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Rethinking Early Intervention

Contents

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Contributions to *Parity* are welcome. Each issue of *Parity* has a central focus or theme. However, prospective contributors should not feel restricted by this as *Parity* seeks to discuss the whole range of issues connected with homelessness and the provision of housing and services to people experiencing homelessness. Where necessary, contributions will be edited. Where possible this will be done in consultation with the contributor. Contributions can be emailed to ***parity@chp.org.au*** in Microsoft Word or rtf format. If this option is not possible, contributions can be mailed to CHP at the above address.

The 2021 *Parity* Publications Schedule

November: Understanding and Responding to Indigenous Homelessness
December: Ending Homelessness in Western Australia

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Editorial

Early Intervention: If not now; when?

Jenny Smith, Chief Executive Officer, Council to Homeless Persons

This edition, *Rethinking Early Intervention*, drills down into early intervention policy and practice responses to homelessness, particularly youth homelessness, challenging us to embrace programs that "nip homelessness in the bud".

The last national homelessness strategy, highlighted the need to 'turn off the tap' to prevent homelessness. Early intervention responses, that prevent an imminent or early episode of homelessness from becoming entrenched, are integral to this process.

The continuing currency of the principles and practices of early intervention are strongly reflected not only in the focus of this edition, but also in the breadth and range of arguments and articles it contains.

Guest editors David MacKenzie and Tammy Hand, begin by recounting the creation of the Reconnect program, and pose the question: where do we go beyond Reconnect?

Keith Waters' *A Strategy to End Youth Homelessness: Solutions-focused Advocacy in Action*, proposes 'solutions-focused advocacy' as a more constructive and politically effective way of securing change.

Professor Stephen Gaetz and Melanie Redman, both keynote speakers at the 2019 Victorian Homelessness Conference, report on the Making the Shift Social Innovations Lab, whose work is designed to explore new models of youth homelessness prevention.

Rethinking Early Intervention: Place-based Reform in Support of Vulnerable Young Victorians, describes the 'community of services and schools' (COSS) models of early intervention and the potential to expand the model.

Ella Monaghan from YACVic argues for the importance of early intervention as articulated by young people through a YACVic consultation.

Paul McDonald's article *The Home Stretch Story* outlines the lessons of the Home Stretch campaign and Phillip Mendes of Monash University, argues the case for the social investment in programs, like Home Stretch.

McKinley, Crane and Wise report on an innovative early intervention initiative for older single women at-risk of becoming homeless, that uses a web platform to enable matches for shared housing arrangements.

Stephen Gaetz poses the question: *What if We Treated the Pandemic like Homelessness?* pointing to the disaster that would have been, had this happened. The clear message and implication is, that we need to address homelessness in the same way Canadian and Australian Governments have mobilised their policies and resources to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The article by Lawton and Butler, *Recognising the Abuse and Trauma Histories of Clients in Early Intervention Homeless Initiatives — Insights from Greater Western Sydney and Beyond*, reports on the findings of a research project into the extent and nature of the histories of abuse experienced by people in the early stages of homelessness who are accessing homelessness services. The implications of this research point to the importance of trauma-informed care for practice.

In their article entitled *A New Place to Call Home*, Paul Stolz and Angela Spinney, report on research into the Kids Under Cover early intervention and prevention housing model.

The concluding section focuses on the debate around 'functional zero' as a strategy to end homelessness. There are some who support this approach, while others are more critical.

Following the introduction of the debate by MacKenzie and Hand, David Pearson and Jessica Dobrovic advocate the idea of functional zero and by name lists as 'the perfect pairing' in relation to prevention, while two American contributors, Bob Erlenbusch and Barbara Duffield critique the approach, and draw on American experience to point to its limitations in preventing homelessness.

Parity seeks to encourage the important discussion and debate on the efficacy of the range of early intervention responses to homelessness.

Acknowledgements

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Special thanks to Guest editors David MacKenzie and Tammy Hand for all their work in the development and preparation of this edition.

RECONNECT: Rethinking Early Intervention 1.0

David MacKenzie, Director, Upstream Australia, University of South Australia
and Tammy Hand, Senior Research and Development Manager, Upstream Australia

The policy of early interventions to stem the flow of young people into homelessness has had a long gestation. Most of the earliest attention was on homelessness youth as 'street kids'. During the 1990s, it was widely thought that youth homelessness was a temporary effect of high youth unemployment and that as youth unemployment decreased, so too would youth homelessness. However, the expected 'turn around' never happened and youth homelessness increased.

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) Commissioner Brian Burdekin's report, *Our Homeless Children*[1] offered some insights into the potential of schools to address homelessness: *'Our schools and teachers represent a critical resource which we must use effectively if we are to address the difficult issue of child and youth homelessness'*, but at the time, there was no explicit nomenclature of 'early intervention'. The media tended to continue to focus on 'street kids' like the dominant media coverage throughout the 1980s. In 1994, a research study estimated some 11,000 homeless students in Australian secondary schools and exposed the fact that homelessness in schools was evidently more common than thought. The policy challenge was that schools, as mainstream institutions, had the potential to play a much more significant role in addressing youth homelessness than had been understood previously.

A House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs inquiry into *Aspects of Youth Homelessness*[2] focused on the support provided to homeless youth, the 'availability of family support and welfare services (including mediation services), their role and effectiveness in reducing homelessness and in resolving differences before young people leave home' and the nature and adequacy of income support. The Inquiry's main realisation was that: *'early intervention is probably the one area of public policy which could deliver the greatest returns in terms of increased social cohesion through the reduction in the levels of family breakdown and long-term welfare dependency'*. An early intervention strategy was suggested to *'improved family support services and an early intervention strategy in schools'*.

Alongside this Inquiry, Crane and Brannock[3] undertook a national consultation with young people and parents about their experiences of homelessness. They concluded that: *'schools are well placed locations for providing early intervention or prevention responses'*.[4] However, they recognised the limitations of schools when interventions involved families, and suggested that: *'schools can certainly use skills in the community and youth sectors, and work in partnership with agencies who do essential coordination. In this way, schools can incorporate a mixture of preventive and early intervention strategies, in the manner of KITS, which stands out as being based on many of the principles suggested in this study as best practice.'*[5]

Reconnect is Born

After the 1996 election, the incoming government continued its support for the Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program (SAAP), but the Students at Risk (STAR) program was wound up. In its place, Prime Minister John Howard set up a Prime Ministerial Taskforce on Youth Homelessness chaired by Major David Eldridge from the Salvation Army. The Taskforce produced a report followed by an initiative of 26 pilot projects to explore how early intervention might be done using mediation and reconciliation.[6] In 1998, the Reconnect program was launched with the pilot projects becoming the recurrently funded outlets of a national program. This was a significant innovation in policy and the first explicit government program in Australia to undertake 'early intervention' in the homelessness sector. It was probably the world's first early intervention government

funded program initiative, certainly for young people becoming homelessness. By 2003, Reconnect was deployed at 100 sites to work with young people and their families and address incipient homelessness.

Following a change of government at the 1996 election, the Howard Government continued support for the Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program (SAAP), however, over the next decade, the real value of homelessness funding incrementally declined.

The Reconnect program was rolled out in stages from 1998 to 2003. This allowed time for experience in early intervention practice to be developed and absorbed by the workforce. A significant commitment was made to action research as a methodology whereby what was being learned in practice could be collectively digested and passed on. Dr Phil Crane authored an *Action Research Kit* along with seven good practice guides. These action research materials and program conferences and activities were used as a way of developing reflexive practitioners and a program culture of good practice.

Has early intervention been effective? A part of the answer is whether Reconnect is an effective program. However, over the past decades, there has been a range of changes that may have impacted on the efficacy of the total early intervention effort. The evaluation of Reconnect in 2003 concluded that the program had significant positive outcomes for young people and their families. Three quarters of the young people and parents involved with the program reported an overall improvement in their situation.[7]

However, a second source of information about the efficacy of 'early intervention' comes from the findings from the *Counting The Homeless 2006* project.[8] From 2001 to 2006, the number of homeless young people has actually decreased from 26,060 to 21,940. Up to 2001, the homeless youth population continued to increase despite an improving economy and falling youth unemployment. The broad suggestive inference was that an improved labour market could not account for the decrease, but on the contrary, that *'early intervention appears to account for most of the decrease in youth homelessness since 2001'*. On the other hand, early intervention is more than only Reconnect; more likely, it is the totality of 'early intervention' taking place on the ground, including what youth homelessness crisis services may be doing. The specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) Data Collection makes a distinction between clients who are homeless when they first present and clients who are at-risk of homelessness. In many cases, when adults face losing their rental tenancy, homeless

agencies act to prevent a loss of tenancy (that is, early intervention). Housing is the predominant issue. But, with young people, the onset of homelessness is not just a housing issue and if family issues can be resolved and the young person supported to remain at school and in the community where they live, the problem of finding housing options for a young person who has to venture to live independently does not arise.

In 2013, a Departmental Review of Reconnect[9] set out to identify *'what is and is not working within the Reconnect program'* (that is, current performance), to assess the '*appropriateness of current operation*[s]' and make an assessment of the interim outcomes for the Reconnect program. During 2011–12, a total of 5,818 young people who were homeless or at risk of homelessness were supported in the program. Some 60 per cent had previously left home for a period. About half (52 per cent) were supported for three months or less; about one quarter (23 per cent) were supported for seven months or more. Only one quarter of clients (25 per cent) have been referred by schools, another 21 per cent by family, friends or a caregiver and 17 per cent were self-referrals.

The Departmental Review affirmed that Reconnect was having 'positive impacts for clients' and generally 'meeting or exceeding its performance indicators', however several issues were identified: a need to be freer to work with a wider age range of young people on the grounds that *'the age of becoming at-risk is decreasing'* and advocacy from agencies *'to be able to begin intervention work prior to these life-course milestones in order to be able to address existing or developing issues'* (p.30). Generally, based on the published outcomes data, the program appeared to perform well — an overall improvement of 90 per cent for 2011–2012. However, in terms of Reconnects contribution to the national objective of reducing homelessness ('turning off the tap'), its impact is less clear. There was a debate during the Rudd Government as to whether the Commonwealth Government should directly operate service delivery programs such as Reconnect. In the end, the decision opted for the status quo.

The broader question that arose is what lies beyond the horizon of Reconnect. This is a question that comes from a critical appreciation of the Reconnect program. Can early intervention be accomplished more effectively? Are there reforms in the way that schools and agencies interact which could and should be pursued? There are several obvious points to consider:

(a) Reconnect relies on receiving referrals from schools, other agencies or members of the community. Other people identify risk of homelessness or incipient homelessness and most often Reconnect services are responding to young people who have become homeless recently. This is a major limitation in terms of the 'early' in early intervention frame.

(b) There are only about 100 Reconnect services, usually a pair of early intervention workers in a particular location. Some communities have a Reconnect service but many others do not. The deployment of Reconnect services by the Commonwealth was not done in close coordination with the states and territories crisis services, and the number of services has remained relatively static for more than 15 years. This is a capacity issue, where Reconnect services cannot possibly reach the entire at-risk cohort in a community despite positive outcomes for some at-risk young people.

(c) Reconnect was conceived as a targeted program and a significant innovative initiative for the late 1990s, but new thinking about service system reform has tended to move to place-based and collective impact models as having the capacity and purpose of changing what actually happens for young people on the ground and across entire communities. Nevertheless, it is testimony to the significance and virtues of the Reconnect initiative that the Canadians have begun implementing Youth Reconnect as part of their campaign for early intervention reform.

The Geelong Project[10] and the 'Community of Schools and Services' model of early intervention were born out of a critique of the restrictions imposed on Specialist Homelessness Services, but also an appreciative critique of the limitations of Reconnect. The impetus for reform is not because Reconnect is failing, but the need to strengthen early intervention as not only a response to homelessness but a more robust multi-issue and community-based response that is capable of dealing with whatever adolescent issues arise and in a way that can deal with both early school leaving and youth homelessness as well as other adverse issues experienced by young people. It's a different way of working and it is called placed-based 'collective impact'.[11].

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A Strategy to End Youth Homelessness: Solutions-focused Advocacy in Action

Keith Waters, Youth Development Australia/National Youth Commission

In terms of 'rethinking early intervention' I will leave the conceptual arguments to other contributors. What I want to reflect on is how the youth and youth homelessness sectors can achieve some long-overdue change so needed for the most disadvantaged young people in Australia. Despite episodic public attention on the issue of youth homelessness, there is an unfortunate history of under-delivering. Part of the problem may be that young people are the least well-resourced and organised, and inexperience when it comes to the complexities and difficulties of politics and policy formation. In order to remedy this issue, we must rethink the status quo of youth homelessness services and work out what the youth homelessness sector and young people themselves need to do to bring about change and how that change agenda can be successfully advanced.

The National Youth Commission Inquiries

On 8 March 2008, Commissioner Brian Burdekin and Minister Tanya Plibersek launched the independent National Youth Commission into Youth Homelessness (NYC) report *Australia's Homeless Youth*[1] at an event in Sydney. Before the advent of social media, which is so pervasive today, the NYC and its report to the Australian people received unprecedented radio, print, and TV media coverage. The first pilot of the ABC *Q&A* television format was trialled as a discussion about the NYC report, moderated by Tony Jones, with Minister Plibersek, Rhonda Galbally, and Majors David Eldridge and Paul Moulds from The Salvation Army.

Alongside the NYC Inquiry, modelled on the 1989 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) Inquiry,[2] a feature documentary, *The Oasis*[3] made by the award winning production house, Shark Island Productions, featured homeless young people courageously sharing their life experiences.

What is not so well-known, is that during the first week of the NYC Inquiry being announced, while there was an outpouring of enthusiasm from many workers and community organisations, there was also push back from some stalwarts in the homelessness sector — *'who said you could do this … we weren't consulted … and, who appointed Narelle Clay, Father Wally Dethlefs, Major David Eldridge, and research academic David MacKenzie as commissioners? What authority do you have?'* On balance, the grumbles from a minority were overwhelmed by the rallying of the sector around this proactive strategy to effect policy change. There is a lesson here in how to begin something innovative without the expressed 'permission' or approval from everyone else.

The problems identified in the 2008 Inquiry were broadly similar to what was reported two decades earlier in the 1989 HREOC Inquiry. However, since 1989, the Australian economy had grown into the world's twelfth-largest economy with one of the lowest levels of gross debt compared to other OECD countries; the homelessness service system has been developed and expanded substantially, yet there are more homeless young people in 2021 than in the years prior to 2008.

In the 1980s and 1990s, there was a good deal of advocacy undertaken by various peak bodies supported by community organisations to address youth homelessness. This was problem-focused advocacy at its best. Getting the attention of governments and the community was a high priority. A lot was achieved, and Commissioner Burdekin launched his HREOC Inquiry in large part because of the vigorous advocacy during the years prior. In some ways, the HREOC report could be considered a capstone accomplishment of 1980s advocacy that raised the profile of youth homelessness to a new and higher level of community awareness.

A second National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Employment and Transitions (*https://nycinquiry.org.au*) was launched in March 2019 to explore how young people could be better prepared and supported in their transition from education to work. The Inquiry has heard from over 1,200 individuals and organisations at public hearings and community consultations across all states and the Northern Territory. Of the 1,200 people, more than half were young people of school age or early adulthood.

Both of the NYC Inquiries demonstrated the importance of deep engagement with young people and other stakeholders which far surpasses the many convenience surveys and questionnaires that are put out purporting to express the voice of youth.

In August 2020, the National Youth Commission convened the national Youth Futures Summit (*https://nycinquiry.org.au/youth-futures-summit/*), bringing together over 1,000 participants in a week-long virtual event to discuss some of the big issues currently facing young people. The NYC Inquiry's interim findings report, *What Future?*,[4] and a discussion paper proposing a *Youth Futures Guarantee*[5] were released during the Summit.

The Youth Futures Guarantee lays out a framework of reforms and initiatives that will support young people to meet the challenges of the future, but also benefit Australian business and the wider Australian community. The Guarantee policy pillars reflect the priority concerns brought to the attention of the NYC Commissioners, and at the Youth Futures Summit. The final papers for the current NYC Inquiry will be progressively released between late 2021 and early 2022, prior to the 2022 Federal Election.

The NYC as a Change Strategy

The NYC model is a unique collective process whereby young people and community stakeholders, educators, and employers bring forward detailed solutions to challenging national issues. The organic authority of the NYC and its potential for impact rests with the active coalitions, its activities and Australians, especially young people activated by the NYC process to advocate for change. Though independent, the NYC inquiries essentially appropriated the 'authority' of an official inquiry, operated much like an official inquiry by adopting the same standards of rigour.

In the policy literature, the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) model advanced by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith[6] has gained ground as a credible and realistic theory of policy formation that is up to coping with the complexity and the twists and turns of a real policy process. The ACF model helps to explain why the NYC model provides an effective way of achieving systemic change or a whole agenda of initiatives/reforms.

The NYC model actively creates a bipartisan and cross-sectoral broad coalition around the strategic focl of the NYC — in 2008, youth homelessness; and in 2020–21, education, youth employment, and associated transition issues. In terms of the second NYC, over 120 formally collaborating partner organisations have joined. The media plays a crucial role in various policy spaces. If issues are aired in the media, public interest can be stirred, and politicians are moved to respond. The NYC has the means to actively create a constant stream of media on the issues, and as the first NYC on youth homelessness demonstrated, this builds pressure for action to be taken by government on a social problem.

A third element of the ACF is the important role of research and evidence produced by experts in changing the policy beliefs of key actors/stakeholders. Successful policy advocacy, especially on difficult and complex matters takes time even when there is a political will for reform. The NYC has taken the Advocacy Coalition Framework model of policy formation, and effectively turned it into 'a theory of practice'.

Rebuilding the Youth Homelessness Sector

In March 2019, in the absence of functioning national leadership of the youth homelessness sector, a group of youth sector activists convened the first National Youth Homelessness Conference to be held for 20 years. Over the two days, there were 380 Conference registrants and another 40 people who attended selected sessions by arrangement.

During the Conference, *A Report Card on Youth Homelessness*[7] was issued, that in summary concluded: *'a less than average response to youth homelessness — at best a two-star rating … developing — some progress underway … the next decade needs to be a very different story'.*

Dr John Falzon presented a Communique[8] that expressed the key messages from the Conference. The Communique appealed to all Australian politicians to support a national effort that is 'strategic, adequately resourced and coherently national' and a Strategy for Ending Youth Homelessness. The Communique advanced four strategic points:

1. early intervention to stem the flow of young people into homelessness

2. rapid rehousing and a rethink of social housing for youth as well as an explicit consideration of the needs of young people in national housing and homelessness agreements

3. engagement in a different approach to 'achieve the best possible education, training and employment outcomes possible' in the rapidly changing world of work

4. extending state care support for young people leaving care at age 18 to at least 21 years.

At the end of the Conference as delegates were beginning to head homeward, a young worker approached one of the organisers and said: *'this was great! It felt like a call to arms'*. She was answered: *'yes, it is!'*

During 2020, the COVID pandemic rolled over Australia and the world. Support work had to adapt; radical measures for how the health of the most vulnerable people including young people could be safeguarded were implemented; the economy and employment were hugely affected.

In 2021, some 500 people participated in the second National Youth Homeless Conference held virtually on 15–16th June (*https://youthhomelessnessconference.org.au*). Unlike most conferences, this conference sought to set in motion a process of collective action to develop a *Strategy to End Youth Homelessness*.[9] The *Strategy to End Youth Homelessness*, will not be purely the product of a particular government but will stand as a reference for the planning and implementation that various state and territory governments undertake. Nothing quite like this has been proposed before.

The *National Housing and Homelessness Agreement* (NHHA) identifies priority groups of which one is *'children and young people'*, and key themes of which one is *'prevention and early intervention'*; the various jurisdictions have plans and what they loosely call strategies but there is nothing that advises how to operationalise priorities and key themes. The problem with so many government frameworks and strategy documents is that when a government changes, the new government wants fresh documents or changes policy emphases for purely political reasons.

The proposed Strategy Project has been designed to become an

influential reference document and resource for the Commonwealth, state and territory governments (regardless of political party affiliations) to draw on when negotiating their plans and strategies as well as a foundation document for youth homelessness services to use in their advocacy. All jurisdictions including the Commonwealth, along with leading community sector organisations, philanthropy, and the private sector are currently being approached to resource this work[10] and there is growing interest in the idea of the proposed Strategy Project.

During the COVID pandemic, a whole swag of emergency measures had to be taken, some quite radical. Money was found to get us through the crisis. Will money be found to support the reforms needed to successfully reach a better place beyond this crisis? In the context of homelessness, the need for a bold strategic approach, more effective interventions, creative reform, and innovation has never been more important.

In Summary

The two National Youth Homelessness Conferences and the second National Youth Commission have been instrumental in helping to reinvigorate the youth homelessness sector, which is slowly reviving and building new relationships and forms of collaboration. It is evident that coalitions and collective action as well as social media campaigns tend to be the newer ways that policy advocacy is advanced, rather than relying on the more traditional forms of lobbying and representation. Increasingly, young people have become more involved directly in political advocacy projects and demanded participation in decision-making processes that affect their lives. Solutions-focused advocacy is about proposing rather than simply opposing; it accepts and understands the complexity of the policy formation and politics; it seeks to work with government and with key people within government departments; it minimises public relations spin (which is way too rife in this sector) while using social media for good; it develops detailed plans with costings and options; but speaks truth to power as necessary and speaks critically as well as appreciatively about problems.

We need to be change-makers not place-holders!

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Rethinking Policy: The Role of Inquiries in the Processes of Policy Reform

Dr Tammy Hand, Upstream Australia, Dr Peter Gill, Victoria University and Associate Professor David MacKenzie, UniSA

Introduction

The role of inquiries as part of the real-world policy formation and reform processes informs this article on 'rethinking' in the homelessness space.[1] Since the time when youth homelessness was first named as a problem, there have been a series of inquiries in youth homelessness and homelessness, including several key inquiries: 1982 Senate *Inquiry into youth homelessness*; 1989 landmark Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission *Inquiry into youth homelessness* headed by Commissioner Brian Burdekin; 1995 House of Representatives *Inquiry into Aspects of Youth Homelessness*; 2008 independent National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness; and most recently, the 2020–2021 Victorian Legislative Council *Inquiry into homelessness in Victoria*, and a Federal House of Representatives *Inquiry into homelessness in Australia*. It should be noted that there are other inquiries that focus on specific topics that are cognate and relevant to homelessness.

Generally, the homelessness inquiries have not been hampered by partisan divisions nor been subject to major partisan differences. Inquiries recommend but governments then make decisions about which and how recommendations will be implemented.

This article highlights the more important findings and recommendations in the Victorian Inquiry which released its report on 4 March 2021, and the Federal Inquiry into homelessness in Australia report that was released on 1 August 2021.

The Inquiry into Homelessness Victoria

The Victorian Legislative Council Legal and Social Issues Committee, chaired by Ms Fiona Patten, conducted its deliberations during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Eighteen hearings were held from November 2019 to September 2020, eight in person meetings and ten by teleconference. An extraordinary 452 written submissions were received. The live broadcasts and transcripts of hearings as well as most of the written submission can be readily accessed on the Inquiry into homelessness in Victoria webpage.[2]

The main message from the Victorian Inquiry final report[3] is that:

> *'Victoria's homelessness system must be reoriented away from crisis management to focus on a dual approach:*
>
> 5. *The promotion of early intervention programs*
>
> 6. *The procurement of sufficient long-term housing'*

The Report's argument is that a *'lack of long-term accommodation and early intervention programs in Victoria has led to an increasingly crisis-oriented sector'*. As part of the inquiry process the existing homelessness system was critically investigated and the report argues that *'a more adaptable and flexible system is needed' in order 'to reorient away from a crisis response system'*.

Early Intervention

The case for early intervention is strongly argued *'to prevent people becoming homelessness'*, highlighting the fact that *'early intervention is particularly critical for those who first experience homelessness at a young age … prevention of homelessness amongst young people or intervening early is important to ensure that experiences of homelessness and disadvantage at a young age do not affect the life changes of an individual and increase the likelihood on ongoing homelessness into adulthood'*. This point is even more important as we begin to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. While the health impacts for elderly people were dire, young people have been, and will continue to be, significantly disadvantaged in other ways by COVID-19 and for the most vulnerable, this disadvantage could be long-term or even life-long. The pre-COVID-19 dynamics of disadvantage are likely to be exacerbated post-COVID-19. Altogether, in the 2021 Victorian inquiry report, there were nine findings and 28 out of 51 recommendations specifically on early intervention.

There is an extensive discussion in the report of the Community of Schools and Services' (COSS) model of early intervention, best known from the inaugural pilot site, The Geelong Project. Recommendation 19 outlines that the COSS Model expanded to other parts of Victoria would have *'substantial benefits, including reducing the incidence of youth homelessness and providing overall cost savings'* and recommends *'that the Victorian Government provide funding and support for the expansion of initiatives linked to the COSS Model, with a minimum expansion to seven pilot sites that will include four metropolitan sites and three regional sites'*.

There is growing and active support for the COSS Model expansion from members of parliament across the political divide. Questions were

tabled in Parliament by the member for Wodonga, Ms. Tania Maxwell, and the former Minister of Housing Wendy Lovell. Inquiry Chair Fiona Patten submitted an adjournment[4] matter directed to the Minister for Housing, explicitly asking for Recommendation 19 to be immediately funded. Support has been coming from various community stakeholders including Regional Partnerships, schools and education providers, and Local Learning and Employment Networks. A Victorian COSS Consortium has been formed, comprising seven 'shovel ready' sites that have been actively working on place-based reforms using the COSS Model. Several youth homelessness crisis agencies are part of this Victorian COSS expansion project. The challenge of building more complete place-based ecosystems of support for vulnerable young people — early interventions, crisis support, and post-crisis youth housing options — is what has motivated their commitment to change.

Kids Under Cover focuses on keeping young people connected to home, education, and community. The Kids Under Cover model[5] of providing one or two-bedroom studios (with a bathroom) on the properties of families where a young person is at-risk of becoming homeless was found to be a successful early intervention initiative. However, not every family situation has space for a studio, nor is it always appropriate for a young person to remain at home. Kids Under Cover is expanding to use high-quality relocatable studio units in a supported village concept and this would be particularly practicable in regional Victoria. Increased funding for this model was recommended.

Foyers are a supported transitional housing model that requires a commitment to education, training, and employment for young people accepted as residents. In Victoria, the Education First Youth Foyers model[6] for young people aged 16 to 24, who are homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless was identified as promising. Notwithstanding criticism of the model's intake criteria[7,8] and effectiveness, the report recommended that the Victorian government assess its suitability for other metropolitan and regional areas.

Social Housing Investment

While crisis accommodation is a gap in the service ecosystem in some Victorian communities, an examination of this situation from a systems perspective in the Inquiry report cautiously notes: *'Such an investment in crisis accommodation is not intended to increase the emphasis on the provision of crisis accommodation in Victoria's homelessness system'*. Instead, the inquiry has argued the case for providing more affordable and social housing: *'The provision of affordable, stable, long-term housing is key to reducing the number of people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness in Victoria'*.

