Discussion Paper
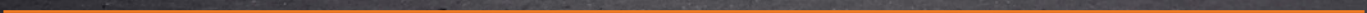## on the main drivers of youth homelessness

PROPERTY
INDUSTRY
FOUNDATION

We Are
For Homeless Youth

Introduction

Homelessness is one of the most severe forms of disadvantage and social exclusion that any young person can experience.[1]

The ABS defines homelessness for the purposes of the Census as 'the lack of one or more elements that represent 'home'.[2] This includes situations where a dwelling is inadequate or uninhabitable, does not allow the person to have control of and access to space for social relations, or where the person has only short-term or no tenure of housing.[3]

Homelessness is a significant and pressing issue in Australia. According to the 2016 Census, homelessness was experienced by an estimated 116,000 people across the country on any given night.[4] The situation has become significantly more pronounced in recent years, due to the COVID-19 health pandemic and corresponding economic downturn forcing many young people into unemployment, underemployment, and eviction from housing as a result. According to the 2021 Census, approximately 122,000 people are homeless across Australia on any given night, a 5.2% increase from 2016.[5]

Of the total number of people experiencing homelessness, approximately 38% (or 44,000) in 2016 were 'youths' aged between 14 and 25 years old. A disproportionate number were of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin.[6] Youths experiencing homelessness on any given night are particularly vulnerable given their age and circumstance.

Shockingly, the highest rates of homelessness per 10,000 people in 2021 were for those aged between 19 and 24 years old (91 people per 10,000) highlighting the drastic need for specialised services to cater for this age group. This was also the largest in 2016 (at 95 people per 10,000). Between 2016 and 2021, young people aged 12 to 18 years increased from 51 to 53 people per 10,000.

Youth homelessness is a complex issue linked to a range of drivers, typically associated with:

- family breakdowns;
- experiences of trauma and mental health challenges;
- substance abuse; and
- a lack of appropriate and affordable housing.

This paper explores the main factors contributing to youth homelessness in Australia. It also discusses the potential actions that can be, and are being, taken by organisations, governments, and the community to respond to young people experiencing homelessness and reduce the likelihood of more young people having this experience. Whilst this paper highlights four major drivers of youth homelessness, it is evident that they are all very broad in nature and highly inter-related. A comprehensive and integrated care approach is required to address the underlying drivers of youth homelessness and reduce its prevalence.

Purpose

The Property Industry Foundation is an independent not-for-profit that is the charity of choice for the property and construction industry.

Over 28,000 young Australians aged 12 to 24 years were estimated to be homeless on Census night 2021. Young people are particularly vulnerable to the impact of homelessness, not only to their education and transition to employment, but also to the formation of stable and healthy relationships. Affordable, suitable and stable housing is fundamental in ensuring the economic, social, psychological and physical wellbeing of young people.

As the creator of homes and communities, our industry can and should play a role in addressing youth homelessness. Our vision is a safe home for every young Australian.

Our mission is to increase the number of bedrooms available for homeless youth and support initiatives that have a tangible impact on youth homelessness. In addition, the Foundation allocates 20% of all fundraising to driving a systemic change agenda geared at reducing and preventing youth homelessness in the first place.

We do this through partnerships with other charities, companies and staff in the property and construction industry.

This paper on the main drivers of youth homeless is intended to inform a targeted series of industry sessions to bring together industry knowledge on this important subject, and to explore the potential to support organisations operating in this space.

Every five years we measure homelessness via the Australian Bureau of Statistics census, and for the last 15 years the results have stayed broadly the same. In 2006, 45 people out of every 10,000 were considered homeless, in 2021 48 people out of every 10,000 were considered homeless. In 2021 that represented 122,000 people without a safe place to sleep at night and 37% of them were under 25. That's 45,000 young people every night in Australia without a safe and secure place to sleep. In 15 years very little has changed, despite a growing amount of broad community concern over vulnerable youth combined with a not-for-profit sector that passionately wants to see things change.

A major reason for the lack of change in the last 15 years has been the lack of a federal plan for homelessness – something that the current federal government is looking to address with the development of a National Housing and Homelessness plan. Without national leadership, the response to homelessness across the states and councils has been uncoordinated, unaccountable, and uncertain.

