HOPE STREET YOUTH & FAMILY SERVICES

Responding to Youth Homelessness in Outer Growth Corridors:

A Research Project in Response to Youth Homelessness in the City of Melton

August 2015

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By Hope Street Youth & Family Services

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Serap Ozdemir	Service Development Manager (2014/2015)
Mandy Baxter	Service Development Manager
Dale Hardy	Operations Manager
Kylie Charleson	Hope Street In Melton Program Case Manager
Rutendo Chirisa	BOOST Specialist Practitioner
Louise Maree	Youth Reconciliation Program

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The City of Melton is a robust active community in the outer growth corridor of Melbourne's west. It is located on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation. Traditional Owners of the Kulin Nation have always lived in the local region.

The City of Melton embraces a series of townships and communities, the largest being Caroline Springs (19 kilometres west of Melbourne's CBD) and the township of Melton (35 kilometres west of Melbourne's CBD).

The population growth rate of the City of Melton is the second fastest of all Victorian local government areas and has a projected 85% increase in children and 83% increase in young people by 2031. The municipality has also experienced a significant increase in the total population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The rapid population growth is accompanied by increases in youth homelessness leading to the City of Melton Council expressing concern that current service provision will not be able to meet predicted future demand without investment from State and Federal Governments.[1] Young people in Melton become homeless for a myriad of reasons including family violence. Data documented in the City of Melton's submission into the *'Australian Government Senate Inquiry into Domestic Violence Australia 2014'*, quoted; the highest rates of family violence for the western region were reported in the City of Melton (1,166.1 per 100,000) in 2011/12.

The City of Melton via the Youth Allocations Committee (YAC) reported during June 2014 to August 2015 a total of 79 presentations/cases of youth homelessness[2], though these figures are thought to be even higher given reports of most young people couch surfing with friends and family contacts. Alarmingly, there is no immediate crisis response to homeless young people in the area - the nearest youth emergency facility is 27 kms away.

Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show the City of Melton, despite being a major population growth corridor, experiences greater levels of disadvantage than Melbourne or Victorian averages in education and low income, levels of unskilled employees and unemployment rates. On the Index of Relative Socioeconomic Disadvantage (IRSED) Melton scored 1010 and placed in the category 'Disadvantaged' (Department of Health 2011).

[1] Melton Youth Strategy 2015-17 Page 24 -available on City of Melton's website: www.**melton**.vic.gov.au/.../**Youth_Strategy**_20152017.pd

[2] Melton City Council, Youth Allocations Committee Statistics August 2015

Hope Street Youth and Family Services has been operating the Hope Street in Melton Program for the last 5 years. Using a 'Foyer-like model', Hope Street in Melton provides purpose built residential accommodation up to 2 years for young people and young families. It also offers intensive one-on-one assistance enabling young people to be active participants in creating opportunities to strengthen their possibilities for housing, employment, education, training and personal and social development.

Hope Street is one of the longest established specialist youth homelessness services in Victoria and provides a comprehensive crisis response in the City of Moreland as well as longer term Foyer-like models in Melton and Whittlesea local government areas.

Hope Street has undertaken this study to:

- identify solutions and strategies to better address the housing, social, economic and developmental needs of young people and young families with diverse experiences of homelessness or risk of homelessness in the City of Melton
- develop a sound evidence base of young people's experiences, the local community's experiences and the impact of youth homelessness, in order to advocate for resources to better plan and address the crisis housing and crisis support needs of young people in the Melton LGA within an early intervention and prevention framework.

Research Methodology

This study asks the question: ***What are the housing and support needs of young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in the growth corridor of Melton?***

To answer this research question and address the above objectives, the study sets out to:

- explore the facets of youth homelessness in the Melton local government area
- explore and highlight the lived experiences of homeless young people in Melbourne's outer growth corridor, specifically the Melton local government area
- identify early intervention and prevention strategies regarding youth homelessness
- identify and consider the influence of relevant social policies
- explore and highlight the impact of homelessness on marginalised groups, particularly young women and new migrants
- explore the impact of homelessness on the wider community

The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, involving a qualitative and quantitative literature review as well as interviews and focus groups with community service workers, young people and established community networks. The interviews were conducted in compliance with professional research ethics and standards and in line with Hope Street philosophy.

Twenty face to face and phone interviews were held with young people aged 17 – 24 years from diverse backgrounds with lived experiences of homelessness or at risk of homelessness. Fifteen young people were from the City of Melton and five were from nearby suburbs of metropolitan Melbourne. Community service worker interviews and focus groups were undertaken to develop insight into perspectives in the wider community. Face to face interviews occurred with ten workers from a broad range of community services located in Melton including Police, educational institutions, Council, health services, Sunshine Magistrates Court and culturally specific services. Two focus groups were held in Melton during: February 2015 the first attracted 32 professions from the Melton Youth Advisory Network, the second involved 16 members of the Melton New and Emerging Communities Network.

Key Findings

1. Facets of youth homelessness in Melton local government area

The literature review identified that while youth homelessness is not a pre-determinate for poor outcomes later in life, it is nevertheless an indicator of future disadvantage and homelessness in adulthood. Accordingly there needs to be an increased focus on youth homelessness prevention/protection strategies. Such support is likened to 'scaffolding' that is adjusted over time as the person's capacity increases.

The City of Melton via the Youth Allocations Committee (YAC) reported during June 2014 to August 2015 a total of 79 presentations/cases of youth homelessness[3], though these figures are thought to be even higher given reports of most young people couch surfing with friends and family contacts. With current and predicted rapid population growth in the City of Melton there will be more young people in the municipality and thus increased numbers of young people facing homelessness or risk of homelessness. Existing services are not adequate to deal with this growing problem. Participants reported a general lack of understanding of the issues facing young people in the municipality and a general failure to see homelessness as a community problem to be addressed by the community.

[3] Melton City Council, Youth Allocations Committee Statistics August 2015

Nevertheless, implicit in the findings of this report are the underlying strengths of the communities in the City of Melton. There is a committed, albeit under resourced and limited, service base well supported by Council. There is also a willingness of households to assist young people experiencing homelessness demonstrated by their offering temporary accommodation, generally couch surfing. There is capacity to strengthen the linkages and responses between schools and the service sector to bolster engagement in education and foster protective factors to prevent recurring homelessness.

1.1 Causes of youth homelessness

Participants reported a range of factors and causes for homelessness for young people in the Melton area including:

- family violence
- family conflict
- challenges of blended or non-conventional family dynamics
- difficulty transitioning from the family home
- geographic isolation impacting on education, employment and transport options
- cross-cultural familial tension
- culture of welfare dependence
- substance use
- social and peer influences.

1.2 Emerging social issues

Participants identified a number of emerging social trends and issues in the City of Melton, including:

- increasing cultural diversity
- increasing family violence
- increasing incidents where young people are perpetrators of family violence (against parents or siblings)
- young perpetrators of family violence are often linked with drug use
- rapid community growth, with a rise in 'non-conventional' family composition
- increase in couch surfing
- increase in young people in crisis staying with other young people
- rising drug use.

2. Lived experience of homelessness for young people in Melton and surrounds

2.1 Barriers

In general participants valued highly their connections with family and friends and were therefore keen to stay in and around the City of Melton. Unfortunately they face a number of barriers making this connection difficult to maintain. Whist experiences varied and are difficult to summarise, the following common barriers faced by young people were identified:

- Young people reported having difficulty finding work (55% of participants reported they are not currently working). They often felt discriminated against when job seeking due to age. Assistance from Job Support Agencies was seen as largely ineffective and unhelpful in gaining employment.
- Young people reported difficulties in renting in the private market, citing finding a bond and onerous paper work as key barriers. They felt they were discriminated against because of their age based on perceptions that young people were irresponsible tenants.
- Young people expressed the need for stable income. Junior wage levels create barriers to living independently, and 75% of participants relied on below poverty line Centrelink payments for the majority of their income.
- Homelessness was a major cause of young people leaving school early. While schools in the area are doing some effective early intervention work to prevent disengagement, 50% of participants felt they had not been adequately supported by their secondary school.
- The majority of participants (68.5%) left home by the age of 16. The main reasons for leaving home were family violence (25%), pressure from the family to move out due to financial constraints or overcrowding (25%), family breakdown (50%) due to issues such as parental physical or mental illness, poor relationships and conflict.
- Opening Doors Access Points are over 26km away and people are often directed to attend at 9am. Only 15% of participants had positive experiences of access points. None of the participants were aware of the housing access point outpost at Melton which operates only three days a week and requires a pre-arranged appointment.
- There is no crisis support and accommodation service operating in Melton, the nearest service specifically for young people is 35 km away in the Melbourne CBD.
- There are few accommodation options available to young people who can't remain in the family home. Predominantly participants stayed with friends and family connections, but none of these proved sustainable in the long term.

2.2 Most difficult aspects of homelessness

While experiencing homelessness young people in Melton and surrounds reported the most difficult aspects to be:

- getting access to Centrelink entitlements without parental co-operation or fixed address
- high cost of temporary accommodation (hotels/motels/caravan parks)
- experiencing hunger and not being able to afford regular meals
- social connections/friendships being put under pressure, for instance through asking people if they can stay for more than one or two nights
- losing contact with people they have met through school, disengaging through homelessness
- the destabilising effects of homelessness making it difficult to build a foundation for adult life and engage in education or employment
- difficulty forging new relationships while homeless.

3. Impact of homelessness on marginalised groups

- There is a growing population of young people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds in the City of Melton. With state and national statistics showing this cohort has the greatest level of homelessness, there is a compelling need to build relationships with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, consult with services that already exist in the area and ensure Indigenous perspectives are represented in meaningful non-tokenistic ways.
- Refugees and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are 6-10 times more likely to experience homelessness than other young people. They are more likely to have suffered trauma and to find it difficult to trust and approach services.
- Young people from culturally diverse backgrounds (CALD) experience language barriers as well as tension between their family culture and that of Australian society. They fear stigma from their cultural group as well as the community in general because of being homeless, so have a tendency not to ask for support and end up 'going it alone'.
- The intersection between mental illness, housing instability and homelessness is well documented, with 75% of participants experiencing homelessness also experiencing mental illness. Mental illness is both a driver and an outcome of homelessness in young people.
- Young women have added impacts and barriers. They are more likely to have had experience of family violence and have responsibility for bringing up a child alone. Young mothers face greater social isolation and are often hesitant to approach support services.

