



# Redesign of a homelessness service system for young people

From the AHURI Inquiry  
An effective homelessness services system

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## Acronyms and abbreviations used in this report

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AHURI	Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited
AIAD	Australian Index of Adolescent Development
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CBD	Central Business District
CFFR	Council on Federal Financial Relations
CIMS	Client Information Management System
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
COSS	Community of Schools and Services Model
CSHA	Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement
DHHS	Department of Health and Human Services (Victoria)
DPC	Department of Premier and Cabinet (Victoria)
DSS	Department of Social Services (Australia)
EFY	Education First Youth
ETHOS	European Typology of Homelessness
FACS	Family and Community Services
FaHCSIA	Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (Australia)
GRLLN	Geelong Regional Local Learning and Employment Network
HF4Y	Housing First for Youth
HREOC	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
IAP	Initial Assessment and Planning
LGA	Local Government Area
LGBTQI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and Intersex
MFYH	My Foundation Youth Housing Company
NAHA	National Affordable Housing Agreement
NHHA	National Housing and Homelessness Agreement
NYC	National Youth Commission

NYCH	National Youth Coalition on Housing
OOHC	Out-of-home care
SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
SHIP	Specialist Homelessness Information Platform
SHS	Specialist Homelessness Services
TGP	The Geelong Project
VCOSS	Victorian Council of Social Service
VETis	Vocational Education and Training in Schools

## Glossary

A list of definitions for terms commonly used by AHURI is available on the AHURI website [www.ahuri.edu.au/research/glossary](http://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/glossary).

## Executive summary

### Key points

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- Children and young people (aged 12–25 years) are one of the largest cohorts of users of homelessness services: in 2017–2018, there were 81,193 young parents and accompanying children (28%) and 43,200 young people presenting alone (16%).
  - Children and young people, as well as ‘people exiting institutions and care into homelessness’ are priority cohorts under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NAHA; 2018), and this is carried over into most of the state and territory strategies and plans.
  - The redesign of the youth homelessness services system is best conceptualised at the community level, as the ‘system’ where interaction between young people and services—including schools—actually takes place.
  - Thinking about the ‘community as system’ means that small-area data analysis of need, trends and outcomes should be developed into community-level focussed planning of the ecosystem of supports required by vulnerable young people.
  - There is a strong case in theory—and from practical experimentation—for adopting a system reform agenda that makes the shift from a program-oriented approach to a place-based cross-sectoral ‘collective impact’ framework for support and service delivery for at-risk and homeless young people.
  - A systemic implementation of a place-based community approach to early intervention involving proactive identification of risk, a tiered practice framework, an extended workforce of youth and family workers, and school welfare/wellbeing staff working under a formal collaboration and within a strong data-driven outcomes framework will begin to reduce the flow of young people into homelessness.
  - A policy imperative is to fund the development of youth-specific social housing options that provide the appropriate levels of support that young people need, while scaling up rents over time as young people progress through education or training and gain access to employment.
  - A systemic needs-based implementation of the Home Stretch agenda, which advocates the extension of support for all care-leavers until 21 years, would have a significant impact on a major stream of vulnerable youth becoming homeless.
-

## Key findings

- A significant proportion (44%) of all individuals who need and seek help from homelessness services are young people and children. About 42,000 (16%) are adolescents and young adults presenting to services on their own, and this cohort remains at a higher level than in the decade prior to the federal government White Paper, *The Road Home* (FaHCSIA 2008).
- The known drivers of homelessness such as family conflict and domestic violence have not abated; more young people are now referred to care and protection services than were a decade ago, and housing affordability has not improved over that period of time. The issue of inadequate youth incomes and benefits is a subject of public debate and advocacy.
- Young people leaving out-of-home care (OOHC) into independent living arrangements are particularly vulnerable to experiencing homelessness.
- Between 40 and 50 per cent of young people exiting homelessness services move into a situation of further homelessness.
- Informants raised the developmental needs of adolescents and young adults in terms of the work of supporting them—but particularly in terms of how they might struggle to cope with a fully independent living situation.
- Engagement in education and training—as well as supported pathways towards employment—was raised as a crucial factor in the future options that homeless young people may or may not have. Given various programs and initiatives directed to addressing early school leaving, or providing supported accommodation linked to education and training, a strong cross-sectoral strategy and a more carefully considered deployment of interventions could be considered.
- Housing options for homeless young people are a subset of a broader housing affordability issue affecting the community and young people generally. Access to social housing remains highly problematic, and the very idea of youth-specific and youth-appropriate housing is not well developed at a policy level.
- Even at sites where there is innovation around early intervention and critical thinking about the homelessness services system, a common comment from frontline crisis workers is: 'We need more crisis accommodation'. However, while this is understandable from a lived experience perspective, and perhaps intuitively, it does not amount to a cogent policy agenda informed by systems thinking.
- Place-based arguments and an interest in collective impact were found in most community sites where key informants were interviewed, primarily due to the purposive selection of sites and informants. However, in terms of system redesign, there are several funded Australian-developed community-based 'collective impact' models in Victoria and New South Wales (as well as overseas), as well as interest and incipient community development in a growing number of other communities.
- Aboriginal young people and Indigenous Australians are generally over-represented in homelessness services. The main advice from Indigenous and non-Indigenous informants in this study—who were mostly workers in the field—was that 'culturally appropriate service provision and practice' was not as widely available as needed. Also, it was suggested that Aboriginal young people needed a choice of Indigenous and non-Indigenous support options that are often not available.

## Policy development options

### Redesign systems with a focus on community-level organisation, planning, access and outcomes measurement

If systems thinking and planning is framed by a homeless service system for young people as a community-level ecosystem of institutions, services, programs and supports, then system redesign begins to consider new ways of joining up services and linking homelessness service providers with mainstream agencies, such as schools and educational programs. The focus is local programs, not centrally managed discrete programs. Also, within a pre-crisis early-intervention framework, risk of homelessness and homelessness as experienced by young people is more evidently linked with other emerging adverse issues in young people's lives, such as early school leaving, mental health issues, or drug and alcohol issues. In practical terms, community-level early intervention works across issues and thus needs to be cross-sectoral. The current funding environment remains siloed.

### Improved access through Youth Entry Points

A practical structural and organisational reform that potentially offers an efficiency dividend would be to develop Youth Entry Points on a regional and sub-regional basis in all Australian jurisdictions. The Victorian entry points are a feature of the Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS) system in that state, and serve to simplify contact with and access to support services in a more efficient manner. The entry point is provided by a group of services that meet together as a network—and this serves to foster greater cooperation among local and regional providers. Several communities in NSW have created local entry points on their own volition. South Australia maintains a central Youth Gateway. Experience and feedback from SA homelessness workers about entry points suggests that the central access point may not be the best approach.

### Invest in early intervention and prevention

There is a clear policy imperative to implement 'early intervention' to reduce the flow of young people into homelessness. The National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) specifies children and young people as a priority cohort and early intervention and prevention as a key. The long-standing Reconnect program embodies practice experience, while the piloting of the 'community of services and schools' (COSS) model of early intervention provides both an experiential and research-evaluation evidence-base for implementation to scale.

The COSS model is a place-based model for supporting vulnerable young people and families to reduce disengagement from education and early school leaving, and to help where family issues are heading towards a crisis and possible homelessness—as well as other adverse outcomes. The outcomes achieved by the Geelong Project (TGP) of a 40 per cent reduction in adolescent homelessness and, at the same time, a 20 per cent reduction in early school leaving has demonstrated what a place-based approach is capable of achieving, and this is what has generated interest nationally and internationally (MacKenzie 2018c).

The success factors of the COSS model seem to be:

- Local community leadership in one of the participating key stakeholders, ideally the lead agency responsible for the early intervention support work.
- The construction of a formalised community collective through a community development process.
- A population-screening methodology that can proactively identify vulnerable youth and families before the onset of crises.

- A flexible practice framework that can efficiently manage proactive support to at-risk youth and their families, while still able to be reactive when crises occur.
- A single-entry point into the support system for young people in need.
- A data-intensive approach to risk identification, monitoring and outcomes measurement (utilising Sir Michael Barber's 'deliverology' [Barber, Kihn et al. 2011]).

### **Invest in youth-specific social housing for young people**

Homeless young people on their own are over half (54%) of all single people who seek help from homelessness services, but they are only 2.9 per cent of principal tenants in social and public housing in Australia (AIHW 2018a). The current business model of mainstream social housing means that providers are often reluctant to accept young residents because of their low and insecure incomes, and because they are regarded as high-risk tenants. What incentives or changes could increase the proportion of young people as resident in mainstream social housing is not clear.

### **Integrate Youth Foyers into the exit pathways for young people leaving Specialist Homelessness Services**

The Youth Foyer model has been widely accepted and supported as a housing model for at-risk or homeless young people, as it addresses their education, training and employment support needs. The commitment to education/training and employment pathways is a condition for access to this type of supported transitional housing. Over the past decade, foyers have been established in many jurisdictions and there are now some 15 foyers, or foyer-like projects, which have been developed to support about 500 young people (16–25 years) at-risk of homelessness or recovering from homelessness.

As Youth Foyers are a relatively expensive model, there are some questions that need to be considered:

- Should foyers strictly provide a pathway for young people recovering from homelessness? Or should they take in a wider population of at-risk youth?
- Should foyers be congregate facilities—as is currently the case—or a dispersed set of units connected to a nearby community hub?

In terms of the place of Youth Foyers in a redesigned homelessness service system for young people, their contribution to post-homelessness ('breaking the cycle') outcomes would be strengthened if their intake was restricted to young people exiting the SHS system.

### **Extend state care until 21 years**

The relationship between OOHC and homelessness has been understood since the mid-1990s (London, Moslehuddin et al. 2007). There have been many leaving-care initiatives and projects over the past two decades. Good practice knowledge about after-care support is well developed—yet the net national effort to prevent this cohort of young people from entering homelessness has been inconsistent and evidently inadequate. The national Home Stretch Campaign is 'a national campaign seeking to extend the current leaving care arrangements for young people in state care until age 21 years' (Home Stretch 2019), but on the basis of robust needs-based standards of care and support.

The Victorian Government has adopted the Home Stretch policy and programmatic requirements for 250 young people over five years, on the basis that this \$11.6m investment will have a significant impact, even if it is not available to all young people leaving the care system. Based on the high proportion (variously reported as 30–60%) of homeless young people, a full and effective implementation of the Home Stretch agenda would have a significant effect on the number of young people becoming homeless.

## The study

This research project, *Redesign of a homelessness service system for young people, is part of a wider AHURI Inquiry into an Effective Homelessness Service System* that includes cognate studies of two other population cohorts – older Australians (Thredgold, Beer et.al. 2019) and families (valentine et.al. 2019). The project is aimed at identifying and proposing measures that could, if implemented, reduce youth homelessness and lead to improved outcomes for young people who experience homelessness.

The investigation was strongly informed by systems thinking that conceptualised the ‘system’ as a place-based community of interventions, programs and institutions that affect young people, and are, in turn, affected by young people—an ecosystem around young people that extends beyond the SHS. Of course, government policies, departmental guidelines, funding and contract management practices—and how these are conceived and implemented—also affect the local system, and what happens for the young people who need and seek help.

A key system concept in this study was the stock and flow model: stock being the number of young people in the SHS and flow being the number of young people moving into and out of homelessness. This is a widely applied system concept which, in this context, directs attention to the ecosystem of related activities, processes, institutions and programs beyond the SHS system that are relevant to addressing homelessness.

Stroh and Zurcher argue that implementing a ‘systems thinking’ approach involves the following process:

1. *Building a strong foundation for change by engaging multiple stakeholders to identify an initial vision and picture of current reality.*
2. *Engaging stakeholders to explain their often competing views of why a chronic, complex problem persists despite people’s best efforts to solve it.*
3. *Integrating the diverse perspectives into a map that provides a more complete picture of the system and root causes of the problem.*
4. *Supporting people to see how their well-intended efforts to solve the problem often make the problem worse.*
5. *Committing to a compelling vision of the future and supportive strategies that can lead to sustainable, system-wide change. (2012: 4)*

A premise of this study was that the most promising initiatives for system change are most likely to be found in some form somewhere among the many programs and services across Australia. Using purposive sampling, key informants were sought in community settings known for promising initiatives or innovation. Redesigning the homelessness system is about finding reforms and measures that promise to lead to better outcomes, especially where there is a strong evidence-base. These reforms are not just about changes to the SHS.

# 1 Investigating system redesign for homeless youth

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- Despite youth homelessness having a high public profile and being the subject of several government inquiries—as well as a body of research evidence—this has not translated into a systemic policy and programmatic response.
  - Children and young people are one of the largest cohorts of users of homelessness services—81,193 young parents and accompanying children (28%), and 43,200 young people presenting alone (16%).
  - ‘Children and young people’—as well as ‘people exiting institutions and care into homelessness’—are priority cohorts under the NHHA (2018), and this is carried over into most state and territory strategies and plans (NHHA: 17).
  - The NHHA seeks ‘reforms and initiatives that will contribute to a reduction in the incidence of homelessness’ and ‘early intervention and prevention’, including the involvement of mainstream services, and is one of three key focuses of the national agreement (NHHA: 4).
  - There is a well-developed body of evidence from research about the causes of youth homelessness, the experiences of and pathways traversed by homeless youth, the vulnerability of particular cohorts—such as young people leaving care—and emerging models of early intervention.
  - The research methodology for this project has a focus on community-level systems as a way of considering system redesign—producing an argument about a place-based ‘collective impact’ approach rather than standard targeted programs.
- 

## 1.1 Why this research was conducted

This research project, *Redesign of a Homelessness Service System for Young People*, is part of a wider *AHURI Inquiry into an Effective Homelessness Service System*. The project was aimed at identifying and proposing measures that could, if implemented, reduce youth homelessness and lead to improved outcomes for young people who experience homelessness.

In Australia, youth homelessness has been recognised as a named social problem since the early 1980s, which is decades earlier than other Western countries, such as the United States and Canada, and even the UK (Quilgars, Johnsen et al. 2008). During the 1980s, there was considerable community advocacy around the problems of homeless young people, accompanied by a steady output of media coverage about ‘street kids’. In 1982, the first federal government report, the Senate Standing Committee on Social Welfare’s *Report on youth homelessness* brought the issue of youth homelessness to the attention of policy makers (Senate 1982). The main government programmatic response was the 1985 consolidation of several state and Commonwealth homelessness and housing programs into a joint Commonwealth-state program known as the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). SAAP-funded services remained largely oriented to crisis accommodation and ‘chronic homelessness’. About one-third of SAAP services were youth services (about 34% of the 1300



agencies in 2005–6). However, the transition of young people from crisis accommodation to affordable social or private rental housing or supportive housing, which hardly existed, was seen as a continuing problem.

The 1989 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's (HREOC) Inquiry into Youth Homelessness brought 'youth homelessness' into the national consciousness. Commissioner Brian Burdekin's HREOC report, *Our Homeless Children*, was wide-ranging and thorough (HREOC 1989). The report generated a huge amount of media, and this stimulated community interest in youth homelessness (Fopp 1989; 2003) and gave 'youth homelessness' a relatively high public profile as a social problem. A follow-up report, a House of Representatives review, *Report on aspects of youth homelessness* (referred to as the Morris Report, after Chairman Alan Morris) offered the insight that 'early intervention is probably the one area of public policy that could deliver the greatest returns in terms of social cohesion through the reduction in family breakdown and long-term welfare dependency'. Morris argued that an early intervention strategy was needed and that 'schools become the focal point for early intervention' (House of Representatives 1995).

Most of the Morris Report's recommendations were not enacted, but an incoming Howard Liberal Government set up its own Prime Ministerial Youth Homeless Taskforce. The taskforce report proposed an 'early intervention' perspective and fielded a program of 26 pilot projects that subsequently gave rise to the Reconnect program (rolled out 1997–2003), which was an important innovation in policy and service provision, and the first explicit early intervention program in the homelessness sector—and possibly a world first (Prime Ministerial Youth Homeless Taskforce 1996).

The 2008 independent National Youth Commission (NYC) Inquiry into Youth Homelessness conducted a Burdekin-type inquiry into youth homelessness and brought to public attention the lack of progress since Burdekin. The report from this Inquiry, *Australia's homeless youth* (NYC 2008), shaped the government White Paper, *The Road Home* (FaHCSIA 2008). In 2019, a decade further on, *A national report card on youth homelessness* (MacKenzie and Hand 2019a: 8) acknowledged that the past decade had 'begun well with some promise', but drew the conclusion that *The Road Home* agenda had only been partially delivered.

A piecemeal approach to improving the status quo of current programs raises the question whether a more systemic reform and system design might be required.

Youth homelessness has had a relatively high public profile from early on—yet the practical policy and program responses, despite often being innovative, have fallen short of achieving a significant impact on the problem (MacKenzie 2018a; MacKenzie and Hand 2019a). There has been a considerable body of research done on youth homelessness in Australia, so a lack of knowledge about youth homelessness cannot be the main issue. The challenge of this project and its underlying premise is to think about the problem of youth homelessness from a system perspective, and consider what reforms and redesign could achieve that has not been achieved by the current status quo of policy and programs.

## 1.2 Policy context

Over nearly three decades (1980–2008), the Australian experience with youth homelessness as a social problem has been marked by a promising early start, vigorous advocacy by community organisations and youth advocacy coalitions, the launch of the Reconnect early intervention program in 1997, three major official inquiries, and one independent people's inquiry, a lot of media coverage and, since the 1990s, a continuous stream of research on youth homelessness.

### 1.2.1 The incidence of youth homelessness

Homeless youth and children are one of the largest cohorts using the SHS: 43 per cent of clients of the SHS system—or 124,393 men, women and children—are under the age of 25 years. However, this statistic is somewhat misleading unless unpacked and explained.

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) *Report on homelessness services, 2017–18* (AIHW 2018b), some 43,200 young people aged 15–24 years present alone when they approach a homelessness service for assistance—which is 15 per cent of the SHS annual client throughput. There are:

- 47,682 children aged 0–9 years who are accompanying a parent or parents;
- 17,887 children aged 10–14 years who are, with a few exceptions, also with a parent or parents;
- 15,624 individuals, the majority of whom are either young parents or an adolescent accompanying a parent or parents.

So, 81,193 young adult parents and children present for assistance as family units, mostly single parents with accompanying children (28% of the SHS annual client throughput). The young adult parents and children require a family-friendly and appropriate response, whereas the youth cohort aged 15–24 years require an individual response.

### 1.2.2 Commonwealth-level policy

Homelessness policy in Australia is still substantially shaped by the Commonwealth Government White Paper *The Road Home: a national approach to reducing homelessness* (FaHCSIA 2008)—despite several changes of government in the years since, and many different ministers.

The White Paper proposed a strategic framework linked to the long-term objective of halving homelessness, and three core strategies:

- **‘Turning off the tap’**—a colourful way of expressing the idea of prevention and early intervention;
- **‘Improving and expanding services’**—upgrading and improving the current homelessness service system;
- **‘Breaking the cycle’**—support and housing options for the most vulnerable people to ensure that their experience of homelessness does not reoccur (FaHCSIA 2008).

The report also recognised that redressing homelessness required policy reforms beyond the narrow purview of the system of SHS. The importance of mainstream institutions and programs in the early intervention policy frame was raised but not given much in the way of detail—despite advocacy around early intervention since the mid-1990s.

Alongside the White Paper, the federal government consolidated the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement (CSHA) and several other existing Commonwealth housing and homelessness assistance programs into a National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA). A new agreement, the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) replaced the NAHA for the period 2018–2023, with an option for further terms of five years (CFFR 2018a). In terms of homelessness, the NHHA requires that states and territories have a strategy that:

- addresses the priority homelessness cohorts;
- sets out reforms and initiatives that will contribute to a reduction in the incidence of homelessness;

- incorporates the homelessness priority policy reform areas ... where appropriate to its needs.

Of six national priority homelessness cohorts, 'children and young people' are one priority cohort, while 'people exiting institutions and care into homelessness' are another. In terms of state-specific priority policy reform areas, the NAHA focuses on three key areas for reform:

- Achieving better outcomes for people, setting out how the desired outcomes for individuals will be measured—which may include a focus on priority groups, and economic and social participation;
- Early intervention and prevention, including through mainstream services, setting out actions being taken through homelessness services and mainstream services—which may include a focus on particular client groups or services;
- Commitment to service program and design that is evidence- and research-based, which shows what evidence and research was used to design responses to homelessness and how responses and strategies will be evaluated (CFFR 2018a: 17).

The original 2008 White Paper still stands as a kind of shadow framework that is seldom explicitly acknowledged—even though it still broadly informs and shapes federal, state and territory government plans and strategy documents (MacKenzie and Hand 2019a).

### 1.2.3 State- and territory-level policy and strategies

Various strategy documents and plans have been issued by the states and territories.

#### **Victoria**

The most recent strategy document from the *Victorian Government is Victoria's homelessness and rough sleeping action plan* (DHHS 2018), an effort that was criticised for being less of a homelessness strategy and more a refocus on inner-city 'rough sleeping'.

However, although the action plan was clearly a response to the abortive street protests about homelessness in the central business district (CBD) in 2016, the broader Victorian approach to homelessness is more nuanced, balanced and substantial. The key policy directions are:

- 'intervening early to prevent homelessness';
- 'providing stable accommodation as quickly as possible';
- 'support to maintain stable accommodation';
- 'an effective and responsive homelessness service system' (DHHS 2018: 25).

The action plan referenced significant funding for a range of initiatives, including \$2.8m to expand TGP from four to seven schools in Geelong. Victoria has adopted the Home Stretch agenda for supporting young people leaving care.

#### **New South Wales**

New South Wales has issued several documents. *Foundations for change* (NSW Government 2016) was followed by the *NSW homelessness strategy 2018–2023* (NSW Government 2018), which emphasises a commitment to early intervention. The NSW strategy is focussed on three key areas:

- Prevention and early intervention—'build a mainstream service system that is able to intervene early to prevent homelessness and break disadvantage';
- Better access to support and service—'increase access to supports, including housing, that prevent homelessness and re-entry into homelessness';

- An integrated person-centred system—‘create an integrated, person-centred service system’ (NSW Government 2018:25).

Children and young people are an identified priority group: ‘Ninety per cent of young people experiencing homelessness have witnessed violence in their home, 60 per cent have been in out of home care (OOHC), and 50 per cent have a reported mental health issue. Young people leaving OOHC who left school in Year 9 or 10 are 32 per cent more likely to access SHS compared to those who completed Year 12’ (NSW Government 2018: 9).

The NSW homelessness strategy has provided \$4.7m of funding for two pilot COSS-model sites over four years—the Albury Project and the Mt Druitt Project—under what is called the Universal Screening and Support Project.

### **South Australia**

South Australia’s *Homeless to home: South Australia’s homelessness strategy 2009–2013* (Department for Families and Communities 2011) has been largely superseded by the Adelaide Zero Project, a plan involving 30 organisations committed to ‘working to end street homelessness in Adelaide’ (Adelaide Zero Project 2018), with a 2020 target to achieve functional zero homelessness in the CBD.

This SA project is modelled on plans to end city homelessness in the USA, and is heavily influenced by leading US advocate Roseanne Haggerty. A discussion paper issued in August 2017 highlighted how Haggerty—who had been the 2005 Thinker in Residence—had ‘issued the challenge to Adelaide to end street sleeper homelessness by application of the Functional Zero approach in the local context’ (Tually, Skinner et al. 2017: 10). Haggerty saw this as a first step towards ending all homelessness in Adelaide—and ultimately all SA.

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 simply rooflessness. So, although the Functional Zero project appears to be well-organised and strongly supported, it is out of step with much of what is being planned in other jurisdictions.

### **Queensland**

Queensland’s most recent initiative is the plan *Partnering for impact to reduce homelessness in Queensland* (Department of Housing and Public Works 2018), which is a component of the *Queensland Housing Strategy 2017–2027*, and emphasises ‘early intervention’ and supportive housing initiatives as central tenets. The Queensland Government promised that ‘beyond our commitment to five-year funding, we will consolidate and expand efforts towards homelessness prevention and early intervention, supportive housing and improving pathways out of homelessness’ (Department of Housing and Public Works, Partnering for Impact 2018). In terms of housing options for young people, two new foyers are planned—for the Gold Coast and Townsville—while the existing Logan Youth Foyer will be expanded. The other proposition relevant to youth homelessness is the commitment to ‘trial a place-based case management approach across schools, youth services and homelessness services to support young people at risk of homelessness’ (Department of Housing and Public Works 2018: 5). The consultation in south-east Queensland to determine the readiest communities for implementing the COSS model has been completed, and two pilot sites are likely to be launched in 2020.

