



HOPE STREET YOUTH & FAMILY SERVICES

Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria

By Hope Street Youth and Family Services

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1. Summary of key recommendations

The recommendations contained in this submission are formed on evidence-based program models that deliver positive and life changing outcomes for young people and young families who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness. The recommendations are extremely cost effective, and have the ability to both divert young people from entering homelessness, and prevent young people becoming entrenched in long-term homelessness. Put simply, they are solutions that work.

On the pages herein, Hope Street Youth and Family Services has put forward the following recommendations:

- a) Increase the number of purpose-designed specialist youth refuges in growth corridors, including funding Hope Street's First Response Youth Service in the City of Whittlesea and the City of Hume (at a cost of \$4.8 million capital and \$2.3 million operating expenses per annum);
- b) Increase the number of Hope Street foyer-like models of supported transitional housing for young people in growth corridors;
- c) Provide youth-specific supported private rental assistance programs in growth corridors, including funding Hope Street's Hope to Home program in the City of Whittlesea and the City of Melton (at a cost of \$2.8 million over three years); and
- d) Establish a quota of community housing properties specifically for young people and young families.

2. Introduction

This submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria, prepared by specialist youth homelessness service [Hope Street Youth and Family Services](#), brings to the fore the issues of most concern for young people and young families who are experiencing homelessness in Victoria. By way of preparation for this submission, we interviewed and consulted with young people who are current and/or previous Hope Street clients, and their Case Managers, to capture their voices and opinions on how Victoria can best respond to youth homelessness.

Overwhelmingly, the most pressing feedback we received from young people is that youth homelessness requires a specialist response that is different to the response required by the general homeless population. In the absence of youth-specific responses, young people are often missing out on resources and falling through the gaps. Young people also require homelessness services to be available in their own communities, not only centralized in Melbourne city.

Ultimately, long-term social housing for young people and young families is key to ending homelessness, however until there is ample supply, short-term supported crisis accommodation and medium-term supported accommodation options such as foyer-like models will be a necessity to keep



vulnerable and disadvantaged young Victorians safe. Housing options need to be designed appropriately for young people, and need to be youth-specific and specialist.ⁱ

We believe in the vision of a future Victoria in which all young people have access to a safe and secure home from where they can reach their full potential. When young people are provided with the support they need at the time they need it and within their own communities, their experience with homelessness can remain just that – a short-lived experience that does not have to negatively impact on the rest of their lives. We believe that Victoria has the means to end youth homelessness, and we look forward to continuing to collaborate with the Andrews Government to provide young people and young families with the support they need to prevent, mitigate and end their experiences with homelessness.

3. About Hope Street Youth and Family Services

Hope Street Youth and Family Services (“Hope Street”) is one of the longest established specialist youth homelessness service providers in Melbourne, with 38 years’ experience in providing place-based responsive services to young people in Melbourne’s northern and western growth corridors. As a medium size not for profit agency and registered company limited by guarantee, Hope Street had an annual operating budget of \$4.3 million and employed 29 staff members EFT in 2018-2019 across all programs including those operating 24/7. Our aim is to assist young people and young families who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness by providing them with resources, support, compassion and opportunities to overcome disadvantage and reach their full potential. We believe young people have the right to be treated as equal citizens in our society, including the provision of safe, secure, affordable housing. Hope Street is a leading player in local homelessness networks and has a strong history of both advocating for young people who are experiencing homelessness and for driving integrated service system reform.

In 2018-2019, Hope Street supported 670 young people (aged 16 to 25 years) including their dependent children, who were experiencing or at risk of homelessness across our sites in the growth corridors of the Cities of Moreland, Melton and Whittlesea. We take a place-based approach, working in partnership with local communities, City Councils, Government, philanthropy, the community sector and local businesses to respond to the needs of young people who are experiencing homelessness. Our support and services are based exclusively on the specific needs of young people and young families, which are very different to the needs of older people who are experiencing homelessness.

