. The initial focus of the association was twofold. Firstly, the focus was on pay, conditions and supporting current union campaigns; secondly, on stemming the erosion of the quality and standing of youth work training by private providers in the VET sector. The importance of establishing the identity of youth work as a profession, promoting the human rights framework of practice espoused through the code of ethics and carving out a distinct vocational space within the human services sector continued to be the themes driving the YWA's development at this time (Corney 2014; Corney & Broadbent 2007; Corney, Broadbent & Darmanin 2009).

A key identity debate occurring nationally during this period centred on who could call themselves a youth worker and on what basis (Grogan 2004; Sercombe 2004; Sercombe 2007; Griffin & Luttrell 2011). It was argued by some (Broadbent & Corney 2008) that although youth workers may have a similar cohort or 'client' group to other professions such as teachers, psychologists, social workers, or religious practitioners for example, youth work practice and its underpinning theoretical frameworks were very different from these other professions, with specific university-level training courses, a well-defined body of knowledge and recognised practice frameworks. It was also pointed out that these other professions, in most cases, have their own professional body or industry organisation that excluded youth workers (Corney & Broadbent 2007; Broadbent & Corney 2008; Corney, Broadbent & Darmanin 2009).

Another identity issue was the annexing of the traditional 'practice tools' of youth work by those working within the same space, such as recreation, outdoor education and the arts. These recreation-based practitioners, although not qualified as youth workers, were keen to legitimise their roles with young people by offering activity-based solutions to the complex issues that young people faced. Broadbent and Corney (2008) countered by arguing that recreational activity-based programs act primarily as a practice tool for engaging young people, and that youth workers use these practice tools to engage young people not just with the activity but beyond, to the services and community organisations relevant to meeting both their immediate and long-term needs. It was noted by Broadbent (2000) that while many young people engage in services for recreation and social opportunities before issues are identified, importantly it was the rapport that was built through the use of these tools that enables youth workers to identify young people's broader issues and needs. As such, Broadbent (2000) argued that traditionally youth work had not seen these activities as standalone frameworks or solutions but rather as enablers of youth engagement, and that this set the identity of youth work apart from others working with young people in the recreation and arts space.

A sector-wide meeting held in August of 2008 led to the forming of the new professional association and the first YWA board being elected at an inaugural AGM shortly thereafter. Reaching this point of formality in the (re)-establishing of the professional association was the culmination of what Corney, Broadbent and Darmanin (2009) referred to as the disparate nature of the industry galvanised into action as a response to the threats to its identity and practice, and its industry standing and benchmark qualifications being undermined.

One of the first tasks of the new Board of the Youth Workers Association was to review its criteria for membership. In the lead up to the re-establishment of the YWA, the initially proposed membership criteria had caused considerable consternation in the sector. This was hardly surprising as the professional association was seeking to sure up the professional identity of youth work by defining its membership eligibility criteria according to a specific vocational qualification (youth work) and to demarcate its level of membership according to level/quality of qualification. The incoming Board made no change to the generally agreed minimum requirement, full membership requiring a Bachelors Degree in Youth Work, and associate membership a Diploma in Youth Work.

However, in a nod to those in the sector who had many years of experience but no formal qualifications in youth work, the YWA Board established new criteria acknowledging there could be a number of possible pathways to full membership. This included extensive industry experience and other courses that pre-dated the current youth work degree/diploma courses, and acknowledged the synergies with community development workers and the importance of community development as a practice framework of youth work both in Australia and internationally (Corney 2004a; Corney 2004b; NYA 2010).

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## Conclusion

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Meeting the needs of YWA members was deemed to be an important role for the new association and crucial to attracting members. As such, the YWA has continued to stay relevant to its membership, undertaking industry-wide surveys of members with a focus on various practice and training issues that inform and increase youth work skills and knowledge. Recently the YWA Board, with the assistance of youth work academics, explored with its members what skills and knowledge should underpin youth work education. This process also drew on the youth work training accreditation processes and standards of the United Kingdom's National Youth Agency (NYA 2010). This was undertaken in a bid to impact on the education and training of future workers. This led to the development of a draft course accreditation criteria and sector consultation process. This criteria, and the accreditation of youth work degrees by the YWA, has enabled existing university degree level training courses in youth work to be recognised by the Federal government as a professional pathway qualification eligible for Federal government subsidy (DESE 2020).

Today the YWA is a dynamic professional association, serving its youth work members and taking every opportunity to support and build capacity in the youth sector across Australia.

**Dr Tim Corney, YWA Deputy Chair and founding member.**



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