



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.

Education and Employment

School based education | Practical skills | Life-skills | Self-confidence | Stability | Independence

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 necessary to enter the labour force and remain competitive throughout adulthood.

Young people characteristically have strong aspirational goals, are resilient, courageous and determined to make their own way. However a young person cannot end their experience of homelessness without access to education and employment opportunities. Good education and skills are crucial to improving a person's economic and social prospects.

Young people who disengage from education are more likely to find themselves unemployed, live in poverty, engage in unhealthy or dysfunctional relationships, engage in criminal behaviours, experience poor social and emotional health and are often dependent on welfare for survival. Employment and education are integral strategies in preventing homelessness and are also vital for a young person to end their experience of homelessness¹.

¹ Gronda and Coventry 2009 (Parity Volume 22 Issue 8, Sept 2009), Education, Employment and Training for Young People Experiencing Homelessness: Outcome Dimensions, Grace, Marty¹; Gronda, Hellene²; Coventry, Louise)

School is typically a challenging experience for all young people. It is particularly challenging for a young person who is experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The educational attainment of an individual is intrinsically linked to socio-economic factors, with a young person from a low socio-economic background having a 56% chance of completing high school compared to the national average of 75%². Disruption to a young person's educational pathway adversely affects the level of schooling attained, their skill development and self-confidence³.

Typically these young people may have moved schools any number of times and for a myriad of reasons. The family may have moved in pursuit of greater employment and income generating opportunities, as a result of eviction or the necessity to find more affordable housing. In other cases, illness, domestic violence or family breakdown is the causal factor. The necessary coping mechanisms to manage and overcome such turbulence and uncertainty at this early stage of life may not yet be developed. Without the skills, internal foundation or positive connections, living a transient and uncertain lifestyle may provide significant stress and pressure, and consequently, young people disengage from school.

Once a young person has disengaged from school, which may also be their final linkage to a positive adult or mentor, they are more vulnerable towards engaging with and developing risky and deleterious behaviours. The longer a young person remains disengaged from the school system, the more difficult it is to re-engage at a later stage. School practices around reintegrating suspended students are important in this context. The individual educational and psychosocial needs of a young person must also be considered and where necessary, additional educational or psychological support programs should be provided to address academic deficits, and emotional problems that may have resulted from the frequent disruptions. Greater sensitivity from school personnel is also needed to ensure the young person is not victim to further victimisation or stigma⁴.

It is also important to acknowledge that the formal or traditional school system is not always the most appropriate pathway for all young people. Appropriate alternative options therefore need to be made available and accessible to young people for whom the mainstream

² Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations 2011, Review of funding for schooling – final report, p.114, retrieved from, <<http://foi.deewr.gov.au/documents/review-funding-schooling-finalreport-december-2011>>. Poorer young people in Australia have lower levels of academic performance than in other OECD countries, such as Finland and Canada. Source: NOUS Group 2011, Schooling challenges & opportunities: A report for the Review of Funding for Schooling Panel, August, p.5.

³ Rafferty, Y (1991). The impact of homelessness on children, *American Psychologist* 46 (11), 1170-1179.

⁴ Horowitz, S., Springer, C., & Kose, G. (1988). Stress in hotel children: The effects of homelessness on attitudes toward school. *Children's Environments Quarterly*, 5, 34- 36.

school environment is not suitable. For example, these may include, Youth Pathways⁵, TAFE⁶ and Vocational Education and Training⁷.

Transitioning between schools and localities not only significantly hinders a young persons' education pathway, it also disrupts social relationships and friendships with classmates, mentors and peers⁸. These interruptions significantly impede the social outcomes for young people in early adulthood and can cause long-term disadvantage throughout life.

The economic and social costs associated with leaving school early are significant. Early school leavers are more likely to encounter difficulties finding appropriate employment than their peers who remain in school. Young people who miss out on school also miss out on gaining basic skills and knowledge and are at greater risk of socio-economic disadvantage, unemployment, poverty, homelessness and involvement in crime.⁹ From a financial perspective, young people who finish school will earn on average \$1.5 million more over their working life than those who exit prior to year 12¹⁰.