This is one area where the Victorian Government in its economic stimulus response to the COVID-19 pandemic has already foreshadowed a significant social housing program, when it announced a A$5 billion program to build 9,300 new social housing dwellings over the next four years.[9] Even with this 10 per cent increase in dwellings at below-market rents, the report notes that Victoria

will still be below the national average for social housing as a proportion of all housing.

The Federal Inquiry into Homelessness in Australia

This inquiry undertaken by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs commenced in February 2020 and published its final report on 4th August 2021.[10] The Inquiry's terms of reference were wide ranging and five public hearings were held and some 200 written submissions were received. This report provides a systematic update on a whole series of topics about homelessness and the homelessness service system. A discussion of the Australian Bureau of Statistics definition of homelessness and the measured prevalence of homelessness in Australia yielded some proposed improvements to data collection and analysis. There is a discussion of the experience of homelessness by different vulnerable groups and its causes and risk factors.

The main accomplishment of the report is contained in the options for better addressing homelessness in Australia — *'increased focus on early intervention and prevention'*, a 'Housing First approach' combined with the provision of 'more social housing' and finally, Recommendation 35 counsels that *'the Australian Government, in consultation with state, territory and local governments, develop and implement a ten-year national strategy on homelessness'*. Potentially, and if implemented with bipartisan support, this recommendation would redress the gap that followed the 2008 White Paper when the project to develop a national strategy or plan was shelved.

In terms of rethinking 'early intervention' Recommendation 27 urges:

> *…that the Australian Government work with state, territory and local governments and community organisations to develop a more integrated 'place-based' approach to homelessness prevention and early intervention.*
>
> *This should include:*
>
> - establishing a national strategic *framework for prevention and early intervention, setting out targets, roles and responsibilities, data collection and reporting requirements, and evaluation;*
> - *identifying the structural support and resources required to support 'place-based' programs; and*
> - *funding for 'place-based' research and pilot programs.*

Recognising the importance of stopping homelessness early in life, the Committee further recommends that there be a particular focus on prevention and early intervention of youth homelessness.

This is potentially a major paradigm shift from disparately deployed targeted program outlets to a more integrated place-based approach to homelessness prevention and early intervention, and youth homelessness should have a particular focus. Recommendation 28 is about workforce development to *'strengthen training across the health and community sectors on prevention and early intervention'* for vulnerable children and families and Recommendation 29 is about all jurisdictions working together *'to ensure that data collection and reporting systems adequately capture the experiences and needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable children and families, in order to support the early identification, assessment, support and/or referral of those experiencing or at risk of homelessness'*. The COSS Model was discussed in the body of the report as a promising evidenced-based model of early intervention.

Several important reforms to increase the supply of social housing are advanced, including *'the introduction and harmonisation of inclusionary planning approaches across Australia'*, financial incentives for *'attracting greater private-sector investment in social and affordable housing'*. The principles of Housing First are recommended for future agreements between the Commonwealth and the states and territories.

Concluding Comments

Hopefully, having two recent substantial reports on homelessness issued by two government inquiries is a harbinger of some major policy reform initiatives. Despite what some lobbyists urge, homelessness as a complex and wicked problem that will not be redressed by a simple silver bullet approach to policy and strategy. Homelessness is more than simply a housing problem, and not only a rough sleeping issue. Yet there is a major problem in Australia of insufficient social and affordable housing. Ending homelessness will not be achieved by focusing on street homelessness and accepting a functional zero stasis. The homeless population consists of diverse cohorts whose trajectories into homelessness are different. The two largest cohorts who become homeless are families with children and young people on their own.[11] Families, mainly women with children, typically become homeless when fleeing domestic and family violence.[12] Adolescents typically become homeless because of intolerable problems at home.[13] Early intervention cannot entirely and absolute prevent homelessness from ever occurring. Once homeless, and where a return home is not an option, finding housing as quickly as possible is the imperative.

An effective strategy for ending homelessness will focus on an eco-system of supports that includes a great deal more early intervention, a crisis response for when crises are unavoidable, and post-crisis housing options. These Inquiry reports point the way forward, but it is up to the Australian Governments to undertake reform where change is required and actually fund the doing of what needs to be done to reduce and ultimately end homelessness.

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Conrad Clark – *Family*, mixed media, 41 x 51cm, 2020

Making the Shift: Changing the Canadian Conversation About How to Address Youth Homelessness Through Social Innovation

Stephen Gaetz, President of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and Scientific Director of the Making the Shift Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab and Melanie Redman, President and Chief Executive Officer of A Way Home Canada and Partnership and Implementation Director of the Making the Shift Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab

> *'If we want to stop people dying on roads, we invest money in seatbelts, not in the emergency department. In the same way in regards to homelessness, why would we wait to intervene with a young person when they're in crisis, when we can intervene early and keep them at home, and in school and engaged?'*[1]

Historically, prevention has been largely absent from homelessness policy. The dominant paradigm about addressing homelessness in Canada (and the United States (US)) is to focus on three things: broad implementation of Housing First (which is a good thing) combined with efforts to optimise the homelessness sector to do this through community planning and coordinated access (also good) and finally, a mission focus on prioritising chronically homeless people for Housing First. We refer to this as the 'new orthodoxy', though in the US, it has been broadly in place since the turn of the century. The narrow mission focus means that we have basically ignored flows into homelessness, and transitions to chronicity. Rather than turning off the tap, it is possible that we have built a machine that in fact produces chronicity.

The good news is that several promising developments suggest a shift towards prevention in Canada. First, the Government of Canada, through its Reaching Home homelessness strategy is now prioritsing prevention, to reduce inflows to homelessness as well as reduce the returns to homelessness in two out of four of the mandatory priority outcome areas for communities that it funds. The second positive indicator of change is that a growing number of communities and service organisations have expressed interest in moving towards prevention, with a number implementing such programs. Prior to 2016, there were very few preventive programs, and not a lot of interest in moving in that direction.

While this emerging momentum towards prioritising prevention in Canada is positive, there remain considerable challenges for a broader implementation. There still remains scepticism in some quarters about whether innovations developed in foreign countries (such as Australia) can be usefully applied in Canada. Additionally, many people have internalised the argument that there is a lack of evidence for the efficacy of prevention. This is somewhat ironic given that so little of what happens in the homelessness sector has a strong evidence base, apart from Housing First or Permanent Supportive Housing. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, even amongst those who now 'get' that prevention is important, there is a lack of knowledge and capacity within community-based organisations and government about how to actually do youth homelessness prevention.

Social Innovation Labs

> *'Every innovation has two parts: the first is the invention of the thing itself; the second is the preparation of expectations so that when the invention arrives it seems both surprising and familiar — something long-awaited'.*[2]

Creating the conditions for transformative social change is neither easy nor straight forward. The lack of knowledge and capacity mentioned above can be helpfully addressed through an agenda of social innovation in order to *'build a knowledge base that can provide evidence for the efficacy of prevention, clear examples of how it works, and inspiration for change in Canada'*. Social innovation labs have emerged as one way to address complex problems through collaboration, in order to conduct research, engage in experimentation, and build strategies that can lead to social transformation,[3] involving a shared agenda, co-creation and co-ownership of the work and the outcomes, and the maximisation of the knowledge, skills, and reach of collaborators.[4]

In order to help facilitate the broader adoption of homelessness prevention in Canada for young people, the *Canadian Observatory on Homelessness* and *A Way Home Canada* have collaborated on a federally-funded, ambitious project to drive social change — the *Making the Shift – Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab* (MtS). MtS was launched in 2017 with a mandate to build an evidence-base on youth homelessness prevention. MtS provides a structured process for tackling complex societal challenges requiring systems change through developing novel ways of working that produce better outcomes for youth and their families. MtS is designed to build an evidence-base for youth homelessness prevention that supports and builds capacity amongst service providers and policy makers for preventive interventions, coordinated ecosystems, breaking down silos and a reorientation of investment into prevention.

MtS has developed and implemented a comprehensive research agenda guided by five intersecting theme areas designed to address knowledge gaps and enhance our understanding of how to effectively prevent youth homelessness. To date, MtS has funded 30 different research

projects across Canada, focusing on developing our knowledge of what works and for whom in the prevention of youth homelessness, including early intervention, supporting sustainable exits from homelessness, Indigenous-led solutions, and exploring how to leverage data and technology to drive policy and practice. Approximately one third of the projects focus on Indigenous homelessness.

Also, MtS operates demonstration projects that blend experimental programme delivery with research and evaluation. The demonstration projects use design thinking (and in particular, human-centred design), to identify, develop, prototype, test, evaluate, and mobilise innovations in policy and practice. Currently, MtS has demonstration projects on Housing First for Youth (four sites) Upstream (two sites), Enhancing Family and Natural Supports (eight sites) and Youth Reconnect (one site) with a plan to pilot a youth-focused Duty to Assist project in the future.

Housing First for Youth (HF4Y)[5]

Developed in Canada as a rights-based intervention for youth who are experiencing, or at risk of homelessness, HF4Y focuses on providing housing and client centred supports without preconditions in order to enhance stabilisation. It is an adaptation of the adult Pathways Housing First model, with added provisions for the specific needs of developing adolescents and young adults. We have four Housing First for Youth demonstration projects. The Ottawa project has a special focus on youth with moderate acuity. In Hamilton, the project is Indigenous-led for Indigenous youth, and includes important programmatic elements focused on cultural reconnection and healing. The Toronto Housing First for Youth project focuses on youth exiting care. Our project in Kelowna focuses on high acuity youth.

Upstream[6]

Originating in Australia as The Geelong Project (The 'Community of Schools and Services' model of early intervention or COSS Model supported by backbone support from

the Upstream Australia platform), this school-based early intervention model is a preventive approach that offers supports to youth ages 12 to 18 who are identified as at risk of homelessness and school disengagement using a universal screening tool, the Australian Index of Adolescent Development survey (AIAD) to undertake population screening. This universal approach sets Upstream Canada apart from other interventions, as it identifies students who do not display outward signs of risk and experience barriers to accessing help. As an equity-focused early intervention that works through the collective efforts of schools and community-based organisations, Upstream Canada works to prevent youth homelessness and early school leaving. The two Canadian sites are in St. John's, Newfoundland and Kelowna, British Columbia.

Enhancing Family and Natural Supports (FNS)[7]

Emphasising the important role that family and adult supports can and should play in all young people's lives, FNS is a program and/or intervention designed to prevent or end a young person's experience of homelessness through strengthening relationships between vulnerable young people and their support networks, including family. We have seven FNS projects across Alberta and one in Toronto. In each community the program is adapted for the local context and homelessness system (or lack thereof). The Toronto project is unique in that it works in partnership across the whole youth homelessness system to ensure that every young person who touches the system is offered these important supports.

Youth Reconnect[8]

A community-based early intervention and prevention program, YR provides supports for young people aged 13 to 24 years (and their families) who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Young people are engaged through schools or other community services, in an effort to meet them *'where they are at'*. The goal of Youth Reconnect is to help young people stay connected to their family, community and school, and strengthen connections to natural supports in order to reduce the risk of homelessness. Our demonstration project in Hamilton, Ontario is helping to transform the youth homelessness system to focus on younger youth and their families at the point of crisis, thus preventing them from entering the youth homelessness shelter. Our work with Youth Reconnect has been greatly informed by the Australian Reconnect program as well as other Canadian innovation in the Niagara region. Mindful that Reconnect in Australia lacks a coherent and consistent service model design, we have created a clear program model guide, and training and technical assistance to ensure that future adopters implement YR consistent with our design.

We acknowledge that developing quality research will not on its own drive a transformation agenda. In fact, 'implementation science' alerts us to the fact that even after sufficient evidence has been developed for an innovative new intervention, it can take years for uptake to happen in communities, but this process can be accelerated if there is a robust strategy for knowledge mobilisation.[9]

Our orientation to create research impact begins with a recognition that we must have an understanding of knowledge users and their needs and create different pathways for end-users to engage, understand and commit to change. We have to be aware of and address those factors that enhance or inhibit the uptake of research and the conditions necessary for policy and practice to incorporate new knowledge. Continuous and meaningful engagement with communities, service providers and policy makers is key to mobilising knowledge for impact, including mechanisms for providing support for uptake and implementation through a robust Training and Technical Assistance strategy.

We have learned that our efforts must be comprehensive and relentless, but also patient. The good news is that there is growing interest in the transformation agenda. Following the early success of MtS, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe has declared this body of work as the Toronto Centre of Excellence on Youth Homelessness Prevention at York University which will enhance the possibilities for future international collaboration.

Taken together, these initiatives are *'designed to heed the calls of young people: do more sooner; well before young people find themselves in situations where homelessness is imminent and unavoidable'*.

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Place-based Reform in Support of Vulnerable Young Victorians

Rachel Habgood and Michelle Fell, Junction Youth Services — *The Wodonga Project*; Donna Bennett, Hope Street and Peter Gill, Victoria University — *Project Northwest Z30*; Stephen Nidenko, Kevin Hecker, WAYSS and Andrew Simmons, SELLEN — *The Dandenong Projects*; Melinda Lawley, The Bridge Youth Service, — *The Shepparton Youth Initiative*; Pippin Rice, The Salvation Army and Wendy Major, South Gippsland Bass Coast LLEN — *The Inner Gippsland Project*; David MacKenzie, Tammy Hand and Annie Ryan — *Upstream Australia*

Introduction

This article on 'rethinking' the homelessness space discusses policy recommendations for prevention and early intervention and suggestions for reform that explore place-based service delivery approaches, in light of recent inquiries into homelessness. The Victorian Legislative Council *Inquiry into homelessness in Victoria*[1] and the Federal House of Representatives *Inquiry into homelessness in Australia*[2] both released reports in 2021, to which could be added the Federal *Inquiry into housing affordability and supply in Australia*[3] still underway.

The major recommendations coming out of the two homeless inquiry reports independently advance basically the same reform agenda around early intervention. In the context of recovery from a health and economic pandemic crisis, the big question is whether our Commonwealth and state/territory governments can meet the challenge of housing and homelessness reform at the same time?

What has animated the reform movement around youth homelessness and disadvantage is that programs thrown at vulnerable youth, are too often, not highly effective, certainly when it comes to changing the macro-statistics. Sometimes this is poor program design; at other times well-thought out program interventions are deployed so thinly or in so few places that the effect of the interventions is minimal when considered against the actual quantum of need of vulnerable young people. A broader critique might question the dominant paradigm of targeted programs delivered through departmental silos.

However, there is an emerging movement for change coming from

communities where somebody or some organisation has a nagging sense of discontent with the status quo of support for vulnerable young people and their families. These communities are concerned that the service system is overly crisis-oriented, and that good workers doing good work to help people in need are overwhelmed by the continual stream of people seeking help. What is missing is an effective prevention and early intervention capacity in the community.

The COVID pandemic has disrupted the momentum of community activities in 2020 and into 2021. However, this year has seen the COSS Initiative Groups and interested stakeholders revivify their efforts to push the place-based collective impact agenda around the COSS Model as a potentially important part of the COVID recovery. In this article, we briefly highlight the Victorian 'shovel-ready' place-based initiatives that are driving early intervention reform in their communities and which have come together to approach the Government as a consortium. Others have expressed interest and maintain a watching brief, but not yet ventured to actually lead and start to make change. In all cases, the efforts in these communities, pre-dates the release of the Inquiry into homelessness in Victoria report, and in most cases, pre-date the Inquiry entirely.

The Wodonga Project

Wodonga and Albury are twin cities that straddle the New South Wales (NSW)-Victoria border. People might live on one side of the border but travel inter-state to receive a particular service or go to school. In Albury the main homelessness agency YES Unlimited had been following the development of The Geelong Project since about 2016 and are now a COSS site funded by the NSW Government. Bev Hoffman from the North-East LLEN played an important role in facilitating the community stakeholders to come together around an implementation of the COSS Model in Wodonga. In August 2018, an initial meeting was convened in Wodonga, and in 2019, a group started meeting monthly to 'develop and discuss funding, community commitments and the on-the-ground presence of the projects implementation'. Junction Support Services emerged as the lead agency of the group. Initial project funding was committed by three local organisations NELLEN, Gateway Health and Junction Support Services.

Further funding ($30,000) was sourced from the Wodonga Council and Rachel Habgood stepped up as The Wodonga Project lead. A good deal of the community building has occurred, including winning support from all the local members of Parliament, and service and school readiness work. The project is now a priority of the Ovens Murray Regional Partnership. Wodonga is ready to go (for more detail see *The Wodonga Project: Together for Better* article in this issue).

The Shepparton Youth Initiative

To pin down the beginning of the Shepparton Youth Initiative to a day it would have to be on the afternoon of Thursday 14 September 2017. David MacKenzie was speaking at the Council to Homeless Person's Victorian Homelessness Conference and as the audience started to disperse, Melinda Lawley, the Chief Executive Officer of the Bridge Youth Service in Shepparton, came forward and asked: *'could we talk more about this model please … we would be very interested to take this on in Shepparton'*. What followed was the engagement of several Shepparton stakeholders including the Goulburn Murray LLEN. A meeting with local independent member of Parliament, Suzanna Sheed, secured her interest in the COSS Model and how it might be implemented in Shepparton.

In 2018, a monumental effort over some two months was mobilise around a bid for funding under the Partnerships Addressing Disadvantage (PAD). The development of the proposal demonstrated how well an extended version of the COSS Model was fit for purpose for social impact bond funding. In November 2018, MacKenzie spoke at the Bridge Youth Services AGM. Work on the Greater Shepparton Secondary College project began in 2017 with the development of the Shepparton Education Plan to amalgamate four existing secondary schools into one on an entire newly built campus due to open for students in 2022. Melinda has been actively involved with the Shepparton Education Plan Board advocating a different approach to student welfare based on the COSS Model architecture and methodology. An active coalition of key stakeholders is committed making the Shepparton Youth Initiative happen.

Northwest Melbourne (Project Northwest Z30)

In September 2019, a group of Victorian and Federal Labour Party members lead by Katie Hall, Steve McGhie, Daniel Mulino and Bill Shorten conducted a Homelessness Roundtable to discuss ways to address the homelessness crisis in the Northwest. In attendance were key stakeholder and service providers in the Northwest including Hope Street Youth and family services, and researchers from Victoria University. Annie Ryan from The Geelong Project was invited to speak to the third Roundtable meeting about what had been done and achieved in Geelong. This stirred considerable interest in whether this could be applied in the West. From this roundtable, a Western Homelessness Action Group (WHAG) was formed, which has met regularly to move forward initiatives to address youth homelessness. One of the key outcomes of this group was the commitment to develop a community of schools and services (COSS) in the northwest to address youth homelessness and disadvantage. Project Northwest Z30, as it is now known, continues to bring together local people and organisations who are committed to reform and to addressing youth homelessness. Preparations continue towards full roll out of school based prevention in 2022 and beyond. Project Northwest Z30 has also partnered with the other Victorian COSS sites and Upstream Australia as part of the Upstream Consortium that will lead the Victorian expansion. Bill Shorten has indicated that he is prepared to champion Project Northwest Z30 as part of the Upstream Consortium in its bid

for Victorian Government support. Two COSS sites are planned in the Northwest of Melbourne.

The Inner Gippsland Project

Wendy Major from the Inner Gippsland and Bass Coast LLEN was one of 65 people who attended the workshop on the COSS Model held at Melbourne Polytechnic in October 2018. Wendy and Jasmine Furphy, a manager with The Salvation Army in Leongatha turned up at the March 2019 National Youth Homelessness Conference in Melbourne. They asked for a discussion at the end of the Conference to talk about how they might be able to develop the COSS Model in their community. As a result, in June 2019 a visit was made to the Bass Coast and a meeting held at Wonthaggi Secondary College with the various stakeholders on the Initiative Group and the leadership of the school. The unanimous view of that meeting was that the COSS Model was needed and should be implemented. Jasmine attended the Upstream Community of Practice Assembly in Geelong in November 2019. The COVID pandemic interrupted the regular initiative group meetings in 2020, but in 2021, The Salvation Army has moved to build on the preparatory work pioneered by Jasmin and self-funded the appointment of Pippin Rice as acting project Lead, with Mark Dixon providing managerial support to build the Inner Gippsland Community Collective. Some additional funds will be invested in the work prior to government funding for a workforce to implement the Inner Gippsland Project as part of the Upstream Consortium. The local interest and disposition to improve the local service system remains strong and the seed funding is committed.

The Dandenong Projects

An inaugural Casey Cardinia Housing Summit was held in July 2017. David MacKenzie was invited as one of the keynote speakers. After the formal proceeding had concluded, Stephen Nidenko from WAYSS, a long-established youth and family homelessness service in the area, approached MacKenzie to say: *'what you had to say about the Geelong Project was really interesting … could my organisation WAYSS talk to you some more about this work … this area has big problems and homelessness is one of them'*. The City of Greater Dandenong is home to a complex, diversity community with an history of various collaborations; it is also a community that experiences considerable disadvantage in terms of school completion rates. Nearly one third (31 per cent) of families with children have no parent in employment, high unemployment (10–11 per cent) and according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the City of Greater Dandenong is the 'second most disadvantaged municipality in Victoria' and the most disadvantaged in all of urban Australia.[4] Following the release of The Geelong Project's interim report in February 2018, Andrew Simmons, Chief Executive Officer of the South-East LLEN, attended a meeting of stakeholders interested in *'service system reform, collective impact and early intervention'*. Homelessness remains a big issue in this part of Melbourne. In 2021, a third Casey Cardinia Housing Summit was held. A series of discussions are underway to form a standing working group. In September 2021, the SELLEN convened a virtual meeting that authorised participation in the Upstream Consortium bid for the development of COSS community sites in the South-East. Two COSS sites are foreshadowed as necessary in Melbourne's South East area given the size of the population and the area and level of disadvantage.

Some Final Thoughts

Will the Victorian Government adopt the reform agenda that the inquiries have recommended? Increasingly, politicians, are understanding the transformative potential of a shift from crisis management to prevention and early intervention, coupled with improved social and supported housing options, in the context of an increased supply of affordable housing. Increasingly, people in government departments get it, and have said they welcome a better way of achieving social and educational outcomes. Nevertheless, shifting from an entrenched targeted program paradigm with its many in-place programs, contracts and established practices, let alone the vested interests of existing employment, is like undertaking the demolition of a large building, while restricting the new building to replace it, to the same site using a lot of the same materials and while doing both demolition and building at the same time.

What is different this time is that the impetus for place-based reform is not top-down, but coming from coalitions of community stakeholders that envisage a more effective ecosystem of support for vulnerable youth and families, around the proven COSS Model architecture and methodology — mobilising a community's capacity to support its most disadvantaged people, while at the same time implementing a rigorous discipline for measuring and monitoring community-level outcomes. Yes, the COSS Model is an exemplar of place-based reform not just another program, and this is key to its significant achievable outcomes. Conceptually, the Victorian Government is seriously interested in the possibilities for place-based reform.[5] On a practical level, place-based reform, such as the COSS Model, is eminently doable because it can be done in certain places and later extended place by place.

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Early Intervention is an Integral Part of the Approach to Ending Youth Homelessness

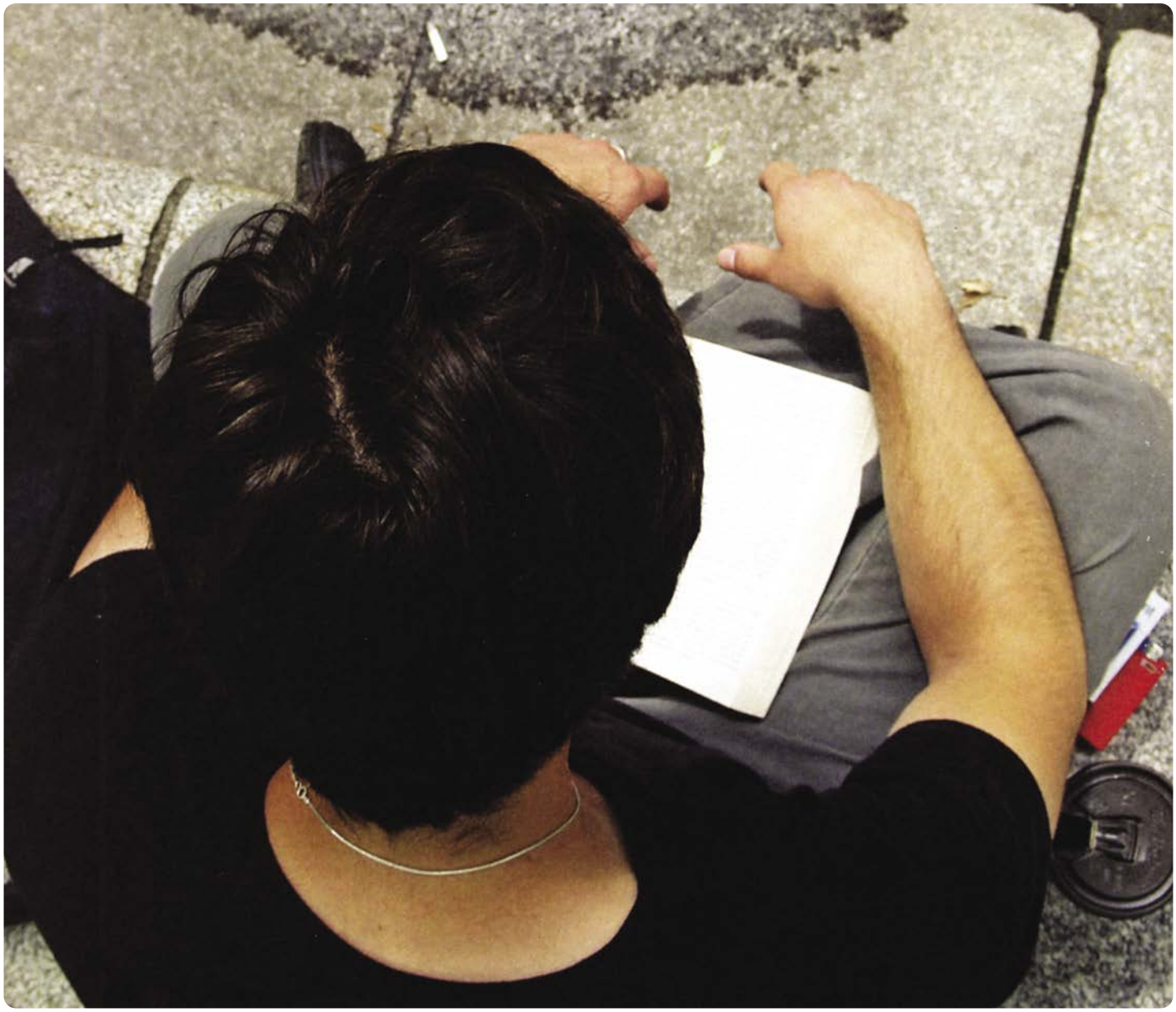
Ella Monaghan, Policy Intern at Youth Affairs Council Victoria

In 2019–2020, nearly 42,400 young people in Australia between the ages of 15 and 24 accessed Specialist Homelessness Services by themselves.[1] Increased and improved early intervention programs and safe housing options for these young people would have prevented many from experiencing homelessness and the consequent lasting negative impacts on their lives. Kirra, a young person with lived experience of homelessness, reflects on these impacts by saying *'The hardest thing for me has been constantly moving. It creates so much instability throughout all areas of my life and really disrupts study, work, my mental health and the ability to think of my future. Having a stable place to live would have the biggest positive impact.'*[2] This article centres the perspectives and experiences of young people with lived experience of homelessness in order to emphasise the individual, social and economic benefits of early intervention. Early intervention is integral to ending youth homelessness, however the experiences of young people demonstrate that early intervention must be accompanied by improved access to safe, secure and affordable housing for young people who are at risk of or are experiencing homelessness.