Hope Street’s programs and services are client-centred, evidence-based, flexible and responsive, accessible, empowering and delivered through a strengths-based and solutions-focused approach. Our current program models include:

- Youth refuges (operating 24/7) with attached enhanced response initiatives and mobile outreach services (including after hours) - Brunswick and Melton;
- Foyer-like models of supported transitional housing (17 cluster model independent units) for both young individuals and young families - Melton, Thomastown and Preston;



- Youth counselling and family reconciliation services via a co-located a Youth Reconciliation Practitioner - Brunswick;
- Co-location of a Homeless Youth Dual Diagnosis Initiative (HYDI) practitioner who provides capacity building for specialist youth homeless services workers to assist them to identify and respond to the complex needs of young people who are dually experiencing homelessness and emerging/diagnosed mental health and/or substance use issues – Brunswick; and
- The Hope to Home private rental assistance program targeted exclusively at young people and young families – City of Whittlesea.

4. Young Victorians and homelessness in growth corridors

There are roughly 6000 young Victorians aged 12-24 years old who are homeless on any given night, representing over 40 percent of all people experiencing homelessness and a 26 percent increase between 2006 and 2016.ⁱⁱ A further 8000 young people are living in caravan parks and overcrowded or improvised dwellings.ⁱⁱⁱ On any given day in Victoria almost 3400 young people and 6100 accompanying children present to specialist homelessness service agencies in need of support, with many being turned away.^{iv} The main contributing factors to youth homelessness are Australia's housing crises and domestic and family violence.^v

Melbourne is a city that is growing by 1850 people per week^{vi}. Supply of housing is currently insufficient to house the population, and Melbourne will require an additional 1.6 million new homes by 2051 to meet the need.^{vii} Victoria currently spends less on social housing per capita than any other State - \$82.94 per person compared with \$166.93 per person as the national average for 2018-2019.^{viii} In 2018-2019 there were 160,000 Victorians in need of accommodation; 82,000 people were on Victoria's social housing waiting lists; and 53,286 homeless people were turned away from the overwhelmed homelessness service sector.^{ix} Young people are one of the most vulnerable groups impacted by Australia's housing crisis.

As a result of the lack of supply, private rental affordability is currently at an all-time low. No Melbourne rental properties are affordable for young people receiving the Newstart allowance or the Youth Allowance, and less than one percent of private rental properties are affordable for a young person who receives the Parenting Payment.^x These welfare payments are between 34 and 44 percent below the national poverty line. Shared rental properties are challenging and often inappropriate for young people who have experienced homelessness and its connected trauma, mental health issues and early school leaving.^{xi} Young peoples' incomes and ability to secure and sustain private rental accommodation are also compounded by underemployment, the casualization of the workforce and low wages growth.^{xii}

Melbourne's northern and western growth corridors have particularly high rates of family and domestic violence, low affordable housing supply, and resulting high rates of youth homeless. In the north, the recorded data identifies an increase in homelessness by 16 percent between 2011 and 2016^{xiii}, and in 2018-2019 23,062 people presented to homelessness services for assistance.^{xiv} In the west, homelessness increased by almost 40 percent between 2011 and 2016, with rough sleeping



increasing by 120 percent and the numbers of people living in severe overcrowding increasing by 79 percent.^{xv} In 2017-2018, 13,546 households presented to homelessness services in the West, but the Western Homelessness Network claims its member organisations were only able to assist 11 percent of these.^{xvi}

Ending youth homelessness in Victoria will not only be to the benefit of the individual young people experiencing the homelessness, but also to society and the economy in general. Youth homelessness costs the national economy an estimated \$747 million annually, or almost \$18,000 per year per young homeless person, in additional health and justice services due to young people experiencing homelessness. This does not include the additional lifetime impact of high school attrition rates and low engagement with employment.^{xvii}

5. Hope Street endorsements

Hope Street is in support of the following changes to both State and Federal approaches to homelessness, as advocated for by [Everybody's Home](#), [Council to Homeless Persons](#), [The Home Stretch](#) and the [Northern and Western Homelessness Networks](#):

- ✓ A Housing First approach – moving young people who are experiencing homelessness into permanent housing with flexible and individual support for as long as needed;
- ✓ Development by the Federal Government of a National Housing Strategy that commits to ending homelessness by 2030 including meeting Australia's identified shortfall of 500,000 social and affordable homes;
- ✓ A quicker transition towards extending statutory care to the age of 21 for all young people who are in out-of-home care, along with guaranteed housing for young people who are leaving statutory care; and
- ✓ Increasing welfare payments, including the Youth Allowance, Newstart and Parenting Payment, to be equal to or above the national poverty line.

