

Chief Commissioner Ken Lay
Victoria Police
GPO Box 913
Melbourne VIC 3001

2 February 2012

Dear Commissioner Lay

Our organisations write to congratulate you on your recent appointment as Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police. We trust that the experience and professionalism you bring to this role will continue the invaluable work of Victoria Police and create new opportunities for the organisation.

We are particularly encouraged by your comments responding to recommendations made by State Coroner Judge Jennifer Coate following the inquest into Tyler Cassidy's death. We feel that Victoria Police and our respective organisations have a mutual interest in implementing these recommendations as a matter of urgency.

Our organisations possess significant experience in the fields of criminal justice, mental health, youth services and the law, meaning we are well-placed to advise on the circumstances and issues of young people and people in crisis, as well as effective ways to engage with them. We share Victoria Police's interest in enhancing community safety and seek to do so through policies and practices that are smart, evidence-based and human rights compliant. We wish to express our support for the Coroner's recommendations and our willingness to assist wherever possible in your efforts to implement these.

To achieve this, we propose the establishment of a Taskforce consisting of representatives from the community sector, government and Victoria Police to drive a whole-of-government response to the Coroner's recommendations. The recent consultation with community legal centres on Victoria Police's use of force model is a pertinent example of the benefits of a transparent dialogue between our organisations.¹ We would welcome the opportunity to make such conversations a regular occurrence through a community-police Taskforce. We note that a similar body existed several years ago within Victoria Police's Youth Affairs Unit, providing an effective mechanism through which senior command and the community sector could regularly converse on issues of youth policing.

Such a Taskforce may also have utility as a review body for Transport Protective Services Officers, providing Victoria Police with community and government perspectives on the effectiveness and operation of PSOs.

Equipping Victoria Police Members to Respond to Vulnerable Young People and People in Crisis

¹ This consultation, initiated by Superintendent Michael Williams, took place 31st January 2012 at the Federation of Community Legal Centres.



One effective approach to community safety is to equip law enforcement officers with the skills to most effectively interact with young people and people in crisis (including young people in crisis), in line with Recommendation 1 of the Coroner. It was the Coroner's finding that young people are a discrete group warranting a tailored response from police. The Coroner also observed that critical incidents involving vulnerable young people such as Tyler were a 'foreseeable risk' and, thus, Victoria Police must have systems in place to safely engage with such people. The Coroner ultimately recommended the inclusion of a youth specific component to Operational Safety and Tactics Training (OSTT) and the inclusion of a component to assist in responding to people in crisis. Our organisations are willing and able to assist Victoria Police in the development and delivery of this training.

Recommendations for Youth Specific Training

We believe it would be beneficial for the youth-specific OSTT component to include:

- The importance of age in making a risk assessment when responding to incidents or planning operations, in light of emerging research on adolescent impulse control and decision-making capabilities.
- Information on non-statutory definitions of a 'young person'; that is, definitions focusing on cognitive and neuropsychological development in the 12-25 age bracket.
- Ways to identify a young person based on the physical, cognitive and behavioural characteristics of youth.
- The importance of trust and relationship building when interacting with young people, in particular young people in crisis.
- The issues and experiences of young people, in particular the high prevalence of mental health concerns amongst young Australians and the untreated nature of many of these concerns.
- Information on particular groups of vulnerable young people, such as culturally and linguistically diverse, Aboriginal and homeless young people, and the tailored response these groups require.
- Guidelines for appropriately utilising crisis response services when dealing with young people in crisis to ensure the safe resolution of critical incidents.

This training, being highly relevant to daily policing work, complements current OST Training, in particular the 10 Safety Principles, which already address principles of communication and trust. We suggest incorporating youth-specific examples into the OSTT curriculum and utilising expert trainers to enhance members' preparedness for interactions with young people, at a very minimal cost. We reiterate our offer to assist in implementing these recommendations.

We note that the recruitment and training of 940 Protective Services Officers is now underway, creating further opportunities for Victoria Police to trial youth-specific training modules as part of an OSTT package.

Recommendations for Training on Interacting with People in Crisis

It is our understanding that Victoria Police currently deliver a Vulnerable Persons Training Module to operational members, with input from a mental health reference group as to the content and delivery of this component. We are fully supportive of the ongoing delivery of such training to both new recruits and all other operational members and we would recommend ensuring that such training includes:

- The concept of crisis, including the likely characteristics and responses of a person in crisis, strategies likely to be effective when engaging and strategies that will not;
- Ways to recognise mental illness and a person in crisis, in the event police have not been provided with this information;

- Information on vulnerable groups, with young people constituting one of these groups, and the often co-occurring nature of these vulnerable states'
- The importance of communication, de-escalation, trust & rapport building, with the threat or use of force an absolute last resort;
- Conducting a risk assessment and planning a response with the person's potential state of crisis in mind;
- Guidelines for appropriately utilising crisis response services when dealing with people in crisis to ensure the safe resolution of critical incidents.

Additionally, we would encourage ensuring the availability of police members with crisis negotiation skills, given the high volume of critical incidents attended by Victoria Police that involve people in crisis.²

Monitoring and Evaluation of Critical Incidents and the Effectiveness of Police Training

In addition to the introduction of specific training content, we support the Coroner's recommendations regarding the necessity of continually monitoring adherence to the 10 Operational Safety Principles; the collection of data on critical incidents to improve OSTT training modules; and the post-OSTT assessment of police members.

Additionally, we would welcome continuous improvement of OSTT in response to emerging community issues and new research on best practice policing. There are a number of best practice guidelines from organisations such as 'headspace' on managing challenging adolescent behaviour and risks of self-harm and suicide. Such models would provide a strong foundation for Victoria Police's youth-specific training.

Proposed Actions to Progress the Implementation of the Coroner's Recommendations

We make the following recommendations regarding Victoria Police's response to the Tyler Cassidy inquest:

1. The timely and transparent implementation of the Coroner's recommendations by Victoria Police, including public distribution of information on changes to police training.
2. Greater inter-agency collaboration between Victoria Police and support services, for example the Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS), when dealing with young people in actual or potential states of crisis, with *all* members receiving training on the optimal use of such services.
3. Collaboration with experts on the development and delivery of training modules relevant to young people and vulnerable people.

To achieve the timely and successful implementation of the Coroner's recommendations, we propose:

1. The establishment of community-police Taskforce involving representatives from the community sector, government and Victoria Police to coordinate the response to the issue of safely resolving critical incidents involving vulnerable people.
2. A consultation process regarding OSTT content, with external stakeholders providing assistance to Victoria Police, including training resources and the recommendation of trainers experienced in working with young people and other vulnerable people.
3. The production of 6-monthly report card on the progress made in adopting the Coroner's recommendations, based on conversations with the Chief Commissioner and Victoria Police. This report card could also be made available to the Coroner's Court.

Conclusion

² In this regard, Professor James Ogloff's research into police responses to people with a mental illness may be appropriate. See <http://www.med.monash.edu.au/psych/research/centres/cfbs/project-primed/index.html>

We would like to take this opportunity to request a meeting with yourself or an appropriate representative to discuss these matters further, given our shared interest in the implementation of the Coroner's recommendations.

We look forward to working together with Victoria Police to achieve these outcomes and note the benefits that youth-specific training will generate for Victoria Police, for young people, and for community safety.

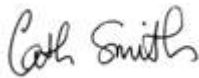
Yours sincerely,



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