### **Western Australia**

The Department of Communities in Western Australia is leading a process for developing a whole-of-community 10-year strategy plan to address homelessness. The summary report (Department of Communities 2019) highlights service providers’ responses to an online survey, including their call for increased crisis accommodation and outlines the three ‘focus areas’ that require high-level of change over the life of the upcoming strategy:

- creating sustainable pathways out of homelessness, which includes an increase of crisis and short-term transitional accommodation;
- prevention and early intervention, which may involve supporting the Home Stretch agenda;
- transforming the existing homelessness service system to create an integrated, person-centred system.

### **Tasmania**

The Tasmanian response to homelessness is laid out in *Tasmania's Affordable Housing Action Plan 2019-2023* published in March 2019 (Department of Communities Tasmania 2019). This document represents a Stage 2 implementation of *Tasmania's Affordable Housing Strategy 2015-2025* (Department of Communities Tasmania 2015). The key priorities were firstly the creation of 'new supply' followed by 'improved access' and 'responsive services'. A press release from Minister Jaensch on 12 June 2019 framed the Action Plan 2 in terms of 'the only way to address the housing shortage and reduce homelessness is to provide more homes for those that need them' as well as a commitment to 'expand the capacity of existing crisis shelters and build new ones' (Jaensch 2019). Targeted early intervention is mentioned in terms people experiencing housing stress and who may therefore be at-risk of homelessness. The response to youth homelessness is in terms of 'new supported accommodation for youth' – the expansion of Thyne House in Launceston, that provides long-term affordable and supported accommodation for young people, and plans for new youth foyers in Burnie and Hobart.

### **Australian Capital Territory**

The Government's *ACT Housing Strategy* following a community consultation in 2017 presents a strategic vision that 'The ACT Housing Strategy will encourage and promote a housing market that meets the diverse and changing needs of the Canberra community, and enable a sustainable supply of housing for individuals and families at all income levels' (Australian Capital Territory Government 2018: 4-5) that is broken down into five strategic goals:

- An equitable diverse and sustainable supply of housing for the ACT community;
- Reducing homelessness;
- Strengthening social housing assistance;
- Increasing affordable rental housing;
- Increasing affordable home ownership.

The main emphases on homelessness are about a stronger and more sustainable homelessness services system and improved pathways out of homelessness. It is not clear from the strategy document how early intervention and prevention will be implemented apart from reference to strong community partnerships throughout the ACT services system.

### **Northern Territory**

When Minister McCarthy launched the Northern Territory Homelessness Strategy 2018–23, *Pathways out of Homelessness*, he declared that:

*our goal is to see an end to homelessness in the NT. We want to end homelessness through collaborative partnerships and collective action. We want Territorians who are homeless to be able to access and sustain stable, long-term housing. For people who experience vulnerability, we want to prevent them falling into the homelessness cycle. We want all Territorians to have a high quality life and good health and to feel socially included.* (Northern Territory Government 2019: 1)

The rate of homelessness in the Northern Territory is the highest for any Australian jurisdiction and the Strategy identifies overcrowding as 'the major driver of homelessness in the NT'

(Northern Territory Government 2019: 4). While the main strategic focus is on the housing challenge, early intervention is conceived of as support delivered to people leaving care and custodial settings and the NT Government's efforts to address domestic, family and sexual violence.

### **Nationally**

While there is commonality among these states, there is also a disturbing extent of divergence among the jurisdictions: commitments to early intervention are evident in some state and territory plans, but barely mentioned in others, where rough sleeping has been given a greater focus or where the response to homelessness is conceived of as largely a housing issue. The overall national response to homelessness would be greatly strengthened by working to an agreed national strategy—as is done in other high-priority areas of social policy (MacKenzie and Hand 2019a).

#### **1.2.4 Early intervention and prevention**

Prevention and early intervention are often used as if they were synonyms. The terminology of 'prevention' and 'early intervention' has been taken from the health sector.

##### **Prevention**

A first meaning of *prevention* is for 'universal prevention', which refers to programs and initiatives directed towards an entire population or a whole-of-population cohort. In terms of homelessness, these might include:

- raising youth benefits so that young people who need to move onto independent living early are more likely to be able to afford private rental;
- broad measures to improve student support services in schools, to ensure schools provide a more inclusive environment;
- changes to school curricula so that fewer disadvantaged students leave school early.

Universal prevention measures often serve as generic prevention of a range of adverse outcomes for young people.

A second meaning of prevention is 'selected prevention'. This is prevention directed towards individuals who are members of a designated at-risk group, such as entitlements for support for all young people who have been in OOHC on the grounds that they belong to a group known to be at higher risk of homelessness. Another example might be to focus on additional support for young people from socially and economically disadvantaged single-parent families. Individual screening is not required.

A third meaning is 'indicated prevention' or 'targeted prevention', which focuses on identified at-risk individuals. Indicated prevention refers to measures that are directed towards individuals because of characteristics that are known to place them in the high-risk category. These characteristics are identifiable from available individual data or via a process of individual screening. In the prevention terminology of the health sector, early intervention for homelessness using the at-risk indicator and other information is 'indicative prevention'.

##### **Early intervention**

In Australia, 'early intervention' has been about reaching recently homeless youth—but it also includes highly or imminently at-risk young people. Early intervention, defined in this way, is the same as indicated prevention (see Shinn and Toohey 2001).

While early intervention found its way into high-level policy documents such as the Australian Government 2008 White Paper, *The Road Home*, government resourcing for youth homelessness has generally fallen short of what might have been expected from its public



policy prominence. A year after the White Paper, in the short 2009 Australian Government report, *Along The Road Home* (FaHCSIA 2009), the Government held up the long-established national Reconnect program as its exemplar of early intervention, helping 5,500 young people and 3,500 family members at a cost of \$22m across 108 services.

### 1.2.5 Out-of-home care and homelessness

The problems of the care and protection system are endemic, and the relationship between young people in OOHC and homelessness has been well established.

In the White Paper, *The Road Home* (FaHCSIA 2008: 9), it was noted that a 'significant number of people who are chronically homeless were under the care of child protection systems in the past', and that 'young people leaving care and child protection systems also report high levels of homelessness'. This was because 'child protection systems have not been able to provide secure, stable accommodation'. Service providers reported that 'many young adults who are experiencing homelessness have recently left child protection systems and do not have the income or skills to manage a home of their own'.

The current overarching policy for OOHC is the *National framework for protecting Australia's children 2009–2020* developed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). Its implementation is via a series of three-year action plans:

- the first plan focussed on improving collaboration between government and non-government sectors;
- the second plan focussed on raising awareness on child protection issues;
- the third plan focussed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families;
- the fourth and current plan is seeking to improve outcomes.

The Commonwealth Government has a facilitatory role within the scope of the national framework, but responsibility for OOHC largely rests with the states and territories (COAG 2009). Since 2012, there have been eight public reports by various state and territory governments and statutory bodies that focus on improving service responses to children in OOHC, and recommend increasing the age of transition (Mendes 2019):

- Victoria: Report of the protecting Victoria's vulnerable children inquiry (DPC 2012).
- Tasmania: *An uncertain road ahead: young people leaving care in Tasmania* (Commissioner for Children and Young People Tasmania 2012).
- Queensland: *Taking responsibility: a roadmap for Queensland child protection* (Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry 2013).
- South Australia: *The life they deserve* (Attorney-General's Department 2016)
- Australian Government: *Out of home care* (Senate Community Affairs References Committee 2015).
- New South Wales: Child Protection Inquiry into Child Protection Report (Legislative Council 2017).
- Northern Territory: Royal Commission into the protection and detention of children in the Northern Territory (Australian Government 2017).
- Western Australia: *Young people leaving care* (Office of the Auditor General 2018).

Similar issues are discussed in these reports. There was an emerging consensus that support for care-leavers should be extended to at least 21 years, but perhaps 25 years of age would be more realistic, and that there is a cost-benefit to be gained (Raman, Inder et al. 2005).

### 1.2.6 Advocacy around youth homeless in Australia: the current state of play

On 18–19 March 2019, a National Youth Homelessness Conference was held—the first in some 20 years. It was supported by 700 attendees and was organised around a review of what has been achieved since the *2008 National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness* and the release of the *Roadmap for Youth Homelessness* agenda issued by that Inquiry. The 2019 Conference launched a Report Card (Hand 2019) that concluded that ‘the past decade began well with some promise’ but that ‘the early promises made have only been partially delivered’. The Report Card offered an overall scorecard of progress, which was ‘at best a two-star rating ... developing—some progress underway’ (MacKenzie and Hand 2019a, 2019b).

### 1.2.7 The challenge ahead

Early intervention to avert and reduce youth homelessness is well established in policy statements and with some promising initiatives attempting a place-based community-level response. The challenge is that a more cross-sectoral integrated or collective impact response ideally requires different departments to closely collaborate on how they might support such a radically different approach to service provision, and what that would involve at higher levels of government administration—even down to co-funding. In terms of housing options, the problem facing young people is not explicit in housing policy nor appropriately considered in employment support policy. The broad policy consensus on OOH is that the implementation of adequate leaving-care support has yet to have the impact needed to reduce homelessness.

## 1.3 Existing research

As already noted in this section, there is a mature body of research and policy work on youth homelessness in Australia (MacKenzie and Hand 2019e): two major government inquiries, the Senate Standing Committee’s *Report on youth homelessness* (Senate 1982) and the House of Representatives’ *Report on aspects of youth homelessness* (House of Representatives 1995); the landmark report of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC 1989); and the report of the independent National Youth Commission into Youth Homelessness (NYC 2008). These reports proposed recommendations for action—but despite the high public profile of youth homelessness, much less was done than envisaged in these reports.

### 1.3.1 Conceptualising youth homelessness as a social problem

In the wake of the Burdekin Report, researchers paid attention to youth homelessness. One ongoing issue is the definition of homelessness. Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1992) advanced a cultural definition of homelessness as more than rooflessness using the following categories:

- **Primary homelessness:** rough sleeping, in tents or cars or public facilities;
- **Secondary homelessness:** temporary shelter, either couch-surfing or supported accommodation;
- **Tertiary homelessness:** boarding house accommodation.

Broadly, homelessness is a situation below the bottom boundary of what is considered adequate housing in a particular culture or country.

The National Youth Coalition on Housing (NYCH) advanced a service delivery definition of homelessness that recognised a broad range of unstable and insecure situations as ‘homelessness’. This was widely referred to and informed the definition of homelessness embodied in legislation for the SAAP.

More recently, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) combined much of the cultural definition of homelessness with the European Typology of Homelessness (ETHOS) and inadequate



housing situations to advance a new statistical definition of homelessness (ABS 2012a). It is important for policy and planning purposes that official statistics on homelessness in Australia are collected—but several controversial issues remain unresolved.

The first issue is that the number of young people couch-surfing is under-reported, and the ABS concedes that it:

*has not yet been able to establish any reliable way, with existing data sources, of estimating homelessness among youth staying with other households and for whom a usual address is reported in the Census. Service providers and researchers have indicated that the estimates of homeless youth derivable from Census data do not concord with their knowledge about youth homelessness.*  
(ABS 2012b)

The second issue is defining serious overcrowding as a form of homelessness. This has created a category of 'homelessness' referred to by critics as the 'housed homeless'—a situation in which these individuals may be at-risk of homelessness but not homeless while they remain housed or at home (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2014).

Thirdly, there was debate and research on the extent of the homelessness problem. An early claim was based on a census of homeless school students in Australian Government and Catholic secondary schools, which found some 11,000 reported cases of young people still at school but in an out-of-home situation (MacKenzie and Chamberlain 1995). These young people typically were unable to continue their attendance at school and tended to drop out fairly quickly.

A fourth issue is about to represent the dynamics of homelessness. A frontline for research was the idea of homelessness as a process, a 'career', or a series of trajectories and pathways. The notion of a homeless 'career' based on an ideal-typification similar to Howard Becker's deviant careers usefully emphasised the dynamic nature of the homelessness experience (Becker 1973), but has been criticised as 'a singular linear trajectory rather than multiple and different pathways in and out of homelessness' (Johnson 2009). It has been criticised also on the basis of questioning the idea of a homelessness identity rather than young people faced with a lack of other options adapting to the reality of their situation.

### **1.3.2 Drivers of youth homelessness**

Multiple issues are implicated in young people becoming homeless such as drug issues, mental health issues, gender and LGBTQI issues (Cooper 2017; Castellanos 2016; Macdonald and Cooper 1998; Mallett, Rosenthal et al. 2005; Rosenthal, Mallett et al. 2006). Many young people become homeless because of issues related to their family of origin, such as parental drug and alcohol abuse, and domestic and family violence (Jordan 2012). LGBTQI young people are also vulnerable to homelessness.

Young people who have been in care and protection—and particularly young people who have to leave the care and protection system and move onto independent living—are particularly vulnerable to becoming homeless (Beauchamp and Hollywood 2012; Maunders, Liddell et al. 1999; Osborne and Bromfield 2007). This has been well known since the early 1990s, and since then, there have been many leaving-care projects and initiatives. However, Phillip Mendes, a leading Australian researcher on OOHHC, has commented that 'to date [there has] been only limited examination of the effectiveness of the various leaving care and after care programs' (Mendes 2012b), and that remains largely true to the present day. The vigorous Home Stretch Campaign has highlighted that—despite the relationship between leaving care and homelessness being well known, and after many projects and initiatives—the net impact systemically has not significantly changed the outcomes for this particularly disadvantaged cohort (Home Stretch 2019).

Behind the reasons young people end up experiencing homelessness are broader structural factors such as:

- the labour market available to young people;
- insecure employment;
- income issues related to unemployment benefits or benefits available to young people who are not—or not able to be—in the labour force.

Studies by Johnson, Scutella et al. (2015a) examined the entry and exits of people who experience homelessness in terms of individual and structural factors. They found complex interactions and differently relevant factors dependent on different cohorts within the homeless population. They highlight three main policy implications (2015a:44) as follows:

- 1 'The importance of interventions designed to prevent homelessness among identified high risk groups';
- 2 'Thinking about entries and exits from homelessness separately' and 'some groups that are at higher risk of entering homeless have less difficulty exiting homelessness', and vice versa';
- 3 'housing and labour markets matter' less for complex and high-need clients, but matter more for individuals without such high and complex needs or behavioural issues.

Another relevant body of research by Dwyer and Wyn (2001), published as *Youth, Education and Risk: Facing the Future*, examined the complexity of changes in society and the economies of Western countries such as Australia that impact on the transition trajectories from adolescence to adulthood, and from school to work. The way young people who experience homelessness make sense of and work their way through this complex changing world is a subset of Dwyer and Wyn's broader argument.

### **1.3.3 Effective casework and interventions**

Given that the SHS system consists mainly of crisis and transitional services, along with activities and programs associated with such services, the dominant mode of practice is case management of clients. There is a large body of literature on case work in the social work profession that generally applies to responding to homelessness, but relatively little in the way of specific research studies on effective practice, especially practice focussed on young people.

A paper in the social work literature about the large study of case-management services in Victoria using large government datasets, found that unemployed and homeless young people who received 20 or more case-management contacts had significantly better accommodation and employment outcomes (Grace and Gill 2014; 2016).

An AHURI report by Gronda (2009), *What makes case management work for people experiencing homelessness?* Evidence for practice, found that effective case management is about developing relationships with clients that are 'persistent, reliable, intimate and respectful'. Transactional 'short-term crisis responses, or as high caseload, office-based brokerage and referral services' are to be avoided, although not every person needs a long period of case management. What is more important is that the duration of case work should be needs-based and 'individually negotiated with reference to the person receiving assistance and a realistic level of self-care as an outcome goal' (Gronda 2009: 11).

A recent literature review of effective interventions (Barker, Humphries et al. 2013a) and an accompanying report on the practice of Reconnect services (Barker, Humphries et al. 2013b) examined more deeply the range of practices relevant to the early intervention of what Reconnect workers typically do when they respond to referrals. The principles of practice are similar to the good practice principles for case work in crisis services—relationship-oriented,

client-centred, flexible, holistic, strength-based and solution-oriented—but early intervention involves family-focussed interventions as well as one-to-one interventions (Barker, Humphries et al. 2013b). In the literature review, Barker, Humphries et al. (2013b) discuss early intervention practice from a system perspective and advocate place-based services ‘developed locally’ and ‘tailored to meet the needs of young people and their families within particular contexts’ (see also MacKenzie and Hand 2019c). Likewise, Bruce, Boyce et al. advise that, ‘Long term sustainable programs and services tend to be community-based, birthed and sourced from within that community’ (2009: 26).

Barker, Humphries et al. (2013b) distil from the literature the following mechanisms that support long-term sustainable services:

- Systematic coordination of services;
- Involvement of services, including education, that work with vulnerable young people;
- Collaboration and cooperation between government and community organisations;
- Voluntary partnerships across services;
- Comprehensive protocols for data collection and sharing to inform comprehensive service delivery;
- Identification of preferred outcomes for young people;
- Inclusion and participation of young people in planning and decision-making;
- Investment in workforce development.

Long-term support and sustainability have been highlighted in both the national and international literature as key issues in supporting vulnerable young people (Lemmon 2008). This key point might apply as much to the local service youth and homelessness system as it does to the experience of support by some young people, who may need support for a long period of time.

### 1.3.4 Early intervention

The argument about intervening early has been raised since the mid-1990s from research studies, as well as from several government inquiries (MacKenzie and Chamberlain 1995; MacKenzie and Hand 2019b; House of Representatives 1995).

A more recent compelling argument for early intervention is based on research into the costs of young people becoming homeless. The study by MacKenzie, Flatau et al. (2016) followed some 400 homeless and unemployed young people over three years to determine which health and justice services they used over that time. The average costs per person per year due to homelessness was \$14,986 in health and justice costs alone—which amounted to an annual cost to the community of \$626m, which was more than the \$619m spent each year on providing homeless services in Australia for all people using these services. These costs are apart from the cost of providing support and accommodation through the SHS system.

Another important study of the costs of disadvantage is Lamb and Huo’s (2015) *Counting the costs of lost opportunity in Australian education*, which calculated the fiscal and social costs of early school leaving in Australia. Young people who experience homelessness are a significant cohort within the larger cohort of young people who leave school early. However, we do know that early school leavers are more likely to experience homelessness at some point. The annual costs per disengaged young person was \$10,300 fiscal and \$27,600 social costs, making a fiscal cost of \$470.7m and \$1.26b annually and \$18.8b fiscal and \$50.5b social costs over a lifetime.

The Commonwealth-funded Reconnect program—which is discussed in detail in Chapter 5—was first deployed in 1997, and still provides early intervention in 108 locations throughout Australia (MacKenzie 2016b) to young people who are referred to the program. The 200 early-intervention workers take referrals and engage with families doing family reconciliation and mediation or counselling, as required. Considerable attention during the early years was given to developing reflective early-intervention practitioners through an action research and professional development program.

Another model of early intervention beyond the horizon of Reconnect is the ‘community of schools and service’ (COSS) model, which is also discussed further in Chapter 5. This model has achieved recognition in Australia and internationally as an exemplar of effective early intervention. It is designed to reduce family issues that are heading towards a crisis and possible homelessness, as well as to reduce other adverse outcomes such as disengagement from education and early school leaving.

The COSS model is a ‘collective impact’ initiative in which key local stakeholders collaborate deeply on a common vision and agenda, with shared data, a new form of governance and operational organisation, as well as a backbone staffing for the community collective (Hand and MacKenzie 2019; MacKenzie 2018b). A key innovation of the model is population screening for risk (which enables pre-crisis early identification of young people at-risk) and then working efficiently and systematically with the entire at-risk cohort through secondary school and beyond until a pathway to employment has been firmly established.

The outcomes achieved by the COSS model in Geelong, Victoria (the Geelong Project), of a 40 per cent reduction in adolescent homelessness, and a 20 per cent reduction in early school leaving has demonstrated what an early-intervention place-based approach is capable of achieving (MacKenzie 2018c; MacKenzie and Thielking 2013).

### **1.3.5 Social housing options for young people**

Young people exiting homelessness need rapid access to affordable, safe and stable housing to prevent relapsing back into homelessness. The current system does not provide rapid rehousing, except in some individual cases where the experience of homelessness and contact with the homeless services system coincides with a housing opportunity—which is the exception rather than the general rule. Repeated calls to overhaul the youth social housing options for young people exiting homelessness have been voiced with little effect—except in NSW.

Three important models of housing options for young people exiting homelessness, which are each discussed further in Chapter 4, are:

- The Youth Foyer model derived from the UK, but developed in Australia as a response to youth homelessness (Steen and MacKenzie 2013);
- A model of social housing for young people, My Foundations Youth Housing Company. It does not reference research studies but is an initiative in NSW to create a youth-specific social housing provider (MacKenzie 2016c);
- Subsidised rentals in the private rental market.

## **1.4 Investigating the possibilities for system redesign**

The focus of this supporting project is both timely and relevant, given the NSW policy priority on ‘reducing youth homelessness’ (which is one of the NSW Premier’s 12 policy priorities) and the continuing focus on youth homelessness in state and territory jurisdictions.

The research for this study was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committees of Swinburne University and the University of South Australia. In reporting the data collected for this study, care has been taken to preserve the anonymity of key informants and workers. As there are fewer Aboriginal-specific organisations in the service sector, we have been especially sensitive to reporting data from Aboriginal workers and workers from Aboriginal-specific organisations to ensure their identities and the organisations' identities are protected.

#### **1.4.1 Research questions**

This project is one of three interrelated research projects of a wider *AHURI Inquiry into an Effective Homelessness Service System*. The main question informing the overall Inquiry was:

*How can the homelessness service system be redesigned and implemented to be effective for different groups across the life course?*

Each of the three research projects explored the effectiveness of the homelessness system for specific life stages—young people (this report), families (valentine, Blunden et al. forthcoming) and older people (Thredgold, Beer et al. 2019).

This research project focuses on young people seeking help as individuals—as a specific cohort. It focussed on three research questions:

*Q1. How might policy decision-makers go about rebalancing the support system for vulnerable young people to significantly expand early intervention and post-homelessness rapid rehousing and supported housing for young people?*

*Q2. What changes to housing agreements and policies, as well as income and employment support policies and practices, would be needed to redress the current issues young people have in accessing and maintaining affordable housing options (affordability being relative to the prevailing income levels of unemployed, disadvantaged and homeless young people)?*

*Q3. If education/training and vocationally relevant skills are vital for young people to achieve a sustainable livelihood, how can the education/employment support systems and the community services/homelessness systems be better integrated systemically to reduce the cohort of disadvantaged and/or homeless individuals into the future and across the life course?*

#### **1.4.2 Methods: overview**

This project relies on a conceptualisation of the homelessness service system for young people as most meaningfully a community-level system. Chapter 2 discusses the systems thinking that underpins this premise.

Certain communities were selected purposively. This was because we knew either that they were trying out new approaches, or that certain people in these locations would be key informants for thinking beyond immediate experience to a broad agenda for policy development and system improvement. The investigation was therefore searching for insight and critical thinking about the service system status quo.

In order to investigate the effectiveness of the homelessness service system for young people, the research worked from the premise that focussing on community-level systems in which young people live, go to school and interact with various government-funded youth services (MacKenzie and Hand 2019c) had the potential to answer the key policy questions framing the Inquiry in a practically useful way. Thus, the homelessness service system—where actual interactions take place between at-risk or homeless young people and the services and programs—was conceptualised using a systems thinking approach. The project was designed

to examine the life-stage issues of adolescents and young adults (12–25 years) in the context of a homelessness service system and policy options that would improve systemic effectiveness for this cohort.

It is important to note that themes were not regarded as ‘more significant’ because of the number of informants who spoke about them. Rather, as this study is concerned with critical perspectives and innovation, sometimes it is the themes that were only stated by a small number of respondents that are the most notable examples of innovation.

