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Brisbane Youth Service tackles hidden form of homelessness with launch of new Couch Surfing Hotline

Brisbane Youth Service (BYS) is tackling a hidden form of homelessness with the launch of a new **Couch Surfing Hotline**, offering vital assistance to Brisbane's vulnerable young people and families.

Taking an innovative approach BYS will trial the Hotline for young people who are couch surfing due to homelessness. Young people will be assisted to access tailored support and explore pathways for moving into safe and sustainable housing.

The launch comes after research undertaken in 2018 by BYS in partnership with Griffith Criminology Institute attracted national media attention and revealed young couch surfers have consistently higher rates of poor mental health than any other group of young people seeking support from BYS, even those who are sleeping rough.

Families and carers who are concerned about young couch surfers can also access information and support via the Hotline, as well as community members who are providing temporary 'couch accommodation' to young people. Learnings from the trial will help shape services for this vulnerable group of young people into the future.

BYS CEO Annemaree Callander said young people who are couch surfing have also been found to have poorer engagement with support services and lower levels of family support.

"A couch is not a home. Couch surfing means staying somewhere temporarily because you have no safe or stable place to live. Couch surfing is the most common form of homelessness for young people in Australia," Ms Callander said.

Half of the homeless young people who come to BYS for support are couch surfing. 70% of couch surfers are young women and young people experiencing couch surfing are slightly more likely to identify as LGBTIQ+.

Ms Callander said couch surfing is a widespread, national issue with young couch surfers emerging as a mental health priority group.

"These young people have higher rates of both suicide risk and self-harming behaviour," she said.

The hotline will help improve the safety and wellbeing of young couch surfers and assist them to access support and facilitate follow-up and face-to-face visits.

The **Couch Surfing Hotline** will be officially launched on Wednesday, 9 October. The Hotline will be open Monday to Friday between 10am-2pm, and Wednesday 1pm – 4pm with a message service and call-back service available. 0402 526 965 is the number to call or text. For more information contact couchsurfinghotline@brisyouth.org.

The evaluated trial of the Couch Surfing Hotline was funded by the Queensland Mental Health Commission.

BYS has worked with vulnerable and homeless young people (aged 12-25) and young families in Brisbane and surrounding areas since 1977. More than 4,500 young people face homelessness in Queensland every night. For more information about the work we do to create new futures for young people visit brisyouth.org.

Join the conversation online with #HiddenHomelessness and #ACouchIsNotaHome.

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