

The Future of Youth Housing

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Contents

Parity

Australia's national homelessness publication

Published by Council to Homeless Persons

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Contributions to Parity are welcome. Each issue of Parity has a central focus or theme. However, prospective contributors should not feel restricted by this as Parity seeks to discuss the whole range of issues connected with homelessness and the provision of housing and services to people experiencing homelessness. Where necessary, contributions will be edited. Where possible this will be done in consultation with the contributor. Contributions can be emailed to parity@chp.org.au in Microsoft Word or rtf format. If this option is not possible, contributions can be mailed to CHP at the above address.

The 2021 Parity Publications Schedule

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June: Where to Now for Social Housing?
July: Learning from Lived Experience
August: 'Every Grain of Sand: Preventing Homelessness Deaths'
October: Rethinking Early Intervention
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Street art, Melbourne.

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Editorial

Jenny Smith, Chief Executive Officer, Council to Homeless Persons

Still a long long way to go



The imperative to intervene early to make sure that young people in our community have a home that is safe and well supported is clear. Without a safe home, young people struggle to remain connected to education, their health suffers, and for many this results in a lifetime of unemployment, and poor health and wellbeing.

Providing a safe home to young people to prevent an experience of homelessness, or to make an experience very brief, means young people have the best chance to bounce back from adversity, and to make a positive and well supported transition into adulthood.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the prevalence of youth homelessness prompted voluminous and ongoing research, investigation, and analysis of the causes and consequences of youth homelessness in Australia and beyond.

This research clarified that family conflict, family violence, and the impact of the trauma that follows, are all drivers of youth homelessness. It highlighted that young people living in poverty — with the associated unequal access to education and employment opportunities — are also more vulnerable to experiencing homelessness.

Alongside these factors pushing young people into homelessness, is the ever increasing difficulty of accessing housing that is affordable to those on low incomes. This is something that is horrendously problematic for young people who are both on our very lowest incomes and face discrimination in the housing market, just by virtue of their age.

The pioneering work of Chris Chamberlain and David MacKenzie demonstrated the value of early intervention in helping to prevent youth homelessness, leading to the establishment of the Reconnect program.

From the early 2000s, the Foyer model and Foyer-like approaches have become more prominent and have gained considerable traction and support from government. Nationally, the number of Foyers continues to grow, including in regional areas and particularly with an emphasis on education and training.



There is now a growing focus on the interface between specialist youth homelessness services and the work of mainstream youth and other community services 'in place'. The much-celebrated Victorian Geelong Project is an important example of a successful approach. Nationally and internationally it is being adopted and adapted in the context of different community environments.

Youth refuges are also an important part of youth homelessness responses, but are no longer considered adequate to be the sole or main response to youth homelessness. As many of the articles in this edition attest, youth refuges are an important crisis response, one that is only one part of a system response providing the necessary support and housing.

In this edition of *Parity*, Angeli Damodaran, Claire Taylor and Tracey Dodd propose an enhanced model of youth housing. They outline a 'wraparound model of youth housing to support long-term transitions to independence'. This type of model builds on the strength and work of existing models like the Education Foyer and Youth Foyer models.

Donna Bennett from Hope Street Youth and Family Services outlines the work of the First Response Youth Service model in stabilising young people in crisis. Donna makes it clear that this work is constrained by the lack of access for young people to sustainable and affordable housing, in either private housing market or in any form of social housing.

A number of contributors focus on the dearth of affordable housing options for young people at risk of homelessness, or seeking to exit homelessness, or indeed seeking to leave the crisis or transitional accommodation that is provided by youth homelessness services. Emma Bruce from Melbourne City Mission succinctly points out that '*long-term housing in both the private and public spheres has become increasingly inaccessible*'. This is an obvious source of ongoing frustration given the innovative work that is being undertaken by best-practice services. These services have had to develop programs and models



Street art, Melbourne

Photo by Anne Cabrié

to work around and attempt to compensate for this glaring deficit in affordable housing supply.

The point is well made that the aetiology of youth homelessness is not always to be found in housing issues per se. This valid point does need to be balanced against the fact that exits from youth homelessness and ending youth homelessness invariably have their foundation in obtaining and sustaining housing.

The private market has not, does not, and probably cannot, provide the affordable housing solutions needed by young people at risk or experiencing homelessness. Social housing is the only realistic option for a sustainable solution. However, as the articles by Shorna Moore, Sebastian Antoine and Kirra-Alyssa Horley point out, access to the affordable social

housing for young people, remains problematic given the absence of youth-specific social housing. Thankfully this edition of *Parity* shows that the work of articulating what the continuum of housing and support to end homelessness for young people should look like in Australia, is now well underway.

Acknowledgements

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Homelessness in Victoria: What is the Solution?

Kieran Crowe, Inquiry Officer, Legislative Council Standing Committees, Parliament of Victoria and Fiona Patten, Chair, Legal and Social Issues Committee, Parliament of Victoria.

The Parliament of Victoria's Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee tabled the final report for its Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria at the beginning of March this year. The report is the result of one of the longest and largest Committee inquiries conducted by the Legislative Council in recent years.

The Committee Chair Fiona Patten told *Parity*, 'when we began this inquiry, we knew that homelessness was the ultimate expression of disadvantage in our society and that to get to the bottom of it we would have to consult extensively.'

The Committee received 452 submissions and held 18 days of public hearings with 131 separate organisations and individuals, including those directly affected by homelessness. These included organisations in the housing, family violence, mental health, drug and alcohol and legal sectors, regional and rural bodies and government agencies in Victoria and overseas.

The Committee knew it was vital to hear directly from people experiencing homelessness so they had a say in what could be done to improve homelessness services. However, it was mindful that it is not necessarily simple for people experiencing homelessness to participate in the online submissions process.

'Luckily, the Council to Homeless Persons stepped in to help us. They arranged forms for people at homelessness access points to tell us about their

experiences and let us know where the system was failing them.'

Two huge events shaped the course of the inquiry throughout 2020: first the bushfires of 2019-20, and then the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

'We were lucky to be able to travel to Wangaratta before the onset of COVID-19 to hear about those who lost their homes in the fires in the north-east. The resilience shown by the affected communities was very moving and we know they will continue to rebuild and recover.'

The COVID-19 pandemic was a watershed moment for the homelessness sector. The early stages of the pandemic saw rough sleepers provided with emergency hotel accommodation to keep them sheltered in light of escalating case numbers.

'COVID-19 had such a profound impact on the mindset of everyone in the homelessness sector. We saw

that, for the first time, some forms of homelessness could be ended in a matter of weeks if the Government had sufficient will to do so.

'That period of stability for people in emergency accommodation has had such a beneficial effect. Instead of being moved around from crisis accommodation to rooming houses and motels, people had a secure place to call home and a shot at focussing on the factors that will help them to maintain housing in the future.'

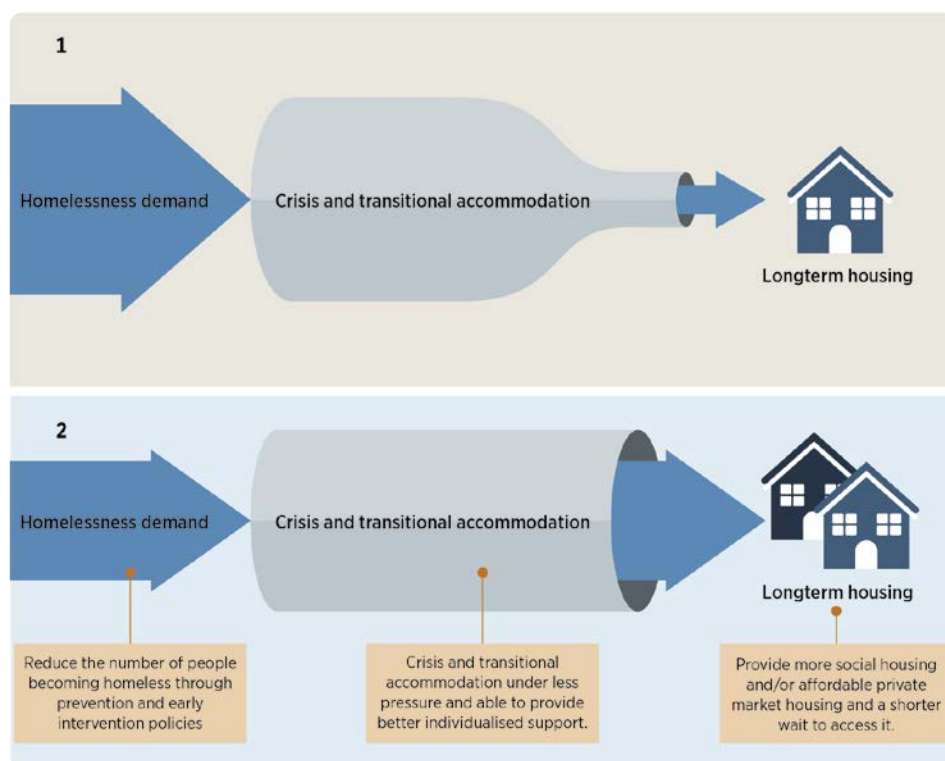
Prior to COVID-19, the Committee was travelling around Victoria to hear about the unique issues in each part of the state that were contributing to homelessness. Once the State of Emergency was declared, the Committee switched to holding online hearings so it could still hear from people across Victoria.

'Homelessness is not just a Melbourne issue. Each and every part of the state has people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness and the issues that lead them there are unique. We felt it was so important to continue our hearings so that the experiences of people from regional Victoria could feed into our recommendations.'

The Committee made 51 recommendations to the Victorian Government about how homelessness can be prevented and treated.

The evidence presented to the Committee showed that overall, the sector was underfunded and much of its limited resources were used to meet the most urgent needs of people seeking crisis accommodation.





'There was not enough of a focus on preventing people from reaching that crisis point. We know that preventing the trauma of homelessness has far better outcomes for individuals and it saves the Government money in the long run.'

In addition, the Committee heard there was a serious lack of long-term accommodation for people experiencing homelessness.

'The lack of long-term accommodation was creating a bottleneck in the system. People who needed help were only able to access crisis accommodation because there were few other options.'

The Committee decided on a dual approach to break the cycle of homelessness that would see more of a focus on early intervention services as well as the provision of more secure long-term housing.

Fixing the Bottleneck: A Change in Focus From Crisis Accommodation to Early Intervention and Long-term Housing

'Some of the early intervention services we already have in place are working well, such as the Private Rental Assistance Program which provides help for disadvantaged people to stay in their rental property. We need to expand access

to these kinds of services to help people who experience temporary setbacks stay in their home.'

One early intervention program the Committee studied was the Community of Schools and Services (COSS) Model. It aims at identifying disadvantaged young people at risk of homelessness to keep them engaged in school and with their community. Engagement in education is a predictor in gaining employment, both of which are key protective factors against homelessness.

'The beauty of the COSS model is that it utilises the strengths of local communities to support disadvantaged young people to make positive decisions around continuing education and engaging with their community. The ultimate goal is to see these young people lead stable, productive lives and the COSS model gives them a better chance to do that.'

The other key aspect to fixing homelessness is the provision of more long-term secure housing. This includes public housing first and foremost, but also community housing and affordable housing. The Committee heard that long-term housing is both a prevention and a cure when it comes to housing.

'Provision of secure, long-term housing is the key policy that will

help to end homelessness. Social housing gives people the security to address the issues that led to their homelessness. It gives them a chance to pursue education or employment. Goals that are very difficult to achieve when cycling through rooming houses or motels.'

In 2020, the Victorian Government announced the biggest social housing building program in the state's history. The program, called the *Big Housing Build*, will see more than 12,000 social and affordable homes built.

'I commend the Victorian Government on their decision to commission the Big Housing Build. It will make a huge difference in the lives of many disadvantaged Victorians. Unfortunately, decades of underinvestment in social housing mean that Victoria will still not meet the national average of social housing as a proportion of total housing once these homes are built. More needs to be done to meet the demand for social housing into the future.'

The Committee made a number of recommendations regarding the provision of long-term housing, including the provision of more social housing to meet the national average and the need to consider mandatory inclusionary zoning in new major housing developments. Pop-up housing, and the use of surplus government land and buildings should also be considered to meet the housing needs of disadvantaged Victorians.

'We know that homelessness is solvable. We need more early intervention services to prevent homelessness and a concerted housing-led effort to provide a roof over the head for those who need our help.'

'It is not only solvable but the Committee also recognised that it is a fundamental human right and as such we have recommended that the right to housing be incorporated into Victoria's charter of human rights.'

'The Victorian Government has until September 2021 to consider the recommendations in our report and we hope they will be taken up so that people experiencing homelessness can live with the dignity they deserve.'

Introduction: A Data Overview from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

Young People Needing Support from Homelessness Services

Jodi Coppin, Housing and Homelessness Reporting and Data Development Unit,
Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

In 2019-20, almost 42,400 young people aged 15 to 24 presented alone to Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) for assistance, accounting for 15 per cent of all SHS clients. Of these young people, around two in three (65 per cent or 27,400) needed some type of accommodation or were seeking assistance to maintain their housing tenure (33 per cent or 14,100). While youth homelessness does not always stem from a lack of housing,¹ the need for accommodation or a housing crisis is one of the main issues for young people seeking assistance from Specialist Homelessness Services.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), around 27,700 young people aged 12 to 24 were experiencing homelessness on Census night in 2016, making up around 24 per cent of the total homeless population.² Youth homelessness is likely to be underestimated in Census-based estimates, as many others are in 'hidden homeless' situations.³ For example, those who are 'doubling up' (one family living with another) or couchsurfing (living in garages, at a friend

or relative's place, or sleeping in temporary shelter without guarantee of continued residency or permanency) are difficult to estimate because of the transient nature of couchsurfing and the fact that young couchsurfers often do not classify themselves as homeless.

Specialist Homelessness Services Clients

The Specialist Homelessness Services collection includes data on all people who present to services for assistance, not all people who are currently experiencing or at risk of homelessness.⁴

- In 2019-20, almost 290,500 people received support from SHS agencies, most (57 per cent) were housed but at risk of homelessness upon presentation, and of these, most were living in private or other housing (61 per cent) or public or community housing (24 per cent).
- Two in five (44 per cent or almost 126,200 clients) were aged under 25 years, with 17 per cent aged under 10.

Young People Presenting Alone

Young people presenting alone are defined as any client aged 15 to 24 who presented to an SHS agency alone in their first support period in a financial year.

In 2019-20, almost 42,400 young people aged 15 to 24 presenting alone to SHS agencies received assistance. Half (51 per cent) of all young people presenting alone were known to be experiencing homelessness at first presentation, with almost one in three (29 per cent) couchsurfing (higher than the overall SHS population, 17 per cent) and a further eight per cent rough sleeping (lower than the overall SHS population, 10 per cent). Of those who were housed but at risk of homelessness, one in three (33 per cent) were in private or other housing (compared with 39 per cent of the overall SHS population), while one in 10 (10 per cent) were in public or community housing (compared with 15 per cent of the overall SHS population).

Table 1: Service use over time for young people presenting alone, 2015-16 to 2019-20

| | 2015-16 | 2016-17 | 2017-18 | 2018-19 | 2019-20 |
|--------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Number of clients | 44,621 | 44,197 | 43,180 | 42,960 | 42,387 |
| Proportion of all SHS clients | 16 | 15 | 15 | 15 | 15 |
| Rate (per 10,000 population) | 18.7 | 18.3 | 17.6 | 17.2 | 16.7 |
| Length of support (number of days) | 44 | 47 | 49 | 54 | 55 |
| Average number of support periods | 1.8 | 1.8 | 1.9 | 1.8 | 1.9 |
| Proportion receiving accommodation | 34 | 31 | 31 | 31 | 31 |
| Median number of nights accommodated | 41 | 44 | 45 | 45 | 43 |

Source: AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services, 2015-16 to 2019-20

Additional characteristics of young people presenting alone to Specialist Homelessness Services for assistance in 2019–20 include:

- The majority (63 per cent) were female.
- Around one in four (26 per cent) were aged 15 to 17 years with the remainder aged 18 to 24 years.
- Over one-quarter were Indigenous (28 per cent).
- More than half (58 per cent) were returning clients. This was most prevalent for those aged 18 to 24 years (80 per cent) compared with those aged 15 to 17 (66 per cent).
- Young people presenting alone made up 15 per cent of all SHS clients but accounted for 73 per cent of all SHS clients aged 15 to 24.
- The largest number of young people presenting alone accessed services in Victoria and New South Wales (both around 13,700 clients).

Service Use by Young People

There has been little change over time in the number and proportion of young people presenting alone however the rate of young people presenting alone has fallen (Table 1). There has been an increase in the level of service use by young people. In 2015–16, young people received on average a median of 44 days of support; by 2019–20, this had increased to a median of 55 days of support. The median number of nights of accommodation

has also increased over time from 41 in 2015–16 to 43 in 2019–20 (compared with 33 in 2015–16 and 28 in 2019–20 for all SHS clients).

Housing Services Needed and Provided

Young people presenting alone had a higher need for accommodation compared with all SHS clients. Despite this, young people were less likely than all SHS clients to be provided short-term or emergency accommodation and slightly more likely to be provided medium-term/ transitional housing or long-term housing, although the proportion of young people presenting alone who were provided accommodation remains low (Table 2).

Additional housing-related services needed by young people presenting to services alone for help included:

- assistance to sustain tenancy or to prevent tenancy failure or eviction (33 per cent needed this service and it was provided to 82 per cent of those needing it)
- assistance to prevent foreclosures or for mortgage arrears (one per cent needed this service and it was provided to 62 per cent of those needing it).

Housing Outcomes for Young People Receiving SHS Support

There were around 30,900 clients who finished support during 2019–20. Of the almost 24,300 clients with a known housing situation at the end of support more were housed than were experiencing homelessness. Of the 11,700 clients who started support at risk of experiencing homelessness

most (87 per cent) were assisted to avoid homelessness. Of those who began support experiencing homelessness, around a third (36 per cent) were not experiencing homelessness at the end of support. These trends indicate that by the end of support, many young people who presented alone to SHS agencies achieved or progressed towards a more positive housing solution.

Where to From Here?

The SHS data collection is limited to those clients seeking assistance, it does not report on all young people who may be experiencing homelessness, or all of those facing housing insecurity. Linking this data to other sources — for example, information on rent assistance, income support, or social housing — would provide more comprehensive information on people's circumstances, journeys, and outcomes. In addition, further work on identifying and improving the estimation of homelessness, particularly youth homelessness, is important to facilitate transparent and reliable measures that will inform effective policy and service responses.

Endnotes

1. Moore S 2017, *Couch surfing limbo: legal, policy and service gaps affecting young couch surfers and couch providers in Melbourne's west*, WEStjustice, Melbourne
2. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2018, *Census of population and housing: Estimating homelessness, 2016*. Cat no. 2049.0, ABS, Canberra.
3. Ibid.
4. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2020, *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2019–20*, AIHW <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/contents/summary>.

Table 2: Accommodation services needed and provided (per cent), 2019–20

| Service | Needed | | Provided (as per cent of those who needed it) | | Neither provided or referred | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|-----------------|---|-----------------|------------------------------|-----------------|
| | Young people | All SHS clients | Young people | All SHS clients | Young people | All SHS clients |
| Accommodation provision | 64.6 | 58.8 | 48.1 | 50.5 | 35.7 | 33.6 |
| Short-term or emergency accommodation | 42.5 | 38.9 | 51.6 | 59.0 | 36.4 | 30.8 |
| Medium term/transitional housing | 40.0 | 29.3 | 26.4 | 25.8 | 55.3 | 56.5 |
| Long-term housing | 44.4 | 38.5 | 4.3 | 3.5 | 73.0 | 70.9 |

Source: AIHW Specialist Homelessness Services, 2019–20

Chapter 1: The Youth Housing Crisis: Sources and Issues

The Dual-edged Sword of the 'Homeless in Hotels' Program

Brendan Pearl, Senior Clinician, Substance Use and Mental Illness Treatment Initiative, NorthWestern Mental Health, Senior Practitioner, Homeless Youth Dual Diagnosis Initiative, Hope St Youth and Family Services and Holly Clarkson, Senior Clinician, Substance Use and Mental Illness Treatment Initiative, NorthWestern Mental Health, Senior Practitioner, Homeless Youth Dual Diagnosis Initiative, Melbourne City Mission

With much relief from the sector, people who were rough sleeping in 2020 were placed into vacant hotels as part of the Victorian Government's response to COVID-19 — the 'Homeless in Hotels' program. More excitingly, in July 2020 the Victorian Government announced an extension of the hotel funding arrangements and the plans to lease large numbers of private rental properties while social housing units were being built.¹ This has, mostly, helped.

The Homeless Youth Dual Diagnosis Initiative (HYDDI) has been written about in *Parity* over a number of years. This past year, the initiative was fortunate to receive news that the program would receive permanent funding instead of the year-to-year funding that had been in place for the previous decade. For those who have not heard of the program, it is a partnership between youth Specialist Homelessness Services and clinical Area Mental Health Services. Our aim is to jointly support the capacity of the

youth Specialist Homelessness Sector to respond to mental health and substance use issues amongst young people, and to provide specialist clinical support to young people who are engaged with the sector.

The housing sector and the Victorian Government's responses to COVID-19 in 2020 provided many young people like Kara the opportunity to experience some housing stability. The simple knowledge that they could remain in one place,

Kara's Story

'Kara' (not her real name) has had a chequered housing history for most of the two years that she has been engaged with HYDDI. Her complex mental health needs and substance use have precluded her from maintaining placements in refuge settings. She is not eligible for most other housing programs because, as a New Zealand citizen, she is not eligible for unemployment benefits, despite having been living in Australia for more than 10 years and growing up largely in the out-of-home-care sector.

Like many young people experiencing homelessness, her mental health is not 'severe enough' to qualify her for specialist mental health supported accommodation. Her main non-professional 'supports' [*and I place that word in quotation marks very deliberately*] have been male partners who have been controlling and abusive.

Like others residing in the hotels,^{2,3} Kara is terrified of what will happen when the scheme wraps up. Kara herself has noticed an improvement in her mental health which, as much as it may be due to the long-term work she has done with our program, is overwhelmingly attributable to the security she experiences in a stable hotel room.

But this improvement is tempered, because at times the hotels are just as marginal as rooming houses, caravan parks, or squats. Her access to communal cooking facilities and laundry is cut off at a moment's notice. One day, *'the dryers have been set on fire'*. Another day, *'the stove is broken'*. She is told to use local coin laundries, but without an income, that option seems unlikely. Three people have died in the hotel where she is staying over the past few months. Her neighbour, by suicide. One, by avoidable overdose. The last,

cause unknown. She knew them all. Emergency services are a regular attendee to the hotel to serve warrants, respond to overdoses, or arrest perpetrators. Kara is very articulate about her surroundings: *'This is like rough sleeping, the same people with the same issues, the only difference is that there's a security guard'*. Since she is ineligible for income support, Kara has to rely upon casual paid employment. But she cannot safely attend work when her neighbours are knocking on her door all night asking for cigarettes or to use her phone.

Kara is also very articulate about her position: *'I'm not ungrateful for being placed here, I know that it costs money, I'm just scared to be here but I'm scared that if I turn down [an offer] they'll kick me out onto the street'*. In two years, this is the most reflective Kara has been — a testament to the improvement she has experienced having been able to stay in one place for months.

because of promised funding arrangements for the hotels, led to improvements in their mental health.

The importance of stable housing in promoting recovery from long-term poor mental health has been recognised by the recent 'Royal Commission into Victoria's Mental Health System'.⁴ But this stability has been tempered by the fact that problems that existed on the street have largely moved into the hotels.

We would like to hope that in Kara's case can demonstrate the important role that specialist youth housing

services play being able to provide trauma-informed and immediate connections for people in need. We hope that it can also underlie a call for an expansion of purposefully designed youth refuge accommodation with integrated support options. This would enable people like Kara to move from homelessness into housing while simultaneously addressing trauma-related complex co-occurring mental health and substance use issues.

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A Couch is Not a Home: New Ways of Understanding and Assessing Risks with Young People Who Are Couchsurfing

Ratna Beekman, Jacqui Byrne, and Rhianon Vichta-Ohlsen, Brisbane Youth Service

Couch surfing is the most common, if the least visible, form of homelessness for young people in Australia. Faced with a lack of affordable, safe, or crisis housing options, couchsurfing is often assumed to be a safer option than other forms of homelessness. Since young couchsurfers are often considered 'housed', albeit temporarily, they commonly become viewed as a lower priority for support. Similarly, qualitative research with couch-surfers suggests that many do not seek housing support because they do not view themselves as homeless, or as 'deserving' as those who fit the rough sleeping stereotype of homelessness.¹

However, Brisbane Youth Service (BYS) research and specialised intervention has shown that young people who are moving transiently between houses without a stable home are a concerning vulnerable population. In particular, the disproportionately high mental health impacts of couchsurfing require specific consideration and targeted service responses. With increasingly limited other housing options, it is critical to undertake targeted and evidence-informed risk assessment with young people who are couchsurfing to ensure the safest possible practice responses. Developed through the evaluated trial of a dedicated Couch Surfing Support Service undertaken by BYS, this paper shares key learning about the use of a targeted couchsurfing risk screening tool, to identify and respond to situational risk factors commonly associated with young people's couchsurfing experiences.

We know that, in 2019–2020, more than 42,400 young people (ages 15 to 24) were experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity in Australia.² This includes rough

sleepers, and those who have a roof over their heads but do not have a 'home' of their own — a space where they have security, stability, safety, and a sense of belonging. While highly likely to be disproportionately under-reported, as a 'hidden' form of homelessness, the rates of recorded couchsurfing have escalated faster than other forms of homelessness.³ This is likely to continue to grow as young people face an increasingly tight affordable housing market and ever-increasing demand for crisis and transitional housing. In Australia, the number of people who presented to specialised homelessness services and said they were couch-surfing increased by 33 per cent from 2011–12 to 2014–15, with the largest proportion of couch-surfers reporting they were under-25.⁴

There are many commonly held misconceptions about young people's couchsurfing. It sometimes appears to be the only, and therefore best, housing option, particularly in rural and regional areas. However, decisions about young people

staying in other people's homes should be not be predicated on assumptions that it is a safer, less risky form of homelessness — nor that young people are necessarily relatively 'OK' while they are able to couchsurf. Previous research has demonstrated that there are a wide range of serious risks associated with couchsurfing for young people.^{5,6,7,8} Young couchsurfers report disproportionately poorer mental health, increased risk of suicide and self-harm and less connection to professional and community support than young people in other forms of homelessness or housing insecurity.⁹

Young couchsurfers, despite frequently financially contributing, were found in BYS research and practice to be highly vulnerable to both being suddenly cast out and to physical, sexual, and financial exploitation at the hands of their hosts. Their couchsurfing is found to be frequently characterised by very high levels of transience and instability, with young people moving between sometimes 50 or more



different places during their period of couchsurfing. Young couchsurfers report very high levels of anxiety about 'where next, what next?'. The instability itself also becomes a barrier to stable income and finding housing, as well as to education, employment, social connection, and personal relationships.

In 2018, quantitative analysis of more than 800 BYS client records identified concerning patterns of demographics and co-occurring issues and risks of young people couchsurfing.¹⁰ This evidence was used to design a targeted intervention for young couchsurfers, funded by the Queensland Mental Health Commission. This evaluated trial aimed to increase practice knowledge and develop tools for effective responses to the risks associated with young people couchsurfing.

Through this initiative, a targeted Risk Screening Tool was developed, which was trialled with young people using the dedicated Couch Surfing Service and in generalist housing intake service, before finally being refined into a tool suitable for use in multiple contexts. The Risk Screening Tool was designed to be used to enable workers to better understand, assess, and respond to risks experienced by young people in the context of their couchsurfing environments. The questions within the tool were formulated based on risks already identified through the previous research; risks commonly recognised in the wider homelessness sector (such as substance use risks); and also some of the lesser-acknowledged, but found to be common risks, associated with how young people find and negotiate couchsurfing arrangements.

Specifically, the Risk Screening Tool guides workers in assessing:

- a) young people's access to basic necessities while couchsurfing
- b) young people's access to privacy including sleeping and bathroom arrangements
- c) the expectations of hosts — what are young people expected to do in return for accommodation?



- d) the mental and emotional health impacts of being in the couchsurfing environment, and of the couchsurfing experience itself
- e) access to support participants appropriate to their needs
- f) alcohol and other drug, (AOD) use and exposure within, around, or arising from the living environment
- g) physical safety risks including violence, health risks, criminal behaviours, abuse, assault etc.

The Risk Screening Tool was used to gather data about risk patterns and as a pre/post intervention measure of change in young people's couchsurfing risks. The 42.5 per cent of young people identified being as 'high' or 'very high' overall risk level at intake to the service reduced to 3.5 per cent (one young person only) post support. For the 50 per cent of young people who were found to be at a medium risk level, mental health issues and a lack of support for mental health were found to be key risk factors.

For the young people at highest risk, it was clear that they were in highly unstable and insecure living situations that frequently lacked access to basic necessities such as food, facilities to wash, clean bedding, or a bed at all. They are often uncomfortable or unsafe due to a lack of privacy or space to themselves. They are often

disconnected from support — largely because they don't know where to go — are not connected to peers for word-of-mouth, or do not feel eligible for homelessness support because they, technically, have a place to stay. Thus, they frequently remain in unsafe situations as long as they can, and only reach out for help when they have to leave. High-risk levels of AOD use and physical safety concerns were found in some environments. The critical questions were around the expectations of staying, and the mental health impacts of couchsurfing. These assessments showed that young people's mental health was a significant concern while couchsurfing and, as such, required specialist responses to stabilise their safety while couchsurfing and alternative housing options were sought.

The Risk Screening Tool was found to serve multiple purposes in a homelessness practice environment. It achieved its intended purpose of effectively guiding workers to ask less common but important questions that enabled identification of risks that may otherwise have been over-looked if 'a roof over your head' was the primary focus. While in some circumstances this led to rejecting the couchsurfing arrangement as a safe option, in other situations young people were able to be supported with additional referrals and interventions that mitigated those risks.

Concurrently, the tool served an educative purpose in building young people's capacity to self-assess risks of their wellbeing. The questions served to increased awareness about the potential risks of couchsurfing, enabling young people to increase their knowledge and confidence in making safer, better-informed choices around where and who to stay with and how to negotiate places to stay in future. Likewise, the tool also served an educative purpose for generalist housing workers who had not previously unpacked the complexity of couchsurfing. The tool was also used to guide conversation with family members, couch providers and other services who contacted the Couch Surfing Service for information and advice. Raising awareness of the common risks associated with couchsurfing, assumedly resulted in enhanced

support responses for young people. The tool's dual purpose was, therefore, to challenge assumptions and misconceptions, and to build community capacity to respond to young people's couchsurfing risks.

While inherently problematic in its instability, temporarily couchsurfing cannot always be avoided — particularly in highly disadvantaged or non-metropolitan areas where safe crisis housing services are not available or are inadequate to meet demand. This makes it critical to sensitively assess the impact of couchsurfing arrangements and environments and, where possible, provide stabilising support until alternate safe and sustainable housing can be accessed. Knowing that there are support services that are both available and responsive to the wide range of risks experienced by couchsurfers can significantly improve young people's safety and capacity to manage their own risks, identify their own support needs and strengthen their support networks. For some, only moving into more stable forms of housing will effectively reduce risks. For others, using a targeted Risk Screening Tool can assist workers and others with implementing risk mitigating strategies. These may include specialist supports for mental health issues, AOD use, relationships, exposure to violence, or other concerns that may otherwise be overlooked. It can help young people develop knowledge, language and capacity to negotiate their own needs. To assist this process, services need to ask questions that are informed by awareness of the complexity of couchsurfing beyond the assumption that 'at least it is a roof over your head'.¹¹

The BYS Risk Screening Tool is available to support youth homelessness workers engaging with young couchsurfers in responding to the underlying or less obvious risks associated with couchsurfing. The tool provides a useful guide to meaningful conversations with young people, their family, couch providers and other service providers and, at the same time, increases service capacity to provide effective practice responses.

In February 2021, BYS held a webinar for the wider youth homelessness



sector to share learning from the couchsurfing service trial and our broader quantitative and qualitative research about couchsurfing. Titled: *A Couch is Not a Home — Let's change the way we look at young people couchsurfing*, the full presentation is available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=bQSJGiMeqSQ

For further information, please contact research@brisbyouth.org

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Transitional Housing Management for Young People: Time for a Change

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The Transitional Housing Management (THM) Program Transitional housing and transitional support are the largest programmatic responses to homelessness in Victoria. For young people experiencing homelessness, going from refuge or crisis accommodation into a transitional housing property is still regarded as one of the best outcomes available in the system. However, as service providers, we are all aware that there are real problems with the program, and its fundamental premise — getting people ‘ready’ for long-term housing — is outdated and increasingly untenable.

The main aim of transitional housing is to support people to transition into longer-term or permanent housing over the short to medium term. Transitional housing always

comes with Transitional support, usually provided by a Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS) funded agency. A network of housing providers and support providers across Victoria work in partnership to provide the THM program. The combination of housing and support is regarded as key to assisting people develop the skills necessary to maintain a tenancy and to address the issues that led to their experience of homelessness.

The THM program is the most heavily-funded and longest-running housing and support program in Victoria. However, there is no robust independent evidence that demonstrates its effectiveness as a model for a range of cohorts in either promoting stable housing outcomes over the long-term, or improving peoples’

health, well-being, education, or employment outcomes. It is also widely accepted that the program is no longer meeting its primary aim of transitioning people to permanent housing within a timeframe that would be considered short to medium term.