In addition, the homelessness sector has needed to also shift gear and look at adopting new approaches to homelessness if its goal of ending homelessness is to ever be real.

At the Property Industry Foundation, we have also acknowledged this with a change in our strategy a few years ago with regards to how we invest capital, time, and energy. We want to have a tangible impact on the lives of homeless youth and believe that our building program – the Haven Project – is the right response. We put 80 per cent of our capital, time, and energy here and that means that last year we built 20 more bedrooms for homeless youth. We know that 335 young people took refuge last year in the bedrooms that we have built – that's 86,870 safe nights of sleep. However, we acknowledge that you cannot end homelessness by building bedrooms alone which is why the remaining 20 per cent of our capital, time and energy is now directed towards supporting initiatives that bring about systemic change.

Systemic change requires you to look at the whole of the problem, rather than just one part. When you look at the whole of the problem there is one key question that becomes startlingly obvious – why do young people become homeless in the first place? We can build more bedrooms, but if we don't stop young people becoming homeless, we will never move the dial. Supporting systemic change means that we want to support the redesign of the system, rather than continue pouring resources into a system that does not achieve the results we want for the most vulnerable in our society.

Systems change is a huge area and because it can be the opposite of obvious and linear, it can be hard to know where to start. That's why we are delighted to be identifying systemic change projects with the support of Qualitas and KPMG.

Family Breakdowns

Family breakdown – and the associated loss of a young person's source of support, shelter and sense of belonging – is one of the leading drivers of youth homelessness in Australia.

According to a study conducted by *Melbourne University*, 62% of respondents cited family breakdown as the primary reason for their circumstance.[7] According to data provided by *The Salvation Army*, family breakdown was the one of the most prevalent 'main reason' for young people seeking support in the 2022 financial year (at 38%).[8] Family breakdown can include conflict, domestic and family violence, neglect and separation.

Family breakdown can lead to young people voluntarily exiting the family home, being forced to leave by parents or guardians, or being placed in statutory out of home care (OOHC) where they are unable to live with their own families due to safety concerns. A 2020 study by CREATE Foundation found homelessness was common among young people existing the OOHC system,[9] with:

- the majority of young people experiencing homelessness having exited the OOHC system without appropriate support to secure alternative living and financial arrangements from that point on;[10]

- 30% of people in OOHC between the ages of 16 and 18 becoming homeless within the first year of leaving OOHC;[11]

- 70% of young people were living below the poverty line within the first three years of leaving OOHC;[12] and

- 44% of young people were disengaged with education and training within the first three years of leaving OOHC.[13]

These statistics highlight the challenges faced by young people leaving OOHC, in terms of gaining employment and disengaging with education and development pathways. Without ongoing employment and support, obtaining and then maintaining permanent housing is extremely difficult. This is particularly apparent in the current rental climate, characterised by high rental costs and a competitive housing market in areas close to jobs and public transport.

At a time when many young Australians are living at home for longer,[14] mainly due to increased costs of living, young people in OOHC are rarely given this opportunity and are generally required to obtain permanent employment immediately after completing school. For many young people who have experienced trauma in both their familial and institutional environments, there are complex needs that make it exceedingly difficult to pursue employment or education, especially given the lack of resources available to support their healing. As a result, young people who have experienced OOHC are considered the least likely group to cope with independent living at age 18.[15]

As of 1 July 2021, the Victorian Government introduced Home Stretch which allows eligible participants to stay with their carer until age 21, giving them more opportunity to transition to other housing options and gainful employment prior to independent living.[16] Tasmania, WA, ACT, NSW and SA have also since announced they will join the program. Queensland and the Northern Territory have committed to extend OOHC to age 21 but are yet to implement the *Home Stretch* program.[17]

The introduction of *Home Stretch* was influenced by the success of a similar program in the United Kingdom, called *Staying Put*, which equally allowed eligible young people to remain in care until age 21. The *Staying Put* program was introduced in 2014 and after three years had halved homelessness and doubled education engagements for those who had their period of care extended past the age of 18.[18] While support programs such as *Home Stretch* play a crucial role, it is important to note that the additional care assistance provided does not translate to increased stock of housing, which is where the core issue lies.

