

# Responding to the Specific Needs of Young People in Community Housing

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For young people who have experienced homelessness and have been reliant on support services — whether specialist homelessness services or out-of-home-care providers — a key goal is to prepare that young person to transition to independence.

Young people require varying levels of housing support throughout their life. Support may be required to transition from dependence to independence, to move away from home to pursue education and employment, or to ease their transition out of care arrangements (for example, Out of Home Care (OOHC) or Juvenile Justice). For a small number, particularly those with complex needs, they require an option for medium and long-term supported tenancies. It is therefore vital that the Australian housing system recognises these needs.

A key barrier for young people commencing a new tenancy is the inability to afford the upfront costs for establishing a new tenancy, including bond, rent in advance, and basic household items such as furniture, fridge, cooking utensils, and cleaning materials. Prior to 2014, young people 15 to 25 years old who were leaving statutory OOHC as well as those leaving Juvenile Justice or informal care (for example, homelessness services) were able to receive the Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA). TILA provided \$1,500 to cover the basic upfront costs of moving into independent living. Since then, this payment has been limited only to those leaving formal statutory OOHC. This change meant a significant number of vulnerable and disadvantaged young people have lost access to this crucial

support payment.<sup>1</sup> One worker commented that she 'sees many clients with housing but no "home" because they lack necessities'.<sup>2</sup>

Many young people require guidance and support in order to thrive and have successful tenancies. Having a solid tenancy history is critical for young renters now and in their future. Malcolm Gunning, former president of the Real Estate Institute of Australia (REIA) stated that an agent or landlord is looking for two things when screening a tenant: ability to pay rent and a good track record of looking after a property.<sup>3</sup>

Rent that is paid consistently late can count against a young person when applying for their next rental property. For those on a tenancy blacklist the consequences can be dire. It can lock people out of the private rental market, and in some cases, tenants will be forced to move into unsuitable accommodation like caravan parks or even homelessness.

Community housing can provide a supportive steppingstone or alternative to private rental for many young people on low-incomes. Having a place to call home with the support of a caseworker can help a young person establish a routine, complete their education, gain employment, and set up a strong tenancy history to move into more permanent and independent housing.

It is essential for community housing providers to work with young people to build their independent living skills and sustain a tenancy. Community housing providers need to have youth specific initiatives that are holistic and trauma-focussed, with caseworkers working alongside young people to address their needs across the following life domains:

## Housing/accommodation

This includes understanding where to look for housing, the different housing options, the importance of a good tenancy history, the hidden costs of living in their own place (for example, furnishings, bond and upfront rental payments), the basic terms of a tenancy agreement, how to choose where to live based on the conditions of the property and nearness to transport/work, and signing a tenancy agreement.

## Health (physical and emotional)

This includes the importance of eating healthy food, keeping their kitchen clean, having a routine, and looking after their health. Also, when to visit the doctor or dentist and practicing good personal hygiene, and how to obtain appropriate referrals for mental health support and any Medicare rebates they might be entitled to.

## Education, training and employment

This includes understanding where to look for jobs, writing an effective application and how to hold onto work and have a good record so they can move on to other opportunities. Also, young people should know where to look for further education and training opportunities, and any support payments they may be eligible for to help cover the costs.

