

# Youth Homelessness in NSW

Yfoundations response to the  
“Foundations for Change” discussion paper

Prepared by Chris Stone, Kiera Tallon, and Natalia Gale  
October 2016



## Table of Contents

<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>About Yfoundations.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Creating pathways into housing .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Harnessing community and corporate engagement to prevent and reduce homelessness .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Better exit planning .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Empowering people through education, training and employment to prevent homelessness .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Putting people at the centre of responding to homelessness .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Embedding early intervention and prevention .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Strengthening collaboration .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Building effective referral pathways and processes.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Using data to improve services .....</b>	<b>30</b>

# Summary

## Creating pathways into housing

The experiences and circumstances of young people who are homeless vary widely, and so their needs vary too. Some young people are capable of exiting the SHS system into the private rental market, others will benefit from transitioning through social housing to private rental, and some will need social housing long-term or permanently. To allow for this diversity of need there must be pathways into both the private rental market and into social housing. Since young people's need for support also vary there must be in all pathways the capacity to deliver the support needed by the young person.

## Recommendations

- That the rental subsidy scheme for young people exiting homelessness continue to be rolled out state wide and expanded.
- That funding be made available to incentivise the creation of a “social real estate agent” to connect aspiring young people who have experienced homelessness with socially conscious landlords.
- There should be increased investment by the NSW and Australian Governments in social and affordable housing stock to meet community demand.
- The NSW Government should encourage and support the creation of new stock to be owned and managed by youth specific community sector Social Housing providers.
- A needs-based funding benchmark for support services should be established to ensure sufficient support is in place in all districts, with an overall increase across NSW in funding for support services.
- Following the results of the trial of the Transitional Housing Plus model, consideration should be given to extending this model as an option in all parts of the social housing system, as part of a suite of options to suit the differing needs of young people.
- A long term commitment and collaborative strategy is required between SHS and mental health services. Mental health outreach support and access to regular ongoing intensive support is required for young people with a mental health illness.
- Existing successful programs directed specifically at address youth mental health should be expanded to all districts and funding increased to enhance current capacity.
- Reduced waiting times to access mental health services
- Collaboration, information sharing and case co-ordination across systems need to be improved in order to be able to adequately link people to suitable housing options.

## Harnessing community and corporate engagement to prevent and reduce homelessness

To date there has been little success with getting any major private sector involvement to deliver social and affordable housing. It is evident that there is room for the corporate sector and philanthropists to get more involved with the issue of homelessness. Government need to look at their approach regarding this. This involves how can they make it more appealing to the private sector. The private sector are aware of the issues around lack of affordable housing, but a barrier in involvement could be that there is not enough clear and concise detailed information of how they can become involved or how they can contribute to alleviate this problem while also making it appealing for them to do so. Advisors should be employed

to approach the private sector to educate them regarding investing in social and affordable housing models, and a marketing strategy should be developed.

#### Recommendations

- Advisors should be employed to approach the private sector to educate them regarding investing in effective social and affordable housing models. This needs to be a viable and lucrative in order to obtain “buy in” with a clearer framework supporting it.
- A clear marketing strategy needs to be developed to tackle all issues mentioned above.

#### **Better exit planning**

It is important that young people are assisted to develop independent living skills before they leave care. However, a strong criticism of foster care by young people was the lack of preparation for leaving care. Yfoundations has also been informed by member services that many people leaving OOHC are not financially or socially and emotionally prepared to live independently. Young people need to be heavily involved in exit planning in order for them to feel safe and secure.

#### Recommendations

- Increase efforts to ensure that all children in the child protection system have a leaving care plan.
- Increase the resources of caseworkers and/or carers to actively provide skills for independence.
- Exit plans need to have clearer pathways into housing and increased options for young people leaving state care. Young people leaving care should be a priority group for more affordable housing and housing policy should reflect this.
- Exit plans need to be flexible and not focus on a “one size fits all” approach.
- Provide after-care independence skill training for care leavers, such as an online resource with engaging video content.
- Programmes and initiatives need to be culturally appropriate.
- Post care support should enhance supports already existing. This is critical in relation to engaging young people in education from an earlier age.
- Introduce programs that deliver intensive support (designed in genuine consultation with youth services) in all districts for those young people who leave care at high-risk of homelessness.

#### **Empowering people through education, training and employment to prevent homelessness**

Initiatives to enhance the participation of children and young people in education, training and employment are extremely important to reducing youth homelessness. Some initiatives have a role in helping young people exit homelessness, these include taking a Foyer approach and bolstering the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector's ability to address disadvantage. Other initiatives are important in preventing youth homelessness, such as a strategy for early education and school engagement and culturally appropriate programs for indigenous students.

#### Recommendations

- A Foyer approach should be implemented across the whole service system including:

employment development officers, youth hubs, and traditional Foyers where appropriate.

- TAFEs should be sufficiently resourced to continue to provide regional campuses, 'second chance' education, and additional support services such as counselling and child-care.
- Part of the registration process for training organisations should require endorsements from local community services and a history or an endorsed plan of working with community services sectors such as the youth homelessness sector.
- Prevention and early intervention needs to start earlier in schools to prevent low school attendance which is an indicator for disengaging in school at a later stage.
- Adopt culturally appropriate programmes of support for indigenous students.

### **Putting people at the centre of responding to homelessness**

Across the service system there can be misconceptions about the causes of youth homelessness and this can lead to inappropriate responses to young people who are experiencing homelessness. Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) is a significant factor in youth homelessness, but this is not always recognised, and even where it is known the implications of the trauma caused by DFV are not always understood.

#### Recommendations

- Better understanding of drivers of youth homelessness in the service system should be promoted through inclusion in basic training requirements for anyone likely to be in contact with young people who are homeless.
- Fund and support services to adopt a model of trauma informed care and practice.
- All services should screen for trauma at first contact with the young person accessing their service.
- Service staff should be aware of potential re-traumatisation in clinical settings.
- Organisations must be trauma-informed, creating calming, predictable and reliable environments, and acknowledging the safety and wellbeing needs of staff working with traumatised individuals.
- Practice should be tailored and individualised by adapting the therapy to the young person; they should, within the limits of the organisation, be involved in designing treatment services.
- Services should ensure that their relationships with young people offer respect, information, connection and hope.

### **Embedding early intervention and prevention**

Early intervention and prevention initiatives are able to produce significant efficiencies, allowing the same services system resources to have a greater impact. However, the effectiveness of such initiatives can be difficult to measure as the savings accrue over the long-term and across agencies and portfolios of government. For this reason it is important to favour evidence-based models of early intervention and prevention, or to conduct rigorous trials where such models are not yet proven. For at-risk young people a model exists with very promising evidence backing. The Community of Schools and Services (CoSS) approach is a place-based model for early intervention with at-risk young people.

#### Recommendation:

- Implement funded trials of the Community of School and Services model in NSW.

## **Building effective referral pathways and processes**

When designing or reforming referral pathways three critical requirements must be allowed for: planning for lack of capacity, specialist and local referral services, and access to up-to-date information.

Recommendations:

- Referral pathways must include options for when there is a lack of capacity.
- Referral processes should include both state-wide generalist referral systems and specialist and local systems.
- Well-integrated information systems giving access to data on services are necessary, but not sufficient. There must be the capacity for referral systems to have strong relationships with the services they refer to.

## **Using data to improve services**

There are two categories of ways in which data can be used to improve services. The first is the sharing of client information between multiple services working with the same client. The second is the use of linked, but de-identified, data in research to better understand the factors driving both homelessness and the exit from homelessness. There are a range of advantages in sharing client information between the services working with that client. However, sharing client information risks violating their rights to privacy and confidentiality. Powerful insights can be gained from linked data. The potential broad benefits need to be balanced against the risk of privacy violations, but this should not have the effect of paralysing research.

Recommendations:

- It should be ensured that all services have protocols and procedures to ensure that genuinely informed consent can be obtained from clients to share their information.
- Information sharing systems must be sufficiently flexible to allow partial sharing of data, so that client can exercise control over what information is shared.
- Efforts should be made to link and de-identify data for use in research to gain better understanding of how to assist the disadvantaged. The risks of privacy violations should be managed.