The current labour market in Australia is challenging for all young people. According to ABS Labour Force Data¹¹, the unemployment rate for young people aged 15 to 19 years in June 2013 was 27.3%¹². The highest unemployment rate for 15 year olds of 29.7% was recorded in 1998 and the lowest level of youth unemployment was recorded 2008 at 15.5%.

Upon completing high school, a large proportion of Australians go onto further education or training. In 2001, 47.4% of young people that completed high school pursued further education (higher education 33.2%, TAFE 11.2%, other tertiary 3.0%). Only 19.5% of young people who finished school early pursued further education. The rate of young people in full time employment in NSW is significantly higher for those that completed year 12 or equivalent. According to 2011 data, 70.5% of young people completing year 12 or equivalent were employed in full time work compared with 1.96% of people who exited school in year 8 or earlier.

⁵ Youth Pathways is a programme funded by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and forms a part of the Career Advice Australia initiative of the Australian Government.
<http://www.linkemploy.org.au/youthpathways.asp>

⁶ <https://www.tafensw.edu.au/>

⁷ <http://australia.gov.au/topics/education-and-training/vocational-education-and-training>

⁸ Rafferty, Y (1991). The impact of homelessness on children, *American Psychologist* 46 (11), 1170- 1179 .

⁹ Beresford, Q, The really hard cases, a social profile and policy review of early school leaving, 1993 v.12 n.4 pp.15-25. *Youth Studies Australia*, <http://www.acys.utas.edu.au/ysa>

¹⁰ Argued by Professor Sue Kilpatrick, director of the Centre for University Pathways and Partnership at UTAS, http://www.themercury.com.au/article/2013/05/04/378430_tasmania-news.html

¹¹ <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6202.0jun%202013?OpenDocument>

¹² Defined as people looking for full-time work

At a global level, unemployment rates among university graduates stood at 4.4% on average across OECD countries in 2009. However those who did not complete high school faced unemployment rates of 11.5%, up from 8.7% the year before. This contributes to the significant problem of youth unemployment that currently exceeds 17% in the OECD region¹³. “The cost to individuals and society of young people leaving school without a qualification keeps rising,” said OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría. “We must avoid the risk of a lost generation by all means. Despite strained public budgets, governments must keep up their investment to maintain quality in education, especially for those most at risk. Investment in education is not only about money, it’s also an investment in people and an investment in the future”.

Exclusion from the labour market leads not only to financial disadvantage but also to disadvantage across many other life domains including health and wellness, positive connections, appropriate housing and accommodation and feeling safe within the community¹⁴.

For some young people, a clear pathway is not initially recognisable. It is therefore important to ensure multiple pathways are available and accessible to young people, which afford the necessary time, space and support, to work through and ultimately overcome the barriers impeding their development. An example might include the Links to Learning¹⁵ program.

It is not only formal education that young people benefit from. It is vital that young people are given the opportunity to learn healthy, positive life skills to enable them to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life¹⁶. These basic skills assist young people to cope with difficulties experienced across personal, emotional and social domains of their young lives¹⁷.

The *Education and Employment* foundation is closely associated with the other four foundations. For example young people require positive encouragement and support from and connection to their networks. Whether it’s a family member, a friend, a mentor, a school staff

13 <http://www.oecd.org/newsroom/educationcrisisreinforcesimportanceofagoodeducationaysayoeecd.htm>

14 Buddelmeyer H et al, 2012, Educating oneself out of social exclusion, Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, NATIONAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING RESEARCH PROGRAM RESEARCH REPORT

15 Links to Learning is a targeted program implemented by the NSW Department of Education and Communities to improve outcomes for young people and focuses on effective transitions for at risk young people. Links to Learning provides grants to non-government community organisations and local government authorities to assist them in working with young people, who have left or are at risk of leaving school, so that they can reach their full potential. The organisations operate creative and innovative projects that assist

- Students in Years 7 to 12, identified as at risk of disengaging from their education. Projects are run collaboratively with Department of Education and Communities Secondary and Central schools.

