



# **“COP THAT”:**

## **BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN YOUNG PEOPLE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS**

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## **“COP THAT”:** Bridging the gap between young people and law enforcement officers

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### **ABOUT YACVIC AND THE YRG**

The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) is the peak body representing the youth sector in Victoria. YACVic works with and makes representation to government and serves as an advocate for the interests of young people, workers with young people, and organisations that provide direct services to young people.

The Youth Reference Group (YRG) is a diverse group of young advocates who assist YACVic with this work. The YRG provides a forum for young people to develop proposals, campaigns, and projects that relate to YACVic’s overall work; provides advice to YACVic about the issues it focuses on and the way it engages with young people; and provides advice to community organisations and government departments about a range of issues affecting the lives of young Victorians. The work of YACVic and the YRG is funded by the Office for Youth, Department of Human Services.

### **ABOUT YOUTHLAW**

Youthlaw is a specialist state wide community legal centre for young people. They provide free and confidential legal advice to young people up to the age of 25. More info is available at [www.youthlaw.asn.au](http://www.youthlaw.asn.au).



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## BACKGROUND

In 2010, the Baillieu Government pledged to appoint 940 Protective Services Officers (PSOs) to be stationed on train platforms. The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria's Youth Reference Group (YRG) identified that this initiative was likely to result in increased contact between young people and law enforcement officers. As a result, we decided to investigate the relationship between those in a position to enforce the law and young people, and explore strategies that could be undertaken to improve these relationships in the future.

This was a peer led research project undertaken by the YACVic Youth Reference Group and supported by YACVic and Youthlaw. Research methods for this project included critical analysis of published articles (13 articles), an online survey (211 participants), a focus group and one-to-one interviews (9 participants), and vox pops (23 participants).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Young people are often negatively stereotyped within the media and viewed as "trouble makers" in society. This impacts on the way that young people are treated in law enforcement contexts. Nonetheless, contemporary international and local literature provides insight into initiatives that may be helpful in creating positive relationships between young people and the law.

## YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES WITH POLICE

The most common way that young people experience police is through representations of police in the media. Young people's experiences with police officers outside of law enforcement settings were more likely to be described in a positive way, suggesting that these interactions may be important in shaping positive perceptions of police from young people. Although direct experiences with police enforcing the law were, for the most part, described by participants as positive, mixed or inconsistent experiences were also quite common.

## YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS OF POLICE

The experiences young people have had with police considerably affected their perception of police. This was most acute for young people who had been charged with an offence. While the majority of young people reported having respect for police, this was not necessarily a two way street. When asked whether they felt respected by police, young people's responses showed considerably more variation. Overall, young people do not find police intimidating and are not scared of police. Despite this, many young people expressed concerns about police officers overusing their power.



## **YOUNG PEOPLE'S IDEAS ABOUT PROTECTIVE SERVICE OFFICERS**

Approximately half of young people were aware of the Government's plan to introduce PSOs on train platforms. Participants were evenly divided as to whether they thought this was a good idea or not. Many young people believe that the introduction of PSOs on train platforms will make train stations feel safer, particularly at night. Young people also have concerns about the level of training provided, that officers will be carrying guns and the potential for abuses of power.

## **CREATING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN YOUNG PEOPLE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS**

Young people stressed the importance of opportunities to engage with police officers outside of a law enforcement context as a means to breaking down stereotypes that young people hold about police and vice versa. Mutual respect and understanding are important to young people in a law enforcement context. Young people are prepared to show respect to police but in turn they expect to be respected and understood as individuals rather than judged by age-based stereotypes. Young people want to work in partnership with police to ensure their communities are safe.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of this report, the YRG recommend:

- Increased opportunities for young people and police to interact outside of law enforcement settings through events and programs in school and community contexts.
- A focus on initiatives that will improve the quality of individual interactions between young people and law enforcement officers, including training for PSOs and police officers about relating to young people and more opportunities for young people to become informed about their legal rights.
- Greater publicity of Victoria Police's youth engagement programs, as well as promoting positive actions of young people in the community.

# BACKGROUND

## INTRODUCTION

After being elected in 2010, the Baillieu Government pledged to appoint 940 Protective Services Officers (PSOs) to be stationed on train platforms at all metropolitan and major regional stations by 2014. There will be at least two PSOs assigned to a train station and their surrounds from 6pm until after the last train, seven days a week. They will carry weapons, receive twelve weeks of training, and be charged with the responsibility of keeping train stations safe.<sup>1</sup>

The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria's (YACVic) Youth Reference Group (YRG) has some concerns about the introduction of the PSOs on train platforms. In particular, the group is worried about the amount of training provided, and the fact that they will carry firearms.

In response to these concerns, the YRG discussed the ways in which they could best influence a policy that was ultimately going to be introduced across the state. Given that the introduction of PSOs is likely to result in increased contact between young people and law enforcement officers, the group decided to look into the broader issue of the relationship between those in a position to enforce the law, and young people. We also decided to look at strategies that could be undertaken to improve these relationships in the future.

It is hoped that this information will be a catalyst for positive interactions between young people and PSOs as well as with police and with law enforcement officers more generally.

The YRG went through a rigorous research and consultation process. This included critically analysing a range of relevant published material, creating and circulating an online survey, running a focus group at a youth centre in the northern suburbs of Melbourne, and completing vox pops at a National Youth Week event in the south eastern suburbs of Melbourne. Once all of the research was completed, the YRG worked incredibly hard putting all of the work into a report format, with this document being the finished work of the group.

This report begins with a literature review including current national and international texts that have been released on topics relating to law enforcement of officers and young people. The report then looks at the methodology that we chose to use and the reasons that we chose those particular methods to conduct our research. The results of the research is then presented and is divided into four areas: young people's experiences with law enforcement officers, young people's perceptions of police, young people's ideas about Protective Services Officers, and ideas to create positive relationships between young people and law enforcement officers. The report then concludes with recommendations developed based on these findings.

The data presented in this report provides insight into current attitudes of young people towards law enforcement officers. It also makes recommendations that we believe will improve relations between these two groups. It is important that this data is used effectively to create much more positive perceptions and relationships between police and young people. The YRG hope that you enjoy this report, and that it is a useful resource for people all across Victoria and Australia.

1. At the completion of this report (31 May 2012) 18 PSOs have been stationed and working (as of February 2012) at both Flinders St and Southern Cross Station. The second roll out commenced in May 2012 at both Footscray and Dandenong station, with two PSOs to be stationed at Footscray and five at Dandenong. The current total of working PSOs is at 41. It is believed Richmond, North Melbourne and Parliament Stations will be next in line.



## METHOD: WHAT WE DID & HOW WE DID IT

This research project aims to address the following questions:

1. **What are young people's perceptions of law enforcement officers?**
2. **What are young people's experiences with law enforcement officers and how do these influence perceptions?**
3. **What factors contribute to positive relationships between young people and law enforcement officers?**

To make sure that we covered these questions as comprehensively as possible we used a range of methods. It is our belief that we have been successful in this aim and that the results discussed in this report have relevance to Victoria's broader youth population.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

**3 topic areas**

**13 articles**

**Each article was critically analysed with relation to the research questions providing a basis for the other methods.**

### ONLINE SURVEY

**6 questions**

**Distributed through YRG, YACVic and Youthlaw networks**

**Live for 4 weeks**

**211 respondents from all over Victoria (132 metro; 79 non metro)**

### VOX POPS

**3 questions**

**23 participants**

**Conducted at a National Youth Week Festival in outer south east Melbourne**

### FOCUS GROUP AND ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEWS

**9 participants**

**Combination of questions and activities**

**Conducted at a youth centre in northern Melbourne**

### A YOUTH LED RESEARCH APPROACH

This project has been conducted by members of the YACVic's YRG with support from the YACVic Participation and Development Officer and the Youthlaw Youth Engagement Officer. The project is unique in that the YRG developed the idea for the research and sourced support from the relevant professionals, as needed, in order to carry it out. This is contrast to usual models of peer led research in which professionals identify the area of inquiry and recruit young people to assist.

### SOME NOTES ON RESEARCH ETHICS

Participants were given an overview of the research and what the results would be used for prior to taking part.

Participants had access to further information about their rights with regard to the law if they wanted to find out more about anything we discussed.

Identifying information has been removed from all of the data.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review aims to inform an understanding of current perspectives about the relationship between young people and law enforcement. Research shows that throughout the last 40 to 50 years the relationship between young people and police has been somewhat volatile. This suggests that increased contact between young people and the law through the introduction of the PSOs has the potential to further divide young people and law enforcement, rather than bridging this gap.

The literature review will seek to illustrate this in the following way:

- Section one will explore research that highlights how young people have been represented by the media and society in the 20th and 21st centuries.
- Section two focuses on international theories and practices concerning young people and law enforcement officers.
- Section three examines current knowledge about the relationship between young people and police in Victoria and Australia.

## YOUNG PEOPLE AND REPRESENTATIONS WITHIN THE MEDIA

**This section identifies the ways in which deviant behaviours of young people have traditionally been constructed in society. It also demonstrates how the media plays a major role in the development of negative stereotyping of young people as trouble-makers in society. It is important to examine and understand how these stereotypes have been created in order to better understand the relationship between law enforcement officers police and young people in Victoria.**





**Cechaviciute, L & Kenny, D.T. 2007, 'The Relationship Between Neutralizations and Perceived Delinquent Labeling On Criminal History in Young Offenders Serving Community Orders', *Criminal Justice and Behaviour*, Vol. 34, No. 6, pp. 816-829.**

This article looks at labelling theory and explores the degree to which it has an effect on constructing young people as delinquents. It also aims to explore the level at which these young people share community views of themselves as young delinquents.

Labelling theory suggests that the initial deviancy of a person is formed due to social, psychological, and other factors. In this form of primary deviancy, the young person carrying out the act of deviancy does not perceive the act as a delinquent behaviour but rather as just mere adventure or mischief.

According to Cechaviciute and Kenny, secondary deviancy is created when societal reaction labels young people as criminals after their first offence. This in turn may result in further delinquency as primary offenders resolve the dissonance between their "prosocial self-concept and their antisocial behaviour" (p. 817) by embracing the label and hence by acting on it in order to fit into the label that they have been given.

Cechaviciute and Kenny carried out this research by using questionnaires that aimed at assessing justifications for offending. The sample consisted of 153 young offenders serving community orders.

The findings from this research showed that nearly one third of the young people believed that others were labelling them. They also reported that they were engaged in more deviant behaviours than the young people who felt that they were not labeled as such. This supports the idea of labelling theory, which suggests that when young people adopt their labels, they tend to carry out more delinquent behaviours.

It should also be noted that half of the participants did not believe that they were being labelled as delinquents. This could be due to the fact that the sample group did not derive their self-identity from the term delinquent, rather it could have been seen as a relatively insignificant part of their lives.

This article is therefore very important as it sheds light on how young people perceive themselves after being labeled as delinquents by the legal system and society. The findings allow us to see how labelling theory relates to the behaviours of young people and how that can create negative outcomes for young people.