4. Impact of homelessness on the wider community

The full impact of homelessness on the wider community requires research beyond the scope of this project. However the limited findings of this study suggest the impact of youth homelessness ripples through society, with indirect impact on all people of all ages, not just those with lived experience of homelessness.

Community service workers reported the impact of homelessness to be twofold:

- firstly the financial cost to the wider community, and
- secondly the social impact of negative perceptions and stigma towards disadvantaged people.

5. Identify early intervention and prevention strategies

To be effective early intervention and prevention strategies require a holistic approach with a whole of community commitment.

Participants suggested the following preventative strategies:

- increased attention on the lack of housing options
- increased educational and training options
- more employment opportunities
- a suite of support for families and parents addressing conflict and mediation
- enhanced community participation and fostering a sense of community
- support for young people to develop independent living skills.

6. The influence of relevant social policies

The influence of social policies on youth homelessness has been minimally addressed in this research and report.

The social policies identified as having significant impact on youth homelessness are the Victorian Homelessness Action Plan; the federal government's Youth Connections initiative; the Open Doors Framework; the federal budget cuts to truancy officers and Youth Connections and visa restrictions.

Generic Opening Doors Access Points are not effective for addressing the needs of young people. These barriers are exacerbated by most people in Melton having to travel over 20km to an Open Doors Access Point to access the Homelessness Service System. There is a clear need to improve the opening hours of the housing access point outpost in Melton and make it more accessible and responsive to young people. Participants believed the best solution would be to fund a youth specific Access Point in Melton.

Participants identified additional social policy gaps requiring attention including:

- concentration of liquor outlets in low socio-economic areas
- the need for better regulation of rooming houses
- the need for more understanding of issues facing young people by employers
- a stronger commitment to community capacity building by developers/private enterprise/ including providing affordable social housing for young people
- school enrolment policy being based solely on age of student rather than developmental capacity.

Identified Unmet Needs

- There is a clear demonstrated need for a youth crisis response and accommodation service in the City of Melton.
- Participants and young people in Melton and surrounds value a hub model, where comprehensive support services are integrated and available on premises.
- There is a growing diversity of cultures in Melton and surrounds requiring more intensive culturally appropriate interventions.
- There is a growing population of young people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds in the City of Melton. With state and national statistics showing that this cohort has the greatest level of homelessness, there is a compelling argument to consult people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds in the Melton area and support Indigenous driven research to identify needs and inform indigenous lead solutions.
- There is capacity and need to strengthen the linkages and responses between schools and the service sector to bolster engagement in education and foster protective factors to prevent recurring homelessness.

Key Challenges

Six key challenges in Melton are:

1. keeping young people engaged and connected to networks, community activities, education, training and employment
2. ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities within the local region are involved in decision making processes relating to Indigenous youth homelessness in the area
3. finding ways to engage young people of all ethnic backgrounds with supportive service environments, when the tendency for many CALD communities is to handle experiences of homelessness privately among their own networks
4. securing adequate investment from state and federal governments to provide appropriate crisis response and housing/accommodation infrastructure
5. securing adequate investment from state and federal governments to extend current service levels to meet the demands of this rapidly growing population.
6. fostering engagement and cooperation of the whole Melton community to address the myth that homelessness is an individual problem.

Key Recommendations

1. In collaboration with local council, pursue the development of a youth crisis response and crisis accommodation centre in Melton to provide timely, safe and responsive accommodation options with wrap around support in collaboration with community services.
2. Secure government resources to establish a youth specific Access Point to the Homelessness Service System in Melton that also provides afterhours response and addresses the immediate needs of young people who are homeless.
3. Consult with the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people regarding the further exploration of youth homelessness, the impact and solutions by:
    - building relationships with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and consulting with community based organisations, programs and services that already exist in the area, ensuring Indigenous perspectives are represented in meaningful non-tokenistic ways
    - scoping out possible Memoranda of Understanding and partnerships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, programs and services
    - ensuring Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander representation in the membership of the Hope Street Youth Homelessness In Melton Advisory Group.
4. Consult with people (and organisations) from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds:
    - ensuring their perspectives are represented in meaningful non-tokenistic ways
    - ensuring their representation in the membership of the Hope Street Youth Homelessness In Melton Advisory Group
    - ensuring interventions to address their experiences of homelessness are culturally appropriate
5. Increase resources provided through the federal and state government National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness Youth Initiatives to extend the Youth (Family) Reconciliation Program to growth corridors.
6. Explore community engagement strategies, including linking with established social and sporting clubs and local businesses to:
    - effect greater employment, training and social opportunities for young people; and
    - reduce stigma and prejudice associated with being young and homeless.
7. Lobby for federal funds for early intervention initiatives aimed at preventing youth disengagement from education, training or employment similar to the former Youth Connections Program.
8. Explore the potential of youth-driven positive image campaigns to generate awareness and address barriers that further disadvantage young people and perpetuate their homelessness.
9. Consider ways to strengthen already existing support pathways and linkages between schools and the community services sector with a focus on prevention of youth homelessness and disengagement from school.
10. Lobby for increased funding to support more welfare programs in schools to prevent disengagement of young people, particularly those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
11. Continue and extend the collaboration across services and government sectors in Melton to ensure holistic early intervention and preventative strategies are implemented.

INTRODUCTION

Young People; Family; Home.

Young People; Family; Home - these inextricably linked terms not only underpin the focus of this report but also underpin societal assumptions about where young people should live. So strong are these assumptions that many young people living without their family, home, or both face challenging barriers to securing what they need to live more interdependently. Many young people will transition well from youth to adulthood, however many will face the formidable challenges of mental illness, family violence, housing instability and homelessness, abuse and neglect, drug and alcohol issues, disability and involvement in criminal justice. Without responsive and timely support the consequences of these challenging experiences can be life long, including poor outcomes in health, education and employment, rippling beyond the individual and impacting on entire communities.

Communities on the fringes of Melbourne's urban boundaries face a particular set of challenges in addressing homelessness. Rapid population expansion and lack of social infrastructure options place pressure on communities to develop and reach their capacity.

Hope Street Youth and Family Services Limited (Hope Street) based in the Northern and Western regions of Melbourne is one of the longest established specialist youth homelessness services in Victoria. Hope Street Youth and Family Services' ongoing presence in the Melton area has led to the development of this study. Hope Street will continue to work towards responding to the demonstrated need for specialist youth homelessness services in Melton. This need has been identified in statistical analyses, client feedback, experiences of our outreach program and youth support services and through our work with Melton City Council in recent years to respond to the needs of vulnerable young people in the area.

This report provides data and information that will be used by Hope Street to plan and develop a youth crisis response and crisis accommodation service that provides rapid wrap around support for young homeless people in Melton.

This study aims to provide a snapshot of the myriad of homelessness experiences, interventions, perceptions and gaps in the housing and homelessness sector in the Melton Local Government Area.

Overarching Research Question

The study seeks to examine:

> ***What are the housing and support needs of young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in the growth corridor of Melton?***

The objectives of the study are:

1. identify solutions and strategies to better address the housing, social, economic and developmental needs of young people and young families with diverse experiences of homelessness or risk of homelessness in the City of Melton
2. develop a sound evidence base of young people's experiences and the local community's experiences and the impact of youth homelessness in order to advocate for resources to better plan and address the crisis housing and crisis support needs of young people in the Melton LGA within an early intervention and prevention framework.

To achieve this, the study will:

- explore the facets of youth homelessness in the Melton Local Government Area
- explore and highlight the lived experiences of homeless young people in Melbourne's outer growth corridor, specifically the Melton Local Government Area
- identify early intervention and prevention strategies regarding youth homelessness
- identify and consider the influence of relevant social policies
- explore and highlight the impact of homelessness on marginalised groups, particularly young women and new migrants
- explore the impact of homelessness on the wider community.

HOPE STREET YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES

Hope Street Youth and Family Services[4] (Hope Street) is a leading organisation in the Victorian Homelessness Services sector. Key objectives specified in its Constitution are:

- provide specialist support, crisis accommodation and housing services to vulnerable young people and their children who experience homelessness or are at risk of homelessness
- develop partnerships with stakeholders in the wider community that redress youth homelessness
- expand funding/income streams to grow Hope Street's capacity and responsiveness to the growing needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged young people and families in our communities
- develop innovative programs that achieve meaningful outcomes in service delivery, sector development and social change that will benefit young people and their children experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness.

With over 30 years' experience in delivering responsive services to young people in local communities Hope Street provides both strategically targeted and holistic programs for young people including young families. These programs include the following:

- Hope Street in Melton Program
- Hope Street in Whittlesea Program
- Hope to Home
- Boost Program
- Residential Program
- Youth Reconciliation Program
- Youth Support Services
- Homeless Youth Dual Diagnosis Initiative

Hope Street operates in the belief that all young people have the right to safe, affordable housing and that any assistance and supports they may require are available and readily accessible to them.

Hope Street philosophy sees resolving homelessness as the responsibility of federal, state and local governments, the community, families and individuals. Hope Street believes young people have the right to be treated as equal citizens in society. This means equal access to resources, decision making and life options. The overriding aim is to assist young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness by providing them with resources and services to realise their potential.

Hope Street in Melton Program

Hope Street already has, and values a strong presence in the City of Melton including enjoying established collaborative and strong relationships with key community agencies, businesses and networks in the municipality – particularly the Melton City Council. Hope Street and the City of Melton worked closely on the design, building and establishment of the purpose built Hope Street in Melton Program in Coburns Road (see Appendix 1 for Hope Street Client Demographic Overview).

