



Yfoundations has identified five foundations as integral to the process of ending youth homelessness. These foundations should be accessible to every young person. Furthermore, all services that work with young people experiencing homelessness should be considering these foundations within the work that they do.

Safety and Stability

Access | Participation | Independence | Control | Inclusion | Stability | Financial Security

It is vital that all young people not only feel safe, but are actually protected from risk factors that may impede their developmental process. During childhood and adolescence, young people must receive the necessary support to ensure they develop a strong safety system, both internally and within their external networks. A strong and stable foundation will foster confidence and independence within a young person, which will promote active participation in community life.

A young person cannot end their experience of youth homelessness without the necessary *Safety and Stability* mechanisms supporting them. It is important that during the early childhood phase of life, a young person is given the opportunity to develop a strong internal foundation, resilience¹ and a positive sense of self, which will enable them to cope with and overcome adversity throughout life.

Adolescents who lack fundamental cognitive, emotional, familial, societal, and cultural supports are at increased risk of suffering adverse effects of trauma exposure² and are more likely to engage in substance misuse, gang involvement and crime and other unhealthy behaviours.

Trauma symptoms are often comorbid with other disorders commonly found among homeless youth such as anxiety, behavioural, and conduct disorders. Other comorbid factors highly prevalent among homeless youth, such as substance abuse, increased risk-taking behaviors, and serious mental health issues³ may also exacerbate and/or mask trauma symptoms. The safety and stability of a young person may be significantly compromised when one or multiple symptoms are present.

1 "Resilience is the capacity for successful developmental outcomes despite adversity or threatening circumstances and challenges" (Masten A, Best K, Garmezy N. (1990). 'Resilience and development: Contributions from the study of children who overcome adversity'. *Development and Psychopathology*; 2:425-444.) Resilience research has shifted from "protective factors" toward protective "processes"; trying to understand how different processes are involved in both promoting well being and protecting against risk.

2 Becker DF, Daley M, Gadpaille WJ, Green MR, Flaherty LT, Harper G, et al. (2004). 'Trauma and adolescence 2: The nature and scope of trauma'. *Adolescent Psychiatry*. (2004); 27(special issue): 165-193

3 Cauce AM, Paradise M, Ginzler JA, Embry L, Morgan CJ, Lohr Y, et al. 'The characteristics and mental health of homeless adolescents: Age and gender differences'. (2000) *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*;8:230-239.

The *Safety and Stability foundation* refers in the first instance to the physical environment in which a young person resides. However beyond the physical structure, the foundation also refers to the idea that young people need to feel safe within their social and personal networks, as well as have a strong sense of control over their decisions and future. Young people need to feel they have the capacity to plan and make informed, mature decisions relevant to their lives and strive towards achieving personal goals.

Young people are not a homogenous group. It is important to recognise the diversity within the youth population as well as the unique safety challenges that each young person may face. For example, the safety needs of a young lesbian bisexual gay transgender queer or intersex (LGBTQI) will be significantly different than those within other groups. Similarly, the needs of a young mother or person from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background will also be unique. The safety and security needs of all young people are important and should be considered within the policy and service provision framework. This is particularly the case for young homeless people, whose safety may be significantly compromised as a result of their homelessness.

Young people in general are more likely to be victims of violence than other members of the community. ABS data from 2008-9 indicates that adolescents aged 15–19 years had the highest victimisation rates for physical assault across all age groups at 9%. The rate for young males was over twice as high as for young females (10% compared with 4% respectively)⁴. However Australian females aged 15–19 years had the highest victimisation rate for sexual assault (546 per 100,000) across all age groups⁵). It is also vital to acknowledge the impact that being a victim of abuse or neglect within a family context, including witnessing domestic violence, has on a young person's safety and stability. In 2009–10, 4 in every 1,000 Australian young people aged 12–17 years were the subject of a substantiated report of abuse or neglect⁶. Family violence is a significant contributor to homelessness among children and young people, and those who enter Out of Home Care are over-represented in the homeless population⁷.

The Internet and increased use of social media has changed the way young people communicate with their peers as well as adults, and along with many benefits, is also presenting new risks to young people. For example, cyber safety and bullying is a serious concern for young people⁸. The prevalence of young people self-harming by 'cutting' themselves online or with the intent to publically post a video in the future is another⁹. Both of these activities have been linked to severe mental health issues and suicide. There is currently scant empirical data exploring these issues and the prevalence or overall impact on the lives of young people is currently unknown. Young people are typically at the forefront of societal change, particularly in regard to use of the Internet and online services. Thus it is important that sufficient and timely consideration is given to any change within the social environment and the potential impacts or risks these changes may have on the lives of young people.