The research methodology had three main components, with three sub-components in the first:

- Community-level system analysis comprising:
  - analysis of local client data
  - interviews with key local informants
  - interviews with departmental officers responsible for homelessness funding.
- Discussions with key international youth homelessness informants.
- Discussions with Indigenous workers and Indigenous-specific organisations.

Each of these three components is discussed below.

### **1.4.3 Community-level system analysis**

The goal of system redesign requires a conception of the system to be redesigned. Thus, the methodology for this study is shaped by what a service system meaningfully is. The methodological approach is a focus on ‘place’: local communities.

A basic premise of this approach is that a ‘system’—in this case, a homelessness service system for young people—consists of interacting parts, which are the interventions, programs and institutions that affect young people and are, in turn, affected by young people. Young people tend to frequent their own local areas, certainly during their teenage or adolescent years. A local community service system is bounded, either closed or, to varying degrees, open; the whole is more than the sum of its parts. In terms of conceptualising a system in this way, a real-world homelessness services system is something that functions at a sub-regional community level, although the geographical scope of the system as an entity is not a simple matter. Policies and funding—and how these are conceived and implemented—will affect the local system and what happens for the young people who need and seek help.

This component, therefore, compiles system and qualitative data from local community support systems for young people in three state jurisdictions: NSW, SA and Victoria.

It began with an exploratory analysis of local homelessness client data in an attempt to understand the ‘stocks’ and ‘flows’ of young people entering and leaving the homelessness services system and other connected or related systems, such as schools. Each of the selected jurisdictions operates an online data system for clients of the SHS system:

- SA has the Homeless to Home case-management system (H2H);
- Victoria has the Specialist Homelessness Information Platform (SHIP);
- NSW has the Client Information Management System (CIMS).

Access to these local datasets enabled a comparison to be made about client numbers according to geographical places and age groups. For example, data from three SA communities were compared with Geelong—as outlined in figures 3–9 in Chapter 3—to show the effectiveness of interventions such as TGP in reducing adolescent homelessness. Local area data were also compared to state-based aggregate data.



This small-area analysis of client data was complemented by information from informants at a community level, as well as from responsible administrators. Face-to-face and telephone or video conference interviews were conducted with key informants, such as community sector staff, who were able to offer local knowledge about what they regarded as happening for young people in the area who become homeless, leave school early, have limited family supports and experience multiple systemic barriers associated with accessing housing, as well as disability, mental health and family support services. A few interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, but on other occasions, notes were taken during and after the interviews to capture what the informants said.

The selection of community locations was purposive, but included regional areas as well as local government communities within capital cities that have:

- an active youth homelessness service system;
- the existence of early intervention;
- interesting youth housing initiatives.

As this research is concerned with innovation and better designs for youth homelessness service systems, the areas were selected because of known interesting or innovative features of the community contexts and the local services systems, and because key informants there could offer critical insights on system redesign.

The communities selected as locations for reaching key informants were:

- 1 Central Coast of NSW
- 2 Northern Beaches area of Northern Sydney, NSW
- 3 South-west Sydney, NSW
- 4 Hunter Region, Newcastle and the Hunter Valley, NSW
- 5 Northern Rivers area of the North Coast, NSW
- 6 City of Greater Geelong, Victoria
- 7 Greater Shepparton/Moira/Strathbogie, Victoria
- 8 Knox/Maroondah/Yarra Ranges, Victoria
- 9 Mount Gambier, SA
- 10 Northern Corridor of Adelaide, including the City of Playford and the City of Salisbury, SA.

Several face-to-face and telephone interviews were done with departmental officers from NSW, SA and Victoria in order to understand service administration perspectives on the systems the departments preside over through funding homelessness services and monitoring performance for accountability purposes.

#### **1.4.4 International youth homelessness system responses**

The second component of the methodology relies on data derived from conversations with key international informants, mainly Canadians Professor Stephen Gaetz and Ms Melanie Redman and their staff from the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, the Homeless Hub, A Way Home Canada and Making the Shift.

Professor Stephen Gaetz is the Head of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and the Homeless Hub located at York University in Toronto, and probably the most well known figure in homelessness policy and research in Canada. In recent years, Stephen has pioneered a focus on youth homelessness and early intervention in Canada, advocating for shifting the focus of

the homelessness service system from an emergency response to prevention and rehousing (see for example Gaetz 2014).

Melanie Redman is the CEO and President of A Way Home Canada, a national Canadian coalition that seeks to reimagine solutions to youth homelessness through transformations in policy, planning and practice. Melanie also leads the National Learning Community on youth homelessness, which is a Canadian national community of practice of youth homelessness providers committed to reducing the amount of time young people experience homelessness, including reducing the duration of young people's crisis accommodation (emergency shelter) episodes.

Making the Shift is a youth homelessness social innovation lab co-led by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, York University, and A Way Home Canada. Making the Shift operates with the mandate to contribute to the transformation of how Canadians respond to youth homelessness through research and knowledge mobilisation, specifically on youth homelessness prevention and housing stability. With the overarching goal of transforming Canadian responses to youth homelessness, Making the Shift is designed to affect a shift from the ad-hoc responses to youth homelessness—which are centred on emergency services and time-limited supports—to a more strategic and integrated system that prioritises prevention and ending youth homelessness (Making the Shift 2019).

Canada is an ideal country from which to learn about youth homelessness because of the similarities between Canada and Australia, and more specifically, because Gaetz and his colleagues have been so active on youth homelessness policy and programs over recent years. This information has been useful highlighting policy and practice experience and examples of effective system and practice change that informs the Australian case for a youth homelessness system redesign.

#### **1.4.5 Indigenous issues**

While the fieldwork and case study communities did not specifically include a remote Aboriginal community, we spoke to numerous Aboriginal informants, notably Indigenous workers and workers in Indigenous-specific organisations in SA, NSW and Victoria. These informants were asked in face-to-face and telephone interviews about their perspectives on the homelessness service system that Aboriginal young people use and experience.

Issues relating to Aboriginal young people also arose consistently from fieldwork in interviews with non-Aboriginal informants, but more so in some communities than in others, where the Indigenous community is small.

The following chapters draw from the data gathered for this study. The chapters discuss:

- redesigning the youth homelessness system;
- early intervention and prevention of youth homelessness;
- youth housing options;
- young people leaving state care;
- policy developments and implications for redesigning a homelessness system for young people.



## 2 Conceptualising the ‘system’ to be redesigned for young people

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- The youth homelessness services system that faces the redesign challenge is best conceptualised at the community level, where interaction between young people and services, including schools, actually takes place as a system.
  - Small-area data analysis of needs, trends and outcomes can be developed into community-level focussed planning of the ecosystem of supports required by vulnerable young people.
  - There is a strong case for adopting a system reform agenda that moves from a program-oriented approach to a place-based cross-sectoral ‘collective impact’ framework for support and service delivery for at-risk and homeless young people.
  - The relationship between family conflict leading to a risk of homelessness and early school leaving is a significant factor in long-term disadvantage, including homelessness, and leads to thinking about how social and educational services need to be delivered conjointly.
  - A system of local Youth Entry Points would encourage greater networking among homelessness services in local contexts, and potentially provide a community level reportage of SHS client entry and exit statistics.
- 

### 2.1 Local communities as systems

A basic premise of the approach taken in this research project is that a ‘system’—in this case, a homelessness service system for young people—consists of interacting parts: interventions, programs and institutions that affect young people and are, in turn, affected by young people. Young people tend to frequent their own local areas, certainly during their teenage or adolescent years. The primary focus for investigating systems redesign issues is local community systems, including related services and institutions outside of the SHS system—and this can usefully be described as an ecosystem.

Conceptualising the homelessness service system in this way reframes how to imagine the provision of services (MacKenzie and Hand 2019c). The provision of services in local suburban areas to assist young people in the early stages (or risk) of homelessness is essential (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2009). This line of thinking moves away from statewide programs implemented top-down in specified locations, and leads to place-based approaches that ‘work within a geographical community, mobilising community stakeholders and leaders to address specific issues and social problems in their community’ (MacKenzie and Hand 2019c).

*Place-based approaches seek to reform the usage and implementation of the resources available to a community to address specific social issues in that community, such as youth homelessness. Place-based approaches do not aim to focus primarily on targeting individuals or groups according to program criteria, but rather, on bringing a community together to reform local systems to better redress issues such as youth homelessness (MacKenzie and Hand 2019c: 5).*

*Place-based approaches can be the key that unlocks the great power communities hold to develop and deliver innovative local solutions that help overcome entrenched poverty and disadvantage (Mukherjee and Sayers 2016: 7).*

In terms of implementation, MacKenzie and Hand (2019c: 5) advocate the following three steps:

- **Step 1:** agreeing on a system concept of youth homelessness;
- **Step 2:** developing a place-based strategy for the specific community;
- **Step 3:** planning how the strategy will be operationalised in practice.

John Kania and Mark Kramer's seminal 2011 article, 'Collective impact', is arguably the clearest articulation of this type of work (MacKenzie and Hand 2019c). Collective impact initiatives 'are better able to deal with complexity—working to address wicked social problems, such as youth homelessness' (MacKenzie and Hand 2019c: 5).

Collective impact is defined as 'the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem' (Kania and Kramer 2011: 40) and is considered a breakthrough concept for how to operationalise a strong place-based approach to change (MacKenzie and Hand 2019c). While the goal of collaboration in the human services sector is not new, collective impact initiatives are distinctly different from the status quo of programs, and comprise five core conditions:

- a common agenda;
- shared measurements;
- continuous communication;
- mutually reinforcing activities;
- backbone support.

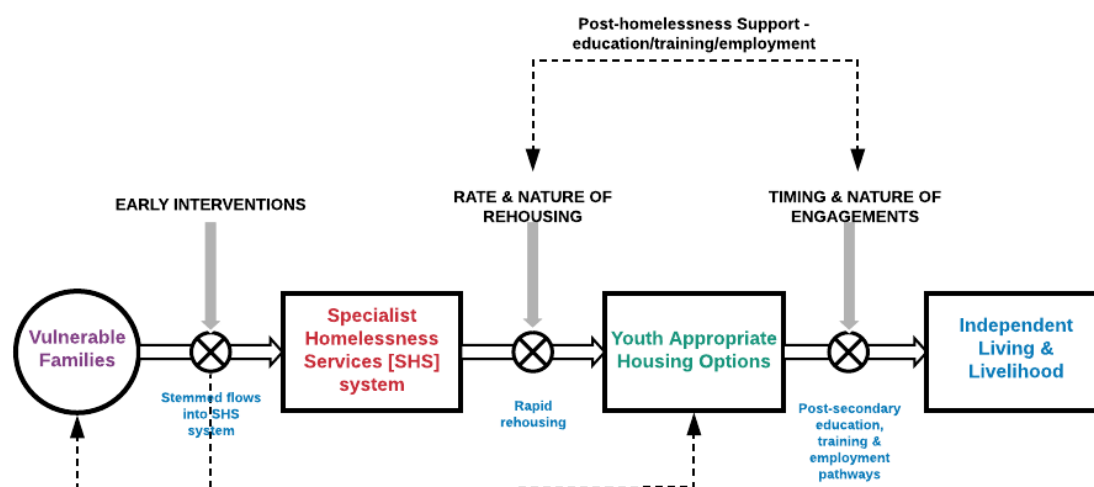
See Section 6.2 for an elaboration of these core conditions.

Across the community locations where we spoke with workers, the general advice was that 90–95 per cent of the young people they had contact with and provided support to were local. In thinking of system redesign, informants from SA called for more locally based services for young people to prevent young homeless or at-risk youth from drifting into the Adelaide CBD to access centrally based services. Many of the Aboriginal informants noted the importance of supporting young people in their community. The premise of local communities as systems—which underpins the systems thinking in this project—seems to hold up.

## **2.2 Before and after youth homelessness: stocks and flows**

Figure 1 is a stock and flow diagram that is a useful way of representing the service system available to young people. The 'stock'—which is the SHS system, and is depicted in red—will be the number of young people who become homeless and for whom the local service system has the capacity to support or accommodate.

**Figure 1: Stock and flow diagram of the homelessness service system for youth**



Source: Developed by MacKenzie, D.

The front-end perspective is whether it is possible to reduce ‘the flow’ of young people becoming homeless by identifying who are they; why they become homeless and what measures could begin to reduce the number becoming homeless?

A back-end perspective is how to effectively and efficiently move young people who have become homeless and sought help from the SHS system into a situation where they are no longer homeless. If returning home with family members is not an option—and it is not an option for some—then moving as quickly as possible into a sustainable housing situation is imperative.

These distinctions become particularly important when thinking about early interventions and what these may require, as well as rapid rehousing to move young people or the families of young parents into some form of supported housing as quickly as possible. The analytical topics in this report are framed by the stock and flow diagram representation of the youth homelessness service system.

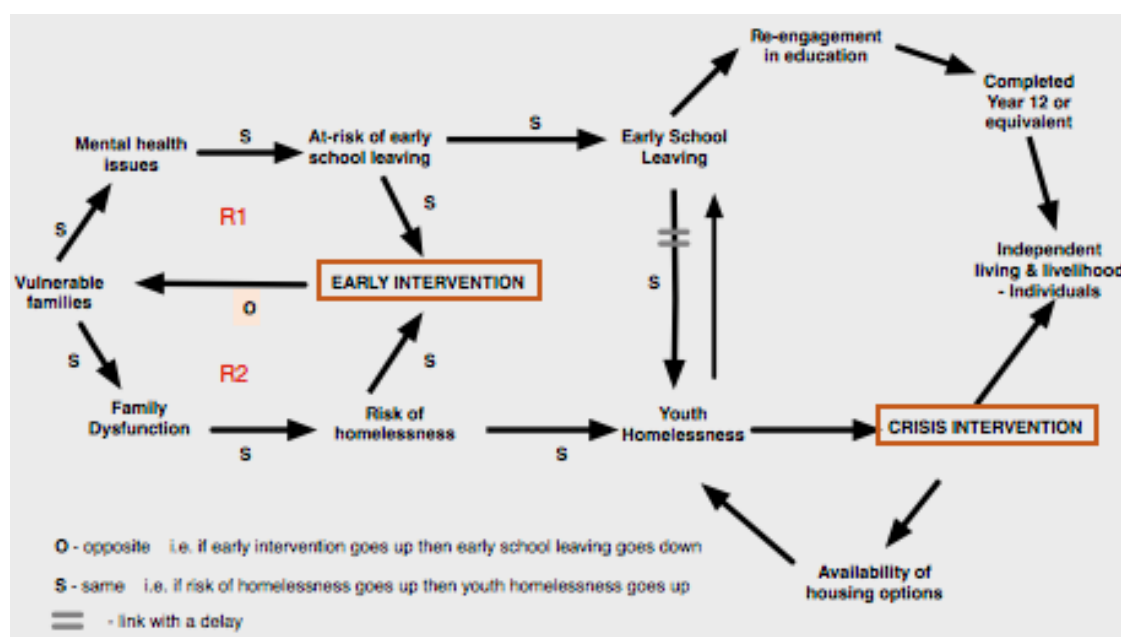
## 2.3 Systems as causal relationships

Another way of usefully representing a community system is to consider the causal relationships between the various input and output variables for ‘early interventions’ and ‘crisis interventions’. Figure 2 reveals the interrelationships between education and homelessness variables, which arguably have particularly important policy implications for avoiding life-long disadvantage, including long periods of homelessness.

A relationship between two variables may be that when one increases so does the other also – an “s” or same directional relationship. An example of this is when the ‘risk of early school leaving’ increases so does early school leaving. Alternatively, the relationship between two variables may be that when one increases, the other decreases – an “o” or opposite directional relationship. The example in Figure 2 of this type of relationship is that if more effective early interventions are implemented then the expected result will be reduced risk amongst vulnerable families.

Two loops have an R at their centres (R1 and R2) which indicates that the loops represent a reinforcing process, in this case reducing the source of the problems provided the ‘early intervention(s) are continuing and effective.

**Figure 2: Causal loop diagram of adolescent homelessness**



Source: Based on an earlier causal loop diagram in MacKenzie, D. & Thielking, M. (2013: 23).

Table 1 sets out the possible transitions, mapped across the two key dimensions of home and relations with family (the homelessness dimension), and school (the education dimension). The ideal is that young people are supported at home and continue on a successful education pathway and leave home when they are able to move on to independent living. Leaving school early even if homelessness is not at issue, for many, tends to lead to long-term disadvantage. Leaving home early if a young person moves on to a sustainable independent living situation is a positive outcome particularly if the young person is able to continue their education.

**Table 1: Mapping transitions for at-risk young people**

Homelessness dimensions	Education dimension			
		In school	Alt. education	Not in education
	At home	<b>A1</b> At-risk school students	<b>B1</b> School leavers in alternative education	<b>C1</b> Early school leavers, not homeless but at-risk
	Homeless	<b>A2</b> Homeless school students	<b>B2</b> Early school leavers in alternative education but homeless	<b>C2</b> Homeless youth, not in education or employment
	Independent	<b>A3</b> School students living independently	<b>B3</b> Early school leavers, living independently, in alternative education	<b>C3</b> Early school leavers, independent, not in education or employment

Source: MacKenzie, D & Thielking, M. (2013), p.13.

The following are the groups constructed using the typology shown in table 1, as used in the Geelong implementation of the COSS model (the Geelong Project, or TGP):

- **A1: At-risk school students:** Students identified as at-risk of homelessness or at-risk of leaving school early.
- **A2: Homeless school students:** These are students who have left home early and experienced homelessness. They may be staying with friends—that is, couchsurfing—or boarding somewhere, but they are often in supported accommodation. These students are highly at-risk of leaving school early as a result of the additional stresses of homelessness.
- **A3: School students living independently:** These are students who are unable to live at home and attend school, but live independently. Their level of risk depends on their living circumstances and how secure they are, and also on their age. These students are deemed to be at-risk because school-age young people living independently will face many stresses.
- **B1: Early school leaver, in alternative education, but still at home:** Some 17,000 students leave Victorian schools each year before completing Year 12.
- **B2: Homeless young person in alternative education:** This is a young person who has left home and experienced homelessness but attends an alternative education program. If in the homelessness service system, they would be supported by Barwon Youth (Geelong), but if not—and if they have become homeless recently—they would be supported by TGP.
- **B3: Early school leaver, living independently and attending alternative education program:** These are young people who have both left home early and left school. They are not homeless if their accommodation is affordable and relatively secure. They remain involved in education and training. This group is reachable because they attend a program but must be regarded as at-risk of homelessness.
- **C1: Early school leaver, living at home:** This is a young person who is not homeless, but has left school before completing Year 12. They are no longer the responsibility of the school, and opportunities to intervene during the process of detachment from school have passed. Their risk of homelessness will depend on their home situation, but they may well be outside contact with the service system, unless they approach an agency for assistance or receive outreach from the planned extension of TGP architecture, which is designed to follow-up early school leavers.
- **C2: Homeless young person:** These are young people who are experiencing homelessness and who have detached from education. They may be difficult to reach, unless they make contact with an agency.
- **C3: Early school leaver, living independently:** This is a young person who has left school and home and is living in an independent living situation. This group is difficult to reach because they are not involved in education.

There are several transitions where the opportunity for intervention is possible:

- **Transition (A1 ⇒ A2) and Transition (A1 ⇒ A3):** A student leaves home but stays at school. If the school quickly becomes aware of this event, then early intervention is possible. For a student to move into an independent living situation without some help is very unlikely.
- **Transition (A1 ⇒ B1):** A student leaves school early, but homelessness does not present as an immediate issue or approaching crisis. In these cases, liaison may take place between the school and the alternative program to manage the transition.
- **Transition (A1 ⇒ B2):** At-risk student experiences homelessness, but is engaged in alternative education or training, which is a positive connection.

- **Transition (A2 ⇒ B2):** Homeless student leaves school early, but is engaged in alternative education or training, which is a positive connection.
- **Transition (C2 ⇒ C1):** Homeless young person returns home but remains disengaged from education or training.
- **Transition (C2 ⇒ C3):** Homeless young person is assisted into accommodation or housing, but is not engaged in education.

For a discussion about how these transitions and interventions can be managed in an integrated community-based approach, see Chapter 6.

Figures 1 and 2 and table 3 outline in diagrammatic form a framework for analysing the place-based homelessness services system as it impacts on young people. The framework highlights the redesign challenge at the community level, where interaction between young people and services—including schools—actually takes place as a system.

The next chapters follow this framework by outlining:

- small-area data analysis of needs, trends and outcomes;
- community-level access to the homelessness service system;
- the early intervention and prevention programs;
- the ecosystem of support services;
- the housing options for exiting from the homelessness service system.

This analysis provides a strong case for adopting a system reform agenda that:

- moves from a program-oriented approach to a place-based cross-sectoral 'collective impact' framework for support and service delivery for at-risk and homeless young people;
- encourages a system of local Youth Entry Points—and thus greater networking among homelessness services in local contexts and a higher community level reportage of SHS client entry and exit statistics;
- addresses key risk factors such as family conflict, by conjointly delivering social and educational services;
- provides a sound basis for community-level focussed planning of an ecosystem of supports that vulnerable young people require.

### 3 A community-level data picture

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- An exploratory analysis of community-level client data in SA, NSW, and in Geelong, Victoria, was framed by the premise of focussing on communities as interactive service systems for young people.
  - Age ranges are an important variable: 12–18-year-olds are school age, although not all individuals will be attending school, particularly if young people in this age group are experiencing homelessness; 19–20-year-olds are more likely to have detached from home; and 21–24-year-olds are more likely to have been living independently in a family situation or in a relationship without children.
  - Local government area-level (LGA) client data analysis revealed interesting similarities and differences—apart from the fact that some areas are larger than others and some areas are more disadvantaged than others. In Playford, SA, adolescent homelessness—that is, 12–18-year-olds—had increased significantly, while in Blacktown, NSW, there had been a decrease, yet by most indicators both areas are disadvantaged.
  - The example of Geelong is notable because the early intervention work there achieved a 40 per cent decrease in adolescent homelessness (12–18-year-olds) within three years, and the longitudinal analysis that established this outcome used 10 years of client data.
  - A number of limitations are attached to the exploratory community-level client data analysis: only two years of data in SA and NSW were available for analysis and comparison; and the collection of the data relied on the capacity of the services available in an area.
  - Based on SA data, a significant proportion of young clients leave SHS into situations of homelessness: 43 per cent of 12–18-year-olds; 53 per cent of 19–20-year-olds; and 43 per cent of 21–24-year-olds. This implies a lack of housing options for many—but also no capacity to achieve effective early intervention at the front-end.
  - Developing collective impact models—such as TGP—as part of the response to youth homelessness will require more sophisticated data modelling based on community-level data.
- 

Agencies have access to their own client data, while reports produced by the AIHW or state and territory departments generally contain aggregated jurisdiction-wide data analysis. Relatively little client analysis has been done at a community-local government area (LGA) level of analysis. However, this is arguably where the most interesting differences are evident. Also, this is the level of analysis that is appropriate for a place-based perspective for service provision and development, and for a ‘collective impact’ model.



Each of the selected jurisdictions operates an online data system for clients of the SHS system:

- SA has the H2H Case Management System.
- Victoria has the Specialist Homelessness Information Platform (SHIP).
- NSW has the Client Information Management System (CIMS).

From each of these platforms, a set of data is uploaded to the AIHW Specialist Homelessness Online Reporting (SHOR) website. The jurisdictional data systems contain much more information than that provided to the AIHW. Agencies also hold more data on clients than is provided to state or territory departments for accountability purposes. Sufficient access to client data was obtained—although not everything that was sought—to demonstrate the differences among communities that would necessarily inform place-based community-level reform.