The Hope Street in Melton Program takes a youth focused early intervention and prevention approach to address the needs of vulnerable young people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness.

The Hope Street in Melton Program provides residential accommodation to young people and young families and intensive one-to-one assistance to engage young people in creating opportunities to strengthen their housing, employment, education, training and personal and social development. Support is provided within a foyer like model of eight accommodation units for young singles and two units for young families.

Individualised support to young people is offered utilising strengths-based and solutions-focused approaches, encouraging young people to be active participants in their own destiny. The program service model also has a strong focus on connections and reconnections with family and other personal relationships, building new connections with community as well as general support as the young person moves towards interdependence. Further support is provided by the Youth Reconciliation Program.

In addition, the **'Skills for Life 101'** series of participatory workshops has been designed to support young people to develop and/or enhance a range of skills to support them on their progression towards interdependence. Topics covered include: *How to Sustain a Successful Tenancy; Accessing and Sustaining Employment, Education and Training, Personal and Social Development and Citizenship.*

The Hope Street in Melton Program also helps young people develop meaningful relationships with their community via joint initiatives with local groups and agencies, partnership and capacity building activities. The Program provides an intensive outreach support service offering an integrated case management to young people with links to the City of Melton. It proactively assists young people to develop resilience through effective integration and interdependence with their local communities through intensive individualised case management, Skills for Life 101 program, and integration with community programs (see Appendix 1 for Hope Street Client Demographic Overview).

[4] Information in this section is adapted from www.hopest.org

Hope to Home:

In partnership with real estate agents, other Melton businesses and philanthropic trusts Hope Street is piloting the Hope to Home project. This exiting initiative supports young people18-25 years old to transition from supported accommodation at Hope Street in Melton to renting successfully in the private rental market. Using funding from a range of sources (brokerage, Hope Street funds, business partners and philanthropy) young people will have their rent subsidised for a period of six months. This subsidy will be gradually reduced until, at the end of the six months, the young person has the capabilities to pay the rent on his/her own.

At the same time the program assists young people to build on their skills and knowledge base to maintain their tenancy, and maintain engagement in employment, education and training and healthy relationships in their local community.

Hope to Home works on the premise that when community, business and government join together lasting meaningful change occurs for the benefit of the whole community.

Youth Reconciliation Program

The Youth Reconciliation Program offers short term, one-on-one, strengths-based and solution focused counselling as well as family mediation. With a strong focus on counselling, the Youth Reconciliation Worker works collaboratively with young people to find viable solutions to help solve any concerns that they have.

Hope Street in Whittlesea Program

The Hope Street in Whittlesea Program is based on the same model as the Hope Street in Melton Program. It has five purpose built 2-bedroom self contained units to accommodate young people and young families. The Hope Street in Whittlesea Program provides residential and outreach case management support to young people and young families.

Residential Program

The Residential Program provides emergency accommodation and support to young people. The Residential Program can accommodate up-to 7 young people in the refuge and a young family in the self-contained Young Family's Unit located at the rear of the refuge. The usual stay in the youth refuge is six weeks, and three months in the Young Families Unit.

Boost Program

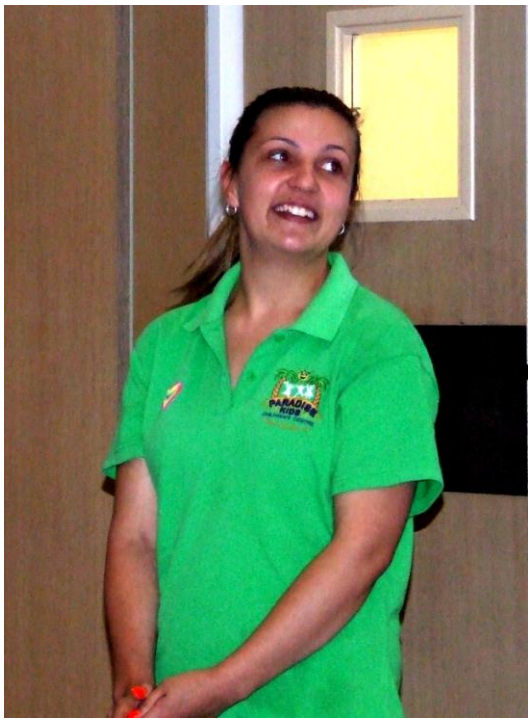
The Boost Program is part of the Enhanced Youth Refuge Response Initiative. The Boost Program responds to the immediate needs of young people and young families. It targets young people with high and complex needs, providing outreach case management support as well as a seven day Short Stay bed in the Residential Program.

Youth Support Services

The Youth Support Service provides case management support to young people and young families linked in with the program. Working collaboratively, case managers work with the young person to identify goals and develop a case plan, accessing short, medium, and/or long term housing and if required linking with services such as educational and employment programs, health and wellbeing, living skills, financial support, legal support, mental health supports, and parenting supports.

Homeless Youth Dual Diagnosis Initiative (HYDDI)

HYDDI is a Department of Health and Human Services Youth Homelessness initiative in partnership between Hope Street and Melbourne Health. HYDDI is designed to work with young people experiencing homelessness who have a dual diagnosis of mental health issues and substance use issues. HYDDI fosters helpful ongoing partnerships between mental health, drug and alcohol and youth homelessness services.



RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach involving a qualitative and quantitative literature review, as well as interviews and focus groups with community service workers, young people and established community networks located in or with links to the Melton local government area.

The empirical investigation of this study focused on interviewing young people to develop insight into their lived experiences. Community service worker interviews and focus groups were undertaken to develop insight into perspectives in the wider community. The approach to the study reflects Hope Street philosophy and standards that value a whole community approach to supporting young people's rights and needs. Participatory and action research elements conceptualized by Wadsworth (1997) informed the research design, which seeks to consciously engage people that are directly or indirectly involved in the inquiry effort. This approach recognises unambiguously the function of research as a mode of effecting change.

Interviews with Young People

Twenty 1:1 interviews were held with young people from two distinct groups – young people with an experience of homelessness or at risk of homelessness from the Melton Local Government Area (LGA) (*n*=15), and young people with an experience of homelessness or at risk of homelessness from various north-western outer suburbs nearby, but marginally outside of the Melton LGA catchment area (*n*=5). Interviews were conducted over the period 14/01/15 – 10/02/15.

Approximately half of the interviews were face-to-face and half were phone interviews. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in Melton with young people living in a variety of settings, including transitional accommodation, private rental or with family. Phone interviews were with young people living in crisis accommodation and in private rental in Melton and beyond.

All young people who participated in the study received a $30 shopping gift voucher as thanks for their time and effort, and as a means of encouraging participation.

In recognition of our duty of care and the vast range of lived experiences all young people were provided with contact details of the Hope Street Youth Reconciliation Worker and encouraged to connect with this cost-free and confidential counselling service.

Recruiting Young People

Participant recruitment for young people began one month prior to the interview period. Participants were sourced from a contact list containing young people from Melton who have previously been engaged with our Hope Street in Melton program. At the commencement of the interviewing phase, the target had not been met and other recruitment strategies were employed to meet the target sample size. This included engaging a different set of service providers and workers from a wider radius to try and catch young people from the Melton area that were engaged with services out of the Melton LGA. Results were negligible demanding further development of the approach, and the recruitment of young people from other growth corridor communities near Melton. Mirroring social 'action research', this reflected a cyclic feedback mechanism whereby preliminary research actions informed the next phase (Wadsworth 1997).

Profile of young people who participated

- Interview participants age range: 17 – 24 years
- Country of origin: Australia (75%), Ireland, Sudan, New Zealand, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan
- Cultural background: Indigenous Australian (10%), Australian (40%), Filipino, European (British, Irish, Italian and German), Sudanese, Maori, Sierra Leone, Hazara
- First languages: English (80%), Dinka, Creole, Hazara

Table 1:

Table 1: **Living arrangements at time of study**		**No. of Y P**	**%**
What type of accommodation are you living in?	Refuge/crisis accommodation	2	10
	Supported transitional property	8	40
	Private rental	6	3
	Family/partner	4	20
How much?	Under $50 per week*	2	10
	Under $100 per week*	11	55
	Under $150 per week	3	15
	Under $200 per week	2	10
	Not paying rent	2	10
With whom?	Alone	8	40
	Friends/share house	3	15
	Single with children	3	15
	Renting/staying with partner with children	2	10
	Staying with family	2	10
	Crisis accommodation	2	10

Interviews with Community Service Workers

Ten workers from community services located in Melton - or with direct links to the community - were interviewed face-to-face. Interviews were undertaken in the period 16/12/14 – 23/12/14. Agencies and organisations providing interview participants included:

- Victoria Police (Melton)
- VicSeg (Melton)
- Youth Connections (Melton)
- DHS (Federal and Victoria, Sunshine)
- Djerriwarrh Health Services (Melton)
- Melton City Council's Housing Services, Youth Services and Family Services
- Sunshine Magistrates Court (Sunshine)
- Victoria University (Footscray)

Focus Groups

Two focus groups were held in Melton during February of 2015.

The first group held on 05/02/15, engaged members of the Melton Youth Advisory Network[5] (MYAN). MYAN is comprised of broad range of professionals, representing a range of sectors working in direct contact with young people. The focus of MYAN is to discuss, advocate for and address local issues relevant to young people.

The February meeting attracted 32 participants, representing:

- ten separate educational institutions representing local and neighbouring public and private schools (including primary, secondary, VCAL and higher education)
- council services workers representing housing, youth and family services
- specialist non-government youth and child residential care providers
- specialist non-government youth and child support service providers
- employment and apprenticeship service providers
- specialist drug and alcohol service providers

The second focus group on 10/02/15 was held for members of the Melton New and Emerging Communities Network (MNECN). Membership included representatives of community groups, community services and organisations. The network places particular focus on local refugee and migrant issues. The February event had 16 members in attendance, representing the following areas:

- governmental departments of immigration, and social and human services
- community health services
- non-government migrant, refugee and CALD service providers
- non-government women's advocacy and service organisation
- specialist multicultural employment and education service providers
- specialist multicultural disability advocacy and support service provider

Ethics

The interviews were conducted in compliance with professional research ethics and standards. This included developing an interview protocol and guide and providing language translation services. Informed consent protocols were employed, including written consent documents and verbal consent protocols for phone interviews. Prior to interviews participants were briefed on the aims of the study, the handling of data and the intention to release a public report. Privacy and confidentiality was discussed and permission gained for de-identified quotes to be published. The research data was collected and collated in accordance with privacy and confidentiality codes.