Young People and THM: The Message is Confusing

There are a number of ongoing issues with the THM program that are widely understood and acknowledged by support and housing agencies:

Exit Points: Transition to where?

It is generally accepted that there are limited housing options for people exiting homelessness. The situation for young people is exacerbated even further by their ludicrously low incomes — both Youth Allowance and youth wages. This makes private rental virtually unattainable and makes young people unattractive from a financial perspective for community housing providers. In addition, public housing waiting times are extremely lengthy. At Melbourne City Mission (MCM), the Creating Connections program in the inner-south supports a small number of young people in transitional housing. Of the five tenancies supported, four have been in their tenancy for over two years, with one young person in their tenancy for over five years.

Since 2016, we have been working with a young single mother of two young children. The mother and her children have moved around to three different THM properties within this time. Initially, the mother engaged with the program while pregnant and couchsurfing, following a relationship breakdown. The young person has a lived experience of family violence, poor mental health,



Artwork by Darien Silarsah

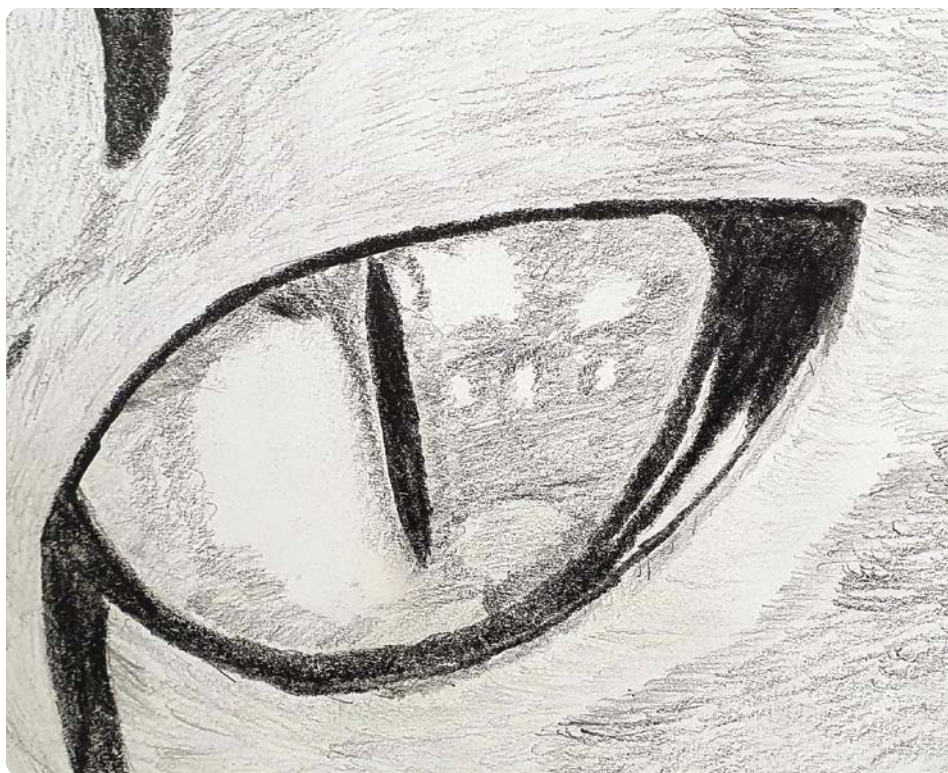
and Child Protection involvement with her children. Since 2016, the family have been on the public housing waitlist. However, they have yet to receive an offer of housing. A share house is not an option for this young person and rental properties within her community network are well outside of her financial capacity.

The mother would like to be able to enter the rental market, reflecting that she wants to *'be able to raise her kids in a rental, something that no one in my family has been able to do. All my family have always had to rely on public housing'*.

For this mother, there has been significant growth in her parenting, living skills, and mental health. There is a motivation to work as her children become independent and there are now discussions about her own education. In many ways, we could argue that, as a family, they would be ready to exit THM support. But given the constraints of the rental market, their most viable housing option is public housing, for which there is an indefinite wait.

Pressure to Move On

Even though it is well understood that exiting transitional housing is extremely challenging, there is pressure applied from the outset for young people to plan for their exit. Within the first three months of their tenancy, young people are required to work on a 'housing exit plan' with their support worker. This plan, and the steps that have been taken to move toward it, are reviewed every three months. Interestingly, despite the idea that transitional housing is meant to provide an environment in which the young person can 'learn' how to maintain a tenancy and get the support they need to recover from whatever it is that caused their homelessness, their 'readiness' to move is not generally part of the assessment of the timing of their exit planning. The transitional program has a limited time frame — whether the young person is ready to leave or not. If they do receive an offer of housing elsewhere, not being 'ready' to take it is not seen as a valid reason not to move, even though transitional housing is supposedly based on the idea of helping people become 'housing ready'.



Artwork by Chris Laritt

Young people that we spoke to expressed both their relief in having been given a transitional housing property, and then their distress and anxiety when told that they needed to immediately start looking for somewhere else to live. The tension between feeling that they were safe and secure and then being told that in fact this wasn't the case, was a common experience. One young person commented: *'I remember when my worker told me I needed to start looking for housing, and I was really confused, because I'd just moved into my transitional housing property, so I thought I'd already found housing'*.

Fundamental Problem with the Concept of Transitional Housing

Transitional housing is based on the concept of 'housing readiness'. The program's aim is to help the young people address the issues that have contributed to their homelessness and help them become 'ready' to maintain a long-term tenancy. The theory is that when a person is 'ready' and no longer requires a level of support, they will then move into different housing. It is unclear what it is people learn during their time in transitional housing that they couldn't also learn in long-term housing with support in place. The continuum of support idea — that people need to move from crisis accommodation,

to transitional housing, then to long-term housing as their final reward — is still well entrenched in the Victorian service system, despite growing support for the Housing First ideal. It is likely that this will continue until the structural realities of the housing system are changed to match the Housing First approach.

The Future of Transitional Housing

What we have in transitional housing is a program that sends a range of confusing messages to young people: you are safe and secure, but you cannot stay here even though we know it is extremely difficult to find anywhere else to live. We will support you to maintain your housing, but also need you to leave as soon as you can. If you do well in this housing, we will reward you by making you leave.

With the imminent changes to the *Residential Tenancy Act* (RTA), it is unclear how transitional housing will be managed into the future. So far there has been no indication from THM managers of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) how leases will be managed under the new provisions. What is certain is that transitional housing as a model has probably had its day, and we need to look for other ways to provide housing and support to young people to help them permanently exit homelessness.



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Getting Teens Out of the 'Too Hard' Basket: Housing Options for Homeless Young People with Complex Needs

Dr Elizabeth Watt, Research and Policy Manager, Olivia Iannelli, Senior Research and Policy Officer and Shoshana Booth, Research and Policy Assistant, Yfoundations

A 15-year-old turns up alone at a youth refuge in northern New South Wales (NSW). He claims to have been abused by his mum's partner, and that his dad is out of the picture. The refuge takes him in, but his trauma manifests in inappropriate sexual behaviour towards other young people. Staff have to monitor him 24-hours a day — even sitting outside his room at night. Despite their efforts, his behaviour drives other vulnerable young people from the refuge. Eventually, the service is forced to expel him, and he spends the rest of his teens couch-surfing, rough sleeping and cycling through youth homelessness services.

In such a circumstance, one might think that the NSW child protection system would be obliged to step in. After all, they are mandated to protect young people under the age of 18 from neglect and abuse. But, despite numerous reports, child protection caseworkers failed to respond in this case. As the NSW Ombudsman made clear in their 2018 report, *More than shelter — addressing legal and policy gaps in supporting homeless children*, this disappointing response is far from an anomaly. In our state, as elsewhere in the country, young people with complex needs are too-often left on the 'edge of care'¹ because they are simply 'too hard'² for the child protection system

Since the release of the *More than shelter* report, Yfoundations has worked closely with the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) and youth Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) to improve the child protection response to teens experiencing homelessness. In a recent submission to the NSW *Inquiry into the child protection and social services system*, we identified a number

of key issues.³ Not only are child protection workers overburdened, they are also encouraged to prioritise younger children, and to assume that those living in SHS are 'safe'. Another major barrier, which we'll explore in this article, is the lack of supported housing options for young people with complex needs.

When the Optimal Isn't an Option

Almost 6,000 under 18-year-olds presented alone to NSW homelessness services in 2019/20.⁴ The most common reason these young people left home was 'relationship breakdown/family conflict' (26 per cent).⁵ Hence the primary goal of the Homelessness Youth Assistance Program (HYAP), which has been offered by select SHS to 12- to 15-year-olds since 2014, is to help mediate these conflicts and reunite families.

However, as the recent evaluation of HYAP highlights, the noble goal of family reunification is — for many adolescents experiencing homelessness — a complicated one. More than 50 per cent of the 2,707 young people who received HYAP services between 2015–16 and 2018–19 have some kind of child protection history.⁶ As HYAP providers noted in the evaluation, it is well beyond the scope of their program to address the complex, trauma-related needs of these young people and their families.

The NSW Government is currently trialling several intensive and expensive family interventions, such as the evidence-based programs as Functional Family Therapy Child Welfare® and Multi-Systemic Therapy Child Abuse and Neglect®. While such programs have been found to be effective with teens experiencing homelessness,⁷ they currently have a

very strict eligibility criteria and limited placements. And even if they were widely available, circumstances would remain when home-based treatments aren't effective or appropriate.

The New Face of Foster Care

Thirty years of research suggests that the first choice for these young people with complex needs who can't be cared for at home should be 'therapeutic' or 'treatment' foster care.⁸ In this model, well-trained, supported and compensated carers provide one-on-one, around the clock supervision and mentoring. Internationally, therapeutic foster care has gained widespread attention as a more effective alternative to residential care, youth detention, and in-patient care.

While Victoria was a relatively early adopter of therapeutic foster care,⁹ NSW has been slower to embrace this evidence-based model. The state's foray into the area, a project launched by Uniting Care Burnside on the north coast of NSW in 2005, came to an abortive end when funding was cut after just two years. In the last few years, there have been some promising developments:

- Social worker Jarrod Wheatley launched the Professional Individualised Care (PIC) program in 2015. The PIC approach, which is based on a long-standing German model, relies on recruiting qualified and experienced workers from the care sector. These carers are offered full-time award wages, plus a foster carer's allowance, and their skills are matched with the individual needs of the young person.
- OzChild began implementing the Treatment Foster Care Oregon (TFCO) program in Bankstown



Artwork by participant of Melbourne City Mission's Front Yard Youth Services

and Campbelltown in 2018. The TFCO is a highly structured and well-researched model, originally developed in the United States for young people with criminal histories. Carers are offered a \$75,000 tax-free reimbursement, specific training in the TFCO approach, and the support of a clinical team.

- The DCJ launched the Therapeutic Home-Based Care (THBC) in 2018, as part of the new Intensive Therapeutic Care system being implemented by non-government organisations across the state. There are limited details on the THBC model, however guidelines suggest that program carers receive larger stipends, more specialised training and greater support than typical foster carers.

Despite these positive changes, therapeutic foster care placements are still extremely limited in NSW. At the time of writing this article, there were only 20 PIC placements, 14 TFCO placements and approximately 10 THBC placements across the state.

A Place for Residential Care?

Placing young people with complex needs in residential care is more controversial. In Australia, institutional care has been tainted

by the historical association with the forced assimilation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and instances of child sexual assault. Young people in residential care also tend to have poorer outcomes than those in family placements. For example, a review of the cases of 604 young people in temporary emergency care and residential care in NSW between 2017 and 2018 found that almost all young people exhibited signs of development delays, mental illnesses and behavioural disturbances.¹⁰

Yet according to advocates of the new therapeutic models of residential care, these grim statistics reflect the fact that young people are currently only placed in agency-run accommodation as a 'last resort'.¹¹ Rather than throwing the baby out with the bathwater, they call for a transformation of the system — so that it provides specialist care for traumatised youth, rather than just emergency shelter following multiple placement breakdowns. In response to these calls, the DCJ committed to replacing its residential care system with an Intensive Therapeutic Care system by 2020. But to date, this goal has not yet been achieved and there remains a dire shortage of both therapeutic and non-therapeutic placements.

NSW has the lowest rate of residential care of Australian states. There were only 517 young people in residential care as of June 30 2019 — just 3.1 per cent of the total out of home care placements.¹² Yet around the same time, another 199 vulnerable young people were being housed every night in 'temporary care arrangements', usually in motels supervised by rotating caseworkers.¹³ In the 2019–20 financial year, 236 under 18-year-olds were kept on remand in juvenile detention, simply because they had no alternative accommodation.¹⁴

Other Residential Options

Locking young people up in youth justice facilities simply because they are experiencing homelessness is a serious rights violation. However, intensive, therapeutic residential care provided in a compulsory, restrictive setting may be necessary for those with the highest needs. This includes young people who are likely to run away from care and suffer significant harm in the process, as well as young people who are at risk of causing harm to themselves or others.¹⁵ NSW currently has only one 'Secure Care' facility, Sherwood House, which accommodates just six young people with extreme needs.

Another accommodation option for young people with drug and alcohol issues is residential rehabilitation. While research on the effectiveness of this model for young people is still emerging,¹⁶ residential programs offering therapy and case management have been found to be effective for adults. Unfortunately, there are currently only four public residential rehabilitation centres for young people across NSW, accommodating just 60 young people at a time. As with adult services, demand far outstrips supply.¹⁷

The Call for Change

When a young person with complex needs flees or is 'kicked out' of home, home-based family therapies should always be the first line of action. But even the most intensive, evidence-based interventions are not always appropriate or effective. It may be that the home environment is unsafe, or the parents and carers are unwilling to engage. Or it may

be that families are simply unable to manage their teenager's behaviour or meet their complex needs.

International evidence supports the use of various supported housing models for this group — in particular, individualised, therapeutic foster placements. However, as we have highlighted, the availability of such placements is extremely limited in NSW. The eligibility criteria is also extremely narrow, with all placements — except for rehabs — reserved exclusively for young people in statutory care. Expanding the number and eligibility of therapeutic placements is an essential step if the NSW Government hopes to take young people with complex needs out its 'too hard' basket.

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Young People, Income, and Housing Support: Keeping Young People Living Below the Poverty Line and in Rental Stress

Dr Tammy Hand, Upstream Australia and Associate Professor David MacKenzie, University of South Australia and Upstream Australia

Introduction

There is an affordable housing crisis in Australia, which is a major concern for the general community and affects young people broadly — but particularly disadvantaged young Australians the most.

It is well established that young people are overrepresented in the homelessness population — and that this is acknowledged to be an underestimation of the actual size of the youth homelessness cohort. Homeless and at-risk young people presenting alone are 15 to 18 per cent of all clients presenting to the Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) system each year, which is about 44,000 individual young people annually.¹

Many young people require financial support to assist them for a range of reasons including, during periods of studying; while living away from the familial home; and during episodes of unemployment or under-employment. Some young people need access to financial support due to experiencing homelessness. Many of these young people, who experience homelessness and access services and supports through the SHS, need access to social and community housing as a pathway out of homelessness. Many other young people who do not experience homelessness also require assistance with housing — whether this is access to social housing or support to rent in the private rental market — due to a range of issues including but not limited to precarious employment and under-employment.

This article outlines the range of income and housing supports that are available for young people. It makes an assessment on how young people fare in the current Australian

housing and income support policy and practice landscape, and whether these current measures and levels of support meet their needs.

Income Support for Young People

There is a limited range of income supports available for young people, with only a few key options: Youth Allowance, Newstart, and JobSeeker.

Youth Allowance was first implemented in 1998 and Newstart Allowance from 1991. Various changes have been successively implemented since then, generally tightening up the criteria and obligations required of recipients. Youth Allowance applies to full-time students and apprentices aged 16 to 24 years, or job seekers under the age of 22 years who are looking for work while studying part-time or who are temporarily unable to work and study. Secondary students under 18 years can access Youth Allowance only if they live away from home. Table 1 details the levels of Youth Allowance and Newstart, prior to the COVID-19-related supplementary benefits discussed below.

The levels of both Youth Allowance and Newstart have been the subject of sustained criticism. The Australian system of income support is complicated and problematic and has been criticised by a range of stakeholders including social policy advocates, the Business Council of Australia, some leading economists, and recipients such as unemployed young people and students working while studying. These issues have been examined in several government inquiries, and yet, these problems have remained a neglected set of issues over many years.

Deloitte Access Economics senior partner Chris Richardson described unemployment benefits as ‘unnecessarily cruel’ and ‘our standout failure as a nation’, pointing out that unemployment benefits and Youth Allowance have slipped well behind other social security payment over a 25-year period.²

An OECD study found that 53.5 per cent of unemployed Australians live in poverty, placing Australia in the second worst position amongst 33 comparable advanced countries.³

| Table 1: Youth Allowance and Newstart, singles and couples, without children, living at or independently away from a family home, 2019 | | |
|--|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Client Situation | Living at Home | Living Away from Home |
| Youth Allowance (per fortnight) | | |
| Single, 16 to 17 years | \$253.20 fortnight | \$462.50 fortnight |
| Single, 18 to 24 years | \$304.60 fortnight | \$462.50 fortnight |
| A member of a couple | \$462.50 fortnight | \$462.50 fortnight |
| Newstart Benefit (per fortnight) | | |
| Single, unemployed, aged 22 years or older | \$565.70 fortnight | \$565.70 fortnight |
| A member of a couple | \$510.80 fortnight | \$510.80 fortnight |

In response to the COVID-19 global health pandemic, the Newstart Allowance was ceased 20 March 2020 and replaced with the JobSeeker payment for those aged between 22 years and aged pension age. Between 20 March 2020 to 31 March 2021, Jobseeker was also paid with a Coronavirus Supplement of \$150 per fortnight. The various JobSeeker payment amounts for which young people may be eligible are summarised in Table 2.

As reflected in Table 2, from 1 April 2021, the JobSeeker payment has been increased by \$50 per fortnight — an increase which has received significant criticism for being too low. In the foreword to a recent 2021 report, Social security and time use during COVID-19,⁴ David Tennant, CEO, FamilyCare Co-chair, Treating Families Fairly states:

On 1 April 2021, the base rate of JobSeeker will increase in real terms for the first time since March 1994. The increased payment of \$3.57 per day might just cover a cup of coffee, leading many to ask whether it was worth the wait. To maintain access, recipients will have to meet increased mutual obligations.

April 1 also marks the end of the Coronavirus Supplement, which commenced a year ago providing extra income for people receiving working-age payments, including JobSeeker. The initial Supplement of \$550 per fortnight was almost double the JobSeeker Payment for a single person. The extra \$39 a day purchased much more than a cup of coffee. It provided an opportunity to do normal things like eat properly, pay bills and obtain medical treatment. Little wonder many have responded to the first increase to unemployment benefits in 27 years with disappointment rather than appreciation... The experience of the Coronavirus Supplement however, shows just how quickly and significantly change can be effected if there is a will to act.⁴

During the COVID-19 crisis, there was also the JobKeeper option for businesses to pass on to employees; a measure designed to support businesses retain employees.

Table 2: Various JobSeeker payment amounts for which young people may be eligible

| Client Situation | Maximum fortnightly payment: 20 March 2020 to 31 March 2021 | Maximum fortnightly payment from 1 April 2021 |
|--|---|--|
| Single, no children | \$720.80 includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$570.80 JobSeeker Payment • \$150 Coronavirus Supplement | \$620.80 includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$570.80 JobSeeker Payment; and • \$50 rate increase |
| Single, with a dependent child or children | \$767.50 includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$617.50 JobSeeker Payment • \$150 Coronavirus Supplement | \$667.50 includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$617.50 JobSeeker Payment; and • \$50 rate increase |
| Partnered | \$665.40 each includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$515.40 JobSeeker Payment • \$150 Coronavirus Supplement | \$564.40 each includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$515.40 JobSeeker Payment; and • \$50 rate increase |

This was an important measure during lockdowns when many businesses were unable to trade. The hospitality industry, which employs many young people on various employment conditions, was a major beneficiary of this program. By the end of JobKeeper on 28 March 2021, there were some 1.3 million people still receiving the benefit. Predictions about job losses range from 125,000 to 550,000 depending on assumptions about the economic recovery that is underway in Australia. Regardless, following the end of JobKeeper, young people are likely to be

over-represented in unemployed and under-employed cohorts.

Dual System of Housing Support

Australia provides a dual system of housing assistance to low-income individuals and families who need to live independently. This dual system is via: cash payments through Commonwealth Rental Assistance (CRA) administered by the Department of Social Services; and direct funding to the states/territories for public and community housing, with a trend to reduce public housing provision and increase community housing.



Table 3: Commonwealth Rental Assistance minimum and maximum payments

| <i>Presenting status</i> | <i>Fortnightly rent is at least...</i> | <i>Maximum payment if your fortnightly rent is at least...</i> | <i>Minimum fortnightly payment is...</i> |
|--------------------------|--|--|--|
| Single | \$124.60 | \$310.73 | \$139.60 |
| Single, sharer | \$124.60 | \$248.69 | \$93.07 |
| Couple, combined | \$201.80 | \$377.27 | \$131.60 |

Commonwealth Rental Assistance

Commonwealth Rental Assistance (CRA) is a demand-driven supplement paid to private renters who receive government benefits or pensions and meet the eligibility criteria. The supplementary payment is non-taxable and means-tested with the payment dependent on household and family circumstances. The CRA scheme was designed to provide financial assistance to low-income and highly disadvantaged individuals and families.

CRA is payable where more than a minimum rent is paid to a private landlord or community housing provider, but tenants in public housing or people living in government funded support facilities are not eligible. For young people, there are some special conditions attached to the receipt of an ABSTUDY Living Allowance, a Disability Support Pension, the Jobseeker Payment, and Sickness Allowance or Youth Allowance dependent on whether the person is considered to be living with parents or a guardian or not. Independent living means living separate from the dwelling in which parents reside. The minimum and maximum payments are shown for several categories of household are shown in Table 3.

The total number of income units receiving CRA is falling. There were around 1.34 million incomes units in 2015 which fell to about 1.29 million income units in 2019.

AIHW annual reports⁵ provide proportions of income units receiving CRA, cross-tabulated by age in years — see Figure 1. The percentage of young income units receiving CRA has declined each year since 2017 for both young age cohorts (that is, under 20 years, and 20 to 24 years).

The largest age cohort of CRA recipients is the over 65-years cohort; the size of this cohort has also increased each year since 2017. The second largest age cohort is 30 to 39 years, which has been steady at a median average of 21.3 per cent between 2017 and 2019.

The AIHW Housing Assistance reports (2018, 2019, and 2020)⁶ indicate that at end June 2017, end June 2018, and end June 2019 (median percentages shown):

- if not for CRA, 68 per cent of all CRA recipients would be in rental stress; and

- even with CRA, 41 per cent of all CRA recipients were considered to be in rental stress.

For young people with CRA, the Productivity Commission⁷ reported that:

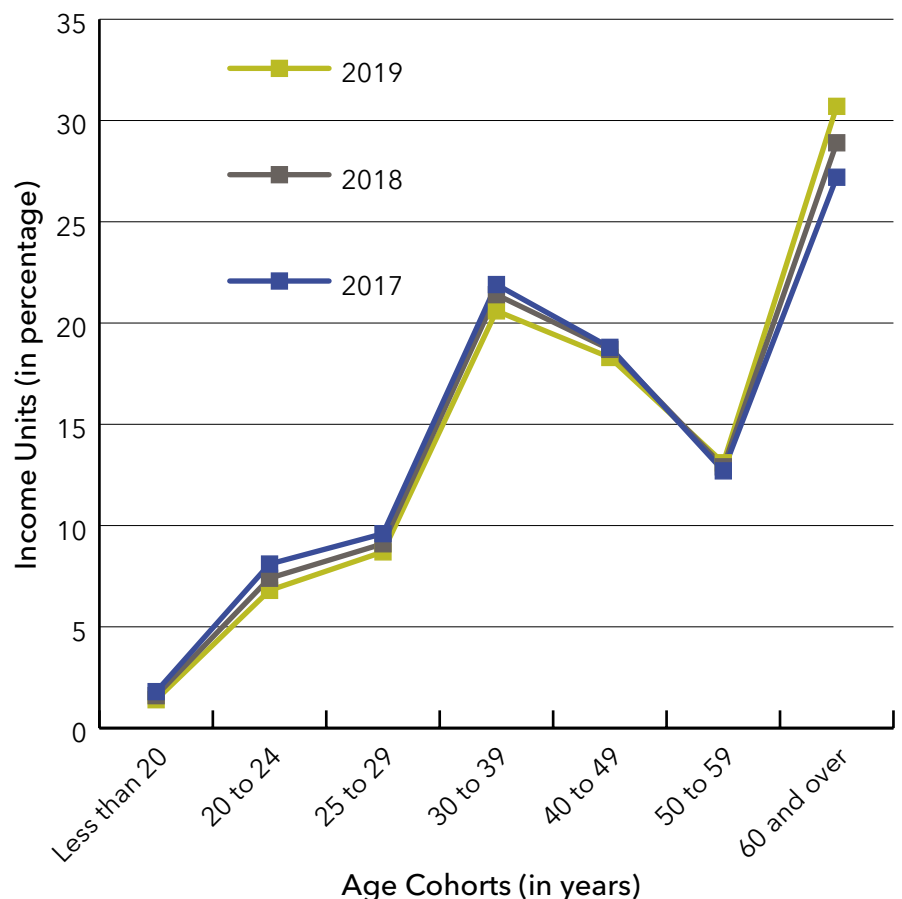
- in 2018 nearly 60 per cent of young CRA recipients (aged 24 years and under) were in housing stress.

Thus, despite the annual \$4.4 billion cost to deliver the CRA program,⁸ some 530,000 CRA recipients still live with rental stress.

The Commonwealth Rental Assistance scheme has attracted a range of criticisms such as:

- the complexity of its structure and calculations
- failure to allow for regional variations in private rental markets
- efficiency as a support payment

Figure 1: Income units (in percentage) receiving CRA by age groups (in years), Australia-wide: 2017 to 2019



- steadily declining rates of early homeownership, which have tended to increase the number of young adults requiring CRA to support their private rentals
- the proportion of recipients still in rental stress even after receiving CRA
- failure to keep up with rental increases that have been higher than the CPI adjustment associated with the CRA payment; this has led to increasing housing stress for CRA recipients especially for a majority of young people under 25 years.

Social Housing Programs

There are three main social housing programs in Australia: Public housing, state owned and managed Indigenous housing, and community housing.

At 30 June 2018, there were 398,086 main tenants in 'ongoing' social housing (meaning that the tenancy has not been concluded) across the three social housing programs,⁹ of which only 12,176 (3.1 per cent) were young people aged 15 to 24 years, at an annual cost of \$4.1 billion.¹⁰

At 30 June 2019, the figure of main tenants in ongoing social housing was 398,002. Only 11,907 (2.9 per cent) of the main tenants were young people aged 15 to 24 years. The majority (53.1 per cent) of social housing main tenants were older people aged 55 years and over.¹¹

This data reveals that despite being an over-represented cohort in the homelessness population and a significant proportion of clients in the Specialist Homelessness Services system, young people as main tenants are not accessing social and community housing in a proportion close to being commensurate with their level of expressed need.¹²

So, What Does This All Mean for Young People?

Young people do not fare well under the housing and income support policy and practice status quo in Australia. This is a continuing set of issues and there is a case for some serious reform.

Young people who are not able to be supported by or reside with their families need somewhere to live. Yet, as a cohort they are only able to access a tiny proportion of the social housing properties. As such, many young people need to turn to the private rental market, but the current rates of CRA — relative to the high costs of rent in the private market — still leave many young people vulnerable to rental stress. Young single people who are successful in accessing financial support still find themselves living below the poverty line; Youth Allowance plus CRA and the Energy Supplement is \$168 per week below the poverty line; and Newstart plus CRA and the Energy Supplement is \$117 per week below the poverty line.¹³

This is a precarious position for young people, and it is still unclear what the full effects of COVID-19 will have on this situation.

What needs to be done?

Firstly, there is an immediate imperative to redress the inadequacies of the youth income benefits and allowances. A thorough review needs to be conducted specifically around the difficult position faced by young people. Secondly, as part of a national social and affordable housing development plan, there needs to be remedial investment to increase the supply of social housing for disadvantaged and homeless young people, not as a one-off injection but a steady flow of investment over the long-term. When social housing is reenvisioned as 'social housing for youth', additional support and transitional financial arrangements are appropriate, given that social housing for many young people is needed for only a period, and not as a housing solution for the rest of their life. Plus, what about Housing First for Youth, a model which has great potential but is yet to become a realistic option at any scale in Australia.¹⁴

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Young People in Housing Crisis in Tasmania

Joanne Horton, YNOT Project and Policy Officer

Tasmania is currently in the grip of a housing crisis that is having a profound impact on young people. More work needs to be done in order to ensure that every young person has access to a safe, secure and affordable home.

Tasmania has recorded a significant decline in housing affordability, with Hobart continuing to be the least affordable capital city in Australia for local average income households.^{1,2} Rental prices have continued to rise across the state, with median rental prices a staggering \$450 per week in Hobart and \$370 per week in Launceston.³ The decline in housing affordability has created strong competition to secure affordable rental properties and young people are missing out.

Sadly, young people are particularly vulnerable to the challenges associated with housing affordability, with home ownership becoming a pipe dream for many. Home ownership has become increasingly unobtainable due to this surge in property prices, with few affordable and appropriate rental options for young people on low incomes, such as Youth Allowance or minimum wage.⁴

Unemployment and underemployment in Tasmania contributes to young people's inability to secure appropriate housing as many young people are experiencing financial hardship and living below the poverty line. Youth unemployment in Tasmania is currently sitting at 14.8 per cent and has been sustained above 12 per cent over the last decade.⁵

As housing prices increase, young people are less likely to be able to afford safe and secure housing

in areas with access to essential services. Instead, young people are being pushed to suburban fringes where they experience added barriers to participation and service accessibility due to limited or poor transport options. Young people are also becoming increasingly reliant on marginal housing options such as shared and temporary accommodation, and boarding houses.

While the Tasmanian Government *Affordable Housing Action Plan 2 2019-2025* contains a range of welcome measures for young people, there are significant gaps in Tasmania's social housing and Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS) systems that must be addressed — along with an increase in private housing stock.

During 2020, less than two per cent of young people on the social housing register were successfully housed each month, waiting an average of 43.8 weeks for assistance.⁶ Young people comprise just under one third of the social housing register, yet they are not being prioritised for social housing.

Tasmania has the second highest youth SHS presentation rates in the nation. On any given day, approximately 499 young people aged 16 to 25 years present to SHS in our state — accounting for one in four people accessing SHS accommodation.⁷ There are only 55 beds available for young people presenting to crisis and short- to medium-term accommodation services in Tasmania. In addition, there are no medium-term youth accommodation services in some regions of the state. Clearly the current system is not keeping up with the demand.

Tasmanian SHS are operating at capacity and young people are being turned away daily from crisis accommodation. Young people report sleeping rough, couchsurfing or sleeping in tents and cars while they wait for accommodation. The impacts of this can be devastating for both the young person whose needs are not being met, and SHS workers who are limited in their capacity to respond.

In addition, there is a lack of service exit points for young people moving between crisis, medium-term, and long-term supported accommodation. Workers regularly report bottlenecks in the SHS system, with young people being unable to transition to long-term or supported accommodation. These gaps are creating additional pressure on an already stretched service system.

In Tasmania, all existing long-term supported accommodation facilities are transitioning to Education First Youth Foyer models where residents will be supported for a maximum of two years. This Victorian model has excellent outcomes for some young people including the development of independent living skills and reengagement with education and employment.

While this model has benefits, it is not suitable for all young Tasmanians in need of long-term supported accommodation. Unlike other states, Tasmania does not have long-term accommodation options for highly vulnerable young people with complex needs, including comorbidities, who will otherwise not meet the eligibility requirements of the Education First Youth Foyers.

Every effort will be made to support Foyer residents into independent living. However, the two-year

maximum tenancy term places young people at risk of homelessness at the end of their tenure, due to the lack of private rental options and lengthy delays in Tasmania's social housing. This is predicted to create further challenges for young people looking to transition from social housing to the private housing market.

We need a coordinated and strategic approach to youth housing solutions and greater investment by the Tasmanian State Government in housing solutions for all young Tasmanians. Importantly, we need to address the systemic issues that are resulting in young people being disproportionately impacted by the state's housing crisis.

To effectively respond to the housing crisis, government and community need to engage and consult with young Tasmanians who are at risk of, or are experiencing, homelessness. Young people must be involved in the co-design of local housing solutions intended to meet

their needs, and contribute to the development of systems, policies and programs that impact their lives.

It is crucial that a diverse range of services are available, across the continuum — from prevention and early intervention, to long-term supported accommodation for young people to help them find secure and appropriate housing. We need to be cognisant that a 'one model fits all' approach will be ineffectual in meeting the needs of all young Tasmanians, particularly with regard to long-term supported accommodation.

Every young person deserves access to a safe, secure and affordable home. Importantly, young people are embarking on an important transition to independence and having a home is essential to help them positively engage with their education, training, and employment, and to fully participate in their communities.

Tasmania's current housing crisis is clearly unacceptable. More needs

to be done to ensure that all young Tasmanians have access to affordable, appropriate, safe and secure housing to live a good life and reach their full potential.

The Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT) is the peak body for young people aged 12 to 25 years and the Tasmanian youth sector.