The community of services and schools (COSS) model is a strong example of effective early intervention in youth homelessness as it engages the key communities in young people's lives to support young people at risk of homelessness to remain in their family homes.[3] The Geelong Project attests to the success of the COSS model as six months after the commencement of the program, 89.5 per cent of the participants were still living at their family homes and 85.2 per cent were still attending school.[4] Another model of early intervention is mentoring young people at risk of experiencing homelessness to keep them connected with safe housing.[5] As well as preventing negative experiences and impacts for young people, early intervention produces significant economic benefits ensuring that young people are less reliant on expensive state-funded crisis response services.[6] An analysis of homelessness services in Western Australia found that greater investment in early intervention programs would save the state government more than twice the amount that they currently spend on homelessness services.[7]

Young people who have spoken with YACVic similarly identify the individual economic benefits for young people who can remain in safe housing. Frankie, a young person from Warrnambool says *'Some money goes on things I didn't buy when I had a home: like fast food, laundry, stuff I used to be able to do at home. Being homeless is expensive.'*[8] Early and ongoing supports for young people facing homelessness significantly increase the likelihood of these young people remaining in safe housing, which consequently produces significant economic benefits both for the affected young people and for the state government. Moreover, these findings reflect the experiences and desires of young people with lived experience of homelessness to be self-reliant and independent. One young person with lived experience of homelessness summarises this desire to YACVic in the statement *'I'll take care of myself if you just give me the resources to do so.'*

The success of early intervention programs demonstrates the importance of early intervention in the youth homelessness service landscape, although we must ask — what happens to the young people who fall through the cracks? Young people still experience homelessness despite participating in these programs, perhaps due to these programs being geographically exclusive or not addressing niche experiences. For instance, what happened to the 10.5 per cent of young people who participated in the Geelong Project but did not remain in their family home?[9] Safe, secure and affordable housing must be available to young people whose experience of homelessness cannot be prevented by early intervention services because of the complexity of their experience, the availability of programs or their unique needs and desires. The 2018 Victorian homelessness and rough sleeping program succeeds in identifying and focusing on two key pathways that frequently precede homelessness, as it focuses on providing young people who are leaving out of home care or the youth justice system with housing as quickly as possible to support their safety and wellbeing.[10] However, many young people with different experiences to this who are also at risk of homelessness would similarly benefit from fast access to housing. For example, YACVic has heard from some LGBTIQA+ young people that staying in their family home is not an option if they want to stay safe and have positive mental wellbeing. A non-binary asexual young person living in regional Victoria gives further context to this by explaining that *'there are many young people who identify as LGBTIQA+ who feel unsupported or unsafe to come out at home or at school.'*[11]



Other young people from rural and regional Victoria who spoke with YACVic elected to move from their family home to a regional centre or Melbourne to pursue study or work before experiencing homelessness because of low income support payments or a competitive rental market. These particular experiences emphasise the importance of access to safe, secure and affordable housing options for young people whose experience of homelessness is not caused by the drivers of youth homelessness that are addressed through existing effective early intervention programs. The Victorian Government's focus on providing key groups of young people with fast access to housing is commendable and the model should be expanded to include a wider range of young people for whom early intervention may not be appropriate and who need access to a safe home.

Early intervention approaches effectively support young people to remain in safe housing, contributing to individual, social and economic benefits. Alongside expanded early intervention, young people with more complex or divergent experiences who would not be supported by early intervention need access to a safety net of safe, secure and affordable homes through youth-focused crisis accommodation, affordable housing, youth-focused social housing and medium- to long-term housing programs designed by and for young people.

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Supporting Vulnerable Students: The Role of Schools in Early Intervention

Dr Brad Russell, Director, Educational Leadership, New South Wales Public Education, Albury

Introduction

In 2010, I made the move from Sydney to the Riverina Region of New South Wales (NSW) as I have always had a deep connection to rural Australia and a driving commitment to close the education equity gap for rural students. I came to Albury and became an active member of a vibrant community. Since 2014, I have held several Director-level roles, and in 2016 I was appointed Director, Educational Leadership for the Albury network of public schools. I had formed the view that to close rural gaps in equity and achievement required a collective approach by communities, with a sense of ownership about the best way forward. Unfortunately, rural communities can sometimes, shield disadvantage from 'outsiders' and accept that — *'it is what it is'*.

In my time as Director, I have actively sought to address rural youth disadvantage and I have been rewarded with seeing the Albury community embrace The Albury Project. The Community of Schools and Services model of early intervention (COSS) has created champions for its work from local parliamentarians to small business owners.

Rural NSW: Albury and the Murrumbidgee Region

Many young people in rural areas leave secondary school early and experience ongoing and often long-term disadvantage. The City of Albury and the broader Riverina region harbours more disadvantage than many might think, and is troubled by youth homelessness and youth suicide, amongst other issues. The following two anecdotes are stories of school-aged young people — school absentees. I have changed these stories and names to safeguard the identities of the individuals. The accounts are cases that I happen to be personally aware of.

Derek

Derek stayed with friends for six months and left school before completing Year 12 to take up a sales assistant position. Many years later, he is still stuck in a low-skill low-paid position, unable to take advantage of the regional boom in higher skilled and higher paid jobs and career advancement. Derek has remained stuck in this position for four years because he does not want insecurity in his life again. He is a young person with considerable potential whose academic record suggested a trajectory of high achievement and a rewarding career. A recent casual comment from the generous family that cared for Derek and gave him shelter was: *'if only The Albury Project had been in place, things would have been so different for Derek'*.

The 'Boy in the blue hoodie'

This encounter began my research into the most appropriate way to address impoverishment. To this day I am haunted by the 'boy in the blue hoodie'. One very cold and inhospitable winter's Sunday afternoon I was walking my three dogs when I was confronted by a boy walking towards me with his head firmly downcast at the ground. He stopped abruptly and looked up. In that moment I saw a fear and anxiety in his expression. I asked him *'are you OK, is someone chasing you, do you need any help?'* Thinking that it may have been my three large dogs that he feared, I assured him that he was safe. He resumed his gaze at the ground in front of him, thrust his clenched hands into his pockets and walked quickly around me and disappeared. As I walked home, I couldn't stop wondering what was wrong and what had happened to him to cause such an expression of fear and apprehension — what seemed to be a cry for help from beneath that blue hoodie.

On Monday I received a call from a very distressed principal at one of the Albury high schools. A teacher had requested a newly enrolled boy remove his blue hoodie as it wasn't part of the school's uniform. The boy had self-enrolled on the previous Friday and the school was still waiting on information supporting the enrolment. The boy in the blue hoodie 'exploded' at the teacher, left the class and left the school. The full story came to light soon after. The boy lived with his grandfather in a caravan at the bottom of the yard of the grandfather's mate. The grandfather had died and the mate didn't want the caravan or the boy on the property. The day after the grandfather was buried, the caravan was removed and the boy in the blue hoodie was homeless. A classmate of the boy took him in for a night. However, his friend's parents were insistent that he could not stay any longer than one night. That one night was the night before he self-enrolled at the local high school. His friend arranged for him to sleep at night in the garden shed as no one would know, but he would have to disappear early and stay away until after dark so the parents wouldn't catch on. The fear and anxiety I saw etched on his face was on day two of this plan. On day three and the school incident happened. To this day we don't know what has happened to him and 'if only' conversations continue. *'If only we'd had The Albury Project at that time we would have known how to respond differently and more appropriately. We'd have changed procedures and we would not have made incorrect assumptions.'*

Addressing Youth Homelessness Through Early Intervention in Schools

Early intervention is about identifying an issue before the issue reaches crisis point. If we look at youth homelessness, school attendance and completion rates, employability, mental health, self-harm, substance abuse and youth suicide, we see a set of distressing and complex issues. It turns out that often, all these issues are interrelated. This complexity cannot be addressed through a siloed responsibility of a single government agency such as the Department of Education.

As it happens, increasing school attendance and the proportion of students who complete secondary schooling are key objectives of the Department of Education and therefore of schools. The wicked problem facing schools is that you cannot significantly improve these outcomes if students don't attend or they leave school prematurely. Instability at home, issues such as domestic violence and substance abuse all contribute to young people being at increasing risk of homelessness, non-attendance at school, and as a result, a failure to complete their education. The research evidence is that about two-thirds of the factors that account for educational under-achievement are not school factors, but social factors such as home life, community, and poverty.

It is compulsory to attend school in Australia. Nearly every young person goes to school and attends school up to a certain point. This makes schools a universal institution. The national goal is that 90 per cent of young Australians should complete secondary school to Year 12. Currently, from a national perspective, eight out of 10 young people (79 per cent) complete Year 12. However, this completion rate is not equal across all communities. The most vulnerable young people, those who experience homelessness or leave school early can be reached while still at school. Are we intervening in ways that promise significantly better outcomes for young people? I would argue that evidently we are not.

The opportunity to change the trajectory of a young person's life through early intervention and by providing point-in-time placed-based actions is not just compelling, but is also an undeniably more effective approach. The Albury Project has begun to demonstrate this. What The Albury Project has shown is what can be achieved through a collective community effort, an enhanced practice of each agency through an agreement to share data, undertake coordinated actions, and a strong approach to measuring social and educational outcomes as well as and the efficient use of resources to avoid duplication, conflicting agendas and ineffectual reporting.

The COSS Model of Early Intervention: A School's Perspective

From the perspective of schools, early interventions to prevent the onset homelessness is a compelling possibility. It provides knowledge of the problems facing a student that otherwise may have gone unnoticed. It provides an opportunity to target support and mobilise resources more efficiently. I have had the opportunity to play a small part in supporting the Albury schools become part of The Albury Project and witness the changes that this collective work has begun to make. I have heard back from principals what they feel are the benefits of working in this different way.

One principal was particularly impressed by the success of implementing the Australian Index of Adolescent Development (AIAD) Survey as part of population screening. I report here what he said:

> *'A student with an excellent attendance rate, no discipline issues, and an excellent academic record came to notice based on the AIAD survey. This was a young person who had 'slipped under the radar' as she came from a family that appeared stable, middle-class, and there were no alarm bells ringing, and where serious issues can remain hidden unaddressed. The result was an intervention that not only prevented her imminent departure from their home, the likelihood of early school leaving despite an excellent academic record and risk of an attempted suicide due to depression. Since this case has come to notice the school, The Albury Project has identified 10 other students whose problematic situations had gone unnoticed but who were successfully supported to a better place through The Albury Project.'*

This is a compelling narrative of tragic human stories at a young age but also the 'value added' benefit of The Albury Project that can be delivered to young people in need.

Some Reflections

For a long time, I have been concerned about the disadvantage experienced by young people. The implementation of the COSS Model in Albury involving the Albury secondary schools, YES Unlimited as the key lead agency that provides most of the youth and family support and the mental health sector, especially headspace and CAMS and some other specialist providers, has been a real game changer. What has impressed me is that it is not just another program amongst other existing programs. Rather it is a different way of delivering support using existing resources together with some additional early intervention workers. The Albury community has embraced The Albury Project and really owned this place-based approach — the name gives that way.

Our welfare service outside and inside schools tend to respond to crises. However, this may not be particularly effective, nor does it address the causes of crises and may well cost the community in the long-term. The obvious alternative is for earlier interventions that reduce vulnerability and risk. Working together in a community to redress disadvantage and impoverishment is about mobilising social capital; 'the networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society' — drawing on a community's capacity to ensure that the community is equitable, that contextual issues are addressed through a deeply place-based approach with flexible and targeted resourcing, and operating under the direct responsibility of the community — by which I mean the organised collective of the Albury community — that is, The Albury Project network.

Towards a Uniform and Adequate Social Investment Safety Net to Prevent Homelessness and Other Layers of Disadvantage for Young People Transitioning from Out-of-home Care

Professor Philip Mendes, Monash University Department of Social Work*

Over the past four years, the Home Stretch Campaign led by Anglicare Victoria has advocated for the extension of out-of-home care (OOHC) in every Australian state and territory till 21 years of age. That campaign assumes that extended care will provide enormous social and economic benefits for both care leavers (sometimes called care experienced young people) and the broader community.

Prior to the Home Stretch campaign, most Australian jurisdictions provided only limited (and poorly funded) discretionary rather than mandatory assistance to care leavers once they turned 18 years of age. Yet, multiple Australian studies both official (that is, governmental or parliamentary inquiries or evaluations) and independent (that is, non-government organisations (NGOs) and/or academic research) have reported that many care leavers experience difficult pathways and poor outcomes when they leave care at 18 or younger. There appear to be multiple reasons for this: care leavers are not developmentally ready or supported adequately to live independently; they often have limited ongoing participation in education; they exit care directly into homelessness and/or endure ongoing housing instability, or they spend time in the youth justice system. [1]

For example, a recent national report by the CREATE Foundation, based on a sample of 325 care leavers aged 18-25 years, reported that 30 per cent of the young people experienced homelessness in the first year after their transition from OOHC.[2] Similarly, a study using linked administrative data from Victoria for 1,800 young people who had transitioned from OOHC in 2013 and 2014, reported that 54 per cent had experienced homelessness in the four years after leaving care.[3]

In contrast, evidence from extended care programs in the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK) indicates that providing support till 21 years of age can enhance outcomes for care leavers in key areas such as housing, health, education, employment and training, social relationships and community networks, and general well-being. This is because extended care establishes a more normative transition process based on developmental capacity, rather than chronological age, and enables greater continuity of supportive relationships with foster and kinship carers, professional workers and informal community networks that assist care leavers to cope with a range of emotional and practical life challenges. Extended care makes it less likely that care leavers (who are already vulnerable due to experiences of childhood trauma and for some major placement instability) will fall into crisis, and become

entrenched as long-term users of crisis support services pertaining to homelessness, drugs and alcohol, mental ill-health, family violence, child protection and criminal justice.[4]

Additionally, extended care is predicted to secure major economic savings via reducing the likelihood of chronic poor outcomes and inequalities including major intersecting challenges across the life course.[5] Indeed, Deloitte Access Economics estimated that extending care nationally would facilitate major improvements in areas such as educational engagement, reduced homelessness, lower hospitalisation rates, reduced involvement in the criminal justice system, and lower rates of mental illness, substance abuse and teen pregnancy. They calculated that the savings over 10 years for a cohort of care leavers would be $2.4 billion or an average of $34,520 per care leaver annually.[6]

Part One: Towards a nationally consistent safety net of extended care

To date, Home Stretch has influenced the introduction of major extended care safety nets in six out of the eight jurisdictions. As Table 1 below indicates, Victoria and shortly Western Australia are clearly the leaders in offering support to young people leaving all forms of OOHC till 21 years. South Australia, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) provide an allowance to foster and kinship carers only till 21 years, and Queensland offer the same assistance only till 19 years. The Northern Territory (NT) has promised to legislate universal extended care shortly. New South Wales (NSW) are the laggard in providing no form of extended care. [7]

These social investment initiatives are significant gains given that care leavers have been neglected by most jurisdictions for decades despite overwhelming global and domestic evidence in favour of expanded policy and program supports. Yet, some systemic weaknesses remain. One limitation (as noted above) is that only two out of eight jurisdictions currently offer extended care to young people transitioning from residential care who are generally recognised as the most vulnerable care leaver cohort.[10]

The second limitation is that no jurisdictions currently permit young people living in residential care to remain in their existing homes beyond 18 years of age. Nor have any governments introduced Staying Close programs similar to those trialled in the UK whereby residential care leavers are enabled to live close to their former accommodation and maintain links with their former carers and support networks.[11]

A third limitation is the inconsistency (or in NSW to date non-existence) of extended care models. The Federal Government, preferably via the existing National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, urgently needs to benchmark a uniform model of extended care to be introduced by all the States and Territories that would universally assist all care leavers till 21 years. That nationally consistent model would also protect the support entitlements of mobile care leavers (often disproportionately Indigenous young people)[12] who move from one jurisdiction to another.[13]

Part Two: From Uniform safety net to Adequate safety net

The establishment of a nationally consistent universal extended care model should ensure a reasonable safety net for most care leavers. In particular, the availability of a guaranteed housing allowance till 21 years accompanied by

Table 1: State and Territory transition from care numbers and extended care reforms

State or Territory	*Numbers leaving care aged 15–17 years, 2019–20*[8]	*Forms of Extended Care*
Australian Capital Territory (ACT)	52 (10 Indigenous)	Extended payments to kinship and foster carers till 21 years.
New South Wales	1281 (464 Indigenous)	No state-funded extended card. But Uniting provide a Social Impact Bond-funded program.[9]
Northern Territory	77 (61 Indigenous)	Proposed legislation to extend care to 21 years.
Queensland	762 (322 Indigenous)	Have extended the allowance for foster and kinship carers till 19 years.
South Australia	254 (89 Indigenous)	Optional extended payments to kinship and foster carers to 21 years.
Tasmania	Not available, but 56 in 2018–19 (11 Indigenous)	Optional extended payments to kinship and foster carers to 21 years.
Victoria	878 (168 Indigenous)	From January 2021, universal extended care till 21 years. Legislation introduced October 2021.
Western Australia	314 (151 Indigenous)	Budget announcement in September 2021 confirming universal extension of care till 21 years.

caseworker support and other forms of flexible funding assistance (that is, the model introduced in Victoria), is likely to disrupt the common direct pathway from leaving OOHC to homeless services which often results in longer-term housing instability or homelessness.[14]

To be sure, there are sub-groups of care leavers who may require longer and specialised forms of assistance including: young parents, those with a disability or poor mental health, those transitioning from youth justice custody, those living in remote communities, those leaving residential care as already noted, and Indigenous young people who may lack connection with their culture and identity. There is an increasing consensus within both Australian and international research literature that OOHC should be extended until at least 25 years in order to reduce the intersectional inequalities experienced by many care leavers.[15]

Once a nationally consistent extended care model is established, an independent evaluation of that model would need to ascertain whether or not the allocated funding and supports were adequate to meet the demonstrated needs of care leavers. Such an evaluation would need to be co-designed with a group of care leavers from every jurisdiction, and preferably employ lived experience consultants and/or peer researchers[16] to ensure that the real experiences and challenges of care leavers were formally recognised and costed. It would also need to include a detailed economic analysis of minimum needs based on the average expenditure of most parents in the community to support their children till at least 25 years of age.

Conclusion

The needs of care leavers in Australia were neglected for many decades despite well documented evidence of significant social and economic disadvantage. Their stigmatisation as an undeserving group[17] allowed policy makers to pretend that they could miraculously transition from childhood to adulthood in an incredibly short period on, or prior to, turning 18 years, and without the ongoing supports that their non-care peers (who in contrast have mostly enjoyed stable and supportive childhoods) typically call on till at least 25 years of age.

The Home Stretch campaign has effectively disrupted the nonsensical debate around expectations of a sudden transition to independence that paralysed Australian leaving care policy reform for decades, and demanded with significant success that all jurisdictions introduce minimum extended care safety nets. The long-term challenge is twofold: firstly, to ensure that a uniform national and universal model of extended care is in place that provides a safety net to support all care leavers; secondly that the minimum safety net model is promptly evaluated to assess its adequacy for preventing continuing pathways from out-of-home care to homelessness and other forms of long-term disadvantage.

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Shared Housing Matchmaking Schemes as a Housing Early Intervention

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Abstract

There is an increasing number of older single women in Australia experiencing housing insecurity. This article briefly outlines an early intervention strategy that is being developed which offers a web-based introduction platform for women over 55 years of age to self-match into shared housing arrangements. This alternative pathway to 'home' enables sharing of housing and the associated expenses while providing companionship. The initiative provides this at-risk demographic access to peer support and enables self-efficacy to avoid crisis housing interventions.

Introduction

In recent years, older women in Australia have emerged as a significant cohort at growing risk of experiencing housing insecurity through longer life expectancy and on average lesser accumulated wealth. They have an increased risk of homelessness particularly when they cease paid employment.[1] Older women's homelessness is often hidden from view as women experiencing homelessness often 'self-manage' their homelessness through strategies such as moving between family and friends.[2] Shared housing schemes are an early intervention that leverages this 'self-manage' capacity. In Australia, there have been several shared housing strategies developed for older women, some of which are highly successful and others with limited uptake.[3]

Shared living arrangements, while widely accepted as a temporary phase in early adulthood, are not typically a preferred housing model for older single women in Australia, with the notable exception of Indigenous women living on country.[4] It is generally considered a 'dysfunctional' stereotype.[5] Rather than being a choice-based housing decision, sharing a home is more often seen as a constraint-based option.[6] While preferable to other types of housing conditions, such as homeless shelters, it is not necessarily considered a 'home' situation.[7] For older women experiencing housing insecurity for the first time sharing requires a reconceptualisation of home, away from the continuation of the nuclear family.

Home sharing with non-related persons in similar circumstances enables access to properties (and locations) otherwise too expensive.[8] It also has added benefits, like companionship and reduced isolation. This is particularly important for older people as ongoing positive aging health outcomes are linked to greater social interactions and autonomy.[9,10]

Conrad Clark – *Woman and child in a room*, 2020

Previous Elderly Home-sharing Schemes

The early intervention model of matching elderly people to housemates is not a new housing initiative. Formal programs to establish shared homes for older single participants exist in many countries throughout Europe.[11] In North America, these services have existed since the 1970s with as many as 98 different agencies throughout the United States and Canada.[12]

These home-sharing agencies acted as facilitators for matching unrelated people by screening and introducing the potential housemates.[13,14] These agency-assisted home-sharing programs operated on small budgets with limited staff.[15] The process of matching people was time intensive, particularly when initial interest was often followed by significant drop-out rates.[16] By the mid-1990s these programs proved to be an unsustainable model of high service costs, reliance on grant funding, and low participant numbers.[17]

The Better Together Housing initiative

Better Together Housing (BTH) established on the Sunshine Coast in 2017, is both similar and different to these North American services. Similar, in that it does not provide housing, instead providing a process for screening and introducing prospective housemates. Different in that it avoids the time intensive service of matching the participants.

This housing intervention is an online introduction service that works on the principle that the participants are quite capable of matching themselves to a suitable

housemate, and only require a safe and supportive forum through which to do so. BTH provides an online platform and periodic facilitated 'morning teas' to provide friendly non-confrontational ways to meet like-minded women with the intent of sharing a home. The web-based platform incorporates a number of safeguards to screen users and provide peace of mind that the person you are meeting is vetted and genuine. A limited review of the pilot program suggested broad interest for this type of community-based approach to housing.[18]

Much like the well-known Tinder dating site, BTH does not provide matches, it is only the mechanism for meeting prospective housemates. The participant takes control of their own share relationships and housing outcome.

Meeting prospective romantic partners online, rather than through face-to-face introductions has become increasingly popular, including for older users.[19,20] The last decade has seen the rise of self-organised peer-to-peer contact technologies, such as Airbnb and Uber, with an accompanying increase in trust amongst strangers.[21] Finding potential housemates has also become internet-based in the general population with accommodation sharing web platforms such as flatmates.com.[22] BTH's platform has added advantages of being age and gender specific. By introducing persons with similar life experiences and concerns it also provides a potential source of peer support.

Unlike dating sites, BTH provides guidance for establishing and documenting the shared housing relationship. It would be like a dating site assisting with a pre-nuptial agreement. BTH provides a template home-sharing agreement that can be adapted to suit a variety of different shared housing scenarios, where a woman who owns her home is looking for someone compatible to share with, to pairing of women who decide to jointly rent a home together.

The BTH template includes a statement of commitment in which the parties acknowledge that the success of their home-sharing arrangement requires each of them committing to its success. It enables negotiation and agreement on issues such as pets, guests, car parking, noise, and any other matters of importance to either party. It also requires the parties to treat each other with respect, and otherwise use their best endeavours to maintain good relations between themselves, and with any landlord and their agent. For Centrelink purposes, the template confirms that their relationship is platonic, based on mutual convenience, that they are not financially dependent on each other, and they are not carers for one another.

The template also prompts the parties to produce a sketch of the home to indicate the common areas and spaces that are private to one party. Household costs are also addressed, with a form to be negotiated and completed on establishing the shared home, detailing how particular costs are to be divided. Similarly, the template allows each party's responsibility for particular household chores to be documented and agreed in advance, as well as a process for that division of labour to be adjusted over time if necessary. There is also a grievance process for resolving issues that arise between the parties during their cohabitation and provisions for unwinding processes when one of the household wants or needs to leave for any reason.

Conclusion

BTH aims to catalyse self-directed shared housing relationships among interested older women by providing a safe online platform for them to meet. They capitalise on the new social acceptance of peer-to-peer contact technologies to overcome the staff intensive aspects that previous home-sharing agencies have suffered from. Further, BTH provides support in establishing these new households in a negotiated, proactive, and self-affirming manner. This model, while still in its early phases, offers mature single women an alternative pathway to home and avoid housing insecurity.

BTH is funded through the Queensland Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy. The BTH website is at *https://bettertogetherhousing.com.au/*

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Early Intervention Through the COSS model: A South Australian Perspective

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Each year, nationally, young people (ages 12 to 24) comprise a growing number of users accessing homelessness services,[1] with demand for services continually accelerating, especially following sustained impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. This increase has been felt across each state — including South Australia.[2,3] Despite attempts to reform the sector,[4] knowledge regarding effective early intervention strategies remains nascent.

Further research and work is required to test models that can deliver 'necessary and essential' early intervention resources, models, and strategies, which reflect the current state of youth homelessness.[5] The Community of Schools and Services (COSS) model points to pillars of how such interventions could implemented, however, further empirical investigations are required to develop the evidence base to support boarder application.

The COSS Model

The COSS model is an evidence and research driven place-based model, which stands as a proponent of a more inclusive and collaborative approach to youth homeless intervention services. The 'COSS' model, first implemented across three schools in a localised Geelong metropolitan case study area, represents a novel approach of 'collective impact'[6] — engaging numerous local stakeholders to collaborate via data-sharing, collective co-ordinated governance, and shared staffing resources for cohesive purposes.

A defining point of differentiation between COSS and other early intervention models, including Foyer models, is its systematic use of population screening for risk factors at local-user level. At-risk young people are proactively identified based on three metrics: at risk of homelessness indicators, disengagement from school indicators, and Kessler (K10) psychological distress indicators with data collated via client interviews, local school information sharing, and utilisation of the AIAD survey tools.[7] Through identifying users whose responses reflects a higher risk/vulnerability for future homelessness profile, support and service providers may act pre-emptively — before a young person reaches a full blown crisis level. The majority of Specialist Homelessness Services (SHSs) operate on a crisis-oriented model of care — COSS model's added level of proactive screening allows for a 'targeted or indicative prevention' approach — tailored to the unique individual. A 'complementary approach' — also possible through the COSS Model, allows for segments/groups of at-risk populations to be targeted for service provision.[8]

Photo by Hilary Faye for Hope Street Youth and Family Services

The COSS Model's benefits have been measurable since its inception. Overall foundational desired outcomes include lower levels of family conflict and homelessness and reduced levels of early school leaving.[9] These measured outcomes include a 40 per cent reduction of adolescent homelessness and 20 per cent reduction in early school leaving in the affected school catchment areas over the model's first five years.[10] The effectiveness of the COSS model has demonstrated the need for a systemic early-intervention response to stem the flow of young at-risk people into the homeless population, through an integrated proactive framework of inter-connected stakeholder groups, operating at a localised collective level.