In alignment with Hope Street's commitment to support young people to realise their potential any research undertaken by the organisation should do no harm to participants. Reflecting this, all interview participants were informed of the availability of our Youth Reconciliation Program for support, and provided with contact details for the service.

Considerations and Limitations

When a young person exits a Hope Street program they are no longer a client of the service therefore it is not necessary for the organisation to keep the client file open. Additional case notes are made only if the young person re-presents to the service. Given this and the transient nature of young people it was difficult to contact previous clients who have moved on. This reduced the pool of potential participants significantly. Further consideration should be given that the time of year the study was carried out provided for some difficulties in recruitment and focus group planning. Many agencies had staff on leave in January, and some young people had temporarily relocated for summer work. This impacted on recruitment and participation in the study. Furthermore considering the small sample size of this study, the findings are obviously not representative of all young people in the north-western growth corridors, or the Melton LGA. However, they do provide insight into some of the key issues experienced by a select group, and indicate attention and intervention addressing youth homelessness is warranted. The findings are consistent with a body of extensive research into youth homelessness referenced in the literature review.

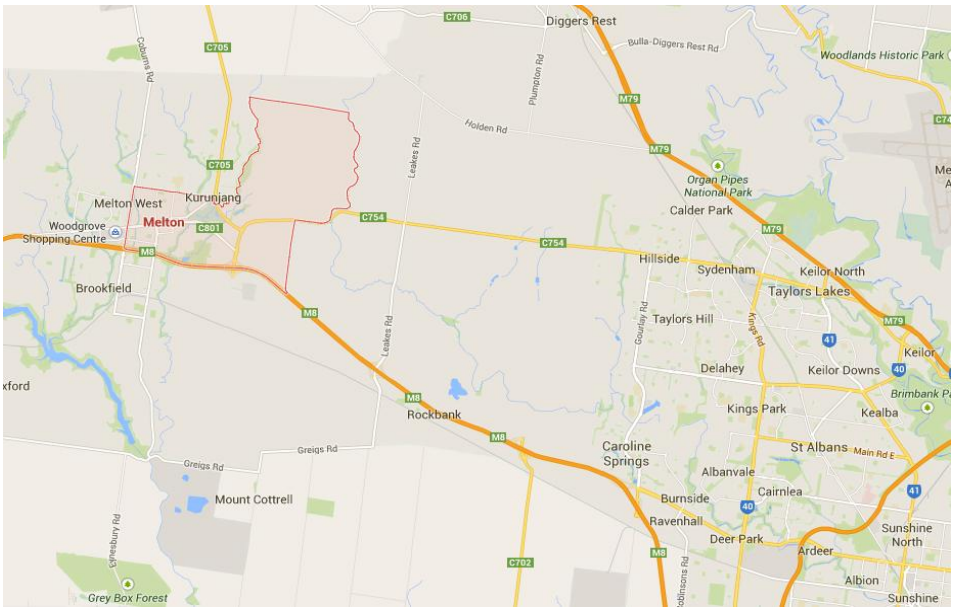
[5] Melton Youth Advisory Network information: http://www.melton.vic.gov.au/Services/People/Youth/Melton_Youth_Advisory_Network_MYAN

THE CITY OF MELTON – AN OVERVIEW

The City of Melton is located on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation. Traditional Owners of the Kulin Nation have always lived in the local region.

The municipality incorporates a series of townships and communities including Melton (35 kilometres west of Melbourne's CBD) and Caroline Springs (19 kilometres west of Melbourne's CBD). Other communities within the municipality include Diggers Rest, Exford, Parwan, Rockbank, Mount Cottrell, Hillside, Burnside, Taylors Hill.

Image: **City of Melton**



Source: Google maps

City of Melton Population

The outer suburbs of Melbourne are experiencing a period of significant growth, predominantly in western and northern greenfield[6] developments. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2014) data demonstrate that Melbourne's western region experienced the largest growth in 2012-2013. This region also contained some of the fastest growing areas during this period, including Melton South with 9.5% population growth in 2012-2013 (see Appendix 2 for population tables).

ABS data also show that the City of Melton has experienced a significant increase in the total population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in the region. As of 2006, the Bureau of Statistics estimated a total population of 507 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In 2011, the total population increased to 787. It is likely that this is an under-representation of the actual number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in the region[7].

Melton has experienced significant increases in the number of young people, contributing to increased pressure on community services in the area. Between 2006 and 2011 the City of Melton experienced a 29% increase in the number of children aged 12 to 17 years, and a 31.4% increase in the number of young people aged between 18 and 24.

The number of young people in Melton is projected to rise significantly again by 2031, with a forecasted 85% increase in children aged between 12 and 17 years, and 83% increase in youth aged 18 to 24 (see appendix 3 for statistical information of adolescent physical and mental health in Melton).

As of 30th December 2014, the total population in the City of Melton reached 130, 451 (City of Melton 2015). The City of Melton (2015) has provided the following summary of statistics:

- *During 2012/2013 the City of Melton had the fifth fastest growth in Victoria (4.3%).*
- *Between 2001 and 2014 the estimated residential population of the City more than doubled.*

[6] Greenfield developments refer to previously undeveloped land, often rural, agricultural and outer suburban areas.
[7] City of Melbourne Community Profile http://profile.id.com.au/melton/population

- *Population projections indicate that the City's population will be more than 315,908 by 2036, making it almost the size of Canberra today.*

Table 2: The distribution of population growth within the City of Melton during 2012/2013:

- *Melton Township^ increased by 2,658 people (or 5.1%) to 58,168. The largest population growth occurred in Melton South.*
- *Melton East^^ increased by 2,324 people (or 3.7%) to 66,618. The largest population growth occurred in Caroline Springs.*

Population Growth Snapshot 2012/2013

	Year	Week	Day
People	5028	97	14
Families	1734	33	5
Babies	2172	42	6

^Melton Township includes: Melton, Melton South and Melton West, Kurunjang and Eynesbury.
^^Melton East includes: Caroline Springs, Burnside, Burnside Heights, Taylors Hill, and Hillside.

Source: City of Melton, 'Growth Statistics', 2014, http://www.melton.vic.gov.au/Council/About_the_City/Demographics/Growth_Statistics

Recognising the impacts of this population growth on youth services, Council in its 2015-17 Youth Strategy advocates for investment by State and Federal Governments:

> *Although the Shire is serviced by a number of outreach service providers to young people, there are gaps and under-servicing in a number of important areas which will require state and federal government investment to overcome during the next four years.*
>
> *Over the next ten years, as the Shire experiences rapid population growth, the demand for a range of services for young people will become critical. It is important to plan now for required services and to coordinate approaches from a community perspective and all at levels of government. Identification of service gaps are outside the scope of this Strategy and the Shire will benefit in the future by conducting a regional service mapping and gap analysis project with other western local government areas'*[8]

Homelessness

The Council to Homeless Persons data shows that in 2011 there were 177 homeless people in the Melton area, compared with 136 in 2006 (an increase of 30%). The City of Melton via the Youth Allocations Committee (YAC) reported during June 2014 to August 2015 a total of 79 presentations/cases of youth homelessness[9], though these figures are thought to be even higher given reports of most young people couch surfing with friends and family contacts.

Statistically Aboriginal and Torres Strait people are over represented in all aspects of homelessness including youth homelessness.

Socioeconomic Disadvantage

Despite being a major population growth corridor Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show the City of Melton experiences greater levels of disadvantage than Melbourne, or Victorian averages in education and low income, unskilled employees and unemployment rates.

For example the City of Melton LGA scored 1,002.1 on the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The index measures levels of socioeconomic disadvantage derived from data collected in the 2011 Census. This figure is comparable to the Australian average score of 1002.1, less than the State of Victoria's' score of 1,009.6, and considerably lower than the closest urban centre, the City of Greater Melbourne, on 1,020.3. (For more details see Appendix 4 and Appendix 5 for education, training and employment statistics in Melton).

Within the Melton LGA, areas experiencing greatest disadvantage are Melton South, Melton, Melton Township, and Kurunjang. On the Index of Relative Socioeconomic Disadvantage (IRSED), Melton scored 1010 and placed in the category 'Disadvantaged' (Department of Health 2011) (see Appendix 6 for Index of relative socio-economic disadvantage 2011).

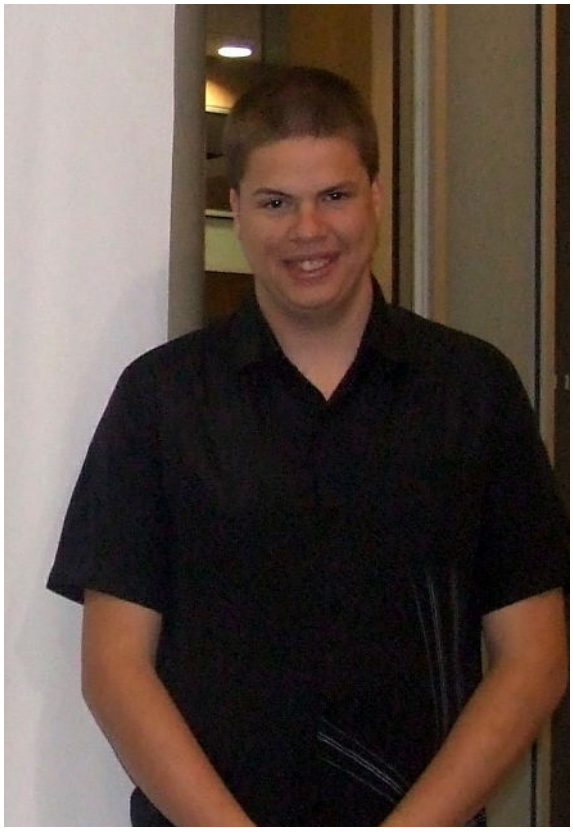
[8] Melton Youth Strategy 2015-17 page 24:

[9] Melton City Council, Youth Allocations Committee statistics August 2015

Youth Services in Melton

The City of Melton has invested significantly in supporting young people.[10] It created the Melton Youth Strategy after an extensive research and community engagement process. The strategy guides Council's youth related service delivery and community development initiatives between July 2015 and June 2017 inclusively. Council's Youth Services offer programs, events and support services for young people aged 12-25 years and their families. Council sponsors the Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) involving young people between the ages of 12-25 years who advocate on issues affecting local young people. YAC grants are available to individuals and groups for key initiatives and YAC awards are made to young people who have 'done something special in the Melton community'.