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The Role of the Intake Assessment for Homeless Youth is Not to Provide a Housing Only Result

Mark O'Brien, Senior Manager Frontyard Youth Services and Hannah Smith, Manager Systems and Reporting Frontyard Youth Services, Melbourne City Mission

Melbourne Youth Support Services (MYSS) has provided a service to young people who are experiencing homelessness and need emergency accommodation for over 30 years.

Annually MYSS is contacted by over 2,500 young people seeking emergency accommodation support. For most, this is their first-time seeking housing support and there is a wide variation between personal resourcing, vulnerability and complexity amongst the young people presenting. The data collated over this time shows some consistent themes in the lives of the young people presenting such as: child protection history; family breakdown and family violence; intergenerational homelessness; and gender and identity exploration. When you examine varying research pieces, an appreciation for different best-practice approaches become apparent.

Watson¹ identifies that homelessness excludes people from social and economic resources, which in turn leads to diminished social support and poor physical and psychological health. While supporting clients to address their housing concerns first is a central tenement of the Frontyard model, supporting clients to recover social and economic capital is core to the Frontyard social model of health goals.

The role of Frontyard intake staff is to support clients who are seeking a housing response to be skilled enough to avail clients of the benefits of addressing the other issues they have identified. Annually over the last decade, approximately half of all young people seeking housing presented only once. Therefore, a balance must be found between assessing for brief intervention, engaging clients so

they have space to articulate their presenting needs, checking back to ensure these are addressed, and capturing sufficient information to ensure that clients are adequately serviced needs to be found.

Conversely, approximately 10 per cent of young people attend more than 10 times. These clients require an approach that is familiar with the complexity and drivers of sustained homelessness. The client-centred approach should be cognisant of the role non-parental adults can play in supporting young people; that is, informal engagement, case management support and service navigation.

This also needs to be balanced with preventing service dependence in young people by intervening and linking young people with the right services at the right time.

As the intake tool data indicates, while most clients identified as being at risk of homelessness, multiple other issues — such as mental health, family violence, and legal issues — were present which can affect a client's capacity to maintain their housing.

MYSS is one of several teams based at Melbourne City Mission's (MCM) Frontyard youth services in the CBD. The service operates as a homelessness access point from 9am to 8pm Monday to Friday and from 10am to 6pm on the weekends and public holidays. Over the last several years, MYSS funding to support emergency accommodation has been a combination of Victorian Government funding and MCM fundraising.

All young people seeking emergency accommodation support undertake an Intake and Assessment Plan (IAP).

For the young people returning for support their IAP's are updated to reflect changes in their situation. The following domains are covered off in the IAP as we seek to get a picture of the resources, vulnerability and needs of the individual.

There are few domains that need to be called out as being prioritised in the undertaking of an IAP. Where the staff member perceives that the psychosocial health or the safety of the young person is in question, resources such as tertiary mental health supports, and family violence supports are brought up, rather than an IAP being undertaken. On average approximately 50 to 100 young people annually are connected at intake with mental health or family violence services without the intake assessment progressing.

The IAP conversation is as much an exploration of the resources available to each individual as a single session therapy and motivational interviewing session. The assessment process helps staff form the immediate response and ongoing plan based on the capacity, resources, vulnerability, and needs of the young person, so that the response is effective and appropriate to the situation.

While the lack of an apparent housing option is the biggest issue for the young person at the end of an intake assessment, it often is not the young person's highest priority. MYSS staff are in a unique position to explore the aforementioned domains and provide some coaching and priority setting space for each young person. Annually, approximately half of all young people that present self-identify that they have family or friends they can access, or that they would like support to re-establish a relationship with where they have last stayed.

| | | | |
|--|--|---|---|
| Housing History of housing including experiences living with family and friends, sleeping rough, refuge stays, crisis accommodation, shared and independent living | Education/employment Has been supported and provided with resources to participate in education and or secure or apply for employment. | Living Skills Has the skills and capacity required to function effectively in society (literacy and numeracy, ability to navigate public transport, cooking, cleaning, hygiene, conflict resolution). | Financial Income type and financial literacy |
| Social History of social and emotional wellbeing, and any current engagement with services. | Diversity Feels safe, valued and understood, identifies with a sense of belonging and connection to a group/ community. Is educated on their rights. Can participate as a member of their community. | Significant relationships Stability of relationship with family/friends and/ or intimate partner. | Parenting Responsibility of the wellbeing of any children Involvement with Child Protection? Details of Child Protection orders in place, if any. |
| Legal Any previous, current, or future involvement with the criminal justice system. | Health Identify any current medical conditions. Ability to access and navigate health care systems to meet health care needs. | Psychosocial Health/ Wellbeing Exploration of their mental health, personal strategies and where relevant experience with mental health services. | Substance Use Any current or past substance use. Identify if substance use is/ was opportunistic or problematic. History of involvement with drug and alcohol support services. |
| Safety Experience of violence or feeling unsafe. History of help-seeking and service navigation to support safety. | | | |

Often during the response/planning stage, young people are confronted with the realisation that there isn't housing stock available, and that the emergency options are more likely a motel or backpacker bed for a few days rather than a supported and affordable refuge bed. This is where the experience of the intake staff can be utilised to assist the young person to explore other options available to them that they had not considered.

Emergency housing options are limited. There are over a dozen youth refuges in the greater Melbourne area and several provide short-term beds that the collective access points are aware of.

Beds are in high demand as the overwhelming waitlists for transitional housing and public housing system creates a bottleneck in our crisis accommodation system. It is fair to say that young people who have experienced out-of-home care or Child Protection are often reluctant to accept a refuge bed offer if they have no experience

of a youth refuge model. Hotel or backpacker accommodation can only be provided to young people who have photo identification, which can provide a barrier to some young people and can be an inappropriate option for those whose vulnerability and/or needs requires a supported accommodation response. The MYSS team contact Child Protection where the young person is a minor. Similarly, notifications are made in instances where young people report family violence or intimate partner violence.

Overnight emergency accommodation annually is provided for over 20 per cent of the young people that present to Frontyard — approximately 500 people. The significant majority of these young people do not come from the inner suburbs and, after providing emergency accommodation, MYSS seeks to find alternate options for these young people. A strong focus is on supporting them to reach out to friends, family or resources in the local community from which they come from. The basis for this is MYSS's own

anecdotal evidence that reconnecting young people back to their community is one of the strongest mechanisms to prevent them from remaining dependant on homelessness support.

Approximately 10 per cent of the young people that present each year will require ongoing support. This is provided through the case management teams that are co-located at Frontyard or through other specialist homelessness or mental health services.

It is important that when a young person presents seeking housing that as much as possible a comprehensive assessment is undertaken. As we have indicated above a significant portion of the young people presenting benefit from creating a space to work through their own narrative and to explore the resources available to them to support them in their pathway out of homelessness.

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Reimagining Social Housing for Young People

Shorna Moore, Head of Public Policy and Government Relations, Strategy and Engagement, Melbourne City Mission

Never has the need for a safe, secure and affordable home been so pressing than during the COVID-19 crisis. Our collective health has been reliant on finding appropriate housing for everyone, and the lack of social housing has been acutely felt. Having a home is critical for people's mental and physical health, their education and employment opportunities, and their ability to fully participate in society.

Despite the significant and welcomed injection of stock under Victoria's *Big Housing Build*, the overall scale of the challenge facing young people experiencing homelessness in Victoria will be broadly unchanged. That is, unless a supported housing system is created for young people that ensures access to a safe and secure home with appropriate supports in place — providing them with a pathway to independence.

The Challenge

The social housing system is designed for adults and adult problems. Young people have different experiences of homelessness and support needs, and they regularly fail to benefit from adult-focused services. The current system in Victoria is funded with a focus on responding to the initial crisis by providing short-term support and accommodation, leaving a young person with no real exit pathways out of homelessness.

Homelessness during adolescence means disconnection from the supportive and nurturing relationships with parents or caregivers that enable young people to build the confidence and capability to transition to adulthood. The absence of these supports in early adulthood creates a high-pressure environment in which young people are forced into survival mode, and do not have the

luxury of years to develop coping strategies, emotional regulation and problem-solving skills.

The majority of housing options and support services, however, are based on the assumption of independence and a momentary crisis. As a result, young people's access to social housing remains highly problematic.

Nationally, young people experiencing homelessness are only 2.9 per cent of main tenants in social housing, despite that they make up about half (54 per cent) of all single people who seek help from homelessness services. The current business model of mainstream social housing means that providers are often reluctant to accept young people because of their low and insecure incomes (including Centrelink and entry level wages) and because they are regarded as risky tenants.

It is estimated that there are 7,000 young people in Victoria experiencing or at risk of homelessness seeking medium-term transitional housing whose needs are not being met. There is a clear gap in medium-term supported housing for young people with medium to high support needs. Without effective intervention, this group will go on to require a high level of support across a range of public services.

Through the delivery of Victoria's *Big Housing Build* and *10-Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy*, the Government has a real opportunity to create a youth specific and supported housing system that is transitional, to ensure young people can access social housing with the levels of support that they need to transition from crisis to independence. This includes reform to Victoria's outdated transitional

housing system — a system that is still operating as it was in the 1990s.

The Solution

In 2021, we have an opportunity to conceptualise a youth specific and supported housing system that moves away from an adult system with ad hoc youth elements and provides a pathway out of crisis to independence.

Removing Financial Barriers

Housing in Victoria is particularly difficult for young people to access due to their low incomes. Young people's incomes — whether it be from Centrelink payments, or from entry level wages — are considerably lower than that of an adult.

Social housing is not geared toward providing housing to young people as rent is calculated based on tenant or household income and is generally set at 25 per cent of income. Social housing providers have reported that they struggle to house young people for financial reasons, as young people's lower incomes make them less financially viable for providers.

For a young person who is in receipt of the maximum rate of Youth Allowance and is lucky enough to access social housing, they are left with less than \$25 per day in their pocket after rent.

The Victorian Government should develop a strategy to remove young people's financial barriers to accessing social housing. This could be done by adjusting the social housing subsidy model for young people to a financially viable model that significantly reduces the proportion of income-based rent a young person has to pay. Consideration of fully funded operating models or a youth homelessness supplement will go a long way to supporting a young person in crisis to transition



Ending Veterans' Homelessness

Webinar Series 2021

The Salvation Army National Homelessness Stream in partnership with RSL QLD and Australian Alliance to End Homelessness

Committed to a shared vision of ending veterans' homelessness in Australia, the 2021 Webinar Series is an opportunity for individuals and organisations to hear from veterans' and their experience of homelessness, to connect and network with one another and consider strategies to end veterans' homelessness.

In the August 2020 edition of *Parity*, homelessness and ex-service organisations came together to highlight the needs of veterans experiencing homelessness and discuss strategies for change. The issue, "A Home Fit for Heroes: Meeting the Needs of Homeless Veterans", led to the Australian Alliance to End Homelessness and The Salvation Army committing to some actions to end veterans' homelessness.

Please join us for the following webinars:

Key Issues in Veterans' Homelessness

Date: Thursday 15 July 2021

Time: 11am – 1pm AET

Description: Explore the key issues in responding effectively to veteran's homelessness

Co-hosted by: The Salvation Army and RSL Queensland

Indigenous Veterans' Homelessness

Date: Thursday 14 October 2021

Time: 11am – 1pm AET

Description: Learn about Indigenous Veterans' Homelessness and the increased risk factors to this cohort in the lead up to NAIDOC Week

Hosted by: The Salvation Army

Register interest: www.surveymonkey.com/r/CNQJYVG



to independence and exit the social housing system. Rent savings and incentive models can be incorporated into the program, whereby young people are expected to pay a small percentage of their income as rent which will be returned to the young person at the end of the program, to help build their financial capacity.

Identifying Stock for Supported Youth Housing

In Victoria, 13,800 young people presented alone (that is, not as part of a family group) when seeking assistance from Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) in 2018–2019.¹ On 2016 Census night, 25 per cent of the total homelessness population were young people.

However, approximately three per cent of social housing in Australia is allocated to young people aged 15 to 24.² If this allocation is applied to the *Big Housing Build*, the initiative will only increase the supply of housing for young people by approximately 370 dwellings across Victoria.

In order to ensure that young people benefit from the new housing stock that will be delivered by Victoria's *Big Housing Build*, at least 15 per cent (1,800 dwellings) should be quarantined for young people and matched with appropriate support. The Victorian Government could identify 1,800 dwellings out of the *Big Housing Build* and put them in a youth focused transitional housing system.

An Integrated Housing and Support Framework

While making more social housing available is a critical first step, there's a further need to connect young people with models of supported housing that are appropriate for their needs. In other words, while housing may end an individual episode of homelessness, good case management and support breaks the cycle and provides a pathway to independence.

It is therefore important to recognise the characteristics of youth homelessness, and how it differs from adult homelessness. Young people who experience homelessness at an early age are forced to take on a range of adult responsibilities, without having been given the time and

support to develop the knowledge and skills required. This includes how to maintain a property and their tenancy rights and responsibilities.

Young people are being supported for extended periods of time in models of care that are designed for brief periods of crisis and are unable to access the continuity of supports that they need to exit homelessness permanently. There is a clear and significant gap in the service system for young people experiencing homelessness with medium to high support needs.

Therapeutic support to help young people heal from trauma is lacking in most homelessness and housing program design. Therapeutic support focuses on supporting young people to develop positive strategies for dealing with stress and anxiety, emotional regulation and building strategies for healing and recovery. Therapeutic support will also lay the foundations for young people to successfully sustain their tenancies and move between different housing options including transition into private rental.

A youth housing program must provide integrated, sustained support comprising housing, case management and therapeutic support in order to address the complex personal and structural causes of their homelessness. This framework aims to build the independence and resilience of young people experiencing homelessness and their capacity to sustain social housing and successfully transition into the private rental market.

Medium-term Supported Housing Models for Young People

For many young people experiencing homelessness, a form of medium-term supported housing is needed as a pathway to independent living at the conclusion of an eight-week stay in a refuge.

However, young people reveal a strong sense of frustration with the housing and homelessness system as many experiences significant transience between short-term stays and support from different services. Some young people report spending years between refuges.

It is imperative that there is an expansion of the availability and models of medium-term supported housing options that is paired with step-up step-down long-tail support.³ With appropriate supports in place, a 'youth specific' transitional housing model is an important setting to grow the practical and emotional skills necessary for a young person to transition from crisis to independence.

In 2020, Melbourne City Mission (MCM) developed a new housing program for young people, the Youth Housing Initiative (YHI), to support young people experiencing homelessness to transition to independence.

Endnotes

1. This figure accounted for 15 per cent of the total number of people seeking assistance from the SHS. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2019, *Specialist Homelessness Services annual report 2018–19*, AIHW, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/shs-annual-report-18-19/contents/client-groups-of-interest/young-people-presenting-alone>.
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Making Social Housing Work for Young People

Sebastian Antoine, Policy and Research Officer YacVic and Kirra-Alyssa Horley, Lived Experience Consultant, Y-Change, Berry Street

The Victorian Government has announced a big spend on social housing, committing \$5.3 billion to build 12,000 new homes over four years, and is also developing a 10-Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy.¹ The initiatives are a big step towards ending homelessness and the biggest spend on social housing in Victoria in years. It shows the Government has listened to people experiencing homelessness and the sector, who have been calling for more social housing.^{2,3} Currently, Victoria has the smallest proportion of social housing among all the states and territories in Australia and this initiative is a step towards addressing this disparity.⁴ The build will create a significant dent in — but not fully end — the waiting list

for social housing, which is currently almost 50,000 applications long.⁵ However, without a commitment to building enough properties to fully end the waitlist, or specific systemic changes to the current social housing model, young people will continue to miss out on social housing.

Young people are nearly twice as likely to experience homelessness as anyone else yet are rarely supported with social housing.⁶ Across Australia, only 2.9 per cent of properties are leased to people aged 15 to 24.⁷ When applying for social housing, young people join the end of a lengthy waiting list. The waiting list is so long that many young people don't even bother signing up because they know support is years away, while they are focused on how to survive the next few weeks or months.⁸ Further, young people on Youth Allowance are indirectly discriminated against in community housing because they are less financially lucrative for community housing providers than older tenants.⁹

So, what would the *Big Housing Build* have to do for it to work for young people? What initiatives, systems and policies need to be implemented so that young people can actually benefit from the Big Build? What do social housing properties that work for young people look like? Finally, how can young people with lived experience be meaningfully involved?

To start answering these questions, I speak with Kirra-Alyssa Horley (Kirra). She has lived experience of homelessness, is a youth homelessness advocate, and is part of the Y-Change initiative at Berry Street. She presented at the *National Homelessness Conference 2020* on young people's experiences

of housing during COVID-19 and has written about her experiences in *Parity*.¹⁰ We discuss what Victorian social housing needs to look like to properly work for young people. We present our discussion as a transcript, edited for clarity and length. This format combines the equal and complementary expertise of lived experience and research, demonstrating the value of meaningful collaboration.

Kirra and I imagine what it takes to create a social housing system that works for young people. This is a thought experiment that has a practical application. Homes Victoria is developing a 10-Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy which encompasses the *Big Housing Build* and beyond.¹¹ Through the strategy and the *Big Housing Build*, Homes Victoria has an unmissable opportunity to make social housing work for young people.

Why Social Housing for Young People?

Kirra: *Creating social housing that's accessible to young people will make a massive difference because it will be some sort of stability. The hardest thing for me has been constantly moving. It creates so much instability throughout all areas of my life and really disrupts study, work, my mental health and the ability to think of my future. Having a stable place to live would have the biggest positive impact. It is like a 'housing first' model, where we provide young people with the most important thing first: a safe home. It makes sense to do that because it makes focusing on the other stuff — mental health, studying, working — easier. Providing that kind of support would definitely help with breaking cycles of disadvantage and intergenerational trauma.*



Sebastian: Young people experiencing homelessness told YACVic they can't focus on study, work, or their caring responsibilities while they are stressed about their living situation. Supporting young people with social housing would provide that stability, support young people into independence, and save the Government money in the long run.

Improving on the Lived Experience of Social Housing

Kirra: Public housing isn't always a safe environment for young people. There is also a lot of stigma attached to living there. Ideally, social housing is somewhere safe, an environment that you want to be in that is supportive so you can get to where you want to go in life. I always say, you can't heal in the same environment that hurt you. What I mean by that is for young people who've experienced trauma or trying to break cycles of disadvantage, they need a safe space and time to process.

Good social housing is where you have what you need to survive and thrive. This includes things like furniture, a fridge, and a microwave. These are expensive, so it would be good to have some furnished options that are ready for young people to move into. Having shit that works and getting stuff fixed quickly is important. Having pets, a garden, some communal spaces, and maybe a shared outdoor barbeque would make it feel more like a home.

Sebastian: I've heard about homes infested with rats and cockroaches, leaking roofs, and appliances that never get fixed. Worst of all are homes that are not accessible for disabled young people where adjustments take months. The Big Housing Build will refurbish some existing properties, but these issues should really be fixed as soon as they occur.

Building Enough Homes to Meet Demand

Kirra: Over summer, I went to apply for social housing and the worker said I'd have a five to seven year wait — that's fucked.

Sebastian: That's disappointing, but also not surprising. The main reason why the wait is so long is because there are simply not enough homes for people. Victoria is far below the national average and even this new commitment will not bring us up to the average. Let's imagine that the Victorian Government commits that the Big Housing Build will work for young people. How should they do it?

Kirra: Definitely build more houses, the waiting list is so long!

Sebastian: Absolutely. The acute lack of social housing is the main reason young people are locked out. By the time young people reach the top of the waitlist, they are no longer young people! Building enough properties to end the waitlist would mean that young people can get the support when they need it.

Youth Participation in Design

Kirra: They should also build houses specifically designed for young people and designed with young people. They could have a quota system so some of the houses are reserved specially for young people, so we will stop missing out.

Sebastian: Social housing designed with young people would be different because homes would be built near schools, TAFEs and universities, near public transport, and have a range of bedroom configurations. Young people have great ideas on how to reduce the stigma attached to social housing.

Kirra: Homes Victoria should involve young people in the process, from start to finish. They could have a youth advisory board, but sometimes they can be a bit tokenistic, even if the people running them have good intentions. There are heaps of different ways to involve young people, including employing them. Homes Victoria needs to work on how their staff perceive young people, to make sure they really want to hear from us and will act on what we say. It's about meaningfully working with young people as equals. Not putting us in a separate room, over there, where we don't have any power to create change.

Having lived experience doesn't mean that we know everything, but our different perspective on the issue is very important.

Sebastian: Youth participation recognises that young people are the experts in their own lives. It will lead to better outcomes for young people, Homes Victoria, and the broader community. Sharing power can be scary, but it is vital to making a positive difference. Best practice would be involving young people as equal members of advisory groups, treating them as genuine stakeholders, taking their ideas seriously, and meaningfully involving young people in decision-making processes. If Homes Victoria works with young people, makes changes to the social housing system and, most importantly, commits to building enough social housing to end the waitlist, the Big Housing Build will meaningfully support young people and be a big step towards ending youth homelessness.

Endnotes

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4. Coalition of Housing Peaks 2020, op cit. p. 4.
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Roseberry Queensland *Shelteristic 2025*

Michelle Coats, General Manager, Roseberry Queensland

Background

Roseberry Queensland is a charity operating in regional Queensland with a mandate to create strong, vibrant, and compassionate communities through investment in young people. Over the past five years, we have seen a dramatic increase in youth homelessness in the Central Queensland region. In 2019, in response to this growing concern within our community, we launched the *Shelteristic 2025* project¹ — a community-led, collaborative approach to finding solutions to this escalating issue. Our aim was to develop an innovative model that was community owned, developed and led, that would lead the way to reducing youth homelessness in our region. Our *Shelteristic 2025* project aims to develop a community led plan for addressing youth homelessness in our region by answering these questions:

- Q. 1. *Why do we need to act?* — developing a strong case to support our action
- Q. 2. *What do we need to do?* — exploring service model and shelter design.
- Q. 3. *How we are going to make this happen?* — exploring partnerships, social investment, community collaboration.
- Q. 4. *When are we going to do it?* — planning project milestones, timeline 2025.
- Q. 5. *How do we measure success?* — identifying impact goals.

The Why and What

The *Shelteristic 2025* project was kicked off in August 2019, with a three-day intensive workshop around social innovation in the youth housing

sector. In partnership with Central Queensland University (CQU) Social Innovation Unit and Queensland Youth Housing Coalition, Roseberry Queensland facilitated the workshop, which focused on exploring '*what it is we need to do*' to reduce youth homelessness. The objective of the workshop was to get young people's thoughts on defining what a suitable shelter looks like (shelter being defined as '*shielded or safe condition; protection*') and how a shelter should function (service model).

Participants were young people with lived experience, university students, and staff from the housing and social services sectors.

The workshop was a human centred design approach to innovative solutions, underpinned by *The Queensland Housing Strategy 2017-2027*⁴ key principles:

- Housing is an essential human service.
- Safe, secure, and affordable housing enables better connections to support services, improved health, and greater social, economic, and cultural participation.
- Better integration of housing and human services will deliver improved life outcomes for vulnerable Queenslanders.
- Proactive and intensive support helps those at risk of homelessness to access and maintain tenancies.

Discussion points were aimed at defining what matters in relation to provision of suitable shelters for young people. The summary of this conversation is set out below:

Building Design Matters

The workshop identified the following building design specifications:

1. Common Areas

Need for external areas to have small spaces where young people can have time-out for themselves.

Need for internal areas (not just the bedroom) where young people can have time-out, participants discussed '*mindfulness room*'.

Group workspaces (not just one but a series of spaces separate to the lounge) where young people can meet and play together, for example, gaming.

Common areas would facilitate social activities fostering mental health, wellbeing and general belonging.

2. Spatiality:

Spaces to provide service users with informal meeting opportunities. These spaces should allow for places which enable chance meetings, informal catch ups and quiet recreational activity and where young people can express themselves. These spaces can be multi-use and be used for wellbeing workshops.

3. Safety and Privacy

The key issues that have been identified, mainly by young people, is the need for the feelings of safety in their room. Much of this related to their mental health and need to be able to access support when required while retaining their privacy and safety.

4. Location

Young people who are experiencing homelessness require access to a range of government and community services to get them on their feet. Young people would

like the ability to be able to do this both independently and with support. The location therefore needs to consider easy access to public transport and/or be within walking/cycling distance to a city centre.

5. Connected

The issues of connectedness related to feeling like the house was your home — a safe place to be. As a result, there were conversation about how a young person could provide some level of self-expression in their personal spaces — such as posters or photo hooks.

Storage was considered important for both young people who might have personal goods or items that provide wellbeing and connectedness.

It was also noted that it was important for shelters to be culturally inclusive.

6. Eco-design

All participants were very conscious of the environmental footprint of the youth shelter. Environmentally friendly designs were strongly supported.

Service Model Matters

1. Supported

Majority of participants identified the need for support to maintain tenancy, learn life-skills, connect with employment and training, and access health and welfare services. Provision of just a safe place to stay was not viewed as a stand-alone solution. Wrap around services needed to be provided to develop pathways for young people to grow, learn, and move into independent living.

2. Mutual responsibility

There was recognition that provision of a shelter needs to be linked to personal accountability — whether this was through a rental contribution (financial) and/or a commitment to regular supports, services, or social activities.



and compassionate communities. This philosophy is grounded on the concept that true community change is created, led and owned by the community. The idea that the local problem of youth homelessness is a problem for all community members and that the solution lies with all its members is the driving force behind everything we do.

Our answer to the 'how' question lies in facilitating community conversations that create awareness of the issue (youth homelessness is a hidden problem and often overlooked), explores opportunities for community members to contribute to the problem solving and empowers people to get involved and make a difference — together.

3. Client-centric and Responsive

The service model — including wrap-around services, clinical support and tenancy support — needs to be centred around each individual. Possible option is through a responsive case management model, allowing for services to create a plan that is tailored around individual needs and a holistic approach to self-development and independence. The service model needs to be responsive to changes within the community — including social or economic impacts — so that service is adaptable to meet the changing needs or demands of the client and community.

The How and When

The next stage of *Shelteristic 2025* is to define how we will develop this shelter and service model. We understand what we need to do, and why we need to do it, but we need to further understand how we can progress our mission of reducing youth homelessness.

Roseberry Qld's philosophy⁵ dictates that all our work contributes to our mission of creating strong, vibrant

Whatever the breadth and scope of the solution, the solution must be owned and led by the community. Our role in this work is to facilitate awareness, stimulate conversation and create pathways for our community to rally together and progress solutions. Our aim is to progress a solution that will lead to a reduction in youth homelessness by stimulating community responsibility to help those who are most vulnerable people in our community.

Endnotes

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Support Through Community: Supporting Young People to Access Their Community Networks

Slavica Lasic, Youth Coach, Detour Program, Youth and Family Homelessness and Marita Hagel, Youth Coach, Detour Program, Youth and Family Homelessness, Melbourne City Mission

Sometimes, the best housing solution for a young person accessing homelessness services, can be found within the young person's existing networks in their community, or in developing new links. Accessing and strengthening these links is an important aspect of early intervention work which focuses on supporting young people who are at risk of homelessness.

The Detour program, established in 2012, was funded as part of a pilot program through demonstration projects funding at the time. The purpose of the program was to divert young people at risk of homelessness, or newly experiencing homelessness, away from traditional homelessness services. Often due to the lack of housing options for young people, they would fall through the gaps of youth homelessness services and/or be placed on long waiting lists for supported accommodation.

For the past couple of decades, early intervention was recognised as essential to the prevention of youth homelessness in Australia and internationally. Programs such as Reconnect were established and federally funded to work with young people aged 12 to 18, focusing on family reconciliation. More than a decade later, Detour was funded in the catchment areas of Sunshine, Frankston and Shepparton where youth homelessness was high and gaps in services were identified. Detour, in a similar way to Reconnect, focuses on early intervention but also works with an older cohort of young people aged from 12 to 24. Behind the development of these programs, not only was early intervention identified as essential

in addressing youth homelessness, but protective factors such as connections to family, significant others and the community were just as important in achieving the goal to stop youth homelessness.

For young people to thrive and work towards moving forward with their lives, they need more than a roof over their heads. Homelessness services such as Detour play a crucial role in supporting young people to develop their connections with either family, significant others or the community. Often when young people have been referred to homelessness services, they have experienced a breakdown in family relationships that leads to homelessness, with contributing factors such as family violence, poverty, mental health and drug and alcohol issues which lead to homelessness.

Services are only in young people's lives for short periods of time. Therefore, work needs to be done, where possible and appropriate, to enrich young people's relationships with those they can rely on, trust and who are there to support them. In instances of family violence where young people are unable to rebuild these familial relationships, Detour works to identify what other links and community engagement strategies can meet their support needs.

Throughout Detour's support provision, we have seen many young people be housed and supported through their social and/or family networks. A very important part of Detour's work is to maintain that connection and accommodation by working

with both the young person and those who are significant to them. Where young people too often experience financial and other barriers to accessing housing options such as share housing and private rental, homelessness services need to continue to work on developing and maintaining these connections.

Detour's partnership with Kids Under Cover, has enabled young people where there may be overcrowding or conflict at home, to have their own space and remain at home (if safe to do so) or to live with significant others who are willing to have a studio installed. Further, the Kids Under Cover studios have allowed many young people to remain connected to family, friends and community. Partnerships with specialist services such as Kids Under Cover are crucial in providing alternative housing solutions and holistic support for young people.

When young people present at homelessness services, the main presenting issue may be being at risk of or currently experiencing homelessness. However, they also come with a range of other holistic supports needs such as mental health, family violence, employment, engagement with training, and access to income. Detour continues to provide early intervention intensive case management support to address these needs, while emphasising the importance of providing support to not only the young person, but to also the young person's family, significant others, and community, where work on these relationships is essential to preventing youth homelessness.

Fostering Social and Community Connection

Mark O'Brien, Senior Manager, Frontyard Youth Services and
Arry Valastro, Operations Manager, Frontyard Youth Services, Melbourne City Mission

Extensive research in the area of social/community connection demonstrates that being socially connected correlates with a person's physical and mental wellbeing.

Wilkinson et al¹ suggest that *'feeling part of social activity has been shown to reduce stress, and enhance self-esteem and cognition, thereby improving people's health and well-being'*. It is anecdotally apparent that most young people who present to Frontyard for

housing support do not readily — and are often unable when asked to — identify social connections.

The intake assessments, completed with young people who present to Frontyard, indicate that most come from areas noted as being socially disadvantaged.²

When considering how to enable and support a young person's journey out of homelessness, it is apparent for many that there is a clear correlation

between social connection and communal disadvantage occurring.

A significant portion of the young people that present to Frontyard come from the outer Melbourne suburbs. These areas are undergoing significant growth, but at the same time approximately 20 per cent of the population of these areas is aged between 18 and 24 and this will remain the case post 2026. These growth areas for the most part also at the time of writing have a high rate of family violence notifications compared to others. Moreover, they tend to be at the end of major public transport corridors, are yet to have established tertiary hospitals or mental health facilities, and have under developed employment opportunities for young people.

The 2015 *Dropping off the Edge*³ report map indicates that these suburbs from a risk perspective in relation to young people, have the highest rate of unemployment, criminal convictions, disability, low education, child maltreatment, family violence, and psychiatric admissions.

In the United Kingdom, the concept of 'social prescribing' has been supported by their National Health Service. The intent behind social prescribing is that health care professionals link people into services and service supports for the reasons that Wilkinson et al describe.

Many young people who present to Frontyard have limited life experience in relation to their age, decreased and limited financial capacity, and many if not all have been raised in a socio-economically disadvantaged communities or have experienced trauma. All that is listed here has a detrimental effect on a young person's ability to know



Artwork by Nangoun Malwal

which services to access and/or their entitlement to access those services.

The structure of the intake assessment at Frontyard has been developed based on the domains of the social determinants of health.⁴ There is an acknowledgement that the services based at Frontyard have a role to play in supporting young people to identify and accessing external services that are available to them. This is achieved by sitting with the young person and identifying areas of social and community connection at the point of assessment.

A significant portion of young people who present are naïve to the youth-friendly activities that exist within their own communities and external communities. They often come from geographical areas with limited infrastructure and where the services provided are not aligned to their developmental needs, or they are just not provided at all.

The *Dropping off the Edge* report⁵ outlined six main areas of concern across Victoria, which include educational attainment rates, unemployment, and mental health. These three areas of concern out of the six listed are areas that programs targeted at social and community connections can address.

Prior to the COVID-19 lockdown, Frontyard was operating cooking sessions, market shopping, pet therapy, job skills programs, art therapy, and yoga. Since December 2020, Frontyard youth services have delivered in-house art therapy, surfing excursions, cooking, and music programs. A review had commenced of our youth programs, prior to COVID-19 as we sought to support young people to access main stream youth services across the greater metropolitan region of Melbourne. The majority of youth services reviewed provide youth programs that offer a combination of study support, mental health, physical health, physical activity, excursion and leadership programs.

For many young people, schools provide the entry to these types of resources. As outlined earlier, a disproportionate amount of young people who present to Frontyard are not engaged at



Artwork by Sean McCubbin

school. Therefore, they not only miss out on the opportunity to be provided with the information about social and community events and services; they also miss out on the opportunity to access and participate.

Therefore, the Frontyard intake assessment process includes conversations with individual young people that identify their personal interests, and the services in their community that align with them, as well as other social activities and supports that may be of interest. Approximately one in five young people accessing Frontyard go on to receive support from a Specialist Homeless Services — or four fifths do not.

Evidence suggests that Social connection for young people within their local community is a significant protective factor for not requiring ongoing Specialist

Homeless Services support. For those one in five young people that do, supporting them to identify through the intake assessment process and provide referral to support their connection to community, provides protective factors and can address educational, mental health and social connection gaps.