Alternatively, the Foyer model is a transitional learning and accommodation setting for young people, either at risk or currently experiencing homelessness.[11] It offers an integrated model of response — through temporary accommodation, while simultaneously providing a range of personalised mentoring, coaching, and personal development opportunities. The Foyer model ensures education and employment prospects are strengthened overall, to improve long-lasting chances of independence and stability.

The Foyer model differs from COSS in that it's largely endpoint accommodation focussed. The foyer accommodation model can be effectively implemented into the exit stage of a user's journey. The COSS model would feature at the first stage of a young at-risk person's treatment journey, during early intervention and prevention phases — when effectively utilised the COSS model could potentially reduce the need for a young person to experience all stages of the homelessness cycle.

Benefits and Limitations of Place-Based Models

The benefits of a place-based early intervention model, such as COSS, are recognised in its contextual specificity. By screening of school populations, then tiering higher-risk individuals, COSS model allows for identification and intervention in the form of various community supports and processes to enable positive future outcomes for vulnerable young people. Users in poor mental health, experiencing academic disengagement, and experiencing housing/family instability can be efficiently assisted utilising a place-based early intervention model — once identified, a user may be referred onto mental health care providers, accommodation support services or academic-specific counselling services.

Place-based early intervention models cannot solely address the structural causes of youth homelessness, factors such as housing affordability, domestic violence, substance abuse, or mental health issues. Early intervention models provide a framework for communities to preventatively target at-risk demographics, before crisis-point, and then enable a synergistic framework of referral and service provision within a local community to capture an at-risk young person before reaching emergency intervention stages.

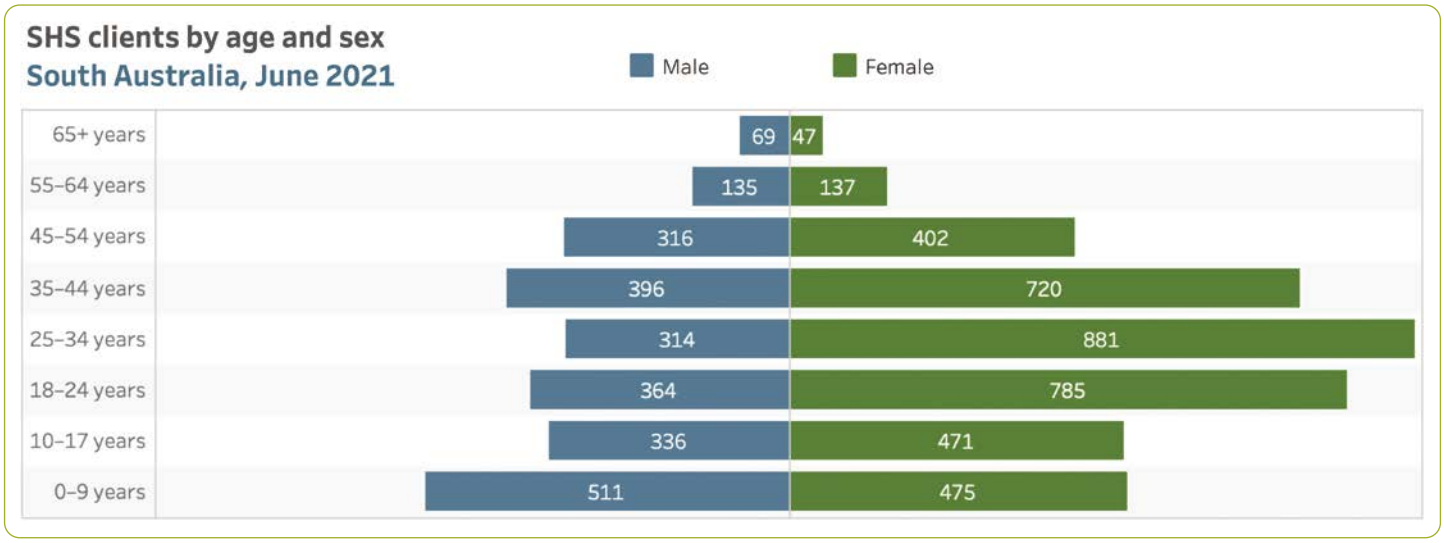
Early Intervention Approaches from a South Australian Perspective: Governmental Reform

Lisa Kosandiak, Toward Home Program Manager at Sonder, a member of the newly-formed Toward Home Southern Alliance, spoke to the inadequate recognition of young people within the state homelessness support sector:

> *'Young people are in danger of falling between the cracks and when that happens, it only adds to the on-going cycle, and overall problem.'*[13]

In December 2019, the South Australian government released *Our Housing Future Strategy 2020–2030* — a strategic plan for improved housing outcomes state-wide.[14] One of the plan's primary outcomes is to reduce potential homelessness through preventative measures. Data from Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, shows that 1,956 young people between ages 10 to 24 accessed support from Specialist Homelessness Services in June 2021 alone.[15]

Historically South Australia's homelessness system has relied on individual organisations that receive State/Commonwealth funding — however strategic reform has led to an 'alliance' system being created. This ideally will lead to improved service delivery, increased



Current data of South Australian SHS client engagement — specifically note youth demographic.

accountability, transparency and efficiency, and from a client's perspective — easier accessibility, higher client satisfaction, and overall reduced rates of repeat homelessness or first-time housing instability. State funding for homelessness support additionally increased to $72.4 million (2021–22), up from $65.5 million (2017–18).[16]

The new alliance system began operation in July 2021.[17] The state government's 2020 reforms also included a Homelessness Prevention Fund valued at $20 million.[18] A youth-specific recipient of funding through this fund is Kids Under Cover (KUC), a Melbourne-based accommodation provider, which builds relocatable accommodation for young people at risk of homelessness. Over three years, KUC will construct 51 relocatable studios for at-risk young South Australians — to benefit up to 78 at-risk young people.[19] KUC's pilot program demonstrates the openness of the South Australian government to early intervention approaches in youth homelessness, and the potential for expansion into new programs and service provision is promising. COSS has already been proven in effective in Victorian research contexts, and with current trial versions occurring in New South Wales, there is little reason why South Australian policymakers should not implement similar pilots in the sector. By engaging community schools alongside specialised homelessness service providers, like Sonder, there can be a more successful, outcome-driven and research-based future for young South Australians at risk of homelessness and housing instability.

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What if We Treated the Pandemic like Homelessness?

Stephen Gaetz, Professor, Faculty of Education at York University and President of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, and co-leader of Making the Shift Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab, Melanie Redman is President and Chief Executive Officer of A Way Home Canada

As we are all enduring lockdowns and fear during the fourth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Canada, many of us are challenging conventional thinking about how we address mass societal problems. Most certainly the pandemic and how we have responded has led some of us to reflect deeply on how we respond to homelessness. In Canada and other countries including the United States, historically the bulk of our effort and investment has been to provide people with emergency supports such as shelters and soup kitchens while they experience homelessness. In recent years, we have begun to shift our response to helping those who are chronically homeless exit the situation through evidence-based interventions such as Housing First. Unfortunately, and perhaps surprisingly, preventing people from becoming homeless in the first place has not been a high priority. This raises an important question — can we conceivably end homelessness without prevention?

Our collective experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic offer some clues. We can begin by asking, what it would look like if we addressed the pandemic like we do homelessness? In other words, what if we basically ignored prevention? This would mean no social distancing, no isolating, no wearing masks, no strategic restrictions on social and economic activity, and significantly, no vaccines. That's right — we would do virtually nothing to help ensure people *don't* catch COVID-19 in the first place. Instead, we would pour our investment into making bigger waiting rooms at hospitals while expanding emergency services, and then wait for people to come. And they of course would. Those who show up at the emergency room would be forced to wait and perhaps be offered a sandwich and an overcrowded place to sleep. Medical care would be rationed for only the most seriously ill. You can see where this would lead us — to an incredible and disastrous situation where many lives would be unnecessarily lost, and a large number who survived would be permanently damaged because of the experience.

As we struggle with the pandemic related preventive restrictions we have to endure this winter and spring, most of us certainly appreciate that this is what we must do — that we will never overcome the pandemic without prioritising prevention. Of course, we understand that a focus on prevention presents its challenges — that allocating resources does not always go right, and that to get there requires a big dose of learning as we go. Nevertheless, most of us are committed to the logic and practice of prevention, and our role in making it a success.

Now, let's switch the question around. What if we treated our response to homelessness as if we were dealing with a pandemic? It would mean doing things very differently. For sure, we would still need some level of emergency services to help people if they do wind up falling into homelessness. There would still be a place for Housing First as a means of helping people to exit homelessness, hopefully never experiencing homelessness ever again. But, we could do so much more. Firstly, we would put in a much greater effort to help people avoid falling into homelessness through effective early intervention strategies like shelter diversion and evictions prevention to ensure that most people don't enter the system, and for those that do that the experience of homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurring.

Finally, we would address structural issues that impact on homelessness, including increasing the supply of affordable housing, and in particular permanent supportive housing. We could reform our public institutions such as child protection, corrections and hospitals, so that they no longer could be able to discharge people into homelessness without offering transitional supports leading to housing stability. As an example, we regularly force young people to age out of foster care and group homes at an age when they are too young, too poor and inexperienced, resulting in homelessness for approximately 20 per cent of them. Our public systems need to be part of the solution through implementing effective discharge planning and supports. We would support communities to organise programs that identify the young people most at-risk of becoming homeless and deliver support to them and their families prior to crises occurring.

There is some good news, however, on the prevention front. Across Canada, communities and government are slowly starting to recognise the importance of shifting our approach to homelessness to embrace prevention. The Government of Canada, through its *Reaching Home* homelessness strategy has signalled a shift towards prevention, with funded communities expected to 'reduce inflows' into homelessness, and to reduce 'returns to homelessness' for those who have exited the situation. Finally, in response to the pandemic, many jurisdictions (including Toronto), are prioritising prevention as they plan what happens beyond the pandemic.

Likewise, in Australia, there has been some ground-breaking innovation done with the development of the 'Community of Schools and Services'

model of early intervention (COSS Model). Australia has been a real leader with the Reconnect Program, probably the world's first early intervention program for young people at-risk of homelessness or only recently homeless, launched in the late 1990s. More recently, Canada has started to deploy its own version of Youth Reconnect as a part of the policy shift to a greater investment in prevention. Also, the two Australian parliamentary inquiry reports, the *Inquiry into homelessness in Victoria* report and the *Inquiry into homelessness in Australia* report, both issued the clearest and strong recommendations for the need to shift the service provision dial towards prevention as well accessible supportive housing and more affordable housing. An emerging reform movement for change is evident in both Australia and Canada.

So if our minds are now changing about the role of prevention, the next step is to figure out how to get there, and how to do it well. In Canada we started to think about what preventive initiatives we could implement across the country? How can we support the implementation of effective preventive interventions such as Upstream in the Canadian context? How will we know what works so that we can invest wisely? How can we build the capacity of communities to shift to prevention, and align funding to support this change?

One important initiative is helping to pave the way. *Making the Shift — Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab*, is a 'made in Canada' centre of innovation designed to provide answers to these questions. The focus on youth homelessness is key here — we know from government data that 50 per cent of all currently homeless persons had their first experience before they were 25. Moreover, we know that over 40 per cent of currently homeless youth had their first experience before the age of 16, and for them we do almost nothing to prevent their entry into homelessness. If we get the prevention of youth homelessness right, then we can have a greater impact on homelessness overall and over time. Through a program of research and development that includes demonstration projects designed to help us understand how to prevent youth homelessness effectively through supporting young people and their families, we are developing the knowledge about how to change lives and produce better outcomes for young people.

A notable feature of the Making the Shift initiative is that it was outsourced to a collaboration between the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness (Homelessness Hub and A Way Home Canada (a national coalition dedicated to preventing end ending youth homelessness) supported by various sector organisations and University partners, rather than as separate contract managed directly by a Government department. Social Innovation is a task that works best outside of government (but supported by it) in a supportive ecosystem where innovation and social research and development can thrive. If you think about it, an innovations initiative ought to be able to be developed in an innovative way allowing for creativity, prototyping and nimble decision-making. Making the Shift ticks all these boxes!

Changing the way we respond to major societal problems can be a huge challenge that seems like steering the Titanic away from danger. However, continuing to let people become homeless, and then warehouse them while offering minimal supports until they become chronically homeless produces negative outcomes to health, mental health and well-being, a situation that has to end. The current pandemic has taught us one thing, however. We can move mountains if we join together with our best ideas and efforts, and are truly committed to the well-being of our fellow citizens, particularly those who are most vulnerable. We can end homelessness in Canada and Australia through a greater focus on prevention — blaming government for not doing what needs to be done is too easy even when that criticism is well-deserved. A community-based movement for change and solutions-focused collective action is the surest way of getting from where we are now to where we need to be in the foreseeable future.

It is up to us.

The Home Stretch Story

Paul McDonald, Chief Executive Officer, Anglicare Victoria

Founded in 2016, Home Stretch is a national campaign to extend the leaving care age for young people in out of home care in all Australian jurisdictions from 18 years to 21 years. Prior to the Home Stretch movement, no Australian state, territory or federal government had indicated any action, interest or desire to extending its services to children in state care past 18 years. Five years later, extended care is now offered in six jurisdictions, and at last count over 1,000 young people are in extended care arrangements to 21 years across the country. This is remarkable social policy reform in a relatively short space of time. Yet, extended care in varying formats can been found in various inquiries over the past several decades.

What was the key to the success of this campaign? What lessons are there for other social policy campaigns?

Advocacy is common in the Australian child protection/ welfare sector, campaigning is not. Mendes argues that research shows that leaving care practices by governments have been failing young people for many years.[1] In 2005, Raman and his colleagues, found that half of those who are required to exit their care placement end up homeless, in prison, unemployed or a new parent within the first twelve months.[2] A Swinburne University national study of 400 homeless young people surveyed found that 63 per cent were recent care leavers.[3] Other studies show that this cohort is over represented in emergency wards of hospitals, youth refuges and correctional institutions.

Advocacy prior to the Home Stretch movement focused almost exclusively on calling government to improve leaving care programs but without demonstrable evidence of effective leaving care outcomes.

In contrast, Home Stretch campaign argued for a reworked version of 'leaving care', challenging government with a key question: Why does the state terminate its care and role as a 'parent' for this age group? Why do they have to leave care in the first place?

Thus the Home Stretch campaign argued that in order to rectify the problem of poor leaving care outcomes, jurisdictions should continue providing care to the child, don't sever it, and provide that care, not for three months, (like many leaving care programs), but for three years until they 'get the key to the door', when they turn 21 years. Do this and there will be demonstrably improved outcomes in life readiness, employment, income, health and economic return for the children.

The campaign had to recognise that Australian Child Welfare systems are inherently conservative. There are no sudden policy changes in this sector. Child Protection systems and structures have remained largely intact for as long as I can remember. And terminating care before 18 years has been entrenched in Child Protection practices for decades. While other human discipline sectors have experienced paradigm shifting service delivery reform (think Disability), Child Protection, a high octane high-risk service of government, has remained largely unchanged, incrementally improving but certainly resistant to large-scale change.

While extending the care of a 17-year-old to 21 years may sound like a 'no brainer', the idea that we should extend care for a three further years, initially served to worry government ministers in some parts of this country.

So against this backdrop, why has this campaign been so successful?

First and foremost, for the reform to work, the campaign needed to be persistent, positively engaging and relentless in presentation. Given the conservative nature of this sector in policy reform, it will require persistence and single mindedness in presenting the reforms to governments that are either aloof to such reform or completely distracted on other child protection matters.

Secondly the reform had good 'campaign DNA'. It had the human element. Everyone can relate to terminating the parental care to an 18-year-old. Everyone knows or has within their circles an 18-year-old, and the ones they are thinking of are likely to still be at home. More so life's chances with housing and economic independence these days are harder, many would observe.

Third, campaign's 'problem', and proposed 'solution' were readily understandable. In three sentences anyone could describe the problem, the solution and the outcomes to a politician — no long winded explanations — just evidence, facts and a simply explainable moral perspective. The reform used repeatedly pithy, evidence-based one liners, such as:

- Extending care by three more years will halve youth homeless rates and double education engagement.
- Most (85 per cent) 18 to 21 year-olds in the wider community are still at home with one or both parents.
- Half (50 per cent) of those who leave care will be either homeless, in prison, pregnant, or unemployed within their first 12 months of leaving care.
- One third (35 per cent) of those who leave care will have five places of abode in the first twelve months of leaving care.
- For every dollar spent on extending care Government will save itself $2.
- Premiers and Ministers around the country are not planning to exit their children from home at 18 years.
- The Youth arrest rate will decline by 40 per cent for this cohort and hospital rates will decline by a third.
- Extended care is seen by United Kingdom (UK) authorities as the most significant child welfare reform in a generation.

So, how did we do it?

We created a presence. Presence means a campaign name and media attention, wherever possible, and a message that engaged the understanding and sympathy of a listener or audience. Presence suggests you are more than you are, particularly in the early stages of the campaign, when you assert the issue forward as a 'must resolve' matter.

Media was a key platform for the campaign. Government's eye is rarely off the media and it was important that the Home Stretch campaign advocated the proposal at every opportunity — Youth Homeless Week, Child Protection Week, Youth Week and so on — all great causes but all great excuses to put out a media release or a comment referencing reform. Opinion pieces, media releases, theme weeks/days that related to the reform, and media releases when presenting at conferences all created a presence for this campaign.

We presented an economic argument with the social argument.

The Campaign commissioned a series of Deloitte Access Economics Cost-Benefit Analyses for the Australian context — first, a landmark report, commissioned by Anglicare Victoria, to get things started on overall cost and benefits for any government if they were to extend care; a second summary report that outlined the costs and benefits for every state; a third report that provided a deeper and more focused cost-benefit analysis for a Federal government; and two separate reports for New South Wales and Queensland, specific to their jurisdictions, commissioned by local committees. All of these reports were used as material to discuss the economics of outcomes with bureaucrats and ministers, and launched publicly to continue to engage the public.

Polling anyone? Alongside an economic analysis, a polling company was commissioned to find out what the public thought. Early in the campaign, the Home Stretch campaign won an award for which the prize was polling by a major polling company on an issue. Yahoo! A survey of 2,000 Australians asked six questions about extending state care to 21 years. Public support was overwhelming.

The game changing role that the lived voice plays. Australia's use of the lived voice in child and family welfare policy could be described as under done. Whilst CREATE do an outstanding job in bringing the lived care voice to government, wider efforts have been sporadic. Yet the role of client voice is critical in positioning any social policy debate on media platforms. Through Anglicare Victoria, we were able to identify ex care leavers who wanted to talk about their care leaving experiences and their wishes for something better. As a result, Dylan Langley became a key ambassador and regularly featured in the media, events and meetings on Home Stretch. Also, Josh, Aisha, Jessie and Gina, were featured in the media telling their particular stories about what leaving care was like. Their impact in talking with politicians on all sides of the political fence was immeasurable.

Use of video to sell the reform. People are visual and oral as well as verbal. Home Stretch campaign commissioned several videos over the course of the campaign. Short video pitches were used over and over during the past five years. Our videos are a mix of emotion and facts with evocative still images with a unique voice over (see Home Stretch campaign: *https://thehomestretch.org.au/*).

In the lead up to two elections, the Philanthropic sector pushed us to develop radio and print advertising on commercial radio. Supported by three philanthropic organisations keen for the reform to be canvassed in the Victorian election of 2018, the Home Stretch campaign worked with Shannons Company to develop advertising messages aimed at Victorian community, not the Victorian Government. Radio advertisements targeting young mums picking up and dropping off children at school, and AM talkback radio. These radio spots were very effective presenting a simple argument to thousands of people, forging new ground in social campaigning for the child welfare sector, which had never been done this way before.

Taking (and making) every opportunity. No invitation was turned down — conferences, presentations at events, meetings, service groups, private firms, individuals. If it was a grandmother who wrote about her granddaughter turning 18 years, Home Stretch campaigners would offer to meet with her to hear her story and encourage her to tell her story to politicians. If it was a young person who told their story, Home Stretch would call them and meet with them. If it was a local group that wanted to know about the issue, Home Stretch would talk to them. No opportunity to meet, present or talk was missed.

Going national — think big. Given the problem is the same in every state, and child welfare is administered by state and territory jurisdictions, a key strategy was to establish campaign committees in all jurisdictions, supported and coordinated by the national Home Stretch secretariat. The national campaign in every jurisdiction, gave the campaign a strong profile, as ex-care leavers to told their stories, carers called for reform, and commissioners declared their support. Notice was given to the political class that the Home Stretch campaign was on the move. Home Stretch arranged to meet with every minister and every shadow minister while briefing the bureaucracy prior to any launch or release of information on Home Stretch in any state/territory. Pre-briefings created a sense of persistence reformism, and ensured that governments were not caught by surprise.

An International Symposium kept the momentum going. Two and a half years into the campaign, the Home Stretch campaign hosted an International Symposium. This was a way of exercising influence on the policy process and politicians. International experts from England, New Zealand, Scotland and the United States attended as did influencers, policy developers and implementers from every Australian jurisdiction. Two years later, in 2021 we held the second Symposium this time with a focus on the 'how' to extend care, rather than the 'why' we needed to extend care.

Home Stretch today

The Home Stretch campaign is supported by over 200 organisations, 12,000 individual pledges, including political parties from all sides, along the way receiving over 20 philanthropic grants.

To date the campaign has achieved significant outcomes in six of the eight Australian child welfare jurisdictions and some 1000 young people have benefited from extended care arrangements.

Nevertheless, the Home Stretch campaign with its persistent advocacy and unique engaging style will continue until our objective of extended care until 21 years, has been fully and effectively delivered in every state and territory.

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Employment Support: A Safety Net or a Youth Employment Guarantee?

Keith Waters, Chief Executive Officer, Youth Development Australia Ltd
and Dev Mukherjee, Senior Researcher, National Youth Commission

We want to be involved in creating something we understand and not be thrown into a system.
— Rick, an NYC Focus Group Participant, 13 May 2021

In the debate about youth homelessness, and the need for a strategy to end youth homelessness — rethinking early intervention as exemplified by this edition of *Parity* is accompanied by the companion issue of more accessible youth specific and youth-appropriate housing. In this debate, the issue of youth employment has too often been sidelined or suffered from problematic policy and programs.

Young people who become homeless while still secondary students have a high risk of leaving school early. As a corollary, many of the young people who leave school early will experience long-term disadvantage including a high risk of homelessness. A young person who leaves home, but is able to obtain relatively stable employment is unlikely to experience homelessness. Other issues such as mental health and drug and alcohol use can complicate the lives of young people during adolescence and young adulthood. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on young people by disrupting their education and employment prospects, as well impacting their mental health due to imposed isolation.[1]

On-going technological developments are changing the nature of employment in so many ways.

During Australia's decades of full employment after the Second World War to the early 1970s, the average unemployment rate was less than 2 per cent. Many young people entered the workforce much earlier than they do now and could leave the family home and live independently. The Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) was the government agency that provided assistance to unemployed people at that time. Much has changed since then.

Sustainable employment pathways and viable careers are a major life issue for a generation of young people living under COVID-19 since 2020. In August 2021, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reported that 279,800 young people currently remain not in employment, education or training.[2]

Australia's Labour Market Programs[3]

With the recession of the early 1990s, the Labor Government under Prime Minister Keating initiated the Working Nation reforms to *'promote the development of community and private sector case managers and to ensure fair competition between the CES and other agencies'*. While a strengthened CES was envisaged to provide intensive assistance to long-term unemployed and disadvantaged job seekers, administer the *Job Compact* and the *Youth Training Initiative*, many of its services were tendered out to employment agencies.

Following the election of a Howard Liberal Government in 1996, by 1998, the CES was wound up, replaced by *Job Network*, a market place of competing employment service agencies. A government run job agency, *Employment Assistance Australia* (EAA) later to become Employment National continued until it too was wound up.

In 2009, a Labor Government renamed *Job Network* as *Job Services Australia* and created five streams of assistance according the level of disadvantage, Stream 4 being for the most severely disadvantaged job seekers. There have been further changes following the election of a Liberal Government in 2013. In 2015, *Job Services Australia* became *Jobactive* and compliance requirements were tightened. The readjusted program started to attract criticism, for example; *'Jobactive is currently a one-size-fits-all model, and this can mean that a lot of individuals, depending on their circumstances, can actually benefit more from a tailored support model and unfortunately due to the structure of our current model, they can often slip through the cracks'*.[4] A stream of complaints and discontent started to be heard from participants — 'poor service', 'baffling decision-making', 'alleged rorting of taxpayer's money' and payments for services provided when clients found their own jobs.

Job Placement Employment Training (JPET) Program (1989–2015)

Amid all the changes wrought on the employment support services and labour market programs, the *Jobs Placement Employment Training* (JPET) program, which began following the 1989 Burdekin Report, was specifically designed to support young people who were homeless or at-risk of homelessness and severely disadvantaged.[5] An evaluation of JPET in 2000 found that the program had very positive results but *'little impact in relation to work experience'*. The local context and level of integration amongst youth services was said by some to be a major part of the problem.

Amazingly, this program operated until 2015 when the Federal Government absorbed JPET into the new streamlined *Job Services Australia*.

Transition to Work Program

Currently, the *Transition to Work* (TtW) program funds services to provide practical support and work experience to build the skills, confidence and work readiness of young people who left school early or had trouble transitioning from education to employment. The providers of *Transition to Work* collaborate with local community organisations that offer complementary services to support young people overcome barriers such as homelessness, mental health issues or substance abuse to achieve employment and education outcomes. To some degree, the TtW program has filled the need left by the closure of JPET. While it requires organisations to work collaboratively with other services, there are inherent risks and costs in such an approach.

TtW seems to have been a more effective program for supporting young people to transition into the labour market. However, given its funding levels, the majority of unemployed young people will not be able to access this service. TtW funding of $481.2 million over four years will allow for a national case load of 41,000 young people. The current TtW caseload is approximately 38,900, therefore the increased funding only provides for an additional 5,100 young people to enter this program.

The indicative caseload of 41,000 young people to be supported through the TtW program represents only about 15 per cent of the approximately 280,000 young people disengaged from education, training and employment.[6]

Given that *Transition to Work* and the *New Employment Services Model* operate in a commercial environment where providers are paid on a transactional basis, it is anticipated that many of the flaws that have made Jobactive unfit for purpose, will resurface unless concentrated efforts are made to change the culture of the organisations delivering these services, including changing the focus from profit motivation and business growth to one that is client-centred and genuinely community-based.