## About Yfoundations

Yfoundations' mission is to create a future without youth homelessness. We are the NSW peak body on youth homelessness and represent young people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness, as well as the services who provide direct support to them.

Since its formation in 1979 this organisation has called for reform and improvement to broader systemic responses to youth homelessness and young people at risk of homelessness. Yfoundations provides advocacy and policy responses on issues relevant to young people affected by homelessness and issues relevant to service providers.

Our aim is to promote, protect and build on existing good practice and excellence in addressing youth homelessness. We also strive to ensure that youth homelessness remains a priority in public policy on: homelessness, youth affairs, youth justice, education, child protection, employment, health/wellbeing, and housing. Our vision is to ensure that all young people have access to appropriate and permanent housing options that reflect their individual need.

In pursuit of these goals, we have identified five 'foundations' for the positive growth and development of a young person and the process of ending youth homelessness:

- Home & Place
- Safety & Stability
- Health & Wellness
- Connections & Participation
- Education & Employment

These foundations place youth homelessness in a broader context, recognising that it interrelates with a range of issues, and that ending youth homelessness will require coordination across silos. They provide a framework for reaching out to other service areas to explore collaborative and integrated solutions. We believe it is vital that each young person has the opportunity within each domain to thrive. More information about these foundations is available on Yfoundations' website.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Yfoundations, *The Foundations* <<http://yfoundations.org.au/explore-and-learn/publications/the-foundations/>>

<sup>2</sup> Not her real name.

<sup>3</sup> Not their real names  
*Youth Homelessness in NSW: Yfoundations response to "Foundations for Change"*  
October 2016

## Introduction

Yfoundations welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Discussion Paper “Foundations for Change”. The discussion paper invites comment on a number of topics that Yfoundations has previously recognised as key issues in youth homelessness. The structure of our submission follows that of the discussion paper with each section drawn from it. However, we have not responded to the discussion questions directly. Instead for each section we have raised the issues in each topic relevant to youth homelessness.

## Creating pathways into housing

The experiences and circumstances of young people who are homeless vary widely, and so their needs vary too. Some young people are capable of exiting the SHS system into the private rental market, others will benefit from transitioning through social housing to private rental, and some will need social housing long-term or permanently. To allow for this diversity of need there must be pathways into both the private rental market and into social housing. Since young people's need for support also vary there must be in all pathways the capacity to deliver the support needed by the young person.

### Private rental

It is not a good time to be renting in NSW, particularly not if you are young. Last year saw the steepest jump in Sydney rental prices in 5 years, which capped off overall rent increases of no less than 16% since 2010. Areas such as the City and the Eastern Suburbs experienced a 25% rent increase over the 5-year period. At the same time demand is high; in 2014 31.4% of the NSW population lived in rental accommodation. In March 2015, average fortnightly rents for 1-bedroom apartments in most areas of NSW equated to almost 75% of net youth allowance payments even with the maximum rent assistance.

*Rent vs Net Income in a sample of urban and regional areas in NSW as of March 2015*

Suburb	Median weekly rent*	Net fortnightly Income after rent**
Sydney	\$960	\$-397.40
Bankstown	\$464	\$98.00
Campbelltown	\$500	\$62.60
Hurstville	\$660	\$-97.4
Penrith	\$420	\$142.60
Gosford	\$440	\$122.60
Wollongong	\$440	\$122.60
Goulburn/Yass	\$460	\$102.60
Albury	\$420	\$142.60
Armidale	\$480	\$82.60
Dubbo	\$420	\$142.60
Orange	\$480	\$82.60

\* Median weekly rents for new bonds for one bedroom apartments – March Quarter 2015

\*\* Percentage of net income is based on the total of Youth allowance payment based on someone 18 year old or older, with no children, who is living outside the family home (\$433.20 per fortnight); and Rent Assistance assumed to be at the maximum rate of \$129.40 per fortnight. This means the total net income per fortnight is \$562.60 before rent.

Rental subsidies and assistance are helpful additions and are an important tool that will enable many to access more affordable housing. However, there are barriers beyond the purely financial for young people attempting to exit homelessness into the private market.

We know anecdotally that young people are often at a disadvantage when they submit applications for properties, regardless of their capacity to pay rent. (We note that other groups can also face discrimination and many of the points raised here would be similarly applicable.)

*Rebecca,<sup>2</sup> 18 years old, was in foster care during her early teenage years. When her placement broke down she moved into social housing supported by a Specialist Homelessness Service. Her caseworkers describe her as extremely well organised and independent. She had a strong desire to move out of social housing and into the private rental market. With their support she applied for 75 different rental properties in the Coffs Harbour area. All were rejected; her social housing tenancy history was not seen as relevant by Real Estate Agents. She currently still resides in social housing.*

*Rahul and Jane<sup>3</sup> are a young couple (aged 23 and 22) with a one-month-old baby. They moved to Port Macquarie to stay with Jane's family for family reasons, but were forced to move out when relations with Jane's family broke down. They have applied for 50 rental properties without success. Although have had a private rental tenancy with no problems, they are told their application is not strong enough. Some Real Estate Agents in the area have stated that they will not lease to young people under the age of 25 years. Rahul and Jane are currently dependant on a Specialist Homelessness Service for accommodation.*

Those young people who do obtain accommodation often can only find it in sub-standard properties (e.g. in high crime areas, in property that is badly maintained, etc.). This discrimination can be because of their age, their sexual preference or gender (young people may be more likely to identify as transgender or intersex), or other factors in combination with their youth (for example, Aboriginal young people face very significant discrimination barriers). Lack of affordable housing can also create a catch-22 situation where a young person applying on their own will be rejected on the basis that they are unlikely to be able to maintain the rent, but if young people apply jointly to share a property they will be regarded as a 'gang' of young people and rejected. Community agencies attempting to support young people will often have limited success since their support can be detrimental; some Real Estate Agents see it as positive, but others see it as evidence the young person is not desirable due to personal issues. We also have concerns that applicants with no rental history are at a disadvantage, as the application process requires previous rental ledgers and a detailed rental history.

State and federal laws theoretically protect applicants from being discriminated against in the application process. However, it is often very difficult to establish that an applicant has been discriminated against, particularly as real estate agents as a rule generally will not explain

---

<sup>2</sup> Not her real name.

<sup>3</sup> Not their real names.

why an applicant was not successful.

At the same time we are aware that there are those with investment properties who would be prepared to charge a lower rent in order to help a young person exit homelessness. There is a need for a “social real estate agent” to connect aspiring young people who have experienced homelessness with socially conscious landlords. We would like to see funding made available to incentivise the start up of such an organisation.

### **Social Housing**

We need to acknowledge that young people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing homelessness are some of the most vulnerable people in our community. For these young people, a robust stable social housing system, which responds to their specific needs, is imperative. To achieve this there is a significant need to increase the number of houses available within the NSW social housing portfolio, and there needs to be housing run with the needs of young people taken into account.

Despite having the largest social housing portfolio (150,000 dwellings) in Australia there is insufficient stock available to meet the current demand. In 20% of the 247 areas where social housing is available, prospective tenants may have to wait up to ten years before being housed, and demand exceeds supply in all locations across the State.<sup>4</sup>

There are 214,000 who are currently reliant on the public housing system currently and a further 55,000 eligible households (120,000 people) waiting for housing to become available. Of those waiting, 5,000 are listed as ‘priority’ (experiencing unstable housing circumstances; at risk of harm; currently living in accommodation that is inappropriate for their basic housing requirements).<sup>5</sup>

A number of options to increase housing stock were canvassed by the Select Committee on Social, Public and Affordable Housing in their report.<sup>6</sup> There should be measures to ensure that sales do not decrease the level of stock (and do not isolate current tenants from their community) as set out in recommendations 2-4. New locations for increasing stock should be planned, taking into account links to employment education and services (as discussed in Recommendation 26 of the Committee’s report). Also, as set out for recommendations 37-39, the Government should consider the use of Rental Bond Board funds to increase housing stock.

