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Youth Homelessness

Youth Action Policy Paper

YOUTH ACTION

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About Us

Youth Action is the peak organisation representing young people and youth services in NSW. Youth Action works towards a society where all young people are supported, engaged and valued. To achieve this, it is the role of Youth Action to:

1. Respond to social and political agendas relating to young people and the youth services sector
 2. Provide proactive leadership and advocacy and shape the agenda on issues affecting young people and youth services
 3. Collaborate on issues that affect young people and youth workers
 4. Promote a positive profile in the media and the community of young people and youth services
 5. Build capacity for young people to speak out and take action on issues that affect them
 6. Enhance the capacity of the youth services sector to provide high quality services
 7. Ensure Youth Action's organisational development, efficiency, effectiveness and good governance.
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Recommendations

1. Resourcing of local FaCS offices to design place-based approaches and distribute government funding
2. Additional funding for community-based youth services to provide community development services

Introduction

Young people aged 12 to 24 have the highest rate of homelessness of any group in NSW with 39% of the state's homeless population under the age of 25. While some are rough sleepers, much youth homelessness constitutes "couch surfing", living in boarding houses or cycling through emergency accommodation.

Family conflict, violence, mental illness, substance abuse and financial stress are all common causes of youth homelessness. The highest rates of youth homelessness exist among Indigenous and refugee populations. Young people leaving out-of-home care and young people leaving the juvenile justice system are also at particular risk. Homelessness has a severe impact on children and young people, and can contribute to lifelong disadvantage.

When it comes to accessing housing generally, young people face barriers and discrimination. High rental costs, low incomes, insecure share housing, and the lack of affordable housing and public housing stock all make independent living a challenge for many young people.

10, 587 young people were homeless in NSW on census night 2006. Of this number, 20% were in boarding houses, 19% in supported accommodation, 40% residing with friends and relatives and 13% living in improvised dwellings or sleeping rough. Under the Specialist Homelessness Services Collection, 52% per cent of users of specialist homelessness services for the December 2011 quarter were aged under 25.

More information:

Youth Homelessness Fact Page, Yfoundations, 2008.

The Road Home: The Australian Government White Paper on Homelessness, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2008.

Which way home? A new approach to homelessness. Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2008.

What are the issues?

Young people need safe, secure and affordable housing options, along with appropriate income support so that they can successfully access private and public housing.

While crisis accommodation is important, it is generally unable to provide an exit from homelessness. It is critical that governments and non-government organisations are focused on ending homelessness for young people permanently.

Young people need access to well-supported, independent longer-term accommodation and integrated services that are tied to education, training and employment.

Greater resources should be invested in specialist youth services – including mental health and alcohol and other drug services - that assist in holistically addressing the complex causes of youth homelessness.

Prevention, early identification and early intervention programs at the primary and high school level are needed to address the under-reporting of youth homelessness and dramatically reduce homelessness rates.

There should be a 'no exit into homelessness' principle written into all policy on out-of-home care and juvenile justice.

The distinct needs of Indigenous, newly arrived and same sex-attracted and gender questioning young people must be specifically addressed by service providers and policy makers to help reduce homelessness rates amongst these groups.

What are the solutions?

Homelessness Action Plan 2009-2014

YAPA endorses the NSW Government's *Homelessness Action Plan 2009-2014* and its specific measures for addressing youth homelessness. These are: the improvement of co-ordination between crisis phone lines, the delivery of housing and support to young people through the Homelessness Intervention Project including the Nepean Youth Homelessness Project, the extension of the Nepean Youth Homelessness Project and the implementation of the Inner City Supportive Housing and Support for Young People project.

No Exits into Homelessness.

YAPA endorses the *Housing NSW Youth Action Plan 2010-2014*, particularly the *No Exits Into Homelessness Strategy* for young people in out-of-home care

Generalist youth services have a role in ending homelessness

YAPA advocates the role of the generalist youth sector in ending youth homelessness in NSW.