Youth Foyers

Considerable funding has been invested in the Youth Foyers model which combines supported accommodation with a condition of participation in education/ training/ employment pathways programs. Foyers support young people aged 16 to 24 years who are at risk of or are experiencing homelessness to achieve their educational and employment goals in stable, secure but temporary supportive housing. However, many of these foyers do not appear to be drawing most of their young residents from Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS). The logic of the model is compelling, but given that the model is expensive, some reforms are probably needed for foyers to make more impact on the twin problems of chronic youth unemployment and homelessness.

Jobmaker

A key element of the Morrison Government's October 2020 Federal budget was *JobMaker* which promised $4 billion over two years to provide an employer subsidy to hire young people. The hiring credit paid to employers included up to $200 a week for young people aged 16 to 29 years who were on *JobSeeker*, *Youth Allowance* or the *Parenting Payment*, and $100 a week for 30 to 35-year-olds. The Federal Government announced that this initiative would create 450,000 new jobs for young people.

Twelve months on it has been reported that there has only been a one percent take-up — pointing to a significant policy failure.[7] This is not the first employer subsidy program to fail, indeed many others preceding it and have disappeared into the policy failure blackhole. Successive governments have operated on the false premise that providing employer subsidies to the private sector will be stimulate employment. It is wishful thinking. Until such programs are youth-centred and involve young people in their co-design, they will continue to fail.

Conclusion

The youth homelessness and broader homelessness sectors we have known for decades that homeless young people have comparatively low education attainment levels and high unemployment rates.

From the standpoint of disadvantaged young people, the employment support system is a mess! Labour market programs ostensibly designed for their benefit do not have a good record of meeting the needs of disadvantaged young people.

Clearly, a 'one-size fits all' approach does not work. Young people with multiple issues require flexible integrated support and stable supported accommodation. For those already homeless programs are required that provide education recovery and vocational training coupled with viable pathways to real employment. The *National Youth Commission into Youth Employment and Transition* has proposed a Youth Guarantee, with the promise of sufficient support until a viable livelihood and independent life is secure.

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Recognising the Abuse and Trauma Histories of Clients in Early Intervention Homeless Initiatives — Insights from Greater Western Sydney and Beyond

Amy Lawton and Laura Butler, Social Research and Information Officers, WESTIR Limited

Individuals experiencing, or at risk of homelessness, often access a range of mainstream and specialist services to holistically address their complex needs, including housing and homelessness services.[1] Homeless individuals also often have histories of abuse and trauma which stem from their childhood. Research to date has recognised that a notable proportion of homeless individuals have been exposed to early developmental trauma, whether it be neglect, psychological abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, domestic and family violence, or disrupted attachment.[2] Studies, which have largely focused on homeless females, have showed the link between homelessness and childhood abuse and trauma.

A large study in the US found that approximately 92 per cent of homeless women surveyed had experienced physical and/or sexual assault at some point in their lives, with 60 per cent by the age of 12.[3] A small qualitative study with women in Melbourne also pointed to child sexual assault as a key contributing factor to becoming homeless.[4] Trauma is both a cause and consequence of homelessness: abuse and violence in childhood can precipitate into homelessness later in life and can lead to further revictimisation during the homelessness experience. The experience of homelessness itself is traumatic, and the impact of previous trauma (which can manifest into longer-term conditions such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and complex trauma) can erode a person's ability to successfully exit homelessness. People can also be further retraumatised when engaging with services that do not recognise their traumatic stress, leaving them feeling powerless and controlled.[5,6] These findings suggest that the interwoven experience of trauma and homelessness cannot be ignored and needs to be addressed during all phases of service delivery.

In 2021, WESTIR Limited (Western Sydney Regional Information and Research Service) undertook a research study called *The Role of Community and Legal Services Covering Greater Western Sydney in Addressing Institutional Child Sexual Abuse: Post-Royal Commission to Present*. The focus of the study was to explore the community service response to institutional child sexual abuse since the Royal Commission between 2013 and 2017, however semi-structured interviews with community service workers revealed that many victims and survivors of institutional child sexual abuse experience homelessness or housing issues, and require support from housing and homelessness services throughout their life:

> *'I have a few clients who have multiple issues going on, and it kind of seems like as soon as you get one thing half way sorted, there's something else. And they tend to be issues around housing and support'*
>
> — Interviewee 1

> *'We have a homeless young person or a homeless young woman with a history of this nature* [of child sexual abuse] *that we are trying to support into adequate housing and to support them with a range of issues'*
>
> — Interviewee 5

> *'In the 90s… five of my* [homeless] *clients overdosed and died as a result of heroin addiction. And when I go back through my notes of each of those clients, they'd all been sexually abused as children'*
>
> — Interviewee 13

Early intervention initiatives for homelessness in Australia aim to intervene before people get into crisis and stem the flow of individuals into homelessness. Typical early intervention responses include multidisciplinary family programs, youth specific housing, and youth education initiatives.[6,7] The findings of this study strongly highlight that the abuse and trauma histories of persons experiencing or at risk of homelessness are significant risk factors that must be considered in any early intervention initiative. In Greater Western Sydney, where this study was based, there are early intervention initiatives[8,9] designed to respond to the early stages of homelessness. However, study participants raised concerns about whether services, including those providing housing and homelessness support, were providing trauma-informed care:

> *'I mean housing is really a company and it's not really trauma-informed, and I guess we are* [using a] *trauma-informed approach, so you kind of feel like you want everyone to at least have done the 101…'*
>
> — Interviewee

> *'I think we need to properly recognise harm and all of the ongoing trajectory that has on people's lives, not as a single point in time, single incident, but disruption to education and*

housing and security and safety and family relationships and networks and parenting and all of those things which have got all of those long term wellbeing impacts'

— Interviewee 8

So what is Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) in homelessness service settings and what does it look like? TIC 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.[10] TIC is an organisational or system-wide re-orientation which sees all staff of an organisation — whether it be direct care, support staff and executive leadership — undertake their tasks and interactions with an understanding of the impacts of trauma so that every action is consistent with the recovery process and reduces the possibility of re-traumatisation.[11] TIC needs to be prioritised across all service providers, from specialist homelessness services to community housing organisations, to better deliver on early intervention outcomes. Some practical ways this can be implemented include:

- Staff training to increase awareness and sensitivity to trauma-related issues.
- Ongoing professional supervision of staff to ensure the practice of appropriate self-care and the prevention or management of vicarious trauma.
- Screening and assessment of the trauma histories of clients during intake.
- Providing a welcoming and relaxing physical space that offers a sense of safety and security for the trauma victim and survivor.
- Adjusting all policies, programs and systems to avoid re-traumatisation.[12, 13, 14]

TIC also involves offering integrated service models that holistically meet the needs of homeless clients. A number of participants in the research study highlighted the importance of this approach:

'So sometimes people [have other needs that need to be met] before they meet for legal advice. They need the top of their tree needs met, it might be their housing and they can't really deal with their victim's compensation or their family law matter until their housing is resolved. So, you know, that holistic way of working and really getting their client to work through to identify what they think is most important for them'

— Interviewee 8

'We will help clients with things like where they can find food, where they can get other support to help them navigate some of those issues. It might be that they might need financial counselling, it might be there is high needs for their children as well, it might be their housing, that they need housing'

— Interviewee 14

On a structural level, findings from this study reiterate the large body of research which explores how adverse childhood experiences increase a child's vulnerability to homelessness into adulthood. There needs to be an ongoing recognition of the link between childhood trauma, abuse and homelessness in the policy development and service delivery of early intervention initiatives to best address the needs of clients.[15] For victims and survivors of child sexual abuse in particular, the journey of disclosure can be long, complex and throughout life stages.[16] This suggests that the applicability of early intervention principles in homelessness programs need not be confined to just younger clients, but other 'at risk' cohorts such as adults, older people and victims of domestic and family violence.

A special thanks to Sue Cripps (SC Consulting Group) for peer-reviewing this article.
The research study *The Role of Community and Legal Services Covering Greater Western Sydney in Addressing Institutional Child Sexual Abuse: Post-Royal Commission to Present* is also available through WESTIR Limited's website (*www.westir.org.au*).

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Constantly Rethinking Early Intervention: Ruby's Reunification Program

Cheryl Lierton, Senior Manager, Uniting Communities*

Nearly 30 years ago, a family therapist took a role in Adelaide managing a youth shelter saw the opportunity to work with the 'homeless' young people in the shelter and their families. Not all of those young people needed to be in a homeless shelter if a service could support them and their parents to navigate the challenging path back home.

The *Ruby's Reunification Program* was created in Adelaide to achieve this. The residential component, originally made possible because of its evolution out of a youth shelter, has remained a unique component of the program, differentiating it from other family reunification services. This family inclusive approach has been challenging to maintain.

Ruby's has achieved strong outcomes in its work to get young people back home and keep them out of the youth homelessness system. Annual data shows that the percentage of young people returning home from Ruby's is consistently over 70 per cent.

Ruby's is considered by most to be an early intervention service for young homeless people. Our hope is that this article may help others reimagine the role of early intervention for young people in the homeless system.

Early intervention versus Prevention versus Intervention

After its evolution from youth shelter to family reunification service, Ruby's focussed on encouraging referrals for those young people and their families who were at an 'early point' in their conflict. To enter the Ruby's service, both the young person and at least one parent had to nominally agree they would work towards reunification.

However, in the last 10 years, a number of factors have shifted this approach. Mostly, these changes have come about due to changes in 'help seeking behaviour'.

Conrad Clark – *Gaia, Save the planet*, 2012

While families used to seek support when conflict was increasing at home, there has been a definite trend towards young people and parents only seeking formal, external service support when they reached a crisis point. Today, the majority of referrals to Ruby's occur when a young person is seeking emergency accommodation. For one reason or another, they say that they 'cannot stay at home', and usually at least one, if not both parties, will initially refuse to consider reunification as an option. Ruby's response is firstly, to provide a safe place for the young person; secondly, to initiate contact with a parent and then try to talk to both sides. These conversations require skilful handling, and often it takes some time to both parties to believe that returning home is possible and desirable.

To be honest, Ruby's fought against this change. If we had already provided accommodation to the young person, staff were doubtful families would consider reunification. They found it incredibly confronting to accept that young people, who no-one in the service had met and assessed, would be staying overnight. These staff had not signed up to work in an emergency youth shelter. In addition, the families were presenting with issues that were more complex and quite often required more time and energy to convince them to try reunification.

It took time and upskilling to change this and not all staff were happy to come on the journey. For management, it was necessary to remain clear about our purpose. Our role is to keep young people out of the homelessness sector. At the time, we had vacancies in the service, because families just were not approaching us

at the early stage of conflict. So, to remain relevant and useful, we needed to adapt what we did.

Compared to what it did 20 years ago, what Ruby's does now could easily be described as responding to crisis, rather than early intervention. We work with young people in crisis, rather than with families before things have got to breaking point. While we provide emergency accommodation, our service is still focussed on early intervention by keeping young people out of the homelessness sector.

So, what's in a name? We would argue that it doesn't matter if you call this early intervention, prevention, or intervention. What matters is the outcome.

Investing in Early Intervention, Not Crisis

During the time that Ruby's had vacancies, management required the service to accommodate 'emergency only' clients. These were clients who were not eligible for reunification. If not for the accommodation at Ruby's, these young people would be couch surging or sleeping rough. We did this, because we could not ethically allow beds to remain vacant while young people were unsafe. Again, this was incredibly challenging for Ruby's staff. However, over time, our approach of working with clients in crisis and attempt to move them into a reunification program has succeeded more than it has failed. By this stage other youth homelessness services knew we would accept a homeless young person and staff accepted this.

And then we were really challenged — how did we turn away a young person who had nowhere else to go, so that a young person working towards reunification could use the room? Arguably, that young person could spend the night at home and be safe, so why should the other young person sleep on the streets. On reflection, this conundrum is exactly what challenges the broader homelessness sector. How do we take resources away from crisis responses and invest in early intervention? The research shows that early intervention is more effective and cost efficient. So why aren't we doing it? For us, the answer was simple — because we felt ethically compromised when we chose to support someone who was not at immediate risk.

The Ruby's staff found this challenging, but eventually accepted that our primary role was family reunification. We decided that we could make the biggest impact by focussing on early intervention, and this meant Ruby's does not now accept crisis referrals.

What's Easy versus What Works

A challenge Ruby's has and other services have faced is how staff and services can fall back into what is easy — because it's tougher to do what works. For Ruby's, this has been particularly evident in several ways.

Ruby's is a youth service. We only work with a family when there is a young person at-risk of homelessness, or entry into the child protection system (depending on their age). We have seen how it is so much easier to work with a young person in isolation. We have seen individual staff, and indeed at times whole teams, fall into the trap of working with only the young person, with perhaps little engagement with the family.

One of the reasons for this is that youth services tend to attract young workers who perhaps struggle to engage, understand and challenge parents. At Ruby's, we certainly don't believe that you need to be a parent to do successful family work, but we do know that it can be easy for staff to slide into youth-focussed only work. This is something we have learned to be vigilant about. We know that to be successful, an early intervention program for young people must also be a family service. This has implications for recruitment and training.

Another hard lesson we learned was about the importance of holistic work. When a family comes to Ruby's, it is unlikely that the conflictual family relationships will be the only stressor in their lives. Most families who come to Ruby's are also dealing with other an endless list of problems.

It is easier is just work on family conflict — that means we only need to be great at family counselling and supporting healthy family relationships. Unfortunately, we have learnt that this alone will not create a sustainable outcome for a family. What works is to engage holistically with the young person and their family members. This will enable us to find out all the things that are impacting on the young person's ability to be at home and to support the family to address these. However, this is also harder, and requires more work, because it means working closely with multiple family members, for example, supporting a parent to address their mental health issues, or heal from past abusive relationships.

Defining the 'Intervention' in Early Intervention

Reflective practice and seeking client feedback and using these to improve service delivery, have always been major parts of the Ruby's culture. If something worked well at Ruby's, we would keep doing it, we would talk about it, give it a name, and pass it on to new staff members.

We have spent a lot of time and energy clarifying and defining the 'intervention' within Ruby's 'early intervention' service. Trying to put into words the 'stuff that works' has been challenging. Thankfully, we are now reaping the rewards of these efforts, with a shared language for our strategies, a clearly defined service model, and service documents that ensure that staff implement the model in their work.

However, we need to continue to analyse our practice and tailor our responses. As such, we have striven to ensure our service model and documents are a guideline, but not a strict or restrictive mould, for practice.

The next major step in Ruby's evolution will come in 2022, when the model will be run by a new provider in the Australian Capital Territory. We are committed to using our experience to support that early intervention service and look forward to the challenges and learning it will bring.

* Cheryl Lierton was the Service Manager for Ruby's from 2012 to 2016, since then she has been in the Senior Manager role at Uniting Communities, overseeing Ruby's and other therapeutic services.

For more information about Ruby's go to: https://www.unitingcommunities.org/service/families-and-young-people/supporting-family-relationships/rubys-licensing

A New Place to Call Home

Paul Stolz and Angela Spinney

The article reports the findings from a Swinburne University research project that examined the impact of Kids Under Cover Studio Program on young people and their families.

Introduction

Kids Under Cover (KUC) is a not for profit organisation dedicated to preventing youth homelessness. Since its foundation in 1989 following the release of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission report, Our Homeless Children, KUC has deployed an innovative early intervention and youth homelessness prevention model, unique in Australia and internationally. It was one of the earliest practical early intervention responses to youth homelessness.

Sarah's Story — A Case Study

Sarah* sat on the arm of the old armchair with her mother diagonally across from her and her mother's partner sitting on the old lounge opposite. The armchair was frayed at the edges and Sarah's mother said, almost apologetically, that they were probably moving in the next few weeks and were throwing most of the old furniture out.

Sarah was 21 and had been going to university for twelve months studying nursing. When she was 20, she informed me that she had a full-time job in a newsagency but had decided nursing was her passion. She suggested that some years previously this would have been unthinkable. What was a more realistic path for her, at that stage, was probably leaving home for an unknown destination, probably homelessness.

During that uncertain time Sarah and her mother were at war, by their own admission. The small housing department home was crowded with other siblings and Sarah occupied a curtained off area in the lounge room as her bedroom. Her mental health was unstable due to previous abuse and she alternated between home and other friends' places to escape the constant tension and feeling of being crowded, lacking any privacy and security.

Sarah's life, and that of her family's, changed when the community service organisation the family was in touch with recommended a KUC studio.

The application was successful, and a one-bedroom studio was installed in the backyard of the home to accommodate Sarah and allow her to maintain a greater sense of security and privacy, while still staying connected to her family.

As the interview progressed it was clear that the path Sarah had now chosen was attributed to the provision of this secure and stable space within the KUC studio.

The additional space had provided enough distance between mother and daughter to repair their relationship, renewed a sense of privacy and security and offered a quiet study space for Sarah to begin to achieve to her capability. She finished the Victorian Certificate of Education and now had decided University was the option she wished to pursue.

The partner of Sarah's mother summed up the transition in the last comment made in the interview.

> *'Sarah is like a butterfly that has emerged from pupa and become strong and beautiful'.*

This was just one narrative of the many that emerged from research undertaken by Swinburne University on behalf of KUC, to investigate the long-term impacts of their unique studio program on young people and their families.

Every narrative uncovered in the research was unique but there were also many similarities that were eventually fed into the research findings by Dr. Paul Stolz as chief researcher.

The Research Project

The research was interested in the early intervention and prevention of youth homelessness provided by the KUC studio program. [1]

Early intervention to prevent risk of homelessness, particularly for young people, has been an area of discussion and media attention for the past three decades. According to MacKenzie [2] this has not translated into effective policy and program development.

Kids Under Cover has provided this early intervention and prevention program for young people during this same period. Until recently, this program had not been examined in depth as to its efficacy in reducing the risk of homelessness for young people.

The study sought to investigate the long-term impact the Kids Under Cover Studio Program had on young people and their families.

The research sought to clarify whether the long-term impact on social and educational development, future aspiration, physical and mental health and employment possibilities align with the claimed benefits of the resource.

This also served to clarify how effective the program is for prevention of risk to homelessness for young people.

The research method used a qualitative approach. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 35 young people and/or their families who had received a KUC Studio.

Four different cohorts were identified for interview. These included:

- those having received a studio for less than six months
- those having received a studio for greater than six months and up to two years
- those at the point of exiting the studio program
- those who had exited the program for longer than two years.

There were a number of interesting and significant findings that were revealed through the research on the experiences of young people who participated in the KUC program.

Impact on Family Relations

- The predominant discourse regarding the impact the provision

of a studio had on family relations across the entire cohort was overwhelmingly positive.

- More stable family relations increased the sense of belonging and of being at home and increased the desire to remain at home.
- Risk of homelessness was ameliorated in families where there was risk of premature departure from home for the young person due to family relational discord.
- In families where the studio had been provided for a young mother, the stability and family support this afforded should be understood as critical for identity development for mother and child.
- The loosening of familial bonds, while being difficult for a close-knit family, provides a gradated process allowing for a smoother transition to better family relations and independence.

Impact on Physical and Mental Health

- It is sometimes difficult to separate mental and physical health when assessing the impact of the studio in this area.
- The impact of the studio had been beneficial in providing health safety where a crowded household endangered medication maintenance for the young person.
- Transmission of infection in crowded households can be better managed when more space is available with a studio.
- Relief from the visceral experience of crowding can be had from the allocation of a studio. This has better mental health impacts for the whole family.
- Young people with mental health issues, particularly depression, can experience dramatic improvement from studio provision.
- More insight into carers needs regarding physical and mental health pre- and post-studio installation may be required to better understand these impacts.
- ASD is a complex challenge that may require a more complex long-term response than additional space.

Social and Educational Development

- The home is where the foundation can be laid for safe transition from the private to public for young people.
- Interviewees reflected a KUC studio has the potential to change a house to a home for young people and families.
- Young people and families consistently remarked on the studio providing a renewed sense of home leading to greater social and educational development.
- Gradual independence is encouraged by the separation of the studio from the main house.
- The space of the studio provides for privacy and a quiet place that aids study and educational achievement.
- Reducing crowding in the main residence through a studio assists in more regular sleep and life patterns. This serves to promote social independence and educational achievement.
- Young people consistently credited the KUC studio for their developing maturity and educational reengagement and/or progress.

Employment Opportunities and Aspiration

- The impact of the provision of a studio has for employment aspiration and opportunity is significant.
- The aspiration is built on the reestablishment of the relational and symbolic aspects of home that include security, safety, privacy.
- Safe entry into the public sphere of education, employment and independence is premised on the symbolic elements of home being foundational and positive.
- The additional space of the KUC studio can provide these foundational elements of home that allows development and aspiration to flourish for young people.
- Acquisition of employment for young people, who may be excluded from the labour market due to social and economic limitations, can be facilitated by this relational reconstruction.
- Personal, social and community benefit is significant for those young people enabled to enter the workforce and become independent in their own 'home'.

Conclusion

The consensus among interviewees was that the studios provided to them by KUC had had a significant positive effect on all areas researched. Those young people faced with immediate risk to homelessness or actual homelessness as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics[3] credited the amelioration of risk of homelessness with the provision of the studio. Sarah and her family are but one example of the extraordinary narratives of success that emerged from research into this unique program. Given these findings, the researchers believe this program makes a valuable contribution to early intervention for those young people at risk of homelessness. Additional funding for program extension would provide for further efficient and effective early intervention for youth homelessness.

* Not her real name.

Endnotes

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3. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012, *Information Paper — A Statistical Definition of Homelessness* [4922.0], Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra.

Hope Street and Early Intervention: In Conversation with Donna Bennett, CEO of Hope Street Youth and Family Services

Interviewers: David MacKenzie and Tammy Hand, Upstream Australia

Interviewer: *Can you tell us a bit about your professional background?*

DB: I studied social work at the Phillip Institute in the 1980s which at the time was seen as an innovative and leading social work course. I loved it! As a student I worked at a regional young women's refuge where I honed my knowledge and practice of structural feminism, which still informs my work to this day. My first job was at the Broadmeadows Youth Housing Program as a young family's worker — primarily young women. Around this time was the Burdekin Inquiry into youth homelessness. I think the whole sector appreciated this national recognition of the issue of youth homelessness.

The first 10 to 15 years of my work and as a volunteer on collectives and committees, were very much focused on advocacy and community develop initiatives collaborating with community agencies to establish innovative service models for women and women and children in the homelessness sector in the Northwest region of Melbourne. I was fortunate to be working alongside some very experienced and highly capable women who I learnt a great deal from and continue to incorporate those learnings into my current practices. In these early years I honed my community development skills and leaned what 'true collaboration' could achieve. I loved the community development and engagement work. And I loved working with young people. I always felt so privileged to work with young people and have admired their strength and courage in telling their stories (as a necessity) to receive assistance.

Interviewer: *Can you talk about the beginnings of Hope Street?*

DB: Hope Street must be one of the first youth services and refuges in Melbourne. It started in a local empty convent, with the blessing of the local priest. What happened was a group of local people saw a need to support young people who were turning up at large homelessness night shelters for men in the CBD. These local concerned residents and came together and decided to do something about it. I love the grassroots nature of how Hope Street started.

Hope Street was incorporated in 1981, with the introduction of the Incorporations Act, but it was already in operation before this time. This was also the early days of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program Act which legislated the funding of homelessness services across Australia, so there was a lot of change and new services developing at this time in response to homelessness including for young people.

Despite being first located in a convent, Hope Street is a secular organisation and was in fact named after the street on which it was first located. We are still there.

Interviewer: *What was your first role at Hope Street?*

DB: After I had my first daughter and was enjoying time with her in-between positions. The acting Co-ordinator at the time asked if I could assist with working at as a casual Residential Support Worker. This was a great introduction to the organisation and the team who all so passionate about supporting young people and young families.

Interviewer: *And what other roles have you had at Hope Street?*

DB: Whilst I was covering some shifts in the refuge as a Residential Support Worker, I was approached to apply for the Co-ordinator position. This was the beginning of the next 20 plus years. Over the years as Hope Street developed and changed the position and the title did too — Co-ordinator became Service Manager then became CEO. I feel so privileged and honoured to be a part of such a great organisation with such dedicated and capable people. In all honesty, having social work training and having practice experience has been so important for my work, including my work as the CEO as I understand what it takes to deliver quality services that are truly youth-focused.

Interviewer: *Tell us a bit about what 'youth-focused' means at Hope Street.*

DB: I am very committed to genuine youth focused practice and services in particular models that focus on immediate intervention as well as models that focus on prevention — immediate and long term. Youth focused practice is referred to a great deal however not often implemented. At Hope Street our teams are truly youth-focused.

This is hard work to achieve and in the short-term requires higher level of resourcing. Youth focused practice to me means: providing safe services which in real terms is youth specific, that is, not adult-focused. It also often means 24/7 services with staff support as well as accommodation programs with staff support on site. Services where young people truly feel that they are paramount, and the service is there for them. Flexibility of operational hours outside of 9 to 5pm; flexibility in terms young

people meeting with their worker as rigid appointment times don't always work for young people therefore requiring practitioners to be flexible. The worker going to where the young person is rather than expecting the young person to navigate public transport, particularly to an unfamiliar area and incur the cost of travelling, to where the worker is located. Valuing and acknowledging the experiences of the young person — identifying their strengths with them and working together to build on those strengths as they work towards their goals. Being respectful of young people — their time, knowledge, skills, and experiences and in the way we interact and communicate. It is so important for young people to be making decisions about their goals and their life — by the time they enter our services they have already been making some very difficult life decisions — acknowledging this a strength.

Genuinely provide young people with a voice whether it be determining their own case plan goals and actions or advocacy or sharing of ideas regarding the operation of programs. Ensuring systems are in place to provide young people with a voice to also raise concerns or complaints and for the organisation to respond respectfully and empowering so that it is a positive and safe experience for the young person. Ensuring that the spaces in our offices and buildings are youth-appropriate and youth-friendly — reflective of young people and their diversity and similarities. I've observed the success of youth focused services. Hope Street has also conducted a number of research evaluations and program reviews consistently highlighting the benefits of youth focused services and practice. I could talk about this for hours…

Interviewer: *Is there anything else you like to tell us about Hope Street?*

DB: We are a smaller place-based organisation, smaller than many other not for profit homelessness services in Melbourne and regional Victoria. We value our connection to the local community and are committed to being of service in our local communities. So, we have lots of great relationships with local services in the homelessness sector as well as allied sectors, businesses, schools, groups and clubs, community leaders, and others. These relationships are integral to Hope Street's purpose and to enabling us to provide responsive services to young people and young families within their local community.

Our people, our teams, and our workers are critical. People who come into youth work have a passion for young people and a sense of social justice. And my experience is that they, as workers, thrive in environments like ours that are truly youth focused and youth friendly. We invest in our staff. We build on their skills and dedication. We have staff who are new to the organisation and sector as well as staff who have been with us anywhere from two years to 20 years.

Interviewer: *How and why have you come to be part of the Victorian COSS Consortium?*

DB: Crisis services are important for an immediate response to a young person who is already homeless, as well as services and supports for the long-term. Hope Street's purpose and objectives are also to prevent young people and young families from experiencing homelessness. Diverting young people from homelessness and needing to access crisis services, whilst at the same time supporting vulnerable young people to remain in education is also how we work to achieve our purpose and vision. We understand the challenges for young people trying to remain at school and in education without safe and stable accommodation/ housing as well as the challenges for young people have disengaged from education and are trying to re-engage.