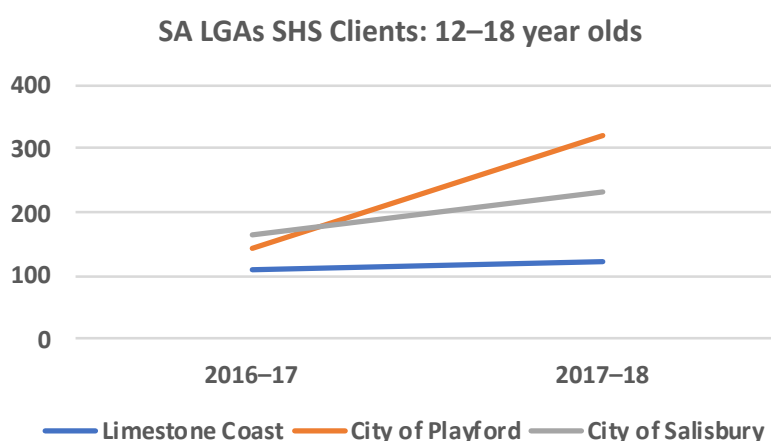
### 3.1 South Australia: comparing three communities

The community-level data revealed differences and similarities that would necessarily inform place-based community-level reform. Three SA communities were compared. They were:

- **City of Playford**, which includes the highly disadvantaged Elizabeth and Davoren Park areas north of the city;
- **City of Salisbury**, an area that is closer to central Adelaide but, with the City of Playford, also along the northern corridor of disadvantage;
- **Limestone Coast** area around Mount Gambier, which is where early intervention along COSS-model lines was trialled for a short time in 2017–18.

The age cohort within the broad range 12–24 years of age is important. Most adolescents aged 12–18 years will be attending secondary school; most 19–20-year-olds will have left school, and many young adults may have left home to live independently or want to leave home, although staying in the family home longer is the contemporary pattern compared with past decades. The differences and similarities are revealing.

**Figure 3: SHS clients in three SA LGAs, 12–18 year olds**



Source: SA H2H data analysis by MacKenzie, D. (2020)



Figure 3 compares 12–18-year-olds in three South Australian LGAs. The notable feature is that over the two-year period there has been a dramatic escalation of school-aged young people in the City of Playford turning up in the SHS system, some increase in the City of Salisbury, but the level of demand in the Limestone Coast has been stable.

However, as shown in Figure 4, there has been a relatively small increase for 19–20-year-olds over two years in the Northern Corridor communities, and a slight decline in the Limestone Coast.

If adolescent homelessness (12–18 years) increases over time, a reasonable expectation would be that there would also be an increase in the 19–20-years age group. From an intervention perspective, an increasing incidence of homelessness for school-aged young people suggests reaching these young people through a school-linked intervention.

**Figure 4: SHS clients in three SA LGAs, 19–20 year olds**

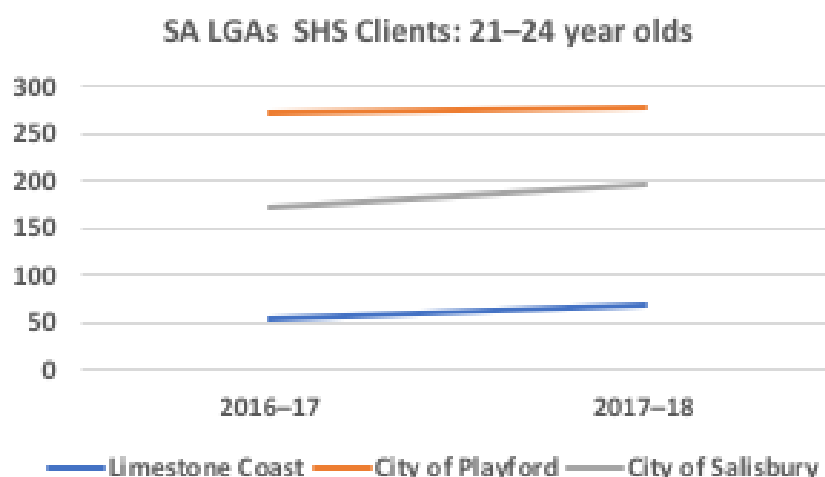


Source: SA H2H data analysis by MacKenzie, D.

Adolescents tend to become homeless due to family issues and conflicts that may well reach the level of violence, together with other issues that may complicate a family situation—such as mental health or drug and alcohol problems.

By contrast, young adults approaching homelessness services are more likely to have been living independently of their family of origin, and their experience of homelessness is more likely to be triggered by domestic violence and a resulting family breakup or a financial and housing crisis.

**Figure 5: SHS clients in three SA LGAs, 21–24 year olds**



Source: SA H2H data analysis by MacKenzie, D.

In the three SA communities for which we were able to obtain data, Figure 5 shows that there has been relatively little change in the flow of young adults seeking help from the SHS.

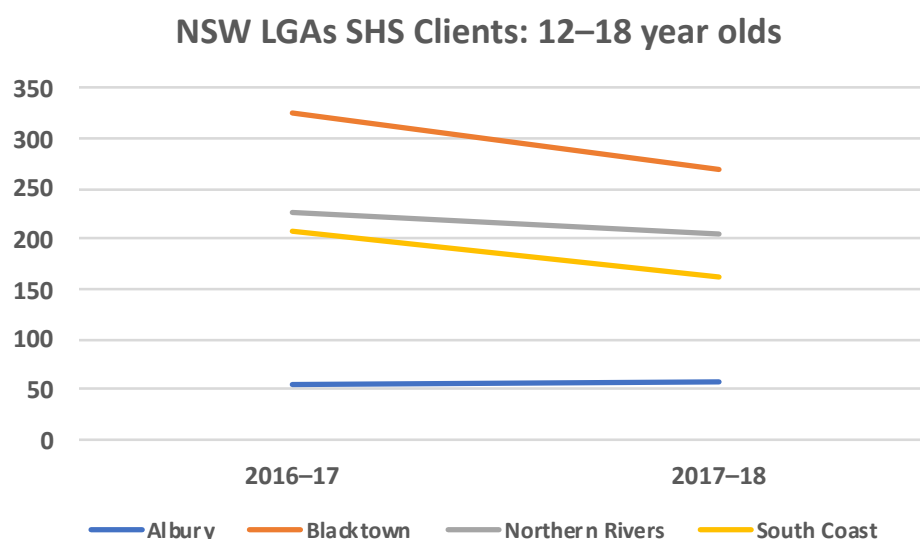
The demand for homeless services for young adults aged 21–24-years-old appears to be relatively stable over the two-year period. This pattern was similar to several Victorian regional communities where the figures reported during interviews suggested a relatively stable but constant demand.

### **3.2 New South Wales: comparing four communities**

In NSW, four communities were compared. They were:

- **Albury:** a regional city on the NSW–Victorian border. For many purposes, the city is Albury-Wodonga, where Wodonga is the town on the Victorian side of the Murray River.
- **Northern Rivers:** an area abutting the NSW–Queensland border. It includes the towns of Tweed Heads, Byron Bay, Ballina, Kyogle, Lismore, Casino and Grafton.
- **South Coast:** for this study, it includes the Illawarra stretches along the coast of NSW from Wollongong to Bega, and includes the towns of Berry, Nowra, Ulladulla, Bateman’s Bay, Moruya, Narooma, Bega and Eden.
- **Blacktown:** a municipality in western Sydney with a population of about 47,000. It has a very multicultural population and is an area containing significant social disadvantage.

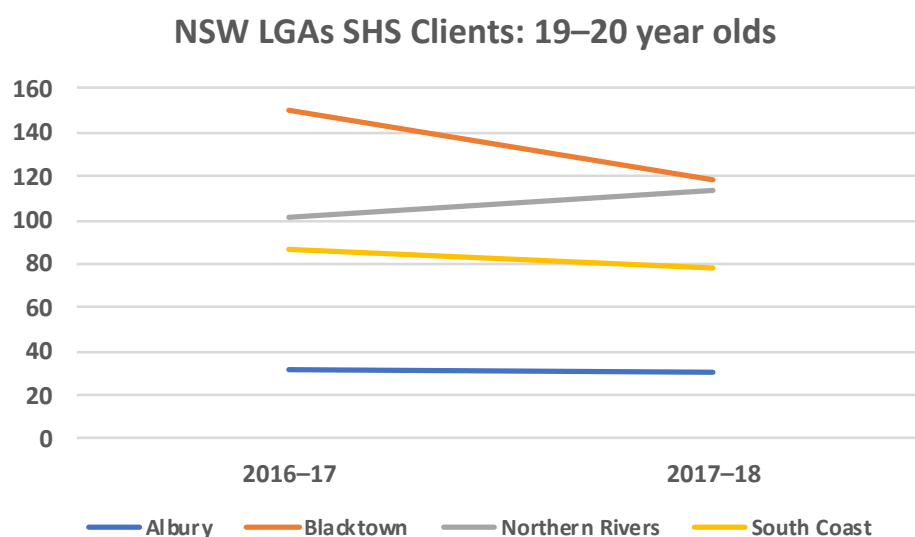
**Figure 6: SHS clients in four NSW LGAs, 12–18 year olds**



Source: NSW SIMS data analysis by MacKenzie, D.

Figure 6 above shows that, in terms of school-age young people, there has been a decrease in adolescents presenting and being accepted as SHS clients, exception for Albury, where there was a very small increase.

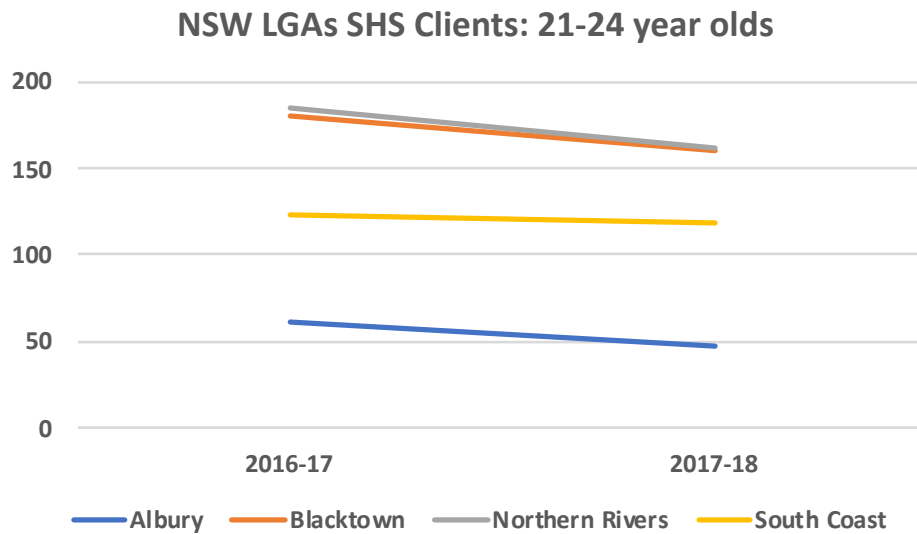
**Figure 7: SHS clients in four NSW LGAs, 19–20 year olds**



Source: NSW SIMS data analysis by MacKenzie, D.

Figure 7 above shows that the decline in 19–20-year-old SHS clients in Blacktown follows the pattern for 12–18-year-olds. There is little change in Albury, a small decrease in the South Coast and a small increase in Northern Rivers.

**Figure 8: SHS clients in four NSW LGAs, 21–24 year olds**



Source: NSW SIMS data analysis by MacKenzie, D.

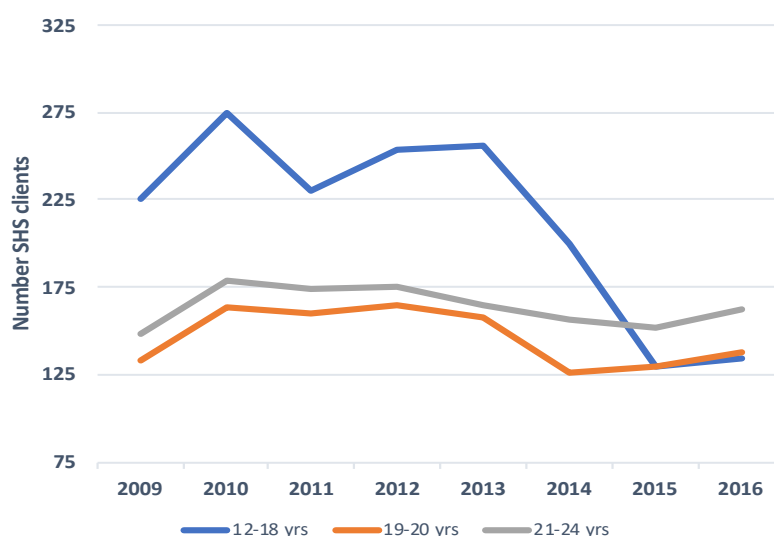
Figure 8 above shows that in all four areas there was a small decrease in young adults 21–24-years-old receiving assistance through the SHS system.

### **3.3 Geelong: longitudinal youth client data**

Figure 9 presents data on SHS clients in Geelong over a longer period (2009–2016). The notable feature of the Geelong data is the significant 40 per cent decrease in adolescents (12–18-year-olds) entering the SHS system through the Youth Entry Point. The other age cohorts showed no significant change.

The decrease in adolescent homelessness in Geelong is in contrast to the data presented on communities in NSW and SA. As far as is known, this is the only example of such a significant decrease so far. This reduction can be attributed confidently to the early intervention delivered to secondary school students through the work of TGP using the COSS Model (MacKenzie and Thielking 2013). As this program has not yet been extended to early school leavers—nor has capacity increased to follow-up and monitor and support the cohort of at-risk young people into young adulthood—the two other age cohorts show no significant change.

**Figure 9: SHS clients by age cohorts, Geelong, 2009–2016**



Source: Analysis of Geelong SHS client data by age cohorts, MacKenzie, D. & Thielking, M. (2013)

### 3.4 The usefulness of local community-level data analysis

The SA data provided profiles on where young people were known to go when they exited from the SHS crisis and transitional housing, where they had been supported and accommodated.

The figures in the following table combine data from the three South Australian LGAs: Playford, Salisbury and the Limestone Coast.

**Table 2: Exit profiles of SHS clients by age group, South Australia, 2018**

	Proportion of clients in SHS exit categories (%)		
	12–18-year-olds (N=675)	19–20-year-olds (N=282)	21–24-year-olds (N=545)
Family	26	12	10
Private rental	27	30	33
Social housing	3	3	7
Homelessness	43	53	48
Institutions	1	2	2
	100	100	100

Source: SA SIMS unit record client data analysis by MacKenzie, D.

Younger adolescents are more likely to be able to return to live with their family—or at least with a family member—even after an experience of homelessness. Private rental remains an important option for housing after homelessness for about one-quarter of adolescents aged 12–18 years and for one-third of young adults. However, as far as service providers know, when 40–50 per cent of young people leave homelessness services, they exit the SHS into situations

of homelessness. The delivery of rapid rehousing and permanent safe and secure youth-appropriate housing remains a serious gap within the local service systems.

The argument about local systems at a community level leads directly to examining existing local client data, as well as generating new local data—as has been done in Geelong.

There are several caveats on this level of analysis. Even to have official client data requires sufficient service capacity. In a community where there were no crisis or transitional services, the statistics could not be obtained. As it happens, most communities do have services but constructing the local data picture can be technically challenging because the outputs are more usually statewide statistics, large regional area statistics or agency level statistics.

Also, most jurisdictions apart from Victoria have the new client data systems that have only been established in recent years, hence the reason for a two-year comparison rather than a more extended longitudinal pattern.

There are several practical implications of community-level data analysis:

- Introducing this level of data analysis is necessary for community-based collective impact developments;
- Successful early intervention that reduces the flow into the system will tend to relieve the pressure to move young people out of SHS services, thus enabling more assistance to obtain securing permanent housing;
- Modelling based on longitudinal community-level data will allow social housing need and investment to be predicted more accurately—assuming that investment in social housing for youth is taken up as a new policy setting;
- Early intervention and investment in youth housing options should be co-developed on a community basis—thereby achieving a complementary impact—rather than being deployed as entirely separate and uncoordinated program initiatives.

## 4 Organising community-level access

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- The National Data Collection was one of the notable developments on the introduction of SHS.
  - A disadvantage of a single central intake system (such as Youth Gateway in SA) is that it is designed to direct an applicant to whatever vacancy is available, rather than addressing the needs of the young person locally.
  - In Victoria, 90–95 per cent of young people with whom services had contact and supported were local residents and from local families.
  - System-wide community-based or regional youth access points would be a relatively minor—but significant—reform initiative across all Australian jurisdictions.
- 

For many years, young people who sought help because of homelessness would approach a homelessness agency that they happened to know about. If the agency was not an agency that could provide a service to the young person—for example, because it was an agency funded to assist another group—that young person would be referred elsewhere. Even if they approached a local youth refuge needing accommodation for that night or the next few nights, the agency might have no capacity to assist—and they would be turned away.

### 4.1 Unmet demand for homelessness accommodation

For years after the development of a National Data Collection under the SAAP system, there was controversy about the turn-away rate. When agencies reported the number of individuals they had turned away on a given night, that figure was added to similar reports from other agencies—which led to the problem of multiple counting, where the same person had approached several agencies seeking accommodation and assistance. Whether there are places available for individuals presenting to services depends on how long current residents stay in the service before transitioning to other accommodation. If homeless clients are able to move relatively quickly into a housing option—that is, rapid rehousing—then someone else can be accepted as a client and provided with accommodation.

Beginning in 1999, a Demand for Accommodation Collection was developed by the AIHW to make a more rigorous and accurate assessment of the met and unmet demand for homelessness services. AIHW describe it this way:

*The Demand for Accommodation Collection covers 2 weeks each year. In 2004–05 it was conducted on 1–7 December 2004 and on 11–17 May 2005.*

*The Collection measures the levels of met and unmet demand for SAAP accommodation by collecting information about requests for accommodation by individuals or groups. SAAP agencies were required to fill out a form every time a person or group sought accommodation. This included when a request for accommodation was met and also when the potential client(s) was turned away. These data are used in conjunction with Client Collection data to calculate the proportion of people turned away from SAAP accommodation.*



*Often when a request for accommodation is not met, agencies are still able to provide one-off assistance to the person or group, for example, when an agency is unable to provide accommodation but able to provide a referral for accommodation. This information is also collected on the Demand for Accommodation form.*

*As there can be seasonal influences and people can have several unmet requests in a year, the daily and 2-week figures cannot be used as a basis for deriving annual figures. It should also be noted that the numbers of unmet requests, people who made those requests, and people turned away presented in this report are underestimates. This is because only data from agencies that participated in the Client Collection and the Demand for Accommodation Collection were used to calculate a turn-away rate and provide an indication of the overall ability of SAAP to cope with the demand for accommodation. (AIHW 2006: 2)*

About half of the individuals and families who turned up on a night during the Demand for Accommodation Collection were turned away, meaning 190 presentations by single adults and unaccompanied youth, as well as presentations by families with children.

When the homelessness service system (SAAP) became the Specialist Homelessness Services system (SHS), one of the most notable developments was redesigning the National Data Collection.

## **4.2 No Wrong Door approach: New South Wales**

A policy and practice initiative to improve access is the No Wrong Door approach, which has been adopted in several Australian jurisdictions (although it is now superseded in Victoria). The basic idea is that when a potential client turns up at a community agency seeking assistance, they can turn up at any agency in a local system and receive assistance to get to where they can be assisted, wherever that is. Community agencies, many of which are social housing providers, use a common form, undertake a common assessment and make informed referrals to where the person can be assisted. All relevant agencies are signed up to a protocol that provides the practice guidelines for how better coordination can be achieved.

In New South Wales, the *Framework for no wrong door* protocol (FACS 2010: 6) states the following principles:

*A client can seek housing advice and assistance through any of the designated 'service delivery' doors of a participating social housing provider and will receive an integrated service.*

*Clients should have equality in access to information and advice about the housing assistance they are eligible for and that assists them to make informed choices about available products and services that best meet their individual needs.*

*Participating providers have responsibility to respond to the range of client needs and act as the 'primary contact service' for clients who apply for assistance through their service unless or until another provider assumes that role.*

*Participating providers will provide a proactive service that facilitates the client applying for assistance or accessing services from another provider regardless of whether the original provider delivers the specific housing services required by a presenting client.*

*Participating housing providers will work collaboratively to achieve responsive and streamlined access services and cooperate to use available resources to achieve the best possible housing outcomes for clients, particularly for those with high, complex or urgent needs.*

It is acknowledged that workers and organisations may 'face many challenges working collaboratively across organisational boundaries to improve services and outcomes for clients' (FACS 2010: 5). However, although the No Wrong Door approach promotes better common practices using existing resources, the idea of a shared vision is not strongly supported by incentives for change. A shift from agency-focussed practice to a more collaborative practice is a large shift to make.

The principle of No Wrong Door has been widely discussed and attempted in the homelessness services sector. The approach has been adopted in principle by several government bodies and departments in Australia, the US and the UK, but research and documentation from the mental health and drug and alcohol sectors concludes that 'the concept was not well described in the literature and evidence of its effectiveness was not available' (Clark, Power et al. 2008; Croton 2005; DHHS 2007).

On 13 November 2018, the WA Department of Communities held a workshop to explore the No Wrong Door approach as part of the community consultations for the 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness. The participating workers and organisations 'felt strongly that without the resources to back it up the NWD [No Wrong Door] is tokenistic'. It remains to be seen whether any system-wide initiative will follow in due course (WA Department of Community Services 2019).

The NSW Government's Futures Matter Access System Redesign discussion paper (FACS 2018) is not primarily concerned with homelessness but its stated broad purpose of 'moving the system from crisis to early help: connecting children, young people and families to the right support at the right time' raises system issues such as:

- 'place-based initiatives in universal settings';
- community hubs that provide universal services and that act as 'non-stigmatising, soft-entry points for children, young people and families';
- multi-agency service provision with improved assessment;
- referrals across the network.

A notable response to the discussion paper among many responses delivered by the March 2019 deadline was Mission Australia's *Their Futures Matter Response to Access System Redesign discussion paper* (Mission Australia 2019). Mission Australia supported the design principles, but suggested stronger and broader statements:

*The focus on prevention and early intervention should be expanded beyond children and families seeking assistance and look at community risk factors and opportunities to strengthen communities.*

*A stronger emphasis on cultural safety is warranted and this should include a principle exclusively related to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities that is based on the views of relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and peaks and a separate principle to incorporate broader cultural diversity.*

*Specific principles in relation to inclusion of children with disability would improve system design.*

*The principles could be strengthened by a more hopeful and aspirational outlook for children and young people that aims for thriving rather than just surviving.*

*Explicit recognition of a child's right to thrive and to a safe, permanent and stable home is also suggested. (Mission Australia 2019: 2)*

In terms of how the discussion paper's system redesign might be operationalised, Mission Australia advocated community hubs and operates several that provide 'co-located and coordinated children and family services and a range of universal and targeted services'. Another key theme emphasised in their response is 'multi-agency service coordination' and several examples of this kind of model are offered, including the Ryde Project which delivered 'early identification of risk and the provision of wrap-around supports through service collaboration to prevent homelessness and other issues arising' and for which Mission Australia was the lead agency.

#### **Ryde project: Community of Schools and Youth Services**

*The Community of Schools and Youth Services (COSYS) is an innovative and tested place-based model for reducing youth homelessness and addressing school disengagement. It is based on establishing and driving productive collaboration between local stakeholders and involves universal screening of all students from Years 7 through 12 within a Local Government Area. The early intervention model can be implemented in any area where local schools, service providers and government are committed to working together to reduce youth homelessness. Mission Australia previously delivered the model in Northern Sydney where it is called the Ryde Project.*

*The model is premised on increasing the effectiveness of existing supports and services in a local area by driving collaboration and alignment of strategies and activities. It is based on the successful pilot, the Geelong Project (VIC), an early intervention involving population screening for risk, a flexible practice framework, youth-focused family-centred case management, and longitudinal follow-up and support as required until social and educational outcomes have been achieved. The development of a formal and coordinated collective of local partners drives these outcomes. (Mission Australia, 2019: 15)*

While NSW operates a No Wrong Door protocol, there are no access points and there is no gateway system as such. Several informants suggested that this was problematic, although agencies do cooperate and have always done so to some extent. However, in Albury, YES Unlimited—the major SHS agency in Albury after services recommissioning following the Going Home Staying Home reforms—has developed its own Youth Access Point. The agency is also the lead agency for the funded early intervention COSS-model regional pilot. Similarly, in the Northern Rivers area of New South Wales, local agencies led by Social Futures have established a youth access point on their own initiative.