Family breakdown is a key driver for youth homelessness. Whilst being difficult to prevent and tackle, investment in early intervention family services have been shown to reduce family breakdown, however it is recognised that there isn't enough capacity in these services. The far-reaching impact on not supporting families to stay together where it is safe to do so has intergenerational impacts.

Trauma and Mental Health Challenges

Trauma and associated mental health challenges is another leading driver of youth homelessness in Australia.

According to a study referenced in *Habitat*, over 80% of the homeless youth population have experienced trauma in their lifetime.[19] For young people, instabilities caused by trauma and its associated mental health impacts can develop into a pathway towards homelessness.[20] There has been found to be a greater prevalence of mental health challenges presenting in young people who are homeless, reinforcing the need to consider mental health as a influencing factor in youth homelessness.[21]

Trauma is certainly a compounding factor contributing to the issue of youth homelessness. This is validated by data provided by *The Salvation Army* from the 2022 financial year, which indicated that mental health issues was not typically listed as the *primary* reason young adults sought assistance, but was typically listed as a factor.[22] A trauma cycle develops, as a young person's trauma leads to difficulties in connecting with peers, family members and potential employers, and increases the need for support services. If a young person struggles to socially re-engage and cannot receive the care they need, feelings of safety and the ability to find and maintain adequate housing can become difficult to secure. This trauma is then exacerbated during events experienced when homeless, and the cycle continues.

Trauma, can be broadly defined to include an event or series of negative experiences that create a sense of fear, helplessness or horror, and overwhelms a person's capacity to cope.[23] It can arise through a range of pathways and can lead to more acute mental health disorders and illnesses which can typically translate to homelessness. Traumatic events can include single event traumas or prolonged or repeated traumas.[24] A 2006 study led by Clinical Psychologist Dr Claudine Martijn and the University of Sydney's Dr Louise Sharpe revealed that 90% of the homeless young people interviewed had experienced at least one traumatic event.[25] More recently, *Mind Australia's* 2014 study confirmed the universality of trauma amongst Australia's homeless populations with all participants experiencing at least one traumatic event and 97% of participants experiencing more than four.[26]

Relatedly, the vast majority of homeless people experience, at minimum, one psychological disorder. This can include but is not limited to depression, anxiety, mood disorders (such as bipolar disorder) and psychotic disorders (such as schizophrenia).[27] Rates of these disorders are over-represented in homeless youth groups and is evidenced by high rates of suicidal behaviours, crime and drug and alcohol dependencies, all of which are indicators of a high degree of psychological distress.[28]

Dr Martijn and Dr Sharpe's study confirmed that rates of psychological disorders in young people experiencing homelessness are much higher than those not experiencing homelessness.[29]

The *2020 Orygen Systematic Report* indicates that:

- having any mental health issue increases the risk of youth homelessness by 70%;[30]

- psychotic disorders increased the risk of youth homelessness by 110%;

- personality disorders increased the risk of youth homelessness by 100%;

- affective disorders increased the risk of youth homelessness by 70%; and

- anxiety disorders increased the risk of youth homelessness by 40%.[31]

Notably, it is not necessarily the type, but the severity, of a psychiatric disorder which determines the young person's level of risk.[32] The effect of trauma is often to increase the risk of severe mental health episodes, lengthen the duration of the illness, and impact treatment.[33]

From a social perspective, trauma and poor mental health, manifesting in unsocial behaviour and often leading to conflict and isolation, can destabilise a young person's living environment and arrangements. From a financial perspective, people who experience severe psychological distress have a 96% increased likelihood of experiencing financial hardship within two years,[34] making it hard to service housing. According to the *2020 Orygen* report, experiences of trauma in childhood and adolescence have been found to increase the likelihood of repeated episodes of homelessness and increase barriers to find stable housing.[35] Trauma itself can often trigger or worsen depressive or psychotic episodes in mid-adolescences and the need for mental health support services increases.

To make matters worse, young people experiencing homelessness have an increased likelihood of experiencing additional trauma whilst sleeping rough, making trauma both a cause and effect of youth homelessness. According to a report by *Orygen*, approximately 83% of homeless young people aged between 15 and 24 are reportedly physically or sexually victimised whilst homeless.[36] There is also considered to be a greater likelihood of these people witnessing potentially traumatic events whilst sleeping rough.[37]

It is the combination and progression of these events that develop into a cycle of trauma, mental illness and homelessness. If a young person developing traumas is treated prior to the onset of mental health problems, social and financial struggles can be avoided. If a young person can access homelessness or social services before they become homeless, further traumas can be prevented, making it easier to treat mental illness and connect with peers and family members, limiting the extent of the cycle.

