

Community Investment with Hope

Bruce Tucker, Service Development Manager, Hope Street Youth and Family Services

I am writing this article after my third week at Hope Street Youth and Family Services in the role of Service Development Manager. It is an exciting time to be joining the Hope Street team as the organisation is poised to embark on implementing some great new programs, particularly in the outer growth corridor area of Melton.

Firstly, in April this year, The Premier, Daniel Andrews, and Minister for Housing, Martin Foley announced as part of the investment in a housing blitz comprehensive funding to Hope Street to provide a 'First Response Youth Service' in Melton that will provide crisis response support and outreach and include a purpose built refuge facility for vulnerable local young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Alongside this is another new initiative that has just commenced, Hope to Home which is a new pilot program. The purpose of this program is to transition young people from the Homelessness Service System into affordable private rental that is sustainable, in collaboration with the local community of Melton.

The goal of this program is to prevent or reduce the prevalence of young people re-entering homelessness. Hope Street believes young people require a multi-dimensional support system and interventions that require creation of alternative pathways to housing stability, particularly for young people in outer growth corridors.

The Hope to Home Initiative emerged from Hope Street's discussions and consultations with key stakeholders (including young people) in the City of Melton. Hope to Home will collaborate with the

local community to develop and implement strategies to enable increased access and sustainability of private rental for young people/families in response to youth homelessness in local space and place. This initiative is based on strong partnerships between Raine and Horne Real Estate Melton, City of Melton Housing Services, Gandal Philanthropy, Victoria University and Hope Street.

Hope Street became a part of the City of Melton community in 2009 with the establishment of its Hope Street in Melton program that provides supported medium term accommodation to young people and young families who experience homelessness. Since 2009 to now the growth and development of the Hope Street programs within the Melton area has been based upon strong community development principles.

As CEO of Hope Street, Donna Bennett stated after the recent funding announcement:

'Hope Street has been working closely with various stakeholders in the LGA of Melton to establish an emergency accommodation facility along with specialist wrap around support services for over 220 young people experiencing homelessness. Hope Street acknowledges the collective effort from the Melton Community, Business, City Council, Local MPs and Service Clubs that continue to provide real leadership and advice ensuring this initiative becomes a reality.'

'This is a real reflection of how a strong community comes together to support its young people,' she said.

When considering this growth through community development in the Melton region, two comments from City of Melton Council officers to me seem to book-end the community development that has taken place across this time. In 2009, when Hope Street first explored the possibility of tendering for the specialist youth supported accommodation program in Melton, the statement was made that — a lot of organisations and services come to Melton and provide services in an outreach capacity but not many come to embed and join with the local community in developing local services to meet the local needs.

Therefore it was encouraging to hear at an event held this July at Tabcorp Park (a key local business sharing our vision for a better response for young people experiencing homelessness) where Hope Street presented to many local service clubs information in regard to the Hope Street First Response Youth Service, the comment from another Council Officer that Hope Street was an organisation worth getting behind and supporting because they came and invested in this local community and did not just provide their services from a distance.

So what are some of these community development principles that have enabled this outcome and maybe provide some guidance towards other community development projects in the future?

Community development is understood in lots of different ways these days with various models and language that sometimes confuses what we are talking about. Community strengthening and community capacity

building are newer ideas that have developed recently.

For this review I am using a more simple definition of community development, one that brings together members of the local community to enable members to identify and develop actions to address local needs. The basis of this is the six simple and generic steps that are the Neighbourhood House — Community Development Model.

1. involve the community
2. identify the community needs and aspirations
3. determine how to address this in the local context
4. partner with community organisations, businesses, government, philanthropic organisations and individuals towards an outcome to meet the needs and aspirations as determined
5. deliver the services
6. evaluate and review.

In reviewing Hope Street against this model, Steps one to four have been worked through in various ways as will be outlined below and five and six are still evolving and will be the focus over the next few years.

It is my observation that a key decision was made back in 2009 by Hope Street Board and CEO in responding to the challenge in the statement from the Melton City Council Officer that they would not just take on a program and run it from a distance but actively seek to work with and alongside the local community and determine with them what were the local needs and how could these needs be best addressed within the local context.

This meant building relationships with local people and local organisations and then through these relationships gaining an understanding of Melton and its community. In real estate the buzz words are 'location, location, location', but in community development it might be, 'relationships, relationships, relationships'.