**Simpson, B. 1997, 'Youth Crime, The Media and Moral Panic', in Bessant, J & Hill, R., *Youth, Crime and the Media: Media Representation of and Reaction to Young People in Relation to Law and Order*, National Clearinghouse for Youth Studies, Hobart, pp.9-15.**

This research looks at the meaning of moral panic, how the media contributes to creating moral panics, the applicability of moral panics as a theory in contemporary Australia and lastly looks at the consequences of moral panics in society.

Simpson refers to Stanley Cohen's work (who coined and popularised the term moral panic in the 1970s).

Cohen defines the term moral panic as a "condition, episode, person or group or persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylised and stereotypical fashion by the mass media..." (Cohen 1972). In Cohen's work he goes on to say that recurrent types of moral panics in Britain can be seen with the emergence of various forms of youth culture whose behaviour is deemed deviant or delinquent.



Simpson agrees with Cohen's sentiment and adds, that when young people retaliate against harsh treatment by police, they are seen as a social problem that needs immediate attention. As a result, further penalties are implemented to control these negative behaviours. Harsh treatment from law enforcement and police towards young people is viewed by Simpson as a result of the moral panics created around young people.

In essence the creation of moral panics does not seek to understand the causes of the offending behaviour, but rather diverts the attention to the status of the members of the group who are being deviant. Hence, it is suggested that there is a lack of understanding of the causes for the behaviour of young people by authority figures dealing with them.

Simpson also argues that in modern Australian society the increasing inequalities (these inequalities can be between the rich and poor, age or cultural/social groups) creates marginalised groups in society. As young people are often in this category, they sometimes respond in ways that are considered deviant in society. This too provides another basis for the creation of moral panics. Simpson argues that moral panic is used to disguise the social and economic forces leading up to the behaviour.

Simpson also claims that the media plays an important role in sensationalising negative behaviours of young people in news items.

The media's main aim is to get advertisers and therefore, their prime concern is to attract as many viewers as possible. Thus, the sensationalising of news items is seen as necessary. Simpson argues that young people often attract a lot of media scrutiny and that literature proves that much of young people's portrayals in the media are negative.

Simpson suggests that the consequences of moral panics is the creation of harsh and oppressive regulations and punishments which neglect the reasons that caused the offending behaviour, but focus on the particular groups of people who are being scrutinised.

This article contends that moral panics, which are shaped through the media, create stereotypes and fear around the behaviours exerted by young people. It also gives an insight into how laws are made in response to moral panic campaigns. Therefore, this research is highly relevant in understanding the reasons why the relationships between police and young people are often negative in nature.

**Bessant, J. 1991, 'Described, measured and labeled: Eugenics, Youth Policy and Moral Panic in Victoria in the 1950s', *Journal of Australian Studies*, Vol. 15, No.31, pp. 8-28.**

Bessant echoes Stanley Cohen's work (discussed in full in the previous article) by linking the creation of deviant youth as a moral panic in society and therefore in need of a tough consistent government response.

This article examines the government response to what was considered in the 1950s, as the "youth problem". The response mainly manifests itself in the creation of policy. These policies centred on the notion that young people needed supervision (especially youth of the working class) and needed to be managed by expert professionals.

The *Child Welfare Act 1954* was introduced, followed by the Barry Advisory Committee in 1956, which aimed to tackle youth problems in society. The committee suggested changes, such as having special police units to detect and control delinquency.

A *Children's Court Act* was implemented during the same year as a response to the suggestions made by the Committee. One of its main aims was to increase its capacity to deal with neglected children.

Other Acts were also introduced as a response, including, the *Youth Organisations Assistance Act 1956*, which aimed to oversee the running of youth organisations.



Hence, this article adds to the literature concerning how young people throughout time have been labelled as troublemakers in society. It is important, as it shows how the works of the past still inform modern day representations of delinquency and understandings of youth. This is also useful in understanding how policies are made as a response to moral panics. As this article gives an account of a decade in Victoria's history, it is helpful in reflecting back in order to identify the discourses around which young people have been labelled as delinquents in the past.

**Davies, S. 1997, 'A Sight to Behold: Media and the Visualisation of Youth, Evil and Innocence', in Bessant, J & Hill, R., *Youth, Crime and the Media: Media Representation of and Reaction to Young People in Relation to Law and Order, National Clearinghouse for Youth Studies, Hobart, pp.55-63.***

This study looks at how representations of youth in the media through photographs/cartoons have contributed to the development of ideas about the "innocence of youth" and youth as "evil" or "bad".

Davies gives an overview of how visual representations have been used as a powerful tool to represent the notions of evil and innocence. He discusses the idea that photography (especially those attached to news items) provides the reader with an idea of reality.

The basis behind this idea comes from the enlightenment period of the 16th and 17th centuries, coupled with the scientific revolution, which played a major role in the privileging of photography as an objective method of asserting that man was superior. By the mid-nineteenth century empirical projects such as phrenology, physiognomy and craniometry sought to make sense of the inherent features of the human to rank the population. Photography was then used, as a tool for capturing this in order to find out and determine differences and inferiority between human beings. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the emerging

field of criminal anthropology, empiricism and Social Darwinism merged together, to produce a portrait of the true criminal whose deviance was both inborn and visible.

The notion of innocence was further determined by age. Medieval depictions of childhood depict children as miniature adults while in the contemporary world childhood is defined as a special stage of life with innocence attached to it. This depiction of childhood as a special stage of life was also followed by a distinction between childhood and adolescence.

By the early twentieth century, adolescence was defined as a time period when all simplicity of childhood was being constantly challenged as the adolescent makes a transition from childhood to adulthood.

By the nineteenth century in Australia, the visual images in print media began to show the significance of age. As the twentieth century emerged the hand drawn visual images were replaced with photographs. These photos depicted children in a certain light using examples of children of Hollywood stars or the children of the British Royal family.

This quest for the perfect child was partly driven by the concern that this innocence might be corrupted by early exposure to the adult world.

Alongside this, depictions of the dangerous and unruly child were emerging. This young person occupied public spaces, wore distinctive clothing, was independent of adult supervision and displayed aggressive behaviour.

This study provides an insight into how photography has contributed to the construction of the notions of youth as both evil and innocent. It is important to understand how depictions of young people in the media have in time developed, in order to understand the current stereotypes formed around young people and how these stereotypes inform the relationship between young people and the police.



## YOUNG PEOPLE AND POLICE: INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

**This section presents observations from international commentators about the relationship between young people and the police. Importantly, the enquiry of the following authors and academics pertains to a range of international police-youth programs and political environments, such as post-ceasefire Northern Ireland. Although there are obvious differences in the Australian context, these studies do provide insights that are useful in considering interaction between law enforcement officers and young people in Victoria.**

**Byrne, J & Jarman, N. 2011, 'Ten Years After Patten: Young People and Policing in Northern Ireland', *Youth Society*, Vol.43, No.2, pp.433-452.**

This article examines the varying experiences of young people and police during a period of political reform and restructuring in post-ceasefire Northern Ireland.

Ultimately, the perceptions of young people about police tend to vary according to their social and economic backgrounds. The primary causes of an often tense relationship are conceived due to negative police tactics, the use of force, an imbalance in power relationships and a perceived lack of recognition of young people's interests and concerns.

Byrne and Jarman suggest that the majority of young people hold negative perceptions about police due to personal experiences which prompted sensitive reactions and feelings of being targeted as criminals.

The key demonstration of this finding is the belief among young people that they are "regularly being discriminated against for acts of vandalism [and] forms

of antisocial behaviour". All in all, a worrying portion of youth feel that they are unfairly used as a collective scapegoat for all criminal behaviour in their communities.

These harmful perceptions are facilitated by an inter-related belief that police are generally "uninterested in the types of issues confronting young people".

Moreover, it was found that young people reasonably believe that police officers "deliberately provoke" aggressive reactions by using harassing language during investigation or simple searches.

However, the prevalence of these perceptions is likely to be reduced where young people have had prior opportunities to engage constructively and comfortably with police members in a casual environment, such as in schools. In any case, young people's immediate, first-hand encounters with police officers seem to be heavily defining in their ultimate and overall perception of law enforcement mechanisms.





**Hopkins, N, Hewstone M & Alexandra H. 1992, 'Police-Schools Liaison and Young People's Image of the Police: An Intervention Evaluation', *British Journal of Psychology*, Vol.83, pp.203-220.**

Hopkins looks at the successes and shortcomings of the Police-Schools Liaison, a British program designed to improve the relationship between police officers and young people. Overall, the program is assessed as having "limited positive effects" as perceptions about youth identification with criminal activity remain pervasive among young students.

Essentially, the Police-Schools Liaison places police officers into close contact with varied members of a school community, including staff members and students, often as part of investigations into alleged theft and damage to school property. Whilst the surveyed students generally viewed police participants in the program favourably, their broader perception of the police remained cynical and antagonistic.

Hopkins attributes this lack of change mainly to the "failure of pupils to see their [Schools Liaison Officer] as typical of the police in general". Moreover, he argues that a great difficulty in promoting a more constructive police-youth relationships is the inevitable imbalance between the parties, which is viewed more sensitively when a young person is "cast in the role of a suspect".

The major point of complaint by participating students related to the manner of police officers when investigating or stopping young people. This was seen as unduly harsh, arbitrary and illegitimate. In this way, Hopkins comments that young people feel discriminated against because "they feel themselves to be treated in a manner that would not be considered appropriate when dealing with adults".

**Hopkins, N. 1994, 'Young People Arguing and Thinking About the Police: Qualitative Data Concerning the Categorisation of the Police in a Police-Youth Contact Program', *Human Relations*, Vol.47, No.11, pp.1409-1432.**

Hopkins further research looks at how youth "categorise" and pigeonhole police officers into types of individuals.

Interestingly, he finds that the reaction of youth towards the police isn't as generalised or simplistic as perhaps initially thought. Surveyed students were often careful to appreciate the role of the police "in the pursuit of institutional goals" and that officers carry out duties "determined by the higher-order supra-individual qualities of an organised social unit". That is, the vast majority of young people don't believe that individual police officers are rogue agents who individually target young civilians for some personal satisfaction.

Hopkins refers to other data (Dobash et al., 1986, 1990) which suggests that young people acknowledge "the need for rules" and the practical utility of law enforcement mechanisms. The difficulty is that this understanding often doesn't translate into mutually respectful, peaceful and productive youth-police relations.

This article therefore should be taken as support for the idea that youth aren't ideologically opposed to authority, but instead have some anxieties about the use of that authority.

Consequently, Hopkins is optimistic about the potential for the removal of harmful stereotypes and the improvement of the youth-police relationship.



**Bradford, B. 2011, 'Convergence, not Divergence? Trends and Trajectories in Public Contact and Confidence in the Police', *British Journal of Criminology*, Vol.51, pp.179-200.**

Bradford provides a whole-of-society consideration of public confidence in the law enforcement system, premised on data from the British Crime Survey which suggests that public trust in British police has been in decline since the 1950s.

Interestingly, much of the data suggests that the decline of youth confidence in police services correlates with a proportional decline in the confidence of older age groups.