To address the differing needs of young people in the social housing system a variety of housing and support options are required. One very effective method of delivering support is through youth-specific community sector Social Housing providers. These organisations understand the needs of young people, particularly those with complex and/or high needs. Not only do they understand the housing needs of this group, but are also conversant with the necessary social and emotional supports services that need to be made available to complement the housing arrangement. It is this wrap-around support that enables young people the best possible opportunity to transition into independence. We support the

---

<sup>4</sup> New South Wales Auditor-General, ‘Making the best use of public housing: Housing NSW and NSW Land and Housing Corporation’ (Audit Report, Audit Office of New South Wales, July 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Select Committee on Social, Public and Affordable Housing, ‘Social, Public and Affordable Housing’ (Report, The Committee [Sydney NSW], September 2014).

provision of social housing by youth-specific community housing providers. However, such provision should be grown by new properties and not the transfer of public housing stock (or long-term leases), as this uses the resources of the community sector without increasing the social housing available, an increase that is needed.

A further model, which should be considered, is the recently established Transitional Housing Plus. Young people have extremely limited income, which excludes them from accessing many housing products, and this model has the potential to address this gap. It aims to provide housing integrated with support to assist a young person (16-25) to stabilise their lives over a longer tenure period (up to five years). The models support the young person to engage in training and employment opportunities, and will move to independent living arrangements during, or at the end of the five-year period. The rent paid by the young person is scaled to increase over the tenure period, on an annual basis. It should be noted that this model is still being trialled and that consideration should follow results from the trial period.

Further the model has been developed for young people requiring a minimal level of support. A multi-tiered response is imperative when designing housing models for young people; a response that adequately acknowledges the needs of the individual young person. A blanket approach is not appropriate and other models with evidence of efficacy, such as the Youth Foyers model and wrap-around support, should be considered.

### **Support needs**

In looking at creating pathways into housing for young people we must first look at what factors are preventing them from accessing housing. Some of the barriers that these young people face sustaining private rental and alternative housing options include but not limited to:

- Low education attainment and casual unstable and insecure employment options
- Complex trauma
- Diagnosed and undiagnosed developmental delays
- Diagnosed and undiagnosed mental health illness

For many young people struggling to engage with support or services or maintain tenancies their difficulties require wrap around intensive support and a willingness to engage with that support before being able to sustain a long-term tenancy.

An important point here is the issue of funding for support services. Funding for support services for young people via SHS differs greatly between districts meaning that capacity to access support services differs depending on where the young person is located. A needs-based funding benchmark for support services should be established to ensure sufficient support is in place in all districts, with an overall increase across NSW to reflect the importance and life long benefits (not to mention long term costs savings to government) of providing adequate support services to homeless/at risk young people.

One of the major barriers with linking young people to suitable housing options is mental health issues. Mental health disorders have been shown to have significant detrimental effects on wellbeing, functioning and development in adolescence, and are associated with impaired academic achievement, unemployment, poor social functioning, and substance

abuse.<sup>7</sup> It is important that programs directed specifically at address youth mental health are accessible across NSW. Existing successful programs should be expanded to all districts and funding increased to enhance capacity of existing services. This should include programs such as the Youth Community Living Support Service that assists young people with serious mental illnesses, as well as programs such as Headspace that address youth mental health more broadly.

Mental health outreach support and access to regular ongoing intensive support for young people who have mental health illness is critical across NSW right now. Waiting times for specialist support need to be greatly reduced. It is well documented that many children and young people who end up presenting to specialist homelessness services have complex/high needs. This includes mental health problems. This requires young people to have access to essential appropriate mental health service provision in order for mental health issues to be addressed. Addressing mental health in adolescence is critical. Early intervention at this stage is crucial so that mental health issues do not exacerbate and continue into adulthood.

The mental health service system in NSW needs to respond more effectively in assisting young people and linking them up with appropriate housing options and support. This would produce more positive housing outcomes for young people. Many specialist homelessness services do not have the capacity to support young people with mental health issues and are struggling to get support from local adolescent mental health services that are already working overcapacity. This is an even bigger problem that presents in more regional areas where there is a concerning lack of adolescent mental health support. The homelessness strategy plan needs to support the mental health reform plan and build on the various components that make up the mental health service system. Both of these plans should focus on bringing together accommodation and psychosocial supports. Collaboration and information sharing across systems are imperative. Case coordination also needs to be improved.

## **Recommendations**

- That the rental subsidy scheme for young people exiting homelessness continue to be rolled out state wide and expanded.
- That funding be made available to incentivise the creation of a “social real estate agent” to connect aspiring young people who have experienced homelessness with socially conscious landlords.
- There should be increased investment by the NSW and Australian Governments in social and affordable housing stock to meet community demand.
- The NSW Government should encourage and support the creation of new stock to be owned and managed by youth specific community sector Social Housing providers.
- A needs-based funding benchmark for support services should be established to ensure sufficient support is in place in all districts, with an overall increase across NSW to support services.
- Following the results of the trial of the Transitional Housing Plus model, consideration should be given to extending this model as an option in all parts of the social housing system, as part of a suite of options to suit the differing needs of young people.

---

<sup>7</sup> R C Kessler et al, 'Social consequences of psychiatric disorders, I: Educational attainment' (1995) 152(7) *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 1026-1032.

- A long term commitment and collaborative strategy is required between SHS and mental health services. Mental health outreach support and access to regular ongoing intensive support is required for young people with a mental health illness.
- Existing successful programs directed specifically at address youth mental health should be expanded to all districts and funding increased to enhance current capacity.
- Reduced waiting times to access mental health services.
- Collaboration, information sharing and case co-ordination across systems need to be improved in order to be able to adequately link people to suitable housing options.

## **Harnessing community and corporate engagement to prevent and reduce homelessness**

To date there has been little success with getting any major private sector involvement to deliver social and affordable housing. It is evident that there is room for the corporate sector and philanthropists to get more involved with the issue of homelessness. Government need to look at their approach regarding this. This involves how can they make it more appealing to the private sector. The private sector are aware of the issues around lack of affordable housing however a barrier in involvement could be that there is not enough clear and concise detailed information of how they can become involved or how they can contribute to alleviate this problem while also making it appealing for them to do so.

Advisors should be employed to approach the private sector to educate them regarding investing in social and affordable housing models. What is it that we want the private sector to provide? What is required- debt, equity, etc.? This remains unclear to many investors at present, and as a result some philanthropic support goes to initiatives that gain media attention but are of little benefit in actually addressing homelessness.

Those involved also need to be clear on what their return is regarding social and financial returns. A marketing campaign needs to be developed. Many people are desensitised to homelessness and unsure how they can help. The issue of homelessness is not just the inability to afford housing. We need to educate and raise awareness of the complex problems and myriad of issues associated with homelessness and how we can tackle these issues. e.g. drug and alcohol abuse as a result of complex trauma. We need to break down the stigma and misconceptions that some people may have around what they perceive as homelessness.

Engaging philanthropists on the issue of homelessness also involves looking at innovative ways to market this. Philanthropists like donating to something that is tangible. They want to see that they are affecting positive change.

Questions that need to be answered:

- Where exactly is the money going?
- Who are they helping?
- How are problems being alleviated?

The strategy will need to focus on clearly answering these questions as it will not be enough

to state finance will contribute to increasing housing supply and homelessness initiatives.

The marketing strategy needs to tackle these issues. Also in order for donations and investments to become stable and long term, those investing and donating need to be kept informed about the outcomes. How are things improving? These individual will be less likely to continue investing and donating if they are not seeing that their money is affecting any positive change.

### Recommendations

- Advisors should be employed to approach the private sector to educate them regarding investing in effective social and affordable housing models. This needs to be a viable and lucrative in order to obtain “buy in” with a clearer framework supporting it.
- A clear marketing strategy needs to be developed to tackle all issues mentioned above.