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Still Missing Out: Young People and Social Housing

Dr Tammy Hand, Upstream Australia and Associate Professor David MacKenzie, University of South Australia and Upstream Australia

It is well established that many people, including young people, who experience homelessness and access services and supports through the Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) system need access to social and community housing as a pathway out of homelessness.¹

In the August 2020 edition of *Parity*, we authored a paper, *Missing Out: Young People and Social Housing*,² which presented publicly available data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). It revealed that despite being an over-represented cohort in the homelessness population and a significant proportion of clients in the SHS system, young people (as main tenants) are not accessing social and community housing in a proportion anywhere close to commensurate with their level of expressed need. We asked the question, 'why [do] young people rarely get into social and community housing in the first place?'

For this April 2021 edition of *Parity*, which is focused on 'The Future of Youth Housing', it is timely and useful to update the AIHW data from our previous article, to assess the current levels of young people's access to SHS agencies and their access to social housing as main tenants.

The title of our article perhaps gives away our core finding.

Rates of Homelessness in Australia

The ABS rates of homelessness data in Australia have not been updated as the next Census is not scheduled until later this year. The ABS data from 2006, 2011, and 2016 shows that from a national perspective, young people are overrepresented in the homeless population

— and this is acknowledged to be an underestimation with the 19 to 24-year-old age cohort being the highest cohort per 10,000 of the population counted as homeless in the last three census counts, see Figure 1.³

Specialist Homelessness Services Clients

Data collected by SHS is not an indication of homelessness prevalence rates; rather, this data captures only the numbers and proportions of clients who access homeless support and/or accommodation services through an SHS agency during

a year. The ABS notes that not all people experiencing homelessness seek services or support during episodes of homelessness.⁴

The supplementary tables in the *Specialist Homelessness Services 2018-19 and 2019-2020* reports provide information on the people who received assistance through a specialist homelessness agency between 2011-12 to 2019-20.⁵ Data from the most recent 2019-20 reporting period shows that there were 290,462 total SHS clients — a very slight increase from the 2018-19 total SHS client number (290,300).

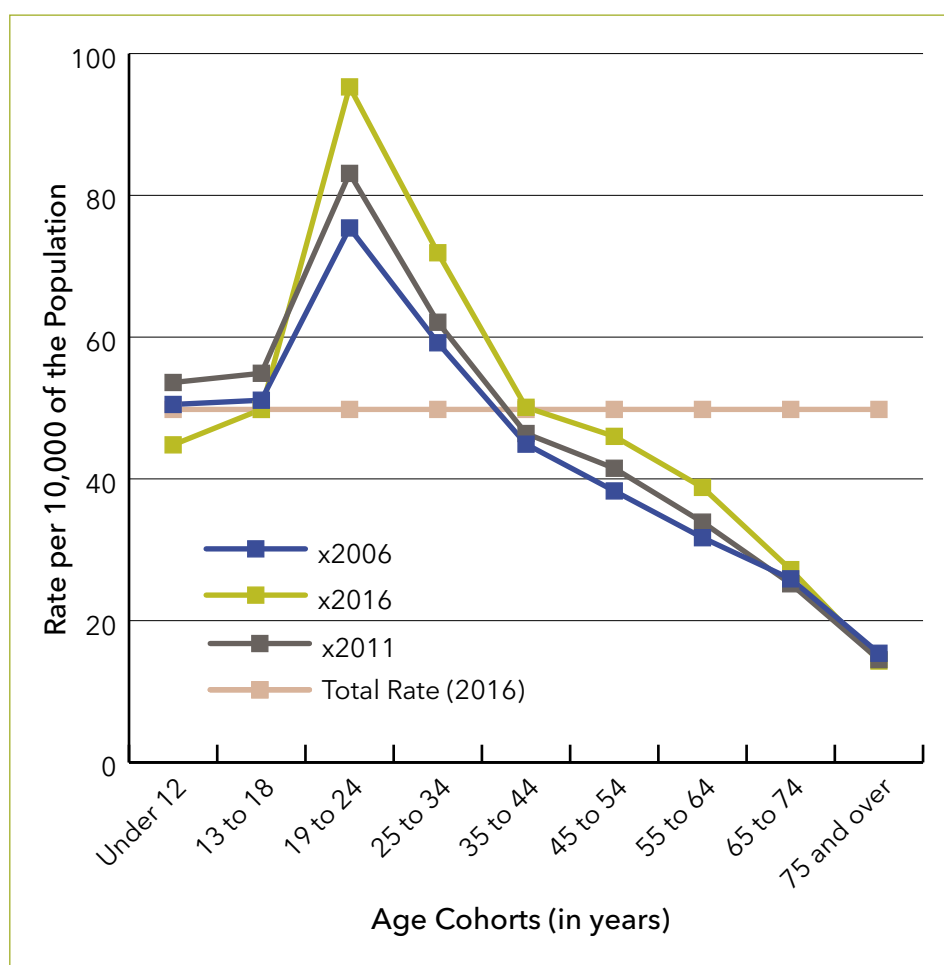


Figure 1: Homeless persons by age cohort (in years) and by rate per 10,000 of the population: 2006, 2011, and 2016.

Young people aged 15 to 24 years who present to the SHS alone (that is, not as part of a presenting family/group unit) accounted for 15 to 18 per cent of all SHS clients between 2011–12 to 2018–19. In numbers, this is a median average of about 44,000 individual clients every year from 2011–12 to 2018–19. In the most recent reporting period, 2019–20, there was a slight decrease in young people presenting alone to the SHS: 42,387 young people, representing 14.5 per cent of the total SHS client pool.

In comparison, older people aged 55 years and over, accounted for six to eight per cent of all SHS clients, or a median average of about 19,600 individual clients each year from 2011–12 to 2018–19, and 24,421 clients in 2019–20.

Some key findings offered in the 2019–20 report include:

- Young people presenting alone made up 15 per cent of all SHS clients but accounted for 73 per cent of all SHS clients aged 15 to 24.
- Half (51 per cent) of all young people presenting alone were known to be experiencing homelessness at presentation to agencies and were more likely to be living in a house, townhouse or flat as a 'couchsurfer' with no tenure (29 per cent) compared with the overall SHS population (17 per cent).
- More than half of (58 per cent) young people presenting alone in 2019–20 had previously been assisted by a SHS agency at some point since the collection began in 2011–12.
- The proportion of young people who were known to be experiencing homelessness decreased from 53 per cent to 39 per cent following SHS support, with the proportion of clients living in private or other housing increasing from 33 per cent to 44 per cent.
- In 2019–20, nearly 10,000 young people were discharged from the SHS into a form of homelessness.

Young People as Main Tenants in Social and Community

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's *Housing Assistance in Australia* reports⁶ detail data on the tenants in social housing. However, for age cohorts of main tenants, cross tabulations are limited to only the number and proportion of main tenants in social housing programs by their age.

Main Tenants in Social Housing

The data from the most recent reporting period reveals that at 30 June 2019, there were 398,002 main tenants in 'ongoing' (meaning that the tenancy has not been concluded) social housing across three social housing programs (that is, public housing, state owned and managed Indigenous housing, and community housing).⁷

Only 11,907 of the main tenants, or 2.9 per cent, were young people aged 15 to 24 years. The majority (53.1 per cent) of social housing main tenants were older people aged 55 years and over.

The proportion of young people aged 15 to 24 years as main tenants has remained relatively stable since 2014, with young people as main tenants accounting for 2.9 per cent of all main tenants across the social housing programs between 2013–2019. As highlighted in Figure 2, young people are consistently the smallest cohort of main tenants. In comparison, older people aged 65 years and over are consistently the largest proportion of all main tenants, representing 30 to 31 per cent of all main tenants between 2014–2019; older people aged 55 to 64 years are the second largest cohort of social housing tenants, representing a median average of 21 per cent. This means that 51 per cent of main tenants in social housing are aged 55 years or more, despite accounting for less than 10 per cent of all SHS clients between 2011–12 to 2018–19.

Main Tenants in Community Housing

Looking at just community housing, the most recent data shows that at 30 June 2019 there were 90,032 main tenants in community housing

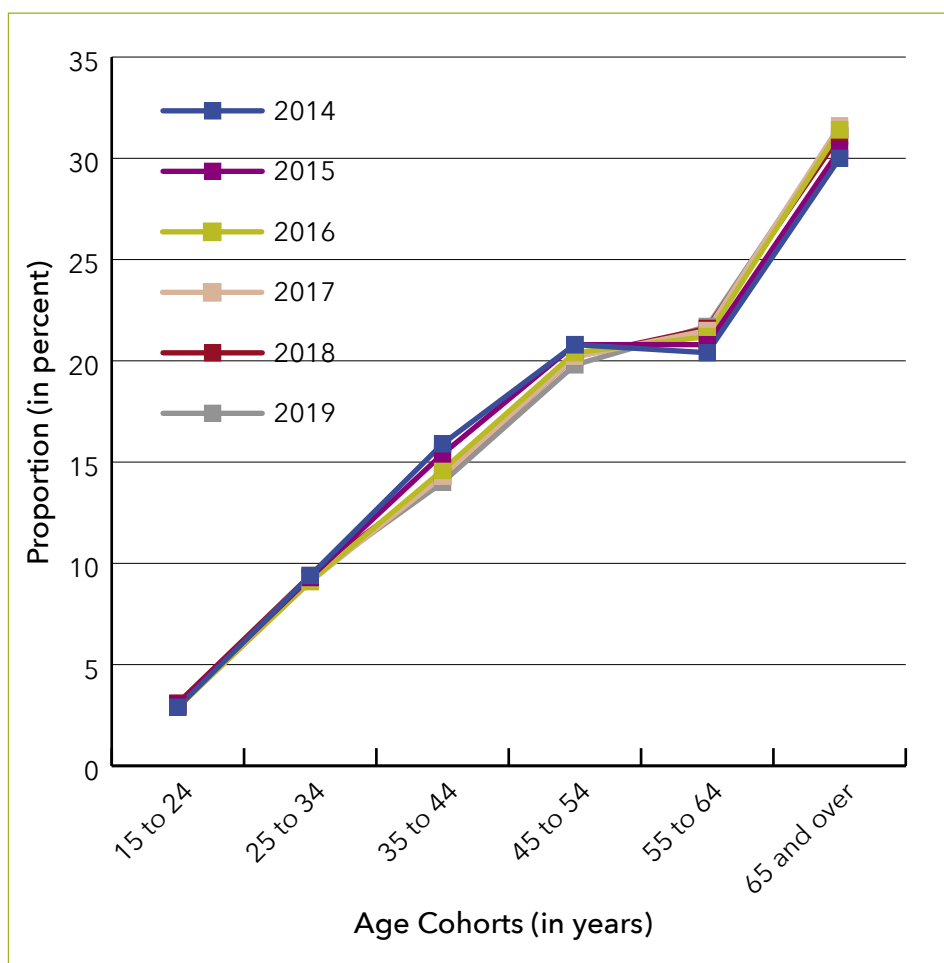


Figure 2: Proportion of social housing main tenants from 2014 to 2019 by age cohorts

dwellings.⁸ People 65 years and over were the largest age cohort, representing 26.5 per cent of all community housing main tenants. Only 4,465 of the main tenants, or 4.9 per cent, were young people aged 15 to 24 years.

The proportion of young people aged 15 to 24 years as main tenants in community housing has remained relatively stable since 2014, with young people as main tenants accounting for about five per cent of all community housing main tenants between 2013–2019. As highlighted in Figure 3, young people are consistently the smallest cohort of main tenants in community housing. In comparison — or all social housing programs — older people aged 65 years and over are consistently the largest proportion of all community housing main tenants, representing a median average of about 25 per cent of all main tenants between 2014 and 2019. Main tenants aged between 45 and 54 were the second

largest cohort of community housing tenants at a 20 per cent, followed by older people aged 55 to 64 years representing about 19 per cent of community housing tenants between 2014 and 2019.

Concluding Comments

The data shows that young people on their own are a cohort of significant need. Young people are overrepresented in the homelessness statistics, a significant proportion of clients in SHS agencies, and yet only a tiny proportion of the main tenants in social and community housing. This is not an argument about reducing the access to support and housing for other cohorts in need. Rather it is an argument for redressing a glaring failure in policy and service provision, which requires some serious attention and investment in more adequate housing options for young people post-homelessness.

The 2019 *National Report Card on Youth Homelessness*⁹ reported that, since 2008, little progress had been made towards

improved access to social housing for young people:

The business model of the community housing sector appears to be exclusive of young people and the prevailing government paradigm is that young people should not have a high level of access to social housing as they would only require short-term transitional housing, not longer-term affordable housing... Relatively little net progress has been made to increase the supply of youth-specific and youth-appropriate social and affordable housing for young people. Access to social housing by young people has not improved and the assessment is that this remains a major issue on which little progress has been made.

A 2020 AHURI report, *Redesign of a Homelessness Service System for Young People*¹⁰ found that there is little evidence of systematic early intervention and prevention initiatives being implemented to divert young people routinely from the homelessness service sector. Rather, the report highlights that the homelessness service sector in Australia is crisis-heavy, with little focus and funding on prevention and early intervention to prevent (young) people from experiencing homelessness, nor on rapid re-housing options for young people post-homelessness.¹¹ Also, social and community housing budgets rarely quarantine specific funding exclusively for housing young people.

In a 2020 *Parity* article, *A Clarion Call for Youth Homelessness System Reform*,¹² we argued that:

...it appears that many mainstream social housing providers are often reluctant to accept young tenants because of their low and insecure incomes, and in general, they are regarded as high-risk. And the statistics on young social housing tenants seem to support this thinking.

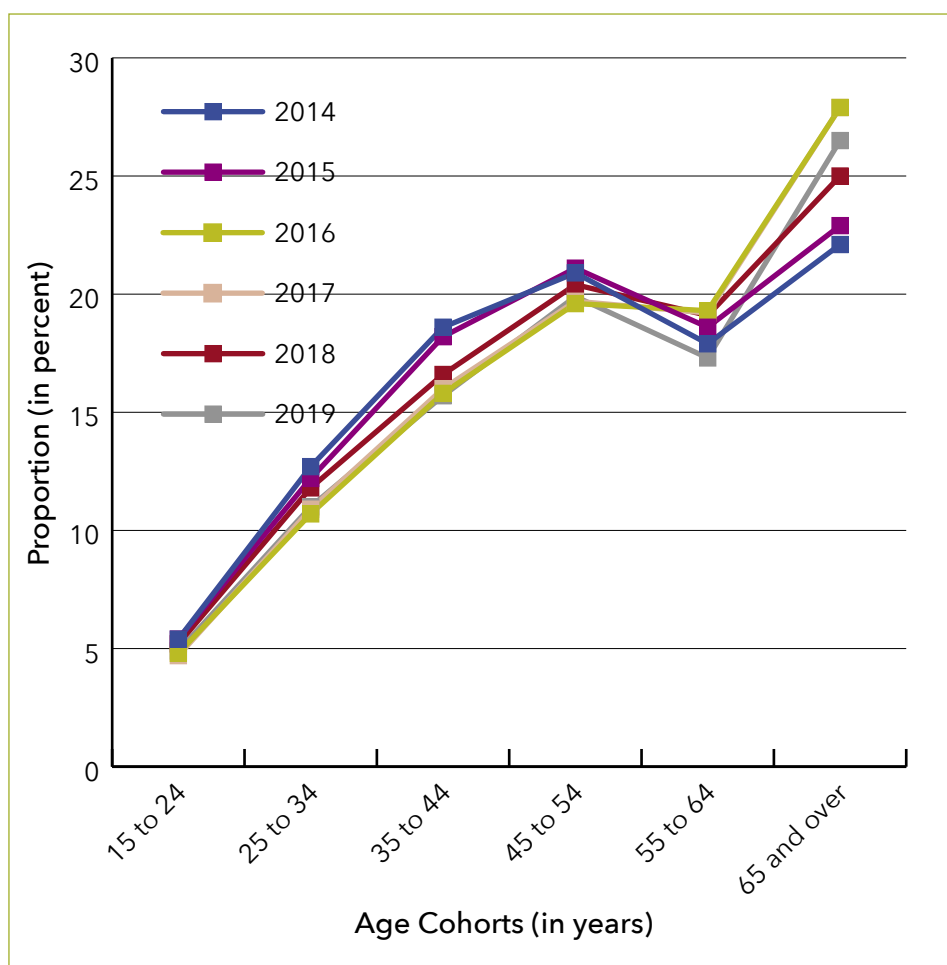


Figure 3: Proportion of main tenants in community housing from 2014 to 2019 by age cohorts

A significant exception is the formation of the youth-specific community housing provider My Foundations Youth Housing Company (MFYH), a world-first youth specialist community housing provider, currently operating exclusively in New South Wales (NSW), but with strategic plans to become a national community housing provider.¹³ The MFYH Transitional Housing Plus (Youth) rent and tenure model is premised on most residents moving on into other tenures at some point in their futures. Building a youth-specific community housing sector would be a cost-effective way for government to ramp up the supply of supported housing for young people exiting homelessness services or for highly disadvantaged young people needing to live independently.

A 2020 UniSA AHURI report,¹⁴ *Young People and Housing Supports in Australia: Income Support, Social Housing and Post-Homelessness Housing Outcomes*, concluded that:

There is a broad consensus amongst nearly all stakeholders that the current arrangements are problematic. The COVID-19 global health pandemic crisis has dramatically exposed the inadequacies of these arrangements and some radical temporary remedial measures have been implemented, backed by a bipartisan consensus. This paper makes an argument for a range of reforms and initiatives that would improve the support for disadvantaged and homeless young people making the transition to independent living. There are some promising supported housing initiatives for young people that could be scaled up, but a reform agenda for youth homelessness seems trapped in a twilight zone of social policy inertia when it comes to changing income support and housing support arrangements overall.

So where do we go from here? The *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement*¹⁵ states that 'children and young people'

are one of six priority cohorts, as well as people leaving care and institutions, of which many are young people. But what does 'priority' mean exactly? For young people, a rethink of broader social and community housing options specifically for young people would be an important starting point. Such a rethink and reform are long overdue. We need a national strategy to end youth homelessness. We need more efficient systems to prevent young people from experiencing homelessness in the first place, and more options to rapidly rehouse young people who do experience homelessness.

In Victoria, following the Legislative Council's Legal and Social Issues Committee Report *Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria*, which highlighted the priority on the provision of 'affordable, stable, long-term housing', it is imperative for Victoria to escalate investment in social housing. The announced Big Housing Build initiative to invest \$5.1 billion in new social housing stock is significant contribution assembled as an economic stimulus component of COVID-19 recovery. If this is the beginning of a sustained program of planned investment, then the *Big Housing Build* initiative will be historically significant.

The cause of rethinking social housing in terms of improved access for young people has gone beyond theory given the founding and development of the My Foundations Youth Housing Company in NSW. A vehicle now exists that potentially provides the youth sector with the capacity to become a developer as well as manager of youth-specific and youth-appropriate social and affordable housing throughout Australia. If a small proportion (five per cent) of the foreshadowed \$5.1 billion spend on social housing over the next four years were reserved for youth social housing throughout Victoria, that would be a modest \$250,000,000. The Victorian Government's commitment to improving the outcomes for young people is not doubted; the challenge lies in realising opportunities that ultimately make

a measurably significant difference. This is one such opportunity which should be seized so that young people do not continue to miss out.

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Chapter 2: Models of Youth Housing and Support

Part 1: Programs in Place

Transitional Housing Plus (Youth): Longer-term Accommodation for At-risk and Homeless Young People, Linked to Support, Education and Training

Rebecca Mullins, Chief Executive Officer, My Foundations Youth Housing Company

Introduction

Social housing was largely designed for families, with adults as head of the household. While perhaps not designed as a life-time destination, social housing waitlists across the country are burgeoning as those in social housing remain in need. Those outside of the system wait ever longer, with social and affordable housing supply failing to keep pace with demand. Meanwhile, young people miss out. Young people represent 16 per cent of all people presenting alone to Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS), yet secure less than three per cent of all social housing tenancies as the lead tenant. Given they have the least financial capacity to solve their housing needs on the private market, whether on income support or wages, where else are they to go?

At My Foundations Youth Housing, we set ourselves the challenge of reimagining social housing for youth. But what does this mean?

Social housing for young people should be age and developmentally appropriate for young people with links to education, training, and/or employment pathways. It should provide young people with tenancies appropriate to them; enough time for them to work out their life goals, to complete their studies or training,

and to engage in paid employment.

Social housing for most young people therefore need not be thought of as a life-long destination. It is this majority cohort of young people experiencing homelessness for whom Transitional Housing Plus (THP) was designed.

Before detailing the THP program, it must be said that for some young people — those with complex needs and/or types of disability which make the private market an unlikely destination — long-term and/or supported social housing is appropriate, and should be more readily available to them than the above statistics demonstrate is currently the case. We must examine and remove impediments to young people who are clearly in need of long-term social housing assistance, and yet are failing to gain access.

By way of background, throughout the early 2010s, the New South Wales (NSW) youth homelessness peak, Yfoundations and many sector activists, myself included, championed the need for greater access to social housing options for young people. The NSW Government responded and, to their great credit, secured funding to provide new social housing properties for young people through the National Affordable Housing Agreement and supported Yfoundations to establish My Foundations Youth Housing (MFYH). Further investments followed with over 100 properties purchased for us from the private market, all representing new social housing stock for young people.

Together we then engaged in a year-long intensive codesign process to develop a new social housing product specifically for young people, the result of which is THP.

Transitional Housing Plus

The aim of THP is to provide housing integrated with support to assist the tenant household to stabilise their lives over a longer tenure period (up to five years). The tenant household are supported to engage in training and employment opportunities, and move to independent living arrangements during, or at the end of the five-year period.

This extended tenure better aligns with a young person's physical and emotional development, allowing them the time they need to transition to adulthood in a predictable and supportive living environment. It provides the stability and time young people need to identify and manage personal issues, set goals, and plan for and work toward their achievements.

Tenant Allocation

Applicants for Transitional Housing Plus are assessed by a local nomination panel comprising senior staff from support agencies that work with our young people, the Area Manager of Juvenile Justice and District Director of Community Services, or their delegates, and other community service organisations. There are four separate nomination and assessment panels covering the areas where MFYH provides THP: Sydney Metro, Sydney, Mid North Coast, and Newcastle.

The role of the panel is to review all applications received and to make nominations to MFYH based on: (a) eligibility; (b) suitability; and (c) priority. This is a rigorous but transparent tenant allocation process that ensures tenancies are allocated to young people best suited to the THP model. The process removes any element or possibility of 'creaming',



The Addison Project at the Addison Hotel.

that is, selecting the 'easiest' young people to house and work with.

Eligibility

To be eligible for Transitional Housing Plus (Youth) an applicant must:

- be a young person between 16 and 25 years at the time of referral
- be experiencing homelessness or be at risk of homelessness;
- be unable to resolve their own housing need in the short to medium term
- have the capacity to transition to private market housing within five years through active involvement in a personal case plan.

This is the specific intake criteria and beyond this there are other criteria that must be satisfied for a young person to be offered a tenancy. Specifically, the young person must be able to keep themselves safe in an independent living situation. We are after all talking about children as young as 16 years, so we must have at least a degree of confidence that someone being asked to live independently — without onsite supervision — has the basic skills required to keep themselves and others safe. However, and importantly, we do not expect young people to come with all of the knowledge and skills they need to manage a tenancy; it is our responsibility to educate them where this is necessary and support them to succeed.

Suitability

The suitability criteria for THP are that young people must be willing to engage in support, and have the motivation and capacity to engage in education and/or training, or an employment pathway. The aim of THP is for the majority of tenants to exit into the private housing market, therefore the suitability criteria is designed to ensure young people will increase their income over time, so that the private market is accessible by the end of the tenure. The panel therefore needs to be confident that an applicant has the motivation and capacity to engage in education, training, or employment.

We are aware that THP is not suitable for all young people who need social and supported housing, particularly for youth who are not yet ready to engage in education, training, or employment pathways. But THP requires that young people can see a life for themselves outside of permanent welfare and social housing. And if they can demonstrate that to the panel, then they will recommend them to us for THP.

Generally, when the panel is not able to gain this confidence, the panel members try to identify possible alternatives within their own support programs or housing services. The young person or their support agency will also be given clear advice as to why their application was unsuccessful and steps they could take

if they wish to be considered again down the track. We have numerous examples of young people securing housing on their second attempt.

Priority

We prioritise those aged 16 to 20 years, young people who have left out-of-home care or juvenile justice, as well as Indigenous young people. Priority though does not 'kick in' until eligibility and suitability have been established.

THP Rent Model

As well as the extended tenure, another unique aspect of THP is the rent model, which has been deliberately decoupled from income and is instead built as a 'quasi' household/reduced market rent. This means that both the household



group and the private market of the relevant region are considered in the rent model, demonstrated in the examples below.

Some key points of the rent model are:

- Generally, all tenants start at the same benchmark rent in year one.
- Using the benchmark rent means that our tenants who are on a statutory income immediately qualify for Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA), whereas under the social housing rent model, young people on Youth Allowance — even those that have proved they are unable
- Maximising CRA makes the provision of THP for young people more sustainable than other types of youth social housing.
- By decoupling rent from income, we seek to remove a possible disincentive to work, as their rent does not change at all based on their (potential) rising income. We purposely sought to create a rent model that 'walks the walk', for example: it sets the rents out at the beginning and

to live at home — have always been ineligible as they did not pay enough rent to get over the CRA qualifying amount.

then supports young people to increase their income over time to ensure they can plan for and manage the annual rent increases.

- The aim is to prepare young people for the housing market in which they live, so the rent amounts vary from years 2 to 5 depending on where the young person geographically resides.
- Under the social housing rent model, people pay 25 per cent of income plus 100 per cent of their CRA. Under THP, the full CRA amount stays with the tenant, assisting them to afford the more expensive benchmark rent.

Examples: Two-bedroom THP rents in Sydney's Inner West vs Port Macquarie on the Mid North Coast

Example one: THP Rent Model — Two-bedroom Calculation by Household in Sydney's Inner West Council Market

| | | Household Group pays | Single Person, Sharing Property, pays |
|------|-------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 2021 | Year 1 rent | \$229.74 | \$114.87 |
| 2022 | Year 2 rent | \$279.79 | \$139.89 |
| 2023 | Year 3 rent | \$329.84 | \$164.92 |
| 2024 | Year 4 rent | \$404.92 | \$202.46 |
| 2025 | Year 5 rent | \$480.00 | \$240.00 |

1. Current market rent according to the NSW Rent & Sales Report, Dec 2020: Two-bedroom in Inner West, \$480.00 per week.
2. Benchmark starting rent (set at \$100.00 per week in 2014, rising 2 per cent pa)
3. A single sharer pays half the rate of a two-bedroom.

Example two: THP Rent Model — Two-bedroom Calculation by Household in the Port Macquarie-Hastings Market

| | | Household Group pays | Single Person, Sharing Property, pays |
|------|-------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 2021 | Year 1 rent | \$229.74 | \$114.87 |
| 2022 | Year 2 rent | \$255.79 | \$127.89 |
| 2023 | Year 3 rent | \$281.84 | \$140.92 |
| 2024 | Year 4 rent | \$320.92 | \$160.46 |
| 2025 | Year 5 rent | \$360.00 | \$180.00 |

1. Current market rent according to the NSW Rent and Sales Report, Dec 2020: Two-bedroom in Port Macquarie, \$380.00 per week.
2. Tenants start at the same rent, but annual rent increases and final year rent vary according to geographic market..

How Long do Young People Remain in THP?

The total tenure a young tenant has in THP is five years. But not all young people need to remain in the program for that length of time and thus the length of tenants' tenure varies across individuals, but mostly varies according to the region in which they reside. Prior to COVID-19, young people on the mid-north coast, for instance, tended to exit of their own accord around the two or three-year point, as they usually found that that the market became affordable for them at this time when they were working full- or near full-time. In Sydney however, many young people have remained in the program for the full five years as the private market was simply unattainable earlier, regardless of their level of income.

As COVID-19 continues to impact regional markets through soaring rents, we expect to see young people in those affected areas stay longer than they have previously.

Outcomes

Transitional Housing Plus is assisting young people who have experienced homelessness to a life of independence. Some nine out of ten THP residents engage regularly with their support service and those that don't are usually in the later years of their tenancy and have minimal need for such support. Our records show that over 85 per cent of residents are engaged in education/vocational training and/or an employment pathway, with the majority of these combining study with some form of employment.

Table 1

| THP Tenant Exit Housing Outcomes by Length of Tenure | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| | <i>Met Aim: Private Rental Market</i> | <i>Other Long Term / Positive Exit*</i> | <i>Short-Term / Unknown Negative Exit**</i> |
| Less than 2 years | 27% | 56% | 16% |
| 2 or more years | 59% | 28% | 13% |
| ALL | 3 | 61 | 1 |

* Includes long-term social housing or living with family and friends

** Includes short-term SHS, prison, or unknown

Tenants' exit housing outcomes are particularly encouraging, improving the longer they remain housed in THP. While positive and negative exits are similar across tenure lengths, they vary significantly in terms of meeting the program outcome of measuring exits to the private market.

Tenants who stay longer than two years are twice as likely to enter the private market than those who leave before then. Those who leave earlier are twice as likely to exit to other social housing products, or be living with friends and family, where they may or may not have long term tenure.

It appears from these results that offering longer tenure to young people has real benefits to them in terms of their ability to make housing choices and achieve independence. It also appears to benefit governments and communities by reducing the need to provide long term welfare and housing assistance. In the simplest of terms, these results suggest that if we give homeless young people the time they need, they are significantly less likely to need income support and subsidised housing services on exit.

We are hopeful that an independent evaluation of Transitional Housing Plus will be released before the end of the year.

The Future

There has been an unwritten assumption that young people, even young people experiencing homelessness, should not be able to access social housing because it is not appropriate for them. This is only true if we continue to envision that social housing must necessarily be a permanent destination for everyone.

Of course for many it will be, and should be available as a permanent housing solution for those who need it — including for some young people.

We argue, however, that the vast majority of young people experiencing homelessness require a different response. One that acknowledges their development, and which allows them the time they need to transition to adulthood in a safe, supportive, and affordable environment. We must reimagine social housing for young people.



Rebecca Mullins and Allan Vidor at the Pop-Up housing project at The Addison Hotel

The My Foundations social housing for youth model we believe is part of the solution. The challenge is to develop a nation-wide capacity and to achieve scale so that young people everywhere can have a safe, supportive and affordable (social) home, while they transition to adulthood and set and achieve their goals.

For more information about Transitional Housing Plus, or My Foundations Youth Housing Company more generally, please feel free to contact me directly at rebecca.mullins@mfyh.org.au



A Wraparound Model of Youth Housing to Support Long-term Transitions to Independence

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Claire Taylor, Senior Manager Child Protection Services, Junction Australia,
Tracey Dodd, Undergraduate Project Management Program Director, University of Adelaide

Youth who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness (for example, young people leaving care, or victims of family or domestic violence) have a complexity of problems requiring tailored solutions which are multi-layered and multi-faceted. We propose an enhanced model of youth housing that incorporates the strengths and most effective elements of other models. This will create a sustainable and wrap around approach to support youth to achieve long-term housing and still be supported while developing their independence.

This enhanced model proposes an apartment building that supports independent living for youth housing and also affordable housing, to build a mixed community who have special access to on-site health and support services. These supports and services are available at the discretion of individuals, who voluntarily interact with the services. On-site social workers can work alongside youth to identify strengths and interests, build on these aspects, and reinforce protective factors. This model of youth housing needs to continue support past the age of 18 years as long as is necessary,

as young people all develop the skills, knowledge, and confidence to live independently at different rates. This is a critical aspect of the model; no young person should have a time limit on the support they require and should never have to worry about how they will find their next home.

Drawing on the experiences and evidence provided by models such as housing first, youth foyer, and common ground, provides a strong foundation for building sustainable long-term positive outcomes for youth. In conjunction with the reinforcement of protective factors for



young people (for example, positive social connections and support, employment, adequate housing, and access to health and social services)¹ for young people the model will reflect strengths-based approaches.

An apartment building brings the opportunity for individuals to live independently in a home that they can call their own, while they work on developing their independence. A housing first model, states that you must first provide a house to individuals who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness, so they can achieve safety and stability before engaging with other support services. The Infinity Project in Canada showed how this model has positive outcomes for youth, with a 95 per cent retention rate in housing, 100 per cent engagement with community activities and supports; and 87 per cent of those under 18 having a stable income.² The housing first model has also proven to improve housing stability for youth living with mental illness,³ which is crucial when 13.9 per cent of youth (aged 4 to 17 years) in Australia are living with mental illnesses.⁴

The development of positive relationships is vital for young people transitioning to adulthood; these relationships create a strong support network for a young person to rely on. Research shows that for young people, especially those leaving care, it is critical to have a strong relationship with a trusted adult.⁵ Living in a community that has social cohesion also has positive impacts on reducing mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, especially leading into adulthood.⁶ Tenants from the common ground model in Brisbane highlighted the advantages of single-site, high-density living as the ability to form friendships and support networks.⁷ The evaluation also highlighted the benefits of common spaces that are multifunctional such as rooftop gardens, kitchens, and computer rooms, which were all purposeful and also served as areas of socialisation.