Notwithstanding this commitment, and as mentioned previously, Council is most concerned that the municipality is grossly under resourced for coping with the growing population and the accompanying increase in young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.



[10] City of Melbourne website http://www.melton.vic.gov.au/Services/People/Youth, Taylors Hill Youth and Community Centre website: http://www.melton.vic.gov.au/Out_n_About/Community_facilities/Youth_facilities/Taylors_Hill_Youth_and_Community_Centre

FINDINGS AND LITERATURE DISCUSSED

The findings of the study are presented and discussed under thematic subheadings combining results from the literature review with comments from participants. The findings demonstrate that youth homelessness is a multifaceted and complex social issue requiring dynamic and informed approaches for effective intervention and prevention.

YOUTH HOMELESSNESS: A SNAPSHOT

This section provides a snapshot of youth homeless in Victoria and nationally.

Summary

In summary, data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare show:

- 6,117 young people aged 12-24 are homeless in Victoria on any night (2011 Census)
- 44,414 young people across Australia requested assistance from homelessness services in 2013-14 financial year, yet more than half of these (25,000) did **not** receive accommodation
- the most common reason for becoming homeless in Australia is family violence or family breakdown
- disengagement from school, poverty, poor mental health, social exclusion and substance abuse can be risk factors leading to homelessness, they are also common outcomes of homelessness
- the highest priority need is for short-term or emergency accommodation with medium and long term housing a close second
- young people were more likely to have identified needs in areas of living skills development, education, employment and training.

While statistics show high rates of youth homelessness, the figures available are only the tip of the iceberg as many young people are couch surfing or staying in temporary or unsuitable accommodation and thus not qualifying as homeless.

Statistics

Measuring homelessness is a challenging task, particularly given Census data typically relies on surveying occupants residing in a dwelling. The quantitative statistics presented throughout this paper represent an amalgam of Census, Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) data.

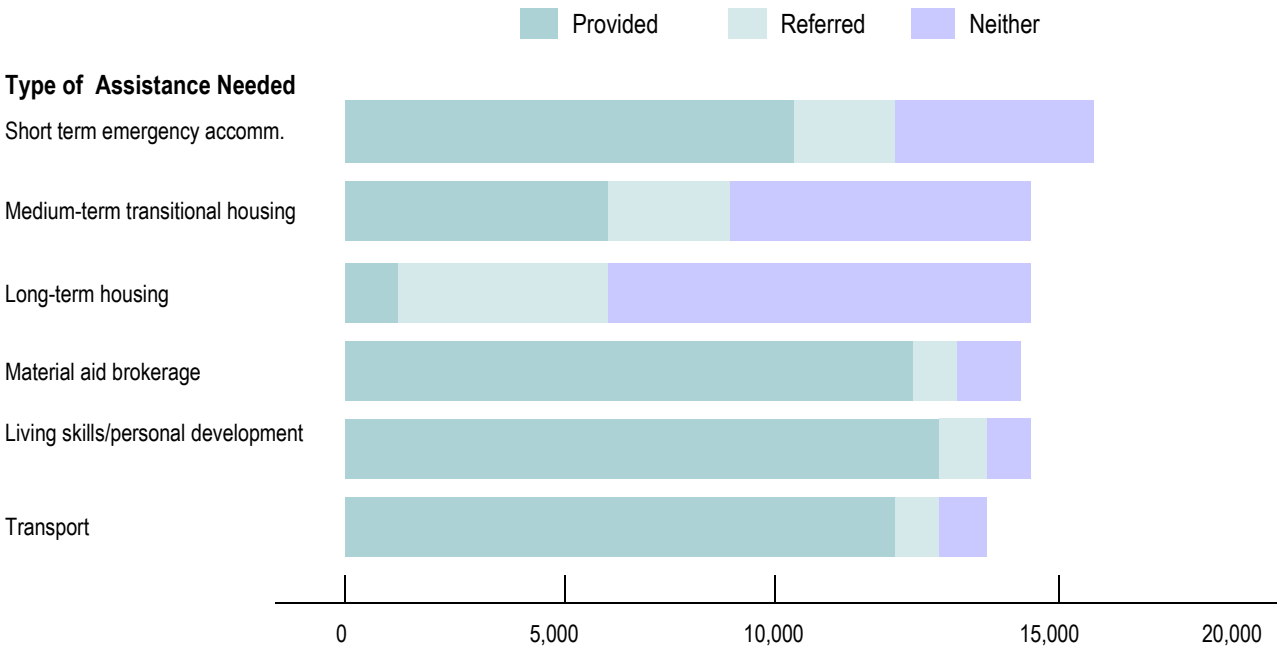
The 2011 Census estimates that on any given night 6,117 young people aged 12-24 are homeless in Victoria, (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011). This can come as a shock as the issue is largely invisible with few young people sleeping rough, the majority couch surfing, or utilising emergency accommodation or rooming houses (Barrett & Cataldo 2012). Furthermore 7,976 young people were experiencing tertiary homelessness on census night through accommodation in improvised dwellings or caravan parks (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011). Young people's most common entry into homelessness is through family violence or family breakdown. Experiences of poverty, poor mental health, social exclusion and substance use issues can be outcomes of, but also risk factors for experiencing homelessness (Johnson & Chamberlain 2008). Having said that, it should be noted that experiences and causes of homelessness are as diverse as the people that experience it and perceptions of a 'type' can be unhelpful (Johnson & Chamberlain 2014).

In the 2013-2014 financial year, 44,414 young people across Australia presented alone to access specialist homelessness services, representing 17% of all clients experiencing homelessness. Of these young people the majority (78%) spanned ages 18-24, and 63% were female. Alarmingly only 43% of this group received accommodation, and were housed for a median period of 69 days (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2014). To restate this, in the previous financial year over 25,000 young people did not receive accommodation after seeking assistance from homelessness services nationwide.

Identified Needs

Compared with overall presentations of homelessness, young people were more likely to have identified needs in areas of living skills development (14% higher), education (10% higher) employment (9% higher) and training (8% higher). Though the need was identified it was unmet in many cases, including education, employment and training (17%, 22% and 20% of presenting cases respectively) (AIHW 2014). The identified needs of young people presenting alone are summarised below. The most common need for young homeless people is access to accommodation, particularly the urgent need of short-term or emergency accommodation (39% or 17,000 young people). Medium and long-term accommodation needs were identified (both 35%) as a close second, however only 7% of young people that presented alone were provided with long-term accommodation (AIHW 2014).

Table3: Young people presenting alone by top 6 most needed services and service provision status, 2013-14



Source: AIHW, Specialist Homelessness Services 2013–14, p. 34

Impact of Experiencing Homelessness

There is compelling social reasoning for addressing youth homelessness.

Homeless young people commonly experience poor self-esteem, depression and excessive distress, mental health and behavioural problems, in many cases due to witnessing or being victims of severe neglect and abuse. They also face far higher risk of exploitation and exposure to experiences of violence (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) 2008, p. 5). Experiencing homelessness as a young person can be an indicator for poorer outcomes later in life (Buesnel & Fielding 2014). Young people from a non-conventional family face greater risk of homelessness, with 67% of participants as documented in the *Youth Homelessness in Australia 2006* study coming from single parent, or blended families (MacKenzie & Chamberlain 2008).

Disengagement from school is a prominent risk factor for homelessness among young people. Identified in a study reviewing the education achievement and youth homelessness, a sub-set of risk factors included low school achievement, family background and socio-economic status[11]. Spending a period in residential care, and illicit substance use are other prominent risk factors for youth homelessness. In 2011 family violence was the most prevalent cause for presenting as homeless, representing 26% of cases. While substance use has a high correlation with experiences of homelessness for young people, it can also be an outcome of the experience rather than a driver (MacKenzie, Theilking & Chauvet-Allen 2012). The *Counting the Homeless 2006 Project* identified three over-represented groups: young people who have been in residential care, Indigenous young people and young people from blended families (MacKenzie & Chamberlain 2008).

Protective Factors

Protective factors such as sense of community and social connectedness can impact upon young peoples' likeliness of becoming homeless. The challenge of residential developments such as the 'Greenfield Development' - occurring in the outer growth corridors of Melbourne - is the profound void of established community, including infrastructure and amenities.

Building community and family resilience is a particular challenge for councils and residents in these areas. Community relationship building should be pursued, coupled with the availability of adequate and appropriate specialist social services supporting young people and families, including family violence interventions, in outer growth corridors (Lynn & Monani n.d.).

Exploring the challenges faced by Cardinia in the northern growth corridor, Lynn and Monani (n.d.) identify the need for *early* provision of social infrastructure in growth corridors, specifically affordable housing options and proactive support from community service organisations.

A pragmatic approach to servicing outlying communities in Melbourne outer growth corridors is provided by Peterson (2006; p. 18):

[11] The Counting the Homeless 2006 Project, MacKenzie and Chamberlain, 2008

> "*…a combination of standalone organisational office locations within outlying community and co-located and collaborative service systems are required, thereby building upon the strengths and expertise of participating organisations. This approach ensures a powerful means of providing an effective local area response*".