Alcohol and Drug Dependencies

A total of 43% of homeless Australians meet the criteria for substance use disorder, with alcohol dependence being the most common form.[38]

Alcohol and other drug use have consistently been found to be more prevalent among homeless youths compared to housed young people. In a 2014 study run by the *Australian Institute of Health and Welfare* (AIHW) 30% of homeless young people cited problematic drug and substance use as a reason for seeking specialist homelessness services (SHS).[39]

According to the AIHW in 2021-2022:

- approximately 9% of clients, or 23,400 people, seeking support from SHS reported drug and/or alcohol use;[40]

- approximately 5.3% or 14,300 clients of SHS experienced problematic drug use;[41] and

- approximately 2.6% of clients of SHS sought assistance for problematic alcohol use.[42]

A study in Canada found that between 2004 and 2005 (the period of the study) 94% of young people experiencing homelessness used tobacco and alcohol, 97% used marijuana, 73% used amphetamines, 56% used crack/cocaine and 40% used heroin.[43] Of this group, the younger aged cohort was more involved in binge drinking.[44]

Similar to trauma and mental health, drug and alcohol use can be seen as both a cause and effect of youth homelessness. As a cause, it elevates the risk and likelihood of homelessness due to loss of employment, family breakdowns, poor mental and physical health, and financial distress, and at the same time is relied upon as a coping mechanism for many homeless Australians. *Journeys Home* data reveals that an average increase of alcohol consumption of one drink a day increased the risk of experiencing homelessness by 0.2%, and that regular drug use increases the likelihood of becoming homeless but only amongst men who use cannabis daily (not weekly use of other illicit drugs).[45] It is estimated that cannabis use at age 20 increases the likelihood of homelessness for young men by 9% and increased by 14% if use begins at age 15.[46]

Co-morbidities of mental health issues and alcohol and drug dependencies

Drug and alcohol use is closely intertwined with mental health issues amongst homeless young people – it is estimated that 50% to 60% of people with alcohol or drug dependencies also have a mental health condition.[47] Alcohol and drugs cause changes in the brain, leading to the depletion of chemicals like dopamine and serotonin that young people rely on to naturally reduce anxiety. As levels of anxiety, stress, depression and other mental health conditions arise, alcohol and other drugs can be used as a coping mechanism, generating an unsafe cycle.[48]

This cycle can progress into a young person withdrawing from social activities, conflicting with peers and family members and developing addictions.[49] It can also result in higher rates of relapse and subsequent hospital visits and unemployment.[50] Homeless young people with substance abuse issues are more vulnerable to long-term substance abuse and un-treated mental health problems, which follow them into adulthood.[51] Recent research by the *Australian Drug and Alcohol Foundation* has noted the area of the brain called the Insula is impacted by social risk factors closely related to homelessness, such as social isolation and social exclusion.[52] Critically, the Insula also plays a key role in the development of substance dependencies. As an effect, there is evidence to suggest that the longer a person experiences homelessness, the more likely they are to develop a drug or alcohol dependency, and the more severe it will become.[53]

These factors all affect a young person's ability to obtain and maintain permanent housing. The combination of homelessness, mental health disorders and substance use amongst young people increases the likelihood to be involved in the criminal justice system.[54] The Australian Alcohol and Drug Foundation believes there to be a strong link between chronic mental health issues, homelessness and drug and alcohol use.[55]

Given the high correlation between homelessness and drug and alcohol use amongst young people in Australia, drug and alcohol use must feature as part of any specialist youth homelessness services prevention program.

Lack of Affordable Housing Options

The current housing affordability and cost of living crisis is a major issue across all Australian States and Territories and is becoming an additional causal factor contributing to youth homelessness.