6. Recommendations

a. Increase the number of purpose-designed specialist youth refuges in growth corridors, including funding Hope Street's First Response Youth Service in the City of Whittlesea and City of Hume

More purpose-designed specialist youth refuges are required to meet the supported crisis accommodation needs of young people and young families in Melbourne's growth corridors and across the state. Currently, Victorian youth refuges provide just 127 beds for the 6,000 young people without a home.^{xviii} The only alternatives to government-funded crisis beds are low-cost private accommodation and rooming houses, which are often sub-standard, unsafe and perpetuate the vulnerability and trauma experienced by young people.^{xix}

Young people require localised, specialist youth refuges to meet their supported crisis accommodation needs within their home communities.^{xx} This enables them to remain connected with their community, education and employment, which mitigates further negative



outcomes from their experience with homelessness. Young people should not have to choose between relocating to youth refuges far from their homes and communities; sleeping in boarding houses often in shared and inappropriate spaces with adults; or sleeping rough in their community.

Young people tell us they want to remain within their communities when accessing crisis accommodation. Relocating elsewhere to access an available bed causes stress related to leaving their friends and extended family behind, having to quit education and/or employment, and having to navigate the nuances of an unfamiliar location. These stresses are on top of the trauma already experienced due to homelessness and the preceding home situations, most often involving domestic and family violence.^{xxi}

“There’s a very different atmosphere over there, it’s a little more posh compared to my home town - it’s all new and different, very busy and quite overwhelming. I had to learn an entirely new public transport system. I had to learn how to cross the road and watch out for trams, and you have to be so quick with getting across the road. It was hard for my friends and my girlfriend to come and visit me because it would take them so long on public transport before they’d even spent any time with me. It really starting to affect me mentally cause I was missing everyone and I was just so isolated.”

21 year old Hope Street client from Melton.

“When you give a young person the chance to stay in their own community and find the care they need there, you are helping them physically and also mentally. You are keeping them in their own community, a place they feel safe in, a place where they are known, a place where their friends are. If they have to go somewhere else they are so isolated. When you don’t see the people you love every day, you start to get mentally affected and it starts to mentally scar you and you start to feel alone. In the situation that we’re in, you don’t want to ever feel alone. You need everyone there with you, it’s good to stay in your own community.”

21 year old Hope Street client from Melton.

“I have children in this area and this is my home, but there were no beds available for me when I was homeless, so I ended up in a refuge in Brunswick and then out in a transitional house in Melton. I had to travel for hours on public transport from Melton to Melbourne every day to be able to see my children and to attend my doctors’ appointments. I did all this whilst pregnant and then having a newborn baby too. I was grateful for the support I received, but it would have been amazing to have gotten that support in my home community.”

23 year old Hope Street client from Whittlesea.



Whilst the 2019 investment by the State Government into additional youth homelessness 24/7 supported crisis accommodation is a welcome and celebrated addition to the Melbourne CBD youth homelessness response, it does little to assist the many young people and young families requiring supported crisis accommodation in growth corridors. Population growth projections predict that the numbers of young people living in growth corridors will continue to rise exponentially, in areas in which youth homelessness, poverty and domestic and family violence are already significant challenges which are only expected to multiply. The majority of young people experiencing homelessness will come from outlying growth corridors.^{xxii xxiii} In order to prevent young people from having to leave their communities and relocate into the CBD to access crisis accommodation, more specialist youth refuges are required in these areas.

On the back of Hope Street's 38 year history of running our flagship [Youth Refuge in Brunswick](#), our strategic focus over the past decade has been on working in partnership with local communities in outlying growth corridors to the north and west of Melbourne to provide place-based specialist youth homelessness programs including supported crisis accommodation. To this end, the [Hope Street First Response Youth Service](#) (Youth Refuge and Mobile Outreach Service) launched in the City of Melton in 2018-2019 thanks to funding from the State Government and contributions from business and philanthropic partners, and has thus far supported 372 young people including dependent children.