## Better exit planning

A strong criticism of foster care by young people was the lack of preparation for leaving care. Some reported only being given a factsheet with a long checklist (over 100 items) of skills for independent living.<sup>8</sup> Yfoundations has also been informed by member services that many people leaving OOHC are not financially or socially and emotionally prepared to live independently. This aligns with research on the issue that, in spite of the guidelines around leaving care, a significant number of young people leave care without a plan. In the CREATE Report Card 2011, only 18% of the sample in NSW had a plan.<sup>9</sup>

It is important that young people are assisted to develop independent living skills before they leave care, so that they are prepared for their transition to independent living. Care plans should include reasonable steps to prepare the young person for the transition from OOHC. Levels of support vary according to individual needs, including additional support for those with behaviour or substance abuse problems. The likelihood of these young people accessing required housing assistance, without leaving care planning, is very low. Without adequate planning and preparation prior to exiting care a young person is likely to transition into homelessness, such as inappropriate or unsafe vulnerable couch surfing options, leaving them at increased risk of experiencing drug and alcohol misuse issues including drug dealing/running and other criminal activities or sexual exploitation.

Young people need to be heavily involved in exit planning in order for them to feel safe and secure. A young person cannot end their experience of youth homelessness without the necessary safety and stability mechanisms supporting them.<sup>10</sup> All plans should be client centred and strength based and really focus and work towards the young persons

---

<sup>8</sup> Family and Community Services, 'Independent Living Skills – A checklist for young people in care' (Fact Sheet, NSW Government, 12 January 2015)

<[http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/319367/leavingcare\\_checklist.pdf](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/319367/leavingcare_checklist.pdf)>.

<sup>9</sup> J J McDowall, 'Transitioning from Care in Australia: An Evaluation of CREATE's What's the Plan? Campaign' (Report, CREATE Foundation, 2011) <<http://create.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/2011-CRE065-F-CREATE-Report-Card-2011-Web-File-webR.pdf>>.

<sup>10</sup> Yfoundations, *The Foundations: Safety and Stability* <<http://yfoundations.org.au/explore-and-learn/publications/the-foundations/safety-and-stability/>>.

aspirations.

When looking at different models of suitable housing options it will be essential to look at the individual needs of a young person. For many young people presenting as homeless or at risk or homelessness to SHS share house type models may not be an option due to complex trauma, depression and anxiety. Young people need increased access and alternative options to accommodation that are stable to address these issues.

Exit plans need to be flexible and not focus on a “one size fits all” approach. Exit planning for young people exiting OOHC needs to start earlier. If the strategy is looking to embed the principals of prevention and early intervention this needs to be incorporated into all aspects of the plan including exit planning and should be included in funding associated with this.

A further point made by young people was that developing the skills months before they were actually needed in preparation for independence was difficult. It was much easier, where possible, to get assistance with learning the skills as they were needed to give a practical application to the learning. This suggests the need for some form of after-care independence skill training that young people can access as needed. Information is given on services that can assist with various issues. However, young people are often reluctant to engage with services, especially those exiting care, who often wish to assert their new independence from the government and communities services. Perhaps an online resource could be developed with engaging video content that demonstrates necessary independence skills and encourages young people to view the services that can assist them as a resource that they can choose to utilise.

The \$40 million over 4 years to youth homelessness initiatives should not only be invested in programs that support the young person once they reach 17 but also be invested in prevention and early intervention supports that start much earlier. Specifically exit plans that focus on maintaining education. More support and increased roll out of the Community of Schools and Services approach (see description in the ‘Embedding early intervention and prevention’ section below) is required. Many young people become disengaged from school before proposed support around maintaining education kicks in.

Young people leaving care or who have left care are over-represented in the statistics on homelessness, early school leaving and contact with the criminal justice system. They are also more likely to have children at an early age and are at greater risk of having their own child taken into care.<sup>11</sup> Improving outcomes for young people who are leaving care requires a dual focus on improving the quality of care and providing better support to young people as they are transitioning from care.

Aboriginal young people leaving care are a high-risk group for homelessness and so require proactive planning and support. The support and services provided to Aboriginal care leavers needs to be culturally respectful and ensure cultural safety, and prioritise connection to family and culture. Aboriginal young people are more likely to experience negative aspects of leaving care, including homelessness. This partly, but not entirely, due to their overrepresentation in the out of home care system. Increasing the risk of homelessness is

---

<sup>11</sup> Toni Beauchamp, ‘A strong future for young people leaving out-of-home care’ (Position Paper, UnitingCare Children, Young People and Families, July 2014) < <http://apo.org.au/node/40611>>.

the higher proportion of Aboriginal young people who leave school early, which as we also know is a risk factor for later unemployment, poverty and homelessness.<sup>12</sup>

Exit plans need to be more proactive instead of reactive and preventative measures need to start much earlier. Given the rates of early parenting for Aboriginal young people and also for young people leaving care, Aboriginal young people leaving care are at an increased likelihood of becoming parents at a young age. Funding that will be directed into the youth homelessness initiatives need to take into account these groups of young people. Programmes and initiatives need to be flexible and client centred.

While improved preparation and leaving care planning will help many young people, there are some for whom more support is required. Some young people, as a consequence of trauma, require ongoing therapeutic support in order to reduce the risk of multiple instances of homelessness after leaving care. These young people often leave care at high risk of repeated homelessness. Often these young people come to youth homelessness services in crisis a year or two after leaving care once the leaving care resources have been expended. There is a need for programs in all districts that deliver intensive support for those young people who leave care at high risk of homelessness. Such programs should be designed in genuine consultation with youth services.

### **Recommendations**

- Increase efforts to ensure that all children in the child protection system have a leaving care plan.
- Increase the resources of caseworkers and/or carers to actively provide skills for independence.
- Exit plans need to have clearer pathways into housing and increased options for young people leaving state care. Young people leaving care should be a priority group for more affordable housing and housing policy should reflect this.
- Exit plans need to be flexible and not focus on a “one size fits all” approach.
- Provide after-care independence skill training for care leavers, such as an online resource with engaging video content.
- Programmes and initiatives need to be culturally appropriate.
- Post care support should enhance supports already existing. This is critical in relation to engaging young people in education from an earlier age.
- Introduce programs that deliver intensive support (designed in genuine consultation with youth services) in all districts for those young people who leave care at high-risk of homelessness.

---

<sup>12</sup> Arney, F., Iannos, M., Chong, A., McDougall, S., & Parkinson, S., ‘Enhancing the implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle: Policy and practice considerations’ (CFCA Paper No 34, Australian Institute of Family Studies, August 2015) <[aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/enhancing-implementation-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-child](http://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/enhancing-implementation-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-child)>.

## Empowering people through education, training and employment to prevent homelessness

Initiatives to enhance the participation of children and young people in education, training and employment are extremely important to reducing youth homelessness. Some initiatives have a role in helping young people exit homelessness, these include taking a Foyer approach and bolstering the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector's ability to address disadvantage. Other initiatives are important in preventing youth homelessness, such as a strategy for early education and school engagement and culturally appropriate programs for indigenous students.

### A Foyer Approach

Foyers are learning and student accommodation centres for young people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. They involve a number of key elements, including most importantly a commitment by the young person to engage in education and/or employment, and a reciprocal commitment by the Foyer to link them with education and employment opportunities. Other important elements include young people being part of a community of other young people and having connections with the broader community.

The success of the Foyer model across Australia and overseas provides a strong evidence base to inform a strategic development plan and to ensure essential responses, for not only secure housing for young people, but for opportunities for them to build their individual capacity and social capital. So it is not surprising that the Foyer approach received a strong consensus of support at the Roundtable Discussion on achieving the Premier's priority of reducing youth homelessness.

It is important to note that representatives at the roundtable tended to talk about "Foyers and Foyer-like approaches". There has been experimentation with the concept of Foyers in Australia over a number of years and a range of services have been associated with the term 'Foyer'.

Foyers are traditionally a single building. However, the approach of a Foyer can be applied to other contexts such as a number of individual units in the locality of the foyer hub (the 'dispersed foyer' model) or even applied across the whole of the current system of medium-term, transitional, and similar accommodation options for homeless young people. Such a 'systemic foyer' approach might involve the creation of employment development officers to develop links with state-wide and local business employers; construction or renovation to create youth hubs for existing housing options; and the construction of traditional foyers in areas where there are no appropriate existing accommodation options.