⁴ ABS: 2010, cited in Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2011): *Young Australians- Their Health and Wellbeing:108*

⁵ ABS: 2012, cited in Australian Institute of Family Studies: 2012: p11 <http://www.aifs.gov.au/acssa/pubs/sheets/rs5/rs5.pdf>
⁶ <http://www.whiteribbon.org.au/uploads/media/AssaultonourFutureFinal.pdf>

⁷ National Youth Commission (2008) *Australia's Homeless Youth- A Report of the National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness: National Youth Commission: Victoria*

⁸ Campbell, Marilyn A. (2007) Cyber bullying and young people: Treatment principles not simplistic advice. In www.scientist-practitioner.com, Paper of the week 23rd February 2007.

⁹ <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2013/s3845800.htm>

In addition to having access to a safe, abuse-free environment, the concept of inclusion is paramount to the *Security and Stability* foundation. It is imperative that young people live within an inclusive, participatory and non-judgemental environment, which promotes freedom of speech and is respectful of individual opinion¹⁰. Young people will be socially excluded and feel disenfranchised if they are prevented from making choices and decisions relevant to their future. Supporting young people to candidly voice their opinions on matters concerning their life is important to the overall growth and development of the young person, and is also beneficial to the community as a whole. It is also a human right acknowledged in the International Convention on the Rights of the Child¹¹. A young person who is not ostracised or disparaged but is encouraged to participate in and contribute to their community, will feel capable of overcoming adversity when faced with challenges throughout life. A young person, who perceives himself/herself as confident and valued, will feel safe in the world.

Unsatisfactory or fractured social inclusion impedes positive growth and development across various life domains. Common issues faced by socially excluded young people include: physical and mental health problems; single parenthood; a history of failure in mainstream education environments; low self-esteem; functional illiteracy; history of offending behaviour; substance abuse; underdeveloped personal and vocational skills and a lack of work experience¹². Participation promotes the rights of young people, improves service design and delivery; enhances democratic principles and is beneficial to the well-being and development of children and young people.¹³

As young people transition into adolescence, it is important they have the opportunities to experiment with the adult roles for which they are preparing. They need to have the freedom and the confidence to make age-appropriate decisions for themselves and others, to participate in groups of interconnected members, such as their families, clubs, teams, churches, theater groups and other organizations. Group participation provides opportunities for young people to take on new, 'adult' responsibilities. It is through these informal roles that young people learn to have others depend on them, which is a key part of their developmental process.

They also need to perceive themselves as individuals who have something of value to contribute to their different communities. When healthy opportunities to belong do not exist, alternative options are sought. Young people may therefore engage in unhealthy and unsafe practices as a means of providing for their own safety, which may include joining a gang or carrying a weapon.

A further important element within a young person's safety system is financial security. Financial security increases opportunities for young people and greater opportunities lead to healthy life decisions. In a 2012 survey, 50% of the young respondents indicated that financial security was of 'high value' to them¹⁴. Young people who are not financially independent may feel compelled to engage in unhealthy behaviours, including stealing or robbery in order to attain money and feel secure.

¹⁰ 2009 AHURI 'Housing and Social Inclusion', (2012) Commonwealth of Australia

¹¹ Article 12. Children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account. The convention encourage^s adults to listen to the opinion of children and involve them in decision making. International Convention on the Rights of the Child. Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989 entry into force 2 September 1990, in accordance with article 49. Ratified by Australiaⁱⁿ 1990.

¹² Shucksmith, M. (2004). Young People and Social Exclusion in Rural Areas, *Sociologia Ruralis*, 44, 43 - 59

¹³ M. Tisdall, Kay E.Davis, J.M, Gallagher, M. (2008), Reflecting on Children and Young People's Participation in the UK, *International Journal of Children's Rights*; Vol. 16 Issue 3, p343-354, 12p

¹⁴ Mission Australia, Youth Survey, 2012

In conclusion, it is vital that young people experience *safety and stability* within the physical, social, emotional and financial facets of their lives. With these supports, young people will be able to confidently explore their full range of options for becoming productive and positive adults. When they experience challenges, they will have the resilience to focus their full attention on facing these challenges and overcoming them.