Case management and easily accessible support services is another key factor of this enhanced model. An evaluation of the Education Foyer Model in Victoria highlighted that having availability

to community health services increased the number of young people who attended routine health visits,⁸ which is a protective factor. They also identified that a positive education culture, constant education support and alignment of interests and strengths to educational opportunities increased completion rates. This is further supported by Youth Foyer models in the United Kingdom, which report approximately 90 per cent of ex-residents being in some form of education.⁹ Similarly, when there are direct opportunities and pathways to employment, work experience and/or work skill development young people increase their confidence and capability to pursue employment.¹⁰

To make such a model successful, the demographic mix of this apartment block is vital to successful integration and the creation of positive relationships. Unfortunately, research is limited on suitable demographic mixes, especially in relation to young people. Hence, this leads us to another question: what is the ideal demographic mix that will support apartment youth housing to be sustainable?

The future of youth housing needs to be disrupted and supported by new evidence-based ideas. This is highlighted by the high number of youth who are still experiencing or at risk of homelessness. While the current models discussed above have had positive impacts to an extent on young people, they still have all experienced shortfalls most commonly in the implementation stage. This enhanced model is based on the common elements and strengths of other models as well as reinforcing protective factors for young people. Thus, the enhanced model proposed sees young people living in private apartments in a block of mixed youth and affordable housing. Having affordable housing within the building also provides a pathway for young people who wish to transition to more independent living.

Within the building there will be support services provided such as a case manager, social workers, a dentist, a doctor, a nurse, mental

health support, and employment services. Having these easily accessible and free services so close to young people's living quarters will likely increase engagement. Through these services, young people have the opportunity and support to develop independent living skills, pursue education, find employment, connect to the community, and form relationships all before moving to alternative housing. The unique feature of this enhanced model is the lack of a time constraint for these young people; they have the freedom to stay as short or as long as necessary for them to reach a level of independence for them to feel confident to enter adulthood.

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The Future With the First Response Youth Service Model

Donna Bennett, Chief Executive Officer, Hope Street Youth and Family Services

Hope Street Youth and Family Services had a community vision in 2015, to develop a state-of-the-art purpose-built youth centre incorporating a refuge and assertive outreach. In 2015 Hope Street Youth and Family Services commenced the planning to develop a facility that would provide young people who were experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness in the City of Melton and surrounding areas with integrated specialist youth-focused supported crisis accommodation and immediate mobile outreach support.

By its very nature — the First Response Youth Service model in particular — the purpose designed youth refuge has created a blueprint for the future of youth crisis accommodation, which has been co-designed by young people and has trauma-informed practice at the centre of the environmental design.

Today, Hope Street's First Response Youth Service is an industry-led centre supporting young people and young families in the municipality of Melton and the neighbouring outer

metro and regional local government areas. This specialist centre is a live representation of innovation, and through its very existence is expected to drive the sector towards continued adoption of innovative design.

About Hope Street's First Response Youth Service

This unique model was conceptualised, planned, designed, and established with a purpose built centre in direct response to youth homelessness in the City of Melton where increasing numbers of young people with high levels of vulnerability were identified.¹

The centre intentionally encompassed supported accommodation services of the client 10-bed youth refuge, including an independent two-bedroom unit for young families, together with crisis assertive outreach case management support via the mobile outreach component of the model. A separate consulting building as the point of entry to the centre enhances service delivery, with consulting rooms available for external specialist practitioners to meet with

clients. The physical separation of the consulting building to the primary crisis accommodation buildings where young people live promotes the safety and comfort of young peoples' experience of being in their shared 'living space'. It simultaneously protects each young person's privacy and confidentiality by meeting with workers away from other young people, and promotes ease for the young person, being located on the same site. The combined components of the design of the centre and service delivery model enables flexible and responsive place-based services to be provided for young people and young families aged 16 to 25 years.

Located in the heart of the community and within walking distance to public transport, schools, shops and health services, the facility enables young people to maintain connections and engagement with family, social, education and training, employment, as well as family and health services. The First Response Youth Service in Melton uses a place-based approach, which promotes community engagement and support of the centre and of local young people accessing the centre. The place-based approach also utilises a collaborative model of community service delivery with existing community and local government services enhancing our holistic client-centred approach. Hope Street has also seen that young people are more likely to develop stronger and lasting connections to services that are local to their community.

Funded in partnership with the Victorian Government, the centre was built on land provided by Melton City Council, supported with in-kind contributions and grants from as many as 40 local businesses and philanthropic partners, as well as



donations from local community members. The level of support received demonstrates a desire from stakeholders to invest in programs that aim to deliver positive client outcomes and community benefits well into the future, as expressed by one of the corporate partners:

*'We believe the youth of the northern and western suburbs of Melbourne deserve a place to feel safe and that all youth in Australia should have a home. Supporting Hope Street is just a small thing that we could do to contribute and we would like to thank everyone at Hope Street for the amazing work they do every day for our youth and the broader community.'*²

This emphasis on partnerships is an important principle underlining Hope Street's commitment to supporting young people within their own communities.

Progress to Date: The Success Story

Since commencing the First Response Youth Service Refuge in 2019, the program has supported 238 clients — 99 males and 139 females. Support was offered to clients from a variety of age ranges including: 25 per cent of clients aged 18 to 20 years; 63 per cent of clients aged 21 to 25 years; and 3 per cent of clients with dependent children aged 0 to five years.³

As many as 2,995 bed nights in short-term accommodation have been provided, four bed nights in medium-term accommodation and 10 bed nights in long-term accommodation.

Furthermore, 14 per cent of clients were placed into employment and 17 per cent engaged in formal study or training opportunities following their exit from the program.⁴

More broadly, community-focused relationships and partnerships continue to strengthen the services as well as the community support for the centre, and local young people utilising the services. This is achieved via ongoing community awareness-raising about youth homelessness; community participation and support; donation of materials and time enhancing the



amenities of the centre such as a BBQ, raised vegetable garden beds, garden shed, outdoor equipment, child's cubby house; donation of time to enhance services such as provision of art classes; and access to material aid for young people setting up their homes when exiting the refuge, or as an outcome of the mobile outreach support. The community is compassionate and eager to contribute for the benefit of young people and young families recognising the reciprocal benefits of our strong partnerships approach. As highlighted with the testimonial from Cr Lara Carli, Mayor, City of Melton August 2020:

*'We're proud to have partnered with Hope Street on this outstanding project which we know will help ensure the best possible outcomes for our residents who need it most. To have safe and supported local accommodation for people to turn to when they're in need is so important to our Council. This new facility will make a meaningful difference to vulnerable young people in our community who are experiencing homelessness and hardship.'*⁵

Since commencing The First Response Youth Mobile Outreach Service, our team have supported 432 clients — 170 males and 262 females — from a variety of age ranges including: 29 per cent of clients were aged 18 to 20 years; 51 per cent aged 21 to 25 years; and 8.3 per cent

young families with dependent children aged 0 to 11 years.⁶

Of the clients who exited the program, 38 per cent reconnected with family and friends in rent-free housing, 35 per cent secured private rental accommodation, 2.4 per cent moved into transitional housing and 0.4 per cent accessed public/community housing. Nineteen per cent of clients successfully secured full- or part-time employment opportunities and a further 21 per cent engaged in formal study or further training.⁷

Through the efforts of the First Response Mobile Outreach team, 210 bed nights were secured in short-term accommodation, along with 14 bed nights in medium-term accommodation. Sixty-nine bed nights were provided in long-term accommodation.⁸

The First Response Mobile Outreach service has established valuable links and partnerships throughout the local community such as: Kirrip Aboriginal Corporation, Victoria Police Melton, Centrelink Melton, Headspace in Melton, Combined Churches, and various local real estate agents.

The program is well regarded in the local area and, with such impressive client outcomes, one can begin to imagine the life-time benefits and impact the First Response Youth Service will continue to have for local young people accessing the program.

What's Next?: The Future

The Hope Street First Response Youth Service is an industry-led specialist youth homelessness support service model that is an integrated and essential pathway out of homelessness. This type of model stabilises a young person's situation, actively addresses their immediate needs (safety, food, shelter, warmth), teaches lifelong living skills, provides connections to community supports, and much more. This is all in preparation for young people to move to the next step: ideally affordable social housing, then private rental with the aim of preventing a return to the homelessness services system and achieving a positive future.

However the next steps are unfortunately not realistically achievable. As noted in our current submission to Victoria's 10-year social and affordable housing strategy, *'young people aged 20 to 24 years are one of the age groups least represented in any form of social housing across Australia, including public housing and community housing'*¹⁰ and *'of the current 53,962 public housing tenancies in Victoria, only 0.4 per cent, 206 households, have youth allowance as their main source of income.'*¹¹ This unacceptable situation is reflected in our internal data, with *'only 0.4 per cent of young people who have left Hope Street services, including transitional housing clients, have been able to access social housing.'*¹²

In light of our practice of submitting applications for most of our clients to access public, transitional, and social housing, the number of young people who secure this type of housing (0.4 per cent) is alarmingly low. This highlights the immediate need for models such as the Hope Street First Response Youth Service — now more than ever.

Hope Street has developed detailed documentation of the need for a First Response Youth Service in the City of Whittlesea, similar to the service recently opened in the City of Melton. An essential feature of the Hope Street First Response Youth Service model is rapid rehousing.

This will be achieved through intensive one-to-one individualised case managed support that focuses



on connecting the young person and young family to accommodation/housing options. This will be further strengthened with a dedicated private rental support worker, who assists young people and young families to access and sustain private rental. Hope Street has demonstrated a strong track record of working with young people to secure long-term housing outcomes. Since the First Response Youth Service was launched in 2018, a high percentage of clients secured longer-term stable housing.

The Hope Street First Response Youth Service in Whittlesea funding proposal is evidence-based and includes:

1. 'shovel ready' design concepts
2. land provided at a peppercorn rent by the City of Whittlesea
3. detailed capital and operational plans
4. specific support from local and state government, non-government, community sector and local business organisations.

The First Response Youth Service in Melton is a blueprint for a model that works, one that serves the needs of young people and their community equally well and with significant social and economic value. The combination of supported crisis youth refuge accommodation, together with mobile assertive outreach

services are perfectly placed to support developing communities today and into the future.

We congratulate the Victorian State Government for taking the initiative to develop Victoria's 10-Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy. With that strategy comes opportunity to continue to deliver innovative projects. With continued support from the Victorian Government, the success story that is the First Response Youth Service in Melton becomes repeatable, enabling us to continue on our Hope Street vision of a society in which all young people and all young families have a safe place to call home.

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The Toga Social Housing Pop-up: A Conversation with Rebecca Mullins

Rebecca Mullins, Chief Executive Officer, My Foundations Youth Housing Company
in conversation with David MacKenzie and Tammy Hand, Upstream Australia

Interviewer: Tell us about the Toga Social Housing Pop-up.

Rebecca Mullins (RM): I would love to take the credit for this, and of course My Foundations Youth Housing (MFYH) can take some, but the idea came from Toga. Toga are actually two companies owned and operated by the Vidor family — there is Toga Constructions, and TFE Hotels, which owns and operates several hotel chains including Travelodge.

The Vidors decided that they wanted to do something and ‘put their money where their mouth was’ as far as their corporate social responsibility (CSR) is concerned. And their particular CSR focus is youth homelessness.

They bought the Addison Hotel in Kensington, Sydney, and their traditional business model is to redevelop or renovate and operate the property as a hotel. When they bought the Addison Hotel, they decided to redevelop, but knew it would take time because a light rail line was being built along Anzac Parade and therefore, they weren’t going to get a construction certificate anytime soon.

Having bought this hotel what could they do prior to development? They had some offers to run it as a cheap motel. However, they thought that if they were ever going to seriously put this CSR into action, that now would be the time.

Interviewer: Can you tell us about the location?

RM: Kensington is in Sydney’s eastern suburbs, and the hotel is across the road from the University of New South Wales, well located, right across the road from the University on ANZAC parade.

Interviewer: And how did MFYH get involved?

RM: Toga set about trying to find a partner to operate it as basically ‘a crisis refuge’ for young people because youth homelessness was always their main interest. However, not being a part of the homelessness sector, they went to some charities that they already knew, to explore, ‘who should we work with on this?’.

They were referred to several homelessness services and the common response was basically ‘oh, yeah, this sounds good, but can I get back to you in four to six weeks?’, which did not work with Toga’s timeframe. When I got the call, it was like, ‘can we meet this afternoon?’.

We met in the hotel that very afternoon and there was a few of us sitting around a table and I said, ‘So what’s the story? What do you want to do here?’. They said, ‘We just want to house homeless people. We want to get kids off the street’. So, my next question was, ‘what kind of return do you want?’. And the response was, ‘We don’t want a return’.

Interviewer: Wow! That is unheard of. Really?

RM: Yep. And I said ‘well, I think we can make that work’. I went back to the office, which was a share office with Yfoundations, as this was still in the early days for MFYH, and we all — that is, everyone from both MFYH and Yfoundations — stopped work and just started spit balling on the whiteboard. What could we do with this building? It was a 42-room hotel. What are we going to do with it? In three days, a detailed proposal went to Toga, outlining our plan and we opened the doors three-months later.

Interviewer: That is a very fast turnaround.

RM: It was very fast. I mean, at that stage, we thought we could only have the building for 12 to 18 months. The thing with pop-ups is that they need to ‘pop-down’. So, you must start this kind of venture mindful of the time at which it is scheduled to end.

Interviewer: Did Toga have any conditions for using their building for this pop-up?

RM: Yes. Toga had two main criteria for us. One was that we had to house homeless young people. In the early days their vision of housing young people was shaped by kids they had seen or heard about who were rough sleeping on the streets. I had to explain to them how homelessness impacts young people including how most homeless youths don’t actually sleep rough most of the time; they are much more likely to be couch-surfing with family or friends.

Interviewer: That is an understandable common assumption. So much media and attention in Australia paints homelessness as synonymous with rough sleeping. Were Toga open to what you were saying about youth homelessness and rough sleeping?

RM: Oh absolutely, without question. Toga were very open to learning about youth homelessness. I said, ‘look, if we’re gonna do this, you have to trust me’. And it was fine.

Interviewer: And what was Toga’s second condition for using the hotel?

RM: Reputational damage was their second concern. Their concern was that if people had nowhere to go at the end of the project, that they would be seen as the big, bad developer

throwing people out. We were determined to ensure that this did not happen to them; and built this into the design of our proposal to ensure that eligibility, allocation, and tenure policies were consistent with the building only being available for 12 to 18 months. But amazingly, they did not care at all about making money from the pop-up, they just wanted to help young people.

Interviewer: *Where did the idea for pop-up social housing come from?*

RM: This was Australia's first pop-up social housing. There was one in the United States, in Seattle I think, but never in Australia. We had to make it up as we went along. And I suppose the beauty of us being such a new organisation is that we didn't have any set ways of working yet.

Interviewer: *Sounds like being an agile organisation was important.*

RM: Yes — the MFYH board warmed up super-quickly to this opportunity and it was like 'let's just see what we can do with this'. We worked together to identify the risks and the plan for how we could manage these risks. The MFYH board never got put off by the potential risks, but rather embraced this opportunity. As it turned out, it was a wonderful way for MFYH to launch ourselves as a company. The whole board was very excited. The Toga opportunity gave us a real lift and we felt grateful that, after such a short time of being in operation, we were getting opportunities like this.

Interviewer: *And an opportunity to do something rather significant.*

RM: That's right. It was a very exciting project, but we had to start with the end in mind. We originally thought that we could only use the hotel for 12 to 18 months, but in the end, we had it for four years. However, because we thought that we could only use the hotel for 12 to 18 months, that is what we planned for. We had to think hard about which young people we could help in that very short timeframe, because there is no way that we wanted to set any young person up for failure. We needed to ensure that every single young person that we housed was able

to transition successfully to other housing after the pop-up was over.

Interviewer: *So, an important issue for MFYH was about not setting young people up to fail?*

RM: Yes. To be able to do this we needed to create a new housing model. We realised that if we were going to have 42 young people living on site then we would need on-site staff available 24-hours per day. We did not get any government funding to provide this service. We just didn't have the time to negotiate with the NSW Government for any additional support. The business proposal to Toga required a sustainable income to support the new model and make the pop-up viable.

That is how we came up with the idea of using the hotel for two purposes. The top two floors we used as affordable student housing, which worked very well, especially considering the location of the hotel being so close to a university and other education settings. To be eligible for our student housing, the young people had to be studying or in a training program, like an apprenticeship. The rent was \$180 per week, which was about 25 per cent of the private rental market at the time. So, still not a lot of money in that market, but also not a particularly low rent for low-income young people.

And we did that because we knew if somebody could pay \$180 a week rent as a student that they could probably walk out and pay \$250 per week rent in a share house or other housing option in 12 to 18 months and they would be okay. So again, we were always thinking about the end point of the venture and how to manage this — how would people leaving the hotel be able to use their time here to achieve what they need, so that they can then go off to be independent? As part of this we also provided these young students with additional supports to help them achieve their goals. They got housing and there was free food on site. OzHarvest used the restaurant space on the ground floor of the hotel, which was originally a Chinese restaurant, and turned it into Australia's first free supermarket.

So, the young students could get free food including cooked meals, fresh fruit, and sandwiches. So even if they spent all their money on rent and their other expenses and spending or whatever that they would still be okay, and they wouldn't go hungry.

Interviewer: *That is amazing ... so entrepreneurial.*

RM: It was unreal. We also gave them 10 gigabytes per month of internet data included in the cost of rent. Also, all the utilities were included: power, water, everything. We had to get the whole building wired up for fast Wi-Fi, but we knew that the young people would need the internet for their studies, so we wanted to include it in the cost of the rent.

Interviewer: *And how did you use the rest of the hotel?*

RM: We used the bottom floor as temporary accommodation (TA). This consisted of 14 rooms available for TA every night. We negotiated with Family and Community Services (FACS), which is now the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), to become a TA provider — and they paid us a commercial rate when accommodating people.

Interviewer: *Was the TA for young people exclusively?*

RM: It was for young people and for women with children. Our extended scope was because there were not enough young people coming through the system for this to be financially viable for us as a TA provider.

Interviewer: *How did the TA go with young people and women with children being housed on the same floor?*

RM: Admittedly, we were somewhat nervous about this at the outset, but honestly, it worked out beautifully. It was such an honour to house these people. In the beginning the department was worried about our TA proposal to house young people, women, and women with children together as they were worried about the risks, which was understandable and appropriate. But we outlined a strong case for risk management in our proposal; after some discussions

with key people in at FACS/DCJ, we reached agreement and the contract was signed. There was still a residual financial risk for us because the department did not commit to using a set number of the TA rooms every night. To break even, we needed to accommodate eight people in TA rooms every night on average. Some nights we were full, but at other times we were not. Over the four years, we just managed to break even, which we felt justified our initiative. After all, we are not a for-profit company.

Interviewer: *How many people were you able to house over this four-year period?*

RM: In total, over the four years, we housed exactly 900 people in that building. The majority was in TA. It was an amazing effort.

Interviewer: *Has the pop-up finished now?*

RM: It has. We handed back the keys just before Christmas. Toga said that we could have the building for a few additional months, but this was a good time to close shop. We had

dwindling numbers in TA due to DCJ pre-booking hundreds more hotel rooms during COVID-19 and we had already started working with the young students to support them into other stable and suitable housing. Everybody was rehoused, with many of the young people moving into the private rental market somewhere else.

Interviewer: *Were there any incidents on site?*

RM: There was nothing major, no, and nothing that got media attention. So, I'm pleased to say that we delivered on our promise to Toga in terms of protecting their reputation; and our staff did a great job creating a safe environment for everyone who lived or stayed there.

Interviewers: *Tell us about what you learnt from this pop-up experience.*

RM: I think we learned as a company, that we could 'walk the walk' and not just 'talk the talk'. The fact that we took the risk, that we were willing to push the boundaries and try something new suggests that we have the right board and a great staff

team. That is very reassuring for the next big steps we need to take.

Interviewer: *And what did Toga think of the pop-up housing experiment?*

RM: In a few words: they loved it. They should feel proud, and they do feel proud. One, it probably made the company a more attractive employer for their staff and prospective staff in the future. And they have talked openly about that because they were not just working for any company, they were working for a company with a genuine and practical sense of social responsibility. The company supported their staff to work on the housing pop-up as well; many did, and not just the senior management team. I give great credit to Toga.

Interviewer: *Would you work with Toga again?*

RM: Absolutely! They were so great to work with. And Toga have told us they want to work with us again too. They are already looking for other opportunities and buildings for us to use for other pop-up social housing project. And we can't wait!



The Youth Accommodation Program

Israel Bull, Tenancy and Property Manager, Accommodation Programs, Gold Coast Youth Services

The Gold Coast Youth Service (GCYS) has several programs tailored to support young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

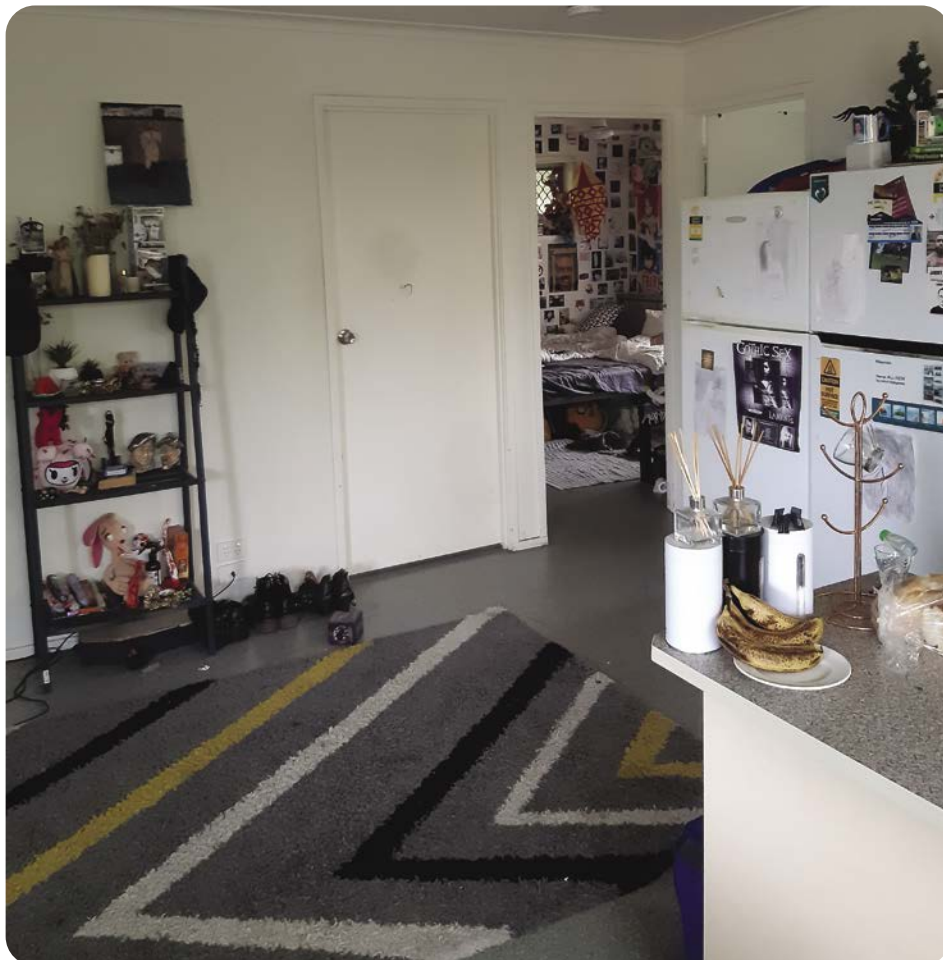
One of these programs is the Youth Accommodation Program (YAP), which is an externally supported transitional accommodation model for singles aged 16 to 21 (or couples/families aged 16 to 25) that enables young people to learn to live independently and manage their own lives in preparation for independence in the community. Engagement in individually tailored case management/case planning with allocated GCYS case workers is a requirement of the program.

The tenancy manager provides support to young people learning how to complete a residential tenancy agreement (RTA) and all other associated RTA documentation including entry/exit condition reports, learning about entry notices, what is expected at weekly property inspections and what their rights are as a tenant. Young people are given a rental reference from the GCYS tenancy manager when transitioning from YAP complete with a copy of their rent ledger, lease agreement, and all other associated documentation that is used by standard real estate companies in the private sector to

determine applications. YAP clients pay 25 per cent of weekly income for rent plus three per cent for inclusion as the units are fully furnished and supplied with appliances, linen, and cutlery, etc.

Providing a pathway to permanent housing the GCYS transitional model provides several avenues for young people to transition to independence via the external case management and goal setting put in place by case workers (in consultation with the young person). Case workers meet regularly with the young people and walk alongside them through various processes while preparing for transition. Examples of transition planning are where staff may utilise a young person's social network to support suitable house sharing situations or online research using flatmate/share housing platforms. Staff attend property inspections and meetings with perspective housemates or help young people complete housing applications at property inspections for real estate-listed rental properties.

Properly implemented transitional housing models are an essential steppingstone for many young people who are wanting to re-enter education, start employment or have stabilised mental health and gained the required living skills to enter the transition phase. This bridges the gap between crisis or medium-term supported accommodation and moving into the private rental market. The YAP program is one response in a continuum of care moving young people from more intensive supported accommodation programs, through to independent living programs at GCYS and into the private rental market (lease) or private shared accommodation situations such as rooming agreements.



Youth Accommodation Program Units.



Youth Accommodation Program Units.

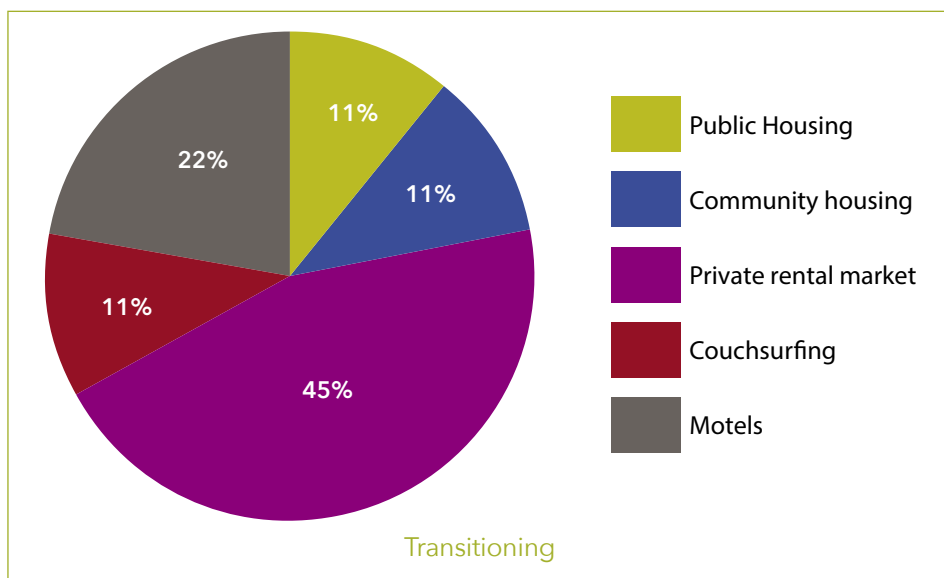
Proper assessment processes are paramount to successful outcomes and this cannot be stressed enough. Simply placing young people in a transitional housing program because they need accommodation is not conducive to successful outcomes. This can create a 'revolving door' where young people begin a cycle of continuing to presenting for support with the same existing issues and barriers, because they were unable

to develop proper structure and stabilise in crisis or medium-term models prior to moving to transitional accommodation. Without appropriate assessments transitional housing programs quickly morph from the desired model to a crisis or emergency accommodation model. In these cases, positive outcomes decrease due to the transient nature and behaviours of short-term and emergency accommodation clients.

We are proud to be able to implement a transitional housing program where many young people achieve their case plan goals and move forward to independent living in the community. Examples of this include a young person who completed the program and has gone on to establish a thriving landscape/gardening business (currently employed by the GCYS to complete mowing and yard maintenance at the YAP units on top of his other contracts/commitments). Another previous client has become a successful small business owner opening his own cafe eatery/take away venue. These young people both cited the YAP program as being instrumental in their lives and success.

The following statistics are for the Gold Coast Youth Service Youth Accommodation Program. The data provided covers the period of 1 July to 31 December 2020 period:

- 100 per cent were experiencing homelessness on presentation — all were couch surfing.
- 67 per cent of young people went into permanent housing either in the private rental market or social housing.
- 11 per cent of young people returned to their family.
- 22 per cent exited into motels or back to crisis accommodation services due to behavioural issues or choosing to disengage from the program. This small cohort consisted of young people who were assessed as being capable of independent living, but had behavioural and/or mental health issues that became too complex for the transitional model. These young people were effectively 'given a chance', but unfortunately it became evident they were unable to sustain their tenancy. Follow up external support was provided for the young person's duration of need after exit.



* This article was written by GCYS Tenancy Manager, with experience working in all accommodation models: from NGO, government funded complex-needs residential crisis and medium-term accommodation in Queensland and interstate; through to semi-independent, transitional, and independent living accommodation programs within the homelessness sector on the Gold Coast.

Melbourne City Mission's Youth Housing Initiative

Emma Bruce, Project Officer, Frontyard Youth Services, Melbourne City Mission

Youth homelessness in Victoria is an ongoing and seemingly intractable social problem with few easy solutions. The slowly worsening housing situation means that young people are at an increasing disadvantage. For those young people who enter homelessness, finding affordable and stable housing is an almost insurmountable challenge.

The homelessness and housing system in Victoria is struggling to respond to the number of young people needing help. The system is also characterised by a lack of growth, both in terms of the amount of suitable housing, and of systems change.¹ Many of the programs that exist to respond to youth homelessness have not significantly shifted in focus or deliverables over the past 20 years, while the environment around them has changed markedly. In particular, long-term housing in both the private and public spheres has become increasingly inaccessible.^{2,3}

Melbourne City Mission (MCM) has developed the Youth Housing Initiative (YHI) in response to a significant gap in the service system for young people experiencing homelessness with medium to high support needs, and the severe lack of affordable housing for young people.

Youth Housing Initiative

The youth homelessness service system is characterised by significant bottlenecks that see young people

experiencing repeated 'churn' back and forth between acute crisis and short-term housing and support.

The YHI aims to address gaps in the system and proposes a way in which housing and support can be delivered to a cohort of young people who are currently cycling through the homelessness system with no clear pathway to sustainable housing options. The model has been designed around three key pillars: housing, case management and living skills support, and therapeutic support.

Housing

The housing pillar focuses on the provision of stable housing for a period of up to four years with a focus on building skills around

maintaining a property, paying rent, tenancy obligations, good landlord/tenant relations, and being a good neighbour. Three housing options will be available: a congregate model offering on-site support during extended hours; cluster model with on-site and outreach support; and shared housing with outreach support. These housing options are flexible and designed to build capacity to maintain independent rentals at the conclusion of the program.

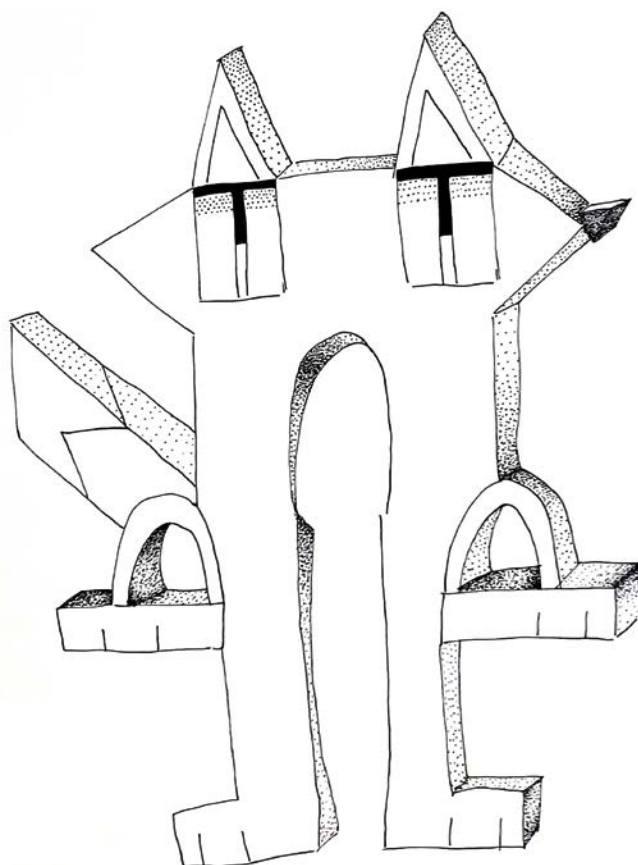
Case Management and Living Skills Support

The support framework recognises the centrality of the relationship between young people and their support workers, and understands that this is integral to the success of any planned intervention. There is strong evidence⁴

to show that what makes a real difference is the development of a trusting, respectful, reciprocal, and long-term relationship with a key worker. The practice approach and key service delivery methods will foster and guide the establishment of effective client/key worker relationships. The focus for support will be on education, employment, daily living skills, community connections, and health and wellbeing.

Therapeutic Support

Therapeutic support incorporates both a trauma informed and asset-based approach which is future oriented, placing the therapeutic work within the context of the young person's desire to achieve goals and realise aspirations. The client-led approach further builds



Artwork by Len Moules

on empowerment, allowing the young person to make informed decisions about the direction of the therapeutic work. The support has a focus on emotional regulation, improved interpersonal relationships, reduced substance use, improved confidence, self-belief and self-worth.

Target Cohort

The target group for the initiative is young people with medium to high support needs. They will also have one or more of the following risk factors: mental health diagnosis; out-of-home care history; justice interaction; alcohol and other drug issues; be an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person; and/or be an LGBTQI+ person.

What is Different About the Youth Housing Initiative?

In designing YHI, MCM reviewed existing literature on effective housing and support for young people within the homelessness system and consulted extensively with current staff and young people connected to MCM services. MCM actively challenged current practices and norms to develop a program that is innovative in several key ways:

Integrated therapeutic support

Delivery of therapeutic support by skilled professionals who are an integral part of the program team, to help young people recover from trauma and lay foundations for change and growth.

