



Youth homelessness numbers increase in Sydney amid COVID-19 pandemic
Funding announced by NSW Government to keep youth homelessness services open

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

New South Wales, 27 March 2020: As youth homelessness in NSW is on the rise amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Yfoundations, the peak body for youth homelessness in NSW, welcomes the Premier's announcement today of \$34million for the sector.

Pam Barker, CEO of Yfoundations explained, "We are already seeing a surge in the number of young people sleeping rough, as what has always been a largely hidden homelessness problem is becoming more visible.

"We welcome this desperately needed support from the NSW Government, and we will continue to work to keep our youth homelessness services in play to protect these vulnerable people. With the numbers increasing as they are, we require all the support we can get."

"Young people experiencing homelessness who have couch surfing or were living in overcrowded dwellings, are being forced out onto the streets due to isolation and COVID-19 fears. And this is being exacerbated by young people losing their casual jobs due to businesses shutting down, and these young people cannot afford the wait for Centrelink funds to come through."

Classified by the health mandate as an essential service, homelessness services will use these additional funds to keep the doors open despite unprecedented strain on the system.

"Homelessness services are struggling to accommodate and feed young people as the numbers rise and distancing orders are put in place. And where is a young person experiencing homelessness supposed to self-isolate? With huge numbers of people becoming unemployed, we are seeing more people become homeless," said Pam Barker, CEO of Yfoundations.

Young people experiencing homelessness are even more susceptible to the current COVID-19 pandemic due to their already vulnerable state, the need to have 24/7 supervision and their compromised immunity from being homeless and not living within a nourishing family environment.

Barker explains, "If you think about where young people experiencing homelessness can go, you can see that the need is acute and it has life and death implications. Young people who were forced to couch surf are losing that option as families respond to COVID-19 social



distancing, overcrowded dwellings are a ticking bomb for the spread of serious disease, and shelters and group homes are now needing to reduce the number of young people who can be in a room for health reasons.”

Homelessness services in NSW for young people are facing a terrible trifecta of need as the number of young people in shelters sees a significant spike: increased costs of food and supplies, reduced workforce (due to self-isolation and children of workers staying home) and new technology requirements for remote working, plus the almost impossible challenge of facilitating social distancing in shelters, self-isolation when needed, and potential quarantine of a young person. Therefore, the announced funding is desperately needed.

Barker continued, “It is imperative for us to ensure specialist youth homeless services stay open with adequate staffing in order to keep young people safe. We are pulling young people off the streets to keep them safe, particularly with the need for social distancing. These announced funds will help us feed them, supply basic necessities to facilitate good hygiene practices and to make sure young people are staying healthy but there is still so much more to do.”

A recent survey shows 44% of homelessness services across NSW have already been impacted by COVID-19. The need to self-isolate some young people as well as staff’s compromised health and capacity to cope, means more young people are not getting much-needed support.

“Services are needing access to gloves, face masks and cleaning products to contain any risk of spread of infection and to help isolate a young person who is unwell in a home where many young people reside. It isn’t as easy as placing a person in temporary accommodation when they are under 18 and sick. Young people under 18 years of age need 24hr supervision.”

With more than 9,000 young people aged 12-24 recorded as homeless in NSW on 2016 Census night – more than any other state or territory, reducing youth homelessness in NSW has been one of the NSW Premier’s key 12 priorities. However, none of the plans would have prepared the sector for this unexpected crisis resulting from COVID-19.

Barker explained, “Our young people, some as young as 12 find themselves on the streets, without a permanent roof over their heads, often through no fault of their own. We have a far broader issue that needs a holistic solution to address early awareness, intervention and prevention tools as well as education, job training, housing and other skills for getting the homeless to get back on track.

“The right support channelled towards keeping our youth services in operation during these difficult times can make or break our young people experiencing homelessness. As it stands,



our system is focused on picking up the pieces after the damage has already been done but we will use this funding to prevent this crisis from damaging our most vulnerable as much as we can.

“Let our youth services help our young people get through the pandemic, so they can get back on track and live life; and do all the things that many of us take for granted.”

-ENDS-

About Yfoundations

Yfoundations is the peak body for youth homelessness in NSW. It represents young people at risk of and experiencing homelessness in NSW, and also represents the services that provide direct support to children and young people. <http://yfoundations.org.au/>

Since it was founded as the “Youth Refuge Action Group” in 1979, Yfoundations has been supporting young people who are at risk of and experiencing homelessness and works collaboratively with members, NGOs, government departments and community members, to provide policy and structural advocacy, services for young people, health projects, and research and sector development.

About Pam Barker, Chief Executive Officer, Yfoundations

Pam Barker is the CEO of Yfoundations, and brings extensive experience across the not-for-profit sector. She sits on the board of NYCH: National Youth Coalition for Housing, My Foundations Youth Housing, WayAhead Mental Health Association, and Australian Youth Affairs Coalition: AYAC. Her experience includes youth services, homelessness prevention, mental health programs, and policy reform.