Skills to Pay the Bills

Education, Employment, and Youth Homelessness

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About Yfoundations

Since 1979 Yfoundations has been the NSW peak body on youth homelessness, representing young people at risk of, and experiencing, homelessness, as well as the services that provide direct support to those young people.

Yfoundations’ mission is to create a future without youth homelessness, where all young people have access to appropriate housing options that can address individual needs. This goal is pursued by: providing advocacy and policy responses on issues related to youth homelessness; promoting, and furthering the development of, good practice in addressing youth homelessness; and striving to ensure that youth homelessness remains a priority in public policy.

Youth homelessness interrelates with a range of issues, and ending it will require a whole of government and service system response, with coordination across different service areas and collaborative and integrated solutions. To place youth homelessness in this broader context Yfoundations has adopted, based on the insights and experience of services and young people, a framework of five domains in which each young person must have the opportunities to thrive. These five foundations for ending youth homelessness guide thinking on what is needed for young people’s positive growth and development. The five foundations are:
Safety and Stability

It is vital that all young people not only feel safe, but also 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.

Home and Place

It is vital that all young people have access to a safe, non-judgemental home and place. A comfortable place that they identify with and feel a strong connection to. A Home and Place should be an environment that promotes growth and fosters positive development.

Health and Wellness

It is vital that all young people, particularly during the formative stages of their growth and development, are physically, socially and emotionally well. To ensure this, young people must have access to all the necessary prerequisites for achieving health and wellness. Being well and feeling healthy, will promote self-worth, and ensure young people feel competent to participate in their communities.

Connections and Participation

It is vital that all young people are given the opportunity to develop and nurture the connections in their lives. Connections to friends, family, community and society promote resilience and social inclusion. Youth people must be listened to and have the opportunity to influence outcomes. Positive connections to and genuine participation in community life during the formative stages of childhood and adolescence enables a young person to build a strong positive foundation and prepares them for adult life.

Education and Employment

It is vital that all young people are given the opportunity to pursue their educational and professional goals. Education and training is crucial to the growth and development of young people. Education and training, including formal tuition and practical life skills, promotes self-confidence and independence and provides young people with the skills and competencies.
Introduction

A young person experiencing homelessness is more likely to have better outcomes when they have access to, and engagement with, education and employment opportunities. This paper will use survey and national data to demonstrate that young people experiencing homelessness have poorer education and employment outcomes and that more needs to be done to improve outcomes for young people experiencing homelessness. This paper will use survey data of 717 young peoples’ experience gathered by Yfoundations during February and March 2017. It will examine the education and employment opportunities and outcomes, of young people experiencing homelessness who are engaged with Special Homelessness Services (SHS). What is not possible within the scope of this paper is to identify outcomes for those who are unable to access services, and more needs to be done in this space. Yfoundations strongly recommends a double investment in a suite of prevention/early intervention and crisis responses now, and the urgent need for local strategy and a national plan, to reduce costs of homelessness into the future.

Youth homelessness context

On census night in 2011 across Australia, around 26,000 young people experienced homelessness with approximately 7000 in NSW. Homelessness includes sleeping rough, couch surfing, moving regularly between places, or living in severely overcrowded accommodation. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) recognises that “homelessness estimates for youth are likely to have been underestimated in the Census.” This is because if a young person is staying temporarily with someone on census night, often it’s not made clear that they are homeless, and their apparent home address is recorded. This may be because the young person doesn’t want anyone to know they can’t go “home”, or the person who fills out the census on behalf of the young person assumes they will return there. Therefore the number could be much higher.¹

Of those experiencing or at risk of homelessness, many don’t identify their experience as homelessness because there is still a belief that homelessness is only rough sleeping, however the majority of youth homelessness is where young people are couch surfing, or have unstable accommodation. As many don’t identify they are experiencing homelessness they may not access homelessness services.

In 2015/16 nearly 14,000 young people 15-24 presented to SHS alone, this number has increased each year. Yfoundations estimates, based on Census data² and data on SHS,³ that less than 22% of young people experiencing homelessness are assisted by Special Homelessness Services (SHS).⁴

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² Ibid.
⁴ Data from the Census indicates that around 105,000 people nationally are homeless on any given night (this is likely an underestimate). Data on numbers of people assisted by SHSs indicates that on any given day SHSs
To support young people to exit homelessness, Yfoundations believes education and employment is key. Remaining engaged in education, or employment or engaging with education and employment can be protective factors for young people experiencing homelessness. SHSs are well placed to support engagement with education and employment as a part of a broader service system.

**Education and employment of young people in SHS**

**Methodology**
A survey was distributed to case workers in 35 youth specific SHS across NSW and was returned to Yfoundations within 2 weeks. Case workers returned survey responses of 718 young people. The survey questions are provided as an appendix.