### **4.3 Youth Gateway: South Australia**

In SA, a central Youth Gateway undertakes intake and assessment of homeless or at-risk young people aged 15–25 years. The statewide Youth Gateway takes referrals from government services, families and schools, or directly from young people, who can make contact by phone or in person. Every morning, SHS bed vacancies for young people are updated at the Gateway.

On any day about two-thirds of the young people are new presentations, while a third are repeat users who drop in and out of the system and have a case worker but cannot access

accommodation. According to informants—and similar to the 2017–18 data—about 140–150 young people seek assistance or are referred to the Gateway each month, but only about five to seven are placed in a service. On the day of the interview, there were only two vacancies across SA: one for a male, and the other for a pregnant female at an agency with a restrictive service criteria.

A view expressed by several workers was that there is 'a massive need for more emergency and crisis services'. This might reduce the turn-away rate, which seems to be very high, and this view undoubtedly reflects the perception of workers in a crisis system that is clogged and experiencing high turn-away rates. However, from a systems thinking standpoint—and thinking in terms of an ecosystem broader than the homelessness service system of SHS crisis and transitional services—the issue of entry and exit from the SHS system leads to pre-homelessness early intervention and post-homelessness housing options and issues.

An obvious disadvantage of a single central intake system is that it is designed to direct an applicant to whatever vacancy is available.

*Young person from Salisbury area can ring youth gateway and get referred to vacancy in any area, limited to where vacancy is, many agencies are concentrated in inner city (e.g. Youth 110), young people often don't like going to adult services such as Hutt St, Vinnies and Westcare or Fred's Van.*

Although the Youth Gateway can refer clients to a service, it is up to that service whether or not they accept the client, and that depends on their priorities and the dynamics of what is happening within the shelter at that time.

## **4.4 Opening Doors: Victoria**

In the Victorian system, the Opening Doors Framework (or Opening Doors) provides a limited number of access points into the SHS system in each region.

The aim is a more coordinated response that, after assessing needs, prioritises and connects people to the appropriate services and resources. Each region has several access points and most of the 19 Victorian transitional housing managers are an access point. In addition, there are specialist entry points in some regions for women, youth and Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples. The entry points operate within Local Area Services Networks.

At entry points, initial assessment and planning (IAP) workers make an assessment of housing and support needs. IAP workers have the capacity to:

- pay for emergency accommodation;
- pay rent arrears;
- make a referral to the most appropriate or available SHS in the area.

IAP workers are also able to:

- provide advice on housing options;
- provide assistance to material aid;
- help with applications for private rental or public housing;
- generally advocate on behalf of homeless and at-risk individuals with real-estate agencies or government agencies—for example, Centrelink, Department of Human Services—to assist them overcome barriers they may face accessing housing with support and other services as required.

There is some variation in how Opening Doors works across the regions, but the access system is generally accepted and well established.

When asked what seems to be working well, local informants in Victoria referred to the Youth Entry Points. The Youth Entry Point in Geelong has been incorporated into a broader system change around early intervention. The lead agency of TGP operates the Geelong Youth Entry Point and this is regarded as an asset for the development of the COSS model of early intervention. In Shepparton, the regional social housing provider—Beyond Housing—is responsible for the youth entry point, and this is generally regarded as working well; the Bridge Youth Service operates a range of programs and the transitional housing for young people; and the Salvation Army operates the crisis refuge.

Victoria is not the only state to have implemented entry points but the only state to have done this systemically. Across the community locations where we spoke with workers, the general advice was that 90–95 per cent of the young people with whom they had contact and to whom they provided support were local. The premise that underpins the systems thinking in this project—local communities as systems—seemed to hold up.

In terms of system change, system-wide community-based or regional youth access points would be a relatively minor—but significant—reform initiative.

## 5 Early intervention and prevention

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- In Australia, early intervention as a policy perspective for responding to youth homelessness has an historical trajectory of nearly 30 years, beginning with the 1989 Burdekin Report.
  - The Reconnect program was Australia's first programmatic response to homelessness, specifically young people becoming homeless. The Commonwealth-funded program has been fully in place since 2003, is well established and regarded as performing positively—but questions have been raised about the future of Reconnect in terms of systemic early intervention.
  - The notion of a place-based community-coordinated early intervention has been suggested by various reports and research papers.
  - To begin to reduce the flow of young people into homelessness, the most promising option would be to systemically implement a place-based approach to early intervention, involving proactive identification of risk, a tiered practice framework, an extended workforce of youth and family workers and school welfare/wellbeing staff, working under a formal collaboration and within a strong data-driven outcomes framework.
  - The COSS model of early intervention, first developed in Geelong, has achieved recognition in several national state/territory jurisdictions as well as internationally as a system-change-oriented model for more efficient and effective interventions to reduce youth homelessness.
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### 5.1 Early intervention: an under-implemented policy perspective

An 'early intervention' perspective for addressing youth homelessness is not new. A census of homeless school students revealed a significant but largely hidden population of homeless young people still attending schools but generally unable to complete their secondary schooling (MacKenzie 1996). Crane and Brannock (1996) 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' (1996: 103). However, they also 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 ... (1996:104)*

The 1996 Prime Ministerial Youth Homeless Taskforce, chaired by Major David Eldridge, produced a report that explicitly proposed 'early intervention', and initiated a pilot program of 26 sites to explore how early intervention might be done using mediation and reconciliation approaches (Prime Ministerial Youth Homeless Taskforce 1996). This became the Reconnect program, which was rolled out in stages between 1997 and 2003.

The 2008 White Paper highlighted 'turning off the tap' as a key theme for strategic action. In a short 2009 Australian Government report, *Along The Road Home* (FaHCSIA 2009), the national

Reconnect program was held out as its exemplar of early intervention, helping 5,500 young people and 3,500 family members at a cost of \$22m across 108 services. Three new services were added.

## 5.2 The Reconnect program

Reconnect was an important innovation in policy and service provision for the homelessness sector and the first explicit program in Australia—and probably in the world—to undertake ‘early intervention’ in relation to homelessness. It was recognised that early intervention required somewhat different practices to those typically delivered in crisis services. Program implementation involved a formal action research component, so that what was being learnt in practice could be collectively digested and passed on, to encourage reflexive practitioners and a program culture of good practice.

For this AHURI project, several communities were selected because they were sites of innovation and—from Geelong in particular—a good deal of work has been done to develop a place-based collective impact model for reducing the flow of young people into the SHS system.

Generally, workers in crisis services talked more about the difficulties of supporting young people who have become homeless into housing options. A common refrain was *‘we need more emergency accommodation’*, which reflects the daily difficulty that they face in practice, especially when calls for support exceed the ability of services to respond to young people in need. However, when asked about the young people they deal with as clients, comments such as: *‘what does not work well is getting young people at a stage by which time their lives have become chaotic—that is hard’* were common. Comments such as this point to a putative intervention prior to homelessness that might have reached young people before their lives became so ‘chaotic’.

Reconnect cannot be regarded as a poorly performing or failed program—but it is difficult to assess its overall effectiveness against the scale of the problem. An evaluation of Reconnect in 2003 concluded that the program had significant positive outcomes for young people and their families (RPR Consulting 2003; Ryan 2003). MacKenzie and Chamberlain (2008: 44) published some findings from their analysis of homelessness estimates in 2006 and made an inference that an improved labour market could not account for the decrease in youth homelessness from 2001 to 2006, but that ‘early intervention appears to account for most of the decrease in youth homelessness since 2001’. They drew the inference that the Reconnect program is likely to have contributed significantly to the overall early intervention impact.

A departmental review of Reconnect (FaHCSIA 2013) reaffirmed some of the key understandings that have underpinned the development of early intervention for homeless youth, and concluded that the program appeared to be performing well. The latest Reconnect program guidelines suggest that Reconnect should be strengthened along place-based lines (DSS 2018).

So has early intervention delivered by Reconnect been effective? A case can be made that the number of young people passing through SHS in the past decade has remained at a level of about 40,000–42,000 individuals (presenting alone). That the number has not continued to increase dramatically is possibly because of early intervention provided by Reconnect, as well as greater efforts by youth homelessness services to divert young people from the system. However, this is a broad inference lacking strong evidence that demonstrates how this might actually be happening on the ground.

There has been debate within government several times over the years about whether the Reconnect program should be delivered by the Federal Government rather than transferred to state and territory jurisdictions. At least once there was an effort to increase the footprint of the



Reconnect program—but this did not eventuate. Reconnect is well established and has been in place in its current form for some 17 years. In the context of a system redesign, the question needs to be asked: ‘What lies beyond Reconnect?’

This question was asked and answered by the developmental work involved with TGP based on a critical appreciation of Reconnect.

*Can early intervention be done more effectively? Are there reforms in the way schools and agencies interact that should be pursued? The Geelong Project was in part born out of a critique of the homelessness service system but also an appreciative critique of the limitations of Reconnect. The impetus for reform is not because Reconnect is failing, but as a way of strengthening early intervention as not only a response to homelessness but a more robust multi-issue 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. (MacKenzie and Thielking 2013:15)*

However, traces exist throughout the research and grey literature that point in the direction of a place-based approach to addressing youth homelessness.

**HREOC report *Our homeless children* [The Burdekin Report] (1989):** argued for ‘coordination mechanisms, which, while they may involve radical changes to individual services will result in a more efficient and rational distribution of services according to need’ and that ‘coordination mechanisms must be adequately funded for each region’ (p.313).

**National Census of Homeless School Students (1994–1996):** argued for improved welfare capacity available to schools and ‘schools as sites for early intervention’ (MacKenzie and Chamberlain 1995: 28).

**House of Representatives Report on Aspects of Youth Homelessness (1995):** argued 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 of the levels of family breakdown and long-term welfare dependency’ (p.360), and reported that ‘the central place of schools, in identifying how best to develop preventative approaches to homelessness, was reiterated frequently during the Inquiry’ (p.242).

**National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness (2008):** Chapter 23 discusses ‘Community Coordination’—‘the notion of *communities of services* ... raises the long-range issue of building infrastructure’ and ‘the refocusing on *communities of services* will provide a way to pay closer attention to *need* but it is also likely to yield efficiencies over time as services are invested with more responsibility for working together to respond to issues’ (NYC 2008: 344).

**Australian Government White Paper, *The Road Home: A National Approach to reducing Homelessness* (2008):** ‘Turning off the Tap’ proposed that ... ‘a significant effort should be focused on delivering evidence-based services across the country to stop people—especially children, families and young people—becoming homeless in the first place’ and envisaged improved collaboration among homelessness services and between homelessness and mainstream services, following a ‘no wrong door approach’ (FaHCSIA 2008:15).

**Barker, Humphries et al., Literature review: Effective interventions for working with young people who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness (2013a):** argued for ‘effective early intervention—which addresses risk factors such as family conflict, mental health issues, unemployment, poverty, alcohol and other drug issues and crime, and builds protective factors such as community connections and healthy family relationships—leads to long-term benefits for young people, families and communities’ (2013a: 2), and emphasised the need for sustainable, community-based, systemically coordinated services.

In the past decade, the introduction of the Family Reconnect model in Canada has drawn on the experience of Reconnect in Australia, as well as on family reconnection initiatives in the UK.

*Family reconnection (and reunification) for homeless youth is an intervention that offers individual and family support for young people who become, or are at-risk of becoming, homeless. It is a client-driven case-management approach that seeks to identify and nurture opportunities to strengthen relationships and resolve conflicts between young people who leave home and their caregivers. Working with young people who are interested in developing healthier relationships with their families, staff offer individual and family counselling, family mediation, referrals to other agencies and services, psychiatric assessments, psychological assessments for learning disabilities, as well as accompaniment and advocacy assistance.*  
(Homeless Hub, Family Reconnection 2019)

A detailed study of one Canadian agency's implementation of Family Reconnect can be found in the report, *Family matters: homeless youth & Eva's Initiative's Family Reconnect program* (Winland, Gaetz et al. 2011). Eva's Initiatives works with homeless and at-risk youth aged 16–24 years, and operates three shelters in the greater Toronto area that house 114 youth each night. Eva's Initiatives also operates the Family Reconnect program, with funding support from the City of Toronto and private donors.

### **5.3 Beyond Reconnect**

The statistics that monitor disadvantage—most particularly youth homelessness and early school leaving—have not significantly been improved, which suggest that the current system of siloed and targeted programs is inadequate and not achieving a reduction in youth homelessness. If the status quo of largely crisis-oriented service provision and programs is not delivering outcomes, then how might policy, programs and interventions be reframed and reorganised or delivered differently (MacKenzie and Hand 2019c; 2019d)?

Four of the community sites—especially Geelong, but also Albury, Mt Gambier and Northern Rivers—have implemented, in part or whole, the place-based COSS model of early intervention. The purposive selection of these community sites was in order to investigate the potential of a place-based approach to addressing youth homelessness, as well as early school leaving and other adverse issues.

Place-based intervention was one of the big new ideas that came out of the 2008 *National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness* (NYC 2008). Geelong was the community where a place-based system reform approach was developed, beginning in 2010, and much of the detail about the implementation of the COSS model relies on input from the Geelong work.

The COSS model has attracted media attention in Australia and overseas—as well as international interest and collaboration under the collective rubric 'Upstream'. Developmental work is underway in Canada, the US and Wales. There are three COSS sites under development in Canada and two funded sites in the US—in Seattle and Minnesota—with interest in a third San Francisco Bay Area site. In Wales, the minister announced a £10m investment in 'early intervention' referencing the principles of TGP, and work is underway within this funding envelope to build a full implementation of the COSS model.

## 6 An ecosystem of support services

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- Despite prior examples of place-based approaches to service delivery in Australia, particularly in Victoria, the dominant paradigm remains siloed departmental targeted programs (6.1).
  - There is growing interest in the ‘collective impact’ framework as a strong version of a place-based approach to improved service delivery. Collective impact requires a commitment to a shared vision and agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities and interventions; continuous communication among the community collective and ongoing backbone support (6.2).
  - The Geelong community provides a case study of a relatively highly developed implementation of ‘collective impact’ in the form of TGP (6.4).
  - A notable innovation in TGP is a methodology for screening the entire school population for vulnerability on a number of indicators, enabling proactive pre-crisis youth-focussed and family-centred interventions carried out by a pooled workforce of youth and family workers organised on an early intervention platform.
  - The collective of key stakeholders focused on a Barwon Continuum of Support (Figure 10), which conceptualises the vision of a seamless support system for children and young people that remains to be fully developed.
  - The Geelong stakeholders describe their services and activities as being part of an ecosystem of supports (Figure 12) for children and young people—interdependent, dynamic and developmental.
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Conceptualising the homelessness service system as a community ecosystem recognises that this is a more meaningful construct than thinking of the homeless service system as all the funded SHS in a state or territory or in Australia, together with administrative sections of government departments concerned with policy about homelessness, and managing contracts and attempting to administer the overall impact of the funded programs.

Ecosystems are made of inter-dependencies; ecosystems are evolutionary as change takes place over time, and ecosystems are inherently dynamic. In the natural world, the ecosystem is all the living things in a given area interacting with each other and the non-living environment.

By analogy, to describe a social services system as an ecosystem of support services, social and educational programs and institutions—such as schools and post-secondary education—implies a service system for young people within a community that is interdependent, dynamic, collaborative, and developing as needs change and new and more effective interventions are implemented. However, a range of services that happen to be in a particular community, operating as siloed programs, weakly cooperating where that may be absolutely necessary, and competing among themselves for tenders, does not rise to the standard of what can be meaningfully described as ‘an ecosystem’. An ecosystem of support services has to be created by design and maintained intentionally as a collective construct.

Such community ecosystems are not closed systems. Community-based systems of support services are embedded within other larger systems in terms of government and departmental

policies, and requirements of service contracts and funding and associated accountabilities attached to such funding contracts.

While elements of a community-based ecosystem of youth support services are an emerging model in a number of places, it is in Geelong, Victoria, where it is the most developed. The discussion in this chapter uses Geelong as a case study, not as a complete ideal case but as an exemplar of where some other communities appear to be heading, and by implication what arguably should be the system reform/redesign agenda into the future.

## 6.1 Place-based service delivery

There is arguably an incremental and hesitant trend towards place-based approaches to service delivery in Australia. In NSW, the *Their futures matter* discussion paper canvasses a community-focussed approach to prevention and early intervention and more integrated service delivery (Department of Communities and Justice 2018). In Victoria, there have been various efforts to implement place-based programs (Wear 2007), such as Neighbourhood Renewal, Community Capacity Building Initiative and an early framework, *Challenges in addressing disadvantage in Victoria* (DPC 2005a; 2005b), as well as community partnerships that reference local decision-making about needs and priorities.

A typology of place-based initiatives found in Griggs, Whitworth et al. (2008), classifies initiatives into five types according to their policy objectives and targeting of place and person:

- **Type 1:** Major focus on place in order to impact place—for example, upgrading community infrastructure to improve community safety and reduce petty street crime incidents.
- **Type 2:** Major focus on place in order to impact person—for example, Neighbourhood Renewal in a particular community.
- **Type 3:** Major focus on person in order to impact place.
- **Type 4:** Major focus on person in order to impact person—for example, specifying the individuals in a defined target group to whom an intervention is directed through a program operated by community agencies in various locations.
- **Type 5:** Simultaneous major focus on place and person in order to impact both.

In Victoria in particular, there have been several shifts towards a more place-based approach to service provision, although this has not become transformative. The Barwon Regional Partnership is one of nine similar bodies across regional Victoria created by Regional Development Victoria. The aim was to provide a leadership structure for communities to have a direct input into policy and budget processes. The partnerships are mandated to consult their communities and decide on what are important priorities for their local constituencies. In 2018, the model was extended to metropolitan communities.

Another initiative, announced in 2018, was community partnerships directed to 'building community resilience, boosting social participation, empowering parents, improving access to council and government services and promoting aboriginal self-determination' (Victorian Premier 2018). A lead organisation will be selected by tender to support the initial rollout of the first four community partnerships.

A place-based approach has yet to be applied by government to youth homelessness, although there is promising place-based work underway, as well as advocacy around this approach (see sections 6.4–6.6).

## 6.2 A 'collective impact' framework for place-based service provision

Since all programs operate through agencies located somewhere, the loose and weak version of place-based is Type 4 of the typology in 6.1: 'Major focus on person in order to impact person'. The strongest version is Type 5 'Simultaneous major focus on place and person in order to impact both', and this has been articulated in one form as 'collective impact'—this framework and the arguments around it have attracted considerable interest.

In a seminal article, Kania and Kramer (2011: 36) described collective impact as 'the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem'. Collective impact is radically different from the current status quo of siloed departmental programs, as it has 'a centralized infrastructure, a dedicated staff, and a structured process that leads to a common agenda, shared measurement, continuous communication, and mutually reinforcing activities among all participants' (Kania and Kramer 2011: 37).

Collective impact builds on current knowledge about the most effective ways to address complex social issues, and offers a promising new approach to addressing complex or 'wicked' social problems and implementing change at several levels.

Kania and Kramer (2011: 39f.) articulate the five core defining conditions of collective impact:

- **Common agenda:** all participants have a shared vision for change, including a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed actions;
- **Shared measurement:** collecting data and measuring results consistently across all participants ensure efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other accountable;
- **Mutually reinforcing activities:** participant activities must be differentiated while still being coordinated through mutually reinforcing plan of action;
- **Continuous communication:** consistent and open communication is needed across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation;
- **Backbone support:** creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organisation(s) with staff and a specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative and coordinate participating organisations and agencies.

The collective impact framework is a rigorous discipline that builds new structures and processes around a common vision and agenda that key stakeholders commit to. Sharing data is where many coalitions falter when dealing with the barriers created by privacy challenges, or by the proprietary concerns of agencies which may be co-operators as well as being rivals at times when competing for government tenders.

A Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) booklet, *Communities taking power: using place-based approaches to deliver local solutions to poverty and disadvantage*, provides encouragement to services to consider a collective impact approach, arguing that 'there are 13 basic elements of place-based approaches that provide the best framework for success' (VCOSS 2016: 33), while alluding to—but not elaborating on—the policy and practice shifts that are involved for the community sector as well as government. The Geelong case study demonstrates what system changes can be achieved locally even where government structures and program and contracting practices have not changed significantly. However, sustainability will require reforms at higher levels in departments, and between departments and an overall government strategy for supporting 'collective impact' appropriately.

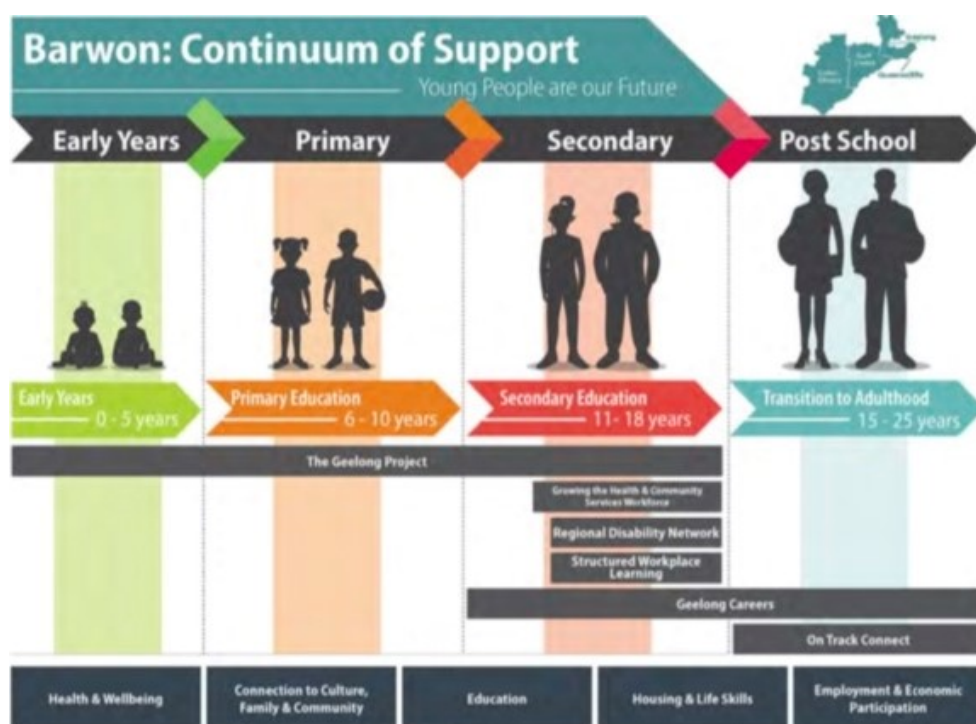
In terms of system redesign for youth homelessness, there is a good case for moving to a place-based approach with both front-end early intervention and back-end rapid rehousing, as well as youth-specific and youth-appropriate housing options, including social housing.

### 6.3 Life-course continuum of needs and supports from early childhood to young adulthood

A community ecosystem of services and institutions intentionally interacts within a community collective and a life-course continuum that references the needs of children and young people from earliest childhood to young adulthood, with the ultimate outcomes of a livelihood and sustainable independent life (GRILEN 2018).

Figure 1 outlines a ‘continuum of support’—a collectively agreed concept among participating Geelong stakeholders. The continuum was a major reference point for the development of a community-based ecosystem of services and supports for children and young people in Geelong and the broader Barwon region.

**Figure 10: Barwon continuum of support**



Source: Geelong Region Local Learning and Employment Network Annual Report 2018 (2018: 47).

### 6.4 The Community of Schools and Services model of early intervention

Geelong has supported the first and most developed community-based ‘collective impact’ exemplar of the COSS Model in Australia. As a regional city of about 250,000 people, 60 km by dual carriageway from Melbourne, Geelong has seen its major historical industrial producers—such as Ford and Alcoa—close down.



However, the city has worked to reinvent itself and its economy, and has a number of steadily growing industries in:

- health and allied services;
- education and research—Deakin University and The Gordon;
- some advanced manufacturing;
- tourism—the Great Ocean Road;
- construction;
- professional services.