Moreover, the trust of younger age groups seems to fluctuate and can't be described as a consistently-declining trajectory. Importantly, survey data suggests that police "stop/search activity" is disproportionately geared towards minority ethnicities.

Bradford suggests that, inevitably, first-hand experiences with police are defining influences over an individual's long-term and potentially deeply-held perception of law enforcement agencies. Nonetheless, he also argues that "there remains a strong residue of support for the police" such that they "retain a largely unchallenged legitimacy as an institution".

In any case, Bradford is confident that the conventional expectations about the influence of gender, age and ethnicity on youth-police interaction are perhaps not fully realised and, as such, opposes proposals for an extreme diversification of police tactics and approaches to investigation.

**De Bruin, J. 2010, 'Young People and Police Series: A Multicultural Television Audience Study', *Crime Media Culture*, Vol.6, No.3, pp.309-328.**

This article looks at the reactions of young people to police-related television shows in the Netherlands. Its findings, whilst indirect in their relationship to the perceptions of youth about the police on the ground, might be useful in assessing the strength of their opinions and expectations.

De Bruin's surveys suggest that Dutch young people view the portrayal of the police in television as "too positive" and "unrealistic", whilst a small number went further to suggest that the police must be involved in the production of shows "to communicate a better image of themselves".

All positive images of the police, it seems, are treated with suspicion and scepticism. This stands in contrast to the overall positive engagement with crime-related TV shows, based largely on the appeal of a "guessing game" narrative.

Interestingly, youth were active in their assessment of storylines "for plausibility" with reference to their own personal experiences with police officers.

The key conclusion here is that young people aren't frightened of the police per se – they're willing and clearly capable of critiquing their performance honestly and frankly. Instead, they are confidently critical of their treatment of young people, and see police/crime TV shows not as an accurate or motivating portrayal of police, but as inaccurate and deceptive.



## YOUNG PEOPLE AND POLICE: AUSTRALIAN AND VICTORIAN PERSPECTIVE

**This section of the literature review focuses on current theories and practices concerning the relationship between young people and law enforcement officers in Victoria and Australia. This will assist in understanding young people's current perceptions of police and the factors which will contribute to positive relationships. The context in which these studies were conducted means that the results have the potential to be useful in developing a platform through which to understand interactions between PSOs and young people in Victoria.**

**Smith, G. 1997, 'Young People Need a Real Change to Police Culture', *Youth Issues Forum*, Winter, pp. 18-20.**

This article discusses a youth policy statement released by Victoria Police entitled 'Shared Respect,' which was published in the April edition of *Police Life* (*Police Life* is the official magazine of Victoria Police). This statement was prepared by the youth advisory unit, led by Chief Inspector Rod Norman, and it acknowledged that children and young people feel "the least empowered in our community", even though they reserve the right to be "treated fairly and with dignity irrespective of gender, race, religion, culture, sexuality or social-economic status".

Importantly, this policy recognises that young people's inclination to socialise in places such as shopping centres, is in no way a criminal offence, and it is conceded that police will respect the lawful use of such places by young people.

Smith then discusses how young people feel in relation to being stopped and questioned by police. He finds that young people find this to be a form of harassment. He does acknowledge that if police regularly stop and question young people this can escalate due to the young person feeling targeted, and therefore result in the young person being charged for using indecent language, resisting arrest and other related offences.

From Smith's findings he contends that the "brotherhood" culture within Victoria Police needs to change, especially in response to how police engage with young people. This article is important in terms of understanding the current perceptions of the relationship between young people and the police.



**Wilkie, M. & Blagg, H. 1997, 'Young People and Policing in Australia: The Relevance of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child', *Australian Journal of Human Rights*, vol. 3, no, 2, pp. 134-156.**

This research aimed to develop template legislation to regulate police contacts with young people, consistent with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. It identifies that police see the issue of street policing as one of "order maintenance", whilst youth workers and youth lawyers view it as "one of law and the defence of human rights".

Wilkie and Blagg argue that the police discretionary powers should be reduced, as this is necessary in order to safeguard children's rights.

They discuss the police officer's power to ask for a name and address from a person, their search powers, and the use of reasonable force in arrest situations.

This study also identified a "near peer" phenomenon, where closeness in age and maturity between the police officer and the person in question can lead to a severe escalation of conflict, often resulting in the young person's arrest for an offence that would not have been committed but for the initial contact with police. Essentially, this study found that police "stops" of young people are unlawful unless justifiable. Therefore when a "stop" is justifiable, the child's fundamental rights should be protected. These rights were found to include the right to silence and the right to liberty. Any public search of the person was deemed a "gross invasion of privacy".

The police view of young people (balanced with that of youth workers and youth lawyers) is important in developing an understanding of the motivations behind young people's perception of law enforcement officers.

**Gardiner G, 2001 'The Police and Indigenous Juveniles in Victoria', *Alternative Law Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 5, pp. 248-264.**

This article marked the tenth anniversary of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody's final report.

Gardiner points out that despite the 339 recommendations aimed at reducing Indigenous people's contact with the criminal justice system, one in five prisoners in Australia is Indigenous and one in five of all custodial deaths is of an Aboriginal person, even though Indigenous people only make up 2% of the total population.

Gardiner contends that the over-representation of Indigenous people in custody is directly linked to the levels at which they are arrested, and uses data to prove that arrest rates for Indigenous male juveniles have grown dramatically since the 1990s. Gardiner adds that the trends established in juvenile arrests will most likely continue to worsen as these young people become adults.

Disappointingly, Gardiner suggests that the lack of effective implementation of the Commission's recommendations has meant that Victoria's position has continued to worsen in the ten years since the report was launched.

**Murphy, K. & Gaylor, A. 2010, 'Policing Youth: Can Procedural Justice Nurture Youth Cooperation with Police?', *Alfred Deakin Research Institute, Working Paper 6*.**

Prior to this study, it had been widely established that the public's motivation to cooperate with police in collaborative crime control, is largely linked to perceptions of police legitimacy.





Police legitimacy can be described as the belief that authorities do their job well and are therefore entitled to be obeyed and respected. Earlier research also indicates that citizens are more willing to respect police if they carry out their roles in a procedurally just manner.

This research was conducted by surveying teenagers across Australia, as an effort to determine whether these preconceived notions of police legitimacy and procedural justice had any bearing on the willingness of young people to cooperate with police in their crime control efforts.

Young people from two public high schools in metropolitan cities were asked their views of police legitimacy, policy efficiency in controlling crime, levels of trust of those in authority, feelings of safety, crime in local areas, willingness to help and cooperate with police, and perceptions of police discrimination.

Respondents were generally negative in their perceptions that police use procedural justice and in their belief about the relationships between youth and police. Also, few young people said that they would report crimes if they observed them.

Further analyses of the data collected found that procedural justice had a significant effect on young people's perceptions of police legitimacy, there was a significant correlation between perceived police legitimacy and youth cooperative behaviours. Youth who viewed the police as using procedurally fair methods were more likely to view the police as more legitimate, which meant that they were more inclined to cooperate with the police.

This article is critical in identifying factors which contribute to positive relationships between youth and law enforcement officers.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this literature review was to identify existing literature concerning young people's perceptions of law enforcement officers, their experiences with law enforcement officers, and the factors which contribute to positive relationships between young people and the law. The first section looked at different theories highlighting the ways in which young people have been constructed as "trouble makers" in society. The second and third sections highlight existing theories and practices concerning young people and law enforcement officers both internationally and in Victoria and Australia.

This literature review was critical in terms of establishing a basis of information on which our research will build upon. In light of past research it has become apparent that this research project is of extreme importance as it fills a significant gap. There appears to be only a limited amount of research available which directly seeks the opinion of young people in relation to law enforcement. As the literature above suggests, this is at least partially due to young people having limited power in this realm.

It is the opinion of the YRG that young people are still, in 2012, viewed as "trouble makers" in society, are negatively stereotyped within the media and that their behaviour is at times the subject of "moral panics". We also believe that this has an effect on the way young people are treated in law enforcement contexts. The remainder of this report seeks to add value to the research discussed in this literature review by hearing directly from young people on this issue. The ultimate goal of this research is to bring to light how young people themselves feel the divide between police and youth can be bridged in the hope of creating positive relationships in the future.

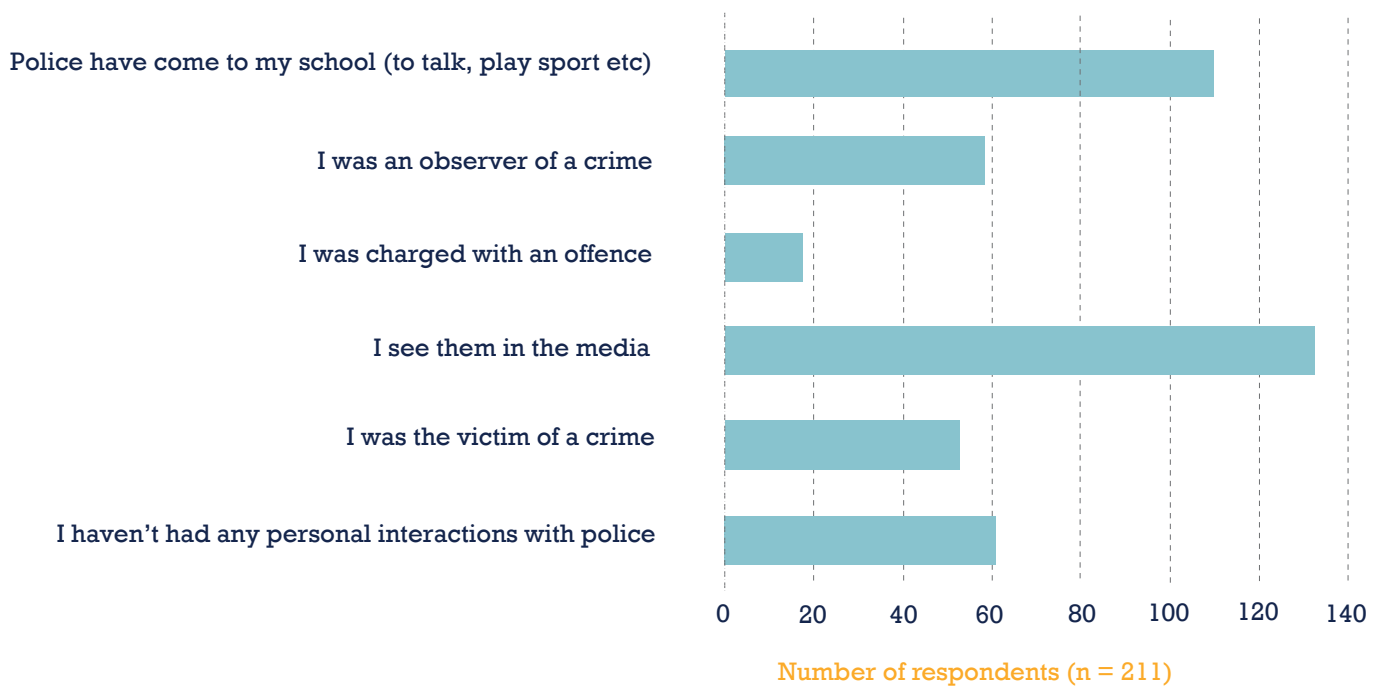


# YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES WITH POLICE

Young people who responded to the online survey and took part in the vox pops were asked 'what personal experiences have you had with police?' In the case of the survey, there was very little difference in the experiences of young people in metro and non metro areas and so responses of all survey participants are shown together in Figure 1 below. It should be noted that young people were able to select as many choices as they liked to this question and the majority of participants had exposure to police in multiple settings.