**Findings**
The survey found that young people experiencing homelessness are at a far greater disadvantage in terms of disengagement with education and employment. 55% of young people were unemployed at the point of entry; this is compared to a general youth unemployment rate of 13%. However, at an average of 6 months later, having engaged in case management and ongoing support, the unemployment rate had dropped to 43%. Although this can’t be entirely attributed to SHS involvement, it indicates that having a consistent place to live, wrap around case management and ongoing support and connection to support networks has helped engagement with employment.

The survey gathered information about the highest year of school achievement by young people aged 20-24 in SHSs, when compared with the general population, there is a significant difference:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Yfoundations Survey Data</th>
<th>2011 Census Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The age range was selected because the survey was conducted at a different time of year than the census and so would not produce comparable results for the cohorts of young people mostly still attending school. The 20-24 cohort has largely finished their school progression (only 8 out of the 236 students had any change in school year achieved from when they first entered the service to the time the survey was administered).

The survey assists 57,000 clients. However, not all of these clients are homeless since SHSs also assists those who are at risk of homelessness. Looking at the data for the whole year of 2015-16 shows that around 40% of clients were homeless. So an estimate of numbers of people experiencing homelessness who are assisted each day is 23,000. Taking these figures together indicates that of the over 105,000 people experiencing homelessness each night, only around 23,000 receive assistance; less than 22%. Comparing the proportions of young people aged 15-24 in the census homelessness estimates, with the AIHW data shows them to be similar, indicating that young people experiencing homelessness are just as likely to obtain support as other people experiencing homelessness.

5 The age range was selected because the survey was conducted at a different time of year than the census and so would not produce comparable results for the cohorts of young people mostly still attending school. The 20-24 cohort has largely finished their school progression (only 8 out of the 236 students had any change in school year achieved from when they first entered the service to the time the survey was administered).

These results illustrate the strong correlation between early school leaving and homelessness. Young people who experience, or are at risk of, homelessness are far more likely to have left school in years 9 or 10, and their year 12 attainment rate is less than half that of the broader population of young people.

The survey collected information on the non-school qualifications achieved by young people.

Table 2: Highest non-school qualification achieved by young people 15-24 years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Qualification</th>
<th>Yfoundations Survey Data</th>
<th>2011 Census Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Diploma</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate III or IV</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certificate I or II</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is some indication in these results that young people in SHSs are more likely to have certificates, less likely to have Bachelor Degrees, and more likely to have non-school qualifications overall. However, the differences between the two data sets are not large, so such conclusions cannot be made with certainty.

The survey looked at the occupational status of survey participants. It is informative to compare this to two common labour force statistics for young people in the broader economy: the participation rate and the unemployment rate. The participation rate is the proportion of people participating in the labour force, this includes all those working and all those who are not working but are seeking work. The unemployment rate is the proportion of those who are participating who are looking for work rather than working. Thus in a hypothetical economy of 100 people, if 50 people are either working or job seeking then the participation rate is 50%, and if of those 50 people 25 are looking for work then the unemployment rate is 50%.

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7 Ibid.
8 This explanation ignores a number of complicating factors such as seasonal adjustment and trend estimation. A more complete explanation can be found here: [http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/6102.0.55.001Main+Features12013?OpenDocument](http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/6102.0.55.001Main+Features12013?OpenDocument)
The ABS gives monthly updates on labour forces figures, including figures for 15-24 year olds. The most recent update, February 2017, gives the participation rate for young people as 67%. Calculating the same figure for the young people in the survey gives a participation rate of 54%. Thus young people being assisted by SHSs are somewhat more likely to be disengaged from the workforce, but the difference is not very substantial.

It is important to keep in mind that there are many reasons why a young person may not be working or seeking work, examples include: studying full-time, having a disability, being a full-time carer, or experiencing mental health difficulties. The survey explored one aspect of this by gathering information on whether each young person was studying. Of the young people who were not working or job-seeking 26% were studying; in the broader economy 76% of young people who were not in the labour force were studying. This highlights the relationship between homelessness and both education and employment disengagement. Substantially more young people who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness are in the position of being engaged with neither education nor employment. Which may exacerbate an experience of homelessness.

In February 2017 the unemployment rate for all ages was 5.8%, but for young people it was 13%. Amongst the young people attempting to avoid homelessness the unemployment rate was 43%. It is clear these vulnerable young people are having a much more difficult time than most at obtaining employment. This emphasises the need for solutions that link young people with education and employment opportunities alongside stable appropriate accommodation options.

