



# **DROP THE KNIFE SAVE A LIFE**

**COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS**



The Drop the Knife, Save a Life project was funded by the Victorian Government as part of the Victorian Government's Crime Prevention Strategy.

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# DROP THE KNIFE SAVE A LIFE COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

## Introduction

The 'Drop the Knife, Save a Life' initiative was created by Youth Activating Youth (YAY), a non-profit organisation that assists disadvantaged multicultural Australian youth re-engage in their communities. YAY aims to break the cycle of disadvantage, to bridge the gap that currently exists between different government organisations, non-profit agencies, and other services providers.

This resource kit was created in direct response to the issue of knife crime. YAY hope communities across Victoria will play a role in raising awareness among young people about the severe repercussions of carrying a knife, and its impacts, not only for themselves but also their families and the broader community. Youth Activating Youth commissioned a report, Drop the Knife: Community Conversations, with academic partners Victoria University, prepared by Dr John Martino of the Youth and Community Research Group, College of Arts and Education, Victoria University. The report detailed the outcomes of community conversations that were held in 2022 and provides much of the content within the toolkit.

Within this toolkit, we have created a range of resources that can be used by community groups across Victoria, to bring people together and discuss the issue of knife crime in their local area , leading to

- Enhanced understanding and awareness of the consequences of knife crime.
- Implement intervention strategies to address pathways to antisocial behaviour and thereby
- Mitigating the impact of knife crime and knife crime rates among young people.

By engaging the community and empowering young people, the project endeavours to foster a safer environment and reduce the impact of knife crime in society.

## What is Knife Crime

A record number of young people (aged 10 to 19) are now perpetrating violent crimes including robberies, assaults, sexual offences, and murders, according to the Crime Statistics Agency. Knives have also become a major contributor to the surge in violent youth crime. But children and young adults are increasingly becoming victims of knife assaults and murders.

As part of this project, YAY were helped by Gilbert & Tobin (a leading Australian law firm) to access information from Victoria Police, as a Freedom of Information request, relating to the incidences of Knife Crime in Victoria from 2017 to 2021.

In the 2018-19 financial year, 32 youths under 19 were treated in hospital for knife assaults. That figure skyrocketed to 142 victims in 2021-22, according to the Victorian Injury Surveillance Unit.

The consequences for stabbing someone may be time in Jail, or extensive community service, fines, diversion. Depending on your history of violence or crimes depends on the harshness of the consequences. If you are only caught with a knife but have not hurt anyone you are still breaking the law, however the consequences are less severe, you may be just fined, or given a warning if you don't have a reason to be carrying the knife. When Ali\* was caught and sentenced to youth detention for using a knife to commit an aggravated burglary, the impact of his crime was felt across his family and his community. Ali's mother was shunned at her local church, and her neighbours would not let their children play with Ali's siblings. His mother was scared to go out in public, such was the shame was brought on Ali's family.

\*Not Ali's real name.

## What are the implications for our communities?

Everyone deserves to feel safe in their local community, and as the instances of young people carrying knives increases, so does the chance that a weapon may be used simply due to its accessibility.

As a community we need to find ways to support the young people who carry a knife because they are fearful for their safety and engage with those young people who are at risk of antisocial behaviour that may lead to knife crime.

## What are some of the reasons young people carry a knife?

When YAY undertook its research with Victoria University, there were two key findings in relation to why young people may choose to carry a weapon.

The most common reason for young people to carry a knife is fear.

Young people fear being the targets of victimization, a weapon provides security and prevents vulnerability. Many young people state that they carry weapons to protect themselves from physical attack or being robbed and not to harm. Many of these young people have been victims of violence, have witnessed it or have been threatened with knives in the past. Others decide to arm themselves, only because they believe that other people in the school or local area carry knives.

The second reason why young people carry a weapon was about identity.

Young people are confused about their identity and where they fit. Be it the push and pull between cultural or religious identity and their need to be part of a collective, with friends or at school.

Often, young people are conflicted about which cultural, social, family, school, work, media identity they fit into. Wanting to be part of a collective can mean being part of a peer group that engages in risky behaviour. For example, 'if my friends are carrying weapons, I might feel the pressure to do the same'.

## We believe that community is the key

In 2022, YAY facilitated Community Conversations involving 10 Melbourne City Councils. These conversations aimed to proactively engage with the community regarding the ongoing impact of knife crime. YAY gathered community feedback, assessed the current impact, gained insights from key stakeholders, including Victoria Police, youth-based services, and faith/community leaders.

This was such a valuable exercise for YAY to undertake, and we believe that it will be just as valuable for your local community.

## Community Conversations are a wonderful way to share ideas and bring people together with a common interest.

*It is likely that there are many people within your community who have heard about the impact of knife crime or read about knife crime in the media. The research undertaken by Victoria University and Youth Activating Youth shows us that everyone will play a role in helping to stop knife crime. It is time to bring your community together and have a conversation.*

An important first step is connecting with your local Council or Shire, as they have dedicated staff who work specifically with young people.