### *Employment development officers*

Many of the elements of a Foyer are present in the support currently given to young people experiencing homelessness. For example, casework support will usually involve connecting the young person with educational opportunities and expecting them to engage with education to increase their employability and to seek employment. However, services often lack the resources to directly connect young people to employment opportunities. To cover this gap and make the broader service system more Foyer-like would require personnel with the skills and time to develop and maintain relationships with employers and employer

bodies. One way of achieving this would be to fund an employment development officer in each district, and to fund training and additional time for caseworkers within existing services to liaise with the employment development officer and maintain the relationships that they develop. These officers would develop relationships both with large organisations such as supermarket chains and also with small business bodies such as local chambers of commerce that would provide opportunities for disadvantaged young people to engage with employment.

### *Youth Hubs*

Another critical aspect of a Foyer is the provision of networks and access to community. This includes connections to the broader community as part of accessing jobs, but it is also about social engagement more generally. Foyers work to provide access to community resources such as local sporting, cultural and community groups. Traditional Foyers also by their nature make young people part of a community of other young people all of who are pursuing their aspirations through engagement with education or employment. The positive benefits of this environment should not be underestimated.

In a traditional Foyer this community of young people is engendered by common spaces for socialising that all the young people pass through each day. Achieving this when the accommodation is dispersed requires means of gathering the young people together in ways that are appealing to them, but do not detract from their engagement with education and employment.

A readily accessible and attractive common space is required; a youth hub. Accessibility means that it must be easily reached by walking or public transport (or perhaps shuttle busses if necessary). The youth hub could be made attractive by including a range of services provided free or heavily discounted to residents of the properties it bring together, such as food outlets with discounted meals, a gym with discounted membership, and free access to facilities for social activities such as pool tables. In addition aspects of residents' support could be located at the youth hub. For example, meetings with their caseworker could be conducted at the site. Also, agreements with mainstream services could be made for them to periodically operate from the site through pop-up offices.

Sites similar to youth hubs already exist as part of some services and may only need slight top-up funding. In other cases renovation of an existing site to make it a youth hub may be possible. In some areas new building may be required.

### *Traditional foyers*

In addition to the above, applying a Foyer approach state-wide will require further traditional Foyers to be resourced. There are some areas, particularly outside metropolitan and major regional hubs, where current accommodation options are extremely poor.

It is essential that regional areas see substantial investment in appropriate social housing models and infrastructure development to address the entrenchment of disadvantage being experienced by young people; and that this priority does not just target major regional hubs, but includes investment in smaller disadvantaged communities. Without this urban drift will continue to increase.

Capital grants could be made available to build new Foyers. An estimated cost is \$7 million

to construct a new Foyer. However, there is valuable infrastructure in small regional areas that have the potential for redevelopment, and could provide a more cost effective strategy than building from scratch. In addition, capital for building may be able to be sourced from philanthropic funds or from social impact investment schemes. A critical role for government will be the on-going support for each Foyer, estimated at around \$1 million per year.

### **Bolstering the VET sector's ability to address disadvantage**

There are concerns in youth homelessness services that recent reforms and funding cuts in the VET sector may have a detrimental effect on TAFEs and make the sector less able to play a critical role in combatting disadvantage. These concerns are based on an understanding of the importance of education in addressing homelessness, and on the YSHS sector's dependence on TAFEs and negative experiences with many (but not all) Private RTOs.

These understandings from on-the-ground experience accord with research into these issues. The employment that provides income to obtain and maintain a home is made much more achievable with education. Research comparing job seeker numbers with job vacancies data indicates that for each low-skill job there are around five job seekers; this is in contrast to higher skilled work where the ratio is more like 1-2 job seekers per job.<sup>13</sup> It is clear that education provides a critical advantage.

Likewise the strong role of TAFEs in providing education to the disadvantage is reflected in research.<sup>14</sup> When looking at a number of aspects of disadvantage (e.g. regional, disability, socioeconomic) it is clear that the VET sector reaches disadvantaged groups far better than, for example, the Higher Education sector. It is also clear that within the VET sector TAFEs on average provide for these groups proportionally more than the Private RTOs. And the very positive experiences of some youth homelessness services with particular Private RTOs indicates that there are many Private RTOs performing very poorly in this regard to bring down the average of this part of the VET sector.

Increased contestability in VET seems to be driving a rapid increase in Private RTOs. Such rapid growth is unlikely to be creating the sort of community embedded Private RTOs that have been found by the youth homelessness sector to be best at engaging disadvantaged young people. It instead seems to be creating more of the sorts of organisations that promote low-quality courses to the vulnerable. At the same time TAFE enrolments stagnate or decrease, and the Private RTO growth is greatest in courses and regions where the highest profits are possible, leaving the more expensive courses to be run by TAFE.<sup>15</sup> This is in effect a funding cut, and it compounds on decreases in government spending on the sector.<sup>16</sup> The result has been closure of regional campuses and the shutting down of 'second chance' education programs; undermining TAFEs ability to address disadvantage.

---

<sup>13</sup> Christopher Stone, 'False Economies, Part 2: Doing Less With Less' (Report, Centre for Policy Development, 2013) <<https://cpd.org.au/2013/05/doing-less-with-less/>>.

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Stone, 'Valuing Skills: Why Vocational Training Matters' (Research Paper, Centre for Policy Development, 2012) <http://cpd.org.au/2012/11/valuing-skills/>>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Community Services & Health Industry Skills Council, 'Building a Healthy Future: Skills, Planning and Enterprise' (Environmental Scan, 2015) <[http://www.cshisc.com.au/media/373197/EScan\\_2015\\_FULL\\_VERSION.pdf](http://www.cshisc.com.au/media/373197/EScan_2015_FULL_VERSION.pdf)>.

The effects of a competitive training market have been negative for some of the most vulnerable in our communities, homeless young people. However, this is not to say that the youth homelessness sector would advocate for TAFE being the only provider. As mentioned, there are examples of Private RTOs that have engaged very well with young people experiencing homelessness. What is needed to best address youth homelessness is a strong TAFE providing the backbone of educational support, supplemented by Private RTOs with particular strengths such as engagement with the community in addressing disadvantage. TAFEs should be sufficiently resourced to continue to provide regional campuses, 'second chance' education, and additional support services such as counselling and child-care. The ability to be flexible and innovative in particular targeted programs in collaboration with services for the disadvantaged should be encouraged in both TAFEs and Private RTOs.

Current reforms do not seem to be creating such an environment and there needs to be investigation of policy that may be able to move towards this. For example, part of the registration process for training organisations might require endorsements from local community services and a history or an endorsed plan of working with community services sectors such as the youth homelessness sector.

### **A strategy for early education and school engagement**

Investment in Australian early education and care has tripled over the last decade to \$7.7 billion in 2015-16, yet research shows that our highest quality programs are concentrated in wealthier suburbs - out of reach of the disadvantaged children who need them the most.<sup>17</sup> NSW needs to develop a coherent long-term strategy for education. If nothing changes social and economic disadvantage will become both more pronounced and more difficult to overcome. Inequality impacts on the whole of society, undermining prosperity and cohesion. In all sectors, we must ensure that spending is directed to where it will have the most impact on student learning, including where there is greatest need.

A state strategy needs to be adopted around school engagement and strong supports need to be put in place around children who are at increased risk of leaving school early. Prevention and early intervention regarding education is critical. Homelessness services do not have the resources or intensive supports that are required to do this at an acceptable level at present. More funding is required across the state to continue and expand on the community of schools approach. Approaches like the CoSS model are designed to target vulnerable young people in the education system and wrap support around them. Programs like this are crucial, but we also need to start intervening even earlier than high schools.

Preventative programmes need to start at primary school level. This is to target children with low school attendance, which puts them at increased risk of disengaging from school at a later age.

### **Culturally appropriate programs for indigenous students**

Aboriginal young people are at increased risk of leaving school early. Culturally appropriate programmes of support need to be adopted to engage this group in school for a longer

---

<sup>17</sup> Rickards Field, 'Four ways to unlock the potential of Australian students' (Research Paper, Melbourne Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne, 2016) <<https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/four-ways-to-unlock-the-potential-of-australian-students>>.

duration. Scholarships and supporting access to third level education for this group of young people are important but we need to create the foundation for them to remain engaged in school first.