The final survey question asked for the number of hours per week that a young person worked if they were employed. The table gives the comparison with census data for young people 15-24.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weekly Hours</th>
<th>Survey Data</th>
<th>2011 Census Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-15</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-24</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-48</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49+</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This shows that as well as a higher unemployment rate, even those young people attempting to avoid homelessness who do find work, generally find less of it than most young people. Almost half the young people in the survey who had employment were

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10 Ibid.
11 Australian Bureau of Statistics, above n 3.
working for 15 hours or less a week. It has been acknowledge that rising underemployment, where a person has less work than they are seeking, is a problem for young people. In February 2017 the underemployment rate was for young people was 18%, which was more than double the general rate of underemployment, and the highest it has been in over 40 years.\(^\text{12}\) Although the survey data does not give the information for an underemployment rate, the low hours compared to other young people indicated that underemployment is an even more severe problem for young people experiencing, or at risk, of homelessness.

Improvements while being assisted
The Yfoundations Survey gathered data on the young people’s educational attainments and occupational status at the point that the survey was taken, but it also asked respondents about these at the point where the young person was first being assisted. This provides an indication of progress while being assisted by SHSs. Note that it cannot be asserted that the assistance from an SHS caused all changes, since many factors could have contributed. But this data does give some indication of the extent to which the stability provided by assistance by an SHS can contribute to a young person’s improvement and foster an environment where personal growth is possible.

As noted above, young people being assisted by SHSs experienced an unemployment rate of 43%. While high compared to the general youth unemployment rate, this figure is an improvement on the unemployment rate of 55% for the young people when they first contact an SHS an average of around 6 months previously. While dropping the unemployment rate by 12% is a significant improvement, the rate is still unarguably too high. This shows the strong need for programs that directly link young people with job opportunities.

Over the period young people were in contact with services, their non-school educational attainments also improved. Around 12% obtained a non-school qualification at a higher level than what they had when entering the SHS. The majority of these were the attainment of a certificate 3 or 4 by young people who had previously had no non-school qualifications. As with the improvements in occupational status, this progress with vulnerable young people over just a few months is notable. We saw above that young people in SHSs have a similar level of non-school education to that of young people generally. But the area that needs strong attention is school attainments. We saw above that early school leaving is much higher among young people experiencing homelessness. This makes clear the need for early intervention programs that keep young people engaged with their school.

Conclusion
The data in this paper presents a snapshot of youth homelessness that is both grim and hopeful. The young people who seek assistance with avoiding or ending homelessness

tend to be more disengaged with education and with employment than most young people, however by engaging with services they have an opportunity for increased stability and support to maintain or access education and employment. There is concern that those not seeking support would have greater difficulties in maintaining or engaging with education and employment, which is why it is important to provide greater avenues for prevention of and responses to youth homelessness.

In NSW, the development of a homelessness strategy is underway, and it is important that young people and services are able to provide input into the strategy. At a national level there is no current plan to address youth homelessness, nor broader homelessness, which is a dire situation that needs urgent attention.

The importance of education and employment to ending youth homelessness cannot be overstated. It is critical that young people be given the support to stay engaged or re-engage in education and employment. This is why it is essential that government support a co-ordinated approach to prevention, early intervention and crisis response approaches, to help young people avoid disengagement, but also assist those who do become disengaged. YFoundations urges Governments at all levels to come together to develop local and national plans to fund a full range of evidence-based programs to avoid the social and financial costs of youth homelessness, to the economy, society and most importantly to young people themselves.

Appendix: Survey questions

Survey respondents were asked to answer the following questions for each young person (aged 12-24) that they were currently case managing:

1. How old is the young person currently?
2. How do they identify their gender?
3. How long, in months, since you first started case managing this young person? (Even if the young person has left and re-entered your caseload, please give the number of months since you first started assisting them.)
4. When you first started case managing them, what was their highest level of school completed?
5. What is their highest level of school completed currently?
6. When you first started case managing them, what was the highest level of non-school qualification that they had completed?
   Please answer with one of the following:
   None
   Certificate 1 or 2
   Certificate 3 or 4
   Diploma
   Advanced Diploma
   Bachelor Degree
7. What is the highest level of non-school qualification they have completed currently?
   (Please answer with one of the options given for question 6.)
8. When you first started case managing them, what was their occupation status? Please answer with one of the following:
   - full-time work
   - part-time work
   - casual work (i.e. work with no benefits such as sick or annual leave)
   - studying (if young person is both working and studying, only record their work status)
   - job-seeking
   - none (i.e. not working, studying or job seeking)
9. What is their occupation status currently? (Please answer with one of the options given for question 8.)
10. If they are currently working, roughly how many hours of work per week do they do on average?