- Young people who have left school before completing Year 12 and have not completed an equivalent Vocational Education and Training qualification.

Links to Learning supports young people aged 12 to 24 years who experience barriers to participating in mainstream education or training. Young people at risk who access Links to Learning are provided with learning opportunities and support services to assist them remain in or re-engage with education or training or transition to employment. The Department of Education and Communities provides fixed-term funding to approved, not-for-profit, community based organisations and local government authorities to operate Links to Learning projects to achieve stated outcomes for young people. <https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/eas/youth/>

16 World Health Organization. (1997). Life Skills Education in Schools. Geneva

17 Nasheeda, A. (2008). Life Skills Education for young people: Coping with Challenges, Counselling, Psychotherapy, and Health, 4(1), Counselling in the Asia Pacific Rim: A Coming Together of Neighbours Special Issue, 19-25.

member or caseworker, these connections are vital to a young person's enthusiasm for and engagement in education and/or training.

Education and employment is also closely related to the safety and stability foundation as temporary supported accommodation or moving from couch to couch is not a conducive environment for a young person to achieve their educational goals. The provision of short term and transitional housing to young people and families needs to take into account the educational needs of young people and be geographically appropriate¹⁸.

A Government-led initiative 'Earn or Learn'¹⁹ reaffirmed that young people from disadvantaged backgrounds require more than simple incentives or coercion to remain in school. Many of these young people have experienced significantly complex and traumatic childhoods, which include poverty, family instability and breakdown and poor physical and mental health. School is however especially crucial for these young people as it may instil a sense of stability that they otherwise lack²⁰.

The current dearth of resources within Specialist Homelessness Services has meant that services are often poorly equipped to address the intensive needs of their young client base in relation to their education and employment. Despite the lack of resources, specific initiatives have been developed to assist these young people to attain their educational and career aspirations. Examples include programs provided by White lion²¹, and the Beacon Foundation²².

There is increasing recognition within government policy that young people need more than just a place to sleep. The developmental needs of young people require the provision of a range of specialised intensive and appropriate 'wrap around' services in order to ensure young people don't progress into long-term homelessness. It has also been acknowledged that a linked up, coordinated approach between youth services and employment services is imperative to improving employment outcomes for young people seeking work²³. In terms of the type of assistance young

18 Rafferty, Y (1991). The impact of homelessness on children, *American Psychologist* 46 (11) , 1170- 1179 .

19 Compact with Young Australians -The Compact with Young Australians requires young people to complete Year 10 and then be in education, training, or employment until they turn 17. To help them meet this requirement the Compact also provides an education or training entitlement.

<http://transitions.youth.gov.au/sites/transitions/pages/welcometoyouthattainmentandtransitions>

20 National Coalition for the Homeless. (1987a). *Broken lives: Denial of education to homeless children*. Washington, DC: Author

21 http://www.whitelion.asn.au/index.php?pageID=11909&merchant_id=0

22 For further information please visit Beacon Foundation, <http://beaconfoundation.com.au/what-we-do/beacon-programs/>;

23 Integrating employment assistance and housing support for homeless people: a case study Final report, A FaHCSIA National Homelessness Research Project October 2011

people want, they tend to focus on the treatment they want to receive rather than the types of services. We are aware they want 'help', although 'not a lot' and would prefer to be shown how to help themselves rather than be mothered²⁴.

It is crucial that a young person has a safe, stable place in which to study or rest at the end of each day. When young people are concerned with fulfilling basic survival activities, including finding food and a place to sleep, their motivation and capacity to pursue aspirational and educational goals is compromised.

²⁴ Beer A et al, Developing models of good [practice in meeting the needs of homeless young people in rural areas, AHURI 2005