In the next one to two years, Hope Street plans to take the [First Response Youth Service to the City of Whittlesea](#) north-eastern growth corridor. The service, which will support 200 young people and their children per year, will incorporate construction of a purpose-built 13 bedroom supported crisis accommodation centre (youth refuge) and a 24/7 wrap-around response including a mobile outreach component. The Whittlesea City Council has committed the long-term peppercorn lease arrangement (30 years plus the option of a further two 10 year leases) of 2500 square metres of council-owned land to Hope Street, on which the First Response Youth Service will be built. Increasing local crisis accommodation is a need identified by the Whittlesea Housing and Homelessness Action Group's 10 year housing and homelessness plan, and the Hope Street First Response Youth Service is one of the Whittlesea City Council's identified advocacy priorities for 2020.

Hope Street submitted a proposal for the capital (\$4.8 million) and ongoing operational funding (\$2.3 million per annum) to the Department of Health and Human Services in September 2019. The Department indicated that, whilst they were supportive of the concept, they were not in a position to make a funding commitment at the time. Our consultations with local Members of Parliament in the City of Whittlesea have indicated that they would support the funding of this model based on Government priorities. Hope Street also has a number of warm leads from businesses and philanthropists interested in contributing to the capital costs. If funded, this will provide the north with a purpose-built specialist youth refuge and enable young people and young families from this growth corridor to access supported crisis accommodation within their



home community. Hope Street now looks to the Government to fund this initiative in the immediate future.

Beyond the City of Melton and the City of Whittlesea First Response Youth Services, a specialized youth refuge will also be required in the City of Hume, which is another growth corridor that is void of this type of service. Hope Street looks forward to collaborating with the wider Hume community, with a view to Government incorporating the funding of this new initiative in their future planning.

b. Increase the number of Hope Street foyer-like models of supported transitional housing for young people in growth corridors.

Foyer and foyer-like models of supported transitional housing have proven a cost effective and impactful medium-term response to youth homelessness.^{xxiv} They enable young people to transition over a one to two year period into independent living with on-site support; the acquiring of critical life skills; long-term relational-based case management; a focus on engagement with education and employment opportunities; and an emphasis on the young person being the director of their life and future goals.^{xxv} Research has recommended an investment in “the development of foyers and foyer-like models of wrap around support including accommodation linked to participation in education, training and employment.”^{xxvi} There is a documented shortage of medium-term youth-specific supported transitional housing units in Victoria, with Melbourne’s north alone having 666 young people on the waitlist for transitional housing as at September 2019, over half of which had been waiting for over nine months.^{xxvii} Increasing the number of transitional accommodation properties for young people is a need identified by the Whittlesea Housing and Homelessness Action Group’s 10 year housing and homelessness plan.

For the past 10 years, Hope Street has operated two foyer-like supported transitional housing programs – [Hope Street in Whittlesea](#) and [Hope Street in Melton](#), providing a total of 13 units for young single people and eight unit for young families who are experiencing homelessness. In 2018-2019 these programs provided homes for 65 young people including eight dependent children. Young people can stay in the units for one to two years and become active participants in creating opportunities to strengthen their housing, employment, education, training and personal and social development. Intensive, individualized, long-term case management and onsite support (including after hours and on weekends) assists young people to have their immediate needs met and to work towards transitioning out of the homelessness service system. Strong one-to-one relationships are formed between the client and the Case Worker, with support provided through a flexible service delivery model that includes tailored levels of support to match young peoples’ needs. Hope Street delivers holistic programs and activities designed to achieve development for young people across the areas of employment, education/training, maintaining successful tenancies, social and recreational development and citizen participation. These include a Life Skills program, the L2P Learner Driver Mentor



Program, Homework Clubs, arts and craft activities, mindfulness activities, employment readiness programs and group outings.