YAPA notes the role of youth services that are not specialised towards homelessness and housing in preventing and addressing youth homelessness. Such services are well represented within YAPA's membership and include youth centres providing drop-in and street-based activities. Recent research with YAPA's membership has confirmed the role of these community-based services in preventing and addressing youth homelessness in NSW. Findings include:

- Of 27 separate issues addressed by youth services in NSW (n=78), the most common issue that young people present to youth services is homelessness. This demonstrates that young people are turning to generalist youth services for assistance with their housing and related needs associated with homelessness.

- 4 in 5 (n=71) youth services work with family members of young people as well as young people themselves. Family support work is a known protective factor in preventing youth homelessness.
- Exclusion from employment, education and training; family violence or family breakdown are all known correlates for youth homelessness. This means the generalist youth services that support these issues are invaluable in their role of protecting youth from homelessness.

The significance of non-specialist youth services in preventing and addressing youth homelessness is also borne out in research and practice literature.

More information:

YAPA Youth Work Snapshot 2011, YAPA 2011.

The role of non-specialist youth services in preventing youth homelessness - a literature review, YAPA 2012.

Homelessness Action Plan 2009-2014, NSW Government 2009.

Youth Action Plan 2010-2014, Housing NSW, NSW Government 2010.

Keep Them Safe, EIPP, Place-based approach and Results based accountability

Since 2011 the non-government community sector has played an increasingly significant role in supporting children, young people and families, a role that has made them increasingly valuable and important to preventing homelessness.

YAPA recognises that the adoption of the Keep Them Safe reforms and the related reform of the Community Services Grants Program play a strong role in NSW's commitments to ending youth homelessness. We recognise the Early Intervention and Placement Prevention (EIPP) model and the transfer of out-of-home care services to the non-government sector, as recommended by the Wood inquiry. We endorse the use of a place-based approach to invest in

and design support for families and communities along with a Results-Based Accountability framework for designing and measuring outcomes for community service provision.

Within this YAPA believes that the appropriate resourcing of the Department of Families and Communities is paramount. This refers to both financial and human capital. A well-resourced Department will ensure the highest standard of community service is provided by agencies in the non-government sector. A key aspect of this service will be the prevention of youth homelessness.

A recent survey of non-government family, youth and community support services demonstrated the significance of well-resourced local FaCS offices in designing a place-based approach and distributing government funding. Many contributors to the report noted the role of an effective place-based approach to community service delivery in preventing youth homelessness and other serious social problems.

More information:

Early intervention and placement prevention: NSW community services in transition, YAPA & NSW Family Services Inc, 2012.

Community development services

YAPA advocates additional funding for community-based youth services to provide community development services.

A key finding of the YAPA Youth Work Snapshot is that, not only are young people presenting in high numbers to youth services with needs relating to homelessness, but youth services are also struggling to support young people with these particular needs within their present level of resourcing. Further research with these services has demonstrated that young people with needs relating to homelessness face a considerable service gap, and that this gap relates to a drop in the number of generalist activities such as drop-in and street work available within community services. Small, community-based youth services perform care and relationship-based work with young people

facing homelessness. Focussed requirements for information provision, case management, and only providing short service periods under the EIPP funding model has made measuring the quality work of small, community based youth services harder than it need be. However, it is as critical to preventing youth homelessness as these more readily 'reportable' aspects of service provision. It is also distinct from the Community Builders programs in that such work is not deliberately targeted at a particular community of identity or interest, instead it relies on young people's self-selection and a generic 'soft entry point.' These services are vital to ensure there is not a gap in the early intervention and prevention of youth homelessness; where homelessness overlaps with the child protection system and early identification and support can save government and community significant money through diverting young people from requiring more intensive, costly supports.

More information:

YAPA Youth Work Snapshot 2011, YAPA 2011.

The role of non-specialist youth services in preventing youth homelessness - a literature review, YAPA 2012.

Homelessness Action Plan 2009-2014, NSW Government 2009.

Youth Action Plan 2010-2014, Housing NSW, NSW Government 2010.

Early intervention and placement prevention: NSW community services in transition, YAPA & NSW Family Services Inc, 2012.