A comprehensive service system would include: a diverse range of services; locally based service delivery; coordination between services reducing client need to retell stories; prompt interventions through services addressing homelessness and family violence; adequately resourced agencies; and an integrated service network - incorporating police and courts – committed to addressing homelessness and family violence issues (Peterson 2006).

Social relationships are highly valued by young people and this is demonstrated in Mission Australia's 2014 youth survey (Fildes et al. 2014). When asked what they valued the most from a select list, friendships and family relationships were highly valued by 78.7% and 74.6% of young people respectively, placing higher than study satisfaction, mental health and financial security. This speaks to the power of social connectedness and points towards the source of support for young people. When asked where they would go in a crisis young people listed social connections first, and in the following order: friends (88.6%), parents and/or relatives (76.0%) and family friends (66.6%). The internet (approx. 60%) then teachers or school welfare workers (approx. 30%) were listed as other avenues for seeking help (Fildes et al. 2014).

The findings unpack a range of facets and drivers for homelessness. Familial and structural issues must be considered together, particularly in public discourses to emphasise the social nature of the issue that contrasts with powerful and pervasive social myths that homelessness is an individual issue.

The challenges are formidable for Melton and other communities on the fringes of Melbourne. There is a demonstrated need for addressing youth homelessness, yet the structural disadvantage of geographical isolation serves to undermine a lot of the supportive interventions that are in place. Many of the factors reported – lack of higher education options, poor public transport linkages and the need to travel to gain access to suitable amenities – are not dissimilar to the challenges faced by rural areas. Yet Melton remains integrated in an urban framework, suggesting the need for dynamic approaches to address issues mirroring rural disadvantage in urban outer growth corridors.

Participants reported a range of factors and causes for homelessness for young people in the Melton area including:

- family violence, family conflict, challenges of blended or non-conventional family dynamics, difficulty transitioning from the family home
- geographic isolation impacting on education, employment and transport options
- cross-cultural familial tension
- culture of welfare dependence
- substance use and social and peer influences.

These factors are discussed separately below.

Family Conflict

The importance of family in the life of young people is represented in the findings of this research. Conflict and disagreement within families was a strongly represented theme. Agencies made the distinction between incidents of family violence and family conflict clear. Facets of family conflict were characterised as disagreement and relationship breakdown, lack of parenting support, and need for mediation or reconciliation. Family violence was characterised by any violent, threatening, coercive or controlling behaviour that occurs in current or past family, domestic or intimate relationships. This includes not only physical injury but direct or indirect threats, sexual assault, emotional and psychological torment, economic control, damage to property, social isolation and any behaviour which causes a person to live in fear.

In recognition of the need for family reconciliation strategies where appropriate, a participant commented that families experiencing other conflict "*need help with family reconciliation where possible*". Without reconciliation support intergenerational conflict reportedly leads to parents struggling to wrestle control and "*parents disowning kids temporarily or long-term"*. A particular source of family conflict was identified as "....*incapacity of parents to cope with blended families*". It was identified that there are instances of "*family conflict requiring mediation or intervention to reconcile*" that are not adequately addressed, contributing to youth homelessness. From this perspective, family conflict is represented as a risk factor for homelessness.

Another point made by the same focus group was the existence of "*unrest in homes that schools are not able to manage*", in reference to instances of schools being the first institution beyond the family to identify problems with young people. This focus group discussed CALD issues under the banner of family issues, stating "*...some parents are from diverse backgrounds and their parenting reflects different culture"*, impacting on intra-familial tension. The final factor impacting on homelessness was listed as overcrowding in family homes, and the unsustainable nature of overcrowded dwellings.

Family Violence

Data documented in the City of Melton's submission into the *'Australian Government Senate Inquiry into Domestic Violence Australia 2014'*, quoted the highest rates of family violence for the western region (of Melbourne) were reported in the City of Melton (1,166.1 per 100,000) in 2011/12.

Young people in Melton and surrounds reported to have experienced homelessness directly and indirectly from family violence. Abuse and neglect were cited as the key reasons for unsafe living environments in the family home, with one interviewee stating that family violence is "*one of largest causes*" of youth homelessness. The impact was stated to be "*...direct as victims of family violence... (and) indirect as a witnessed or present in the home creating unsafe environment*".

Two sub-trends within family violence emerged:

firstly the link between disability and family violence was reported as an increasing issue, with young women at greatest risk, and

- secondly a growing trend of young people as perpetrators of family violence.

A family violence support worker noted

"*intergenerational patterns of family violence impacting on older siblings perpetrating family violence*" paired with "*increasing numbers of adolescent perpetrators of family violence, and pressure to get them out of the house/or reconcile but nowhere for them to go in terms of services or accommodation*".

Transitioning From the Family Home

There were reports of young people leaving home for 'coming of age' reasons, seeking independence and freedom. These comments drew distinctions between young people leaving because of conflict or violence, to young people seeking a lifestyle away from the family home, as they mature and want to establish themselves. One worker's perception was of young people "*not wanting to live with their parents because of rules and restrictions*".

Geographic Isolation

Geographic isolation was another strong theme detected in the interviews. While it is a significant emerging community the City of Melton is geographically isolated and difficult to access or remain connected if you do not have access to a car.

Public transport is not always easy to access and includes:

- an infrequent VLine country service operating from Melton Railway Station (Ballarat Line)
- metropolitan train service from Diggers Rest
- several bus lines operating in different parts of the municipality – all providing infrequent services (generally one per hour) at irregular intervals, making it difficult to remember times.

Participants reported that the poor public transport impacted negatively on employment and educational choices and options.

Participants reported a lack of infrastructure and services relevant to learning and development and services supporting pathways into employment. Participants identified poor literacy levels as a large barrier to housing. Lack of awareness of existing services was also cited as a barrier to education and employment in the area.

Coupled with these local constraints were reports of insufficient transport options to reach better serviced areas, described by one as "*travel issues and lack of opportunity in the area*". Beyond homelessness, other outcomes listed as a result of isolation in the area were commented on. One housing service coordinator sensed a "*perceived lack of opportunities and sense of hopelessness"* among clients. A tertiary education provider noted that without options readily available to them *"....adolescents disengage. There is no TAFE and travel is too difficult*".

Young people commented on another facet of geographic isolation - the difficulty in regaining access to other institutions faced by young people expelled from an institution. The impact of geographical isolation on employment and education options for young people was explicitly raised as a factor driving homelessness.

One comment referred to the predicament of young people from regional areas, stating *"...when they begin to study [at tertiary level] they need to move away".* Focus group responses suggested that this lack of infrastructure extends to social service provision. *"Lack of mediation services"* and *"...lack of facilities for young people*" were cited as contributing factors.

Cross-Cultural Issues For Families

Participants reported cross-cultural tension described as intra-familial tension, as well as tension between CALD families and the Australian or western culture dominant in Melton.

Intergenerational tension related to cultural expectations was commented on, with families presenting to services with "*no awareness of how to reconcile cross-cultural issues".*

Another comment referred to the "*increased cultural diversity growing faster than cultural attitudes/ acceptance*".

Income/Welfare Payments

The perceived reliance on welfare from people from disadvantaged backgrounds was commented on by a range of agencies. The unstable nature of depending on income from this source was the key issue raised, followed by comments related to structural and entrenched poverty. A participant identified a "*social acceptance of reliance on welfare*" fostered through witnessing intergenerational disadvantage and unemployment among families and peers.

Difficulties in securing ongoing accommodation while receiving a Centrelink payment were referred to. One interviewee stated *"I see a lot of hardship experienced - not enough money from welfare*" and another referred to the possibility of young people "*...often can lose payments due to non-compliance*", often impacting upon housing. Families and young people experiencing poverty, financial

issues, and with low socioeconomic status were identified as vulnerable to homelessness. A particularly salient comment referred to "*housing inaffordability*" (sic), and drew focus to the difficulties associated with low incomes and rising housing costs.

These comments are supported by research. According to the Department of Human Services Website[12] as of the 23/07/2015, the maximum rate of pay for a young person in receipt of a Centrelink Youth Allowance Payment is $213.40 per fortnight without rent assistance or $277.60[13] with the maximum rent assistance (if eligible). As of December 2014, the Henderson Poverty Line for a single adult was $511.69.[14] This means a young person in receipt of a Centrelink Youth Allowance Payment (on maximum rate with rent assistance) is still living almost 46% under the Henderson Poverty Line.

Substance Use

Some comments were made in reference to drug use among young people as a contributing factor in Melton and surrounds. A worker from a family service listed ice (methamphetamine) as a contributing factor to homelessness. Another housing worker listed "*...early alcohol abuse...*" as a main significant driving factor, and raised their concern about the proliferation of alcohol use and availability in wider society.

There was specific reference made to the abundance of bottle shops in the area, reflecting the perception of higher concentrations of bottle shops in low socioeconomic areas.

Views differed between those who consider illicit drug use to be the major factor and those that view alcohol use as a main driver. One participant made it very clear that drug use does not necessarily refer to a particular demographic, reporting cases of young people experiencing homelessness due to parental or sibling drug use.

Social Factors

Social capital and peer pressure were the main subthemes that emerged. Interviewees identified the vulnerability of some young people to influence from their peers as well as general peer pressure from friends impacted on behaviours leading to conflict in the family and subsequent family breakdown. Lack of social capital was identified as an issue, as networks and relationships outside the family were identified as crucial to young people remaining engaged in society, and re-entering secure housing. Peer pressure and lack of community connectedness or social capital were noted as key factors. Expanding on this understanding it was noted that youth homelessness may be perpetuated due to a developing "*social norms of homelessness being accepted*" as a facet of society, and not adequately challenged.

Cultural Diversity

Increases in multiculturalism and diversity were reported as a significant trend in Melton and surrounds. While CALD populations were reported to be growing, one comment suggested that in statistics "*CALD people are not over-represented but need more intensive interventions*". A trend of disengaging from education was identified, particularly for migrants from African backgrounds in the area, driven by school enrolments based on age level rather than scholastic readiness. It was reported that students experiencing this typically become disengaged and dropout of school. The same participant commented that there is an *"...increase in South Sudanese population. It's a small group but it draws a lot of attention*".

