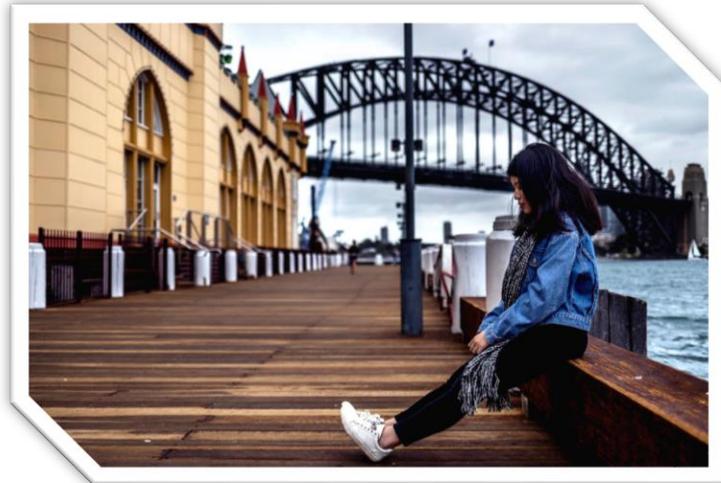


# Youth Work in Australia



I am both the Chair of CAYWA and a Board member of the Victorian Youth Work Association. The two roles speak to our similarities and our different contexts. This is a most unusual year for International Youth Work week but it does not lessen our enthusiasm.

I refer to Youth Work as both a relational pedagogy and an educative practice. When we consider what we do with this lens it adds context for Governments. Youth work is critical in the informal and non-formal learning space. Whether it be spending time in a youth centre or young people attending a sport and recreation program; both are learning opportunities that Youth Workers facilitate.



In Victoria young people have been hit hardest concerning employment in this pandemic. I am sure that this is a global phenomenon. I also understand that our different economies will impact in diverse ways on young people in the Commonwealth and their experience of the pandemic.

In Victoria, the role of the Youth Work Association is supporting a voice for youth workers and in turn vulnerable young people as well as the provision of professional development. Our professional development has had a focus on current issues that are emerging such as co-design of programs with young people, young people with differing abilities and trauma-informed practice. As we deliver some of this work we try and record it to put on our website for others to engage with. For us, the focus is always building the capacity of the industry.

Unlike some of our emerging Association colleagues, we do have membership guidelines that first and foremost privilege a Youth Work degree because there are 3 Youth Work degrees accessible to all who complete secondary education. I speak with my colleagues across the Commonwealth and everyone's circumstances are different depending on how youth work is delivered in your context. That doesn't mean building a professional association on qualifications was not divisive to some extent, nevertheless, we pushed forward as we wanted to *trumpet* our presence as a profession!

Having said that we do have an alternative category of entry that facilitates membership of experienced youth workers and those that have done a PhD in youth work. So we have tried to be accommodating without diluting the importance of a Youth Work degree that provides graduates with a framework of practice to work with vulnerable young people.

It is not only the framework of practice but it is also having content knowledge on the important issues such as mental health. Australia experiences some of the worst mental health statistics for young people. It is a surprising picture for a wealthy country but it is not unusual and many western countries have similar experiences with the rates of anxiety and depression staying stubbornly high.

We are also seeing disenfranchised and disengaged young people who, often as refugees and migrants to Australia, joining with others and executing some serious criminal behaviour. It is not enough for us to speak to structural barriers and poverty. It is also understanding how the world these young people have grown up in has desensitized them to violence. Movies, T.V., and most of all violent video games have all made violence a reality. We are certainly seeing it currently evolving on our streets where young people from specific communities are literally killing each other.

Of course, we have amazing young people especially in the social entrepreneur space and they should be applauded. But our focus is not on those that already have the social capital to achieve but on those that both the digital and economic divide threatens to leave them behind if we do not stand up and enable their voice to be heard. Youth Work makes a difference in young people's lives which is why I am *Ambitious for Youth Work*.

Professor Robyn Broadbent

Chair CAYWA

<https://www.caywa.global/>

Board member YWA Victoria

<https://www.ywa.org.au/>