Young people tell us that the foyer-like programs provide them with stability, safety, community and permission to dream about their future and set and reach education and employment goals.

"I arrived when I was 18, I'd been sleeping in a school, I had no driver's license, I'd failed year 11, I was unemployed, estranged from my family and I'd never lived alone. Now, three years later, I've completed year 11 and year 12 through VCAT, I've got my driver's license, I know how to live on my own and cook and clean and I'm reconnected with my family and I visit them. I don't want to get emotional... I can't even put it into words how grateful I am for this place. All the workers I've gotten to meet and all the opportunities I've got to have. I could just come here and people were so supportive of me just being myself. Even when I was unsure about it because of all the stress of my family not accepting it, the Hope Street team was there to support me. I don't feel homeless when I'm here. This place is my home. I look forward to getting home every single day."

23 year old Hope Street in Whittlesea client.

"Hope Street provides me and my son with a house, a future. Without the housing I may have not have been able to have my son in my care, I love my son. Being a mum is hard being such a young mum, but I look at my son and he is such a good kid, I know I must be doing something right. I am working hard to take all the opportunities presented to me to provide myself and my son with a better future. I am completing VCAL with the plan to study hairdressing and beauty services. My goal is to own my own business and provide a safe, stable and loving environment for my son."

17 year old Hope Street in Melton client.

Hope Street is well positioned to scale up and expand our foyer-like supported transitional housing programs in the growth corridors in the North and West of metropolitan Melbourne, and also to take such models to additional high priority growth corridors such as the City of Hume. We now look to Government to allocate funding for this purpose.

c. Provide youth-specific supported private rental assistance programs in growth corridors, including funding Hope Street's Hope to Home program in the City of Whittlesea and the City of Melton.

Specialist (youth-specific) place-based private rental support is a viable response that can prevent and divert homelessness in young people and young families. As social housing has become focused on those most vulnerable, and home ownership has become less obtainable, the private rental market has become the primary source of rental housing for most who would qualify for social housing.^{xxviii} The private rental market is perilous even for the most capable



tenants due to complicated legislation, high competition for lower cost properties, prohibitive rental costs in comparison with incomes. Vulnerable groups, including young people, face increased risk of tenancy failure.^{xxix} With targeted specialist support and flexible brokerage, young people can access and sustain private rental accommodation, alleviating the pressure on social housing wait lists and decreasing homelessness.

Whilst the Government's investment in the Private Rental Assistance Program (PRAP) and PRAP Plus is a welcome addition to the homelessness response, Hope Street believes a youth-specific alternative is required to adequately respond to the unique needs of young people aged 18-25 years old, and young families, who are seeking to enter and/or sustain private rental accommodation. Such programs should be delivered via place-based responses in those areas experiencing the highest rates of youth homelessness and private rental entry and sustainability barriers for low income earners – growth corridors to the north and west of Melbourne.

Because PRAP is not youth-specific, young people are competing with the general homeless population for support, and are struggling to access it at the rates they should be. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, on any given day in Victoria in 2019, 15 percent of all clients seeking support from specialist homelessness services were aged 15-25 years old.^{xxx} And according to 2016 Census data, nationally, young people aged 12-24 years old make up 24 percent of the homeless population.^{xxxi} And yet, anecdotally we know that in the northern regions of Melbourne the 18-25 year old age bracket makes up only eight percent of PRAP clients.

Young people and their support workers tell us that there are barriers to them accessing the PRAP program. These include the need to have an existing support worker to advocate for their access to the program; the reliance on them reporting to PRAP access points in order to request above the standard levels of support; the fact that PRAP support is not localised or place-based; and the short-term limit (six to 12 weeks) of case worker support as part of PRAP Plus. Young people who are not yet within the homelessness sector and are therefore without a case worker, those who don't have enough money to access public transport to attend PRAP access point appointments, and those whose mental health that further limits their ability to conceptualize and navigate service systems, are falling through the gaps. Young people, particularly those who have experienced trauma and whom lack support systems as a result of their experience with homelessness, need specialist youth-focused support and interventions rather than generalist approaches.