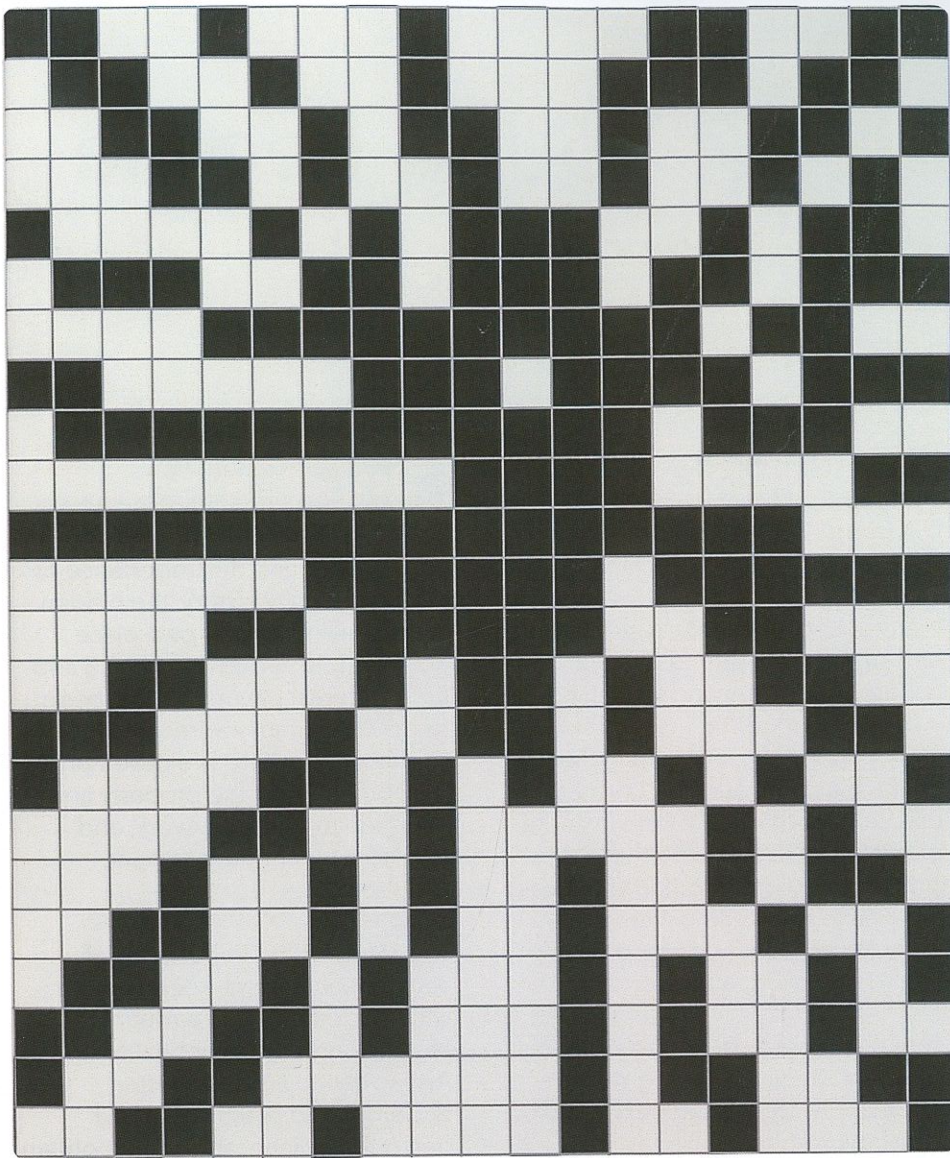
## Financial security

This includes understanding banking, credit, budgets and taxes. This is especially important where young people have to budget to pay for their own food, rent and bills.

## Social relationships and support networks

This includes how to find activities that might interest them, understanding how to manage conflict and where to go to for support.





Artwork by Ant Bridgemen

### Life (and after care) skills

This includes things like how to use a washing machine or dishwasher, how to catch public transport to somewhere new, planning a weekly menu and developing a shopping list and budget, how to tell whether fruit and vegetables are fresh when shopping, understanding expiration labels on food packaging, using kitchen appliances and utensils, and how to clean a house.

### Legal matters

A young person's rights and responsibilities will change when they turn 18 and it is important for them to know what they can and cannot legally do. This includes when and how to vote, the right to a leaving care plan and the right to know about their time in care. It also includes knowing that penalties are much harsher if they break the law.

Aside from a tenancy through a community housing provider, there

are other supported accommodation models that also respond to the specific needs of young people, including; medium-term supported accommodation and the Youth Foyer model.

Medium-term accommodation provides supported housing for children and young people with staff onsite 24/7, providing safety and stability in a home-like environment. Young people residing in medium-term accommodation are permitted to reside for two to three years as they complete their education or training and develop critical living skills. Medium-term services take into consideration that trauma and development significantly impact on a young person's capacity to live independently.

The Youth Foyer Model are integrated learning and accommodation settings for young people, typically aged 16 to 24 years, who are at risk

of or experiencing homelessness. Foyers take a 'something for something' approach in the form of a deal that establishes rights, responsibilities, and expectations. To uphold their side of the deal young people must remain in education, training and/or employment, they must maintain their accommodation, and take up a range of activities the Youth Foyer offers. The key to the model lies in the provision of stable accommodation in a congregated living environment for up to two years. The Youth Foyer model is designed to instil in young people that they are valued and can add value to society. This is key for young people's sense of self, enabling them to navigate their lives after they exit the Foyer.<sup>4</sup> The Youth Foyer models demonstrate a flexible and adaptable approach to housing design and service delivery specifically addressing young people's needs.

The last five decades have seen massive changes to the housing market and research has long demonstrated that a lack of affordable housing is a key driver of youth homelessness. To end youth homelessness, investment is needed into long-term solutions for young people. For many young people, homelessness can be resolved through the availability and accessibility of affordable housing through a community housing provider. For others, they require supported housing models such as medium-term or a Youth Foyers, with trauma-informed approach that focuses on developing living skills and education and employment opportunities.

### Endnotes

1. UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families 2014, *Young people transitioning from out-of-home care to adulthood: Review of policy and program approaches in Australia and overseas*, Policy Paper Social Justice Unit.
2. Tually S, Slatter M, Faulkner D, and Oakley S 2016, *The role of private rental brokerage in housing outcomes for vulnerable Australians*, AHURI Final Report No. 263, the Australia Housing and Urban Research Institute at The University of Adelaide.
3. Kollmorgen A 2020, *Tenant screening and clacklists — what can they list and what can they ask?* Accessed 31 July 2020 from: <https://www.choice.com.au/money/property/renting/articles/tenancy-databases-and-screening>
4. Foyer Foundation 2020, *What is a Youth Foyer?* Accessed 3 August 2020 from <https://foyer.org.au/foyers-in-australia/>