There is currently a record low of only 4% of housing classified as 'affordable' in Australia.[56] The situation has reached a critical point, with the rate of affordable housing stock continuing to fall even as the country's population swells, leaving some individuals no choice but to sleep rough. The limited supply of social housing is a key factor in this issue, as the proportion of social housing units to the population has halved over the past 30 years. Waiting lists for social housing have grown to include 176,000 households in need.[57] Comparatively, Australia is trailing overseas jurisdictions in terms of its provision of social housing.[58] *The National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation* (NHFIC) has identified that there will be a housing supply deficit of around 106,300 dwellings (cumulative) over the next five years until 2027, contributing to the problem.[59]

In terms of costs of living, the Australian economy is facing higher inflation at 7.0% in the March 2023 quarter, slightly down from the 30-year high of 7.8% in December 2023.[60] The Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) has attempted to decrease the rate of inflation by increasing the cash rate from 0.10% in April 2022 to 3.85% in May 2023.[61] As a consequence, landlords are increasing rents across the country to cover increases in mortgage repayments resulting from higher interest rates. Coupled with record low vacancy rates of 0.8% across the country,[62] largely due to returning migration after the pandemic,[63] there is increasing pressure on renters to pay more for housing.

Data collected by *The Salvation Army* for the 2022 financial year reflected that housing eviction and housing affordability stress made up 21% of the 'main reason' why young people sought assistance.[64]

Previously, we spoke about the challenges young adults face after exiting the OOHC system. This challenge is particularly acute in the current economic and housing environment, which makes finding affordable housing hard for anyone, let alone young people exiting OOHC. These young people often exit with no plan in place to support housing, which is coupled with minimal or no rental and employment history, making it difficult when it comes to applying for rental properties. With record high wait lists for social housing, OOHC leavers are often being forced onto the streets.

To combat this issue, the *National Affordability Housing Agreement* (NAHA) was implemented in 2008 by the Australian Government in attempt to improve housing affordability for low and moderate-income households. The scheme also consisted of the *National Rental Affordability Scheme* (NRAS) which incentivised the increased supply of affordable rental housing by encouraging large-scale investment and innovative delivery of affordable housing.[65] Unfortunately, in the 2014-15

budget, the Government announced there would be no further funding towards the NRAS and the program is therefore scheduled to conclude in 2026.[66]

Instead, the current Australian Government has launched the *Housing Australia Future Fund* (HAFF) which promises to deposit $10 billion into the fund, with the returns being spent on a target of 30,000 new social and affordable housing properties in the first five years of the fund.[67] This includes 10,000 affordable homes for frontline workers who have been pushed out of major cities due to high rental prices and 4,000 to support women and children impacted by domestic violence.[68] The amount of housing that is going to be produced through this scheme is of course dependant on the performance and investment returns of the fund. Experts are still suggesting this is not enough.[69]

Charity Organisations and the Government are undoubtedly doing a commendable job in helping vulnerable youths in need, but there is still a lot of work to be done. A lot of programs tend to be more geared towards helping youths who are at risk, but are comparatively managing or coping with their situation, while the more complex cases of youth facing addiction and mental health problems are often being overlooked. Governments and Charity Organisations are typically providing temporary solutions, such as short-term accommodation, which in many cases can end up with the youths back on the streets and back on a downward spiral. This highlights the fact that there are significant gaps in the current system, and more permanent care is needed to address the underlying and systemic issues at play.

Based on the hierarchy of needs developed by Maslow in the 1943 paper, *A Theory of Human Motivation*,[70] shelter and security are needed first before one can work on themselves, overcome addiction, find a source of income, establish security, connection and self-esteem. Without a sense of security, it is difficult to achieve anything, making prioritisation of permanent housing essential.

Addressing the Main Drivers

Youth homelessness can be linked **to family breakdown, the presence of mental health challenges, the lack of affordable housing and drug and alcohol dependencies.**

While the interrelatedness of these factors presents a challenge for interventions, there is a clear need for integrated service settings along a spectrum of support. The vast majority of young people who are experiencing homelessness, or who are at risk of experiencing homelessness, experience additional vulnerabilities and the occurrence of multiple, connected factors.[71]

If the combination of the four main influencing factors of youth homelessness identified in this paper remain unaddressed, additional challenges develop and compound the youth homelessness issue.[72] This is challenging in practice. Young people who are homeless or young people at risk of homelessness are often disengaged from support services, with poor physical access to health services, affordability challenges and differences in social status between patients and healthcare practitioners, which can lead to feelings of inadequacy and perceptions of being judged.[73] Young people who are homeless (or at risk of homelessness) often experience a high co-morbidity of challenges stemming from their experiences, for example, risky alcohol consumption elevating the risk of mental and physical health problems, family conflict and further housing instability.[74]

A range of organisations and partners of the Foundation are seeking to systematically address the drivers of youth homelessness in varying ways. A snapshot is set out ahead, including the main drivers they are focused on trying to address.