Hope Street's Hope to Home program is a unique, evidence-based model that prevents and diverts homelessness in young people (aged 18-25) and young families and provides them with a rental history, enabling access to other tenancies in the future and reducing the risk of returning to the Homelessness Service System. It does this via a place-based approach, engaging the support of community stakeholders, including local real estate agents, private landlords, businesses and city councils, in providing more open and inclusive access to private rental



properties for young people who are at risk of homelessness, and enabling young people to remain connected to their local communities. Hope Street co-signs the rental agreement with the young person for the first six months, making the lease agreement more attractive to the real estate agent and/or landlord, it also provides young people with a rental history from which to secure future tenancies. Rental subsidies and flexible brokerage are provided for the first four months, with case management and episodic wrap-around support (including an after-hours telephone support response) provided for up to 12 months. Workshops to assist young people acquire tenancy and life skills, and tailored training and employment opportunities from local businesses are also provided.

Hope Street piloted the Hope to Home program in [The City of Melton](#) and [The City of Whittlesea](#) from January 2016, in partnership with Gandel Philanthropy (Jan 2016 – Jul 2018) and The Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation (Jun 2017 – Jun 2019). Demonstrated impact and potential for scaling were identified in the 2018 [research evaluation report](#) on the program published by Victoria University. With a 0.6 EFT worker and brokerage funds, the pilot housed 72 people, including 45 (from 73 referrals) young people (average age 20 years) and 27 dependent children across 31 tenancies. Most clients were relying on temporary, unsuitable accommodation with friends and family prior to entering the program. Clients were successfully housed in private rental, on average, within five and a half weeks of commencing the program. The tenancies proved sustainable, with 21 tenancies of longer than six months' duration at the time of data analysis. The range of services provided included assistance finding houses available to rent, assistance with inspections and the application process, liaising with landlords, securing properties (bond and rent), and setting up the house for the occupancy. Many clients benefited from cash brokerage and shopping vouchers, which helped them maintain their tenancies. Overwhelmingly, clients reported that their lack of rental history was a barrier to renting, which the program helped to overcome. Clients reported gaining skills and knowledge that could help them secure and maintain leases in the future. Hope to Home supported clients to pursue employment and education, including assistance with finding opportunities, submitting applications and help with the costs of education.

"My Hope to Home worker helped me to enroll in a diploma in early childhood care, do a first aid certificate, make a CV and get a job as an assistant with a before and after care program. After a few months of income then she helped me to search for rental properties, know where to look, what budget to look within and all those things. I found a room to rent in a lady's home and Hope to Home helped me to furnish my room and fill the pantry with food and purchase a fridge cause I have Halal requirements. I felt settled, like I'd finally settled down, my clothes were hung and weren't in my bags. I could comfortably sleep and wake up and do what I liked whenever I liked. My lifestyle was more organised because I was working and studying – it was my schedule not the schedule of the person whose couch I was crashing on."

20 year old Hope Street client from City of Whittlesea.



“There are a lot of young people out there who don’t have parents who teach them life skills,” Sian says. “I never knew how to look for my own house to rent; my mum only ever showed me how to go to SASHS [Salvation Army Social Housing and Support]. That’s what Hope Street gave me. They taught me how to be a good tenant, to know my rights as a tenant, how to do everything and not to be so worried about everything.”

23 year old Hope Street client from City of Melton.

The Hope Street Hope to Home model is a proven powerful conduit to transition young people and young families who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness into private rental accommodation and to provide young people with a rental history and one to one tailored support to equip them for future rental tenancies. Hope Street hopes to secure State Government funding for a scaled up implementation of the Hope to Home program in both the City of Whittlesea and the City of Melton. To this end a proposal was submitted to the Department of Health and Human Services in September 2019 (for \$2.8 million over three years to transition 620 young people into private rental accommodation in the Cities of Melton and Whittlesea), however it was not supported due to lack of funding. We now look to Government to fund this initiative in the immediate future.

d. Establish a quota of community housing properties specifically for young people and young families.

