

2006 – 2008

# Child & Youth Policy



VICTORIA POLICE

**Working with our communities  
to improve the well being  
and safety of young people**

# Contents

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Chief Commissioner's Message	3
Policy Framework	4
Working with Children and Youth – The Seven Principles	5
Our Commitment	6
Moving Forward – Building Strategies	7



“ This policy statement provides the framework and principles by which Victoria Police will continue to move forward and identify new and innovative ways to improve the lives and social outcomes for young people. ”

# Chief Commissioner's Message

Victoria Police is committed to working in partnership with our communities to improve the well being and safety of young people.

The impact of what our future holds isn't something we necessarily know. Rather it is something we must prepare for and work together to create. As such, we understand that our organisation must evolve to meet the needs of future policing and continue to concentrate on achieving the expectations of the entire community.

Whilst, significant progress has been made already in this area, young people still remain over represented in police statistics as offenders and victims of crime and road trauma. In this sense the challenge for Victoria Police continues.

In order to reduce the involvement of young people in crime and lessen the impact of victimisation and road trauma on the lives of our young people, a holistic and multifaceted response is required. Early intervention and diversion from the criminal justice system are integral features of such a response. Our focus must be on providing a safer environment for our young people that is inclusive of the most important influences in their lives; family, peers, community, cultural, employment and education networks.

This policy statement provides the framework and principles by which Victoria Police will continue to move forward and identify new and innovative ways to improve the lives and social outcomes for young people.



**Christine Nixon**  
Chief Commissioner, APM  
Victoria Police

# Policy Framework

The Victorian Government vision for young people recognises the importance of family, social inclusion and cultural interests as key drivers in building the resilience of our young people to counter some of the many challenges they face in today's complex and diverse society.

Victoria Police acknowledges that it has a significant role in contributing to social cohesion through partnerships with community and other government agencies. In these partnerships, we will all be striving to improve the social outcomes for Victoria's young people. We are aware that it is our responsibility, in partnership with the Victorian Government, to provide a safe environment for our children and young people, one in which they can feel protected and confident to participate.

Achieving better social outcomes requires a focus on identifying early preventative intervention strategies that interrupt the circumstances that lead to the over representation of young people in crime and road statistics, both as victims and offenders. Our policing response must therefore be both timely and effective, and address the causes not the symptoms of problem behaviours. There is overwhelming evidence that the more successful we are at 'early intervention and prevention' the better outcomes we will achieve for young people.

However, in the pursuit of achieving this goal it is important to recognise the complex interrelationships that contribute to offending and victimisation and the added challenges that are created through language barriers, cultural diversity, sexuality and gender identity. To this end, the Victoria Police response to young people must be an integrated and holistic one that embraces the family, peer, community, education and employment networks and is considerate of cultural influences.

The way forward for Victoria Police in improving the outcomes for children and young people is in the building of our capacity at the local level to identify, intervene and respond to the factors that influence young people's over representation in the crime and road statistics.

The target age for the Victoria Police Child and Youth Policy is children and youth aged between 0-25 years.

Whilst a large and diverse group for which the resulting strategies will be very different, the principles underpinning our practice must be reflective of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child and Victoria's own Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities.

# Working with Children and Youth – The Seven Principles

## Recognition of diversity

Children and young people are representative of the diverse nature of our community. The range of policing services and programs developed for them must therefore reflect this diversity.

## Participation

Inclusion and participation by young people in our community is imperative to their health and social development. The involvement of young people in decision making is an important step towards ensuring a policing response that is informed and relevant.

## Early intervention

To ensure optimum outcomes that reduce the likelihood of further harm occurring, an effective police response is required to occur at the earliest opportunity. Early intervention is essential to a proactive and strategic service response to crime and victimisation matters experienced by children and young people.

## Harm minimisation

“Risk taking” is widely recognised as a predominant mark of adolescent behaviour and development. It is necessary that young people are able to explore options for their behaviour, yet this must be in a way that minimises harm to themselves and the community.

## Fairness and respect

Children and youth are amongst the least empowered in our community. They have a right to be treated fairly and with dignity irrespective of age, gender, race, religion, culture, or socio-economic status. Shared respect and understanding needs to underpin the relationship between police and young people.

Further police services should engender equity and access within the community and afford young people equal rights and opportunities. This will enhance young people’s self worth and connection to a community in which they play a vital role.

## Diversion from the criminal justice system

Diversion is of critical importance in protecting young people from the negative effects that exposure to the criminal justice system may bring.

Community partnerships, referral and the use of discretionary powers in utilising pre-court and non court options should be a priority for police to divert children and youth from the criminal justice system.

## Social cohesion

Police have a significant role to play in maintaining and enhancing the quality of life for all Victorians and in building social cohesion. We do this through establishing community partnerships and in the undertaking of social responsibilities. The importance of young people’s contribution to a diverse and healthy society is acknowledged by Victoria Police.



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# Our Commitment

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To contribute to the social well being of young people we must ensure our policing responses are appropriately targeted and evidence based.

We must endeavour to better understand the relationship between victimisation and offending and identify where our interventions are best placed.

We must determine what works and deploy our policing resources accordingly. In particular, we will focus on the reduction of harm and repeat victimisation and offending of young people, and will seek to identify the ways that best prevent and interrupt the onset or continued progression in problem behaviours.

In order to do this we will embark on improving our knowledge to build a robust understanding of the environment that contributes to offending and victimisation, road trauma, and drug and alcohol abuse.

We need to fully understand how police, in conjunction with government and community partners, can make a substantial difference to our most vulnerable children and youth within Victoria.

# Moving Forward – Building Strategies

In support of this policy statement, Victoria Police will conduct a comprehensive research program that examines both international and national experience.

Drawing on an improved understanding of the influences on the vulnerability of our young people, we will develop a child and youth strategy that integrates our core police business to provide a whole of organisation response, inclusive of crime, transit and road safety that improves the future opportunities and policing outcomes for the young people of Victoria.

This policy will extend to 2008 to align with the principles and objectives of *'The Way Ahead'*.

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