

Youth Homelessness from the Family Violence Perspective

Written by a 22-year-old youth refuge resident from Hope Street Youth and Family Services

I wouldn't have become homeless if my mum didn't kick me out. Family conflict was a big part of it. Everyone would argue about who does the dishes. Always the dishes and always my mum's ex-boyfriend would tell me to get out because I didn't do the dishes. Every time I've been kicked out of my mum's it's because of my mum's boyfriend. There was often violence from my mum's boyfriend; not so much physical violence, although he pushed me a couple of times, it was more that he was verbally aggressive. A couple of weeks after my mum met him, he told me I was a waste of a life and space and to just go kill myself.

I was at risk of becoming homeless because my mother's boyfriend was always abusing me and threatening to kick me out when I was 14. It was always hanging over me that at any time I'll be on the streets.

My mum tried to put me into a day program for my mental health issues when I was 15. My mental health was suffering because of the abuse. Instead of stopping the abuse, they were sending me to a program to fix my issue. I tried to kill myself and had to go there. If that abuse wasn't happening, I wouldn't have tried to kill myself.

I see my mum as responsible for me becoming homeless. She should have protected me. She knows that her boyfriend is a bad person but she continues to be a slave to him and do everything that he says and does. If he told her to kick me out, she did it. She always chooses her boyfriend over us kids. She has told us so many times that her relationship came first. Since she's been with him, the whole family has been split up and no one likes my mum any more. She has

changed so much since she met him and it has ruined our family. My brother is homeless now too.

Being homeless has affected my self-worth but I don't let it get to me in that way. I try not to think about it because I don't want to feel down about it.

The only good response that I got was from Hope Street. Other homelessness services are good too, but I have been waiting for a transitional property for four years.

The acceptance of me as a person is what makes the difference.

The workers at Hope Street are really welcoming and they help a lot. They try to get you places straight away and work hard towards keeping you from being homeless.

Even though I've been here so long, and I know how hard it is to find places, they still allow me to stay here even though it has been for a long time. And they still support me.

Not being listened to is the worst thing that happens because it is frustrating. Waiting for housing for so long and getting rejected from every place I apply for is also really hard. Sometimes workers don't understand that the fact is I am homeless and have nowhere else to go. Sometimes the services don't understand you.

Homelessness services should provide more outreach workers. They should provide more supports and more housing, especially more long-term housing. Social workers are the best people to respond to people who are homeless, because they can talk to each other and then the social worker can help even further.

Once they are given the circumstance of the young person, they can connect them to other services.

If they work together, they will be able to help the young person in whatever way they need, even if the homeless person just wants mental health not housing or whatever. At least a social worker can direct them and help with what they want. Social workers know what you need and can help because they are qualified — whereas housing workers just know the housing. There are too many different workers with too many different specialties. We need one worker who can do everything.

Young people have solutions. They think about it a lot. I think about my solutions all the time. The situation can be made better by having more workers, in more places and more housing services. There are a lot of abandoned places that should be knocked down and used for housing. I see abandoned factories everywhere I go and these places are wasted and could be used to house people. Some of these places are dangerous and people live there because they have to. If these places were developed properly for them to live in, there would be no danger and no fires. If the cops catch homeless people they force them to leave empty buildings — but they have nowhere else to go.

Other young people should beware and make sure they respect workers and other clients. This is important to help get respect for yourself. But if you do get disrespected, you have the right to complain about it. I have learnt a lot from my workers and it feels all right.