I'm pleased to say that recently Hope Street has joined a consortium as a lead agency to establish the COSS Model in the western metropolitan area of Melbourne. The COSS model dovetails with our existing programs and services for young people. It is a model that provides that key step prior to crisis with the aim of preventing where possible, a young person from entering into the crisis homelessness system. Being able to respond seamlessly to a young person's home/family situation in a way that will keep young people at school and living with their family, where this is safe, is also a key way for Hope Street to achieve our vision. It is a tested successful model that will build on the work we do in our local communities to prevent young people and young families from experiencing homelessness in the immediate and long-term.

The Kids Under Cover Story

Jo Swift, Chief Executive Officer, Kids Under Cover (2007 to 2021)
and Petrina Dorrington, Executive Officer, Kids Under Cover (1997 to 2007)

The Beginning

The release of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) report, *Our Homeless Children* (known as The Burdekin Report), moved Ken Morgan, Ken Morgan, the well-known and successful businessman to found Kids Under Cover (KUC), a charity dedicated to providing homes and safe and secure shelter to homeless young people. It turns out that Ken Morgan grew up in a family of seven siblings and experienced a somewhat troubled and certainly turbulent family life. As a teenager, he headed off hitch-hiking to New South Wales to get away.

One evening a police officer offer came across Ken sleeping out in a park. The officer said, *'you can either continue on a path to homelessness or go back home and make something of yourself'*. The young Ken Morgan decided to take this advice. He returned home, made up with his family and went out and found a job. However, he never forgot where he came from and the difficulties he had experienced as a teenager: *'I feel it inside emotionally* … [and] … *can't describe it to anyone else'*.

KUC was founded in 1989 with support from the Variety Club, some of Melbourne's most successful businesspeople, media personalities, performers, and community workers. The first house was built in 1991. The first backyard bungalow (now called 'studios') was built in 1993. Over the first decade, some 20 properties had been built, but KUC was experiencing a difficult time and not doing well financially. In 1997, the KUC Board brought in new Executive office, Petrina Dorrington. Petrina faced the challenge of reorganising KUC, developing a strategy for growth, and placing the organisation on a firmer financial footing.

At this time, KUC was primarily geared up to assist young people who were already homeless, and where there was some evidence of homelessness. This meant that young people were usually in foster care and the studio was located on the foster carer's backyard where a child 12 years or older (whether that was the young person in foster care or one of the foster's carers other foster/biological children) moved into the studio. In retrospect, without a nomenclature for 'early intervention' KUC was helping families and young people where they were not yet homeless, but they were definitely at-risk of becoming homelessness if nothing was done. Much of what we were doing was effectively early intervention.

The Shift to 'Early Intervention'

In the late 1990s-early 2000s, inspired by the work of Melbourne academic, David MacKenzie, who was (and continues to) research and write about prevention and early intervention strategies for combatting youth homelessness, Petrina sought to reorient KUC more explicitly in line with this perspective

Around this time, KUC received a telephone call from a grandmother whose sick granddaughter was living in a leaky caravan and was unable to return home to live with her parents. The grandmother wanted to be able to care for her granddaughter but was unable to access any support. She phoned KUC seeking a studio for her granddaughter. This request was out of sync with what KUC provided at the time, so Petrina argued with the Board for this case, and won. A studio was installed, and this young woman was prevented from homelessness and was able to live with her grandmother. This was the first instance of KUC providing a studio based on an early intervention strategy.

Petrina realised that KUC could transition to early intervention for youth homelessness with limited changes to their established criteria. Nevertheless, it was hard to 'sell' early intervention to funders. It is much easier to argue for money when a young person is already homeless — a problem that is still ever-present today. Linked to this is that there was, at the time, limited research on social returns on investment for crisis/reaction responses vs prevention and early intervention responses.

The Next Stage

Jo Swift joined KUC in 2003, originally to work on communications. Petrina and Jo worked closely together. In 2007, Jo stepped up as the CEO of KUC while Petrina remained on the board. The bungalow program expanded dramatically in the subsequent years as testified by a record number of 158 studios to be constructed this financial year.

The education scholarship program was introduced in 2004. The KUC strategy of complementing the provision of stable and secure accommodation with educational support has proven to be a simple yet effective approach to the long-term prevention of youth homelessness. The KUC scholarships give young people the support they need to stay in school. The Scholarship Program helps young people at-risk of homelessness, who have the passion and motivation to continue education but don't have the resources. These scholarships are helping young people aged 12 to 25 years old undertaking schooling, TAFE,

university, and job training. The scholarship program is available to young people who have a KUC studio on their property.

A Culture of Research and Reporting

Based on the difficulty Petrina had to secure funding for early intervention without adequate research and reports, Jo Swift knew that data was necessary when advocating to governments. KUC began a program of regular outcomes reports, which included a survey of results from the young people KUC supported, including details about their wellbeing and whether they were still at school. A number of social returns on investment reports about the KUC model were undertaken, and KUC also funded several academic research projects including funding a PHD scholarship.

Also, there was an awareness that KUC should not just bask in their good work and successes. Although they had been successful in the past, this didn't mean that they should stop asking the question, "is this still working?"

A Culture of Innovation and Social Enterprise

KUC was an innovation to begin with. There have been several challenges that have required determination coupled with innovation. The whole nature of KUC derives from innovative thinking and action. Both Petrina and Jo have always sought to avoid financial dependence on any single source. Although this has not always been easy. At one time, KUC was receiving 82 per cent of their income from the Victorian Government when suddenly the government of the day decided to simple turn off this funding stream. A senior public servant rang to personally (out of respect) tell the CEO of KUC the fateful decision: *'your funding is gone … you are out of business'*. Overnight KUC needed to make 30 percent of their staff redundant, and an emergency board meeting was convened to work out what to do. The Board resolved that they needed to continue working to their goal and vision of supporting at-risk and vulnerable young people to prevent youth homelessness. In the end, they secured enough funding to keep the doors open. But this experience served as a valuable lesson about funding and has fuelled KUC's desire to maintain multiple funding sources to enabled them to stay true to their goal and vision of prevention and early intervention for youth homelessness.

KUC have successfully created funding streams from several different sources and activities, including donations from citizens, government funding, philanthropic funding, an annual ball (a previous activity), the cubby house challenge (a previous activity), and a number of social enterprises including Donate-your-car and Nestd, which are unpacked further below.

Donate-Your-Car

Following a three-month study tour scholarship, Petrina set up a working group to investigate a Donate-a-Car program in Australia, which Jo took over and Donate-Your-Car in Australia was launched. This fundraising program is a completely unique social business in Australia and has been highly successful.

Village 21

In 2016, Jo Swift was philanthropically funded to attend Making Innovation Happen course at Cambridge University. Jo went with an idea of KUC having a 'village'. By the end of the course, KUC's idea won 'most innovate' concept and enduring connections were established with several other participants.

The Village 21 concept has since become a reality. A first-of-its-kind, Village 21 is a scaled-up, co-located version of Kid Under Cover's existing Studio Program. The first build of studios for six young people, located in Preston, provides the young people with stable homes, wrap around support and communal living facilities for up to three years.

This innovative village environment assists in creating strong connections back to the community and teaches skills in self-sufficiency including cooking, maintaining shared gardens, and other life skills. Six young people aged 18 to 21 years and two live-in mentors are able to reside on site, with regular visits by an Anglicare Victoria case worker with expertise in employment and study pathways.

Delivered in partnership with Anglicare Victoria, Village 21 was designed to interrupt the spiral of young people leaving care and often find themselves homeless. Reportedly, some one third of young people (35 per cent) leaving OOHC at 18 years of age end up homeless in the first year. Village 21 was developed in response to the unique needs of this cohort.

Nestd

Nestd is KUC's newest social enterprise. The business has been set up to sell architecturally designed compact homes with all profits going back into KUC's programs. Still in its early stages, Nestd shows all the promise of becoming significant income stream.

The future of KUC

It is now public knowledge that Jo Swift is leaving KUC at the end of 2021, after 19 years of leadership and service. Her replacement will be named in the coming weeks. A new phase of KUC begins but it does so on firm footings that have been laid down over 30 years.

The Wodonga Project: Together for Better

Michelle Fell, Client Services Manager, Junction Support Services, and Rachel Habgood, Wodonga Project Lead and Community Development Manager, Junction Support Services

Introduction

The Wodonga Project is a Community of Schools and Services (COSS) initiative group, consisting of local community and health organisations and schools seeking to address local challenges including the number of young people reaching crisis points in homelessness, mental health or school disengagement. Work has been occurring since 2018 to establish the COSS model in Wodonga.

Wodonga is located three and a half hours from Melbourne, on the border of Victoria and New South Wales. Wodonga's population is over 42,000. 7,907 young people aged nine to 24, live in Wodonga making up 20 per cent of the community's population. By 2036 there is expected to be nearly 12,000 young people living in Wodonga. The wider catchment of Wodonga is over 180,000 people.

Approximately 15 years ago, our three local high schools (Years 7 to 12) combined into two Middle Years campuses (years seven to nine) and one Senior College (Years 10 to 12). Wodonga is also fortunate to have a Flexible Learning Centre whose focus is to re-engage vulnerable young people, aged between 15 and 19 years, with education. Additionally, there are also several private secondary schools and transitional schools.

Wodonga as a Community

Over the years, sectoral meetings have discussed the presenting needs and trends amongst young people in Wodonga. The sector recognised the need to do something differently. Firstly, the needs of our young people were increasing and becoming more complex. There were four main drivers for change:

- One out of five young people had experienced high levels of psychological distress.[1]
- Nearly six out of 10 of year seven and nine students (57 per cent) feel socially dis-connected.[2]
- About one third of young people (36 per cent) have witnessed or were involved in

family violence.[3] Wodonga is the thirteenth in Victoria, for reported incidences of Family Violence.[4, 5]

- Only one fifth of young people (19 per cent) who are experiencing poor mental health had access support when needed.[6]

Our local schools echoed these statistics, their own data demonstrating significant increases in wellbeing demands, increased complexity of presenting needs and the frustration of long waiting times to access services. These statistics are just the tip of the iceberg, giving insight into the challenges faced by local young people. Previously, these statistics have been utilised to seek further funding in our crisis services. It is now acknowledged that the demand continues to grow and only funding crisis services, or working harder doing the same thing, does not meet the presenting needs or make lasting change.

Secondly, in regional areas we are used to working together, however silos of support still remained. Unlike metropolitan areas, young people do not have the luxury of choice of service provider. Often there is only one service providing a specific support and services are split across different organisations. A young person may present at risk of homelessness, with experience of family violence, mental health and drug and alcohol concerns. In Wodonga this could mean engagement with four different organisations, who each have different timelines and intake requirements.

Waitlists at times are up to 12 months for support, there are currently 717 households on the public housing register[7] and our local community housing provider, delivered over 5,000 nights of crisis accommodation last year alone.[8]

Regional housing has historically been relatively accessible and affordable, however, now our current rental vacancy rate is 0.3 per cent. It is reported that up to 100 people apply for each rental property, with rental prices skyrocketing. This is forcing many vulnerable people out of housing and has a significant impact on our local young people who are finding themselves homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Thirdly, in 2019–2020, a local deep dive research project explored young people in residential care's experience of mental health and wellbeing services and support. The project was funded by the Ovens and Murray Regional Partnership and delivered by Junction Support Services who are also the lead agency in the Wodonga Project.

Overwhelmingly young people said that without stable accommodation they were unable to manage their mental health and that earlier help was needed, rather than waiting for a major mental health episode to occur. This added further weight to the argument for an early intervention service that incorporated both homelessness and mental health support.

Finally, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has adversely affected our local young people, including long periods of isolation, increased experiences of poor mental health, unemployment and under-employment and significant periods of education instability. In the Ovens Murray area, border restrictions and closures have added additional disruption. While many young people live in Wodonga they or their parents may work or go to school on the other side of the border. Therefore, adding an extra layer of isolation. The pandemic became the final driver for COSS establishment as it could provide early intervention support preventing further fall out from the pandemic.

Taking the Initiative to Effect Change

The youth sector has recognised the increasing needs of our young people. More young people and their families were ending up in crisis,

our services, while dedicated and skilled, were and are unable to keep up with the demand, resulting in high waitlists, perpetuated disadvantage and a traumatised and stressed system. Therefore, the local sector started to look for a different way.

We asked:

> *'How can we disrupt the flow of young people entering our crisis systems'*

> *'What would it look like if young people got the support they needed when they needed it'*

In March 2018, the Albury Project (COSS model) held a community forum announcing intention to begin COSS in Albury. Members from many local service organisations attended this first meeting.
As the evidence was presented, we felt ourselves agreeing and thinking *'we need this too'* and *'this sounds like a perfect fit for Wodonga'*.

July 2018 saw the COSS presented to the Local Learning and Employment (LLEN) Forum. Wodonga's LLEN initiated meetings with a range of interested local organisations and schools. At these meetings we determined that the COSS model was not just a great idea, but an initiative that met our local needs, building on and giving architecture to the system change that was already being explored. The collective then reached out to Associate Professor David MacKenzie and began conversations about becoming an initiative site.

In March 2019, a formal working group was established with each organisation committing seed funding for initial Research and Development. We were awarded a Wodonga Council's Community Impact grant of $30,000 over three years. This helped fund our ongoing development at this early stage.

June 2019 saw Junction Support Services (Junction) appointed the lead agency and they continued the backbone work. Junction is an award winning not-for-profit organisation, providing children, youth and family services. Junction operates in the regional/rural areas of the Ovens and Murray, with 28 program, 200 staff and 40 volunteers. Junction provides services in homelessness, family violence and youth support including operating residential care houses and a youth refuge. Junction has committed to continue funding the Project Lead role, well after our seed funding finished.

Significant readiness work has now occurred including the employment of a COSS Project Lead who oversees and facilitates the work of the collective including numerous consultations with schools and service providers, consolidation of partners, development of a Statement of Commitment, development of briefing documents, branding, development and implementation of advocacy plans, meetings with local, state and federal representatives, search for funding opportunities and exploration of current services provided to schools to investigate the possibility of streamlining.

Conversations continue with stakeholders about what existing programs can be aligned with COSS including, exploration around pathways into services including fast tracking, standardising of intake processes and developing a 'no wrong door' approach to services for young people in Wodonga.

In April 2021, we brought together 38 individuals representing 16 organisations for Collaboration/ Collective Impact training run by Twyfords Collaboration. These 38 individuals included CEOs, board members, senior staff/ teachers and local principals.

Discussion have been held with the school Wellbeing teams to discuss the model and how it might fit within each individual campus.

Strong advocacy regarding the needs of our community has occurred and the project has become one of the Ovens and Murray Regional Partnership's top 10 priorities.

Active engagement has occurred with the Albury and Geelong projects to glean as much learning as possible. Firm connections with Upstream Australia (backbone support for COSS) have been established, to advocate for sustainable, embedded funding.

Where We Are Up To

Work has begun on the development of a Memorandum of Understanding which will be based around our community values and the values of collective impact. It will also include service level agreements and commitments to COSS model fidelity.

At this point, we are proud to call ourselves 'shovel ready', and we are proud of the work that we have completed together. This for us, is not just about another program to help, rather it's about system change. It is about removing barriers for engagement as a collaborative, it's about better outcomes for young people and it's about a focus on intervening earlier in the upstream to alleviate the downstream impacts.

It is recognised that our success hinges on having a clear and common agenda and a commitment from all parties to do and think differently. It is a commitment to be transparent about ways of working that are not working. It is about joining forces as our project tagline states: *'3690, together for better'*.

So now we actively wait, hoping for funding in the next state budget to establish the Wodonga Project. We do not wait idly, we continue to advocate, to identify the gaps, to lobby and to work on improving our local system.

As we reflect on our journey to this point, we also celebrate how far we have come; soon we will be holding our own community forums and hopefully, like Albury which inspired us, we'll inspire another community to take up the COSS model.

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Early Intervention for Homeless Infants Begins in Refuge

Dr Emma van Daal, DThAP, MCouns, BA (Psych) and Paula Westhead, Emerge Executive Officer

Homeless infants (zero to five years old) are identified in the scholarship as being especially vulnerable due to the considerable short and long-term risks to development, physical and mental health, and social-emotional well-being that are associated with homelessness.[1] Homelessness is experienced alongside poverty, parenting/family stress, mental health issues, cultural dislocation, and domestic/family violence (DFV); all of which have a cumulative trauma effect for infants. Overlay the deleterious effects COVID-19 and stay-at-home orders have had, adding stress during pregnancy, reduced social support, increased isolation, infants being out of view of services, and the social-emotional deprivation 'COVID babies' are subject to,[2] providing early intervention (EI) in refuge has never been more urgent.

Despite understanding the gravitas of poor outcomes for homeless infants, refuges hold the difficult tension of prioritising housing and practical needs over offering EI to traumatised infants in their care. The current funding structure of Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) is not set up to provide EI for homeless infants; yet, there is an urgency for refuges do so.[3,4] The literature tells us we must go beyond simply addressing practical needs and offer a dedicated approach to EI that prioritises consideration of the subjective and emotional experience of the infant.[5]

This article briefly describes two examples of best practice of EI with infants in refuge. First, we consider the core tenets that underpin *Emerge: Women and Children Support Network*'s infant mental health (IMH) program for infants residing in refuge. Second, we propose an IMH consultancy initiative that refuges can access to provide EI to homeless infants.

Early Intervention in a Refuge Setting

Emerge is a Melbourne based DFV refuge who has been offering crisis accommodation to women and children made homeless by DFV for almost half a century. The IMH program was created in 2013 in response to the traumatised infants coming into our service who needed EI but could not access it. We recognised the crisis facing infants is not identical to adults or older children — for infants, the crisis is manifold, impacting every aspect of their inner and outer worlds, carrying their vulnerability forward into childhood and adulthood.

Emerge realised EI needed to extend beyond providing temporary housing, case management, and links to early childhood services, by addressing the multi-dimensional effects of trauma from when infants first arrive. EI also needed to address the immediate and long-term aims of both intervention and prevention.

Bridging the gaps between the housing and health systems that overlook the crisis homeless infants face, we prioritise and provide EI from when we meet families. Our IMH program has grown from the mother-infant group program, Peek-a-Boo Club©[6] to include parent-infant therapy and, 'Safe Nest group', a research project with Swinburne University and Murdoch Children's Research Institute, funded by ANROWS. The IMH program aimed to achieve something uncommon in the Victorian refuge sector: to adopt an infant-led approach to EI that privileged seeing, hearing, and wondering about the subjectivity of the infants[7] and offer infants their own therapeutic intervention. Failing to create spaces for infants to communicate their experiences and offer attuned relationships with other caregivers, denies infants a voice, inhibiting trauma healing and recovery. The therapeutic interventions that shape our IMH program deliberately focus on the infant who possesses inherent capacities for agency and communication, with the same right to receive direct support. We have proudly assisted over 100 infants and their mothers since instituting the IMH program.

As a SHS, Emerge, has had to deal with the challenges of insufficient funding, government policies and guidelines ignorant of the crisis for the infant, and navigating disorganised, disconnected, overwhelmed, and under-resourced systems. The emerging research shows refuges are well placed to do this work,[8] but these issues jeopardise the implementation and sustainability of EI. Our aim is to offer guidance to SHS providers wishing to offer EI to this cohort by drawing from our experience in overcoming these issues to successfully implement EI in refuge.

Core Tenets of Early Intervention

This section briefly describes the main tenets guiding EI design and delivery with infants in refuge grounded in the literature, client feedback, program evaluation, and practice wisdom. They are inter-related and overlap. A more in-depth discussion is outside the scope of this article; however, we hope it encourages refuges to consider EI and not wait for systems to get organised.

1. EI begins when the infant arrives. Infants cannot afford to wait. They are the *most in need* and therefore, need to be *the first to receive*. An important driver of trauma healing and

recovery are interpersonal interactions characterised by relational safety, connection, and love which refuge staff can offer without adding to their workload. This means shifting away from relying on goal focused approaches and attending to fostering the internal change that needs to happen first.

2. Holding the infant in mind by privileging their thoughts, feelings, experiences, and relationships with others, viewing infants as agents of change and not as passive extensions of a parent.

3. EI is grounded in the IMH principles that: prioritises infant subjectivity and recognises the relationships that are important to *them*; promote, prevents, and addresses infant mental health problems and disruptions; supports a specialised workforce through training, professional development, and consultation.

4. Relationship-based practice that models a way of *being* and *doing* with infants and families by wondering deeply about what they are showing/telling us about their worlds. Establishing and maintaining attuned relationships that utilise the professional use-of-self, promotes self-efficacy and self-agency. The quality of the infant-practitioner relationship is a fundamental element of EI.

5. Continuity of care and wrap around support. For EI to be effective, it must connect to a larger whole. Staff provide a secure base that mother-infant dyads can refer to for support in a consistent way, whilst being able to access other early childhood education, health, and specialist IMH professionals when needed. We recommend interdisciplinary collaborations focused on EI, not tied to outcome driven models of service delivery.

6. Reflective practice in IMH is an ongoing process of gentle but critical inquiry into what is unknown, wondering about the infant's experience in the context of different relational spaces, and forms a reflexive alliance of multiple and different early interventionists.

Model of Consultation for Infants in Refuges

IMH consultation programs provided by an external agency is a model effectively used overseas assisting infants in DFV refuges[9, 10,] with the real potential to be applied in Australia. This type of initiative offers clear key benefits as well as addressing the challenges refuges struggle to overcome such as funding, specialist staff, resources, and adult-centric policies and practice. By outlining the main advantages, we can begin to think and work together as a sector about how all refuges can offer EI. These are:

- Access clinical expertise about the impacts of trauma on early development and guidance in how to address these.
- Provide a safe space for staff to explore complex thoughts, feelings, and experiences, and receive reflective supervision.
- Holds the infant in mind, raising their voice(s) in spaces where they are often lost or ignored.
- Assist case managers to adopt a relational lens that views the client-practitioner relationship as transformative and fundamental for EI to be effective.
- Integrates child-focused approaches with the experiences of adults.
- Incorporates IMH principles to program and policy design and influences organisational strategic thinking.
- One consultant can support multiple refuges, cutting costs and increasing the number of infants reached.[11]

Closing Thoughts

Emerge have benefitted profoundly from the consultation with Dr Wendy Bunston, drawing from her extensive expertise in the field to enable us to prioritise the infants in our care. Ultimately, the IMH consultant helps to ease the burden of responsibility on refuges to do more and who lack the resources and infrastructure to do so, whilst offering EI to homeless infants.

Overall, a consultation program provides primary, secondary, and tertiary support with the main objective of building the capacities of staff and the organisation to become competent and feel confident in supporting homeless infants. We hope that the two examples of early intervention in this article allow a greater number of infants and families to begin to recover and heal from trauma, reducing their vulnerability. In closing, both EI and IMH consultation need to be offered from the start.

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The Upstream Cymru Story: A Tale of International Exchange, Collaboration and Persistence

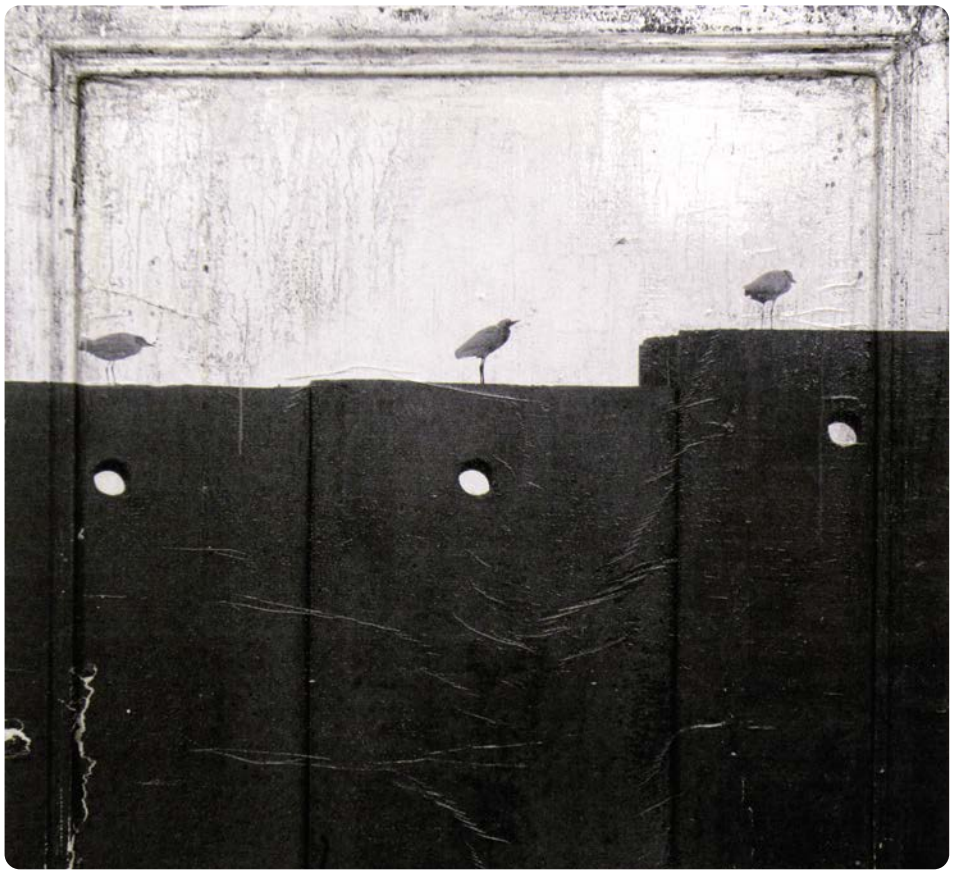
Dr. Peter Mackie, Reader, Cardiff University, Sam Austin, Deputy Director, Llamau, Frances Beecher, Chief Executive, Llamau, Erin Doherty, Upstream Cymru Research Assistant, Cardiff University, Talog Harries, Upstream Cymru Project Co-ordinator, Llamau

2017 was a memorable year. The *End Youth Homelessness Cymru* (EYHC) coalition was launched with a goal of ending youth homelessness in Wales within 10 years. The Coalition's goals were supported by the First Minister of Wales at the time, Carwyn Jones, who stated: 'We believe we have a wonderful opportunity here in Wales to deliver real change. If we can put a man on the moon, we can surely end youth homelessness in Wales'. There was a collective will to rethink responses to youth homelessness in Wales by prioritising prevention and a real appetite for new approaches. In 2018, news about the success of The Geelong Project (TGP) in Australia reached Wales and by 2020 *Upstream Cymru* had been launched. This brief article tells the story of the development and implementation of the initiative.

2018: Discovery and Inception

The journey began in February 2018 when Tamsin Stirling, a leading voice in the Welsh homelessness sector, tweeted an article about the incredible impacts of TGP and tagged key staff members at Llamau (Wales's leading youth homelessness charity), including the EYHC Co-ordinator, Hugh Russell.