You can advertise your Community Conversation in a range of ways, including using community newsletters, community newspapers, and contacting like-groups and organisations, and inviting members to join you.

- Word of mouth encouraging young people to attend
- You can extend an invitation to other local community organisations or local sporting clubs via their websites or through a club secretary.
- Social media can also play a role and posting a message on your local community Facebook group, if they have one, is another terrific way to connect with your community at no cost.
- Your local school may also promote the Community Conversation by including it in their school newsletter.
- You may also consider talking about your planned Community Conversation on local radio as another fantastic way to connect with your community.

When locating a space to hold your Community Conversation, ensuring the space is accessible with access to parking and public transport where possible, and with accessible bathrooms, will help guests feel welcome.

Working from a simple agenda for your Community Conversation can help you manage the time available and provide an opportunity for all parties to be heard, especially if you are inviting guest speakers to join the conversation.

## We recommend extending an invitation to people within your local area who can provide you with local insights and examples.

Where possible, we recommend that invitations are provided to the following list of organisations who may be able to help answer some of the questions that might come up in your Community Conversation:

- **Emergency Services representatives; Victoria Police and Ambulance Victoria**

Victoria Police and Ambulance Victoria are first responders to incidents within our community and are the first touch point in many cases when it comes to young people, and knife crime. Victoria Police have Community Liaison Officers who may be able to attend your Community Conversation and help answer questions about knife crime.

- **Local Youth Agency (contact details can be provided by your Local Council or Shire offices)**

Councils and Shires across Victoria deliver a range of programs and services especially targeted towards young people. Youth Workers within the Council and Shires also collaborate with local service providers. Having a youth worker attending your Community Conversation is valuable, as they can provide specific insights and examples that are relevant to your community.

- **Emergency Department (Local hospital staff, Nurses, Emergency Department Staff)**

Staff from your local hospital and primary care centers can provide insights into the physical impact of knife crime and the care needed for those affected. Staff may also have examples to share that will help educate the community on knife crime.

- **Local Principal/Department of Education Regional representative**

Speaking with a representative from your local school or education provider can also provide insights into ways that the community can support young people who may be disengaged or at risk of carrying a knife or committing a knife crime.

**By starting a conversation within your community, working collaboratively with service providers, and engaging with young people, together we can help keep disengaged and at-risk young people on track, so they can play a valuable role within their community.**

*Our YAY-led Community Conversations produced many suggestions on how to mitigate the issue of knife crime, including some of the following:*

**Increase community conversations** between Government Departments and agencies (including Victoria Police and Ambulance services), service providers, community organisations and young people and their families about issues in the community.

**Identify and facilitate employment pathways** including employment and training programs in the regions, for young people who have skills and training but lack opportunities. Employment can provide financial stability, responsibility, and purpose for a young person.

**Establish diverse recruitment policies** within the education system to ensure that there are more staff employed, or working as volunteers, that reflect the community where these young people are from. There are hundreds of culture represented in Victoria, from Indigenous and First Nations people to more recent migrants from countries across Europe, Asia and Africa.

**Design a community focused media campaign** that delivers the message that knife carrying is “uncool” to change the narrative, and educate on the impact of knife crime, such as only being able to see your family from behind bars.

**Hold events for young people**, that are developed and led by young people, giving young people a sense of agency and ownership in their local community.

**Establish ‘Drop the Knife’ boxes** so people can come and drop their knives. A similar program was successfully undertaken in the UK.



## Free Resources for use in your community

Youth Activating Youth have prepared a range of resources that can be used by your community or can be used to inspire your community to create your own message about knife crime.

### Knife Crime Poster

Speak with your local Council or Shire about where posters can be put up. Offer them as a resource to schools, Community notice boards, Neighborhood Houses or Community Centers, Public Library and other public spaces in your local area.

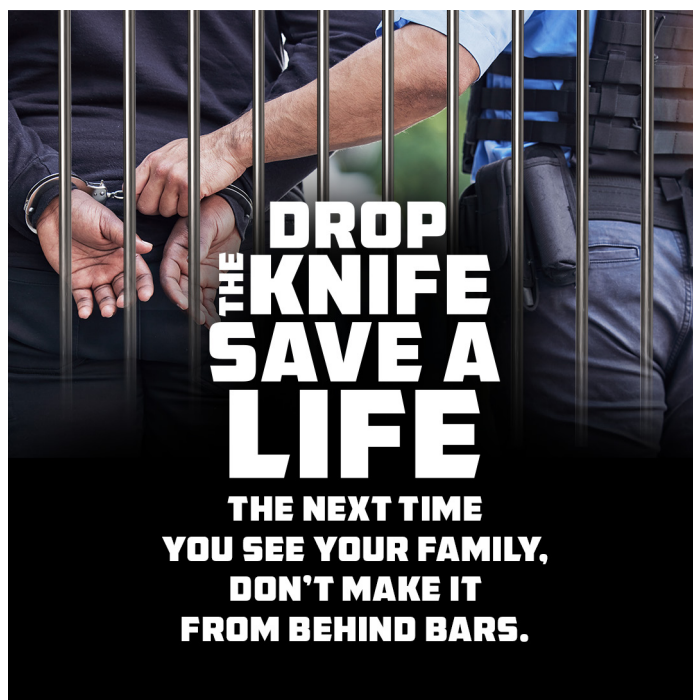
You can access a copy on our website by visiting [yay.org.au](http://yay.org.au)



## Social Media tiles

These can be used by individuals or community groups who wish to support the message of Drop the Knife, Save a Life. A social media post can become a conversation starter for a young person who may be at risk, and who can be supported by contacting a local youth worker or local youth services provider.