### Recommendations

- A Foyer approach should be implemented across the whole service system including: employment development officers, youth hubs, and traditional Foyers where appropriate.
- TAFEs should be sufficiently resourced to continue to provide regional campuses, 'second chance' education, and additional support services such as counselling and child-care.
- Part of the registration process for training organisations should require endorsements from local community services and a history or an endorsed plan of working with community services sectors such as the youth homelessness sector.
- Prevention and early intervention needs to start earlier in schools to prevent low school attendance which is an indicator for disengaging in school at a later stage.
- Adopt culturally appropriate programmes of support for indigenous students.

## Putting people at the centre of responding to homelessness<sup>18</sup>

Across the service system there can be misconceptions about the causes of youth homelessness and this can lead to inappropriate responses to young people who are experiencing homelessness. Domestic and Family Violence (DFV) is a significant factor in youth homelessness, but this is not always recognised, and even where it is known the implications of the trauma caused by DFV are not always understood.

Data from the AIHW indicates that 45% of young people accessing SHS do so due to DFV or family/relationship breakdowns.<sup>19</sup> However, this is likely an underestimate of the extent of DFV. The AIHW data relies on initial assessments and young people will often be unwilling to self identify as victims of DFV. It can take caseworkers some time to establish the necessary trust with the young person to elicit this information. A recent survey of youth homelessness services conducted by Yfoundations provided evidence of this underestimation.<sup>20</sup> In the survey thirty-two services, collectively assisting over 1,500 young people, reported the proportion of their young people who had experienced DFV. Twenty-seven of those services reported higher numbers than the 45% in the data from AIHW. Many services gave significantly higher numbers: fourteen reported 80% or more, with half of those saying all of their young people had experienced DFV.

---

<sup>18</sup> Note: Parts of this section are drawn from an upcoming conference paper: Natalia Gale and Chris Stone 'Requirements for Specific Practice Models to Help Young People who have Experienced Domestic and Family Violence' (to be presented at the Australian Stop Domestic Violence Conference, Brisbane, 5<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> December 2016).

<sup>19</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Specialist Homelessness Services 2014-15* (2015) Specialist Homelessness Services Collection <<http://aihw.gov.au/homelessness/specialist-homelessness-services-2014-15/>>.

<sup>20</sup> Chris Stone and Jessica Fielding, 'Slamming the door: Policy and Service Gaps for Young People Experiencing Domestic and Family Violence' (Policy Paper, Yfoundations, 2016) <[http://yfoundations.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Slamming-the-Door\\_FINAL.pdf](http://yfoundations.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Slamming-the-Door_FINAL.pdf)>.

Despite the large number of young homeless people who are escaping DFV, there can be a view that young people choose homelessness simply to avoid reasonable parental discipline. For example, at one consultation on a youth homelessness program a constable in the NSW Police Force stated that the usual cause for youth homelessness was behavioural issues on the part of the young people. It should be noted that this was not a youth specialist officer and that there are many members of the police with a very good understanding of the realities of youth homelessness. However, across the service system and the wider community there are still those with mistaken views on the drivers of youth homelessness and more needs to be done to address this. Basic information on the causes of youth homelessness should be part of standard orientation and training for anyone likely to be in contact with young people who are homeless.

Even where the causes of youth homelessness are known, there is not necessarily an understanding of the effects of the trauma experienced by many young people who are homeless. Services need to be funded and supported to adopt a model of trauma informed care and practice (TICP)

Although there is no universally agreed definition of TICP, Hopper et al. developed a consensus-based definition based on their review of the literature.<sup>21</sup> It is a strengths-based framework that is grounded in an understanding of, and responsiveness to, the impact of trauma, that emphasises physical, psychological and emotional safety for both providers and survivors, and that creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of control and empowerment.

TICP requires practitioners to appreciate that an adolescent's responses and coping mechanisms have developed in the context of trauma. It recognises the impact of external, socially embedded causes of distress, trauma and disadvantage.<sup>22</sup> The focus is not on what is 'wrong with' the adolescent, but rather on what wrong was done to the adolescent.

Principles of TICP differ slightly from one researcher to the next, but there are five generally agreed upon core principles:<sup>23</sup>

1. Understanding trauma and its impact
2. Safety
3. Ensuring cultural competence
4. Control, choice and autonomy
5. Collaboration

---

<sup>21</sup> E K Hopper, E L Basuk and J Oliver, 'Shelter from the Storm: Trauma-Informed Care in Homelessness Services Settings' (2010) 3(2) *The Open Health Services and Policy Journal* 80-100.

<sup>22</sup> S McKenzie-Mohr et al, 'Responding to the Needs of Youth who are Homeless: Calling for Politicized Trauma-Informed Intervention' (2012) 34(1) *Children and Youth Services Review* 136-143.

<sup>23</sup> V L Hummer et al, 'Innovations in Implementation of Trauma-Informed Care Practices in Youth Residential Treatment: A Curriculum for Organizational Change' (2010) 89(2) *Child Welfare* 79-95; and L Funston, *Trauma-Informed Practice* (n.d.) NSW Government: NSW Kids and Families <[www.kidsfamilies.health.nsw.gov.au/media/225431/CRK\\_Section\\_34\\_Online.pdf](http://www.kidsfamilies.health.nsw.gov.au/media/225431/CRK_Section_34_Online.pdf)>.

The adoption of a TICP model has a number of implications:

### **Screening:**

It is essential that all services screen for trauma at first contact with the young person accessing their service. Currently, very few do. A study by Lewis et al. highlights the importance of identifying individual trauma histories.<sup>24</sup> They found that a significant trauma-by-treatment-by-time interaction reveal that the different trauma groups responded differently to trauma.

### **Avoiding Re-traumatisation:**

Young people who have experienced trauma may be mistrustful and perceive services and their workers as a further threat rather than a helping hand. As a result, while their intentions are good, services and their workers may often – inadvertently – do more harm. Clinical set-ups may produce re-traumatising settings without being aware, such as, for example, using isolation or physical restraints, imposing policies and rules without exceptions or an opportunity for clients to question them, limiting participation in treatment plans, labelling behaviours and/or feelings, and disrupting counsellor-client relationships.

Practitioners should be aware of potential triggers. Re-traumatisation may occur when clients experience something that makes them feel as though they are undergoing another trauma. This happens at an unconscious level and the individual may be left with unpleasant feelings that they cannot understand.<sup>25</sup>

### **Trauma-informed Organisations:**

Trauma-sensitive environments need to be calming, predictable and reliable. To achieve this, it is not just practitioners who must adapt their way of thinking, but the organisation as a whole. Staff need to empathise with adolescents and be aware of how the impacts of violence and victimisation might have hindered a young person's development and coping mechanisms.

Also, the safety and wellbeing of staff working with traumatised individuals mustn't be forgotten. Workers in this line of work are continually in an emotionally charged environment. Providing ongoing supervision and support for practitioners will help to mitigate the impacts of vicarious trauma, as many practitioners will have experienced trauma themselves which may be triggered by client responses and behaviours.

### **Sensitivity to individual differences of young people:**

Trauma may have different meanings in different cultures and traumatic stress may be expressed differently within different cultural frameworks. Practitioners must be aware of their cultural worldviews and histories and how they may influence engagement with young people.<sup>26</sup> They might consider doing this by, for example, asking the young person to educate them on their culture.

---

<sup>24</sup> C C Lewis et al, 'Impact of Childhood Trauma on Treatment Outcome in the Treatment of Adolescents with Depression Study (TADS)' (2010) 49(2) *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* 132-140.

<sup>25</sup> S Barton, R Gonzalez and P Tomlinson, *Therapeutic Residential Care for Children and Young People: An Attachment and Trauma-Informed Model for Practice* (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2012).

<sup>26</sup> D E Elliott et al, 'Trauma-Informed or Trauma-Denied: Principles and Implementation of Trauma-Informed Services for Women' (2005) 33(4) *Journal of Community Psychology* 461-477.

Practitioners must also be sensitive to other individual differences amongst clients and attuned to the prejudices they may have faced as a result, e.g. sexual orientation, religion, age, economic class, disability and ethnicity. All of these characteristics may interact to create more or less stigma associated with violence and trauma.