Affordable housing has attracted young families to Geelong even when their employment remains in Melbourne. A V/Line train connects central Melbourne to Geelong and the journey takes about an hour. Notably, the five municipalities within the Geelong region—Colac-Otway, Golden Plains, Greater Geelong, Queenscliff and the Surf Coast—have created a formal alliance, known as the G21 Geelong Regional Alliance, to provide a platform for coordinated research, strategic planning and advocacy to state and federal governments (G21 2007). The strong sense of community identity may help to explain why the community rallied around the development of TGP and overcame setbacks, such as a loss of funding in 2013.

TGP is an exemplar of collective impact achieving significant early intervention outcomes for disadvantaged, at-risk and homeless young people.

The community of schools and services (COSS) model is an innovative place-based model for supporting vulnerable young people and families. The aim is to reduce disengagement from education and early school leaving, and to help where family issues are heading towards a crisis and possible homelessness, as well as other adverse outcomes (MacKenzie and Hand 2019c). TGP simultaneously achieved a:

- 40 per cent reduction in adolescent homelessness;
- 20 per cent reduction in early school leaving.

TGP has demonstrated what a place-based approach is capable of achieving, and this is why it has generated interest nationally and internationally (MacKenzie 2018b).

The COSS model of early intervention is an exemplar of what is being called ‘collective impact’, in which key local stakeholders collaborate deeply on a common vision and agenda, with shared data, a new form of governance and operational organisation as well as a backbone staffing for the community collective (MacKenzie 2016b; Hand and MacKenzie 2019; MacKenzie 2018c).

A key innovation of the COSS model is population screening for risk, and then working efficiently and systematically with the entire at-risk cohort through secondary school and beyond, until a pathway to employment has been firmly established (Hand and MacKenzie 2019).

### ***Population screening for risk***

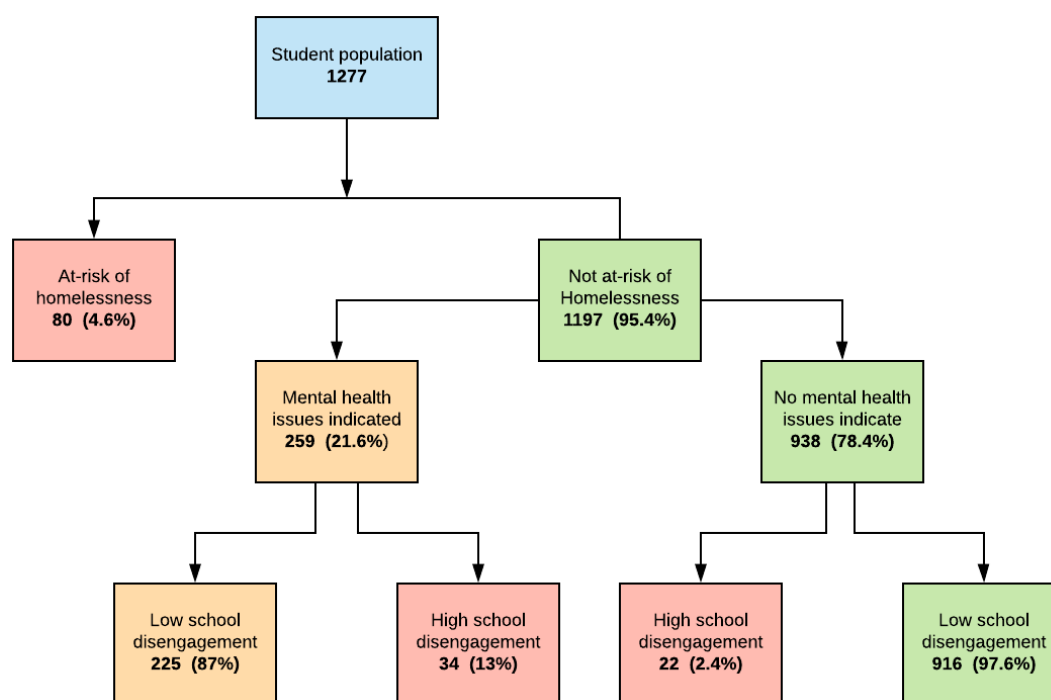
Population screening for risk uses a series of indicators on an Australian Index of Adolescent Development (AIAD) survey instrument, combined with local information from schools and a brief screening/engagement interview. The indicators include:

- an at-risk of homelessness indicator;
- a disengagement from school indicator;
- the Kessler K10 measure of psychological distress.



The methodology allows risk to be assessed, with discrimination between levels of risk, and a pre-crisis response delivered, as shown in Figure 11.

**Figure 11: AIAD population profile of risk, Geelong 2017**



Source: MacKenzie, D. & Thielking, M. (2013), p.15.

In the population profile depicted in Figure 11, the three priority at-risk cohorts are:

- students at-risk of homelessness—80 students;
- students at no risk of homelessness but with an identifiable mental health issue, and who are evidently highly disengaged from school—34 students;
- students at no evident risk of homelessness or mental health issues, but who are highly disengaged from school—22 students.

In the above profile, three key indicators are used to identify the at-risk groups.

- The at-risk of homelessness indicator consists of a validated five-item scale that measures attitude, disposition and behaviours in relation to the young persons family. A score of 9-10 on this scale is an indication of high risk of homelessness;
- The measure of mental health issues or psychological distress is the Kessler K10 scale that indicates the likelihood of psychological or mental health issues but does not diagnose the nature of indicated issues. The clinical range on the Kessler K10 is 30-50;
- The third indicator assesses the risk of a student leaving school early on a five-point scale that combines a student's attitude, disposition and behaviours in relation to school.

**Table 3: At-risk cohorts, characteristics, interventions and outcomes**

Cohort	Characteristics	Intervention(s)	Category	Outcome(s)
<b>Cohort 1:</b> Students who did not complete the AIAD in Feb–Mar	There is a high response rate from most students in a school during the population-screening process but, from experience, some students will be away on any given day. Some of these students are away because of illness or other legitimate reasons. However, there are other students who are still enrolled but largely not attending school, and have disengaged to the point of imminently leaving school. These students and their families need immediate outreach follow-up.	TGP: COSS model	Early intervention	Re-engagement with school, or engagement in an external education or training provider
<b>Cohort 2:</b> Students at-risk of homelessness identified by the AIAD	These are students at-risk, as identified by the AIAD indicator scoring 7–10. Risk of homelessness is about family dysfunction and conflict, and often involving family violence. This group is estimated to be 124 individuals.	TGP: COSS model	Early intervention	Do not experience homelessness
<b>Cohort 3:</b> Indigenous students as identified by the AIAD or the schools	There is an Indigenous community in Geelong, and there are Indigenous students in Geelong schools. Given the lower educational outcomes for this cohort, notionally every student can be regarded as at-risk, until such time as they are proceeding successfully through secondary school towards a Year 12 (or equivalent) completion.	School wellbeing staff	Early intervention	Remain engaged in school
<b>Cohort 4:</b> New arrivals as identified by the AIAD or by the schools	These are students who, given their backgrounds, have to be regarded as an at-risk cohort. This group needs to be considered at-risk by virtue of their experience and background.	School wellbeing/welfare staff and COSS	Early intervention	Remain engaged in school
<b>Cohort 5:</b> Students who have an identifiable clinical level of psychological distress and are disengaging from school	The Kessler K10 is the indicator used on the AIAD to identify a sub-population of students who have mental health issues, which can include a wide range of conditions and degrees of illness. The group that needs to be focussed on are those young people who have been identified as in the clinical range of the Kessler K10 and who are disengaging from school.	Headspace	Early intervention	Remain engaged in school or education
<b>Cohort 6:</b> Highly disengaged school students who were at school and completed the AIAD	A notable feature of this group is that there is no evident family dysfunction or mental health issues—175 individuals. Schools should have already identified many in this group, but incipient disengagement is not always evident in critically low school achievement, challenging behaviours or falling attendance.	Mainly school staff	Early intervention	Remain engaged in school or education
<b>Cohort 7:</b> The annual cohort of early school leavers who leave from Years 10, 11, 12	This is a systemically identifiable cohort that can be followed up in a way that will have impact on the level of homelessness for the 19–20-year-olds, and the educational level of 19–21-year-olds. In many cases, these young people will be known and supported prior to leaving, but the designed intervention is direct and rapid family outreach follow-up.	Navigator workers (funded by DET in Victoria)	Early intervention or crisis response if 60 days out of school	Remain engaged in school, or more likely in alternative education and training options
<b>Cohort 8:</b> At-risk and homeless young people approaching the entry point to the SHS	If a young person approaches the youth entry point, there is an opportunity for diversion from the SHS system.	SHS	Crisis intervention	Case management and support
<b>Cohort 9:</b> Homeless young people exiting from crisis or transitional SHS	These young people have been homeless and must move forward to live independently	Youth-specific social housing	Post intervention	Safe and secure housing

Source: MacKenzie, D. (2018), in unpublished proposal for Shepparton Youth Initiative.

Table 2 provides an extended list of identifiable at-risk and vulnerable cohorts. These cohorts could be more effectively addressed if TGP architecture were extended beyond responding to school students to include young people who have left school early—and who thereby place themselves on a pathway for further disadvantage and adverse life outcomes, unless that can be averted through targeted individualised interventions.

### ***Collaborative decision-making***

The COSS model (MacKenzie 2018c) involves collaborative decision-making at executive and worker levels within a community collective of agencies and schools, under a formal memorandum of understanding. The two main entities within TGP hold Executive Group meetings—for senior school and agency representatives—about four times a year to make overarching policy decisions for the collective. Operational Group meetings are held more regularly so that workers and welfare/wellbeing staff from the participating schools can discuss matters related to the work with vulnerable young people and their families. These entities are not specifically formed because of program funding, but are considered to be institutional forms required to implement the model within a community. ‘Collaboration’ has been operationalised in terms of concrete definable activities and structures.

### ***A flexible and responsive practice framework***

The COSS model has a flexible and responsive practice framework with three levels of response:

- active monitoring;
- short-term support;
- wrap-around support—for complex cases.

Student and family support based on expressed need varies from one point in time to another—and the capacity of the early intervention platform to operate flexibly is a key to achieving efficiencies. Unlike crisis responses, the COSS team supports the entire identified at-risk cohort dynamically and efficiently over time.

### ***Youth-focussed and family-centred support***

Youth-focussed and family-centred support is vital for vulnerable families and young people. Family dysfunction covers a wide range of complex issues, and means that working with a young person also involves working with family members. In 2015, the youth team at the lead agency—Barwon Child Youth & Family—consisted of housing workers, a Reconnect worker, counsellors and so on, but all workers were upgraded to ‘youth and family workers’. This workforce development was accompanied by an ongoing program of professional development.

### ***Data sharing***

Data sharing is a core feature of ‘collective impact’ and a requirement for operationalising collaboration on the ground. Within any of the community collectives such as TGP, backbone support is provided by a dedicated project coordinator. Ideally, this is a full-time role in the formative phase, but still requires more than a 0.5 fraction for a project that is well established, as in Geelong. The other form of backbone support is systemic backbone support, which is provided by an Upstream Australia consortium consisting of the University of South Australia and Youth Development Australia Ltd (Hand and MacKenzie 2019). Upstream Australia acts as the data custodian partner for the community collectives, undertaking data management, data matching and outcomes measurement (Hand and MacKenzie 2019).

## **Supporting success**

Factors that appear to support success in the COSS model are the following:

- Local community leadership in one of the participating key stakeholders—ideally the lead agency responsible for the early intervention support work;
- The construction of a formalised community collective through a community development process;
- A population-screening methodology that can proactively identify vulnerable youth and families prior to the onset of crises;
- A flexible practice framework that can efficiently manage proactive support to at-risk youth and their families, but still be able to be reactive when crises occur;
- A single-entry point into the support system for young people in need;
- A data-intensive approach to risk identification, monitoring and measuring outcomes.

## **6.5 Education and training pathways**

In Geelong, about 250 young people leave local schools each year before completing Year 12. Some recover their education and complete the equivalent of Year 12 later in the form of a Certificate III or IV, but many do not and experience long periods of disadvantage, including homelessness, later in life.

In Geelong, there is an alternative school option for students unable to continue their education in a mainstream school: Youth Plus, which is operated by the Edmund Rice Foundation. In addition:

- The Catholic agency McKillop operates a small flexible learning option as an alternative school;
- Northern Bay College campus offers the Geelong Industry Trade Training program;
- The Gordon TAFE operates a Year 11–12 campus as a feeder into its TAFE courses;
- Diversitat operates a range of training programs, including programs specifically directed to disadvantaged young people, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.

The Geelong Region Local Learning and Employment Network (GRLEN) is an important coordinating and networking asset in Geelong. It has launched several award-winning initiatives, such as the innovative Geelong Careers portal, that deploys an ‘online careers resource that offers a live job feed, a behind the scenes look at hundreds of companies daily, career advice from prominent experts, access to the best professional personalised career coaching, industry hero stories and so much more’. The live jobs feed displays about 1000 jobs per day, and these are regularly updated (GRLEN 2018:12).

GRLEN’s *Growing the Health and Community Services Workforce Initiative* (GRLEN 2019) is a funded joint project designed to increase the number of young people gaining employment in the health and community services industry. Employers and industry representatives are strongly represented on the project and apart from accredited training, the project seeks to develop non-accredited programs designed to raise awareness and interest in what this industry has to offer, provide work placements and guaranteed job interviews to Geelong VET in schools (VETis), and school-based apprenticeship and traineeship program graduates.

Also, developmental work is underway to extend TGP architecture to follow-up and support early school leavers to re-engage with education and training, even if they don't return to secondary school, to ensure that every young person is supported on an educational and vocational pathway.

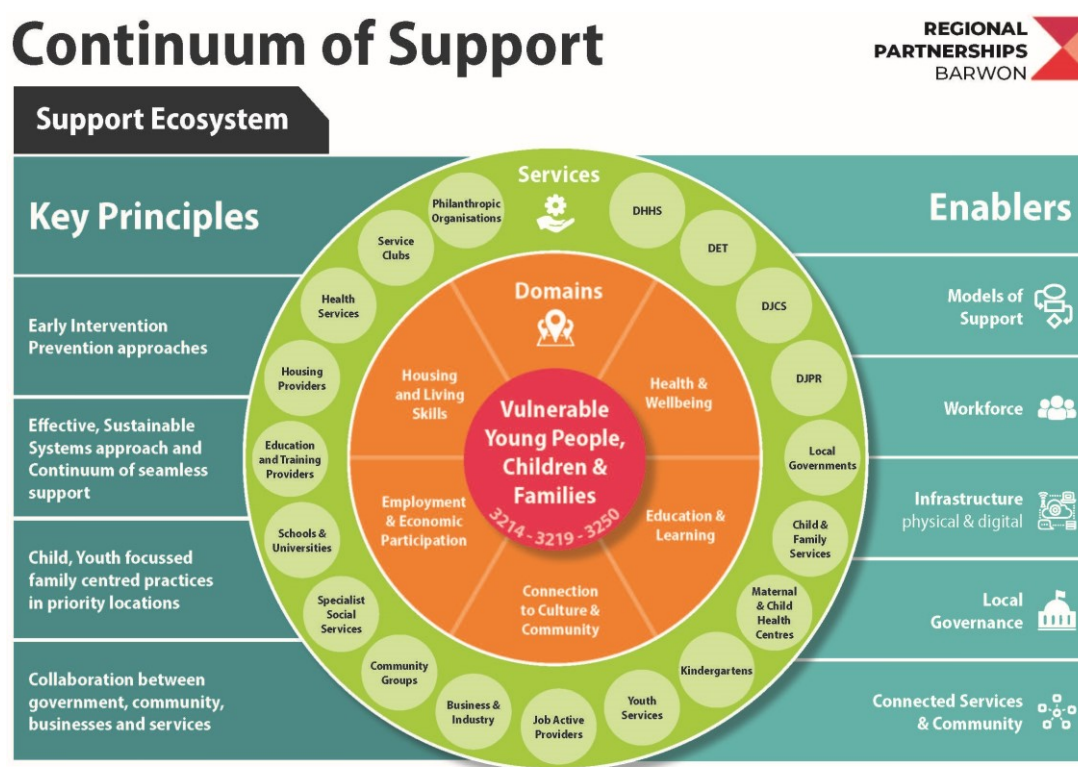
## 6.6 Representing an ecosystem of support services for youth, Geelong, 2019

The case study of Geelong and TGP is instructive because there has been a collective effort to create an ecosystem of services with a focus on vulnerable young people, children and families.

Figure 12 represents the community collective's representation of how the Geelong ecosystem should be understood. The key principles show how deeply the developmental work has been influenced by the idea of achieving a collective impact. The enablers point to some of the engineering work that has been involved so far, including:

- evidence-based models of support;
- workforce development;
- new structures and processes of collective governance;
- infrastructure such as youth housing options;
- digital capability to support a more complex cross-sectoral ecosystem in which services are connected as collaborating participants in the community collective.

Figure 12: Representing the emerging ecosystem of supports for youth, Geelong



Source: Ryan, Anne-Marie (2019) *Unpublished Regional Partnerships Barwon diagram*.

### ***Key principles***

The key principles represent a place-based framework, and a strong commitment to strictly implementing a collective impact model that involves the following:

- Early intervention and prevention approaches—TGP provides the architecture here but the continuum also seeks to strengthen early childhood and primary-age interventions;
- Effective, sustainable systems approach and continuum of seamless support—the community as a system to be developed;
- Child and youth-focussed family-centred practices in priority locations—the creation of an early intervention platform involved workforce development where program position descriptions were superseded by multi-skilled ‘youth and family worker’ generic positions;
- Collaboration between government, community, businesses and services—the GRLEN and the Geelong Region Partnership have been important in bringing a wide range of stakeholders together behind a common agenda and associated activities.

## 7 Exiting the homelessness service system: housing options for young people

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- The problem of housing options for young people exiting the homelessness service system has been raised repeatedly over many years.
  - Homeless young people on their own are about half (54%) of all single people who seek help from homelessness services—but they are only 2.9 per cent of main tenants in social and public housing in Australia.
  - The business model underpinning mainstream social-housing provision does not accommodate young people well because of their low incomes and youthful behaviour patterns.
  - The formation of a youth-specific social housing provider (My Foundations Youth Housing Company) is a promising venture, which has achieved management over 500 properties worth \$65m with 650 resident young people over a three-year period.
  - Youth Foyers remain a promising supported housing option premised on a commitment of residents to education, training or employment. However, closer integration with the homelessness service system would enable a stronger contribution to reducing homelessness.
  - Subsidised private rentals remain an important component among housing options for young people, but there is a case for raising the various benefits for young people living out of home, as well as reviewing the subsidy regime that applies.
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### 7.1 The exit from homelessness services problem

In every community, informants raised the issue of youth housing and the problems of the housing options for young people moving out of the SHS, or for young Australians seeking to move onto living independently (Parkinson, Rowley et al. 2019). In Victoria, one CEO said that what they needed was ‘a steady stream of social housing for young people leaving homelessness services’.

An informant in SA highlighted the problem of housing options:

*Public housing is often the exit for young people and vacancies can be often in the Northern area—but the condition of houses needs attention and high-density flats often turn out to be counterproductive. Boarding houses can be dodgy for young people—not specifically for young people—and [should only be] used as last resort.*

In Geelong, the advocacy of the SHS agency for young people and families together with other community partners has elevated youth housing as the top policy priority for the Barwon Community Partnerships organisation. In Victoria, a notable innovation is the deployment and support for community partnerships to have direct links and inputs into policy formation in the central agencies of government, as this shifts a little towards a more place-based approach to



service provision and development. In Northern NSW, a loose coalition of services is attempting advocacy for housing options in terms of a regionally planned approach.

Informants from the community all raised housing issues for young people passing through crisis or transitional accommodation services. At the local level, a community agency appears to have little leverage to influence or affect the provision of social housing for youth in their community.

For young people who have become homeless, and for whom there is no realistic prospect of reconciliation or returning to living with family, the policy imperative is for these young people to move as quickly as possible to independent living. The broader context is that there is a crisis of housing affordability in Australia (Pawson, Parsell et.al. 2018). Homeless young people on their own are about half (54%) of all single people who seek help from homelessness services, but they are only 2.9 per cent of main tenants in social and public housing in Australia (AIHW 2018a).

An unfortunate fact is that mainstream social housing providers are often reluctant to accept young residents because of their low and insecure incomes—and they are regarded in general as a high-risk group of tenants. This is not publicly stated, but social housing managers will admit that from a business perspective they have to limit the number of young tenants for these reasons. The statistics on young tenants in social housing reflect this thinking and the decisions that flow consequentially.

Another issue is what other housing options are appropriate for young people. Developmental issues during adolescence and extending into early adulthood are important. During the transition to adulthood and independent living, family support is important—but family support is not available to those young people who have to leave home early and who become homeless.

## **7.2 Supported social housing for young people**

Following the 2008 White Paper, there was an associated commitment of \$400m to ‘increase the supply of affordable and supportive housing for people who would otherwise be homeless’. In response to the Global Financial Crisis, there was an initial investment of \$1.5b to support housing construction, and then a second tranche of \$6.6b for social and defence housing. It is difficult to know how much—if any—of this social housing investment flowed through to people who experienced homelessness (MacKenzie 2016c).

Almost every informant from NSW, SA and Victoria referred to the need for more social housing options for young people, collectively calling out the lack of available supported social housing properties specifically designated for young people.

Compounding the lack of Aboriginal-specific youth-supported housing, a worker from an Aboriginal-supported accommodation service stated that a supported accommodation service had just been closed due in that state because of funding cuts:

*The budget cut so now [name of organisation] service will not exist. There will now be no specific culturally appropriate service like [name of organisation] in [location]. [Name of NGO] has picked up the tenure to have Aboriginal-specific clients needing residence... The young people that fall through the gaps now do not have a safe, holistic hub of support and advocacy, unfortunately.*

Culturally appropriate services were a positive factor of the service where she is employed, and it was clear that the closure of the service was a net loss from the standpoint of culturally appropriate options available to Aboriginal young people in that area.

Another Aboriginal informant acknowledged the lack of available options for youth housing and called for young Aboriginal people to be housed close together, ‘in a community where they can

all support each other', but also with formal supports and the necessary casework. However, another Aboriginal informant stated the opposite:

*I like the idea about funding youth-specific houses. But then we need wrap-around support. We have to be realistic about the types of young people who would access this housing. Have a case worker for wrap-around support. And be strategic where you put these young people—let's not place these young people near each other or this might cause problems if they all start hanging out together.*

Even when young people are housed in social housing, many informants raised concerns about the ongoing risk for young people, and the potential issues concerning the housing appropriateness and situation, and maintaining tenancy. For instance, a worker from an Indigenous organisation stated the following:

*I don't think we have one case plan here where stability of housing or longevity of the tenancy or something is not at risk. Whether it's poor housing, whether it's a risky alleyway down the side [of the house] that somebody has been allocated. There's something that's always wonky.*

### 7.3 Youth Foyers

About one-quarter of Australia's 19-year-olds have not completed Year 12, or its equivalent. Adults aged 25–44 years from 2001–2014, who left school without Year 12 or equivalent, and who had not managed to recover their education by the age of 24 years, remain disadvantaged for the rest of their lives (Lamb and Huo 2015).

Homeless young people are a particularly vulnerable group. Some six to seven out of every 10 Australians who ever need to seek help from SHS left school before completing Year 12, and never recovered their education (MacKenzie, Flatau et al. 2016). Early school leaving has been—and largely still is—framed as a school problem, while youth homelessness is often simplistically framed as purely a housing problem. However, as depicted earlier in Figure 2, youth homelessness and early school leaving are intimately interrelated.

It is now widely accepted that support for at-risk or homeless young people needs to address their education, training and/or employment support needs. In 2008, the National Youth Commission into Youth Homelessness (NYC 2008) explicitly proposed the funding of foyers as one promising model for linking education, training and supported pathways to employment with supported accommodation. Over the past decade, foyers have been established in most jurisdictions, and there are now some 15 foyers or foyer-like projects that have been developed to support about 500 16–25-year-olds at-risk of homelessness or recovering from homelessness.