Young people were also asked 'How would you describe this experience?'. The majority of descriptions were positive and suggested that young people see the role of police is to protect and serve the community.

**Figure 1: Personal experiences with police**





Despite giving overall positive descriptions of their experiences, some young people also spoke of exceptions:

**“In all of the above situations I found that some officers were professional, helpful and understanding, however on all occasions there was also at least one officer who was intimidating, judgemental or rude.”**

This mixed view was also represented in the vox pops. With regard to traffic offences one young person stated:

**“Some are polite, they explain what you did wrong others are just smartasses and make a joke of pulling you over.”**

## **POLICE PROGRAMS IN SCHOOLS**

Young people who reported having interactions within a police setting were the most likely to speak positively about their experience:

**“Useful – good to see police within social/school setting. Helps humanise them.”**

Negative descriptions of experiences with police in both the survey and the vox pops were generally quite emotive and related to situations where young people felt judged, frightened or degraded due to police being in a position of power over them.

The main way that young people who responded to the survey had experienced police was either indirectly, through images in the media (n = 132), or outside of law enforcement contexts through education programs (n = 109). A smaller number of respondents had more direct involvement with law enforcement, either by being charged with an offence (n = 17), by being a victim of crime (n = 52) or by observing a crime (n = 58). We were interested to see how the type of experience young people had with police impacted on the way they described their experiences.

**“It was great understanding some of the things police go through when they’re on the clock.”**

Despite mostly positive experiences being reported, several young people did warn against the use of ‘scare tactics’ in school settings.



## VICTIMS OF CRIME

Of the 52 young people who reported being victims of crime, 37% described positive experiences, 17% described negative experiences and 27% described experiences that had both positive and negative elements (19% of participants did not describe their experience). Those who spoke positively praised police officers and the way they handled situations.

**“They did a fantastic job at making me feel dignified and respected, despite having just been through the most horrific hour of my life.”**

Negative experiences largely related to situations when the police were unable to do anything about the claim or did not follow up with the individual.

**“A bit frustrating as I was told I would be sent an email with a form and some other info and I wasn’t.”**

The inconsistency of approach that was reflected in the mixed responses was concerning as was the high number of mixed experiences reported in this context.

**“I had a mixed experience. When trying to get information from them, they were very dismissive and did not follow up. However, there was one particular officer who was really good at keeping me updated on the process.”**

## MEDIA PORTRAYALS OF POLICE

Young people who had seen police in the media generally described negative portrayals. Those who had other experiences to go on were less likely to incorporate these negative portrayals into their personal view:

**“They seem to be doing fine, and you can’t always trust the media. I’d only go by what I know to be true.”**

**“Police in media are often shown negatively. However, the police I have seen talk at my school were fine.”**



## BEING CHARGED WITH AN OFFENCE

Young people who had been charged with an offence did not necessarily describe their experiences negatively as one might expect:

**“Most of the time the police are actually quite friendly if you treat them with respect.”**

**“Very good. They did the right thing and told me what was going on.”**

Across the 17 participants that reported having been charged with an offence the descriptions were spread pretty evenly across positive (35%), negative (29%) and mixed responses (29%). Negative descriptions from young people who had been charged with an offence were the most emotive in the sample:

**“Traumatic.” “Frightening and degrading.” “Scary.”**

## BEING AN OBSERVER OF A CRIME

Some young people who had observed a crime remarked upon police being a little heavy handed in their approach both physically and verbally.

**“[T]here have been times when I’ve seen the police in action out the front of night clubs and sometimes the amount of force they use on people can seem a little excessive.”**

**“I saw and overheard a police man saying to a young person near my work place nasty things like they were going to grow up and become a drug addict ‘just like your mum and dad.’”**

For others, observing police intervention at the site of an offence resulted in feelings of safety and admiration:

**“When I see them stopping someone doing the wrong thing, I feel safe, I feel so happy that they are doing a good job.”**

**“In the [name of regional centre] mall, someone got arrested for something and it made me want to be a police officer.”**



Although more difficult to generalise to the broader youth population, the following case studies collected through the interviews at the youth centre provide some more in-depth insight into young people's experiences with the law.

## CASE STUDY 1

A young person who took part in the focus group explained that she often carried knives due to her work as a chef. She spoke of this creating a problem in situations when she has been "pulled up by a cop" and searched for weapons. According to the participant the police involved knew that she was using the knives for her job but still proceeded to ask her why she was carrying the knives and made her call her employer for verification. The participant noted how rudely the officers conducting the search are, and how they never treat her with respect. She stated: "I have no respect for police because they don't have respect for me".

## CASE STUDY 2

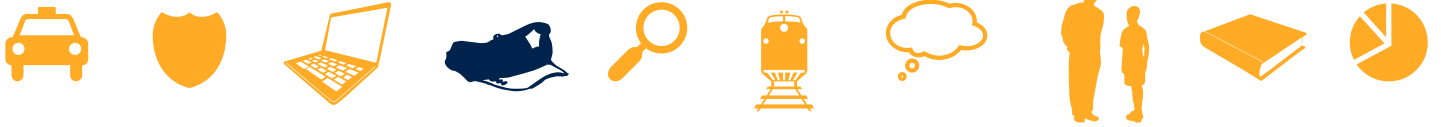
A participant described a situation where their father threw a glass bottle over the fence at a BBQ, and the neighbour threw it back. The police were then called, and the participant's father was tasered and hit with the baton. The participant believed that the force used on their father was excessive. In addition, the participant regularly gets asked by the police for details when in public places, and feels targeted by the police even though they state that it is just a routine check.

## YOUNG PEOPLE IN PUBLIC SPACES

The focus group participants also provided some insight into the way that young people are treated when they hang out in public spaces. One young person discussed an experience in which they were waiting for a bus at a park with a group.

**"Police come up to ask for ID. How are we meant to get home if we can't sit around in a park?... We don't like punching on. We are not bad people. We just want to hang out have a good time, have fun and chill out. The police are just here to bug us, just for the hell of it."**

Another participant described a situation in which she was kicking a football and riding on scooters with a group of friends outside the youth centre, and the police arrived and banned them all from the area immediately. She said that this is a common situation outside the centre, or at a local park. Finally one participant spoke about how they were banned from the shopping centre for three months for spitting on the ground, which they believed was an excessive punishment.



## CONCLUSION

This section has provided an overview of the types of experiences young people who took part in the research reported having with police. Based on the results presented here the following conclusions have been drawn:

- The most common way that young people experience police is through media representations. This highlights the importance of providing a balanced view in the media of the work of the police force, particularly with relation to interactions with young people.
- Experiences with police officers outside of law enforcement settings were more likely to be described in a positive way, suggesting that these interactions may be important in shaping positive perceptions of police from young people. These experiences also seemed to play a role in balancing out negative exposure young people experienced elsewhere, such as in the media.
- Although direct experiences with police enforcing the law were for the most part described by participants as positive, mixed or inconsistent experiences were also quite common. This is concerning, particularly given other apprehensions that were raised about the use of power and a lack of respect from some officers.

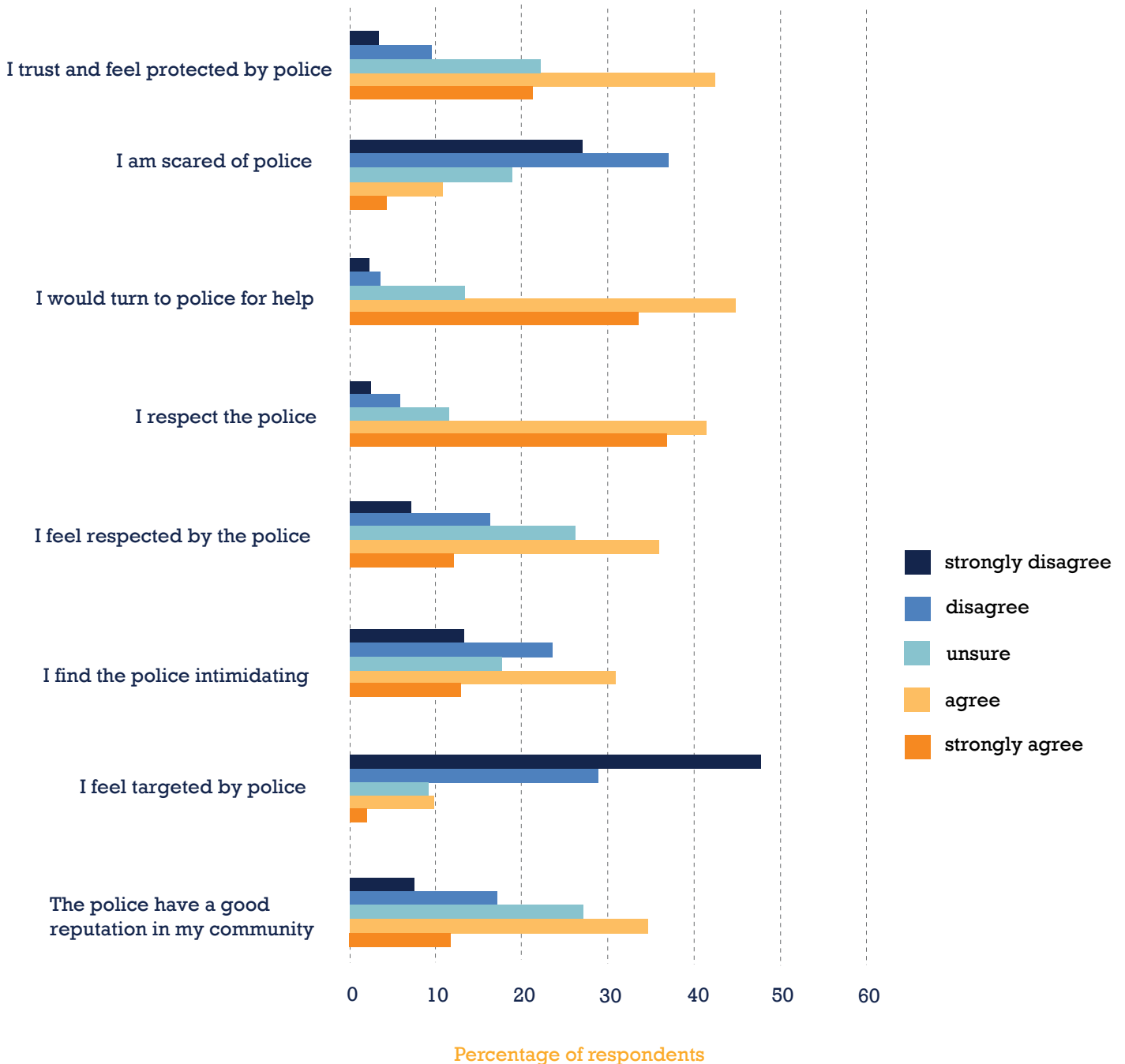
These conclusions will contribute to the recommendations made at the end of this report. The following section will consider young people's perceptions of police, drawing in places from the experiences discussed in this section.



# YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS OF POLICE

Young people were asked to respond to a list of statements about police on a five point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Participants also had the opportunity to express further opinions or comments following this question. The responses from all participants to each statement can be seen in Figure 2. The statements are then listed below, followed by a short analysis of the responses. This includes some comparison based on the experiences young people reported having had with police (as detailed in the previous section).

**Figure 2: Young people's perceptions of police**







## I TRUST AND FEEL PROTECTED BY POLICE

The majority of young people who responded to the survey said that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I trust and feel protected by the police” (64%). As one participant noted:

**“Law enforcement in Melbourne is exceptional. I always feel safe on public transport when the police are on the trains and around the city.”**

Although the overall sentiment here was positive, it is important to note that 36% of participants still disagreed, strongly disagreed or were unsure how to respond. Comments from young people who reported being unsure about this statement reflected the idea that they were singled out as ‘different’ by police.

**“The police were disrespectful to and questioned my brother’s respect of the law because of the colour of his skin, asking if it’s because he hasn’t been in Australia long, even though he has been here his entire life.”**

Responses also varied based on the experiences young people reported having with police. Participants who reported having been charged with an offence were more likely to disagree with this statement. Those who reported having been a victim of crime, or having observed a crime were less likely to agree with the statement than others in the sample, but were still overall more likely to agree than disagree.

There was no observable difference between young people from metro/non-metro backgrounds with regard to this question.

This finding was also consistent with the vox pops, where the majority of young people interviewed were of the opinion that police were doing their job, of the 20 interviewed 11 were of the perception that police were fulfilling their role and that they

**“do their job pretty well”.**



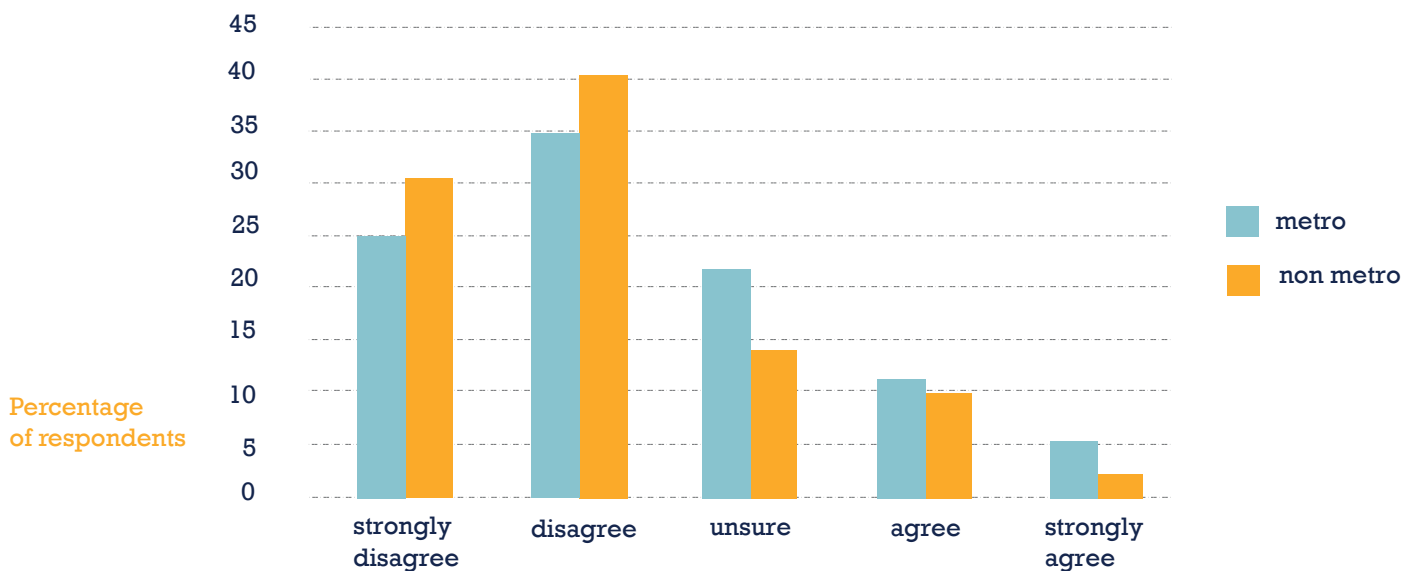
## I AM SCARED OF THE POLICE

The majority of people who responded to the survey disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement 'I am scared of the police' (64%). The remaining 36% agreed, strongly agreed or were unsure.

**“Police are friendly with us. They are protecting our community and all.”**

Young people who reported having been charged with an offence were more likely to report being unsure or agreeing with this statement than other participants, however disagree was still the most common response from this group. As can be seen in Figure 3 people in non-metro areas were less likely to report feeling scared of the police than people in metro areas.

**Figure 3: I am scared of the police**





## I WOULD TURN TO THE POLICE FOR HELP

The majority of people who responded to the survey agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'I would turn to the police for help' (78%).

It is disconcerting to note that 22% of participants fell into the category unsure, disagree, or strongly disagree. One participant noted:

**“I feel as though I might turn to police if I was in immediate danger, however would not otherwise seek help. I feel that police use power and intimidation unnecessarily.”**

It is for these reasons that this project is of importance to ensure that future interactions and the relationship between young people and police improve so every young person feels that they can turn to police for help.

Regardless of the experience participants reported having had with police they were more likely to agree that they would turn to police for help than disagree. Despite this, participants who had been victims of crime, or charged with an offence were less likely to agree with the statement than other participants although they still agreed overall.

Participants from non-metro areas were less likely to agree with this statement and more likely to be unsure than people in metropolitan areas.

## I RESPECT THE POLICE

The majority of people who responded to the survey agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'I respect the police' (78%).

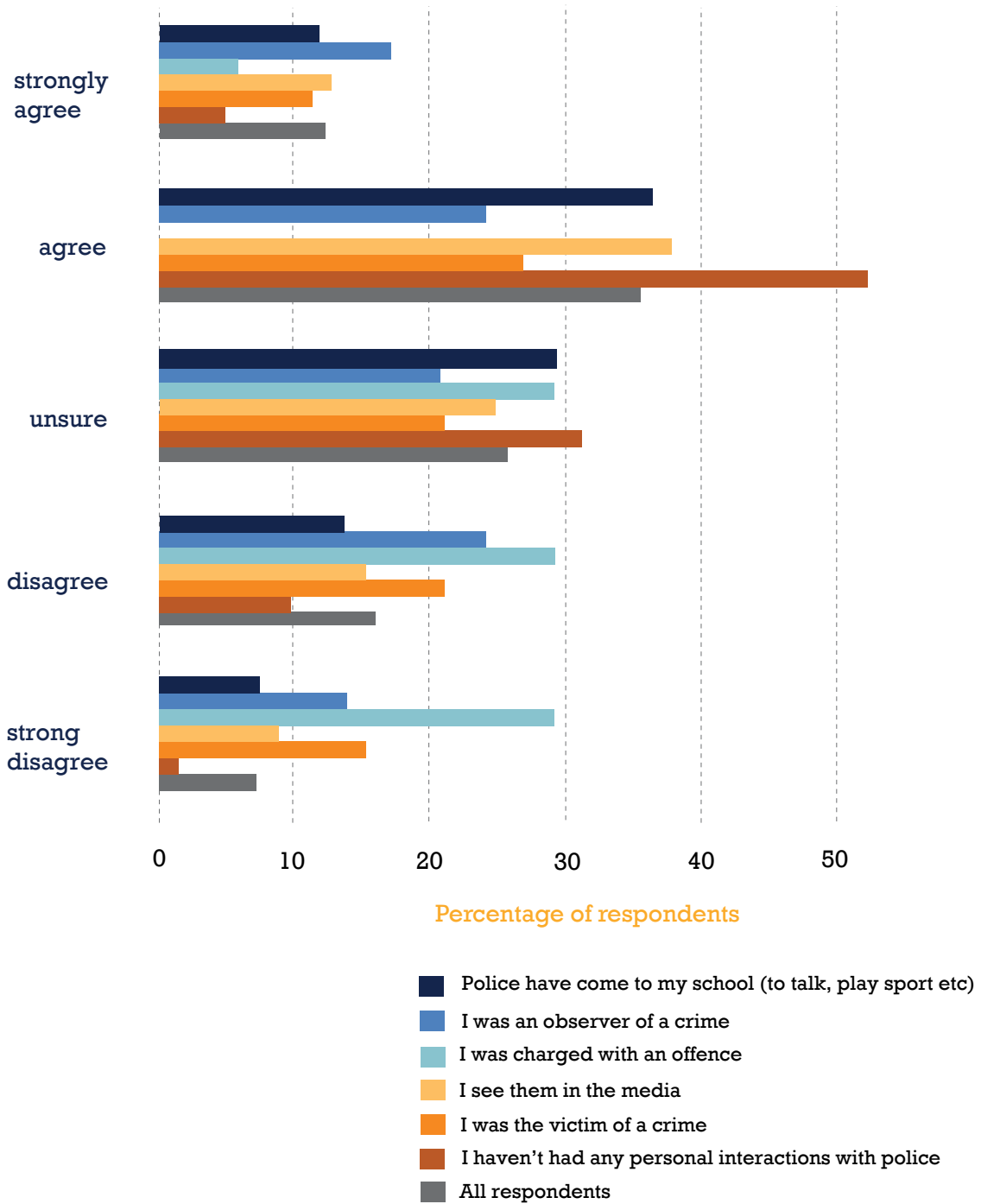
Participants who reported having been charged with an offence were less likely to agree with the statement than other participants. Overall though this group were still more likely to agree than disagree.

Participants who reported having had police come to their school were the most likely to agree or strongly agree with the statement 'I respect the police.'

Participants in non-metro areas were slightly less inclined to agree with the statement 'I respect the police' than participants in metro areas.



**Figure 4: I feel respected by the police**





## I FEEL RESPECTED BY THE POLICE

Although, as noted in the previous section, most participants reported respecting the police, they were much less likely to report feeling respected by them. Forty eight per cent of people responded positively to this statement (either agree 36% or strongly agree 12%). A further 25% of participants reported being unsure, meaning that 27% of participants responded negatively to this statement (either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing).

**“They help me when I need them but if they think I am in trouble they don’t treat you with ANY respect.”**

**“I feel that police always think the worst of you until you prove otherwise, and that they think all teenagers are the same.”**

As can be seen in Figure 4, responses to this question varied somewhat based on the experience participants reported having had with police.