The Geelong Project will already be well-known to most people reading this article, however the key components of the intervention are; a universal screening tool (that is, a survey) undertaken in schools to identify risk of homelessness, and a collaboration of schools and services that seek to put in place appropriate supports to a cohort of young people during secondary school.

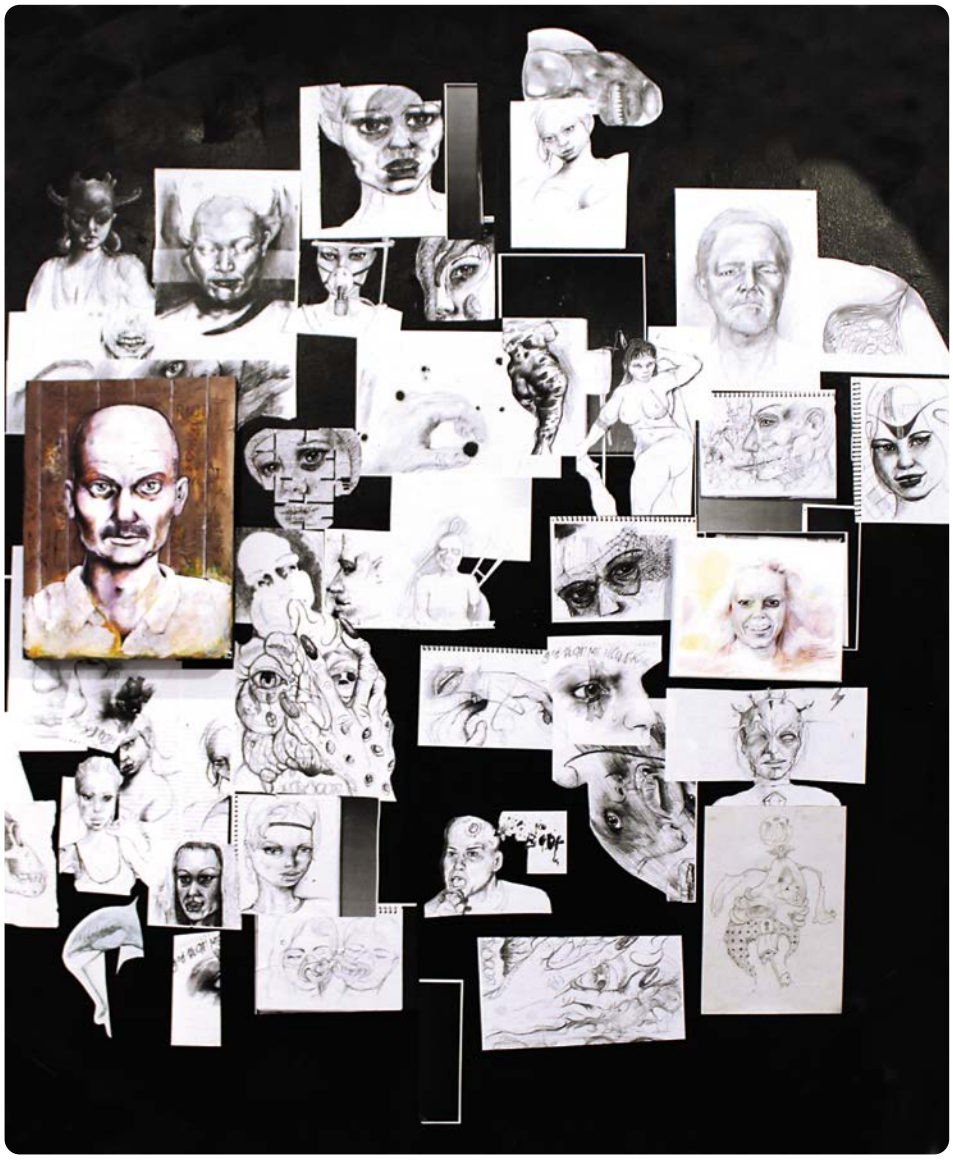


Within months of the initial tweet, international links between EYHC and the architect of TGP, Professor David MacKenzie, had been established, including in person at the *A Way Home Europe* launch.

Academics have played a key role in all contexts where Upstream is being implemented and this was also the case in Wales. Dr Peter Mackie was introduced to Upstream by the EYHC co-ordinator and in parallel he was invited by Canadian colleagues (Professor Steven Gaetz and Melanie Redman) to be part of the Upstream International Living Lab (UILL) — a coalition led by David MacKenzie and supporting the development of Upstream in Australia, Canada, the United States, and now Wales. These international links proved pivotal to the speed at which Upstream could be developed in Wales.

By September 2018, Llamau and the EYHC co-ordinator had begun to engage with senior staff in two local authorities (Cardiff and Rhondda Cynon Taf), including elected leaders and officials with responsibility for youth services, housing, and education. The Welsh coalition was building.

In October 2018, Canadian colleagues authored a report for the Wales Centre for Public Policy[1] where they cited evidence on the effectiveness of The Geelong Project. The Welsh Government responded to this report and in December 2018 committed £3.7m to strengthen existing services *'drawing on the principles of the Geelong model'*.[2] The initial year of discovery and inception ended very positively with hope that this funding might enable meaningful, Wales-wide development of *Upstream Cymru*.



2019: Building a Coalition and Adapting Tools

In early 2019, following multiple discussions between Llamau, Dr Mackie and Welsh Government, it became clear that commitments to *'Geelong principles'* would not equate to implementation of *Upstream Cymru* — most crucially there was no desire at that time to see the development or implementation of a new screening tool. A proposal to a large foundation was also unsuccessful. Funding challenges impacted on the nature of ongoing discussions with local authority partners who would now be required to fund the intervention independently. Additionally, Llamau committed to use their own resources to fund the licence required for the online survey system (discussed later).

The second quarter of 2019 was spent in multiple, detailed, time-consuming, movement-building conversations with potential collaborators in the two local authorities and Llamau and the team were also successful in securing interest from a third authority (Caerphilly). These meetings included important discussions about data protection and privacy, with incredible support provided by the Data Protection lead in one local authority.

In parallel to coalition building efforts, a substantial piece of work was undertaken to adapt the Australian Index of Adolescent Development survey (the screening tool used by TGP) for the Welsh context. Partners in the UILL provided essential support to Dr Mackie who was responsible for leading on the screening tool development in Wales. Colleagues from Australia provided advice on their screening tool, including approaches to scoring and identification of young people at risk, and North American colleagues were able to share their adaptations of the Australian survey. Crucially, in Wales the decision was made to collaborate with Professor Amanda Kirby and DoIT Profiler, enabling *Upstream Cymru* to implement the screening tool online, in a manner suitable to neurodiverse young people.

Despite the funding challenges that characterised the start of the year, the second year of coalition building and survey development ended positively, with an enthusiastic reception and a desire to be part of *Upstream Cymru* from the first school in Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) — Mountain Ash Comprehensive. Multiple meetings took place with the school between November and early into the New Year.

2020: Launching a Schools-based Initiative in a Global Pandemic

In the first quarter of 2020, naïve to the emerging global pandemic on the horizon, the *Upstream Cymru* coalition was in the final stages of preparing for the launch of the initiative in four schools, across two local authorities (RCT and Caerphilly). One of the most important steps was the recruitment of the *Upstream Cymru* Co-ordinator, Talog Harries. An experienced family mediator, Talog was recently described in the following way: *'If we'd genetically engineered the perfect project manager, they'd probably do a worse job than Tal'*. Talog has since been the keystone of *Upstream Cymru*. His appointment was accompanied by the recruitment of skilled family mediation staff, all of whom were ready to begin in February 2020.

Additionally, final amendments were made to the online survey (following input from teachers and young people with experience of homelessness), all data protection and privacy requirements were signed off, the *Upstream Cymru* team were trained in the use of the online tool, and start of intervention meetings were held with schools. Meetings were also held with two schools ahead of a potential later launch of *Upstream Cymru* in Cardiff.

In late March 2020, the COVID-19 global pandemic caused all schools to close, with some vulnerable children and those whose parents were both key workers, able to access school hubs. The *Upstream Cymru* team, and Llamau more generally,

developed a COVID-19 response strategy; remote mediation support was made available to children in hubs and through Social Services referrals. In the absence of the screening tool, this direct-referral approach continued throughout the first period of lockdown in Wales, which lasted until early in the summer term in June 2020.

In July 2020, *Upstream Cymru* mediators also began operating in Cardiff. While some schools were open, and *Upstream Cymru* staff were able to begin working within schools in Caerphilly and RCT, it continued to be impossible to progress the screening tool survey due to the immense pressures on schools.

The return of pupils to schools in September 2020, after the summer break, continued to be problematic as there were many pupil and staff absences and local lockdowns. Yet, it was possible for *Upstream Cymru* staff to work within schools and the first 300 surveys were completed in the two RCT schools. It was December before the next surveys were undertaken, this time in a Cardiff school, however after just one class was surveyed, another lockdown was announced that would continue until spring 2021. This third year of *Upstream Cymru* was exceptionally challenging, yet the team were able to support some very vulnerable young people and their families through the global pandemic, while also piloting the survey tool, and extending the intervention to include the Welsh capital.

2021: Emerging from the Pandemic Crisis Response

In March 2021, before the second major lockdown in Wales ended, while *Upstream Cymru* was still operating in COVID-19 crisis response mode, RCT discontinued their involvement — ending support for young people in two schools. Whether this will be permanent or a temporary suspension remains to be seen. There will be a separate, more detailed process evaluation that will shed light on the drivers behind this decision but buy-in at an operational level within youth services and the inability of the *Upstream Cymru* team to fully implement the screening tool survey are likely to be key factors.

In spring 2021, the lockdown was lifted and the *Upstream Cymru* team were able to quickly move forwards with screening tool surveys in Cardiff (April–May 2021) and Caerphilly (May–July 2021). By July 2021 approximately 1,200 surveys had been completed.

As schools closed for the summer it provided an opportunity for the *Upstream Cymru* team to reflect on what has been learned so far. Presentations were delivered at key Welsh homelessness and youth work events, raising awareness of *Upstream Cymru*, its successes and challenges, and the early findings from the surveys. Additionally, a successful international event[3] was held, including presentations from David MacKenzie and Tammy Hand from *Upstream Australia*. These events have sparked further interest in other Welsh local authorities, in Scotland and in Belgium.

Summer 2021 also provided an opportunity to reflect critically on the risk scoring applied predominantly from the Australian screening tool. Operationally the scoring had proved ineffective and so revisions were made and implemented through the DoIT profiler system. These amendments were due to go live at the time of writing and are likely to significantly improve the speed at which young people at risk of homelessness can be identified through the screening tool. We cautiously look on 2021 as a period of emergence from the pandemic and a shift towards true implementation of *Upstream Cymru*.

Some Reflections

This article provides a narrative of the *Upstream Cymru* journey so far, documenting some of the important milestones. The intention is not to provide a thorough critical analysis of the implementation process, but it is possible to identify three key enablers/challenges:

1. International collaboration has been crucial to the development of Upstream Cymru. Key support, particularly from David MacKenzie in Australia, included: robust evidence on the effectiveness of TGP, access to survey tools, and an unofficial 'phone-a-friend' advice hotline. Upstream Canada even provided the logo.

2. Key individuals in local authorities, schools, Llamau (the Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Upstream Cymru co-ordinator), as well as Hugh Russell the EYHC co-ordinator and Dr Peter Mackie, were the core of the collaboration that has built the Upstream Cymru coalition and launching the initiative in Wales. Without their commitment and drive, often against some opposition at local or national level, Upstream Cymru would not have reached its current stage.

3. Sustainable long-term funding remains important to the long-term success of the intervention and its scaleup. Funding has been somewhat problematic in Wales, with no Welsh Government support and generally only short-term commitments from local authorities.

Clearly, in the longer-term, a more sustainable infrastructural resourcing is necessary. We do not see the Upstream Cymru initiative as an 'add-on' programme but in its fully mature form, a significant change in what happens for vulnerable young people and their families that starts to reform and reshape a more effective local services ecosystem.

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Chapter 4:
DEBATE: Rethinking a strategy for homelessness

Introduction: The 'Functional Zero' Debate

Guest Editors David MacKenzie, Director, Upstream Australia, University of South Australia and Tammy Hand, Senior Research and Development Manager, Upstream Australia

With two parliamentary reports on homelessness released this year, the youth sector pressing for a strategy to end youth homelessness and the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement due to be reviewed and renewed in 2023, the strategic questions about how to actually reduce and ultimate end homelessness Australia are the order of the day. So what would a strategy to end homelessness look like? The following articles by David Pearson, Bob Erlenbusch and Barbara Duffield on 'Functional Zero' are contributions to that debate about how to address homelessness.

David Pearson is well-known in the homelessness sector as the tireless promoter of the Adelaide Project Zero, which mobilised a coalition of some 30 organisations to focus on street homelessness in Adelaide, committed to 'working to end street homelessness in Adelaide' and achieving a 2020 target of functional zero homelessness in the central business district (CBD) of Adelaide. The Adelaide project is a translation of the street homelessness strategy led by Community Solutions in the United States (US) and its partners. Interest in street homelessness was certainly high during the COVID-19 pandemic because of concerns that people sleeping rough were in situations dangerous to their health and the health of others. The functional zero approach of refocusing on chronic street homelessness may have benefited from this conjuncture.

However, questions have been raised about the claim that focusing on street homelessness is the right first step along a path to ending homelessness in Adelaide or anywhere else. Reducing the number of people sleeping rough in the CBD is not the same as reducing homelessness especially when homelessness is understood, as it is in Australia, as a much broader range of situations than just rooflessness. Other expressed concerns about the Adelaide Zero Project are that a sprawling suburban city such as Adelaide is modelling its response to homelessness on the street sleeping response in US high-rise mega-cities with large resident populations in the city. Also, homelessness is defined more narrowly in the US than Australia; and the definitional different is not made explicit. Finally, the Australian approach implicitly recognises that a focus on rough sleeping in the CBD is conceptually blind to a broader ecosystem approach to the problem of homelessness that includes a major effort on prevention and early intervention as well as post-homelessness housing options.

The articles by Erlenbusch and Duffield do present a contrary view about functional zero in the United States. Erlenbusch raises a number of objections. The first is that talking about ending homelessness but then redefining the end as 'functional zero' is a form of spin not a meaningful scientific position. Secondly, he raises objections that to claim success in the growing number of cities seeking to end homelessness by adopting 10-year plans is hollow if many of the cities have shelved their plans or not been able to fulfill them.

Finally, Erlenbusch points out that there is a policy discourse underway about redefining what it means to end homelessness when the focus should be on how that might actually be achieved.

Duffield who heads up a national NGO, SchoolHouse Connection expresses the passionate concern that youth homelessness is a huge problem in the US deserving of much more in the way assistance than has been available. She also questions that the focus on chronic homelessness, which has been the dominate paradigm in the US, has really not been able to demonstrate progress in the terms that it has been promoted.

Is David Pearson's argument that the focus on street homelessness is a form of prevention — 'the perfect pairing'? Or are Erlenbusch and Duffield right to be warning us that the approach in the USA of focusing on chronic street homelessness is not to be accepted uncritically, and on the evidence, not succeeding in ending homelessness.

The still influential 2008 White paper, *The Road Home*, and the two 2021 parliamentary inquiry reports, as well as the current plans for responding to homelessness in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory all have a policy frame of prevention and early intervention, an effective crisis response when that is needed and a range of post-homelessness affordable, social and supportive housing options. The response to CBD rough sleeping is a small but necessary part of that framing of the problem. The big question is whether the response to homelessness in Australia needs major redevelopment? While the answer to that is probably a cautious 'yes', as some of the articles in this issue would suggest, there are clearly some differing views.

Let the debate begin and the various strategies and interventions be considered on the evidence.

By Name Lists and Prevention, The Perfect Pairing?

Jessica Dobrovic, The Australian Alliance to End Homelessness
and David Pearson, The Australian Alliance to End Homelessness

South African human rights campaigner Archbishop Desmond Tutu once said that *'there comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in.'* When it comes to the way we fund and operate homelessness services the time has well and truly come to focus more of our efforts on preventing people from falling into homelessness. The question is how?

Despite appalling measurement of the issue in Australia, all indicators point to the fact that homelessness is not just growing but diversifying. In the four years leading up to 2018–19, homelessness across Australia climbed by 14 per cent, equating to approximately 290,000 people seeking help from homelessness support services during the 2018/19 financial year.[1] The diversification we have seen in recent years has been contributed to by many factors, not least the global pandemic, which influenced social, economic and personal factors that both contribute to homelessness and are caused by homelessness. We continue to spend much homelessness funding on crisis responses such as emergency motel accommodation; expenditure in emergency motel accommodation had already risen 27 per cent in the four years leading up to the outbreak of COVID-19 in Australia.[2]

There is a reason we have not re-oriented our homelessness systems away from crisis, towards prevention — and that's because it is hard. Hard for many reasons: lack of housing, crisis responses being a focus, a lack of granular data at a community level to drive prevention to name a few. Prevention can be difficult to measure because success is often reliant on what does not occur. A secondary reason that homelessness prevention can be difficult, is that we don't have complete line of sight into the ways in which people may become homeless in different communities across Australia. There is a veritable kaleidoscope of reasons someone may end up in the homelessness system, but if we can identify key drivers and systems that contribute to the trajectory into homelessness then we can work towards prevention.

Australian Alliance to End Homelessness[3] supports Australian communities to individually and collectively work towards ending homelessness. The AAEH has worked with a range of international partners and local Australian communities to develop the Australian Advance to Zero (AtoZ) homelessness methodology. Through a shared vision to end all homelessness in Australia, starting with those sleeping rough, the AtoZ methodology incorporates the following:

1. a housing first approach
2. person-centered, strengths-based approach
3. evidence-based systems change approach; and
4. a place-based collective impact approach to collaboration.

A Shared Vision			
To end all homelessness in Australia, starting with rough sleeping, by ensuring that when it doesw occur it is rare, brief one-time.			
Four Approaches to Ending Homelessness			
A Housing First approach.	**A person-centred, strengths-based approach.**	**An evidence-based systems change approach.**	**A place-based collective impact approach to collaboration.**
Eight Proven Solutions			
Assertive Outreach		**Continuous Improvement**	
Common Assessment		**Data-driven Prevention**	
A Real-time Time By-name List		**Data-informed System Advocacy**	
Coordinated Systems		**More of the Right Housing and Supply**	

Figure 1: The Australian Advance to Zero Homelessness Methodology.

Source: AAEH, 2021

AtoZ methodology recognises the complexity involved in seeking to end homelessness and is why it seeks to implement all these approaches simultaneously through a range of proven solutions. See Figure 1 and the AAEH website for more information about this methodology — which is continually being developed and refined though the community of practice that makes up the *Advance to Zero* campaign.

Data driven prevention, is one of these solutions and is enabled by the creation of by-name lists (BNL). The subsequent real time understanding the vulnerabilities of everyone experiencing all forms of homelessness in a community, as well as the flow into and out of homelessness in that community.

The idea of a BNL came from Community Solutions[4] in the United States. In 2010, they launched an initiative, the *100,000 Homes Campaign*, focusing on providing housing to vulnerable people experiencing homelessness. While this goal was exceeded, and housing placement rates improved significantly, there was a limited overall reduction in the number of people experiencing homelessness. The campaign discovered that just housing people won't get us to the goal we all share — an end to homelessness. Community Solutions made two key changes as a result of this campaign. The first was, rather than counting the increasing number of people with housing placements, it would make more sense to count down the number of people experiencing homelessness in the community. The second was providing housing for individuals, while part of ending homelessness was not the only focus required. The community needed to look further upstream towards the trajectory of people experiencing homelessness and look towards preventing people from flowing into the system — what is often called 'turning of the tap'.

Based on the premise that it is fundamental to know who is experiencing homelessness in order to end it. A BNL is a comprehensive list of every individual in a community experiencing homelessness. It is not just about knowing people by name or a data collection exercise, it gives a view of the entire community experiencing homelessness., some indicators as to what factors may have led to their homelessness and provides an understanding of presenting vulnerabilities they are experiencing. BNLs in Australia are created using an assessment called the Vulnerability Index, Service Prioritisation Decision Assistance Tool (VI-SPDAT). It asks questions across four key domains: history of homelessness, risks, socialisation and daily functioning, and wellness.

A crucial component of the methodology is that this by-name data is community owned and led. The collective community ownership of the data enables the various levels of governments (local, state and federal) — as well as government arms (health, housing, specialist homelessness, anti-poverty and many other services), along with the services they fund and the services they do not fund, to all more easily work together. No one agency owns this data, the community does — in trust on behalf of the people who shared their information. This collaborative approach is known as collective impact, and it is an effective way for anyone with an interest in ending homelessness to work together, share resources and ideas, and how they can work towards reducing the number of people experiencing homelessness — through prevention and housing.

Rather than counting down to absolute zero, something that can only ever be achieved at a point in time, the AtoZ methodology works towards something known as *functional zero*. Community Solutions[5] identified that homelessness is a dynamic problem, so how we define the end state we are seeking to bring about needs to be equally dynamic. Functional zero provides a way to measure and end street homelessness over time, by demonstrating that any instances of homelessness that do occur are rare, brief and a one-time occurrence. Why this notion of functional zero is relevant to prevention is because when we make the goal to achieve rare, brief and non-recurring homelessness we give communities the tools to make prevention efforts measurable.

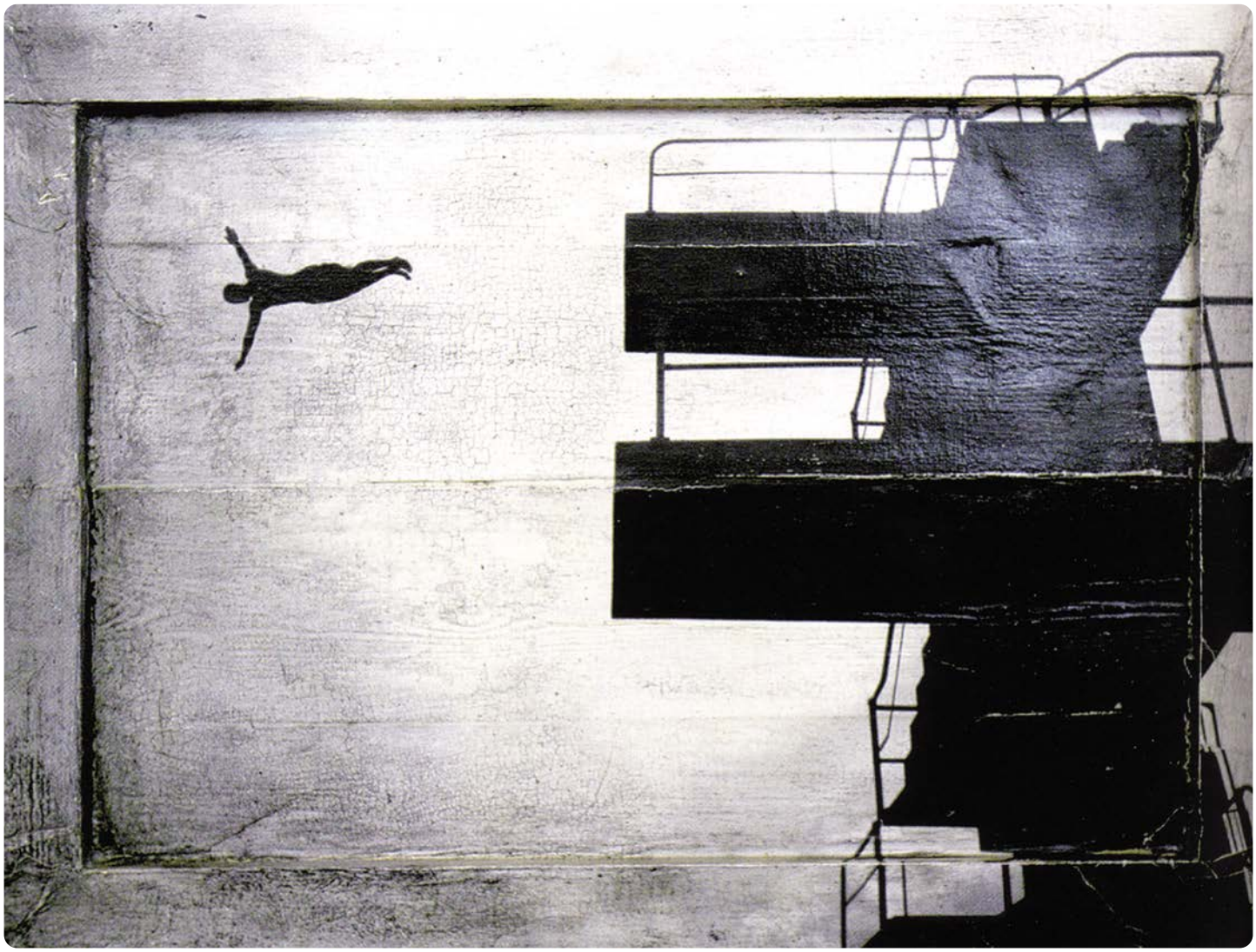
One of the most important things about prevention the alliance found supporting communities across Australia. Is that when we are talking prevention, we're often speaking different languages. To help with this we use the *Typology of Homelessness Prevention* outlined in Figure 2 below.

1. With a community owned and led BNL, systems and structural prevention can be advocated for using real time data that understands inflows to the community, homelessness experienced and what could prevent further homelessness episodes for people.

2. Though a series of quality improvement science measures the AtoZ methodology seeks to drive system change

Figure 2: Typology of Homelessness prevention.

Source: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, 2021[6]



though the use of small tests of change, using the system wide data BNLs provide.

3. When all individuals in a community, and their needs are known, by name, new people entering a community can be more swiftly identified, and can be supported at an earlier stage in their homelessness experience, supporting early intervention.

4. Eviction prevention can be addressed through communities knowing and understanding the reasons people may be losing their housing placements and working with associated housing providers to notify key service providers before eviction occurs.

5. The AtoZ methodology support housing stability by building an understanding of how an individual's vulnerabilities may impact their homelessness and tenancy. Working together as a community of agencies to ensure best housing placement options for tenancy retention.

Homelessness in Australia is solvable, and we are already seeing the impact of the implementation of the Advance to Zero methodology across communities in almost every state. The more we understand communities experiencing homelessness, the better equipped we are to be able to utilise the scare resources we have as effectively as possible. To continue to drive prevention and advocate for the needs of precise housing and support that we know people experiencing homelessness need.

What the pandemic showed is that, when needed, resources can come together to support vulnerable people, and that big changes are possible. AAEH recognises that ending homelessness is possible in Australia, but only if we come together in new ways, to build the evidence though community owned data and to use that data to drive improved outcomes. More collaborative data driven efforts will enable us to not just more effectively rescue people from drowning, or to work with them to prevent them from falling into homelessness (or the river!) in the first place, but most importantly to put the needs and voices of people experiencing homelessness at the center of our efforts to end homelessness.

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Homelessness and 'Functional Zero': A Critique

Bob Erlenbusch, Executive Director, Sacramento Regional Coalition to End Homelessness and Board member, National Coalition for the Homeless

'Functional zero: At any point in time, the number of people experiencing sheltered or unsheltered homelessness will be no greater than the current monthly housing placement rate for people experiencing homelessness.'
— Community Solutions

'If you can't explain it to a six year-old, you don't understand it yourself'
— Albert Einstein

For years, homeless advocates have argued about the definition of homelessness and how inclusive or limited it should be. This is not an esoteric exercise, since the answer drives federal resources.