Community Growth

Changes in the community and economic trends in the wider Melton community were commented on. Economically, trends include increasing mortgage stress, growing wealth disparity and low socioeconomic population concentrated in Melton South. A participant noted that "*incomes in some areas [of Melton] statistically are on par with some inner city suburbs...but debt is much higher [in Melton]*". Lack of education and employment opportunities were emphasised as factors in economic trends listed above. Changes in community attitudes and population expansion were discussed, with one worker noting a "*lack of community support*" for young people experiencing homelessness. With reference to expansion and population growth, comments were made regarding reconciling"*...old Melton vs. new Melton tensions*".

Family Composition & Dynamics

Trends were reported in family breakdown and family composition. The more prominent theme was single parenting and families navigating restructuring due to family breakdown. When it comes to homelessness it was stated that *"...single parent families are most vulnerable*" based on the reduced earning capacity and the lack of income support for single parents. Trends in family breakdown were identified by a participant, who reported cases of family breakdown through the death of a sole primary carer, as opposed to conflict driven breakdowns. Other cases of family breakdown involved parents

[12] Centrelink Payment Rates – Youth Allowance http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/enablers/centrelink/youth-allowance/payment-rates

[13] Centrelink Rent Assistance Payment Rates http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/rent-assistance

[14] Poverty Line https://www.melbourneinstitute.com/downloads/publications/Poverty%20Lines/Poverty-lines-Australia_Dec2014.pdf

experiencing mental illness, or *"...parental absence, where parents are away from home working long hours to service mortgage and household*".

Couch Surfing

A family services worker identified "*couch surfing as a matter of course*" for many young people unable to live at home. Within this trend it was noted that "*couch surfing with friends can give exposure to dangerous behaviours*", and it was common to see "*young people are staying with other young people*".

Drug Use

The use of drugs in populations of young people was described as a theme by some. One participant suggested that "*Ice [methamphetamine] is a major cause*" of homelessness. Issues of drug and alcohol use were identified in general, and specifically in reference to disengaged CALD groups. A worker in family violence commented that "*often teen perpetrators [of family violence] are using drugs [and] often a combination*"

Additional Points

Focus group responses were largely in alignment with the views of other participants. However, three new areas of consideration emerged in focus groups.

Firstly the focus group identified a pathway into homelessness from young people in care (residential), recognising the difficulties surrounding leaving care at age 18, and the expectation placed on the individual to have the capacity to find their own housing.

Secondly, mental illness was discussed as a driver for homelessness. The focus group made the distinction that young people or parents experiencing mental illness can impact upon the likelihood of experiencing homelessness.

The final new theme raised was that in our society, experiences of trauma can negatively impact individual capacity. This was said to be particularly applicable to those with a refugee background.

Early intervention and prevention approaches to youth homelessness have gained traction in debates on addressing homelessness, and have been adopted across Australia as a means of supporting young people at risk. Literature reviewed demonstrates that approaches require clear understanding of causes for homelessness. Sociologically this is fraught as it is difficult to understand the 'cause' of any social phenomenon. Thus understanding homelessness requires consideration along with structural factors, and individual lived experiences. Viewing homelessness as a process, or 'career' is a growing perspective, and very useful in considering the stages of intervention, and what will be effective and when.

In Summary

Participants value their networks and connections to Melton. Maintaining these connections is crucial for preventing homelessness or preventing disengagement from education, training, employment and social activities. (Barrett & Cataldo 2012, Lynn, M. and Monani, D., (n.d.) 2015).

The maxim (put forward by participants) '*it takes village to raise a child*' rings true when considering preventing and intervening early to address issues faced by young people. Narrowing the discussion to focus on the role of families and young people to combat homelessness not only places pressure on already vulnerable population, but absolves social responsibility of the extended community. For example the assumption that family will equip young people with life skills adequate for independent living should be examined. Many young people are lacking these skills, which warrant community engagement via schools, service organisation and social clubs to offer these preventative and protective learning experiences.

Participants suggested the following preventative strategies:

- locally based crisis intervention services, including crisis accommodation (this was seen as having the dual functions of prevention and intervention)
- development of more social infrastructure addressing the lack of housing options
- development of more social infrastructure addressing the lack of education options
- more employment opportunities
- family reconciliation programs
- programs such as the defunded Youth Connections designed to prevent disengagement
- resources to enable schools to provide effective early intervention strategies that prevent disengagement
- a suite of support for families and parents addressing conflict and mediation
- enhanced community participation and fostering sense of community
- resources and support for young people to develop independent living skills.

Defining Intervention and Prevention

The authors identify a lack of clarity in definitions, and propose the following:

- prevention refers to causes and focuses on risk and structural drivers
- early intervention refers to processes of intervention.

This distinction can assist in delineating the focus of some interventions and in establishing best practice through analysing what was effective for certain target groups. The definition also helps identify that early intervening processes will be much easier to evaluate due to the difficulties of measuring the effectiveness of preventative measures, as the goal is to have people not presenting with need at all (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003).

Early Intervention and Crisis Support

The purpose of early intervention is to address youth homelessness, prevent disengagement and build resilience of young people (Barrett & Cataldo 2012, Lynn, M. and Monani, D., (n.d.) 2015).

Two forms of early intervention were referred to in interviews. Performing the dual function of identifying at risk young people and early intervention a participant pointed to the potential of the school system. It was suggested that there should be an initiative *to "enlighten and provide education for school counsellors, principals, teachers etc"* regarding recognition of risk of homelessness, and effective interventions and supports.

The second approach can also provide duality of purpose in both early intervention and potentially preventing young people from being trapped in a cyclical experience of homelessness that recurs later in life. Participants noted the importance of supported crisis accommodation in this approach to early intervention, stating *"there needs to be a case management model for a refuge".*

Services directly engaged in early intervention and crisis support were a prominent theme of discussion. There was a consensus that there is need for a crisis centre, youth refuge or youth shelter. A local central referral point was also suggested. Each of these suggestions contained the stipulation of having combined or in-house support services. In addition there was agreement that the range of services in the Melton area should be developed with a focus on better co-ordination. An increase of transition

housing with on-premises or linked supports was also listed. The potential for youth workers to be positioned within schools was raised as a vital preventative effort. The value of a specialist trauma service for asylum seekers and refugees was commented on as a means of preventing homelessness among this community.

Programs Preventing Disengagement

While family conflict is a major cause of youth homelessness it does not pre-determine what is likely to happen next. Young people negotiate the experience in many different ways, leading to many different possible outcomes. Given that family breakdown is not pre-determinate for ongoing homelessness, welfare workers can be instrumental in facilitating better outcomes. Examples of early interventions and prevention strategies include Family Reconciliation Programs (Victoria), Reconnect (Federal) and School Focused Youth Services (SFYS) (Victoria) programs (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2004).

Schools as Strategic Sites for Early Intervention and Prevention

Throughout the interviews participants identified schools as integral to an effective early interventionist approach.

A 1994 census of homeless young people identified that young people's first experience of homelessness usually occurs while attending school. The same study demonstrated that most homeless students drop out of school (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2004). Early intervention programs that prevent early school disengagement are critical for preventing young people experiencing homelessness, or 'falling through the cracks'. This has particular connotations for young people who do not have safe or supporting family environment, as the school environment may be the sole linkage the young person has to a protective adult figure (Fielding 2014).

Schools are 'strategic sites' for homelessness prevention and early intervention efforts and interventions should be strengthened through education and community sector linkages (Grogan et al. 2013; Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2004) In the decade prior to 2004 attempts by all states and territories to build schools' capacity in early intervention and prevention had been attempted, but not evaluated adequately (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2004).

Experienced Welfare Staff in Schools

To effectively intervene and reduce homelessness, schools need to have experienced welfare staff who are well resourced in their knowledge of community services for referral and linking purposes. Welfare staff must also have the capacity to engage families/students for ongoing periods of time, and engage in outreach for families reluctant to attend on premises. Strong links between schools and community agencies are vital, and are developing, but need more attention.

Preventive measures in schools should be broad, directed towards all students with the aim of developing a protective structure (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2004). Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2004) promote gaining better insight into causes of homelessness and homeless 'careers', and developing robust school welfare programs informed by aforementioned insights gained.

Inclusive School Homelessness Prevention Programs

Effective prevention programs should be inclusive and directed at all school students, incorporating a broad range of activities aimed at developing protective factors. Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2003) argue for national benchmarks for student welfare, setting standards of good practice and good resourcing across the school sector are required. Funding for community network meetings, mirroring the effective and established Victorian School Focused Youth Services program coordination approach is another worthy recommendation (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003).

Prevention strategies typically employed by schools focus on building resilience to housing crisis, through promoting student wellbeing and supporting social development and connectedness (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2004). Effective early intervention strategies that focus on young people at the earliest stages of homelessness include responsive family mediation and the potential for community residential support (i.e. support to maintain accommodation in the community may be a viable alternative option for young people) (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2003).

Early stage interventions according to Chamberlain & MacKenzie (2004) are in two different forms. Firstly strategies can focus on young people seen to be at risk, potentially in a transient stage described as 'in and out'. These strategies prioritise family reconciliation. Secondly strategies are employed when young people have become homeless, the primary focus being on keeping a young person engaged in education. Family reconciliation is incorporated, but these students often do not return home but remain independent.

Young people are at high risk of dropping out of school, whether they are living independently, experiencing financial hardship, having difficulty finding accommodation or experiencing emotional crisis from family breakdown. Furthermore, school is the main source of stability for many independently living young people (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2004).

Youth Foyer Model

A comprehensive early intervention and prevention strategy gaining much attention and support from government is the Youth Foyer model, such as that operated by Hope Street in Melton and Hope Street in Whittlesea programs. This represents a discrete specialist youth strategy, otherwise encapsulated in generalist approaches. Integrated approaches are front and centre to this intervention that provides young people with stable accommodation while supporting them to attain goals in education and employment.