### **Co-design:**

TICP should be tailored and individualised by adapting the therapy to the client rather than the other way round.<sup>27</sup> The goal is to help young victims regain a sense of control over their lives and to build competencies that will strengthen their sense of autonomy.<sup>28</sup> Authoritarian or punitive treatment styles can cause re-traumatisation because patients re-live the experience of coercion and power used by the perpetrator.

An important characteristic of feeling empowered, is the ability to take charge of your life, to have conscious choice and control over your actions. Adolescents must be made aware that they have the right to refuse to answer a question, to refuse treatment and, within the limits of the organisation, to request different staff, modify their treatment plan and set limits. Adolescents should be involved in designing treatment services and be part of an ongoing evaluation of those services.<sup>29</sup>

### **RICH relationships:**

TICP acknowledges the power imbalance in the patient-practitioner relationship and asks practitioners to do their best to flatten this hierarchy.<sup>30</sup> The trauma of a perpetrator having power over the adolescent is more effectively healed using a collaborative and empowering set up. While boundaries, which are a combination of warm and consistent, are important, these should be mutually negotiated and care should be taken to ensure that the client understands their significance and does not experience them as punitive.<sup>31</sup>

Practitioners and organisations need to ensure that communication is open and respectful. Trauma needs to be healed in a context in which the interpersonal relationships are the opposite of traumatizing. A RICH relationship is defined as one that offers respect, information, connection and hope.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup> P Stavropoulos and C Kezelman, 'The Last Frontier: Practice Guidelines for Treatment of Complex Trauma and Trauma Informed Care and Service Delivery' (Practice Guide, Adults Surviving Child Abuse, 2012) <[http://www.recoveryonpurpose.com/upload/ASCA\\_Practice%20Guidelines%20for%20the%20Treatment%20of%20Complex%20Trauma.pdf](http://www.recoveryonpurpose.com/upload/ASCA_Practice%20Guidelines%20for%20the%20Treatment%20of%20Complex%20Trauma.pdf)>.

<sup>28</sup> J Bateman, C Henderson and C Kezelman, 'Trauma Informed Care and Practice: Towards a Cultural Shift in Policy Reform Across Mental Health and Human Services in Australia' (Position Paper, Mental Health Coordinating Council, September 2013) <[http://www.mhcc.org.au/media/32045/ticp\\_awg\\_position\\_paper\\_\\_v\\_44\\_final\\_\\_07\\_11\\_13.pdf](http://www.mhcc.org.au/media/32045/ticp_awg_position_paper__v_44_final__07_11_13.pdf)>.

<sup>29</sup> D E Elliott et al, 'Trauma-Informed or Trauma-Denied: Principles and Implementation of Trauma-Informed Services for Women' (2005) 33(4) *Journal of Community Psychology* 461-477.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> J Bateman, C Henderson and C Kezelman, 'Trauma Informed Care and Practice: Towards a Cultural Shift in Policy Reform Across Mental Health and Human Services in Australia' (Position Paper, Mental Health Coordinating Council, September 2013) <[http://www.mhcc.org.au/media/32045/ticp\\_awg\\_position\\_paper\\_\\_v\\_44\\_final\\_\\_07\\_11\\_13.pdf](http://www.mhcc.org.au/media/32045/ticp_awg_position_paper__v_44_final__07_11_13.pdf)>

<sup>32</sup> K W Saakvitne et al, *Risking Connection: A Training Curriculum for Working with Survivors of Childhood Abuse* (Sidran Institute Press, 2000).

## Recommendations

- Better understanding of drivers of youth homelessness in the service system should be promoted through inclusion in basic training requirements for anyone likely to be in contact with young people who are homeless.
- Fund and support services to adopt a model of trauma informed care and practice.
- All services should screen for trauma at first contact with the young person accessing their service.
- Service staff should be aware of potential re-traumatisation in clinical settings.
- Organisations must be trauma-informed, creating calming, predictable and reliable environments, and acknowledging the safety and wellbeing needs of staff working with traumatised individuals.
- Practice should be tailored and individualised by adapting the therapy to the young person; they should, within the limits of the organisation, be involved in designing treatment services.
- Services should ensure that their relationships with young people offer respect, information, connection and hope.

## Embedding early intervention and prevention

Early intervention and prevention initiatives are able to produce significant efficiencies, allowing the same services system resources to have a greater impact. However, the effectiveness of such initiatives can be difficult to measure as the savings accrue over the long-term and across agencies and portfolios of government. For this reason it is important to favour evidence-based models of early intervention and prevention, or to conduct rigorous trials where such models are not yet proven.

For at-risk young people a model exists with very promising evidence backing. The Community of Schools and Services (CoSS) approach is a place-based model for early intervention with at-risk young people. Originally implemented in Geelong (“the Geelong Project”), where it achieved impressive results,<sup>33</sup> it is now being adapted to NSW contexts.<sup>34</sup> Based upon a strong research and evidence based approach, CoSS projects are joint initiatives between schools and local agencies that assist young people who need support to better engage with school or who are experiencing difficulties in their lives. The projects use collaborative community relationships, population screening, a flexible tiered practice framework, youth-focused and family-centred case management, and robust outcomes measurement, to reduce homelessness and achieve sustainable education and lifetime outcomes.

### Collaborative community relationships:

The CoSS approach is about making sure that resources used at the point where they will be most effective. Clearly a critical part of this is the collaborative relationships amongst the organisations involved. These relationships need to consist of more than casual irregular contacts. The collaboration in a CoSS approach is formalised, MOUs between the organisations set up specific groups with defined roles and regular meetings, and

---

<sup>33</sup> The Geelong Project, *TGP Achievements* (2012) <<http://www.thegeelongproject.com.au/project-achievements/>>.

<sup>34</sup> See *The Northern Beaches Project* <<http://www.thenorthernbeachesproject.com.au/>>; and *The Ryde Project* <<http://theyrydeproject.com.au/>>.

organisations signing up to the MOUs commit to participating in these groups. The relationships are cross-sectorial, they involve all organisations in a community that work with young people. Lastly the relationships involve integrated practice, which means there are connections not just at a leadership level, but also connections between front-line personnel (e.g. school counsellors cooperating directly with community sector youth workers).

### **Population screening:**

A critical benefit is that services do not have to wait until a young person is referred to them, but are able to work with the young person before problems become entrenched. As part of the approach all young people in the project community are asked to take the Australian Index of Adolescent Development survey (AIAD) that contains a number of risk indicators and is administered by the school with support from youth and community workers. The AIAD has proved very effective at detecting young people at risk, in Geelong of the 149 students identified by a pilot of the AIAD only 45 had been identified by school staff.<sup>35</sup> The list of students identified by the AIAD as being at risk is combined with a list of at-risk students compiled by teachers and support workers, and the screening process is completed by brief structured interviews with those students to confirm the level of risk and the appropriate response.

### **Flexible tiered practice framework:**

A Tiered approach recognises that practice is not one size fits all but should be needs focused and ideally flexible over time. Under the CoSS approach children at risk are assigned to one of three tiers of response:

- § Tier 1: Non-casework response. Either active monitoring by school staff or referral to another program or agency.
- § Tier 2: Casework support. Either brief counselling-type casework or case management by the project.
- § Tier 3: Wrap-around support. Case management for complex cases requiring the formal involvement of several agencies.

### **Youth-focused and family-centred casework:**

The nature of the work with young people recognises that working with a young person should also involve working with their family, certainly in an early intervention contact.

### **Robust outcomes measurement:**

The CoSS model relies on good data to identify risk, monitor progress against outcomes and to measure the outcomes achieved in a particular locality. Unlike most program data collections, which are mainly about accountability, the data with the COSS model is primarily about informing practice while also producing robust outcomes data.

Although longitudinal measures of the outcomes of the Geelong Project are still in progress there are early indications that it has reduced youth homelessness in Geelong by 30%. In NSW services in the two communities where the approach has started to be implemented have been very positive, although it is too early in implementation for formal evidence of effects. This evidence is highly promising, but not yet conclusive. Therefore trials of the

---

<sup>35</sup> David Mackenzie and Monica Thielking, 'The Geelong Project: A community of schools and youth services model for early intervention' (Report, Swinburne University, July 2013) 47  
<<http://www.thegeelongproject.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/The-Geelong-Project-FAHCSIA1.pdf>>.

CoSS approach should be implemented.

