

Homeless teens 'saved' with \$6m

MADELINE CRITTENDEN

VULNERABLE teenagers being "forced" to couch surf and sleep rough could be saved with less than \$6m for regional and rural homeless accommodation.

The peak body for youth homelessness in NSW, Yfoundations, is calling on the state government to provide \$5.74m for seven new medium-term accommodation services for homeless young people.

The organisation prepared a business case for the government, pleading for additional accommodation, as well as ongoing funding of \$1,291,028 per annum to operate the centres.

The proposed medium-term accommodation services would provide 24/7 supported housing for one to two years for teens under 18 while they transition to independence.

Yfoundations chief executive Pam Barker said funding for new and existing medium-term accommodation services was critical, saying more than 3000 unaccompanied 16 to 18-year-olds presented to specialist homelessness services in NSW every year.

"This small investment would provide lifesaving opportunities and a huge long-term benefit, socially and economically, for the govern-

ment and our community," she said. "It is shocking that there are only five medium-term accommodation services in the entire state, all of which are severely underfunded, and all are in metropolitan areas."

Ms Barker said that with a current shortage of medium-term accommodation, some teenagers were being forced to "refuge-hop" between crisis services, couch surfing or sleeping rough.

"These young people are not adults, and they urgently need more support to escape the cycle of homelessness and poor life outcomes," she said.

Families and Communities Minister Alister Henskens said the government had committed to a range of specialist homelessness services across NSW but he did not commit cash to the project.



Alister Henskens.