Key to Factors:

● Family Breakdown   ● Lack of Affordable Housing

● Mental Health Challenges   ● Drug and Alcohol Dependencies

The Salvation Army   ● ● ● ●

The largest provider of homelessness services across the country, providing services to adults and families with accompanying children.

The Salvation Army's range of homelessness and housing support services includes crisis accommodation, transitional housing, affordable housing and a casework model of care that assists individuals to overcome challenges and obtain a more stable future.

During the 2020-21 period, The Salvation Army extended support to over 37,000 people experiencing homelessness, administering more than 309,800 care sessions, and providing over 887,500 crisis beds and 1.7 million meals to people accessing their services, which include supporting survivors of family and domestic violence in finding a safe place to reside, providing financial coaching and counselling to those experiencing financial hardship, working with individuals to overcome substance abuse, and assisting at-risk youth with training and employment programs to achieve independence.

Save The Children   ● ● ●

Save the Children run homelessness prevention programs designed to assist young people in need. They provide the tools and skills necessary to overcome certain factors that translate into youth homelessness.

The key focus for the organisation is the prevention of homelessness in the young indigenous community. Save The Children recognises that early intervention is critical; with a focus on providing diversionary activities from involvement in illicit and risk-taking behaviours such as drug and/or alcohol abuse.

This is conducted via educational session and workshops teaching at-risk youths the skills needed to make positive life choices, which lead to better individual and societal outcomes. For example, one program in Kunurrara in Western Australia has reached over 1,100 children since beginning in 2009 and have reduced offending rates and alcohol and drug misuse.[75]

Melbourne City Mission (MCM)

MCM is committed to driving systemic change to end youth homelessness, with stated priorities associated with ending youth homelessness, housing for the youth, preventing family violence and providing inclusive education. The organisation provides integrated services to people from all backgrounds, in Melbourne and surrounding regional Victoria, offering support to those who face any disadvantage in life.

A recent initiative involves campaigning to both the Victorian and Federal Governments to adopt an autonomous Youth Homelessness Strategy that accounts for and addresses the unique drivers and circumstances of youth homelessness. The outcomes included in the campaign include creation of tailored services for transitioning young adults into working lives, the importance of targeted individual support and prevention and early intervention services.[76]

Brotherhood of St. Laurence (BSL)

BSL works to prevent and alleviate poverty across Australia. They conduct expansive work in the youth homelessness space and collaborate with a variety of stakeholders. For example, these partnerships include collaborating with the National Shelter, a nongovernment organisation aiming to improve access to housing, to publish the nationwide Rental Affordability Index.

BSL has also participated with advisory research groups, such as the University of Melbourne Affordable Housing Initiative, and has helped to analyse the effectiveness of Commonwealth Rent Assistance for volatile income households. BSL was also the designer of the Tasmanian Government's *Housing Connect* Strategy and now acts as an ongoing advisor.

BSL has also assisted groups of disadvantaged people. For example, they oversaw the evaluation and education first 'Youth Foyer Model', which is an integrated learning and accommodation centre that develops skills of young people at risk of homelessness.

A partnership with the Melbourne Disability Institute on innovative housing models for people with disabilities will lead to greater standards of accessibility and ease of living.

Mission Australia Housing (MAH)

MAH is a Tier 1 community housing provider which owns or manages more than 2,000 social and affordable homes with the combined goal of ending homelessness.[77] MAH works with key stakeholders to influence the housing agenda in disadvantaged communities across the country. It also provides tenancy and asset management services for third party organisations and private individual investors, including NRAS allocated dwellings. Drawing on the strengths of tenants, MAH also links young people with informal support networks to create employment opportunities.