Length of Support

Sustained support and housing for up to four years. This is longer than typical homelessness services, which generally focus on crisis resolution rather than sustained change.

Rent-savings and incentives model

Participants will pay a small percentage of their income as rent, which will be returned to the young person at the end of the program to help build their financial capacity. Other incentives and milestone rewards will be incorporated into the model and tailored to the individual to foster engagement, future focus, and achievement.

Shared tenancies

The program is overtly aimed at supporting young people to move into shared private rental housing

as the most available and affordable housing option. The model is designed to support young people to develop the skills to be able to manage a shared tenancy. This is key to ensuring a smooth and sustained transition out of homelessness.

Low barrier program entry

'Housing readiness' is not a prerequisite for acceptance into the program. YHI does not rely on an assessment of someone's willingness to engage, or readiness to be housed, but instead presents the young person with a comprehensive program of housing and support that they can choose to participate in or not.

Housing is not conditional on engagement with support

Many support and housing programs that are available for young people are conditional upon the young person meeting a range of obligations that are based around their willingness to engage with supports. By including tailored incentives, the aim is to foster positive engagement with the program, rather than threaten consequences if the young person is struggling to engage. With YHI, a young person's housing is not placed at risk if they are unable or unwilling to participate in support for periods of time.

Trauma-informed healing-oriented framework

Working from MCM's overarching trauma informed and healing-oriented framework, therapeutic care will support the young person by developing positive strategies for dealing with stress and anxiety, developing skills for emotional regulation and focussing on strategies for healing and recovery.

YHI Pilot

The first stage of implementation will be to pilot the program. Melbourne's west has been chosen as the pilot location given the significant levels of disadvantage and relatively high rates of youth homelessness. Additionally, housing is 15 per cent more affordable in Melbourne's west when compared to greater Melbourne⁵ and there is adequate access to public transport and support services.

During the pilot phase, 54 young people aged between 18 and 22 will participate in the program for a

period of up to four years. The pilot will be evaluated against client, system and organisational outcomes with a focus on the following areas:

- health and wellbeing
- education and employment
- independent living skills social connection
- housing
- value for money
- scalability
- decrease in youth homelessness

The YHI program uses the tested and evidence-based approach of housing combined with support, and introduces new elements, such as integrated therapeutic support and incentivised engagement, into one program offering for young people who would otherwise be on a trajectory toward long-term adult homelessness.⁶ MCM believes that in addressing these gaps in the existing homelessness system, young people with complex needs experiencing homelessness will have the skills to navigate sustainable housing pathways in the future.

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Housing First for Youth in Australia

Professor Stephen Gaetz, York University and Homeless Hub, Canada,
Melanie Redman, President and CEO, A Way Home Canada,
Associate Professor David MacKenzie, Upstream Australia,
and Dr Tammy Hand (Upstream Australia)

Housing First

Beginning in the United States in the 1990s, Housing First achieved international recognition as an alternative to a crisis-shelter-based system as a response to homelessness. It was premised on the idea that people without a home are more successful recovering from homelessness if they are rapidly moved into permanent housing with appropriate supports.¹

Housing first frames housing as a human right, and thus the premise is not based on readiness or compliance, but the provision of safe and stable housing as a first priority regardless of the persons perceived 'readiness' or other compliance issues or requirements. Once housed, tenants are provided with services and supports to help maintain their transition to sustainable independence. There is an expanding body of evidence that housing first, when it can be delivered with fidelity, is effective.² By comparison, 'treatment first' approaches are more-costly and less effective.³

Housing first, as a model and an approach, has been discussed and promoted in Australia since around 2006. However, relatively few papers have discussed the potential pitfalls, complexity, risks, and challenges with implementation in Australia.

Core Principles of Housing First for Youth

One of the challenges of implementing housing first in Canada is the recognition that the pathways model, while effective for adults, does not identify strong outcomes when applied to young people under 25 years, does not identify strong outcomes.⁴ As such, in Canada, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (COH) in partnership

with service providers and youth with lived experience of homelessness, engaged in service design to develop and implement the intervention titled *Housing First for Youth*.

There is mounting evidence on the suitability and effectiveness of Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) as a rapid-rehousing alternative for young people who are homeless, including those whose homelessness can be characterised as a chronic condition.⁵ HF4Y adapts a housing first model and approach specifically to meet the needs of young people, and Gaetz⁶ outlines the five core principles of a HF4Y model:

1. A right to housing with no preconditions. All young people have the human right to housing that is safe, affordable, and appropriate. This housing should reflect the needs and abilities of developing adolescents and young adults. Housing is not conditional on housing 'readiness,' sobriety, or abstinence.
2. Youth choice, youth voice, and self-determination. HF4Y emphasises youth choice regarding housing and supports, and provides a framework for young people to bring their ideas, opinions, and knowledge to bear on the services and housing they access.
3. Positive youth development and wellness orientation. HF4Y is not simply focused on providing housing and meeting basic needs, but on supporting recovery and wellness. Through HF4Y, young people have access to a range of supports that enable them to nurture and maintain social, recreational,

educational, occupational, and vocational activities. The HF4Y model employs a 'positive youth development' orientation — a strengths-based approach that focuses not just on risk and vulnerability, but also youth's assets. This orientation means focusing on building assets, confidence, health, and resilience.

4. Individualised, client-driven supports with no time limits. Supports are client-driven and individually-tailored to young people and their expressed needs. The central philosophy of housing first is that people have access to the supports they need as they choose, and these supports should be flexible and adaptable with respect to timeframes.
5. Social inclusion and community integration. HF4Y promotes social inclusion through helping young people build strengths, skills, and relationships that will enable them to fully integrate into and participate in their community, in education, and employment. This requires socially supportive engagement and the opportunity to participate in meaningful activities.

The core principles of HF4Y guide the work, and inform the approach to case management, housing options, and social and health-focused supports that are designed to address the ongoing needs of developing adolescents and young adults.

Lessons from Canada

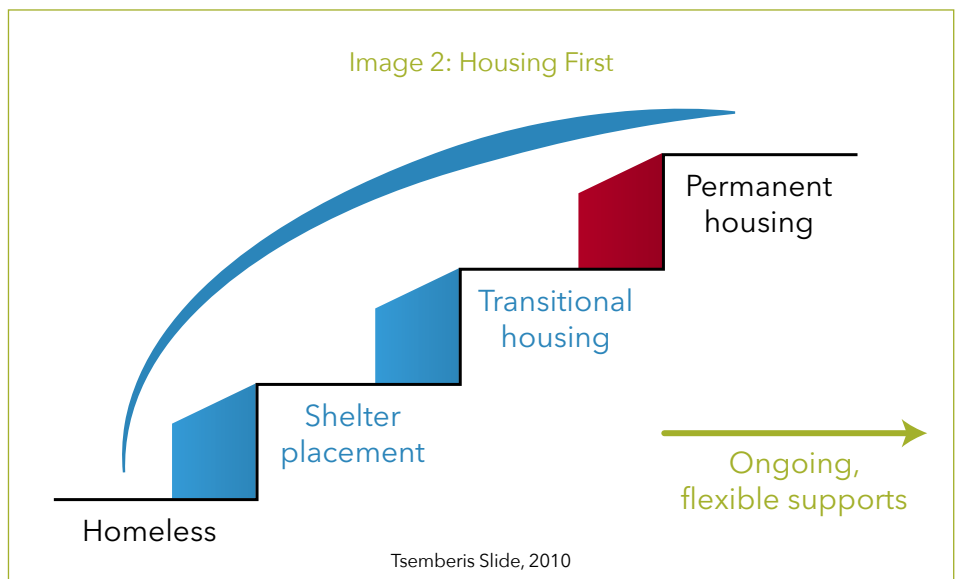
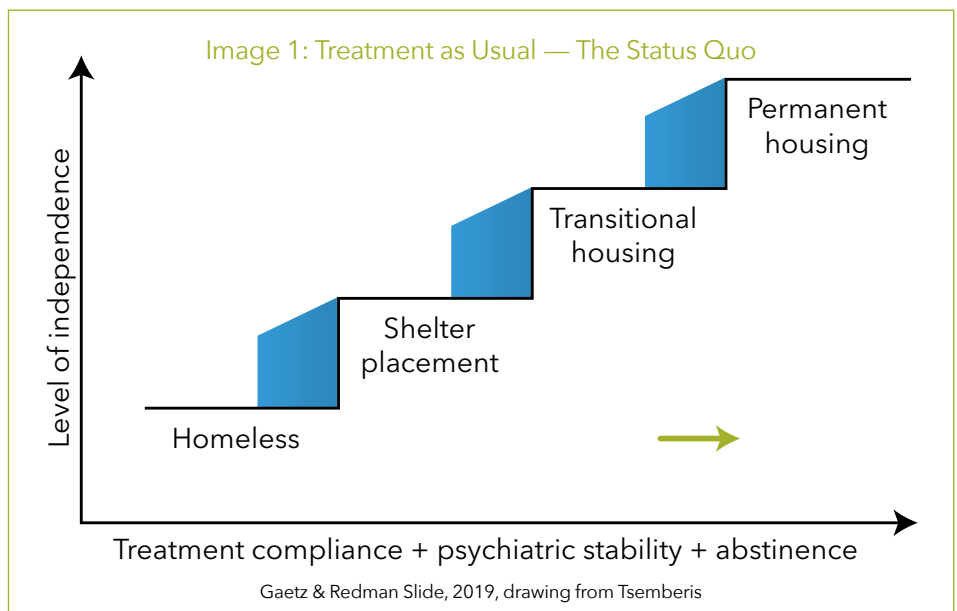
Implementation science tells us that the uptake of innovative practices takes time. In this case, the Canadian

model of HF4Y was taken up more quickly in Europe than in Canada. In order to build the case for HF4Y in Canada, the Making the Shift — Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab (co-led by the COH and A Way Home Canada) has undertaken a series of demonstration projects to prototype and test the intervention in four communities in Canada. The research agenda involves both outcomes analysis and process analysis. Three of the four sites involve randomised control trials, where the outcomes of youth receiving the intervention are compared to young people receiving 'treatment as usual'. One site targets young people transitioning care, while another site focuses on Indigenous youth with both the program model design and the research agenda being Indigenous led.

Early results are very promising. The first year results of the randomised control trials show that young people receiving the intervention, when compared to the 'treatment as usual' group, are showing significant improvements in housing stability, engagement in education and employment, and in terms of quality of life — particularly in the areas of psychological wellbeing and social relationships.

Immediate Access to Housing — A Crucial Factor

HF4Y is grounded in the belief that all young people have a right to housing and that those who have experienced homelessness will do better and recover more effectively if they are first provided with housing. Following this is the need to provide a range of ongoing supports with strong youth-focused case management designed not only to help stabilise housing, but to assist young people in their transition to housing. As with the housing first approach for adults, youth in a HF4Y model should be assisted to obtain housing (that is suitable and appropriate for them) as rapidly as possible, regardless and irrespective of perceived readiness or other entry conditions — see images 1 and 2. The nature or type of the accommodation itself is not necessarily the primary concern, as long as it is suitable for young people, and it could range from congregate living to scattered units within the community.



There is a main difference between housing outcomes of the shelter system in the United States and Canada, and those of the Specialist Homelessness Services system in Australia. That is, that clients exiting the crisis system is not necessarily about the nature and quality of the crisis accommodation or support provided (although there are arguably some major differences). Instead, it is the supply stream of affordable and social housing, including supportive housing, that can be available at any point in time to meet the demand for such housing. Realistically, implementing housing first in Australia would not thereby extinguish the need for quality crisis responses, but it would radically improve the capacity of crisis services to move young people quickly into housing and managing short waiting lists — a situation quite unlike the present status quo in Australia.⁷

Where to From Here?

My Foundations Youth Housing Company (MFYH) is arguably the closest Australian youth housing model to what Gaetz outlines in the Canadian Housing First for Youth model.⁸ Foyers also meet some of the HF4Y criterion described by Gaetz. However, both Transitional Housing Plus (Youth) provided by MFYH and foyers fail to meet the 'a right to housing with no preconditions' criterion, as both housing options only intake clients who are committed to education, training, or employment. However, as the MFYH portfolio expands in New South Wales and to other states and territories, there is the potential to provide social housing access without preconditions for young people with various levels of needs — including high and complex needs — who are not yet ready to engage with education, training and/or employment pathways.



A key consideration is to what extent immediate access to housing can be provided to young people in Australia especially considering the low stock of available social housing dwellings⁹ and the reality that young people rarely get into social housing as main tenants in the first place.¹⁰

The *Big Housing Build* initiative of \$5.3 billion for social housing over four years announced by the Victorian Government is a significant investment, and one of the most historically significant injections of capital for social housing ever seen in Australia. However, for the housing first agenda and specifically HF4Y

to really work in Australia, a lot more needs to happen. In Victoria, an average of about 830 social housing units were created annually over the past decade. This would need to be expanded fourfold and possibly sevenfold, and these are purely conjectural estimates. However, the data exists to make more refined estimates, which then would require a sustained and hopefully bipartisan commitment over the long-term.

From the perspective of Housing First for Youth in Australia, a significant investment is needed in a proportion of social housing designated purely for occupancy by young people

— irrespective of their perceived readiness or other entry conditions
— with appropriate supports available depending on the age, maturity, and general living and life skills of the individual young resident.

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The Future of Youth Housing: The Need to Integrate a Trauma-Informed Approach

Shelley Karpathakis, Youth Reconciliation Practitioner, Hope Street Youth and Family Services

In 2008 the *PLoS Medicine* editors argued that: '*homelessness is not just a housing problem*'¹ and that there are a variety of factors that contribute to homelessness. At Hope Street Youth and Family Services, our Youth Reconciliation Program works with young people and families who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness, to prevent young people entering the pathway to long-term or chronic homelessness. Our Youth Reconciliation Program adopts trauma-informed principles as the first step for the prevention step of homelessness and, ultimately, for achieving an exit from homelessness.

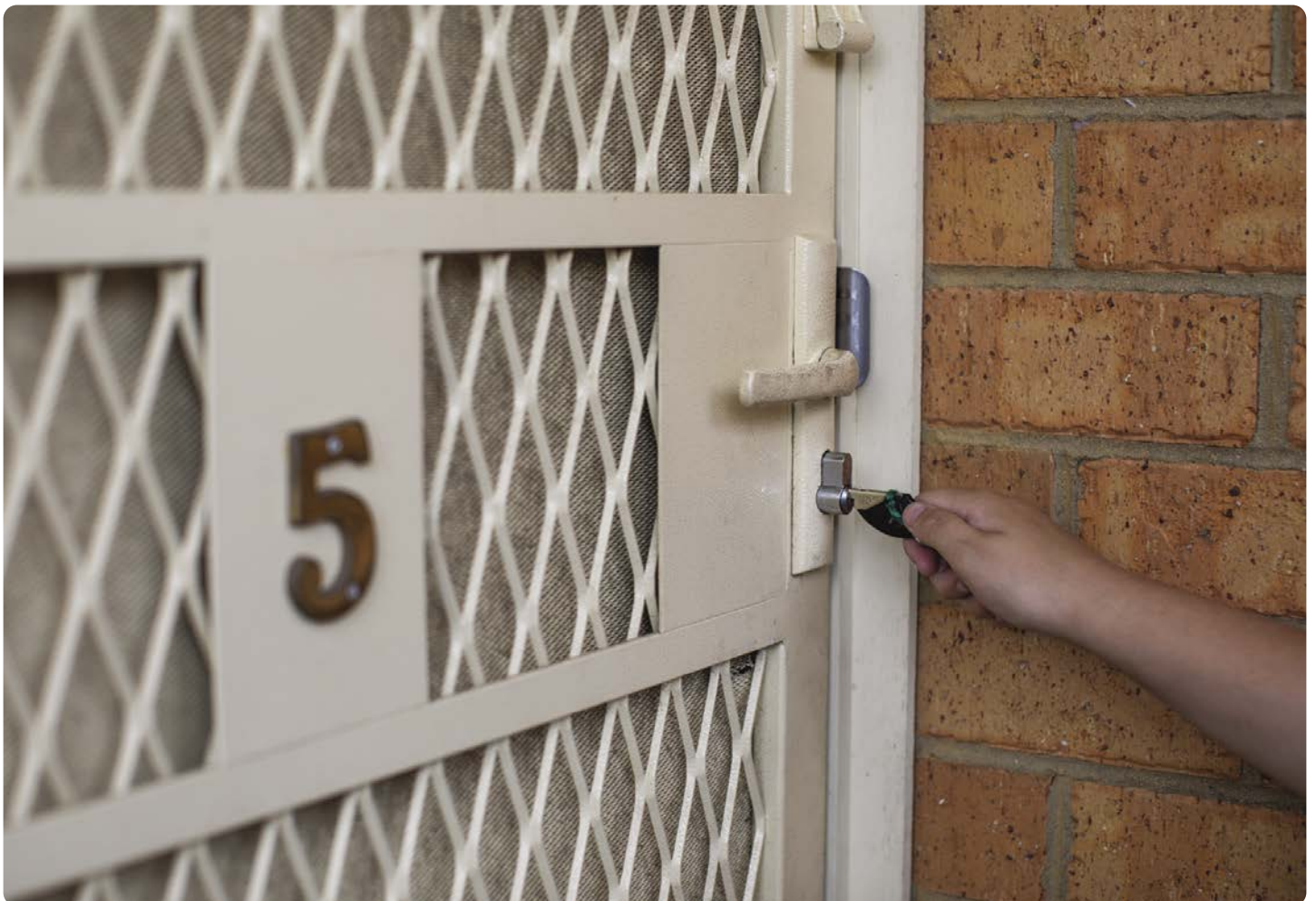
This article explores the significance of youth housing and accommodation models incorporating wellbeing as central to the service delivery and practice approaches.

Strengthening a young person's wellbeing is best achieved utilising a trauma-informed approach as a part of the specialist support (integrated with housing and accommodation) to young people. The importance of implementing a trauma-informed approach while focusing on the future of youth housing is crucial to the recovery of young people experiencing homelessness who have also experienced and are

impacted by trauma.² When young people enter homelessness, they are likely to have experienced significant trauma, which often leads to situations where they do not have stable, safe, or affordable housing — further impacting their trauma.

Key trauma-informed principles which best support vulnerable young people include:

- **Safety:** has a focus on the clients physical and emotional safety. This is highly critical when young people are entering homelessness. Providing young people with a safe physical



environment and skilled practitioners who provide emotional safety is a key first stage to assisting recovery and engaging with the young person to prevent long-term homelessness.

- **Trustworthiness:** maximise transparency, make tasks clear, and maintain appropriate boundaries. Once young people feel physically and emotionally safe, they can build trust with those support people and services around them to assist with them considering their next housing goal.
- **Choice:** is integral for clients. It is important for individuals to have their voice heard in the decision making process for their future, along with identifying goals and the steps involved to support their recovery. Young people can share their voice on what they need and what their vision is going forward.
- **Collaboration:** is a partnership where there is open and clear communication, which seeks to strength the young person's self-esteem. Counselling and emotional support provides a space for clients to feel empowered.³ When people feel empowered, they are more likely to stay motivated to achieve their goals and have the ability to effect positive change in their lives following their negative experiences.
- **Empowerment:** recognise and build upon individual strengths, experiences, and internal personal power. Creating space and opportunity for young people to be able to accept support and use their resilience



while both within and once exiting the housing sector.

In our Youth Reconciliation Program, prevention and exit support is provided in a variety of ways. This includes, without being limited to, supporting young people who are living at home and who are at imminent risk of homelessness; supporting young people to maintain family relationships where they have chosen, or are forced to leave home; assisting young people who have left home to re-establish supportive relationships with family and significant others; providing specialist support and enhancing the capacity of practitioners and agencies in the homelessness service system, to work with young people.

Future housing models targeting young people that incorporate the development of trauma-informed life skills will be a significant step toward preventing chronic homelessness and assisting young people to achieve

their housing, education, employment, social, and wellbeing goals. These include improved communication and emotional management skills; self-management, conflict resolution, and decision-making skills which support young people to have the confidence to manage themselves in various situations and navigate the housing options available for them.

The opportunity to conceptualise, consider, and plan housing and accommodation models of the future specifically for young people and young people with children, is an opportunity for young people to have their wellbeing needs met, which will have life-changing benefits. Prioritisation of wellbeing needs through adoption of trauma-informed principles will enable young people to develop the emotional capacity to exit homelessness

with skills developed, resilience built, connections made, and hopefully to have an empowered approach. Combined with purpose-designed housing that is stable, affordable, sustainable, and safe, young people and young families will be better equipped to continue their developmental progression into the various stages of adulthood as thriving individuals and community participants.

Endnotes

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Rent Choice Youth: The Albury Experience

Jon Park, Client Services Manager,

Elizabeth Cattell, Early Intervention Specialist, Yes Unlimited, Albury New South Wales

Introduction

The current rates of Youth Allowance and the associated Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) have been widely criticised as inadequate levels of support.¹ Young people who comprise one of the largest cohorts experiencing homelessness and requiring support from Specialist Homelessness Services have a restricted access to social housing in Australia — less than three per cent.² About two-thirds of the young people who do manage to gain access to the CRA remain in housing affordability stress. Many young people experience issues with their housing and its lack of affordability.

As a Specialist Homelessness Service operating in Albury NSW, Yes Unlimited is all too familiar with these issues and has been excited about the progress and outcomes achieved through the Rent Choice Youth (RCY) model for our young clients.³ While its outcomes remain limited by the availability of affordable housing, the way in which RCY links accommodation to education and employment — combined with financial support and case management — positions the private market as a potentially practicable homelessness exit option for young people.

Rent Choice is range of Private Rental Assistance products provided by the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) is designed to facilitate access to the private rental market for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. RCY specifically targets young people aged 16 to 24 years old, who: are on a low income that satisfies the

social housing income and assets eligibility criteria; hold Australian citizenship or permanent residency; are capable of maintaining a private rental tenancy; have the capacity to engage in education/training and employment; are prepared to engage with the support provided by the program; are not a candidate for priority housing; and are referred to the program by organisations that are part of the local Partnership Facilitation Group (PFG) in the community.

RCY provides case management, a rental subsidy for up to three years, and financial assistance from a \$2,000 per client brokerage fund. If young people are under 18 years, they are required to go through the lease agreement with a tenant advocate or solicitor, while completing a *Rent It Keep It* course in preparation for taking on the tenancy.

The RCY initiative has been highlighted as a promising program that could make a significant contribution to a community-based response to homelessness organised around the 'community of schools and services' model of place-based collective impact.

RCY has been a game-changer for the Yes Unlimited youth homelessness team in Albury. Over time, there has been a steadily increasing number of young people who exit our youth refuge or other temporary accommodation arrangements into the private market.

Historically, Albury's rental market has been comparatively affordable and accessible, but with growth, changing local demographics, and more recently the COVID-19

pandemic, this advantage has gradually diminished. The rental subsidy and the associated support are a recognition of a widening affordability gap faced by young people. In the first 12 months, RCY clients contribute 25 per cent of their income plus 100 per cent of their CRA entitlement towards their rent. RCY provides young people with a 'buffer period' where they can gain new skills, complete their education/training, begin to move along an employment pathway, and secure a relatively solid foundation for their transition into adulthood.

While the individual components of the RCY model are not radically innovative, what is innovative is to put all of these components together in the same model — and there are a few features that do stand out in terms of good program design:

Case Management

RCY requires a local support agency to agree to three years of case management support that runs alongside the tenancy. While the full length of this case management is often not required (or desirable), it does mean that support can be quickly activated if some kind of crisis presents itself — which from a developmental perspective is to be expected for young people transitioning to independent adulthood. While RCY relies on the existing service infrastructure to achieve its programmatic aims, the support agency does receive a moderate level of funding per young person that supports an expansion of their current capacity.

Education and Employment

RCY connects housing and support with education and employment in a non-punitive way. All young

people agree to actively engage in education or employment and this is facilitated by brokerage funds that can be used to cover the associated costs such as work uniforms, training, and course fees, as well as support to guide a young person through this process.

This approach mirrors other youth homelessness models such as the Youth Foyers with a 'something for something deal'⁴ and My Foundations Youth Housing Company's Transitional Housing Plus (Youth) model, where the expectation on young people to contribute is reciprocated with support and resources to facilitate their engagement in education/training and employment. In our experience, this component of RCY is highly valued by young people and perhaps is one of the most important factors contributing to longer-term outcomes.

Financial Support

The RCY model addresses the structural deficit created by our current rates of Youth Allowance and Commonwealth Rental Assistance, and the reality of housing affordability for young people. Too often youth homelessness responses inadvertently place the responsibility on young people in terms of their behaviour, developing living skills, gaining employment, and generally becoming 'housing ready'. While all of this may be important, none of it actually matters when affordable housing or a sufficient income is simply not available during a developmentally vulnerable period.

Keeping Young People out of the Homelessness System

RCY keeps young people at arm's length from the homelessness system. It is a reasonably long-term, conventional, rental option: the tenants hold the lease; they are involved in choosing the property (to the extent that there is choice available in the local market); and young people can continue the tenancy beyond the scope of the program. All going well, the young person leaves the property with a solid rental reference and an understanding of how to navigate their own rentals. The impact of an early experience of homelessness and

contact with homelessness systems on a young person's trajectory are well known⁵ and ideally good youth homelessness responses should deliberately minimise the time a young person identifies as 'homeless'.

These elements together lay a foundation of financial, practical, and emotional support for young people in RCY that meets a number of developmental needs for this cohort. Take the following example of Chloe:

Chloe was almost 16 when referred to Yes Unlimited Youth Refuge Broughton House, by her child protection worker after an experience of family breakdown. Chloe was approved for RCY and, alongside her Yes case manager, began looking for a property immediately. Chloe applied for numerous properties over a number of months before successfully gaining a tenancy. Chloe maintained her first property for the full 12-month lease and commenced a TAFE course, with RCY covering the cost of some whitegoods for her house and equipment she required for the course. After 12 months, she decided to move to be closer to the local TAFE and the local take-away shop she had been offered work in. While still in the RCY program, this time Chloe required less support; she identified suitable properties on her own, applied for the property, and organised her own move, including setting up all utilities and rent payments. Chloe successfully maintained a second 12-month lease, completed her TAFE course and continued her part time work. Chloe decided to end her tenancy to live with her partner and relocate for a sea change in another state. Chloe is now 19, no longer requires support in her third successful tenancy, and has a qualification, steady employment, and a strong rental history, with good rental references to support her in the future.

Chloe's story is generally typical of the young people who have been able to be supported through RCY; however, the program is by no means a panacea for youth homelessness. For some young people, the expectations and responsibilities of renting in the

private market are developmentally inappropriate. Also, the program relies on the availability of affordable properties in the private market, which much of the time can be likened to shuffling cars in an already full car park — certainly in and around Albury. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic this has become particularly problematic, with vacancy rates in many regional areas — including Albury — close to zero. This in turn means we tend to have a large number of young people eligible for RCY, but waiting in less than ideal accommodation until a property becomes available.

In general, Yes Unlimited's experience of the Rent Choice Youth model has been positive. RCY is a promising approach for supporting young people in the private rental market. While it does not resolve the housing affordability crisis in New South Wales, it does provide a support safety net for some young people renting in the private market. A case can be made that a model of deeper private rental support could be a useful part of a more comprehensive national youth housing strategy. Chloe deserves to have the final say: *'The Rent Choice Youth program is the chance I never thought I had'* — a happier ending than might have been the case without the support that the program was able to provide.

Endnotes

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Future Housing and Accommodation for Young People with Complex Needs

Hope Street Youth and Family Services

Jarrold was 17 years old when he was referred to Hope Street's First Response Youth Service (Mobile Outreach) in Melton to address his housing needs. Jarrold had been asked to leave his family home located in Sunshine after Child Protection involvement regarding allegations of sexual abuse incidents against his younger sister a number of years ago. According to Jarrold, at the time, no assistance was provided by Child Protection in obtaining housing for Jarrold and when Hope Street began working with him, he was sleeping rough.

Immediately, the First Response in Melton Mobile Outreach team worked with Jarrold to place him into a motel for four nights (emergency accommodation), completed a safety plan and provided food vouchers. During the initial period of working alongside Jarrold, it became apparent that Jarrold did not have any identification documents that could be used to help obtain Centrelink. This greatly hindered his ability to access any housing or accommodation options. The team therefore supported Jarrold to access interim emergency accommodation for an extended period while assisting Jarrold to secure longer-term housing. The Salvation Army Youth Service agreed to fund Jarrold with 40 days of emergency accommodation utilising Housing Establishment Funds.

The assessment of Jarrold's situation by the housing referral agency was based primarily on the Child Protection information. Combined with Jarrold breaching his Intervention Order conditions (enforced by Child Protection), it compounded the challenges in securing supported accommodation for Jarrold with eight to 10 referrals for vacancies declined.

In reassessing the situation, the First Response in Melton Mobile Outreach team contacted Jarrold's mother to better understand the concerns in place and to review the Initial Assessment and Planning (IAP) so it was more reflective of his situation. Jarrold's mother revealed that they were subjected to family violence for a long time. With this and other information, the First Response in Melton Mobile Outreach team updated the IAP and adjusted their advocacy for his housing requirements.

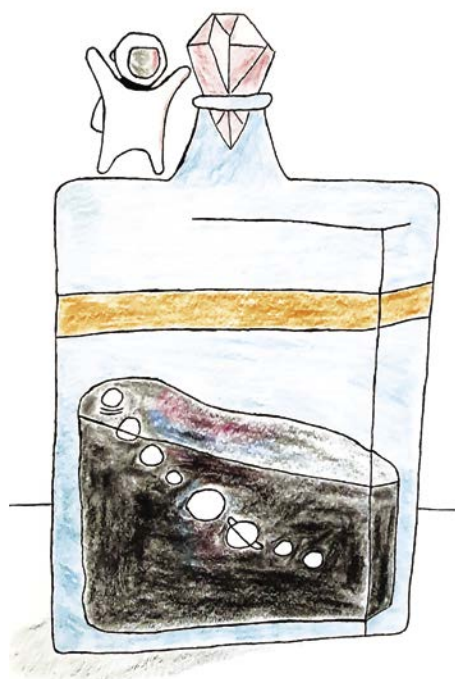
The team successfully referred Jarrold to the Frontyard's Accommodation Program. This program had a vacancy for a tenancy with eligibility criteria for those clients who *'have been unsuccessful in gaining referral to all subsequent refuges due to risk or behavioural issues'*. Jarrold was accepted for the medium-term vacancy. When Jarrold exits from

Frontyard, he will be 18, which increases his eligibility for more housing options for him to explore.

On the basis of Jarrold's story, it is critical that future housing and accommodation includes:

- specialist youth focused support programs where the young person is the primary client
- a co-ordinated approach between all agencies, with the young person being the centre and driver of the planning and implementation as much as possible
- access to funding to provide extended emergency accommodation in recognition that a lot of options are not readily available and it will take time to secure suitable accommodation or housing
- pathways that eliminate (not create) barriers
- conducting a comprehensive assessment of a young person's situation utilising a holistic approach and, as required, may occur over a number of weeks as the client develops trust and rapport with the specialist support or housing worker
- increased specialist youth-focused accommodation and housing programs tailored and equipped to support young people with complex needs with the aim of preventing long-term homelessness and further trauma and disadvantage.

Note: The Hope Street in Melton Mobile Outreach Program is funded in partnership with The Ian Potter Foundation.



Artwork by Chris Larritt

Village 21

Pete Zwiers, Head of Programs, Kids Under Cover

A stable and secure home, combined with wrap-around services, are key for young people to successfully transition from Out of Home Care (OoHC) to independent living.

This is what Village 21 is based on an innovative youth homelessness prevention program focussed on the unique needs of young people in OoHC. Funded by the Victorian Government and delivered in partnership with Anglicare Victoria, Village 21 was initially designed to provide support to young people leaving care at age 18 and interrupt the spiral of homelessness which they often find themselves in. Now the provision of care for young people in Victoria has been extended until the age of 21 by the Andrews Government, Village 21 provides another model and option for young people in OoHC.

Officially launched in December 2020, six young people will live on site at Village 21 for up to three years. They are supported by two live in mentors and a full time Anglicare Victoria case manager with expertise in employment, training and study pathways. The village environment assists in creating strong connections back to the community and teaching skills in self-sufficiency.

This model supports the development of essential living skills that young people may not have had the opportunity to learn in other OoHC settings, including household skills such as cooking, cleaning and budgeting. Social and employment skills are also focused on, to support transition to employment and fully independent living. Young people will leave Village 21 with a rental reference from a local real estate agent, ready for the next step in realising their full potential.

Kiren was one of the first tenants to move into Village 21, after 16 years living in OoHC. He left his last foster carer when he was 18 and was sleeping on his friend's couch before moving into the village. Kiren has shared his experience of living in Village 21 so far.

The first few months living in the village have gone quite fast to be honest.

The support here is absolutely amazing. Having the mentors and staff around as a support is one of the greatest things about the village. When they say they are going to do something, they 100 per cent are going to do that. They help with everything, which I find great because a lot of young people do really need support.

I've found in a lot of other places the staff say they'll help and support you, and they do but only to a certain extent. Previously, if I said no to something a lot of workers would leave it at that. I find here they really push you to better yourself in life and take care of you.

We have a community meeting once a week with all the tenants and staff. Basically we discuss any problems or issues and bring up anything in general. We also allocate someone to cook for the group at these meetings and take turns each week.

I really like the layout of the village. It's really great because you can hang out with everyone in the communal areas and then say, 'it's time for just me', and be able to go to your bedroom.