Collage of Community Development in Melton

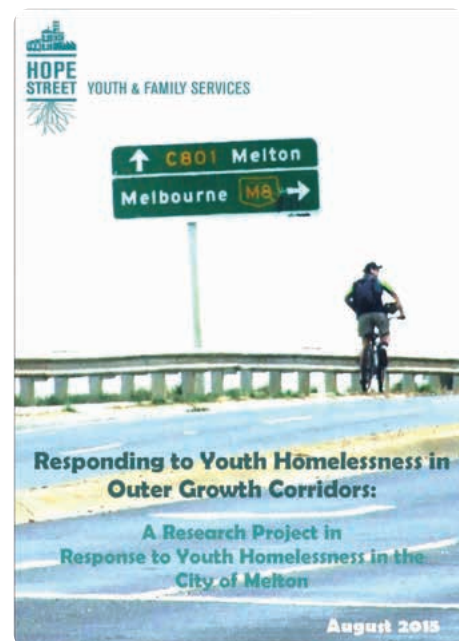
A key in this relationship building was to connect with 'door openers' in the local community. These are key people who are already well connected and linked within the community and then open doors or link you to other key people. Hope Street was very fortunate to be introduced to a couple of these key people early in the process. In all communities there are always people who have a strong desire to see their community grow and develop and to address emerging issues. Space opens for community development to occur when these key people can be linked together by a common goal and further linked with many others in the community towards developing clear actions towards addressing the local issues with local solutions.

Hope Street was able to take the facilitator role alongside some other key local people and in particular provide a focus around the key local emerging issue of vulnerable young people, family violence and the risk of homelessness and lack of services to address this locally. Building and maintaining these type of relationships was very important and needed to remain a core activity to ensure progress and development. This meant achieving consistent and specific activities, lots of smaller actions to stay connected, to keep the focus, and address any issues and concerns quickly and openly.

Extensive consultations were undertaken with a wide range of stakeholders in the City of Melton including young people (particularly

those who had experienced homelessness), key local organisations, local service clubs, local community networks, Inspector for Police for the Melton area, local businesses, local Victorian Members of Parliament and local government executive and officers.

The Councillors and Officers of Melton City Council were an integral factor to the establishment of this development and it fitted well with their strategic goals of advancing the local community in addressing key issues, including for their youth. Along with providing key linkages, they assisted with organising forums, consultations, provided data,



Cover of Hope Street Research into youth homelessness in Melton



Leader joins Hope Street Youth and Family Services in campaign for a youth emergency accommodation centre



Butterflies of Hope Campaign Melton

resources and other expertise to assist the processes.

Another integral group were the local Members of Parliament and their Electorate Officers who were highly knowledgeable about key community members/groups and were extremely supportive of processes to engage, resource and connect people and groups who would benefit and share the community's vision for a specialist youth homelessness service in the City of Melton. Local Members of Parliament were also important in utilising their knowledge, environment (Parliament) and relationships (Government colleagues) in support of the community's vision.

Local businesses provided resources, spaces for meetings, insights and their name to develop a community response and it was no surprise to discover that many held a strong sense of hope and aspiration for the local community and cared about seeing better options for the young people they connected with.

Hope Street conducted a Partnership Workshop with local stakeholders. The workshop explored a shared vision for a new crisis response and accommodation service for young people in Melton, potential elements of the service model, short and long term actions and partners. From this workshop an Advisory Committee

was established with high-level representation from senior stakeholders. The Advisory Committee developed clear Terms of Reference for the Committee which assisted with maintaining an overall focus on achieving the vision and assisted greatly in ensuring local perspectives were maintained and addressed.

Stakeholder engagement was also achieved as part of a detailed research project conducted by Hope Street between November 2014 and August 2015.

This research resulted in the launch of the report — *Responding to Youth Homelessness in Outer Growth Corridors: A research project in response to youth homelessness in the City of Melton, August 2015* in September in conjunction with Woodgrove Shopping Centre in Melton. This research report then formed the basis of writing a business case to the State Government for the funding to establish the Hope Street First Response Youth Service in Melton initiative to meet the identified needs re-affirmed by the research.

It was then a case of presenting the report to the community and again a number of community events were undertaken including presentations to key organisations and community groups where a proposed draft model for comment was put forward. This included development of a concept model for the facility that was very

generously prepared by an architectural group. The Advisory Committee played a key role in seeing this undertaken and brought together.

It is important to build the case around what the community has identified and come to some agreement as to how the issues might be addressed from a local perspective. Though some aspects of the model overall could be sensed prior to the research, there was also lots of new insights and perspectives that were able to be added to the eventual model that was developed.

Once the model was developed it was then important to line up all the key influential supporters so that the business case would be presented from a strong position.

Hope Street and Melton Leader teamed up late last year to launch the Centre for Hope campaign, to raise awareness of homelessness in Melton and push the urgent need.

The Housing Minister, Martin Foley, was reported to have stated to the local member that the business case presented such a compelling view that it could not be ignored.

Without the consultations, the development of the model based on what was identified and revealed by the community, the ongoing significant support of the wider Melton community and advocacy of local MP's this might not have been the case. The business case may have been put forward by Hope Street but it had the full weight of the community behind it and without this it would not have been anywhere near as compelling.

It is often stated that homelessness is a community problem and needs the community to be part of the solution. However putting this into practice is not always easy and requires effort and time. Because Hope Street started and focused on the ideal of investing into the local community, the result has been a community developed solution into youth homelessness in Melton. My role going forward will be to continue to facilitate and nurture collaboration within the local community to achieve our shared vision.



Hope Street CEO, Donna Bennet — Hope Street Parity Launch 2015