In 2018, after 10 years of MAH, over 3,500 people had been housed, 25% of which had experienced homelessness in the past.[78] MAH has provided numerous community-based programs supporting young people experiencing homelessness in the form of providing accommodation, counselling, mediation and support with a strong emphasis on family reconciliation.[79] One of these support

services includes MAH's Grove Youth Outreach & Support Service in Penrith, NSW, for young people who are homeless or experiencing housing vulnerabilities by providing transitional and permanent accommodation alongside case management services.[80]

Launch Housing

Launch Housing is a registered Community Housing Association located in Melbourne. It provides services to individuals who are homeless and supports them with housing that can transform their lives.[81] Below are details of two initiatives by Launch Housing.

Melbourne Zero is an initiative focused on encouraging businesses, organisations, and individuals to take tangible steps towards ending homelessness in the city. Melbourne Zero provides updates including, documenting personal accounts from those who are experiencing homelessness, which are translated into resources designed to enhance public compassion and empathy. Melbourne Zero's primary focus is on eradicating street homelessness / rough sleeping, as it is considered the most traumatic, hazardous, and isolating form of homelessness.[82]

The Harris Transportable Housing Project is an initiative delivered in partnership with philanthropists Geoff and Brad Harris from Harris Capital, with support from the Victorian Property Fund. It provided a total of 57 relocatable tiny homes on nine vacant parcels of land owned by VicRoads in Footscray and Maidstone, specifically designed to house individuals with chronic homelessness. This project is a great example of how unused Government land can be utilised to create safe, secure homes for people who urgently need them.[83]

Kids Under Cover

Kids Under Cover provides support for youth homelessness by constructing one- or two-bedroom studios for children at risk.[84]

Their Studio Program consists of building studios in the backyards of OOHC houses to allow carers more room to accommodate young people in their care. Once the studio is no longer required, the organisation arranges to relocate the structure to the next young person in need. The studio is provided at no cost to the care-giving family, instead being funded through the Government and Charitable Trusts, Foundations, and individuals.[85]

The organisation also delivers a combination of accommodation and education scholarships to address interrelated drivers of youth homelessness, holding the belief that young people should remain connected to a sense of belonging

More recently, Kids Under Cover, along with Anglicare, is delivering projects similar to the Harris Transportable Housing Project on under-utilised local council land. The project, called Village 21, comprises a complex of six apartments for young people aged 18-21 who are leaving OOHC. The young people live onsite with wrap-around support from two professional mentors and Anglicare staff. These supports assist with employment and study pathways, cooking, maintaining shared gardens and learning life skills for these young adults.[86]

End Street Sleeping

End Street Sleeping is a collaboration in NSW between governments, non-government organisations, philanthropists, businesses and the community with a goal of halving street sleeping across NSW by 2025 and work towards ending it by 2030. The collaboration tackles two issues simultaneously. Firstly, helping front line workers access necessary information to coordinate services and secure housing for individuals, while also offering appropriate wrap-around services. And secondly, provide evidence to government and non-government organizations to identify where the health, social services, justice, and care systems are failing, enabling these issues to be addressed to prevent future street sleeping.

batyr

batyr is focussed on combating mental health challenges in young people and is a leader in prevention and stigma reduction through programs at Schools and Universities. Through sharing lived experience stories and peer-to-peer education, their mission is to keep young people from reaching crisis point. They conduct research and advocacy work, delving into critical issues that matter to young people.

batyr's approach recognises that young people are the authorities on their own experiences. They collect valuable perspectives through their initiatives and by listening to the mental health journeys shared by storytellers. Their research findings are co-created with young people to ensure their voices and views are accurately represented. Collated research is designed to produce tangible outcomes, from improving programs to informing government policies and practices in the real world.[87]

Lighthouse Foundation

Lighthouse is dedicated to ending youth homelessness. Their mission is to provide young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness with the care and support they require to heal, flourish and establish a lasting sense of belonging. They accomplish this by partnering with communities and utilising their evidence-based Lighthouse Model of Care to create therapeutic homes and administer customised support programs that positively transform the lives of young people.