It should be noted that it is important that such a CoSS projects should align with existing communities. The CoSS projects to date have been implemented in areas with a community identity and this may well have an impact on getting relevant organisations involved, as the a sense of community ownership is engendered. Also, pre-existing communities will already have informal, as well as formal, networks that can be built on in the development of the organisational relationships that are critical to the CoSS approach. This means local sensitivity to community identities will be necessary, and although based on experiences so far a community of a size with around 10,000 students is ideal, the number of students and schools will vary between projects.

It has been estimated<sup>36</sup> that three fully funded trial sites of around 10,000 students each could be implemented for annual funding of \$4,700,000. However, that amount could be reduced by covering around some of the costs of service provision with reallocation of existing community sector workers. Up to half the service provision costs could reasonably be covered, but a more conservative estimate of covering around a third of service provision (this is similar to what was achieved in the Geelong Project), leads to a final annual figure of \$3,300,000 for three trial sites including evaluation.

**Recommendation:**

- Implement funded trials of the Community of School and Services model in NSW.

## Strengthening collaboration

Strong genuine collaborations deliver a range of benefits. Three significant barriers to collaboration to aid young people experiencing and at risk of homelessness are: lack of funding and support for collaborative efforts, overly short timeframes for tender processes and contracts, and lack of cross-sector communication and interaction.

The relationship-building essential to collaboration takes time and resources. This impacts disproportionately on smaller organisations with less total resources and capacity. One approach to addressing this utilises the Collective Impact model of collaboration. A critical aspect of collective impact is having a “backbone organisation”. This can be a new organisation or can be provided as part of an existing body, such as a local council. Backbone support can significantly improve collaboration by undertaking the burden of supporting the building and maintaining of relationships; providing organisational and administrative support that reduces the burden on small organisations.

The way in which tendering processes are currently often operated can hinder collaboration.<sup>37</sup> It is difficult to build the necessary relationships and trust in an environment that is constantly highly competitive where ideas are often not shared for fear of having a new approach appropriated in upcoming tenders. Short contracts mean that the tender

---

<sup>36</sup> The notional figures have been provided by Associate Professor David Mackenzie (Swinburne Institute for Social Research, Swinburne University) who is the architect of the COSS Model.

<sup>37</sup> Productivity Commission, ‘Introducing competition and informed user choice into human services: identifying sectors for reform’ (Report, Australian Government, 2016) <<http://apo.org.au/files/Resource/human-services-identifying-reform-preliminary-findings.pdf>>.

processes reoccur more frequently and mean the environment is constantly competitive. Also the short period of most tenders rarely adequate to allow for formalisation of collaboration through joint ventures. Longer periods for contracts and tender processes could reduce the barriers to collaboration.

Youth homelessness services consistently have difficulties building certain cross-sector relationships. Services report finding it difficult to build connections into the education and the mental health sectors.

Many youth homelessness services have some level of contact with local schools. However, these connections are often fragile because they depend on relationships with particular welfare staff at schools that are vulnerable to staff turnover. The CoSS approach described in the previous section is one example of deeper and stronger relations that can, and should, be built between the homelessness and education sectors.

Relationships with mental health services involve a number of issues as described above.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Provide funding for Backbone organisations to support collaboration through Collective Impact models.
- Make standard longer periods for contracts and tender processes to reduce the barriers to collaboration.

## **Building effective referral pathways and processes**

When designing or reforming referral pathways three critical requirements must be allowed for: planning for lack of capacity, specialist and local referral services, and access to up-to-date information.

### **Planning for lack of capacity**

Referral processes should not be designed with an assumption that all needs can be met. Under the No Wrong Door Policy many homelessness services reported that they were receiving a high volume of referrals but due to high demand for services have difficulty accepting these referrals and also have difficulty referring clients to other services because these services are also at capacity. This process detracts from effective service provision (and in some cases has serious impacts on client safety) due to the time and resources required to support clients in need of referrals.

Embedding a culture of warm referrals would greatly benefit clients in helping to ensure support. However, warm referrals become extremely time-consuming when multiple services must be contacted to attempt to find a service with capacity, or when multiple follow-ups are required to check if capacity has become available. In many areas homelessness services are at capacity.<sup>38</sup> A culture of warm referrals in mainstream services will quickly fatigue unless some alternative to successful referral into the SHS is possible.

---

<sup>38</sup> See, e.g. City of Sydney, *Street Count* (August 2016)

<http://www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au/community/community-support/homelessness/street-count>.

### **Specialist and local referral services**

There are good arguments for generalist state-wide referral systems such as Link2Home. Such points of contact can be highly visible as they are advertised to all, and clients do not have to meet particular criteria. However, there are equally good arguments for specialist and local referral systems, such as the advantages of specialised skills when dealing with particular cohorts or the efficiencies of having local knowledge.

The different approaches to referral systems do not have to be mutually exclusive. Specialist referral systems, such as DFV or youth homelessness helplines, can coexist with a generalist homelessness line. The specialist systems then provide an alternative that particular cohorts may be more comfortable with, while the generalist line continues to provide that advantages of a well-advertised inclusive system to help ensure all those in need have good access to referral systems. Collaboration between the two systems is possible and advantageous; clients not meeting eligibility requirements for the specialist referral system can be quickly directed to the generalist system, and the generalist system can utilise specialist systems where they are difficulties in providing service to particular groups. Likewise local referral systems can coexist with state-wide referral systems; each providing their own advantages and collaborating to improve overall access.

### **Access to up-to-date information**

Quality referral can only be delivered when there is access to accurate information on services, such as their capacity, eligibility criteria and location. This accuracy must be maintained through updates as the information changes. Without accurate up-to-date information inappropriate referrals will be unavoidable. During the early implementation of the Link2Home line there were difficulties with integration of the Vacancy Management System that led to services with vacancies not receiving referrals, while some clients were referred to very distant services. A well-integrated information system is clearly critical.

However, a good information system alone cannot cover all complexities of a service system. In practice referral systems will need to have the capacity to build relationships with the services they refer to. In this sense the Link2Home line provides a model of good practice. The willingness of senior staff at Link2Home to both inform and listed to the homelessness sector has been admirable and has resulted in significant improvements in the line over the time of its operation.

### **Recommendations:**

- Referral pathways must include options for when there is a lack of capacity.
- Referral processes should include both state-wide generalist referral systems and specialist and local systems.
- Well-integrated information systems giving access to data on services are necessary, but not sufficient. There must be the capacity for referral systems to have strong relationships with the services they refer to.

## Using data to improve services

There are two categories of ways in which data can be used to improve services. The first is the sharing of client information between multiple services working with the same client. The second is the use of linked, but de-identified, data in research to better understand the factors driving both homelessness and the exit from homelessness.

### Shared client information

There are a range of advantages in sharing client information between the services working with that client. These advantages include services sharing insights on how the client can be assisted and the saving of both the client's and the service's time by avoid clients having to tell their story multiple times, this can also reduce the chance of re-traumatisation. However, it should be noted that in the case of young people there can be value in them retelling their story as it can help the young person to better articulate their situation and further insights can sometimes be gained by service workers.

However, sharing client information risks violating their rights to privacy and confidentiality. Obtaining informed consent manages this conflict. For this reason it is important to have protocols and procedures within services to ensure that genuinely informed consent is obtained from clients. Also, information sharing systems must be sufficiently flexible to allow partial sharing of data, so that client can exercise control over what information is shared.

### Research using linked de-identified data

Powerful insights can be gained from linked data. The ability to see how a range of services' assistance affects individuals over the long term is highly valuable in designing better services that can more effectively assist the disadvantaged. The potential broad benefits need to be balanced against the risk of privacy violations, but this should not have the effect of paralysing research. Linking and using data will always contain some risk of privacy violation, but not using the data risks failing to help those in need by improved services.

### Recommendations:

- It should be ensured that all services have protocols and procedures to ensure that genuinely informed consent can be obtained from clients to share their information.
- Information sharing systems must be sufficiently flexible to allow partial sharing of data, so that client can exercise control over what information is shared.
- Efforts should be made to link and de-identify data for use in research to gain better understanding of how to assist the disadvantaged. The risks of privacy violations should be managed.