You can access a copy on our website by visiting [yay.org.au](http://yay.org.au)



## Local contact list – We know you will make the right call

This contact list can be displayed within your local community and populated with local youth services contact phone numbers, email addresses or websites. You are welcome to use this template or create your own.

You can access a copy on our website by visiting [yay.org.au](http://yay.org.au)



# DROP THE KNIFE SAVE A LIFE



## WE KNOW YOU WILL MAKE THE RIGHT CALL

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### Mental Health Services

**Monash Mental Health triage- Emergency  
Psychiatric Services**

Phone: 1300 369 012  
Address: 246 Clayton Rd, Clayton VIC 3168

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**Mid West Mental Health**

Phone: 03 9288 7000  
Address: 4A Devonshire Rd, Sunshine VIC 3020

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**North Western Mental Health Triage- Emergency  
Psychiatric Services**

Phone: 1300 874 243  
Address: 300 Grattan St, Parkville VIC 3050

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**Orygen Youth Health**

Orygen Triage (New referrals to OYH) Phone: 1800 888 320  
Orygen Specialist Program (General enquiries, current clients etc.) General Enquiries: Ph (03) 9966 9100

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**Beyond Blue**

Phone: 1300 22 4636 (24/7)  
Website: [beyondblue.org.au](http://beyondblue.org.au)

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**Lifeline**

Phone: 13 11 14 (24/7)  
Website: [lifeline.org.au](http://lifeline.org.au)

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**Suicide Call Back Service**

Phone: 1300 659 467  
Website: [suicidcallback.org.au](http://suicidcallback.org.au)

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**Mensline Australia**

Phone: 1300 789 978  
Website: [Mensline.org.au](http://Mensline.org.au)

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**Kids Helpline**

Phone: 1800 551 800  
Website: [kidshelpline.com.au](http://kidshelpline.com.au)

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**Embrace Multicultural Mental Health**

Phone: (02) 6285 3100  
Website: [multicultural@mhaustralia.org](mailto:multicultural@mhaustralia.org)

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**Foundation House**

Phone: (03) 9389 8900  
Email: [info@foundationhouse.org.au](mailto:info@foundationhouse.org.au)

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### Drug and Alcohol Abuse Services

**Centre for culture, ethnicity, and health- Multicultural  
AOD Team**

Phone: 1800 888 236 (24/7)  
Email: [mdapadmin@ceh.org.au](mailto:mdapadmin@ceh.org.au)  
Referral Form: [bit.ly/3EsH7Q4](http://bit.ly/3EsH7Q4)

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**Youth Drugs and Alcohol Advice (YoDAA)**

Phone: 1800 458 685  
Website: [yodaa.org.au](http://yodaa.org.au)

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**Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS)**

Phone: (03) 9415 8881  
Website: [ysas.org.au](http://ysas.org.au)  
Address: 1/131 Johnston St, Fitzroy VIC 3065

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**Western Health - Drug Health Services**

Phone: 8345 6682  
Address: 3 - 7 Eleanor Street, Footscray 3011

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**Cohealth - Family Drug Support**

Phone: 8345 6682  
Website: [cohealth.org.au](http://cohealth.org.au)  
Address: 215 Nicholson St, Footscray VIC 3011

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**Odyssey House Victoria**

Phone: (03) 9420 7600  
Website: [odyssey.org.au](http://odyssey.org.au)  
Address: 660 Bridge Rd, Richmond VIC 3121

### **The conversation starter**

A PowerPoint presentation that can be used by Community groups to help facilitate their Community Conversation. The presentation includes speaker notes, topic heading and suggestions for talking points. You can access a copy on our website by visiting [yay.org.au](http://yay.org.au)

### **Victoria University Research Drop the Knife, Save a Life.**

YAY commissioned a report titled 'Drop the Knife: Community Conversations', with academic partners Victoria University prepared by Dr John Martino of the Youth and Community Research Group, College of Arts and Education, Victoria University. You can access a copy on our website by visiting [yay.org.au](http://yay.org.au)

### **Gilbert and Tobin Research**

Law firm Gilbert and Tobin aided YAY in gaining access to valuable information and statistics about youth knife crime trends in Melbourne between 2017 and 2021. You can access a copy on our website by visiting [yay.org.au](http://yay.org.au)

If you have any questions or feedback that you would like to share, please contact:

## Youth Activating Youth

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Artwork by Shaie Designs