Lighthouse offers multiple support options such as Lighthouse Homes, Foster and Family Care, and In-Community care to ensure that their aid is accessible to children and youth who require it, where they require it, for as long as they need it.[88] The foster care program, which operates in the northern Melbourne region provides personalised support, therapeutic care, and a community environment for foster families. The program's innovative approach involves bringing foster carers together at a central "Hub Home" where trained therapeutic carers offer regular respite, sleepovers, and access to trauma-informed support and guidance for the entire family. This unique model can make a significant difference in the lives of foster families, providing them with the resources they need to provide a nurturing and stable environment for the children in care.[89]

Act for Kids

Act for Kids provides professional therapy and support services to children and families who have faced or are in danger of facing harm. Act for Kids has an accomplished team of psychologists, speech therapists, early education specialists, counsellors, occupational therapists, and family support workers who have assisted countless children and families for over three decades. Act for Kids has more than 30 centres and a workforce of over 450 staff from Adelaide all the way up to the Cape York Peninsula, making their services widely accessible.[90]

As well as providing education, therapy, counselling and family support services, Act for Kids also runs a program called Safe Kids which is a collaboration with The Aboriginal Corporation of West Coast Cape York Peninsula Traditional Land Owners (WCTO) and the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women. The program involves operating safe houses in 6 communities in Northern QLD to ensure that children aged 0-17 have a secure and culturally appropriate environment to stay in their communities and stay connected.

Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS)

YSAS is one of Australia's largest youth-specific community service organisations. Operating as Victoria's flagship youth alcohol and drug service, employing over 350 skilled staff across 19 sites in metro and regional Victoria.

Organisational vision includes reducing severity and frequency of alcohol, drug and mental health problems, antisocial and self-harming behaviours. YSAS provides services and teams to offer effective care for young people and families. For example, their day programs which run out of Dandenong and Abbotsford for people aged 12-21 include access to a primary health clinic, access and referral to other supports, therapeutic and skill building programs, supervised recovery spaces and basic assistance such as food packs, showers and washing machines.[91]

Got Your Back Sista

Got Your Back Sista provides support services to women and children who are experiencing or who have escaped domestic violence. The aim of the organisation is to educate and empower women to thrive after traumatic events. Services include a variety of short courses and programs which revolve around rebuilding confidence and self-worth, through teaching and offering classes for new skillsets. These are professionally orientated to provide transferability to developing their careers; for example, workshops in administration, retail, resume writing as well as interview preparation.

Many forms of support are offered for developing these skills. For example, individual support case work, workshops and empowerment circles and work readiness program. The organisation also has a focus on sharing awareness, via community campaigns and fundraising events.[92]

Suicide Prevention Australia

Suicide Prevention Australia is the national peak body for the suicide prevention sector. Exist to provide a clear, collective voice so that lives can be saved, operating as a member-based organisation that's guided by people with a lived experience of suicide. Operating since 1992, Suicide Prevention Australia seeks to inform all stakeholders via collating and analysing current data and evidence, which in helps to update and change policy to influence systematic change.

The organisation seeks to provide policy position on issues that matter to the suicide prevention sector and the Australian community. Initiatives include managing the National Suicide Prevention Office (NSPO) which provides consultations and workshops for men and people who live regionally, are disabled, linguistically diverse or who are over the age of 65. Also run a suicide prevention community tracker, "Closing the Loop" series, which provides summarised publications of key findings from the National Suicide Prevention Research Fund projects, which are funded by the Australian Government Department of Health.[93]

Young and Resilient Research Centre

The Young and Resilient Research Centre embraces an integrated mode of research and development, education, training and enterprise research to develop technology-based products, services and policies that strengthen the resilience of children and young people within their communities. Supported and run by the Western Sydney University, the organisation has partnered with more than 100 stakeholders including non-profits, big business, government and young people themselves to find holistic, technology-based strategies to support intergenerational resilience in preparation for adversity.

The research deploys youth centred, interactive co-research and co-design methods across four key research programs, underpinned by multiple workshops such as: "Intergener8 Living Lab", "Reinventing Learning and Work", "Realising Youth Participation and Engagement" and "Activating Places and Platforms".[94] These programs engage partners to collaborate in producing services, products and strategies for young people in need.

Conclusion

Youth homelessness rates have remained relatively consistent over the past 20 years.

It is vital that specialist homelessness services and organisations continue to collaborate and partner to address the multiple and interrelated drivers of homelessness among young people, associated with family breakdown, the presence of trauma and mental health challenges, drug and alcohol dependencies, and the lack of affordable housing options.

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