Foyers were not initially developed as a response to homelessness. In France, after World War II, foyers were built as housing for young workers. In the UK they were built as a form of supported housing linked tightly to education, training and employment outcomes (Quilgars and Anderson 1995). A 2012 Canadian study offered a critique of transitional housing in Canada and presented a comprehensive case for the foyer model, and emphasised the developmental needs of young people and the kind of support adolescents and young adults need—including education or training, and employment support during transition (Gaetz and Scott 2012).

There are questions about Australian foyers and how they should operate:

- Should they strictly provide a pathway for young people recovering from homelessness? Or should they take in a wider population of at-risk youth?
- Should foyers be constructed as congregate facilities, or as a dispersed set of units connected to a nearby community hub?

- Can foyers be scaled-up to become a substantial part of the youth housing and support sector, given that foyer projects depend on special project funding (Steen and MacKenzie 2014a; 2014b)?

The first report from a longitudinal study of the Education First Youth Foyer model in Australia (Coddou, Borlagdan et al. 2019: 1)—an internal Brotherhood of St Laurence evaluation of their Education First foyers—provides a positive assessment:

*Education First Youth (EFY) Foyers expand upon the original Youth Foyer concept by prioritising education as key to a sustainable livelihood. As such, EFY Foyers are better understood as a form of supported student accommodation rather than a crisis housing response. The EFY Foyer evaluation finds that the model substantively improves participants' education, employment, housing, and health and wellbeing outcomes, and these improvements are largely sustained a year after exit.*

Strong educational outcomes are reported by comparison with other foyers and transitional housing. On entry, 42 per cent of residents had completed Year 12 or a Certificate III but two-thirds (67%) had achieved this level of education by the time they left the foyer, and three-quarters (75%) a year later. The entry level education of young people entering SHS transitional accommodation is about the same as for the foyer, but the education level achieved at exit was lower (54%).

However, the comparison between Education First foyers and transition accommodation is questionable. A foyer is a supported pathway post-homelessness and post-SHS accommodation, whereas young people in SHS transitional accommodation are still homeless. Despite this, the evaluation is an ambitious project and will contribute to the limited evidence-base on the outcomes for the foyer model.

Accompanying the EFY foyer-evaluation report was a report compiled by KPMG. Based on data provided, KPMG calculated a benefit-cost ratio of 1.90 and an approximate \$10m in net benefits over a 20-year time frame compared with transitional housing management services (KPMG 2019).

Historically, the provision of SHS (formerly SAAP) has been separate from programs designed to re-engage young people in education, training and employment, such as the Jobs Placement, Employment and Training (JPET) program. The singular architectural advantage of the foyer model is the strong commitment to education or training and an employment pathway as a primary criterion for deciding which disadvantaged, at-risk or homeless young people are selected as residents.

Shepparton was one of the community sites in this study. Shepparton was selected as the location for one of the three Victorian Education First foyers and this site has provided some information on how the foyer fits within the local service system. Generally, relations among the youth service providers in Shepparton are cooperative, including the Shepparton foyer.

However, the local expectation was that a 40-bed foyer in Shepparton would impact the number of young people in the crisis refuge and the transitional housing properties—but that has not been the case. Instead, the impact has been evident in a program supporting at-risk tenancies where the number in that program has dropped. One worker interviewed for this research expressed the view that *'they are not the same cohort'*, and explained that this was the perception among other workers as well. If true, then it appears that the foyer has not provided pathways for a significant number of young people exiting SHS as was expected, although it may provide opportunities for other disadvantaged young people.

## 7.4 Subsidised private rental housing

The private rental market remains the main housing option for young people who cannot or do not return to live with family members, and who leave SHS and need independent housing.

The reliance on rental subsidies for young people to move into the private rental market remains a major part of the social policy mix that bears on youth homelessness. Questions are continually raised about this area of policy. Advocates argue for a review of rental subsidies for low-income independent young people. Rather than seeking the abandonment of subsidies, they are questioning the level of subsidy available in the private housing market, and the time it takes to support homeless young people into reasonably secure private rental. In terms of managing independence, many young people struggle with these issues, and post-homelessness support is minimal.

One NSW program that was highlighted as working well is Rent Choice Youth—an initiative that complements Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA). The program provides support and encouragement to gain employment and an increased income, so that over time young people will be able to afford a private rental without assistance. The program is open to 16–24-year-olds who ‘don’t have a place to live’, who are ‘willing to engage with a support provider’ and who want to study or train with a view to achieving employment (Rent Choice Youth fact sheet, 2019).

CRA and complementary programs such as Rent Choice Youth do provide flexibility. In one community, Rent Choice Youth was described by an informant as *‘really positive’* and an option that has worked for a lot of local people. The argument around rental subsidies is about resetting rental subsidies as part of a more balanced strategic approach to addressing youth housing and homelessness.

## 7.5 My Foundations Youth Housing Company

As described previously, a vast majority of informants from all locations, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, raised the need for more social housing options for young people, and collectively called out the lack of available supported social housing properties specifically designated for young people. Advocates for young people are calling for a rethink of social housing for young people or, in the words of the CEO of My Foundation Youth Housing (MFYH), to *‘reimagine social housing’* to accommodate the needs of young people (MFYH 2019: 5).

MFYH is one promising innovation that is present in at least two of the community sites. Co-developed with the NSW Government, MFYH is a strategic initiative designed to ultimately reduce the demand for SHS accommodation (MacKenzie, Flatau et al. 2016). The concept was the development of a youth-specific social housing provider. MFYH is a property manager that works in partnership with youth agencies that provide support to the company’s social housing residents in the community. This stock includes a pilot program known as Transitional Housing Plus, a support model premised on a gradual preparation of young residents for independent living in private rental properties. Rents are increased over a five-year period to the market rent in the community of residency. The criteria for Transitional Housing Plus (Youth) are that participants must:

- be 16–25 years at time of referral; <sup>[11]</sup><sub>SEP</sub>
- be experiencing homelessness or be at-risk of homelessness; <sup>[12]</sup><sub>SEP</sub>
- be unable to resolve housing needs in the short- to medium-term;
- have the capacity to transition to private market housing within five years through active involvement in a personal case plan;

- be able to be housed safely with the Transitional Housing Plus property (Housing NSW 2014).

Priority for Transitions Housing Plus (Youth) is given to:

- young people aged 16–20;
- young people who are receiving (or who have received) an OOHC service;
- young people who are (or have been) a client of Juvenile Justice. <sup>[11]</sup><sub>SEP</sub>

Over the first three years, MFYH has gone from three staff, an operating revenue of \$300,000, 74 properties and 100 tenants, to 15 staff, an operating revenue of \$4.8m, 500 properties under management and 650 tenants ‘housed with support available for those who want and need it’. Nearly all residents (95%) are engaged with support services, and about 85 per cent are engaged in education and training or employment (MFYH 2019:9-10). The company was created to eventually expand Australia-wide—but that would require continued government investment in other Australian jurisdictions through public housing stock transfers and a realistic share of new social housing investment funding, as well as private co-investors willing to partner with MFYH.

According to MFYH, an important success factor—given the lower financial returns from rents—is the support given by workers who are skilled in providing support to young people. A second—and possibly equally important factor—is the progressive rental regime underwritten by Transitional Housing Plus.

## 7.6 Housing First for Youth

Housing First achieved international recognition as an alternative to a crisis-shelter-based system. Housing First is a response to homelessness premised on the idea that homeless people are more successful in recovering from homelessness if they are moved as quickly as possible into permanent housing (Gaetz 2014). That principle is not based on readiness or compliance, but provides housing as a right, and in that process begins to apply the supports needed by a client so that their transition to independence will be sustainable. There is a copious body of evidence that Housing First, when it can be delivered, is effective (Goering and Streiner 2015). By comparison, ‘treatment first’ approaches are more costly and less effective (Ly and Latimer 2015).

The Canadian Homeless Hub led by Professor Stephen Gaetz has led the way in formulating the principles that underpin a youth-appropriate form of Housing First. Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) is a rapid-rehousing option for young people who are homeless, including those whose homelessness can be described as a chronic condition. The underpinning principles are outlined below.

- **Immediate access to housing with no preconditions:** this is the fundamental premise of Housing First—to provide assistance so that a young person obtains safe, secure and affordable permanent housing that meets their needs. Contrary to this approach is the assumption that homeless individuals must go through various treatments and remedial activities before being considered able to move into housing. How quickly the move into housing can be accomplished is a crucial issue.
- **Youth choice and self-determination:** this upholds a rights-based approach that is client-centred. In operational terms, it should include:
  - some choice about location of housing and the type of housing appropriate to the individual
  - some choice about which services they are prepared to accept

- access to education and training
- an harm-reduction policy for young people with substance use and addiction issues.
- **Positive youth development orientation:** for young people recovering from homelessness, depending on their age and maturity and the experiences they have been through. Support for wellbeing needs to be acutely aware of young people's development needs in adolescence and young adulthood.
- **Individualised and client-driven supports:** a youth-focussed needs-based approach to providing support, which recognises that each young person is an individual with their own needs and is on a unique recovery pathway. Relationship-focussed practice is at the centre of this kind of work.
- **Social and community integration:** the ultimate goal is for young people to become a part of the community where they live, or a member of a community of interest or activity that is socially healthy. This social and community reintegration should include reconnection with family members, where that can be achieved to any extent that is positive.

The issues addressed by HF4Y arise among the concerns of youth homelessness agencies, but the model itself comes from Canada. A key issue is moving homeless young people as quickly as possible into housing. The nature of the accommodation is not mandatory, and ranges from congregate living to scattered units within the community. A major difference between Housing First for older adults and young people is that HF4Y 'must go beyond assisting young people merely to become independent but rather to enable them to make a successful transition to adulthood' (Gaetz 2014; Gaetz and Scott 2012).

While there is a considerable shared set of principles and practices between foyers and HF4Y, there are some important differences. One major difference is that in Housing First, housing is the priority, whereas a commitment to education, training or employment is a priority criterion for foyer residency. The Australian foyers explicitly state that they are not 'rapid rehousing', and that they do not exclusively take in young people who have been homeless, including chronically homeless young people.

While Housing First has been discussed and promoted to a limited extent in Australia, the closest model to HF4Y would be the social housing model developed by MFYH. The caveat to this assessment would be how rapidly such housing can be accessed by young people who are experiencing homelessness.



## 8 Indigenous perspectives

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- Indigenous Australians, including Indigenous young people, are over-represented users of the SHS system—nine times that of non-Indigenous service users.
  - Informants in homelessness services reported that the complex issues and experiences of Indigenous young people were much the same as for other young clients.
  - A strong message from Aboriginal informants was that a major problem was the lack of ‘culturally appropriate service provision and practices at some services’ while, at the same time, others were well regarded by Aboriginal communities.
  - Culturally appropriate practice involves understanding and knowing how to work with the young person—and also with their family. One homeless agency was criticised for attempting to refer a distressed young Aboriginal person to an Aboriginal organisation when the SHS agency is funded to provide a needs-based support for all young clients.
  - It was suggested that Aboriginal young people need choice: some will not want to be supported by an Aboriginal organisation, while for others, this would be the most appropriate option—if it existed.
  - The call for the development and funding of Aboriginal services was not a major theme coming from the informants in this project, but the interviews were done in SA, NSW and Victoria, and not in north Queensland, NT or northern WA.
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One of the objectives embedded in this *AHURI Inquiry into an Effective Homelessness Service System* was a component that sought to hear and represent Indigenous perspectives on the homelessness service system. Indigenous Australians are over-represented in the homeless population.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are 3.3 per cent of the total Australian population (ABS 2016). However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more likely than non-Indigenous Australians to experience homelessness, including living in insecure housing or overcrowded dwellings, and are over-represented in both the homeless populations and in the SHS client populations. In 2016, the Indigenous homelessness rate was 10 times the rate of homelessness for non-Indigenous Australians. However, a positive change is the fact that: ‘The rate of Indigenous homelessness decreased from 571 per 10,000 population in 2006 to 361 in 2016. The decline in Indigenous homelessness since 2006 is due predominantly to the decrease in Indigenous people living in ‘severely’ crowded dwellings [75% in 2006 to 70% in 2016]’ (AIHW 2019a: vi).

The other relevant statistical measure is the usage of homeless services. Indigenous clients made up about one-sixth (17%) of the clients assisted by SHS in 2011 (AIHW 2011), and a quarter (25%) of all clients assisted by SHS in 2017–18 (AIHW 2019b)—a rate nine times that of non-Indigenous clients (803 per 10,000 population compared with 86 per 10,000). Most Indigenous people using these services were at risk of homelessness (53%), with the remainder homeless (47%) when they sought assistance (AIHW 2019b).



A worker from an Aboriginal-supported accommodation service described the issues and experiences of the Aboriginal young people who were clients of the service as having much the same complex problems as many non-Indigenous young people. The main difference she identified was *'culturally appropriate service provision'*. The importance of culturally appropriate services was echoed by all of the Aboriginal workers and informants from Indigenous services.

Other informants suggested that perhaps some Aboriginal-specific services were not well led, and some staff were not as professional or as trained as they needed to be, which then has implications for the service and for young people: *'People with right skill set need to be put in positions to run Aboriginal-specific services. What has happened is that the wrong people have been put in these positions—then this doesn't work, and then the service folds. Then young people need to go to non-Aboriginal services'*. To remedy this, an Aboriginal worker with a long history of working in the human services argued that there needs to be an investment made to up skill Aboriginal workers:

*We are aware that some Aboriginal people don't have the right skill set and education to support their community. So, we need training opportunities for our people to build skills to be able to support their community. We need to support people to get further education. Tell people 'we will invest in you'. Find people with potential and then support those people to become great workers.*

In another location, with a well established Aboriginal organisation that did provide a range of community services, the view expressed on the local homelessness service system for young people, including Aboriginal young people, was fairly positive. The lack of emergency accommodation was raised as *'one of the biggest issues'*. Being a regional location, camping on the riverbank was an option adopted by some young people, yet our informant said that she worried that sleeping in a tent on the riverbank was not necessarily the safest place to be. In the context of a shortage of places in the service system, a characteristic of the extended family networks among the Indigenous community is that *'the community does look after its own'*—but that informal kinship care had limits.

From an Aboriginal worker's perspective, the main criticism was twofold. First, too often an agency worker will ring up the Aboriginal agency to say that have a distressed Aboriginal youth who cannot return home: *'they ask if they can refer the young person to us—but they are funded to provide supported accommodation, and should be able to assist this young person like any other'*. There is an issue of culturally appropriate support work. Some workers are knowledgeable, skilled and experienced, and know that helping a young Aboriginal youth means some work with their family. *'This can be a bit complicated, but we should expect workers to follow culturally appropriate practices'*.

Second, Aboriginal young people who experience homelessness should have the option of being assisted by an Aboriginal worker and being looked after in a small accommodation setting, somewhere that is reserved for young people for whom this choice is important. This was a complaint that came up in more than one location. For some Aboriginal young people who are in crisis, and likely to be stressed and distressed, being among strangers—most of whom are non-Aboriginal—is a situation they would rather avoid. On the other hand, there are some Aboriginal young people who choose to be assisted by non-Aboriginal workers and would go to a non-Aboriginal service because *'they don't want their business and problems to be known in the Aboriginal community—and people know each other and talk'*. Having such an option is not a simple matter, as even a small-scale setting with staff support requires funding.

Lastly, one experienced Aboriginal worker offered the view that individuals selected to represent Aboriginal communities are not always the best people who are well known in the community. Their suggested remedy for this kind of token representation was to engage in genuine consultation, so that community members have every opportunity to express their views and the organisation or department seeking their views gets a good idea of what community members really want and what they really think.

Other perspectives and experiences from Aboriginal informants are presented in the findings in Chapter 10.

## 9 A particularly vulnerable cohort: young people leaving state care

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- Young people leaving the OOHC or criminal justice systems are particularly vulnerable cohorts, and are at high risk of experiencing homelessness.
  - Young people who have been through the OOHC system at some point in their lives but have returned to live with family members are also a group with a higher risk of experiencing homelessness.
  - There have been many leaving-care projects and initiatives, but the net impact does not appear to have significantly changed the net flow of these young people into homelessness.
  - Adopting the agenda of the Home Stretch Campaign—as the Victorian Government has done—to extend state care support until the age of 21 years, but provide a level of support to young people that is sufficient to address their actual needs, would stem the flow of a major cohort of young people into the homelessness service system.
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### 9.1 Young people in Out-of-Home Care

The problems of the care and protection systems are endemic (Bloomfield, Higgins et al. 2005; Broad 2005; Cashmore and Paxman 1996a, 1996b, 2006a, 2006b; Maunders, Liddell et al. 1999). In the White Paper *The Road Home*, it was noted that:

*A significant number of people who are chronically homeless were under the care of child protection systems in the past and specifically that ‘young people leaving care and child protection systems also report high levels of homelessness ... child protection systems have not been able to provide secure, stable accommodation (and) service providers report that many young adults who are experiencing homelessness have recently left child protection systems and do not have the income or skills to manage a home of their own. (FaHCSIA 2008: 9)*

Young people who have entered OOHC at any point in their lives have already experienced a seriously problematic family situation. Several variables impact on a young person’s trajectory through their young life:

- the age the young person enters the care and protection system;
- the reasons why OOHC was necessary in the first place;
- whether a young person has a relatively stable foster care placement;
- whether a young person has multiple placements and escalating issues (Muir, Purtell et al. 2019a).

Informants in every community highlighted OOHC as a major set of issues:

*We see lots of out-of-home care kids. Many of the girls get pregnant—they have a desperate need to feel love.*

*Many young people have been through or are in out-of-home care, but we only know about it once they have accessed our service and we are supporting them with case work*

If removal from a family is necessary, the preference and priority is to place young people with related family members or, if that is not possible, in foster homes. In 2013–14, of the 15,858 children and young people (0–17 years) in OOHC, 14,665 (92.5%) were either in:

- foster care (37.4%);
- with relatives/kin (45.1%);
- with other home-based care (10.1%).

Only 1,157 (7.3%) were placed in residential care. The trend in child protection policy has been to reduce the reliance on residential settings. This is partly from recognising the problems associated with institutionalisation, and also because of greater understanding about how this setting can affect child development.

Reviewing the past decade is revealing:

- 2008: 34,279 children under care and protection orders, and 31,166 in OOHC (AIHW 2009);
- 2016–17: 64,145 children under care and protection orders, and 57,221 in OOHC (AIHW 2018c).

This represents an increased load of approximately 85 per cent.

Young people who have been through the care and protection system have been recognised as a particularly vulnerable group. Vulnerability varies depending on the severity of their experiences and whether or not children can successfully return to live with their family (Mendes 2005; Mendes and Moslehuddin 2006).

One informant described the NSW care and protection system as operating on what they felt was a random basis—maybe an investigation and intervention but probably not.

*In NSW, the Department seems to have a cut-off for action at about 12 years of age. They don't investigate reports for adolescents. In Wodonga, which is in the Victorian system, they get responses but it's not the same here in NSW.*

The relationship between young people being in care and protection and ending up in homelessness services is not a new issue. In the past, state and territory authorities have been criticised as offloading some of the most disturbed children and young people to SAAP programs (Coalition for Children in Care 2010; Community Services Commission 2002). In that sense, homelessness services had become the de facto residential programs of the care and protection system.

Furthermore, in NSW, under the premier's priorities in 2018, one of the 12 priorities was to:

*Increase the proportion of young people who successfully move from Specialist Homelessness Services to long-term accommodation to more than 34 per cent by 2019. (NSW Premier 2019)*

## 9.2 Leaving care support

An important initiative under the NSW Premier's 2018 priorities was supporting young people leaving OOHC with a package of support that included 'personal advice, education and employment mentoring, transitional accommodation support and long-term accommodation to help them transition to independence' with some \$8m funding over four years in locations throughout the state. This is a significant effort at scale, but whether it is being delivered, and how it is being delivered, and for whom, remain questions (NSW Premier 2019).

In reflecting on possible system reform, several Aboriginal informants who participated in a group interview commented on the need to better support young people leaving foster care and the care and protection system, suggesting that more work is needed in this space:

- **Worker one:** 'I think we need like a particular focus on kids coming out of foster care. Yeah'.
- **Worker two:** 'Yeah, there's not a really good proactive social worker [system] that's putting things in place for these young people'.
- **Worker three:** 'Yeah. It's really heartbreaking actually. Young people leaving care and protection and absolutely most [of these young people] as well end up homeless. And there is a correlation between ex-guardianship people that complete suicide'.

There are various leaving-care initiatives designed to provide post-out-of-home support. However, many of young people making the abrupt transition to independence experience considerable difficulty (see for example NSW Premier 2018). Good examples of leaving-care programs have been highlighted. One is the St Luke's Anglicare leaving-care and after-care support service, which offers a program for young people making the transition to independent living. Support includes:

- case management and therapeutic support;
- connections to housing, education, training and employment;
- transition units for independent living;
- life-skills training;
- family and practical support (Mendes 2012b: 34).

The St Luke's model provides a network of support to young people, many of whom do not have the natural family support, in order to foster independence and decrease dependence on welfare services (Mendes 2012a). The service was demonstrably successful in enabling positive transitions for young people into independent living and particularly effective in providing care-leavers with a successful transition into secure housing. Overall, this model was judged to be a beneficial preventive measure for those young people leaving care, enabling them to avoid homelessness (Mendes 2012b).

Another example of a leaving-care program is Living Independently for the First Time – LIFT (Clare, M., et.al. 2017: 15–15), that was found by researchers to have had positive outcomes for the young men who participated in the program—all of whom avoided homelessness and had shown an improvement in their general wellbeing and behaviours:

- 70 per cent were involved in education or training and/or employment.
- 80 per cent had improved independent living skills.

However, the evaluation focussed on only nine individuals.

London, Moslehuddin et al. (2007) make a general point about the status of evaluation evidence on leaving-care programs in Australia—a point that still stands: they found that there were limited evaluations of the effectiveness of leaving-care and of various after-care programs introduced in Australia by government and non-government providers.

### 9.3 The Home Stretch reform agenda

The relationship between OOHC and homelessness has been understood since the mid-1990s. There have been many initiatives and programs over the past two decades to provide support for young people leaving care. Knowledge about what after-care support should involve is well developed—yet the problem of young people who have been through the care and protection system experiencing homelessness continues. The national Home Stretch campaign has highlighted that the leaving-care problem has not been resolved systemically. Home Stretch is ‘a national campaign formed to seek change to the current leaving care arrangements for young people in state care. In brief, to extend the leaving care age from 18 until 21 years’ (Home Stretch 2019). The central argument of Home Stretch, as argued on their website, is as follows:

*Current government policies require the child protection system to begin preparing a young person to leave care as early as 15 years, while most would leave their care placement during their 16th or 17th year. In comparison, children residing at home, in the wider community, with one or both parents are remaining at home longer, with almost 50% of young people aged 18 to 24 having never left the family home.*

*Research both nationally and internationally indicates that a high proportion of care-leavers end up homeless, in the criminal justice system, unemployed or a new parent within the first year of leaving care. Moreover, international research, where care is extended until the age of 21 shows that education participation doubles and homelessness rates are halved. Whilst there are some available services to assist the transition to leaving care, too many young people are still struggling to cope independently at 18 years after a life in state care. (Home Stretch 2019)*

There is a strong evidence-base supporting this objective (Malvaso, Delfabbro et al. 2016; Maunders, Liddell et al. 1999; Mendes 2012b; NYC 2008). The Victorian Government has adopted the Home Stretch policy and programmatic requirements for 250 young people over five years, on the basis that this \$11.6m investment will have a significant impact even if it is not available to all young people leaving the care system.

From the perspective of early intervention to prevent the onset of homelessness, the process of leaving care is one of those transitions at which support can be delivered—and if delivered appropriately, sufficiently and for as long as necessary—should be able to prevent a young person leaving care experiencing homelessness and entering the homelessness service system.