Participants who reported having been charged with an offence were more likely to disagree with the state-

ment. Those who had no interactions with police, who had seen them in the media and who had encountered them in a school setting were the most likely to agree. For participants who reported having been victims of crime or observers of crime the number who agreed and disagreed showed no marked difference. Participants in metro areas were more likely to disagree with the statement than participants in non-metropolitan areas.

The focus groups at the youth centre provide some more in-depth insight into young people’s ideas relating to respect. The majority of participants in the focus group had a negative perception of police officers noting that police do not know how to treat young people properly.

Many participants feel like they are bullied by police and are not given respect. A young person stated that,

**“They [police] pick on me for no reason”.**

Another young person argued that,

**“Police have to learn how to treat people properly”.**

## I FIND POLICE INTIMIDATING

The most common response to the statement ‘I find the police intimidating’ was agree (31%), and a further 13% strongly agreed. Indicating that 56% disagreed, strongly disagreed or were unsure.

Those who had been charged with an offence were the most likely group to report finding the police intimidating, followed by those who encountered police through their school or were victims of crime. Interestingly finding the police intimidating did not necessarily equate

to being unhappy with the work they did. One participant who agreed with this statement commented:

**“They do a fantastic job.”**

Participants in metro areas were more likely to agree with this statement than those in non-metro areas and people in non-metro areas were more likely to be unsure.



## I FEEL TARGETED BY POLICE

Seventy eight per cent of participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. Therefore 22% of participants agreed (strongly agreed) or were unsure. Despite most young people disagreeing with this statement, there were some comments that reflected experiences of age based discrimination.

**“It seems when you are a youth in Melbourne that they immediately assume you are up to no good.”**

**“I have seen the police treat my peers in a way that would be unlikely to treat my parents.”**

Participants who reported having been charged with an offence were slightly more likely to agree with the statement than disagree.

There was no observable difference between young people from metro/non-metro backgrounds.

## POLICE IN MY COMMUNITY HAVE A GOOD REPUTATION

Thirty five per cent of participants agreed with the statement ‘police have a good reputation in my community’ and 12% strongly agreed making a total of 47% of people who responded positively to this statement. Therefore 53% of participants either disagreed, strongly disagreed or were unsure about this statement.

Participants who reported having been charged with an offence were the only group who were more likely to disagree with this statement.

Participants from metro areas were slightly more likely to agree with the statement.

This mixed view was also represented in the vox pops.

Some participants noted that if police were not around or available there would be “ferals” running around and that police make sure to “keep scum out of the area”.

Others noted that through their own personal experiences or experiences from peers there was a consensus that they just “don’t like police”. One participant was more specific and focused on the issue that police had too much power and abused that power. Another participant commented,

**“They are not around when you need them.”**



The example below from the focus group highlights young people's attitudes towards local police officers.

## CASE STUDY 3

During the focus group at the youth centre participants were asked to respond to a set of images relating to police and law enforcement. In response to an image of a cartoon police officer, all three of the participants that took part in this activity wrote "FOF", which stands for "f\*\*k off fast". The term "FOF" is negative and indicates that the participants do not want to be in an area that has police presence.

## CONCLUSION

This section has provided an overview of young people's perception of police. Based on the results presented the following conclusions have been drawn:

- The experiences young people have had with police considerably affect the young person's perception of police. This was more acute for young people who had been charged with an offence.
- While the majority of young people reported having respect for police this was not necessarily a two way street. When asked whether they felt respected by police young people's responses varied considerably more. This piece of information is crucial to being able to create positive relationships in the future and will be reflected in the overall recommendations of this report.
- Even though young people may overall trust and feel protected by police when asked about their local police officers, responses were much more negative, indicating that it is important for local police to have a stronger presence at the community level in order to gain trust and a good reputation.
- It was remarkable to see that overall young people do not find police intimidating and are not scared of police. Despite this, it is important to recognise that there are percentages of young people for whom this was not the case. It is the aim of this report to further tighten this gap so that young people regardless of their individual experiences can all have positive perceptions and interactions with police.

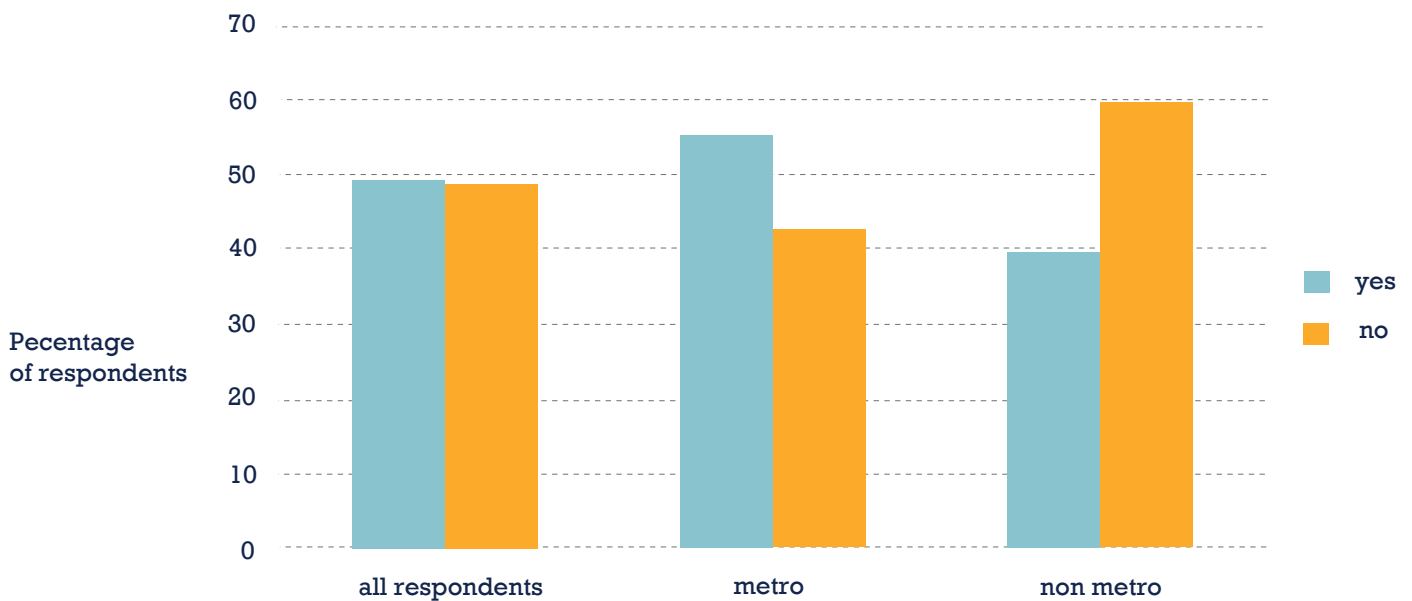
The recommendations of this report will focus on this area, especially in relation to fostering mutual respect.

# YOUNG PEOPLE'S IDEAS ABOUT PROTECTIVE SERVICE OFFICERS

The survey explained the Baillieu Government's plans with regard to the recruitment and deployment of PSOs on train platforms including the level of training provided and the powers the officers will have. It then asked respondents if they were aware of this. As shown in Figure 5 approximately half the respondents of the survey knew about PSOs before they took part in the survey, while the other half had no prior knowledge. Young people in metro areas were more likely to know about PSOs than young people in non-metro areas. This makes sense given the initial roll out of the PSOs will be in metro areas.

Participants were also asked what they thought of this initiative. Responses are presented in Figure 6, grouped based on whether participants responded positively or negatively to this question. Participants' perception of this initiative was extremely varied, with roughly equal number of participants feeling positively and negatively about the introduction of the PSOs on train stations. In addition to this some participants had mixed feelings and others felt unsure. The following section will give an overview of the types of responses that were typical of each of these categories.

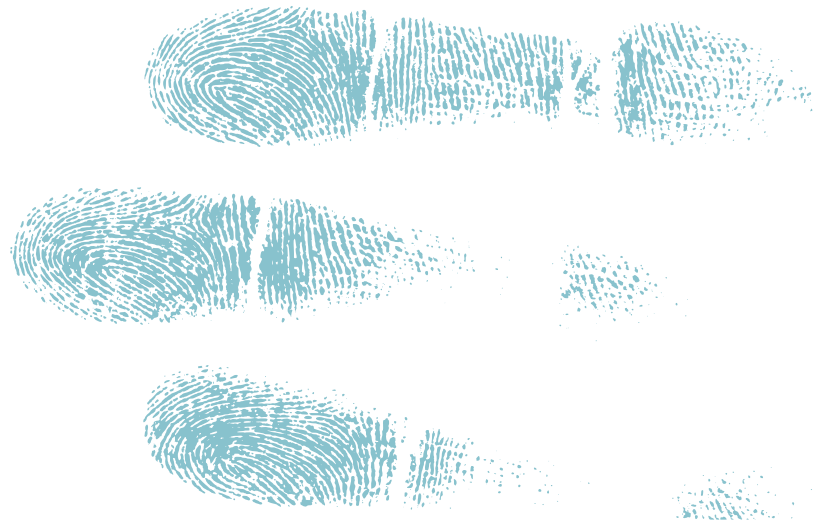
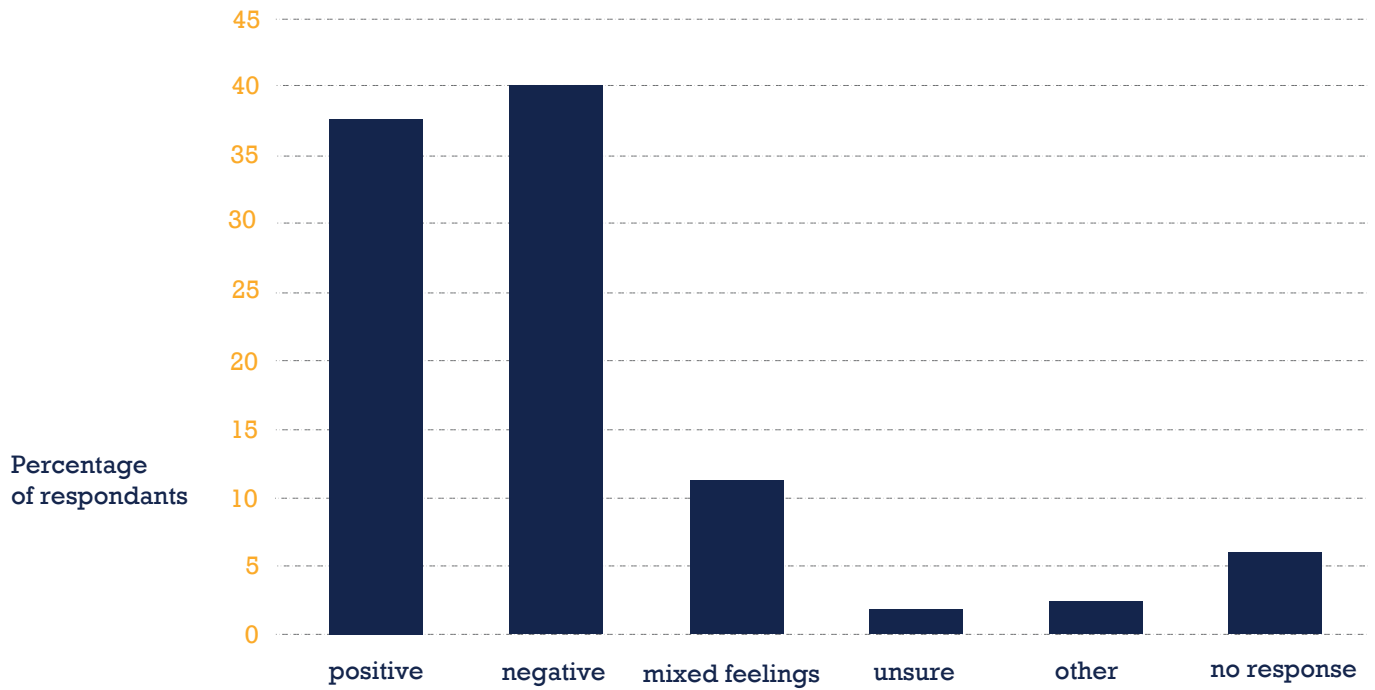
**Figure 5: Did you know about the new PSOs?**







**Figure 6: What do you think of the new PSOs?**





## POSITIVE

Young people who talked positively about this initiative felt that having PSOs will create a sense of safety. Participants indicated that train stations feel unsafe currently, especially at night.