When I first moved into the village I had a lot of unsecured loans.

The team members offered to help. They got me onto a financial advisor and he was great and got everything sorted for me. The village team also said to think about what I spend my money on and spend it on things that help me instead of just wasting my money.

I've gotten a lot of help with finding a job since moving in. I really want some work where I can be hands on, I've worked as a bike mechanic and a cabinet maker before. Lewy [Anglicare Victoria Key Practitioner] has come to a few of my employment meetings with me and helped me with anything I need. Organising and going to these meetings can be kind of hard without somebody else's support. I'm really looking forward to getting back into employment.

It wasn't for Village 21, I'd still be couchsurfing and potentially homeless. It doesn't really get much better than Village 21. It's affordable for young people and a great community. There should be more places like this, because I believe it would help quite a few more young people in care.

A lot of young people leaving care are just kicked out and have nowhere to go. Whereas Village 21 took me in and said, 'as long as you're willing to work with us we're willing to work with you.'

The access to a secure home and support in the critical years of a young person's development can change the trajectory of their lives. Models like Village 21 ensure that young people leaving state care have the best chance of a bright future. As it stands Village 21 is the first of its kind, but hopefully it won't be the last.

Client-centred Responses to Young People in Crisis

Hope Street Youth and Family Services

Before arriving at Hope Street, Shaun was living with his mother and sisters. However, due to Shaun's ongoing perpetration of violence and physical assaults against his mother, the police applied for an Intervention Order to remove Shaun from the family home. He temporarily moved to his sisters' place, however due to overcrowding and Shaun's behaviour, this placement broke down and Shaun spent the following period squatting in the local area, moving through public spaces with nowhere to go.

Shaun entered Hope Street's First Response Youth Refuge with limited independent living skills. With the intensive daily support of our

residential staff Shaun soon improved his independent living skills. Shaun completed all chores, creating a daily structure for himself. Furthermore, Shaun continuously worked on his behavioural issues and is now able to effectively communicate with workers and recognise the behaviours that have a negative impact on his life.

Housing outcomes for Shaun have been limited as he was diagnosed with an intellectual disability and ADHD, impacting his ability to manage behaviour, understand information appropriate to his age level and live independently. Furthermore, given Shaun's aggressive behaviour was mostly triggered

by his family, reunification was not a workable option. The team at the refuge explored all housing options alongside his care team, determining that the most suitable form of accommodation was Supported Independent Living (SIL)

However, the SIL property that was set aside for Shaun was taking longer than expected to become available. Knowing that Shaun had a long-term housing outcome, and understanding that the refuge was for short-term stays, case managers worked with his care team to find more suitable interim accommodation. Sharehouse accommodation was identified as an interim option.



Image by Evolution participant Beck

Utilising the flexible brokerage, which is key to the First Response Youth Refuge model, case managers worked alongside Shaun to ensure he would have a smooth transition into the share house while waiting for the SIL property. This was done by encouraging Shaun to look at the property prior to moving in, making sure Shaun was equipped with all new bedroom furniture and linen, a companion card, \$200 voucher for food, and payment of one month's rent. Furthermore, First Response Youth Refuge case managers encouraged Shaun to use his wellness and recovery plan which he could access and use at any time when he felt overwhelmed or needed to talk to one of his support workers.

Since moving into the sharehouse, Shaun continues to receive intensive outreach support from the First

Response Youth Refuge case managers. Furthermore, he has been engaged with his NDIS support work daily alongside workers from the SIL property to aid the transition into the accommodation. Shaun's goals are to live in stable long-term accommodation and re-build positive relationships with family and friends, which he is achieving. Shaun is thankful for the support that he has been provided and enjoyed his time at the refuge.

While Shaun was able to access the necessary services required to exit homelessness, his options were extremely limited. Shaun's situation required intensive case management and a flexible approach to achieve a longer term housing outcome. The flexible brokerage provided ensured that Shaun was able to exit into an

interim housing option as a planned stepped approach to entering his longer-term housing. Shaun was an active participant in the case management process including determining how the brokerage funding was utilised, which Shaun commented as empowering.

Shaun's situation highlights the value of future accommodation and support models for young people that include:

- an individualised approach
- greater access to flexible brokerage
- case managers who empower young people to be active participants and decision makers in achieving their support plans including financial decisions
- the benefits of specialist supported crisis accommodation such as the First Response Youth Refuge model, which focuses on:
 - holistic youth-centred wraparound case management support tailored to the young person's situation and needs
 - safety
 - stability
 - intensive behaviour therapy
 - referral to specialist services
 - development of key living skills
 - integrated trauma informed practice
 - assisting young people to develop their abilities and readiness to progress into sustainable housing options.

In support of young people in crisis, future youth housing needs to provide more immediate access to housing and accommodation options. Shaun's situation demonstrates that a variety of long-term safe and affordable housing models are essential for young people and must be responsive to each young person's different housing and support needs.



Youth Housing Initiative: Integrating Therapeutic Approaches into a Housing and Support Model for Young People

Zoe Vale, Senior Manager, Youth and Family Homelessness and Amy Liddy, Project Coordinator,
Youth Housing Initiative, Frontyard Services, Melbourne City Mission

In 2019 Melbourne City Mission (MCM) undertook a process to develop a model of supported housing for young people that aimed to address a gap in the current system for young people with medium to high complexity of need. The project is called the Youth Housing Initiative (YHI). During the design phase, consultations with young people experiencing homelessness, and staff within Specialist Homelessness Services provided a great deal of insight into what they valued in terms of support and where gaps existed. The young people that we consulted with told us that getting the right support for their mental health was one of the most important things they needed to help them move forward in their lives — and it was the one thing that they found most difficult to access in the current system.

Why integrate therapeutic support into a housing and support program?

Sixty-four per cent of young people who used MCM homelessness services had a mental health issue or concern identified by a worker, with 44 per cent self-reporting having a prior mental health diagnosis.

The young people we see are at a stage in their development where they are acquiring the life skills and emotional resilience necessary to negotiate the world around them — things that are usually acquired within the structure and support of the family home, school and close social networks. However, young people experiencing homelessness are largely disconnected from these networks and may even have been harmed by them. They lack the protective factors that help mitigate the risk-taking and reactive behaviour that is a normal part of a young person's development.

In addition, the young people who present to homelessness services are often at a point where they have exhausted all other options and have already experienced a lengthy period of instability. Young people spend a significant amount of time staying with friends, family and acquaintances, including using 'survival sex' as a means of securing accommodation, before resorting to approaching the formal support system.

It follows then that the young people who come to MCM have experienced extensive trauma in the family home or in the out of home care system, and are also likely to have experienced further trauma in their attempts to find shelter for themselves.

The YHI integrates a therapeutic approach as a core element in its model of care to help young people recognise, manage and recover from the trauma they have experienced and be supported to grow into adulthood with good mental health and wellbeing.

The YHI will have dedicated therapeutic staff with qualifications from a range of disciplines including psychology, social work, occupational therapy and counselling, who will lead the provision of mental health support, including alcohol and drug focussed support, with the young person.

There are many ways that therapeutic support can be provided, and at different times, young people will need different things. The YHI therapeutic approach is client led and the application of specific mental health interventions and support dependent upon the needs, presentation and goals of the individual. The key aims of the therapeutic approach focus on empowerment, positive emotional

health, interpersonal functioning and positive self-regard. YHI therapeutic staff will implement a range of supports and assist young people to find what works for them.

The YHI will use a strengths-based assessment framework called the Growth and Empowerment Measure (GEM) that has been adapted for the program. The tool helps the young person identify their emotional strengths and areas of difficulty. The GEM then helps inform the development of a tailored therapeutic plan for the young person.

The Personal Wellbeing Index — School Children (PWI—SC), a short-standardised assessment questionnaire looking at a young person's high-level satisfaction with different life domains and will be used with participants as part of monitoring and evaluation. The PWI—SC addresses wellbeing domains relevant to young people experiencing homelessness and will provide feasible and useful indicators of client wellbeing outcomes. Evaluation of these outcomes will contribute to best practice research around mental health outcomes for young people in the Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) sector in Victoria.

Recommendations from the final report from the Royal Commission into Mental Health recognised that stable housing can be transformative, bringing a sense of purpose, hope and opportunity. Furthermore, it acknowledges that supporting good mental health and wellbeing extends beyond the mental health and wellbeing system. Integrating therapeutic support within YHI's supported accommodation model aims to remedy what can presently be a disjointed and difficult to access system.

Life-changing Support Integrated with Stable, Safe, and Low-cost Housing

Hope Street Youth and Family Services

Hope Street in Melton is a specialised program which aims to empower young people through independent living and youth focused case management support for a 12 to 24-month period. The program has key features which allow for young people to progress into positive housing outcomes at the end of their stay:

1. Young people live independently in one of the eight one-bedroom units or two family units (cluster model creating a small youth focused community).
2. Young people are to be engaged in education or employment as one of the key steps along the pathway out of homelessness.
3. Young people are actively engaged with case managers (located on-site, five days a week) utilising strengths based and solutions focused approaches to practice, to holistically assist a young person to achieve their goals while in the program — in-particular securing long-term housing.
4. The living skills team work over the weekend, which includes overnight, providing support and conducting targeted programs with the young tenants.
5. 'The office' is a youth-friendly and welcoming environment, where young people are encouraged to drop by at times suitable to them and

interact with staff, in addition to having one-to-one case management time, getting some grocery items from the pantry, or watching a movie.

The Hope Street in Melton program has been operating for over 10 years. Consistently, these key elements are central to the success of the program and the positive client outcomes achieved; in particular, keeping young people and young families connected in their local community and diverting young people and young families from long-term homelessness.

Models such as the Hope Street in Melton program that are truly youth centred are a must for the planning and provision of future housing for young people. Amy's story below explores the importance of the model and the success when youth centred services are provided.

Amy's Story

Amy was 11 when she first experienced homelessness. Her mother had substance use issues, which resulted in Amy experiencing neglect and living in an unsafe environment. Amy started couchsurfing by staying at her friends' houses before the Department of Health and Human Services organised for Amy to move in with her father at age 14. However, Amy felt unsafe, and living with her father promptly ended.

According to Amy, she felt that the early intervention strategies of Child Protection did not provide safe and supportive accommodation. Due to the instability in Amy's life, most especially surrounding housing — Amy dropped out of school in Year 9. Amy began to use substances and entered

situations that continued to be unsafe due to lack of appropriate guidance, support, and stable and safe housing.

Amy entered a relationship at age 15, becoming pregnant soon thereafter. Her partner was a perpetrator of family violence. Amy said she found the strength to leave the relationship to protect herself and her unborn son. One month before her sixteenth birthday, Amy welcomed her son into the world. During this period, Amy had been living temporarily with her friend and after five months she had to leave this accommodation. Amy and her young son were placed in a hotel by an Anglicare worker.

In November 2018, at the age of 16 and while living in a hotel with her six-month old child, Amy engaged with the Hope Street's First Response in Melton Mobile Outreach Team. The team assisted with a referral to Western Region Accommodation Program (WRAP) where Amy stayed for a few nights before she was referred to the Hope Street in Melton Program (a youth 'Foyer-like' model). The following week she was accepted into one of our two-bedroom family units in the Hope Street in Melton program.

Towards the end of Amy's 24 months, she was graduating from year 12. The Hope Street in Melton program was able to provide flexibility and allow Amy and her son to extend their stay so she could focus on her graduation and plans for 2021.

While Amy was assessed as a priority for public housing, there is extremely limited housing stock in the western suburbs. Therefore, upon entry into the

program, the team discussed the option of private rental as an appropriate exit plan for Amy and her son. It is important to provide an honest overview of housing exit options early, so that young people can begin to develop realistic expectations about their housing options; most especially given Office of Housing will not be an outcome for most young people in the area.

The Hope Street in Melton case managers and living skills staff work alongside young adults to draw on their strengths to ensure they develop the skills to live interdependently within their local community. Amy's skills increased significantly over the 24 months however the anxiety of how to afford private rental in the current Melbourne housing market created a lot of fear for Amy. She spent many hours in the program fearing for her future and how she could maintain stable housing for her family.

During Amy's time in the Hope Street in Melton program, the team supported Amy to build her connection to the local community. Amy was linked into parenting support, education, mental health counselling, and a general practitioner. Regular care plan meetings were conducted which Amy was invited to join, As she began to build confidence, Amy took the lead in the meetings. Amy was provided living skills over the weekends and in case management to increase financial literacy, navigate relationships, increase her learners hours, and develop an understanding of her housing options.

It was a challenge for Amy to secure employment that accommodated her schooling and parenting responsibilities. To create additional income, Amy decided to start her own business and provide make up to the local high school students for the debutants and graduations. The team supported Amy to successfully apply for a City of Melton Council grant to assist her to start her business. Unfortunately, before Amy was able to start her business, Australia was struck by COVID-19.

Yet during the pandemic, Amy showed her resilience by quickly adapting to remote learning during year 12. Amy chose to have her child at home and not access care due to safety concerns regarding COVID-19. With the increase in government support payments during the pandemic and the freeze on rents in transition housing, Amy was able to save her additional Centrelink payment.

Amy completed year 12 in 2020 and with her savings felt ready to explore the possibility of Private Rental. In addition to her savings, the case management team were able to apply for Private Rental Brokerage funding and an Office of Housing Bond Loan to support the transition out of the program into independent living. Amy secured a three-bedroom town house in Melton, which was close to public transport and her son's care provider.

The townhouse required cleaning before moving in so Hope Street provided funding to have the carpets cleaned and provided support to clean the property. Amy received furniture from 'Donation Direct' and used her savings to purchase white goods. Amy moved into the property in February and with our support has turned the property into a beautiful home.

Amy has since adopted a kitten.

Amy is proud of her achievements and the home she has been able to create for her son. In 2021, Amy plans to start beauty school and begin her business. To support her education, the team applied for a grant to fund an eyelash extension course. The case management team are also continuing to provide outreach support for up to 12 months. This will aid Amy's transition into private rental and support a successful tenancy. As Amy's confidence and independence grows, the support provided will reduce.

Amy has demonstrated incredible character over the course of her journey prior to and while at Hope Street, displaying her many strengths including resilience.

Amy acknowledges how much she has grown from the 16-year-old that Hope Street met in 2018. Amy thanks the program for the opportunity of safe stable supported housing, she has stated without the opportunity she had at Hope Street, she may have lost care of her son, which would have completely devastated her. Due to Amy's willingness to participate in the various youth-focused opportunities provided by the Hope Street in Melton program, she has been able to thrive and achieve her goals. Amy feels that her and her son have a bright and successful future ahead of them.

Amy's story allows us to understand the importance of specialised models of support for young people who have experienced homelessness. Greater and quicker access to safe, low-cost social housing could have prevented the anxiety and distress experienced by Amy. Anxiety can be extremely debilitating for people, preventing them from being able to make decisions and take action to move forward in their life. Providing stable, long-term housing allows young people to feel less overwhelmed or anxious and instead allows young people to focus on more positive aspects of their life such as education, employment and their children — as Amy has done.

Furthermore, it is always important to remember that key elements that young people seek in private rental, such as being near public transport, shops, medical and childcare are the same features that people needing social housing desire. Location of housing close to social amenities must be a central focus of future housing for young people.

To ensure young people in similar situations to Amy are not consistently re-telling their story in order to obtain grants and funding, future youth housing models should include larger amounts of flexible brokerage. Funding allocated by the homelessness agency will enable responsive access to resources for immediate client outcomes.

Youth Housing Now: The Salvation Army Youth Services Perspective

The Salvation Army Victorian Youth Housing and Homelessness Portfolio Group

The Salvation Army Youth Services offer an integrated suite of targeted programs engaging with young people across Australia on their journey to independence. We are focused on creating intentional avenues for young people to explore opportunities, build support networks, and to access, participate, and contribute to their communities. We have a national footprint in delivering housing and homelessness programs to young people. Our National Model of Care, *Journey to Independence*, is particularly important in our delivery of refuge accommodation, assisting young people to develop meaningful relationships, as well as transferable and measurable skills to prepare for future opportunities and success.

What is the role of youth refuges in providing access to appropriate forms of youth housing?

The youth refuge sector has significantly evolved over the decades, to now be strongly guided by person-centred, trauma-informed frameworks. Youth refuges offer some young people a genuine period of respite and safety from the often chaotic, violent, transient, and uncertain experiences of early homelessness.

Youth refuges present a unique opportunity to work in partnership with young people to address the causal factors of crisis and homelessness and assist each young person on a pathway to independence, including:

- establishing immediate and on-going safety
- providing environments that allow for stabilising of acute crisis (mental health, alcohol and other drugs, transience)

- providing space for the creation of a therapeutic alliance between young people and staff
- developing and teaching transferrable life and living skills of young people
- providing access to ongoing and independent housing pathways to vulnerable young people who experience barriers to securing other pathways
- providing access to holistic referral pathways for young people to transition out of refuge
- advocating to ensure young people in refuges are not excluded from accessing further opportunities due to the perceived complexity of this group.

Barriers and challenges exist that negatively impact the capacity of youth refuges to effectively deliver successful outcomes. Across Victoria, crisis accommodation timeframes of six to eight weeks are inconsistent with the wider national approach and do little to meet the needs of young people within the refuge system. The concept of short-term 'crisis accommodation' is no longer relevant, and shows a disconnect between evidenced-based responses and funding requirements in understanding the relational needs of young people and the responses required in working through immediate crisis and risk. The Victorian Parliament Inquiry into Homelessness made the recommendation to *'embed flexibility into its approach to the funding of homelessness programs. This flexibility should extend to the amount of time an individual receives support and the services they are eligible to receive'*.¹

Where youth refuges are a suitable accommodation option, we must ensure young people are supported for the duration of their need, moving away from restrictive time-limited episodes of care.

It is also acknowledged that young people accessing refuge accommodation can exhibit behaviours which at times make it difficult to successfully remain in a shared refuge environment or gain access to appropriate exit housing options following refuge accommodation. However, this group must be supported to find appropriate responses and support within the youth refuge sector, to reduce further episodes of homelessness and work towards long-term housing outcomes.

The challenges faced across the refuge space is to be able to meet the needs of individuals who have historically found themselves exited from programs without ever having had the opportunity to realise self-directed case management goals.

Our experience has shown that delivering youth refuge accommodation to young people requires a psychologically aware approach. This approach enables us to recognise that young people accessing services have had experiences of trauma and have lived in crisis throughout adolescence, culminating in feelings of hopelessness and a lack of trust in us as adults, carers and professionals.

Within a psychologically informed environment we show a genuine regard for the young person, a high level of curiosity about each young person's unique life and a commitment to non-exclusion through elastic tolerance.



Photograph taken by Evolution participant Caitlin

Do transitional housing programs provide a pathway to permanent housing?

Over time, transitional and crisis accommodation have evolved to become more aligned, delivering similar service response to young people experiencing homelessness. As most states have moved away from short-term refuge accommodation, and allow young people time to build safety and relationships, supported transitional accommodation client groups have largely changed to young people who would have historically been accommodated in short-term accommodation.

In Victoria, the Salvation Army's education pathway housing model was developed to respond to an

identified need to support young people beyond refuge, who struggled to secure mainstream accommodation options and were particularly vulnerable. The program works in partnership with a range of community housing providers and philanthropic partners to offer safe and supported transitional accommodation for young people engaged in education. In ensuring permanent housing options post the education pathways model, young people can access private rental brokerage to ensure financial barriers do not prevent ongoing opportunities to succeed. These partnerships allow young people to move to permanent housing, while maintaining connection to support during this important change in their life.

The Salvation Army's Lead Tenant Program in South Australia has implemented a unique model of transitional housing for young people. The program provides head-leased accommodation, integrated specialist case management support and an opportunity to establish peer relationships through the provision of lead tenant mentoring.

The lead tenant provides ongoing mentoring and support in living independently, while allowing young people to cultivate their abilities, make choices to shape their own lives and learn how to engage and contribute to the world around them. With the integration of stepped support services, young people involved in the program reported reduced episodes

of crisis, enhanced independent life and living skills, effective transition into the private rental market and feelings of stability and safety.

While youth refuges and transitional accommodation programs provide a critical response for young people experiencing homelessness, they must be delivered as part of a broader housing continuum to ensure flexibility and suitability are considered in responding to the diverse needs of young people.

Can young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness realistically gain access to the private rental market?

Young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness still face many barriers in accessing permanent housing. This is due to the perceived risk of young people in independent accommodation, low incomes, high rental costs, lack of affordable and social housing options, inability to maintain full time employment due to education and training participation, and ongoing challenges in advocating for access when competing against other community members.

In working to ensure young people have access to the private rental market, the Salvation Army has developed and implemented a number of innovative responses to ensure fair and equitable access to the private rental market for young people. These models focus on holistic outcomes for young people, as well as ensuring appropriate levels of support to ensure long-term sustainability.

Rent Choice Youth

A very successful program which actively works to gain access for young people to the private rental market is Sydney's Rent Choice Youth Program run in partnership with the Department of Communities and Justice. This program was first introduced in September 2017 to provide for an unmet housing need for young people exiting transitional programs and leaving care. Rent Choice Youth, through the work of the Housing Liaison Worker, supports young people to access safe and affordable private rental housing. Rent Choice Youth provides young people with a

three-year, tapered rental assistance ensuring secure tenure while they complete their education, training, and employment goals.

The Housing Liaison Worker is instrumental in the delivery of Rent Choice Youth through creating relationship building with real estate agents and education on the support that can be provided to young people while in private rental. In a two-year period, and an extremely competitive rental market, the program sourced 23 private rental properties across inner-city Sydney through the implementation of its real-estate engagement strategy. These mutually beneficial partnerships resulted in real estate agents directly contacting the program with up-coming vacancies on suitable properties for tenancy.

Youth Private Rental Accommodation Program (YPRAP)

In Victoria, YPRAP supports young people and families to establish independent or shared private rental tenancies. The program provides brokerage for tapered rent assistance to allow young people to access and afford shared private rental. Providing brokerage to assist with housing costs is critical in assisting young people to gain fair and equitable access to the private rental market and often normalises their experience of young adulthood and allows the opportunity to transcend the homeless service system. Since 2019, YPRAP has successfully sourced and obtained over 80 private rental tenancies for young people within the homelessness system. YPRAP has proven particularly successful in assisting young people transitioning from our youth refuges and education pathways program.

Can young people be experiencing or at risk of homelessness gain access to the various forms of social housing, community housing, and public housing? What are some of the obstacles to them gaining access to social housing?

Young people exiting homelessness face significant barriers in accessing the various forms of social housing, community housing, and public housing. In working with housing partners, our experience has shown social housing providers are often

reluctant to accept young residents because of their low and insecure incomes, and because they are regarded as high-risk tenants. These barriers within the wider housing sector reduces the capacity for rapid rehousing of young people. It also has the potential to create further disadvantage and increase their experiences of homelessness, through placement in refuge or short-term housing that isn't aligned to the needs of the individual.

Data from the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) shows that young people make up over half (54 per cent) of all single people who seek help from homelessness services, but they only make up 2.9 per cent of principal tenants in social and public housing in Australia.² This identifies a significant barrier young people are experiencing in gaining access to this housing option. There is an urgent need for young people to have dedicated access to appropriate social housing stock.

We believe that equitable access to youth-specific social housing options, incentives or increases to the allocation and proportions of housing available to young people — with appropriate levels of support — will provide further affordable housing opportunities. Consultation with our services nationally, has also highlighted current social, public, and community housing stock are inappropriate and unsafe for young people who have often experienced complex trauma. We need access to 'youth friendly' housing stock with secure tenures (up to five years) to provide stability and appropriate opportunities for youth transitioning to independence.

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Frontyard Accommodation Program Staffing Model Designed to Enable Good Client Outcomes

Mark O'Brien, Senior Manager, Frontyard Youth Services and Leanne Nicholson, Operations Manager, Accommodation Program, Frontyard Youth Services, Melbourne City Mission

Frontyard's Accommodation Program commenced in May 2019 following a refit to the Frontyard Youth Services building at 19 King Street in the central business district of Melbourne. The aim was to bring about an innovative program that provides an integrated, holistic therapeutic program that disrupts the cycle of disadvantage which contributes to young people's experiences of homelessness.

To achieve this, we recognised that we would need to create an integrated model with appropriately skilled staff at the centre of this. The staffing model is resourced with a range of professionals, with specific training and experience targeted at:

- improving the physical and mental health and wellbeing of each young person
- fostering rewarding relationships and social networks including with friends, family and the broader community
- creating pathways into participation in meaningful and enjoyable activities like hobbies, sporting groups, education, training, volunteer work, or employment; improving positive self-identity and good self-esteem
- increasing choice and control by increasing options that create the pathways into safe, stable and sustainable accommodation and increasing the tools and skills for life and personal capacities to sustain the changes.

The rationale for targeting these areas can be described in the context of risk and protective factors.

Priority is given to young people referred to the Frontyard accommodation program when they:

- have had previous refuge stays that were not completed due to being asked to leave and/or were unsuccessful
- have been unsuccessful in gaining referral to all subsequent refuges due to risk or behavioural issues — this may include refusals based on prior criminal convictions
- are not currently engaged in a support system(s)
- are at high risk of not engaging without intensive support.

It is often the case that these young people have previously lived in areas where — from a risk perspective — there is a high unemployment rate, poor completion of school rate, a high family violence rate, and less social support resources.

Mid 2020 represented 12 months of service delivery of the program. A file review at that time indicated that, of the 33 young people entering the program: 52 per cent had been admitted to a mental health inpatient unit; nearly 75 per cent had a mental health diagnosis; and 70 per cent had been prescribed psychotropic medication. While the diagnoses varied, 48 per cent had presented to hospital following a history of suicide attempts.

The program utilises an alternative staffing model to traditional youth refuge in acknowledgement of the increased complexity for this cohort of young people and that an alternative program was required. The young people are generally no longer accessing support services (at their, or the service's, choice), they

exhibit symptoms of trauma, they are experiencing mental ill health and/or substance misuse, and they are at risk of experiencing chronic long-term homelessness. This requires a multifaceted professional approach.

The starting point was recruitment of an experienced, multidisciplinary team of people that work with young people. Our youth workers are present 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with a ratio of one to six. The basis of this is that as per the earlier complexity snapshot it allows staff to provide significant support for an individual, and statistically we may have more than one young person at a time who would benefit from this intensity.

The program worker is a role that supports the development of programs within the integrated model, with the aim to:

- improve overall health and wellbeing
- create new opportunities and learning
- build communication and social skills
- identify and build on personal strengths, preferences, and aspirations
- identify and build community and social connections
- make choices about learning opportunities
- promote self-care, mutual support, and responsibility.

This is achieved through ensuring that the programs encapsulate learnings across the Frontyard identified life domains including

housing, education, employment and training, living skills, finances, relationships, diversity, legal, health, psychosocial health and wellbeing, alcohol and other drugs and safety.

As stated earlier, the concentration of young people experiencing significant mental ill health is higher in the Frontyard Accommodation Program than in general society. The mental health team within the integrated model at Frontyard is composed of mental health qualified staff with differing clinical skills including alcohol and other drug counselling. Their role is to support young people to link in and establish a strong connection with community mental health support as appropriate and to work with staff and young people to develop strategies to enable them to participate fully within the program. Allied health in the form

of occupational therapists, trauma therapists, art/music therapists and our internal senior practitioner support a comprehensive approach to resourcing clients with developmental and level appropriate supports.

Peer workers have been a valuable resource in the mental health sector for a number of years and the evidence is powerful that they support people to engage in utilising services as well as becoming advocates for self. The Frontyard integrated model utilises peer workers to achieve these and other outcomes including increased ongoing learning and development of the program through feedback mechanisms.

The below table provides an outcomes list that outlines why this diverse workforce complements

in supporting the young people referred to the Frontyard Accommodation Program.

The traditional funding and reporting model for Specialist Homeless Services has been one of bed numbers per annum against average length of stay. The Frontyard Accommodation Program has similar targets. However, it acknowledges that with an alternative staffing model that has been created to disrupt the cycle of disadvantage, it needs to go further and articulate both how it is doing this and the outcomes that can be achieved.

The outcomes do not dictate what young people's outcomes will be as a result of the changed staffing model; they merely outline the enablers and protective factors that provide the right opportunity and environment for a young person to thrive.

| Youth Worker Outcomes | Program Worker Role Outcomes | Mental Health Staff Outcomes | Youth Peer Worker Outcomes |
|--|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young person appropriately engaged and utilising resources within the program • Strong care plan developed and supported • Young person feels safe • Support young people to develop tools and skills for life • Young person has increased insight and ability to establish and communicate goals and needs • Enablement of space that supports making informed, safe decisions • Increased ability to financially sustain sustainable housing and positive lifestyle • Increased social connectedness • Reduced conflict • Harm reduction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create rewarding relationships and social networks including with friends, family, and the broader community • Create pathways into participation in meaningful and enjoyable activities like hobbies, sporting groups, education, training, volunteer work, or employment • Increase the tools and skills for life and personal capacities to reach and maintain their goals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people have access to a flexible mental health response • Flexible service provision and ongoing referral pathway, creating engagement with mainstream community mental health services • Young people are able to identify triggers and manage their mental wellbeing • Young people and staff supported to best develop housing plan based upon young people's wellbeing needs • Support and safety needs assessed and addressed • Frontyard integrated service staff are able to identify and appropriately respond to the mental health and wellbeing needs of young people • Specialist practitioners in the form of music/art therapy, occupational therapists and trauma therapists support targeted support and engagement strategies • Senior practitioner works in with teams to support staff development and ensure consistent minimum standards are being met for individuals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide young people with support and advocacy to access Frontyard and mainstream community supports • Provide peer support by working to foster hope and inspire young people to engage in support plans to achieve their goals • Collaborate with Frontyard staff to co-facilitate programs aimed at increasing the skills and capacity of young people accessing the service • Provide education from a lived experience, for young people to better understand their support options, and to increase the capacity of the organisation to better respond to the needs of young people • Participate in advocacy around collective issues at an organisational, community and/or leadership level |

The Future of Youth Housing: Are Youth Foyers the Answer?

Keith Waters, Executive-Officer
and Dev Mukherjee, Senior Research Officer,
National Youth Commission Australia

For a young person to achieve independent living, relatively sustainable employment and a vocational path is needed. Youth employment and associated transition issues have been the focus of the *National Youth Commission's Inquiry into Youth Employment and Transition*; an independent community inquiry into the complex transitions experienced by young people as they move from secondary education and adolescence along to post-secondary education and training pathways to employment and independent living as young adults. Along the way, about three out of ten young people are missing out on achieving a viable transition pathway, and only some manage to recover with help.

Access to appropriate housing, homelessness, employment, and unemployment are all interconnected issues. Youth homelessness remains a social problem and a difficult experience for too many young people as they attempt to navigate their transition from dependence to independence. Access to social housing for young people is not a viable option, since only a small proportion of them are accepted as main tenants of social housing properties.¹ Many young people have not yet secured full-time jobs, are either unemployed, or under-employed or are still engaged in education/training pathways.

There have been several relevant inquiries: The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Committee (HREOC) Inquiry led by Commissioner Brian Burdekin, which produced a landmark report *Our Homeless Children* (1990); a Parliamentary House of Representatives report, *Aspects of Youth Homelessness* (1995); and an independent 2008 National Youth

Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness which issued Australia's Homeless Youth.² In March 2021, the Victorian Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee report entitled *Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria: Final Report* was released.³ It is not that there has been a lack of policy thinking about youth homelessness in Australia.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that young people are a significant cohort within the homeless population, they have missed out time and time again when governments of the day have failed to follow through with strategic action around a long-term planned expansion of housing options for young people and early interventions.

Youth homelessness is a solvable problem. It is a problem that ultimately requires a sustained national effort — and that has yet to happen. The National Youth Commission in 2008 argued that Australia needed a new commitment on homelessness from Commonwealth, state, and territory governments — a national framework and national action plan. The report outlined the architecture of this national commitment as follows:

- a national aspirational horizon — the goal of eliminating youth homelessness by 2030
- appropriate structures and processes designed to work across election cycles in a bipartisan way
- specific targets over the short, medium, and long-term
- strategies that set out realistically how targets will be reached
- a youth-centred focus for service provision and programs

- review and public monitoring so that progress can be recognised and problems identified against the needs of young people experiencing homelessness.⁴

Affordable housing was the second key policy proposition in the NYC's *Roadmap for Youth Homelessness* document that was widely distributed in 2008, while expressing a concern that there be '*explicit attention to the needs of young people and in particular disadvantaged young people*'. Furthermore, the Inquiry advocated '*a new form of youth housing that links housing to education, training and employment programs*'.

Australia had not done so well with this policy nexus. In the past, there was a Jobs Placement Employment and Training program (JPET) managed by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR). At the time, supported accommodation for people experiencing homelessness was managed through the Department of Family, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA). This separation was a less than ideal model and of doubtful efficacy even while in full swing.

The NYC Inquiry into Youth Homelessness advocated that:

...an Australian version of the UK/European Foyer youth housing model should be developed that packages accommodation with other supports, particularly education and training. Other initiatives might include accommodation for homeless school students and 'boarding school' projects for Indigenous communities.⁵

In 2008, there were only a few pilot foyer projects, but since then various jurisdictions have funded foyer projects. There are now at least 15 foyers operating across Australia, in most jurisdictions.

The current NYCA Inquiry into Youth Employment and Transitions has highlighted the importance of stable housing for young people to succeed in education, training, and employment. The NYCA Inquiry has proposed the Youth Futures Guarantee⁶ to help young people navigate the transition from school to post-school education, training, and employment. Housing is one of the nine pillars of the guarantee.