Sadly, some researchers, consultants and advocates convinced Congress years ago to a much more limited definition of homelessness along with focusing resources first on the chronically homeless, with veterans, families and youth all next in line. This was done on the fallacious argument that once we ended chronic street homelessness, we could then devote resources to ending it for the next sub-population. This did not happen and hundreds of thousands of people experiencing homelessness have remained invisible to our leaders at all levels.

'When people are invisible, you can't find a solution because you don't see them'
— Marc Uhry, Fondation Abbe Pierre

Ten year plans to end homelessness are in their second decade or abandoned altogether.

Rather than focus on the systemic and structural systems and policies that have created three decades of mass homelessness — beginning with President Reagan devastating the federal affordable housing budget by 75 percent in 1980; the continuing dismantling of local, state and federal housing, social services, health and mental health budgets; discharge policies from prisons, jails, hospital and foster care that routinely discharge people to the streets and a minimum wage that keeps people shackled to poverty — we now seek to arrest and define our way out of homelessness.

Criminalisation of Homelessness

Despite the admonition by the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness [USICH] to communities to move away from trying to 'arrest their way out of homelessness,' the number of anti-homeless ordinances in the nation has proliferated. For example, the Sacramento city has 11 municipal codes that criminalise people experiencing homeless — five for standing, sitting and resting in public places; five for camping in public places and three that criminalise begging or panhandling. Prisons and jails have become the housing for people experiencing homelessness, especially people of color and those with mental health issues.

Functional Zero

Couple this with the newest trend to define our way out of homelessness.

Community Solutions, through their 'Built for Zero Initiative' has created the term 'functional zero' which took them three pages of definitional 'metrics' to operationalise. What would Einstein say?

Basically, a community can still have 10,000 homeless people, for example, but if that community can say the number of people entering homelessness is equal to the number exiting- they have reached 'functional zero' — forget the 10,000 languishing on the streets and in shelters.

This term is harmful and counter-productive to addressing the myriad of reasons why people become homeless and is dismissive of the systemic reasons why people become homeless.

In no other walk of life do we use the term 'functional zero'- to end hunger; ending domestic violence; ending gun violence? Ending discrimination? In no other walk of life do we address a crisis by redefining it and settling on homeostasis as the new reality.

It is harmful because when politicians and community members hear 'zero'- they hear we have ended homelessness — not what Community Solutions has defined it to mean. Then when it is time to allocate scarce public resources it would not be unreasonable for the public and/or elected officials to argue we don't need as many resources for homelessness because we have solved it! Yet we know nothing could be further from the truth.

We have entered into a new era of becoming more sophisticated about managing homelessness — creating a new way to define status quo — however we rapidly move the same number of people entering homelessness as who exit.

Salt Lake City, Houston, New Orleans and Phoenix

These four cities have become the poster cities for 'functional zero' in ending homelessness — which make great headlines and sound bites.

But, look at the numbers and what they really meant was ending veteran homelessness … Oopps … Not really … chronic veteran homelessness … And they haven't even done that.

Take a hard look at the numbers and trends that each of these four cities report to HUD annually. *See analysis and data below.*

Trends in the Four 'functional zero' Cities: 2012–2014

- Total number of homeless veterans in the four cities in 2014 was 1,392
- Salt Lake City: the number of homeless veterans increased from 247 [2013] to 275 [2014]
- Total number of homeless people in 2014 was 15,357
- The number of total homeless people increased in Salt Lake City from 2,123 [2013] to 2,150 [2014] and in Phoenix from 5,889 [2013] to 5,918 [2014]
- The total number of permanent supportive housing [PSH] units in the four cities in 2014 was 8,831 or 57.5% of the total number of homeless people
- The total number of PSH units in New Orleans decreased from 2,670 [2013] to 2,464 [2014].

Updating these statistics to 2020–2012 — Community Solutions claims that the following Continuum of Cares (CoC), as the two most recent, have achieved either functional zero either in 'ending' either chronic homelessness or homelessness for veterans. A closer look at the HUD data for 2018–2020 for these two most recent examples finds the same trends as above — *overall homelessness, as well as veteran and chronic homelessness, in these communities increased*:

Clearly none of these cities can legitimately claim they have ended either veteran or chronic homelessness, yet they have been successful at creating the new urban myth that if we just do what these cities have done we can end homelessness as well.

USICH

Federal agencies that belong to USICH have recently moved away from using the 'functional zero' terminology and adopted the new 'operational definition of ending homelessness' contained in USICH's recently released amended federal homelessness plan Opening Doors:

An end to homelessness means that every community will have a systematic response in place that ensures homelessness is prevented whenever possible or is otherwise a rare, brief, and non-recurring experience.

This 'new' definition of ending homelessness essentially is a retooled 'functional zero' definition dressed in new terms. Of course we want a rapid and systematic response to preventing homelessness. However, the new paradigm fails to address how we get to that point in the first place. What about the people who are currently experiencing homelessness?

Tragically for people experiencing homelessness, USICH has opted to size the definition of ending homelessness, based on limited existing federal resources rather than right size the resources to fit the homeless crisis in this nation.

Zero Means Zero

While SRCEH supports a 'rapid same-day' response to homelessness, we refuse to abdicate to arresting and defining our way out of homelessness. Yet, a new report by HUD, Family Options Study, has shown that the rapid rehousing approach is not nearly as effective as a housing voucher strategy.

SRCEH remains committed to galvanising the political and community will that 'zero' truly means ending and preventing homelessness in our community.

No definitional gimmicks…
No smoke…
No mirrors.

As a community we first must stop criminalising people experiencing homelessness and focus on creating enough affordable housing, social services, health and mental health care and living wage jobs and income that we end and prevent homelessness.

We can end and prevent homelessness if we are intentional about moving beyond sound-bite jargon and squarely address the homeless crisis as a social justice issue and support housing and health care as basic human rights.

CoC	Year	Total Homeless	Homeless Veterans	Chronically Homeless
Virginia — Balance of State	2018	718	36	38
	2019	761	30	24
	2020	816	32	28
Texas — Balance of State	2018	7,638	451	644
	2019	8,072	324	597
	2020	9,198	355	1,178

Source: Homeless Point in Time Count and Housing Inventory Count, 2012, 2013 and 2014

Moving Past Functional Zero to End Youth Homelessness

Barbara Duffield is the Executive Director of SchoolHouse Connection*

Introduction

Youth homelessness is a pervasive and widespread problem in the United States (US). Pre-pandemic, public schools identified 1.4 million children and young people experiencing homelessness in the 2018–2019 school year — an 104 per cent increase since the 2006-2007 school year.[1]

According to the 2018–2019 school year data:

- Only 12 percent of children and youth experiencing homelessness were staying in a shelter when they were first identified as homeless by public schools.
- Seven per cent were staying in motels.
- Four per cent were unsheltered.
- The vast majority — 77 per cent — of all students experiencing homelessness were staying with other people due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason.
- Unaccompanied young people experiencing homelessness were even more likely to stay with other people, and less likely to stay in a motel: 84 per cent were staying with others, while less than two per cent were in motels.

These numbers do not represent the total number of children and young people who experience homelessness in the US:

- The data represent only those children and young people who were identified as experiencing homelessness, and who were enrolled in public schools, pre-K-12.
- Under-identification of homeless students by public schools is a well-documented problem which has been exacerbated by the pandemic, as virtual learning made it much more difficult for educators to identify children and young people experiencing homelessness.
- Homelessness creates barriers to enrolment and attendance in school; children and young people who were not enrolled in school will not be included in the federal school data.
- The education data does not include all preschool-age children, or infants and toddlers; only young children enrolled in preschool programs administered by local educational agencies are included.

In addition to public school data, research from Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago suggests that youth homelessness is more prevalent than previously known. This research found that least 700,000 unaccompanied adolescents (ages 13-17) — one in 30 — experience homelessness on their own in a year.[2] In contrast, public schools identified 124,255 unaccompanied homeless youth in 2018–2019. This suggests that for every unaccompanied youth identified by schools, at least five are not identified.

Chronic Homelessness Approaches Will Not Work to Solve Homelessness

Childhood and youth homelessness are correlated with single adult homelessness. For example:

- One in five (20 per cent) of unsheltered homeless adults in Los Angeles indicated that they first experienced homelessness when they were under age 18, and 25 per cent when they were young adults between the ages of 18 and 24.[3]
- In a Seattle survey of homeless adults, 22 per cent indicated that their first experience of homelessness occurred when they were children under the age 18, and 26 per cent had their first experience of homelessness when they were between the ages of 18 and 24.[4]
- In Minnesota, more than half (52 per cent) of homeless adults surveyed first became homeless by the time they were age 24, and over one-third (36 per cent) first became homeless at or before age 18.[5]

When homelessness for so many adults first occurs in childhood, homelessness is not 'rare, brief, and one-time' (the high-level definition of what it means to 'end homelessness' per the current national policy).[6]

To address homelessness now and prevent it in the future, we must focus on the complex realities and comprehensive needs of homeless children and young people by adopting an honest definition of homelessness, retooling homeless assistance with child and youth development at the forefront, and ensuring that early care, education, and services are essential aspects of all youth and family homelessness housing initiatives.

Yet tragically, in its perpetual quest to end 'chronic homelessness,' the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has used its formidable administrative

and regulatory power to force communities to maximise services for adult chronically homeless people throughout the country — regardless of local circumstances and needs — at the expense of services for youth and families. An examination of more than 10 years of this approach reveals flawed economic logic, an abject failure to 'end' chronic homelessness today, and a paradigm that will sustain chronic homelessness far into the future.

The problems with prioritising chronic homelessness begin with how chronic homelessness is defined. HUD considers an individual or head of household to be chronically homeless only if he or she meets the definition of a 'homeless individual with a disability,' and has been living in a place not meant for human habitation, in an emergency shelter, or in a safe haven for the last 12 months continuously, or on at least four occasions in the last three years, where those occasions cumulatively total at least 12 months. Each period separating the occasions must include at least seven nights of living in a situation other than a place not meant for human habitation, in an emergency shelter or in a safe haven.[7] The narrowness of this definition excludes many homeless single adults, and even more unaccompanied youth, and parents and children: in order to protect their safety and minimise the potential for the involvement of child welfare and other authorities, families and young people experiencing homelessness are much less likely to stay in visible homeless situations.

The chronic homelessness priority is equally flawed from an economic perspective. The original argument for the approach was that targeting resources to chronically homeless people will 'free up' resources to serve other homeless populations — eventually. Yet, after more than a decade of these policies, neither HUD nor the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) has freed up resources for other homeless populations. They have not explained when or how any savings that might someday materialise will be passed on to other homeless populations. To the contrary, both agencies continue to insist that local communities prioritise chronic homelessness in their use of federal resources, even when those communities repeatedly identify other, equally urgent or more pressing needs.

The hoped-for 'trickle-down' effect of the chronic homelessness priority is also absent on the ground. Programs for homeless youth and families did not see an increase in resources, even when HUD and USICH were touting decreases in chronic homelessness. In fact, many of these programs have lost funding as a direct result of HUD's emphasis on chronic homelessness. This loss is compounded by the fact that many private foundations and local and state governments fell into lock-step behind the federally-established priority on chronic homelessness.

Arguments defending HUD's prioritisation of chronic homelessness revolved principally around the notion that youth and families who stay with others temporarily, or who stay in motels paid for with their own income, were less vulnerable than those in shelters or outside, and that, in the context of limited resources, making these families eligible for HUD homeless assistance would 'take away' from the 'needier' homeless populations (chronically homeless adults who are visible outside or in shelters).[8]

These arguments about relative vulnerability ignore evidence on the impact of hidden homelessness on youth. An analysis of the Centres for Disease Control's Youth Risk Behaviour Survey (YRBS) shows that the vulnerability of high school students experiencing homelessness to violence, suicide, substance abuse, hunger, bullying, and lack of sleep is comparable across all homeless living situations: for every risk behavior studied, the incidence among students in any homeless living situation was significantly higher than that of their housed peers and it didn't matter whether the youth were living in shelters, cars, motels, or were staying temporarily with others (couch-surfing).[9] Other research demonstrates that the academic outcomes of children and youth experiencing homelessness, regardless of living situation, are comparable and are, across-the-board, worse than for students who are low-income, but permanently housed (Building Changes 2019). In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, staying with other people in crowded and unstable situations is a high risk factor for COVID-19, yet still the federal focus is on sheltered and unsheltered (that is, outdoors) populations.

Nor does lack of funding appear to be the real crux of the argument. Legislation is introduced each year by proponents of 'ending homelessness' that authorises hundreds of billions of dollars in emergency spending, and billions of dollars have been appropriated to address homelessness in COVID relief bills passed in 2020 and 2021. However, even with dramatically increased funding levels, the legislation continues to target resources to people who met HUD's definition of homelessness and excludes those who meet the broader definition of homelessness used by various federal agencies (such as the US Department of Education) that recognises and responds to the way children, families, and unaccompanied youth experience homelessness.[10]

Despite the failure of the trickle-down economic theory to justify the focus on chronic homelessness, one still might accept the chronic homelessness campaign if it effectively addressed the plight of people who do meet the definition of chronically homeless. So what do we make of those triumphant headlines trumpeting the end of chronic homelessness in various communities? Is the end of chronic homelessness in sight?

The clear answer is no. HUD's most recent data demonstrates a seven percent increase in unsheltered individuals, and a 15 per cent increase in individuals experiencing chronic homelessness, since 2019.[11] The Biden-Harris Administration appears to blame the steady uptick in chronic and unsheltered homelessness on the Trump Administration: HUD and USICH statements on homelessness continually note that homelessness declined from 2010–2016 — the same years of the Obama Administration's plan to end homelessness, and, also the same years that saw skyrocketing numbers of homeless children and youth in our nation's

public schools. But the current Administration's attempt to blame the former Administration for increasing homelessness ignores the fact that federal policy prioritising chronic and unsheltered homelessness during the Trump Administration was largely consistent with the Obama Administration. The tragic reality is that policymakers from both political parties have embraced the short-sightedness of chronic homelessness initiative. More recently, HUD and USICH have added 'unsheltered homelessness' as their top priority in addressing homelessness; yet this is largely the same population that the chronic homelessness policy addressed, and efforts to address 'unsheltered homelessness' feature the same flawed logic and doomed 'downstream' approach.

In addition to the chronic/unsheltered homelessness campaigns, HUD and aligned advocates have pushed the goal of 'functional zero' as a short-hand metric for 'ending homelessness.' But this Orwellian term does not mean that no one experiences homelessness in communities that reach 'functional zero.' Instead, it means that the availability of housing and homelessness resources in the community exceed the size of the particular population that is eligible for the resources. Whether eligible persons use those resources, remained housed, or are otherwise safe, healthy, and well is not relevant. Under 'functional zero,' people can remain chronically homeless or unsheltered even after their communities have won accolades for 'ending' homelessness — and all the while, the pipeline to chronic homelessness is left untouched.

A More Effective Approach

While chronically homeless and unsheltered adults have been the focus of pre-pandemic federal policy and administrative action on homelessness, comprehensive solutions for families and youth are necessary to truly prevent and address homelessness. As noted above, many homeless adults first experienced homelessness as children or youth, and they failed to graduate from high school, and/or suffered various adverse events that impacted them throughout life. Efforts to intervene before these children and youth reached adulthood could have prevented their later bouts of more entrenched homelessness.

Effective approaches to youth and family homelessness must be grounded in the interconnected and equally vital roles of housing, education, early care, and services. Indeed, without early care and education, the prospects for affording any kind of housing as an adult are slim, making today's homeless youth more likely to become tomorrow's homeless adults.

Education is a critical but often overlooked strategy to address child and youth homelessness and prevent it from re-occurring in the future. Recent research from the University of Chicago found that young people who do not complete a high school diploma or a General Education Development degree (equivalent to a high school diploma) are four-and-a-half times more likely to experience homelessness as young adults than their peers who completed high school.[12]

Education is a critical factor in giving young people the opportunity to obtain stable employment and ensuring that they do not repeat the cycle of poverty and homelessness that they experienced during their developmental years.

Moreover, schools can be a source of caring adults, stability, and normalcy for students as they weather the traumatic and disruptive experience of homelessness. As cornerstones of communities, they play pivotal roles

in connecting children and youth who are experiencing homelessness to a wide array of services and supports. Schools, early childhood programs, and institutions of higher education are often the most consistent presence for youth and families during an otherwise traumatic and unpredictable time. As such, schools may be able more quickly to identify homeless students (or those about to become homeless) and help them to access the services and supports they need to regain stable housing and address other critical issues that may be contributing factors more rapidly.

In sum, public schools, early childhood programs, and institutions of higher education are a de facto homelessness response and prevention system. These agencies see more children and youth experiencing homelessness (including parenting youth) than HUD homeless assistance programs; as child and youth-focused institutions, they know more about the complex needs of youth and families, and are better able to track and respond to mobility; their metrics and goals are more aligned to longer-term measures of health and well-being and future school success; and, if they were properly supported and resourced, they could do even more to assist youth and families to holistically to resolve their homelessness permanently. Early care and educational agencies are not ancillary to the Federal response to homelessness — they are central to it. This is especially true in the time of COVID-19, when schools and early care programs are often the only agencies in communities that are actively looking for and serving children, youth, and families experiencing homelessness.

Thus, solving youth and family homelessness calls for full engagement of childcare, early learning programs, schools, and other children's services as essential and equal partners with housing agencies and homeless service providers. In addition, homeless assistance services, program design, outcomes, and policies must be built around the specific and unique needs of children and youth as clients — with needs equal to, but separate from and different than, the needs of their parents. While these measures are ultimately the best long-term approach to addressing both single adult and family homelessness, they cannot be packaged neatly into ten-year plans to end homelessness, 100-day challenges, functional zero, or other marketing campaigns masquerading as public policy.

Conclusion

Functional zero and other approaches that prioritise chronic street-sleeping or unsheltered homelessness are not the answer to ending youth homelessness, nor any other type of homelessness. If the national US dialogue and outline for action on homelessness is limited to initiatives that provide housing for a narrowly and artificially defined segment of the population, that pay attention to homeless children, young people and families only if they meet HUD's outdated definition of homelessness, minimise the role of essential services (including early care and education), and ignore or treat as an afterthought children and young people's lived experience of homelessness and their unique developmental needs, then we will be generating poverty and homelessness in the US for the foreseeable future. We will not truly end chronic homelessness, or any other kind of homelessness, until the complex realities and comprehensive needs of children, youth, and families occupy a front seat in US federal homelessness policy, which includes keeping youth in education. Only then will we see true cost savings and effective homelessness prevention.

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10. The statutory definition of homeless children and youth used by the Department of Education refers to *'individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate night time residence'* and specifically includes 'children and youths who are sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason; are living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camping grounds due to the lack of alternative adequate accommodations; are living in emergency or transitional shelters; or are abandoned in hospitals' as well as migrant children in such situations, and children and living in other situations. (42 USC. § 11434a(2).)
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Dr Robyn Miller

Chief Executive Officer, MacKillop Family Services

Adolescent Family Violence and Homelessness: Intervening Early

Family violence is a primary driver of homelessness, it can be understood as both a symptom and cause of harm and has far reaching impacts on many Australians each year. Family and domestic violence is the main reason women and children leave their homes in Australia. In this article I will draw on our experience at MacKillop, as family violence is the most prevalent form of harm that drives young people into the out of home care system. I will focus on a specific program for young people in our residential care program who are re-enacting violence. The Safe Relationships program, designed by MacKillop, is not a crisis response service but rather a flexible therapeutic outreach service to adolescents who are using family violence or who are at risk of doing so, and their families. As noted in a recent Crime Statistics Agency study focusing on Victorian service responses to adolescent family violence aggressors, current service responses do not offer opportunities for early intervention or pathways for non-punitive rehabilitative responses.[1]

The program supports adolescents and their families by tackling the root cause of violence and the intergenerational trauma often associated with why it occurs in the first place. The program ideally reaches adolescents before they become parents and seeks to contribute to an overall reduction in the rate of violence and the demand for crisis services. The results of the program are very positive and we have early outcomes data from an evaluation of the Safe Relationships program conducted by RMIT University indicating a reduction in conflict in the home and improved awareness and self-management of behaviour.

The earlier we can engage and address violent behaviours, the more effective we are in changing the trajectory of their lives and their partners, and interrupting the transgenerational patterns.

In 2019–20 those who have experienced family and domestic violence made up 41 per cent of Specialist Homelessness Services clients. [2] Recent data gathered by MacKillop Family Services (MacKillop) as part of the Outcomes 100 project shows that 87 per cent of young people in our residential care homes had previously experienced severe and repeated family violence.

MacKillop is a provider of a range of services and supports to intervene earlier in the lives families who are at risk of breaking down or children protection intervention, these services include the Family Preservation and Reunification Response, MST-Psychiatric, Functional Family Therapy and Targeted Early Intervention. Family violence and housing instability is ubiquitous in the lives of the people engaged with our services and key focus area of our work.

We recognise that most young people who have experienced family violence will not go on to perpetrate violence. However, studies show that children who have either witnessed violence or are subjected to violence themselves are more likely as adults to have violence-supportive attitudes and to perpetrate violence.[3,4] Research also indicates that boys who witness family violence are more likely to approve of violence.[5]

Adolescent family violence can have a significant impact on the stability of a young person's living arrangements[6] and is a particular form of family violence that requires a nuanced, trauma and attachment informed response. Recent Victorian statistics show that the number of adolescent family violence incidents have increased over the past five years.[7] Recent lockdowns have also been associated with a sharp increase in reported incidents of adolescent family violence.[8]

The complexity of experiences and characteristics of adolescents who use violence in the home is reflected in data from an evaluation of the Victorian Government funded Adolescent Family Violence Program. This evaluation found 80 per cent of participants had witnessed violence between other family members and described a high prevalence of co-occurring issues amongst participants including mental health and substance abuse issues and school absenteeism. Researchers reviewing Victorian case files as part of the ANROWS PIPA project

found that in 47.4 per cent of cases there was evidence of the adolescent using violence having a psychosocial or cognitive disability.[9]

The Royal Commission into Family Violence identified the need for a specialised, systemic service response for adolescents who use violence in the home. The evidence base in relation to preventing and responding to adolescent violence in the home has grown in recent years through projects such as the RMIT University's research project Positive Interventions for Perpetrators of Adolescent Violence in the Home and Family Safety Victoria's Building the Evidence project partnership with the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare.[10]

Despite a stronger focus on this area precipitated by the Royal Commission, there remains a paucity of research identifying effective early intervention strategies targeting young males who are at risk of becoming adult perpetrators of family and domestic violence.

With the support of the Lord Mayors Charitable Foundation, MacKillop has responded to this service gap with the introduction of the Safe Relationships program. The Safe Relationships program works together with existing case management to help young people develop safe and respectful relationships. MacKillop's trauma-informed approach acknowledges the difficult circumstances that can lead to the use of violence, whilst also supporting individuals to take responsibility for this behaviour and the harm it causes.

The Safe Relationships program offers relational therapeutic outreach for adolescents aged 10 to 17 who are using or are at risk of using violence in the home or in a dating context. The model uses an ecological family systems approach to work with individuals and their families/caregivers. The service commenced in early 2020 in Northern and Western metropolitan Melbourne.

Delivered through family and individual therapy settings using psychoeducation and therapeutic life story work approaches, the model aims to end violence and increase safety by strengthening family relationships and creating a web of responsibility. The model aims to ensure young people have an accessible and sustainable support network.

The Safe Relationships program is one of a number of emerging programs across Victoria which includes the Adolescent Family Violence Program, Step Up, Who's in Charge?, the Koorie Adolescent Family Violence Program (Mallee District Aboriginal Service), Breaking the Cycle and Functional Family Therapy (Anglicare) (Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare).

The use of violence by adolescents cannot be addressed by services alone, we acknowledge the invaluable contribution that population level prevention measures can make in this area. The Respectful Relationships curriculum introduced in Victorian schools from Foundation to Year 12, is also an important strategy to embed a culture of respects and counter attitudes that are the antecedents of family violence.

MacKillop looks forward to sharing our learning from the Safe Relationships program and collaborating with government and non-government organisations to enable young people and their family's access to effective therapeutic support preventing and responding to adolescent violence in the home.

Endnotes

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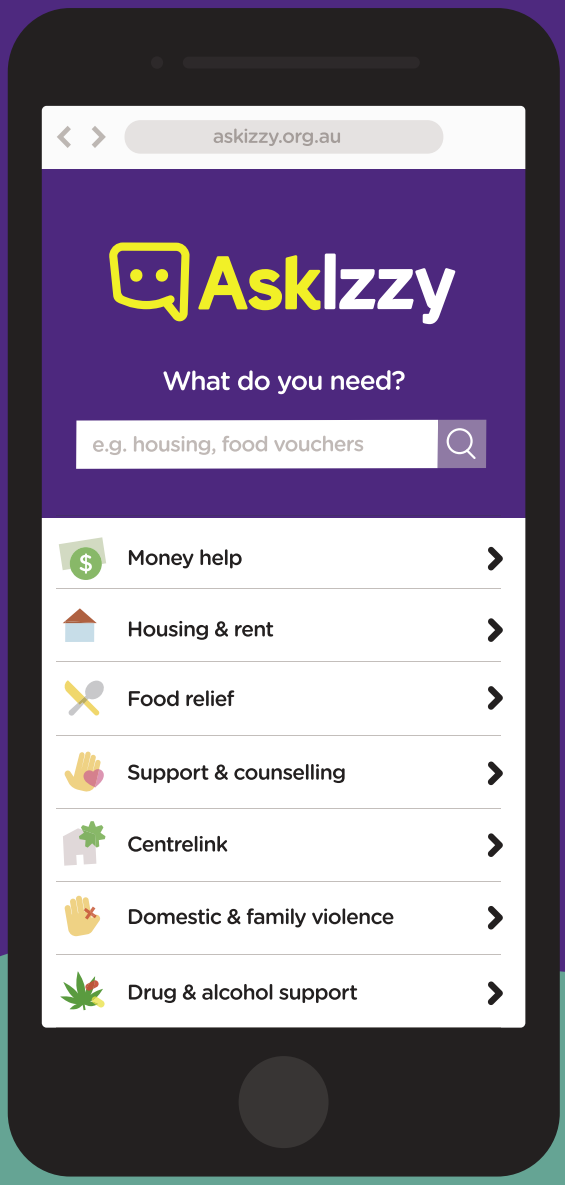

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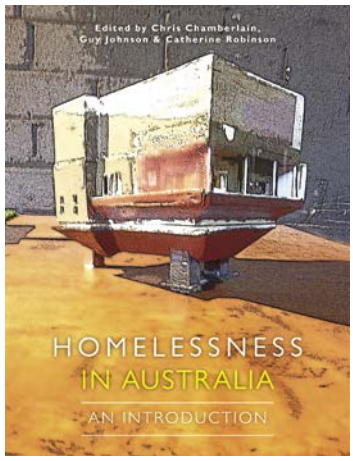

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