**“I think this is good. We need people patrolling train stations, particularly at night, so people can feel safer using public transport.”**

**“It would be a good initiative as I often feel scared at train stations especially late at night.”**

This point was further emphasised with respect to young women, with some participants expressing a concern that train stations feel unsafe for females simply because they are females.

**“I think it is good as many stations are unsafe, particularly as a young female.”**



## NEGATIVE

Young people who talked negatively about this initiative expressed concerns around three interconnected themes: the level of training provided, that the officers would carry guns and potential for abuse of power.

Participants expressed concerns that the twelve weeks training provided to these officers is not enough to equip them to deal effectively with the types of confrontational situations that may arise at train stations.

**“Only 12 weeks of training? Scary.”**

**‘Having PSOs as an added security measure is a good step however they don’t have enough training considering the amount of responsibility they have. This includes having professional practice and not victimising certain groups of people.’**

**“A really terrible idea - putting too much power in the hands of people who may have very little experience dealing with conflict situations (nor enough training in dealing with young people, people with mental illness etc).”**

**“Nurses train for years before they are empowered to handle people’s lives and these PSOs will be put in high-use public places with lethal weapons?”**

Young people also expressed concern that the PSOs would carry guns.

**“It seems a bit serious for them to carry guns - I would prefer only people with full police training carried guns. It could make train stations very sterile and intimidating places.”**

Closely related to both these concerns was unease about the potential for the power given to these officers to be abused. For some participants, these concerns were underpinned by examples of abuse of power that they had witnessed from Metro Officers and bouncers:

**“I think that this is a terrible idea, the Metro transport officers already have a reputation of thinking that they are police and acting like it (e.g. using excess force on people).”**

**“Recipe for disaster, having seen footage of current Metlink officers using hard physical action when it is not required. I don’t think giving them guns and 12 weeks training will improve the train system, although it may free up some seats.”**



## MIXED FEELINGS

Young people who reported mixed feelings about this initiative echoed both the positive and the negative concerns outlined above. They agreed that the presence of PSOs would make train stations safer but expressed concerns about the level of training provided, the officers carrying guns and the potential for abuses of power.

**“I like the idea of PSOs at stations, as stations can be extremely dangerous, especially for me, as a female. Late nights on transport can be very intimidating. I do not like the idea of them carrying guns however - and I feel that 12 weeks of training doesn't allow these individuals to mature - they are likely to abuse their powers and position.”**

**“I think it's a good idea because there's always trouble with public transport, especially late at night. The PSOs will be really helpful, as long as they're there to help people rather than just looking for excuses to lock people up...”**

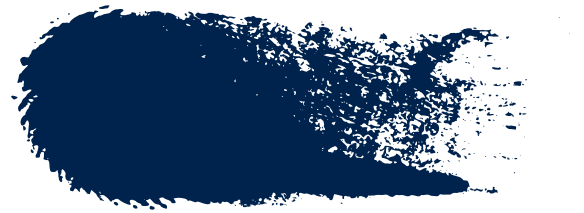
**“Interesting. I think it will make people feel safer on trains though I'm not sure about them needing to carry guns. I hope they don't form a bias towards any particular person/s...”**



## CONCLUSION

This section has provided insight into young people's level of awareness about the Baillieu Government's plan to introduce PSOs on train platforms. It also gives a sense of young people's ideas and opinions about this initiative. With respect to the introduction of PSOs on train platforms this research found that:

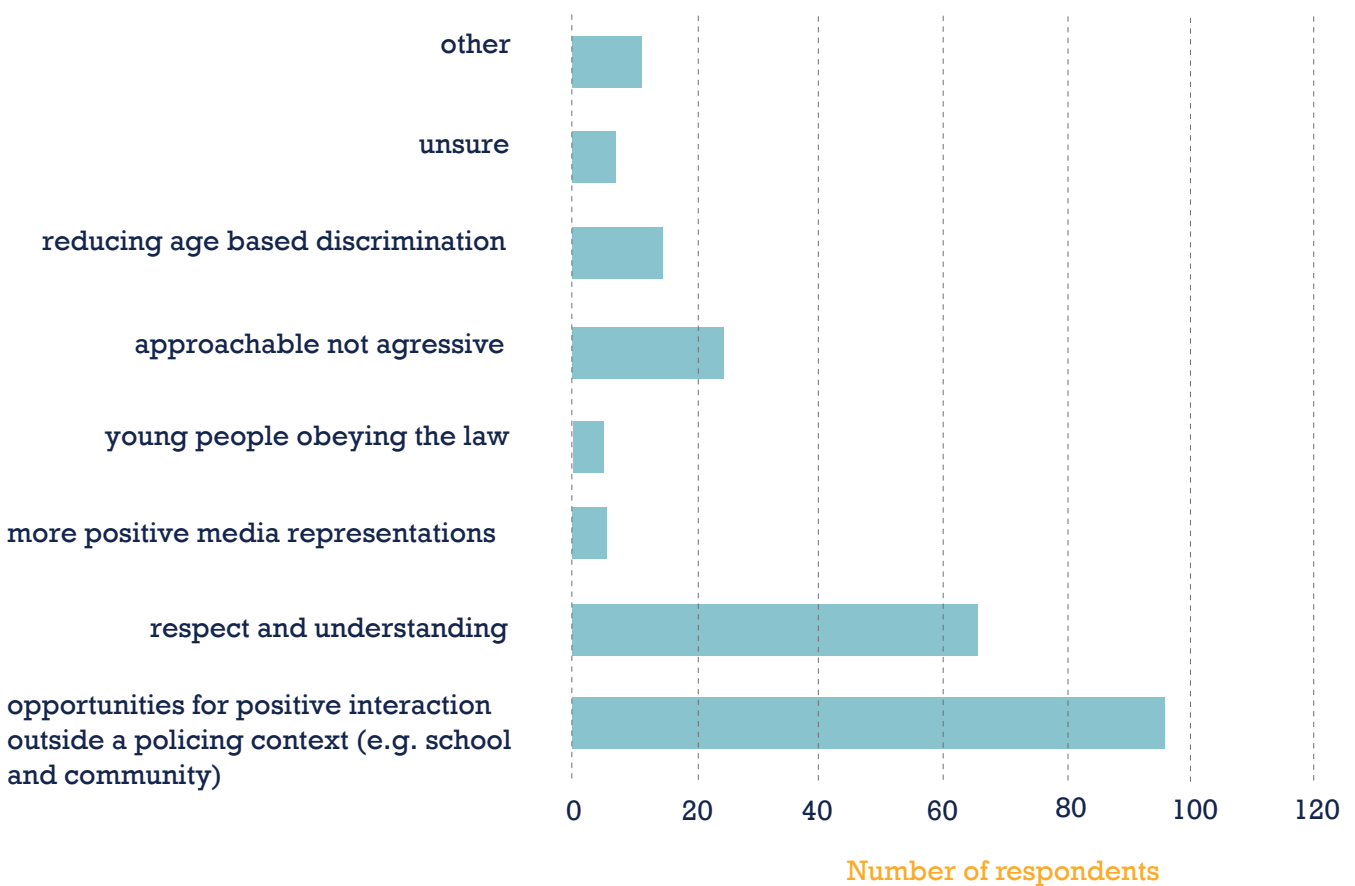
- Approximately half of young people are aware of this initiative. It should be noted that the survey was conducted in October 2011 and that awareness is potentially greater now that the roll out of new PSOs has commenced. Despite this, these findings still suggest a need to educate young people about PSOs, their powers and individuals' rights with respect to these officers.
- Participants were evenly divided as to whether they thought this was a good idea or not.
- Young people believe that the introduction of PSOs on train platforms will make train stations feel safer, particularly at night.
- Young people have concerns about the level of training provided, the officers carrying guns and the potential for abuses of power.



# CREATING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN YOUNG PEOPLE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

Young people responded enthusiastically to the question ‘What sorts of things do you think create positive relationships between young people and police?’ The 211 participants in the survey together came up with 231 individual suggestions (some participants made more than one suggestion). These suggestions have been grouped thematically and are shown in Figure 7 below.

**Figure 7: Strategies to improve relationships between young people and law enforcement officers**





As can be seen in Figure 7, the most common suggestion to improve relationships between the two groups was through providing opportunities for interaction outside of a policing context.

**“Visiting schools, maybe having some more “social” relations with police and teenagers especially. I think if there was more honesty between the public and the police then there would be more respect and trust for them.”**

Suggestions grouped under this theme included police in schools programs, police presence at community events and police involvement in community education programs (e.g. L2P program). Similar initiatives were suggested by participants in the vox pops and were seen as pivotal in addressing the real reason behind the conflict between young people and police:

**“Cops can get out into the community more, share their experiences where they come from, throw something like this (skate competition, youth fest) funded by their organisation”.**

This was seen as important in addressing general hostility that young people might have towards authority:

**“Some of us are just born with it, it’s the company that we keep, we develop hate towards not so much for police but authority figures in general.”**

One participant in the focus group suggested having a police officer visit the Youth Centre to get to know the participants and listen to what they have to say, would help to show the police that:

**“we’re not all bad people”.**

The second most common theme in the survey data, and one that was also raised consistently in the focus group and the vox pops, related to understanding and respect. Many participants saw this as a two way street with a need for ‘equal respect from both sides’. They spoke about police showing understanding and respect to young people:

**“Not all police treat the public properly, and need to further uphold their duty to ‘treat others as they would like to be treated themselves’.”**

In the focus group one participant suggested that:

**“They [police] should be working in partnership with us, not trying to get us locked up”.**

This suggestion was supported by other participants in the room, who believed that currently police are targeting young people to get them in trouble rather than trying to work with young people to prevent them from getting in trouble. Survey participants also suggested that it was important that young people showed respect to police and understood their role in the community:

**“Youth need to respect the police and recognise the importance and complexity of their job.”**



Aggression was seen as counter-productive by young people in all elements of the research, as were age based assumptions about young people:

**“If (some) police were willing to step down a level, stop pretending they’re everything because they have a badge and remember, they’re human too. There’s nothing worse than being in a bad mood, then having anyone standing over you and making you feel insignificant.”**

**“A little lessening of the ageist perception that younger people are mostly criminal, would really help. If people are treated equally then less friction would occur.”**

**“There is a generalisation that all young people are bad when it is only a percentage of us. They should get to know more young people from different backgrounds to understand them, reduce stereotypes.”**

There were a small number of young people who suggested that relationships would be more positive if young people ‘stay[ed] out of trouble in the first place.’ This was a minority view however, and most participants saw creating positive relationships between the two groups as a whole of community project.