There are several features that the NYC Inquiry considers essential in housing for young people:

1. Social and affordable youth housing is linked to education and training, or employment opportunities and pathways.
2. Social and affordable youth housing ideally should be located near employment, education, training, services, and transport, because transport is a significant barrier to young people accessing opportunities and assistance.
3. Wraparound support for young people who have experienced homelessness, poor mental health, and/or substance abuse. Such support promotes housing stability and as well as addressing the health and wellbeing needs of young people.
4. The goal of social and affordable youth housing and associated supports is about viable independent living arrangements. Young people need flexible, temporary arrangements, but with sufficient security, over multiple years while they work out their path in life.

Youth foyers potentially conform to these criteria. A commitment to education, training, and employment is a core criterion for being accepted as a foyer resident. John Thomson of Anglicare Western Australia explained

the importance of pathways of study and employment: *'Our focus on work and studies reflect the understanding that financial independence is the way to break the cycle of homelessness for young people.'*⁷

Many of the youth foyers in Australia are located near education and training institutions. For example, there are three Education First Foyers closely associated with TAFEs in Victoria. The new Foyer Central in Sydney is near a major transport hub, as well as TAFE and universities.

However, foyers are a costly model, in large part because many of the foyer projects have involved the construction of newly built purpose-designed multi-story facilities. In the UK, there are several examples of dispersed foyers which have apartments or houses in a community linked to a support hub. These facilities incur lower capital costs while still delivering quality support for young people.

In a research study based on extensive fieldwork in the United Kingdom (UK) in 2016, Steen and MacKenzie⁸ found that, unlike the UK, the development of foyers in Australia was not financially sustainable in the sense that a package of benefits (income) available to residents is insufficient to cover the support costs of the foyer facilities. In Australia, foyers remain in the category of 'special projects'. Another difference between the UK foyers and the Australian foyers was that in the UK, foyers were a response to the economic recession of the early 1990s; whereas in Australia, foyers are a part of the response to homelessness.

Several witnesses who provided evidence to the NYC Inquiry hearings in 2019 have claimed that foyers are achieving high educational outcomes. Mission Australia reported that the percentage of their foyer residents who had completed Year 12 or a Certificate III increased from 42 per cent at entry to 67 per cent at the point young people left their foyer accommodation, and to 75 per cent a year after exit.⁹

Likewise, John Thompson reported that of more than 450 young people housed at Perth's Oxford Foyer since February 2014,

93 per cent had exited into stable and secure accommodation, which they maintained for at least 12 months after leaving. Additionally, almost 90 per cent were engaged in sustainable employment, education, or training.

A recent AHURI research report, while supportive of the robust link between supported accommodation and education/training and employment, has raised a critical concern about the weak links between foyers and specialist homelessness services as well as some of the claims being made about effectiveness.¹⁰ The Victorian Education First foyers pitch eligibility as for 16- to 24-year-olds 'experiencing or at-risk of homelessness' and promote the model as an 'early intervention measure aimed at assisting young people to avoid entering the cycle of homelessness'.

By contrast, Associate Professor David MacKenzie, an advocate of foyers since before 2008, advised the recent *Inquiry into Homelessness* in Victoria that because foyers are funded under Australia's homelessness response, foyers *'need to take young people out of the homelessness services — not any old young person but those young people who can engage with education and training, and not all young people exiting a homeless service can'*.¹¹ There appears to be an issue about the positioning and functioning of foyers within the broader service system response to youth homelessness.

Also, Steen and MacKenzie have described a range of possible foyer-like models that deserve to be considered in the bigger scheme of supported housing for young people. The pioneering social housing model for young people developed by My Foundations Youth Housing Company (MFYH) in partnership with the NSW Government is one such innovative approach. The Transitional Housing Plus (Youth) model offers up to five years of housing and support, with rental payments that increase annually to approach market rents in the fifth year in order to prepare young people for market



Window Girl by Dean Briggs

rent conditions.¹² To help young people transition to independent living, partner youth services support residents with any day-to-day issues, especially their engagement with education, training, and/or employment pathways, in which eight out of 10 residents are engaged.

To answer the question we posed in the title of our article, are youth foyers *the* answer? Clearly, foyers are *an* answer. The Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria has recommended that:

*'...the Victorian Government conduct an assessment of suitability for additional Education First Youth Foyer sites in metropolitan and regional areas, with a view to providing funding for additional facilities.'*¹³

Support for more foyers is justified but there are several reforms that need to be considered if foyers are to make an impactful contribution to reducing youth homelessness.

In terms of the future of youth housing and broader systemic reform, the National Youth Commission Australia is strongly of the view that all supportive housing models for young people should include support for education, training, and employment pathways.

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Rebecca Mullins

Chief Executive Officer, My Foundations Youth Housing Ltd



My Foundations Youth Housing is driven by the vision that *'young people everywhere should have a safe, supportive and affordable home'*. In a perfect world of course, that home would be with a loving and supportive family. However, every submission to this edition of *Parity* will no doubt demonstrate that this is simply not the reality for tens of thousands of children and young people across Australia.

The youth homelessness sector has rightly argued for a long time that youth homelessness cannot be solved by the provision of housing alone. I have made that argument myself many times in previous youth service delivery and advocacy roles.

For some time, I have come to believe that perhaps we have somehow allowed this argument to be taken too literally by governments at all levels, because the supply of bricks and mortar housing options for young

people has not accompanied government investment in support services. I am concerned that in our determined advocacy about the need for housing plus support, we have had a positive response around support while not seeing governments attend to the housing side of the equation. Not a win-win outcome exactly, more like a win-loss outcome. Homelessness of course cannot be solved without housing.

The goal of My Foundations is to reimagine social housing for young people, to ensure there is a place for every young person who faces homelessness, with various rent and tenure types that match their needs, capacities, and ambitions. Social housing need not be lifelong — though it will be for some.

So, while we agree that young people need more than a house, we believe young people also need our sector to advocate strongly and loudly for a significant investment in a range of social and affordable housing programs that meets the needs of young people who cannot live at home. City, metropolitan, and regional areas across the country need housing options for young people that will enable them to secure a *'safe, supportive, and affordable home'*.

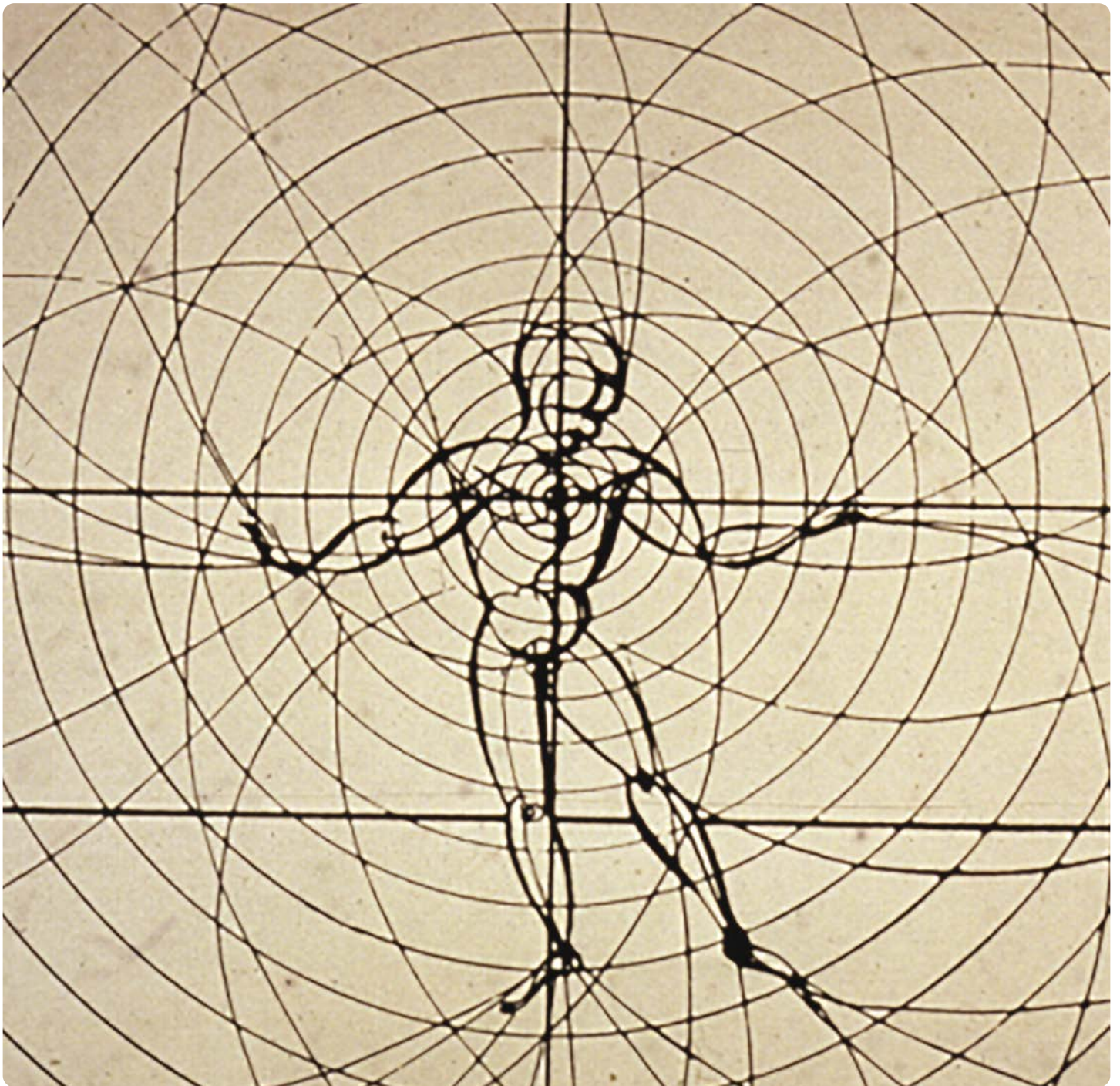
I am not suggesting we switch from advocating for support to advocating for housing. What I am arguing is that we calibrate our advocacy around the absolute necessity for a strong nexus between housing and support. We must advocate for both. If the family unit cannot provide safety and a supportive home environment for young people, then the broader community must.

Young people who experience homelessness are not a homogenous group; they come with different experiences, backgrounds, needs, and ambitions. They therefore require a suite of housing, support, therapeutic, educational, and employment services to be available to them, if they are to have an opportunity to become their best possible selves. This should and must be our aspirational ambition and our defining goal.

There is no one type of housing model that, like the proverbial silver bullet, will resolve youth homelessness. Crisis, transitional housing, medium-term supported housing, and youth foyers all have an important place in context. Our homelessness system might be largely crisis oriented but some communities lack a crisis service; youth foyers work only for a particular cohort of homeless young people experiencing homelessness; our system lacks breadth and depth in many places.

However, we must remember that there are many experiences that unite young people as a cohort, so we must not focus only on their differences.

Another way of thinking about the breadth of housing options is along a continuum of options that recognises that young people's natural human development occurs at different ages and rates. Given the right type and length of support, young people can reach a position of wellbeing and independence that we would want for every young person. Housing policy applied to young people must recognise this, and provide lengths of tenure and appropriate levels and types of support to enable young people to make successful transitions to adulthood.



Drawing of Man as Dancer, from 'Man and Art Figure', circa 1921, by Oskar Schlemmer.

In partnership with the New South Wales (NSW) Government, My Foundations Youth Housing has developed a new housing type for young people with a unique rent and tenure model designed to assist young people in their transition to adulthood. Our experience tells us that Transitional Housing Plus (Youth) can assist most young people to successful social and educational outcomes.

Transitional Housing Plus (Youth) is detailed in another article in this issue. On the other hand, we must concede that it may not work for every young person and

currently the model has only been piloted in NSW. We believe that it is a model that potentially could benefit young people in social housing across the country.

There is a strong argument for early intervention so that young people do not leave home prematurely in the first place. I strongly concur and agree with this argument that also requires a significant investment. What I would add is that the community will fare best if they can undertake early interventions, while at the same time having more housing options for those young people for whom returning to home is not an option.

That said, the core focus of My Foundations Youth Housing is safe, supportive, and affordable youth-appropriate and youth-specific social and affordable housing in their community — if that is where they wish to remain. The significant progress in NSW demonstrates that every Australian jurisdiction could do this and should do this! The opportunity to do just that belongs as part of the COVID-19 recovery. The response to homelessness during the COVID-19 crisis was unprecedented and largely successful. Can we do as well in the post-crisis period and over the next decade or two to ensure that all young people can be safely and affordably housed?

Jo Swift

Chief Executive Officer, Kids Under Cover



What is the future of youth housing? The answer lies in how our governments fund organisations providing youth housing options that meet the needs of this unique cohort.

The Victorian government's \$5.3 billion *Big Housing Build* aims to create over 12,000 homes for families in need, and begins to address the issue of housing for vulnerable Victorians. There is no denying this funding is significant; it is the biggest ever investment in public and community housing our country has ever seen. However, this funding is only available to registered housing providers and associations in Victoria. The *Big Housing Build* acknowledges the work of these larger organisations, while leaving the highly successful small organisations in their wake.

For organisations like ours, the *Big Housing Build* does nothing for the almost 800 families in Victoria who are desperate for housing support to keep their family together. Kids Under Cover had to temporarily close applications for our studio program in May 2020 due to a significant funding shortfall. In no uncertain terms, we were receiving more applications for our studios

than we had funding to provide, exacerbated by the overwhelming impact of COVID-19. We still have 130 approved applications on our waitlist and have received more than 650 enquiries about our studios since May. These families are at breaking point. The young people in these households will remain on the edge of homelessness until we have funding to support them, or their family breaks down. And the longer they are waiting for support, the more likely they will fall into the spiral of homelessness.

Last month we saw the final report for the Inquiry into homelessness in Victorian tabled in Parliament. This was an impressive report, considering more than 450 formal submissions and conducting 18 in-person and online hearings. The committee made 51 recommendations to the Victorian Government, with a significant focus on early intervention of homelessness. As an organisation, we were thrilled to be acknowledged in recommendation 18: *That the Victorian Government provide additional funding to organisations that provide innovative accommodation for young people at their family home, such as Kids Under Cover.* This validates the incredible impact our programs have in preventing youth homelessness. The big question now: what is the Victorian Government's response to the report and associated recommendations?

This inquiry into homelessness is not the first. Kids Under Cover was founded back in 1989 off the back of the shocking statistics of youth homelessness revealed by the *National Inquiry into Youth Homelessness*. Brian Burdekin noted at the time that an estimated 25,000 young Australians were experiencing homelessness.

The report made more than 70 recommendations to address the issue of youth homelessness at a national level, stressing the need for greater coordination of services at a Commonwealth, state, and local level. As a result, the Federal Government committed \$100 million over four years for improved accommodation and services.¹

Fast-forward to today, we have only seen the issue of youth homelessness worsen. There are now more than 43,000 young Australians experiencing homelessness,² with no financial support from the Federal Government to address the issue. In response to the most recent report, the Victorian Government needs increase funding for early intervention youth housing programs and services. They have an opportunity to turn the tide on the youth homelessness crisis, which their predecessors have failed to.

There is no shortage of innovation in the youth housing space and organisations who are driven to deliver youth housing options and provide a brighter future for our young people. As a sector, we have the expertise, the ideas, and the experience to deliver accommodation and support services that meet the unique needs of vulnerable young Australians. The missing piece is the sustained funding from our governments to deliver these housing programs and services. They alone hold the key to unlocking the future of youth housing.

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Opinion 3

David MacKenzie and Tammy Hand

Upstream Australia



Imagine ... It's easy if you try: Victoria invests five per cent of the \$5.1 billion *Big Housing Build* on social housing for youth!

Unquestionably, the announcement by the Victorian Government of its \$5.3 billion *Big Housing Build* project to create 9,300 new units of social housing, replace 1,100 old public housing units, and build 1,600 affordable housing properties is a major initiative. This commitment is part of the Government's response to COVID-19 to pump prime economic recovery.

However, Victoria is working from a low baseline. Over the past decade, social housing has grown by an average of only 830 dwellings per year and Victoria's net per capita spending on social housing has been the lowest in Australia for many years.¹

History shows that bold investment in social housing seems to require a crisis, and exposes a troubling fault line in Australian housing policy. Let's not forget that the last time an Australian government launched a big spend on social housing was the Rudd Government's \$5.6 billion *Social Housing Initiative* in 2009 as



part of the Federal Government's post-Global Financial Crisis response, designed to rapidly build 19,700 new social housing dwellings and repair another 12,000. This successful initiative came shortly after the Rudd Government's declared aim of halving homelessness by 2020, and the release of a white paper, *The Road Home*, in December 2008, together with a down payment of \$800 million, that included \$400 million over a two-year period for social housing specifically for individuals and families experiencing homelessness. There was a lot of excitement in the homelessness sector at the time. Needless to say, homelessness has not been halved by 2020 and the promise of the 2008 white paper has not been fulfilled.² As we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, we are entitled to ask whether history will repeat itself, the first time perhaps as a tragedy of sorts, and second time hopefully not as a farce.

Housing affordability in Australia is a multidimensional problem that has relentlessly impacted the Australian community over several decades. Average real house prices have more than trebled over the 25-year period to 2018 and outpaced the

rate of increase of incomes. Median home prices have risen from four times median incomes in the early 1990s, to more than seven times today. Amongst young adults, aged 25 to 34 years, home ownership rates have fallen by 10 percentage points since 1993. A consequence of rising house prices is that indebtedness has increased from about 40 per cent in 1993 to 140 per cent in 2018, and after-housing poverty has increased significantly. These shifts and changes are not natural nor inevitable, but are the result of an history of policy decisions by successive Australian governments over several decades.³

Our specific concern is that although young people are a significant cohort of Specialist Homelessness Services clients — 16 per cent of 15- to 24-year-olds presenting alone, and 35 per cent of all individual children, adolescents, and young adults receiving SHS assistance annually — except as part of family units with a parent(s), they are accorded a low priority in terms of access to social housing.⁴ As an age cohort with low incomes venturing to live independently, they struggle with the unaffordability of the private rental market, Commonwealth Rental Assistance notwithstanding.⁵

Given the \$5.3 billion *Big Housing Build*, Victoria has an historic opportunity to begin to reimagine social housing for youth. It can invest a small increased increment of five per cent of the new properties specifically for young people, using the tried-and-tested Transitional Housing Plus model of support and longitudinally rental scale-up model.

What would this look like across Victoria? How could a distribution of social housing properties be modelled on the basis of the

estimated need for social housing by young people? Assume that the total funds available for social housing for youth over the next four years of the *Big Housing Build* is \$250,000,000 (approximately five per cent of \$5.1 billion). For the purpose of estimation, the notional unit cost of a property in rural Victoria is approximately \$250,000 on average, and the unit cost in metropolitan Melbourne is approximately \$350,000 on average. Some 800 units could be constructed using these metrics. For the purpose of calculating an equitable horizontal distribution, Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) SA4 regional geographical areas are used which approximate closely to clusters of local government areas.

The estimated at-risk population metric can be constructed in terms of:

- a) The school age regional cohort of disadvantaged 12- to 18-year-old students

who are most likely to leave school early, experience homelessness or other adverse issues including living in poverty, estimated using My Schools data; and

- b) ABS regional population data on young people 19 to 24 who are not engaged in education or employment.

This modelling provides a first approximation for the purpose of illustration of the horizontal relativities of risk and disadvantage across Victoria and Melbourne.

A five per cent allocation does not equate to the actual expressed demand for access to social housing by young people exiting from Specialist Homelessness Services, however, it could be a significant beginning of an historic readjustment. As we began to think about the potential practicalities of a social housing for youth commitment

— something that could happen and should happen but has yet to happen — our mathematical metrics drifted into imagined housing futures, evoking John Lennon's poetic lyrics in his famous song *Imagine*, that invites us to think about the possibility of a better world; in this context, a better social housing future for young people.

Endnotes

1. Legislative Council Legal and Social Committee 2020, *Inquiry into homelessness in Victoria*, Parliament of Victoria, Melbourne.
2. MacKenzie D and Hand T 2019, *A National Report Card on Youth Homelessness*. Youth Development Australia, Melbourne. <https://apo.org.au/node/225611>
3. Pawson H et al 2020, *Housing Policy in Australia: A case for System Reform*, Palgrave Macmillan, London.
4. Hand T and MacKenzie D 2020, 'Missing Out: Young people and social housing', *Parity*, vol. 33, no. 7, pp. 45-49.
5. Hand T and MacKenzie D 2020, *Young People and Housing Supports in Australia: Income Support, Social Housing and Post-Homelessness Outcomes*, UniSA AHURI Research Centre, Adelaide.

Table 1: Relative distribution of social housing for youth funding and properties assuming a five per cent (\$250,000,000) investment over four years

| Regions [ABS SA4 areas] | Population at-risk metric | Proportion of funds (per cent) | Funding from \$250m | Unit properties |
|--|---------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| North West/ Ballarat/ Warnambool SW/ Geelong | 12,496 | 15.3 | \$38.25 | 153 |
| Bendigo/Shepparton | 5,039 | 6.1 | \$15.25m | 61 |
| Hume/ Latrobe Gippsland | 7,114 | 8.7 | \$21.75m | 87 |
| Rural Victoria — total | 24,649 | 30 | \$75m | 300 |
| Melbourne — Inner | 5,434 | 6.6 | \$16.5m | 47 |
| Melbourne — Inner East | 2359 | 2.9 | \$7.25m | 21 |
| Melbourne — Inner South | 2,820 | 3.4 | \$8.5m | 24 |
| Melbourne — North East | 5,307 | 6.5 | \$16.25m | 46 |
| Melbourne — North West | 6,772 | 8.3 | \$20.75 | 59 |
| Melbourne — Outer East | 5,979 | 7.3 | \$18.25m | 52 |
| Melbourne — South East | 12,129 | 14.8 | \$37.0m | 106 |
| Melbourne — West | 12,388 | 15.1 | \$37.75m | 108 |
| Mornington | 4,016 | 4.9 | \$12.25m | 35 |
| Metropolitan Melbourne — total | 57,204 | 69.8 | \$175mm | 500 |

Donna Bennett

Chief Executive Officer, Hope Street Youth and Family Services



The Future of Youth Housing

Hope Street Youth and Family Services (Hope Street) is proud to co-sponsor the April edition of *Parity*. This edition asks the sector to explore the current state of the provision of housing for young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. It also asks the sector to consider youth housing options, and current and new models designed to meet the housing and support needs of young people. Hope Street articles and client stories included in this edition aim to provide insight into the issues faced by our clients. We are leading the way with best practice, industry-led models that drive our service delivery for young people and young families experiencing homelessness.

My drive and passion for overcoming youth homelessness began in the mid-eighties when I worked in a regional young women's refuge and a statutory residential care centre for children and young people on Child Protection Orders. I was completing my Bachelor of Social Work at the time. My experience has spanned over four decades, with 2021 as the beginning of my fifth decade working

in this area. I have experienced the many changes that have shaped the current youth homelessness sector.

The youth homelessness sector emerged in the late 1970s early 1980s with the Supported Accommodation Assistance Act enshrining the responsibilities of the Commonwealth and state and territory governments to this growing social situation. Supported Accommodation Assistance Program Agreements followed, formalising these responsibilities and funding providing the framework for the (wider homelessness) youth homelessness sector.

Over the decades it was a struggle for the youth homelessness sector to adapt to changing federal and state government policies and funding which were woefully inadequate in addressing and preventing youth homelessness. Other areas impacted were the wider homelessness sector, public housing sector, and private housing market. This buffeted the youth homelessness sector significantly. In Victoria, the mandated acquisition of smaller agencies in the 1990s saw many specialist youth refuges and support services merge with community health centres and local governments. Program funding was later handed back when it was understood that youth homelessness services were better aligned in the homelessness sector. The funding environment became extremely competitive. Larger not-for-profit charities achieved considerable growth at the expense of smaller independent agencies. Youth homelessness became a lower priority with reduced funding.

Social and economic factors have also had a profound negative impact resulting in increased

youth homelessness. These factors include: record rates of increased youth homelessness; increasing youth unemployment and under-employment; rapidly growing population; record high private housing costs (purchase and rental); consistent erosion in real terms of Centrelink income and youth wages; significant rises in cost of living; and major underspend in social and affordable housing over the decades. Our program teams and I are constantly challenged with a system in crisis. The private rental market and social housing system are failing our client group. We explore this further in this edition of *Parity*.

In the recent decade, we experienced some investment and change by the Victorian Government and local governments to homelessness. This was an opportunity to begin to address an inadequate and depleted system. Through a local place approach and partnerships, Hope Street has developed innovative models to address systems failing to prevent youth homelessness. In partnership with the Victorian Government, local government, philanthropy, the corporate sector, and local communities, Hope Street developed a number of innovative programs to provide housing and support for young people in crisis. The First Response Youth Service model is our most recent initiative. It incorporates a purpose-designed centre for youth focused supported crisis accommodation and assertive outreach. This is a unique model which was recently opened in the City of Melton. Further detail can be found in this edition of *Parity*.

The First Response Youth Service model is one of a number of Hope Street's truly unique industry-led service delivery models, developed



Photograph taken by Evolution participant Caitlin

over the years. Our *Hope to Home* initiative is another, funded in partnership with philanthropy, Hope Street has continued to operate this evidence-based model that has achieved successful outcomes supporting young people to secure and maintain private rental tenancies, improve their life, and become active citizens within local communities. An important outcome of this initiative is the fact that all clients have sustained their private rental tenancies. With four years of outstanding achievement we continue to look to government to provide recurrent operational funding for this successful model.

Our teams and I have witnessed over many years that when young people are provided with youth-focused support, accommodation and housing at the time they need it and within their own communities, their experience with homelessness can remain just that — short-lived.

Young people's experience does not have to negatively impact on the rest of their lives, instead they can be supported to reach their full potential. We see a future youth homelessness sector supported by a wider community preventative approach to youth homelessness with mandated quotas (percentages) of social housing

that correlate to the percentage of young people statistically recorded by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as homeless.

We see a future in which well-funded specialist support programs are integrated with social housing for sustainable tenancies so young people can thrive. We see a future where government increases their support of evidence-based innovation from smaller-medium specialist youth homelessness organisations such as Hope Street. We see significant strides forward in achieving our vision of a society in which all young people and young families have a safe place to call home.

Lorraine Dupree

Executive Officer, Queensland Youth Housing Coalition



'Being With': The Importance of Relational Practice

*Every child deserves a champion:
an adult who will never give
up on them, who understands
the power of connection,
and insists they become the
best they can possibly be.*

— Rita Pierson, Educator

When we look to the future of youth housing and responding to homelessness, we have significant research and insights to rely upon. The youth sector continues to manage the very real dichotomy of trying to do more with less alongside reconciling the fulfilment of young people's needs with the containment of costs. No matter how much structural reform we undertake, our workers and the young people they support must remain at the heart of our organisations and sector. The reality of the human experience is that we are social creatures. Our human resources are our greatest asset in responding to the varying needs of young people. It doesn't really matter how much we change the system, the platform always needs to be a strong base of relationship which allows young people to heal. Relationship is the opportunity.

The role of social and human services workers within our ever-changing environment has been the subject of much

analysis over the decades. We need to remain cognisant of the fact that core to what we do will always be the strength of relationships formed and the power of connection in building resilience and supporting healing.

The importance of positive relationships with significant adults and practitioners as fostering successful outcomes among young people experiencing trauma has been strongly highlighted by resilience researchers. A 41-year study of young people considered to be at risk due to multiple factors including violence, substance misuse, and mental ill health found that the majority of young people in the study developed personal strengths to overcome barriers. Researchers made a key observation of the young people: *'Studies have shown that the most resilient youth all had at least one person in their lives who was absolutely crazy about them.'*¹

Understanding, acceptance, and being consistent in involvement and commitment with young people is key. Ultimately hanging in there and never giving up is essential to their wellbeing.

From the decision makers in government and senior positions to those on the frontline with young people experiencing difficult times in their lives, it takes courage to turn up every day with those who are at their most vulnerable. To sit still as they express their emotions — sometimes anger or fury at the circumstances facing them — is a skill we undervalue. We need to afford the time for that which is difficult to quantify, and relational practice is just that.

It requires courage and tenacity to commit to relational practice. When we go to work we take along all our own humanness too. We carry our families of origin, relationships past and present, life experiences, ailments both physical and psychological, and feelings such as grief, loss and disappointments. Life happens to everyone. Most of us have empathy for young people as they tackle a myriad of emotions and experiences. What differentiates us is time, age, and position. We need to be mindful of our privilege and position and our own experiences, while being respectful of young people's articulation of their own experiences. Workers in our sector have the capacity to appreciate that young people's behaviours are a roadmap to the interventions required. These behaviours are often the clearest indicator of need.

What young people who are experiencing homelessness have lost, in addition to a safe place to live, is likely to be the fundamental connections that make them secure. Our job as workers is to re-establish connection and build additional supports. Research on the importance of connection for healing and resilience spans decades and over time has moved from focusing on the individual to seeing the young person within a wider family and community context.

Resilience theory crosses over with other relevant theory such as trauma theory, attachment theory, relational and strengths-based practice. These are all relevant to our work in that they all emphasise the importance of relationships and connectedness for young

people and our understanding of their developmental needs. Young people can thrive when they are genuinely connected to family, kin, culture, friends, community or significant others such as workers, teachers, coaches or community members.

Homelessness need only be an experience of a point in time. With quality supports and interactions, our hope is that

this is an experience or set of experiences for young people from which they can move on and heal with as little impact as possible. The most valuable work we do with vulnerable young people is sharing humanity and experiences — while just being there we can role model how we address difficult situations, how we can just be with each other respectfully, and how we can go about the ordinary tasks

of living. There are few youth workers who don't recognise the value of driving with a young person and the gems of conversations that can be had.

'Being with' is the work.

Endnote

1. Werner E E and Smith R S 1992, *Overcoming the odds: High risk children from birth to adulthood*, Cornell University Press, Ithica and London



Wayne Merritt

General Manager, Homelessness, Justice and Family Services,
Melbourne City Mission



Unequivocal societal change comes from daring to be different, and bringing deep human insight to enhance people's lives.

The future of youth housing is to be just that: youth housing — housing designed specifically to meet the needs of young people. It's moving beyond responses designed primarily for adults toward models tailored to the unique life needs and developmental stage of young people, and supporting them in a positive transition to independent lives as adults.

But even more than that, it's about recognising that the pathways into youth homelessness involve significantly high levels of trauma impacting on a critical stage of life development, and ensuring a therapeutic approach is integrated within youth housing responses.

A Therapeutic Response to Young People Experiencing Homelessness

Young people's lives are constantly changing and developing. Every new experience — be it positive or negative — has an impact. Most young people have a loving and supportive community surrounding them, but some young people find themselves in disconnected, unsafe environments. For these young people, a critical developmental stage in life can be disrupted and their pathways can be altered forever if they are not supported with a clear, trauma-informed, healing oriented approach.

As a sector we have a responsibility to do no harm. As practitioners working alongside young people, it is our role to focus on understanding the prevalence and impacts of traumatic experiences across our community, and to respond in ways that support meaningful healing. It is important we focus on lived experience and prioritise transparency, predictability and consistency across the service sector. This requires us to focus on safe and supportive relationships as the healing environment in which we work; prioritise actions and services that promote health and wellbeing, belonging and connections; and foster meaningful participation in personal and community life.

Melbourne City Mission (MCM) is a leader in the provision of integrated service responses for young people experiencing homelessness across Victoria. We recognise that trauma and traumatic stress includes socio-ecological stress, traumatic stress, and adverse childhood

experiences (ACEs). With this in mind, we have developed our *Healing Orientated Framework* which seeks to uphold the safety, dignity, wellbeing, connectedness, and self-determination of people accessing all our services; while working to reduce the risk of re-traumatisation. The framework also supports the health and wellbeing of our workforce to enhance their capacity to provide trauma responsive and healing-oriented care. In doing so, it recognises that recovery is possible for everyone regardless of their circumstances or experiences, and as a community it is our role to instil hope and possibility.

Meeting the Unique Housing Needs of Young People

While around two out of every five people experiencing homelessness in Australia are under the age of 25, our housing and homelessness responses are predominantly geared toward adults experiencing short-term crises. While this may be enough to get some young people back on their feet, it is trapping a growing number of young people in a vicious cycle. Future youth housing responses must meet a significant gap in the current system by providing medium-term supported housing where young people are given both time and support to develop the life skills that adult homelessness responses may assume they already have.

When young people experiencing homelessness can begin accessing safe, stable housing with the support to grow as young people, alongside an integrated therapeutic response addressing life trauma, future youth housing responses will have taken an important step forward.

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Homelessness in Australia: An Introduction

Homelessness in Australia: An Introduction provides thought-provoking, up-to-date information about the characteristics of the homeless population and contemporary policy debates.

Leading researchers and advocates from across Australia have come together to contribute their expertise and experience to produce a foundational resource that will set the benchmark for the future analysis of homelessness. Editors, Chris Chamberlain, Guy Johnson and Catherine Robinson are all recognised experts in the field.

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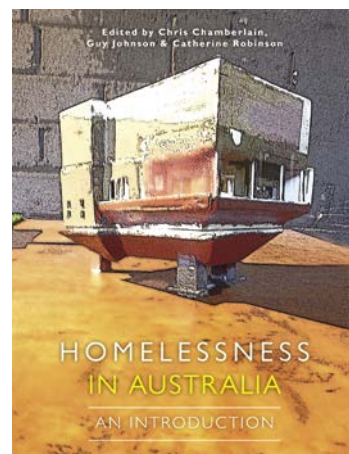
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