A substantial increase in community housing properties is required to meet the current and future needs of Victoria’s low-income earners, however young people will benefit little from new community housing stock unless quotas are put in place to reserve stock specifically for them. Young people who are experiencing homelessness make up roughly half of all single people who seek help from homelessness services, and yet they represent only two percent of tenants in social housing in New South Wales.^{xxxii} The figures from other states follow similar patterns. Research confirms that social housing providers are often hesitant to accept young residents due to their low and insecure incomes and also due to the negative stereotypes that exist for young people being high-risk tenants.^{xxxiii} Similar patterns are observed with community organisations that are also registered social housing providers.

Over 30,000 new social homes will be required over the next 20 years in order to maintain social housing at its current three and a half percent share of the total homes in Victoria. Double this amount is needed if lower income households, currently facing housing stress in the private rental market, are to have affordable housing.^{xxxiv} As Government plans for this ramp up and roll out, young people must be considered as a vulnerable group that requires quotas in order to gain the required access to these housing option. Given that young people make up 24 percent of the homeless population nationally, quotas should reflect this.



Young people and their support workers tell us that accessing public housing for young people who have experienced homelessness is challenging, especially for young people living in the western growth corridor in the City of Melton.

“In the 10 years I’ve been working at Hope Street in Melton, we have had three young mums offered Office of Housing, all outside of Melton. No single young people without children have been offered office of housing or community housing. Many young people in the foyer-like program spend many precious hours fearing their future and whether or not they will be able to maintain stable housing for themselves and their children.”

Case Manager from Hope Street in Melton.

“Amy will utilize the full 24 months of time in the foyer-like supported transitional housing and will be due to exit shortly after her 18th birthday and half-way through her VCAL. She is not likely to secure public housing or community housing as she lives in the outer western suburbs of Melbourne where the housing stock does not meet the demand. Unable to access low income housing, Amy and her son will be at risk of further homelessness once she exits the foyer-like accommodation as she will have no choice but to enter the private rental market and she will be contributing at least 50 percent of her income to rent. Residing in the foyer-like model and being aged 16, Amy currently pays \$30 per fortnight, but when she reaches 18 the foyer-like model rent will increase to \$282 per fortnight, which is an 840 percent increase even though her Centrelink income will not be increasing. If Amy were to be transitioned out of the foyer-like model, private rental will cost her approximately \$600 per fortnight. Within a four month period this young mother’s housing would increase by 1900 percent and rent assistance would be the only additional income to supplement this change – highlighting that this cannot even be considered as an option. An increase in rent would prolong disadvantage which then transcends into other areas in the young person’s life. Amy would be highly likely to cease studying in favour of a low-paying job to manage the rent increase, with the loss of education leading to long-term financial disadvantage.”

Case study on a 16 year old Hope Street client from Melton, as told by a Case Manager.

Unless quotas are put in place to ensure young people can access social housing, they will continue to miss out. This will force more young people into premature access of the private rental market, where failed tenancies and negative rental histories are more likely to result. If private rental fails as an option for them, they are likely to end up in inappropriate rooming houses; repeated stays in crisis accommodation programs; and/or they may enter into abusive relationships in return for a place to stay. All of these options perpetuate poor health and mental health conditions, school attrition and



poverty cycles. We look to the Government to protect young peoples' access to community housing properties by implementing a quota system.

7. Conclusion

Hope Street Youth and Family Services is grateful to the Parliamentary Legal and Social Issues Committee for this opportunity to make a submission to this Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria. We look forward to seeing what results from this inquiry and we value the opportunity to have been able to put forward recommendations, based on input from young people with lived experience of homelessness. We believe that the recommendations put forward in this submission, if adopted and enabled by State Government, have the potential to make a significant dent in the youth homelessness endemic. We are passionate about seeing an end to homelessness in Victoria, and we are committed to supporting young people who are experiencing homelessness in the meantime.

8. Credits and contacts

To discuss this submission, please contact either:

Donna Bennett, CEO: 0412 674 694 or donna.bennett@hopest.org

Or

Jennifer McAughtrie, Operations Manager: 0431 773 205 or jennifer.mcaughtrie@hopest.org

Report written by Olivia Myeza, Business Development and Partnerships Manager at Hope Street Youth and Family Services.



9. References

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