**“Police and young people working together at a local level in identifying issues, inputting into policy making processes, working together in preventative/educational programs.”**

A final theme that was exclusive to the vox pops was that respect for the police within the community could be improved through faster response times when crimes were committed. They felt that the police could improve on

**“quicker responses, so we’re not waiting for ages in case something could turn real serious”.**

One participant explained:

**“we were waiting for two hours for police and no one showed up”.**

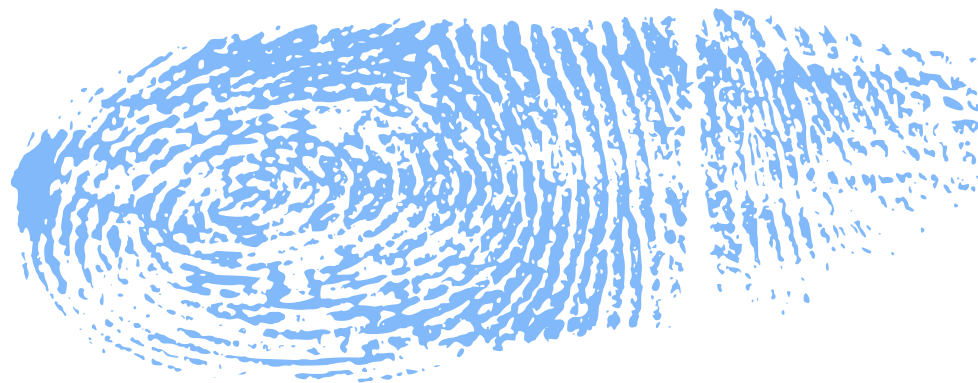




## CONCLUSION

This section has provided an overview of approaches that participants in the research suggested to improve relationships between young people and police. Based on the findings outlined above, it is concluded that:

- Opportunities to engage with police officers outside of a law enforcement context are an important means to breaking down stereotypes that young people hold about police and vice versa. This includes programs in both school and community contexts.
- Mutual respect and understanding are important to young people in a law enforcement context. Young people are prepared to show respect to police but in turn they expect to be respected and understood as individuals rather than judged based on age-based stereotypes.
- Young people want to work in partnership with police to ensure their communities are safe.



# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**This report provides insight into young Victorians experiences with police, their perceptions of police and their ideas to create positive relationships between young people and law enforcement officers. It highlights the interconnected nature of these three questions, with young people's experiences with police shaping their perceptions and both factors shaping their ideas about initiatives to shape positive relationships.**

**The recommendations outlined below are based on these findings and are divided based on three key themes that emerged from the research: opportunities for interaction outside law enforcement settings, mutual respect within law enforcement settings and positive media representations of police interactions with young people.**

## **OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERACTION OUTSIDE LAW ENFORCEMENT SETTINGS**

**We recommend that police increase their presence in schools.**

This could be done through addressing students or running programs with young people. This directly corresponds to the survey results where young people indicated that they had positive experiences with police when they were given a chance to meet with police directly at their school. This therefore helps to break down negative stereotypes for both police and young people.

**We recommend creating more opportunities for young people and police to interact in community settings.**

Getting to know police outside of a policing context is important in breaking down communication barriers between young people and police and could increase the likelihood that they will turn to police for help. Relationships could be developed through initiatives such as police presence at community events, such as BlueLight camps or AusKick programs. These initiatives should be available to all young people, rather than only as a directive for 'at risk' youth.

## **ENSURING MUTUAL RESPECT WITHIN LAW ENFORCEMENT SETTINGS**

**We recommend PSOs and police have more intensive training in regards to interacting and communicating with young people.**

This is especially important with regard to interaction with vulnerable young people, such as those experiencing mental health issues or homelessness, and young people from culturally diverse backgrounds. This training should highlight the power each interaction has to shape young people's perceptions of the law as a whole and the way that this can influence future liaisons.



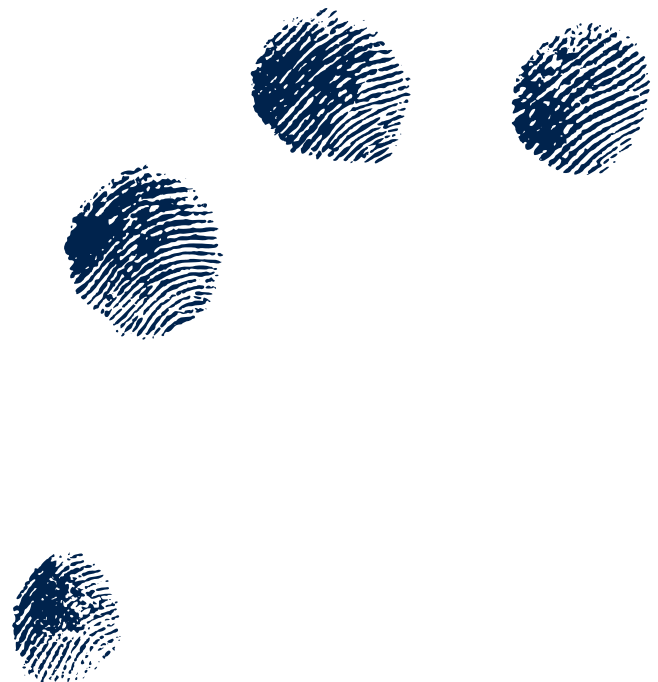
**We recommend a focus on initiatives that increase young people’s awareness of their rights with regard to the law.**

This is a process that both young people and law enforcement officers can be part of. For law enforcement officers, it may include things such as carrying a booklet outlining the rights of the individual for the person interacting with the police to utilize (e.g. ‘Police Powers: Your Rights in Victoria’). This could also be helpful in adding an element of transparency when working within the community. For young people, relevant information can be obtained by using resources like Youthlaw, Victoria Legal Aid and the LAWSTUFF website.

**POSITIVE REPRESENTATIONS OF POLICE AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE MEDIA**

**We recommend that the Victoria Police commence a positive media campaign.**

The campaign should focus on promoting their youth engagement programs, as well as promoting good actions that young people are doing in the community. This could occur through means such as sending out positive media releases, using social media tools to promote positive actions of young people, and through pages on their website promoting positive stories involving young people. This initiative could help ensure that young people have access to a more balanced view of the role of police in their local community.



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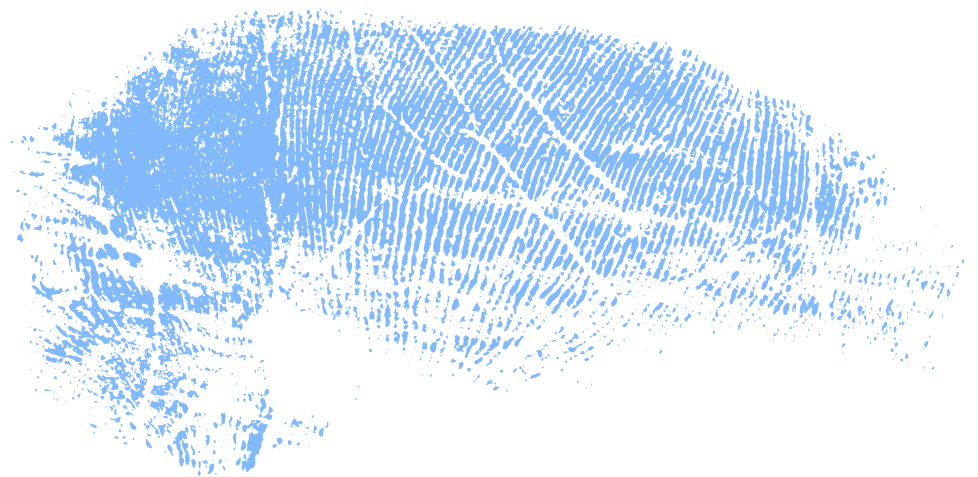
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# APPENDIX I - SURVEY

## RESEARCH PROJECT ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE LAW

We are the Youth Reference Group (YRG), a group of young people who work with the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria and provide guidance to them about issues that concern young people ages 12 - 24.

We are conducting some research about young people's experiences with police and other law enforcement officers. Please let us know about your experiences and opinions by filling out this quick survey. One lucky person will WIN A \$100 JB-HI-FI VOUCHER!!!

We won't share your answers with anyone. Your personal details will only be used to contact you if you win the prize, otherwise they will be deleted. If the survey brings up any questions for you about your rights with the police you can contact YouthLaw on (03) 9611 2412 or by visiting [www.youthlaw.asn.au](http://www.youthlaw.asn.au)

You can stop the survey at any time and if you don't want to answer any of the questions you can leave them blank. You can also contact us with any questions on 9267 3713 or [pdo@yacvic.org.au](mailto:pdo@yacvic.org.au). Thanks.

### 1. What is your postcode/town?

### 2. What personal experiences have you had with Police?

(Choose as many as you like by ticking the boxes below)

- I was the victim of a crime
- I haven't had any personal interactions with Police
- I see them in the media
- I was charged with an offence
- I was an observer of a crime
- Police have come to my school (to talk, play sport etc)

### How would you describe this experience?

### 3. Please rate the following by putting a cross in one box on each line.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
I respect the police					
I find the police intimidating					
I feel respected by the police					
I am scared of Police					
The Police have a good reputation in my community					
I trust and feel protected by Police					
I feel targeted by Police					
I would turn to Police for help					

### Further opinions or comments...



#### 4. What do you think could be happening in these photos? <sup>2</sup>



5. Soon there will be **Protective Services Officers (PSOs)** employed to police train stations in Melbourne. These officers will have 12 weeks of training and, although they are not police officers, they will carry guns and have powers of arrest. Did you know about this?

- Yes
- No

**What do you think about this?**

6. What sort of things do you think create positive relationships between young people and Police?

7. If you want to go in the draw to win the \$100 JB-HI-FI voucher please enter your details below.

(Your information will only be used to contact you if you are the winner. Your name will not be connected in any way to the responses within this survey)

Name:

Address:

Phone Number:

Thank you for completing this survey. If you entered the competition, GOOD LUCK!

For more information about Youth Reference Group and YACVic visit – [www.yacvic.org.au](http://www.yacvic.org.au)

**If you ran out of room to answer any of the questions you can write more here!**

2. Note: Time and space constraints meant we were unable to include the analysis of these responses in this report.



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