## 10 Policy development implications

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- The community-level systems framework of this study followed the logic of systems analysis, complemented by the collection of data on known sites of innovation and critical thinking. Theoretical thinking about a system in this way, using a stock and flow model and a causal loop diagram of the youth issues interactions, was formative. In the documented Geelong case study, a model of a continuum of services and a concept of their local service system as an ecosystem expressed the community vision and aspirations in this exemplary case.
  - At the front-end, a major reform and redesign challenge is how to build an effective early intervention capacity, given a current system that is largely crisis-oriented in most places. Systemic early intervention is about effectively reducing the flow of young people into homelessness.
  - At the back-end—recovering from homelessness—accessible youth-appropriate housing options are an imperative. Rapid rehousing can then be achieved in most cases. Rethinking social housing for young people—in a manner similar to the Canadian HF4Y—offers a strong model for post-homelessness supportive housing.
  - A most vulnerable cohort are young people leaving care (estimated to be 30–60% of young SHS clients). One measure would be to extend the state’s support until at least 21 years, but another would be to implement a rigorously needs-based approach to post-care support.
  - A key issue for all vulnerable young people is how to ensure that every single young person is adequately supported on a sustainable and successful education, training or employment pathway. Young people who leave school early are more likely to experience homelessness later on, while adolescents who experience homelessness are likely to leave school early. As yet there is no coherent strategy: state and territory education departments are pouring resources into programs to avert early school leaving, the foyer sector is promoting foyers as an effective response and, as well, there is promising work underway to embed support for young people leaving school into a collective impact model.
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### 10.1 Key findings underpinning policy development implications

The key findings underpinning policy development implications are as follows.

- A significant cohort of individuals who need and seek help from the SHS system are young people, either on their own or as dependents in families, mainly women with accompanying children. The 2017–18 statistics on SHS clients provides this information. However, an important clarification for policy purposes is that while a majority of the children and young people present to SHS as part of family groups, there are about 42,000 (16%) young people who are on their own at presentation.



- More young people on their own have received assistance from the SHS in the decade since 2008 than was the case in the years before the 2008 federal government White Paper, *The Road Home*. However, youth homelessness has not been reduced, nor is the trend escalating upward. Many of the drivers of youth homelessness appear to be increasing and the accessibility of affordable housing options has not improved over that period. One inference might be that the early intervention through the Reconnect program—and, to a degree, the support undertaken by youth services—is containing the pressure on supported accommodation for young people.
- Young people who have experienced the care and protection system—particularly those leaving care and protection at 18 years of age—are particularly vulnerable to experiencing homelessness. Many research studies have provided findings about the vulnerability of this cohort, as well as the extent to which services report dealing with young people who have been in care.
- Support for young people needs to incorporate their developmental needs as they navigate a healthy transition to adulthood, as well as the transition to independent living. The implication of this proposition is that accommodation and supports must be designed and implemented with the developmental needs and challenges of young people as a priority for practice, with support built on a positive-strengths-based approach.
- Engagement in education and training—as well as support for pathways to employment—is particularly important for all young people at-risk and who experience homelessness, as their future lives depend on a capacity to secure reasonably sustainable employment. Various youth workers offered views about the importance of considering the developmental needs of young people, pointing out that maturation varies from individual to individual.
- The issue of youth-specific and youth-appropriate housing was raised in various comments from workers in crisis services providing supported accommodation for homeless young people, as well as from national advocacy groups such as National Shelter.
- The NHHA explicitly refers to ‘children and young people’ as a national priority homelessness cohort, as well as ‘people exiting institutions and care into homelessness’—which includes many young people leaving the care and protection system or Juvenile Justice. Most of the state and territory strategies or plans contain a youth initiative, although some give more priority to young people as a cohort than others.
- Housing options for young people who need to move onto independent living are difficult to access. The proportion of young people who access social housing is 2.9 per cent, compared to the proportion of young people on their own receiving assistance due to homelessness at 16 per cent (AIHW 2018a). The business model of mainstream social housing providers does not favour young residents on low incomes, who are more likely to be higher-risk tenants. The private rental market remains a major option for young people leaving crisis services who cannot return home—which, based on SA data is about 25–40%—but this option depends on eligibility for rental assistance, and the affordability and availability of rental properties.
- The systems thinking that frames this study focuses on the ‘community as a system’, on the premise that the interactions of young people with services and their school—as well as their everyday lives—are generally very locally bounded. This premise was affirmed by workers who reported that most of their clients were local young people. However, if young people’s homelessness persists, then they tend to become itinerant and move about, turning up in other places seeking assistance, rather than in their community of origin. The limited set of locally analysed client data did reveal interesting differences. It foreshadows the value of understanding a system on a community-level basis, by looking at local data and information to describe the overall pattern within a community in more precise

measurable terms, rather than claims from local stakeholders that are often little more than guesstimates.

- The simple stock and flow system model that has shaped this study (see Section 2.2) highlights the necessity for ‘early intervention’ (or ‘turning off the tap’, as it was put in the 2008 White Paper *The Road Home*) to stem the flow of young people into homelessness, as well as the challenge of rapid rehousing and viable youth-specific and youth-appropriate housing options for young people who cannot return to live with family members.
- When we spoke with workers in homelessness services, a common refrain was ‘*we need more emergency accommodation*’ and this comment reflected the daily pressure of responding to young people in crisis when the demand for assistance exceeds the capacity of a service to respond. In some places, there was no emergency service at all—and in such places, there is a case for having such a service within the local system. Typically, communities that undertook significant early intervention initiatives placed more emphasis on early intervention and more housing options, as opposed to expanding the crisis services.
- Should a major policy position be to expand the crisis capacity of the youth homelessness service system? While the experience of workers often highlights the limited crisis response available to homeless young people, this also raises issues around:
  - pre-homelessness early intervention
  - post-homelessness housing options.
- The finding of this study is that solely funding crisis services should not be a major policy position, and most of the state and territory policy documents have not taken such a position. This is not to say that we do not need crisis services, but that priority needs to be given to early intervention and post-homelessness housing.
- Early intervention and prevention are one of three homelessness priority policy reform areas in the 2018 NAHA and this is also evident in most of the policy documents in the various Australian jurisdictions. However, it remains to be seen to what extent this policy priority gets translated into funded reform and effective initiatives. The call for early intervention today is less about expanding the Reconnect program— as was the case in earlier years— and more about emerging place-based community-level responses such as the COSS model.
- Attention was given to the emergence of the COSS model of early intervention, which is increasingly well known because of TGP. There are two new COSS pilot sites in NSW (Albury and Mt Druitt), and a consultation report in Queensland is looking into where trial sites in Queensland could be located. The notable achievement of TGP is a 40 per cent reduction in adolescent homelessness in Geelong measured as the number of young people seeking assistance from the Youth Entry Point in Geelong. There was also a measurable improvement in the educational engagement of vulnerable young people in the three original trial schools. The Australian model is being adopted for trial in Canada, the US and Wales.
- A feature of the COSS model is that it is an exemplar of collective impact—a relatively new approach to mobilising communities and community resources to address difficult and complex problems on a geographical basis. The collective impact scheme requires:
  - a common agenda;
  - shared data among community partners;
  - reinforcing coordinated activities and interventions;

- continuous communication among community partners;
- backbone support.

An implication of a scaled-up implementation of the COSS model would be a major shift from program-oriented siloed programs to a place-based cross-sectoral community collective of stakeholders, schools and youth services, collaborating to achieve social and educational outcomes for young people.

- The current system cannot provide rapid rehousing for people exiting from homelessness services, except where private rentals can be found and secured quickly. Getting closer to what is ideally needed will require a stream of social housing planned in locations to match the flow of young people out of homelessness. Such social housing will not necessarily require permanent tenure, as most of these young people would move on after some years. The current approach to social housing has not paid great attention to young people as a priority cohort.
- The most promising opportunity to rapidly expand youth-specific and youth-appropriate social housing would be for other Australian jurisdictions—apart from NSW, which has been the main investor to date—to invest in MFYH. Consideration could also be given to incentives and ways of enabling mainstream providers to offer social housing for youth, where the lower financial returns are offset through support partnerships with youth agencies that lower the risk for the property manager (MFYH), which offers five-year secure tenures and links to support, education, and employment. The expansion of MFYH is arguably the closest Australian housing model to what Gaetz outlines in the Canadian HF4Y model.
- Foyers have become an established supported housing model, with a core requirement for residents to commit to education or training, and employment pathways. While the Australian foyers have been quietly criticised as being relatively expensive, the reported support delivered in the model does appear to foster the educational outcomes that vulnerable young people need in order to avoid long-term (or even lifetime) disadvantage, including episodes of homelessness. Fieldwork for this study, which included information about one of the Education First foyers, found that while it was regarded as an excellent initiative, there was a question in the community about whether the foyer's intake should be integrated into the local homelessness service system, rather than being the prerogative of the foyer provider.
- In all data-collection locations, informants mentioned that many young people seeking assistance had passed through the care and protection system despite various leaving-care projects and initiatives. The deployment of these projects and initiatives appears to be scattered: prominent in some places, but absent in others.
- The major finding from speaking with several workers from Aboriginal services was that too many Aboriginal young people in crisis in the homelessness services system are not supported in culturally appropriate ways that include, for example, understanding of the cultural aspects of extended Aboriginal families and how family members interact.
- Criticism of the income and employment support systems for disadvantaged young people has been consistent and persistent over many years (there was a Senate Inquiry about it in 2018). It was mentioned by several informants that homeless and highly disadvantaged young people are not well served by the centralised system that is currently in place. The localised Youth Foyer is one model that attempts to address this, but the work underway to extend the COSS-model architecture to schools is promising, and arguably has greater capacity to work with young people and their families to avoid homelessness and other adverse social outcomes.

The policy debate that this research informs is about which reforms in combination can achieve an ecosystem of support services available to young people that will actually work to reduce youth homelessness.

## 10.2 The youth homeless service system: now and the future

The current homelessness service system is largely crisis-oriented, made up of crisis and transitional services funded through bilateral agreements that sit under the NHHA—the SHS system (CFFR 2018b). Figure 13 depicts the existing balance among prevention and early intervention

**Figure 13: The status quo: the current homelessness service system**



Source: MacKenzie and Hand (2019d).

By contrast, Figure 14 depicts what rebalancing of the system might look like. A central argument of this report is that the reconfiguration of the services system should be undertaken in terms of a place-based framework, with much greater capacity for prevention and early intervention at the front-end and post-homelessness housing and support at the back-end.

**Figure 14: A rebalanced future youth homelessness service system**



Source: MacKenzie and Hand (2019d).

The major redesign challenge for the youth homelessness system is to rebalance between prevention, emergency response and housing and supports.

At the front-end, following the stock and flow framework and based on local knowledge provided by community-based informants, the focus of the response to youth homelessness has been largely on 'emergency response', with prevention and early intervention seriously under-developed. What is needed is a systemic early-intervention response designed to effectively reduce the flow of young people into homelessness, and this is widely being seen in terms of a place-based, more integrated community of services and schools.

At the back-end—recovering from homelessness—it is argued that the housing options need reform and a significant investment specifically prioritised within the NAHA for young people in transition. HF4Y offers a strong model for post-homelessness supportive housing. However, the time dimension of achieving rapid rehousing remains hugely problematic.

### **10.3 Policy development options**

Despite the perception of many workers in the SHS system that the high demand for services requires investment in more crisis services, what is arguably needed—from a counterintuitive system perspective—is early intervention to reduce the flow of young people into homelessness and for those young people experiencing homelessness, rapid rehousing, and a major expansion of housing options, including appropriate support for young people who grapple with developmental issues.

#### **10.3.1 Redesign systems with a focus on community-level organisation, planning, access and outcomes measurement**

If systems thinking and planning is framed by a homeless service system for young people as a community-level ecosystem of institutions, services, programs and supports, then system redesign begins to consider new ways of joining up services and linking homelessness service providers with mainstream agencies such as schools and educational programs. The focus is local, rather than discrete, centrally managed programs. Also, within a pre-crisis early intervention framework, risk of homelessness and homelessness as experienced by young people is more evidently linked with other emerging adverse issues in young people's lives, such as early school leaving, and issues with mental health, drugs and alcohol. In practical terms, community-level early intervention works across issues and thus needs to be cross-sectoral. However, the current funding environment remains siloed.

#### **10.3.2 Improved access through Youth Entry Points**

A practical structural/organisational reform that potentially offers an efficiency dividend would be to develop Youth Entry Points on a regional and sub-regional basis in all Australian jurisdictions. The Victorian entry points are a feature of the SHS system in that state, and serve to simplify contact with—and access to—support services in a more efficient manner. The entry point is provided by a group of services that meet together as a network, and this serves to foster greater cooperation among local or regional providers. Several communities in NSW have created local entry points of their own volition. SA maintains a central Youth Gateway. Experience and feedback from SA homelessness workers about entry points suggests that the central access point may not be the best approach.

#### **10.3.3 Invest in early intervention and prevention**

There is a clear policy imperative to implement early intervention to reduce the flow of young people into homelessness. The NHHA specifies children and young people as a priority cohort, and early intervention and prevention as a key. The long-standing Reconnect program embodies practice experience, while the piloting of the COSS model of early intervention provides both an experiential and research-evaluation evidence-base for implementation to scale.

The COSS model is a place-based model for supporting vulnerable young people and families to reduce disengagement from education and early school leaving, and to help where family issues are heading towards a crisis and possible homelessness, as well as other adverse outcomes. The outcomes achieved by TGP of a 40 per cent reduction in adolescent homelessness at the same time as a 20 per cent reduction in early school leaving has

demonstrated what a place-based approach is capable of achieving, and this is what has generated interest nationally and internationally (MacKenzie 2018c).

The success factors of the COSS model seem to be:

- Local community leadership in one of the participating key stakeholders—ideally the lead agency responsible for the early intervention support work;
- The construction of a formalised community collective through a community development process;
- A population-screening methodology that can proactively identify vulnerable youth and families prior to the onset of crises;
- A flexible practice framework that can efficiently manage proactive support to at-risk youth and their families, while still able to be reactive when crises occur;
- A single-entry point into the support system for young people in need;
- A data-intensive approach to risk identification, monitoring and outcomes measurement (utilising Sir Michael Barber's 'deliverology' [Barber, Kihn et al. 2011]).

#### **10.3.4 Invest in youth-specific social housing for young people**

Homeless young people on their own are about half (54%) of all single people who seek help from homelessness services, but make up only 2.9 per cent of principal tenants in social and public housing in Australia (AIHW 2018a). The current business model of mainstream social housing means that providers are often reluctant to accept young residents because of their low and insecure incomes, and because they are regarded as high-risk tenants. It is not clear what incentives or changes could increase the proportion of young people as residents in mainstream social housing.

#### **10.3.5 Integrate Youth Foyers into the exit pathways for young people leaving Specialist Homelessness Services**

The Youth Foyer model has been widely accepted and supported as a housing model for at-risk or homeless young people that addresses their education, training or employment support needs. The commitment to education or training and employment pathways is a condition for access to this type of supported transitional housing. Over the past decade, foyers have been established in many jurisdictions, and there are now some 15 foyers, or foyer-like projects, that have been developed to support about 500 16–25-year-olds at-risk of homelessness or recovering from homelessness. As Youth Foyers are a relatively expensive model, there are some questions that need to be considered:

- Should foyers strictly provide a pathway for young people recovering from homelessness? Or should they take in a wider population of at-risk youth?
- Should foyers be congregate facilities, as is currently the case? Or should they be a dispersed set of units connected to a nearby community hub?

In a redesigned homelessness service system for young people, the contribution that Youth Foyers make towards post-homelessness ('breaking the cycle') outcomes would be strengthened if their intake was restricted to young people exiting the SHS system.

#### **10.3.6 Extend state care until 21 years**

The relationship between OOHC and homelessness has been understood since the mid-1990s (London, Moslehuddin et al. 2007). There have been many leaving-care initiatives and projects over the past two decades. Good practice knowledge about after-care support is well



developed—yet the net national effort to prevent this cohort of young people from entering homelessness has been inconsistent and evidently inadequate.

The national Home Stretch Campaign is ‘a group of concerned organisations and individuals that believe an option should be available for youth in the Out-of-Home Care system to remain in care until the age of 21’ (Home Stretch 2019), but on the basis of robust needs-based standards of care and support. The Victorian Government has adopted the Home Stretch policy and programmatic requirements for 250 young people over five years, on the basis that this \$11.6m investment will have a significant impact—even if not available to all young people leaving the care system. Based on the high proportion—variously reported from 30–60 per cent—of homeless young people, a full and effective implementation of the Home Stretch agenda would have a significant effect on the number of young people becoming homeless.

## 10.4 Conclusion: final remarks

Youth homelessness has become a prominent public issue worldwide. Australia has been a leader in initiatives to respond to youth homelessness. Yet, such public prominence and publicity has not necessarily been translated into effective policy and program responses that would be warranted by the available evidence.

The current debate about early intervention and a place-based system reform model in response to youth homelessness is active in Australia, Canada and Wales, and is beginning in the US. This research informs the debate somewhat and, at the same time, brings the debate and developmental work underway to the attention of policy makers.

In Canada, there has been a beginning made on developing a Reconnect program-type response—a ‘*Reconnect 2.0*’, according to Melanie Redman—which is similar to Australia’s Reconnect program, but building upon it. There are now pilot programs for the COSS model of early intervention in several locations in all three countries, and work is underway in Wales to develop similar pilot sites as part of an investment in early intervention.

A key argument that arises in the youth sector is a rebalancing of the ecosystem, by expanding early intervention to reduce entry into the homelessness service system, while at the same time expanding a more accessible and appropriate set of housing options for young people at the point of exit from the homelessness system, in comparison with the existing crisis system (as shown earlier in Figure 14).

**Q1.** How might policy decision-makers go about rebalancing the support system for vulnerable young people to significantly expand early intervention and post-homelessness rapid rehousing and supported housing for young people?

There is compelling evidence that implementing early intervention and rapid rehousing would ultimately yield significant cost offsets, if taken to scale. But investment over and above the budget for the existing crisis-oriented system would be initially required (MacKenzie, Flatau et al. 2016).

Early-intervention policy statements are evident in various state and territory homelessness strategy and policy documents. Some investment has flowed into innovative pilot projects that represent a place-based community approach, and there is evidence of interest in further exploration in at least three jurisdictions of how this kind of early intervention capacity could be extended systemically.

A shift to place-based ‘collective impact’ approaches to systemic change for vulnerable young people would vest more power in the local stakeholders who have formed collectives under formal agreements. Consortia are more complex entities. Such collectives are necessarily cross-sectoral, and cannot simply be imposed top-down nor readily packaged as a program



between a department and a single lead agency. This raises new issues for commissioning and funding practices, and is likely to change how such efforts are managed from a departmental accountability perspective.

In terms of the relationship between specialist and mainstream services—a question that was first raised explicitly in the 2008 White Paper but was under-conceptualised and subsequently under-developed over the past decade—the first issue is which mainstream service system(s) is relevant. For adolescents, it is their school and the education/training system more broadly. When young people are unemployed and/or homeless, an important mainstream system is the complex income support and employment support requirements.

**Q2.** What changes to housing agreements and policies, as well as income and employment support policies and practices, would be needed to redress the current issues young people have in accessing and maintaining affordable housing options (affordability being relative to the prevailing income levels of unemployed, disadvantaged and homeless young people)?

The passage to independent living has become an increasingly difficult transition for young Australians over the past four decades. Contributing factors include:

- their later entry into the labour market;
- the insecurity and casualisation of employment;
- the high rents—particularly in capital cities.

Young people who experience homelessness or unemployment, cannot rent in the private market without rental assistance. There is a strong case for increasing unemployment and other benefits for young people. However, the bigger challenge is the supply of youth-specific and youth-appropriate housing options.

Young people are not able to access social housing to the extent warranted by the evident need for supportive housing options. Calls for rethinking social housing for young people would change the view that young people should not be accessing social housing by reconceptualising social housing options for youth, as a form of more open-ended transitional supportive housing. For mainstream social housing providers, an unanswered question is what changes to income support or housing subsidies would be required to make their current social housing business model more viable for young tenants?

In terms of responses to youth homelessness, Australia has generally been ahead of Canada and the USA, both of which rely largely on a crisis system of shelters. However, over recent years, Canada has been active in redressing the deficit of policy and program responses to youth homelessness.

A key model from Canada that raises questions for Australian housing policy decision-makers is Housing First for Youth [HF4Y], which focuses on providing supported housing for young people leaving crisis services. It is argued that the nature of post-homelessness support in HF4Y has to incorporate developmentally appropriate support practices for young people still maturing into adulthood (Gaetz 2014). The Youth Foyers being developed in Australia adhere to some of the requirements of HF4Y, but not to others. The foyer model has a place, but is regarded as an expensive option.

**Q3.** If education/training and vocationally relevant skills are vital for young people to achieve a sustainable livelihood, how can the education/employment support systems and the community services/homelessness systems be better integrated systemically to reduce the cohort of disadvantaged and/or homeless individuals into the future and across the life course?

A purely school-based early intervention response—even if it were effective—would miss young people leaving school early, where homelessness is not an evident risk but who may experience homelessness later on. There have been many calls for the income and employment support requirements for young people to be reviewed, because so many see these systems as endemically problematic.

Over the past decade, Youth Foyers have been seen as a model of supported accommodation linked tightly to education or training and employment. While there are some questions about the high cost of multistorey, purpose-designed facilities, which most of the foyers have been, the foyer remains a viable option—although there should be a shift towards integrating Youth Foyers into the exit pathway for young people leaving the SHS system, perhaps required as a condition of funding.

The most promising model being trialled in two states, and possibly a third in 2020, is the COSS model of early intervention, which proactively identifies risk across several problem domains, and provides flexible long-term support to vulnerable young people and their families to prevent homelessness, and at the same time improve educational outcomes. The model represents a place-based approach to services and support for young people, importantly including the mainstream institution of schools, reorganised into a community collective united around a common agenda, sharing data, working collaboratively to deliver services in an efficient and effective way and with backbone support for the collective work. There is work underway in Geelong and Shepparton to extend this architecture to early school leavers, and to follow-up and support vulnerable young people until they are firmly on a pathway to sustainable independent life and livelihood.

In this study, the system to be redesigned has been conceptualised as the ecosystem of supports, programs and services—importantly including schools and other educational institutions (the mainstream system) and other programs within the community. The ‘community as a system’ is meaningfully congruent with the social world of young people. The systems thinking in this study drew on the widely applied stock and flow model and undertook analysis of the causal factors at work within a young person’s interactional ecosystem.

The perspective that emerged from this line of thought was reframing and reorganising service provision from the current program-oriented perspective to a place-based perspective. The policy settings in NAHA and most state and territory plans authorise a priority on prevention and early intervention, as well as supportive housing options. There are promising exemplars in the key areas where change is needed. Identifying these exemplars through purposive sampling and examining them on a community-level basis was the method used in this study to construct a practical agenda for system redesign. As such, the policy options mainly rely on promising initiatives where there is evidence to suggest that their systemic implementation would have a significant impact on the problem of youth homelessness.

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# Appendix 1: Interview Schedule

## Redesign of a Homelessness Service System for Young People

An AHURI-funded research project undertaken by a partnership of Swinburne University, University of South Australia and the University of New South Wales.

### Semi-structured interview schedule

- a) This project is about trying to understand and model the local service system for homeless young people. We are interested in understanding how the existing system is working, and then about how that system might be redesigned to reduce homelessness through early intervention and rapid post-homelessness support.
- b) Are most of the young people who pass through the local service system local to the area—do you know the proportion of local and non-local clients?
- c) When adolescents approach the homelessness service system in this community, where do they come from—are they secondary school students; are they young people of school age but early school leavers, or are they older?
- d) Could you give me several examples, without mentioning names, of young people fronting up to the homelessness service system? What is the most typical example?
- e) Can you tell me what the numbers look like in terms of how many young people pass through the system in a year?
- f) What aspects of the existing system do you think work reasonably well?
- g) What aspects of the system don't work so well, and why?
- h) Where do young people go on leaving the homelessness service system?
- i) Do you know the proportion who are able to return home?
- j) Could you give me several examples, without mentioning names, of young people leaving the homelessness service system? What is the most typical example?
- k) Now thinking about how the system could be different, more effective and more able to prevent youth homelessness in the first place: What ideas do you have for improving the local community response to youth homelessness and the local service system?
- l) What ideas do you have about early intervention and prevention?
- m) What advice do you have on providing more youth-specific and youth-appropriate housing options?
- n) Do have any quantitative measures of the annual demand for housing by young people leaving the homelessness service system.
- o) Let's summarise our discussion: What would you change? What would you not change?



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