Furthermore health, wellbeing, social inclusion and community participation are supported via this model with potential for family reconciliation support (State Government of Victoria 2011). Youth Foyer models are effective for longer term interventions, but they are not designed to address crisis situations and emergency housing. The benefits and disadvantages of Foyer models are discussed in more detail in the later section - Solutions and Recommendations from the Literature Review.

Targeted Responses

This was a prominent theme in interviews. Commentary was focused on areas of education, employment, social services and housing. A pragmatic approach offered for prevention was the requirement for "*more housing options and people need to be made aware of them*".

Recognising the need for stable income to maintain housing the recommendation of "*building employment opportunities*" was discussed with relevance to educational options. A support worker noted that "*...supporting alternative education options*" is instrumental in building employment opportunities. Comments made by participants emphasised this point, stating we need more "*education beyond or alternative to VCE*" for young people.

They also stressed the importance of having *"...something like Youth Connections[15] to help with education*" for young people who have disengaged for a range of complex reasons.

Other social services listed to be instrumental in prevention included alcohol and drug support services, mental health support services, and another comment suggested there "*should be bigger numbers of youth activities and youth engagement programs*".

Focus group discussion was centred solely on housing and homelessness infrastructure, with one exception. A centre for multicultural youth was suggested as a vital preventative tool. A drop-in centre was offered as an interim solution, or an early intervention tool, whereby young people could go somewhere to access on the spot mediation, drug and alcohol or other services and supports.

Practical Support for Young People

While there was some discussion of alternative approaches to education within the theme of targeted support, this topic is presented here again from a different angle.

A participant referred to the value of practical skills in areas such as cooking, healthy eating and life skills. The potential for schools to provide supplementary practical life skills was mentioned, with one participant commenting that schools could provide "*...education around realities of moving away from home. And education on drugs and the effects and impacts, and not only hearing from users but from the friends and family of those users*" and the need for *"...more education about healthy relationships in schools*".

These measures recognise the impact of abusive relationships and drug abuse on family breakdown, and subsequent housing instability. As well as these practical supports one participant commented that *"...identifying young people 'at risk' way earlier – working with schools*" is a crucial preventative measure that is underutilised and underemphasised.

Beyond supportive functions of schools, one comment made by workers in a multicultural support service stated that a "*youth program focusing on youth justice issues*" can provide preventative functions in terms of ongoing criminal activity or recidivism. Practical support in terms of financial assistance was noted as a means of preventing homelessness. Recognising that some support is available in this area a comment suggested that this type of funding needs to be expanded, stating *'there needs to be more bond assistance and similar support*".

[15] Previously run by Djerriwarrh Community Services until December 2014

The focus groups reported that support for young people is a crucial preventative and early intervention mechanism. The focus group comments focused on two areas: services supporting young people and learning and skills development opportunities.

Independent Living Skills

One focus group made comments on independent living skills, suggesting that beyond life skills surrounding cooking etc, young people need to be educated on home management and maintenance. This idea responds to discussions surrounding young people damaging property, contributing to a stereotype that impact on access to rental properties. Recognising the many ways of learning and development another group raised the possibility of sporting facilities and social hubs providing space and interaction for such endeavours. Conversely it was also commented that there is a need for vocational education opportunities in Melton. Advocacy for young people, particularly advocacy towards supporting young people into housing, was a prominent theme. The group felt that cultural liaison workers specifically for youth are crucial for this. Targeted services were mentioned, suggesting better interventions would come from mental health or drug and alcohol programs that work with young people. Income support from Centrelink was included as a crucial form of early intervention and prevention. The group commented on the value of outreach work with young people and that this could be increased as a form of prevention. Another view shared was the value in funding programs that have demonstrated effectiveness in the area, such as *Reconnect*, *Hope Street* and *MCM Detour*.

Community Participation and Fostering a Sense of Community

Community attitudes and awareness, participation and integration were discussed within this set of findings. A participant offered the maxim "*it takes an entire village*" alluding to the combined efforts of a community in facilitating the development and growth of young people. A housing service coordinator identified challenges in this. "*Building communities in growth corridors, with the current housing type where little to no interaction with neighbours*" presents new challenges is developing a sense of community in areas of new development.

An approach suggested by another professional involved in public service to engage communities is integrating with already existing networks, stating there is potential for "*integration of parenting strategies [and other strategies] in existing community gatherings. Rather than invite people to new things, we can engage with existing social circles*".

Another public servant alluded to community awareness campaigns promoting "social acceptance of homelessness" to help de-stigmatise the experience and develop the understanding of homelessness in the wider community.

One focus group felt the scope of discussion was too narrow when only considering the role of young people and families in youth homelessness, suggesting that it is crucial to develop whole of community responses. Again the maxim '*it takes a village [to raise a child]*' was offered to encapsulate the need for community participation in developing responses.

Support for families

Comments regarding support for families approached the issue from two angles:

- the first being supportive services for families with adolescent dependants,
- the second being young people as parents.

A support worker commented on family mediation and counselling services, stating there should be more available at no cost to clients to reduce the barrier of engaging with such interventions for low income families. Family reconciliation was a prominent theme in interviews, with various agencies citing the need for person-centred family reconciliation, emphasising a need for *"...a diversity of parenting support strategies*". It was emphasised that intergenerational involvement is crucial to "*create dialogue in families for better communication*" when working towards family reconciliation.

Mediation, relationship building and parenting skills were all listed as important.

Parenting skills for young people with families was identified as an area for improvement by a youth worker. The range of discussion in the focus groups closely mirrored responses from participants regarding family support as a preventative measure.

Participants also felt that settlement and support services for newly arrived migrants required attention, including services assisting with visa requirements and family reunions. Continuing the discussion, while it was unanimous that support for family is key it was suggested that work in communities requires a discrete understanding of local communities and how the local community values family.

In Summary

Barriers

While experiences varied and are difficult to summarise, the following common barriers faced by young people were identified:

- Young people reported having difficulty finding work (55% not currently working). They often felt discriminated against when job seeking due to age. Assistance from Job Support Agencies was seen as largely ineffective and unhelpful in gaining employment.
- Young people reported difficulties in renting in the private market, citing finding a bond and onerous paper work as a key barriers. They felt they were discriminated against because of their age based on perceptions that young people were irresponsible tenants.
- Young people expressed the need for stable income. Junior wage levels create barriers to living independently; and 75% of participants relied on Centrelink payments for the majority of their income.
- Homelessness was a major cause of young people leaving school. While schools in the area are doing some effective early intervention work around preventing disengagement, 50% of participants felt they had not been adequately supported by their secondary school.
- The majority of participants (68%) left home by the age of 16. The main reasons for leaving home were family violence (25%), pressure from the family to move out due to financial constraints or overcrowding (25%), family breakdown due to issues such as parental physical or mental illness, poor relationships and conflict (50%)
- Opening Doors Access Points are over 26km away and only 15% of participants had positive experiences of Access Points. There is a housing Access Point outpost service in Melton, co-located in the Council's Civic Centre. None of the young people that participated in the study were aware of it. This is most likely a result of the limited hours of operation of the service available only Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and that the service is by appointment only.
- There are few accommodation options available to young people who can't remain in the family home. Predominantly participants stayed with friends and family connections but none of these proved sustainable in the long term.

Most Difficult Aspects of Homelessness

While experiencing homelessness, young people in Melton and surrounds reported the most difficult aspects to be:

- getting access to Centrelink entitlements without parental co-operation or fixed address
- high cost of temporary accommodation (hotels/motels/caravan parks)
- experiencing hunger and not being able to afford regular meals
- pressure on social connections
- difficulty building a foundation with much stability
- difficulty forging new relationships while homeless.

These findings are outlined in more detail below.

Accessing the Homelessness Service System

Access Points

The Victorian Homelessness Service System is organised under the Opening Doors Framework with designated Access Points in each geographic division of the Department of Health and Human Services. (For details refer to section on 'Influence of Social Policies'.) Participants were asked to comment on their experiences of Access Points.

Positive experiences of Access Points

Only 15% of participants reported positive experiences in attending an access point to gain entry to the homelessness crisis support system.

Positive experiences were reported by young people who went to a service that was able to provide some immediate assistance, rather than a referral only. Participants described their experiences as 'good', because they:

- presented at a service where specialist homelessness workers from other crisis services were co-located, and were immediately linked in
- given assistance with food and material aid before leaving the premises
- received health checks, and felt supported saying: "[it] really helped. They did everything they could".

Negative experiences of Access Points

Negative experiences that were reported were due to a range of factors, including feeling uninformed of processes, feelings of judgement from workers, perceived excessive duration or waiting times, and confusion. The range of experiences listed is diverse.

One young woman who was nine months' pregnant felt the service she visited to be hugely under-resourced, suggesting they needed more employees, and that

despite being there early as instructed she did not receive support. She said:

> *"[I was] told to come back when I'm sleeping in my car, and I was by myself and I was due".*

Another young woman felt ill informed and frustrated at the experience, saying:

> *"It was pretty confusing cos [sic] I didn't know I had to line up out front. I got there half an hour early".*

After asking staff for assistance and being informed she had not arrived early enough, the young woman was distressed and said she was thinking:

> *"why is this happening to me, I just did all this to help myself and you're telling me I'm doing it wrong"?*

Though one young man had a positive experience with the service, he felt he received a very poor outcome, saying:

> *"[they] sent us to a Brooklyn caravan park and it was so dirty. Would have preferred to have no where".*

Many young people had strong responses regarding the way they are spoken to by adults in various capacities,

> *"when you're spoken down to its demeaning. It impacts on your self-worth".*

Trauma and Mental Illness

Experiencing homelessness is one of the most extreme types of disadvantage a person can face, and the social exclusion can be terrifying and traumatic (Flatau et al. 2015). 'Couch surfing' with friends, sleeping rough in squats, cars or public spaces, emergency accommodation in refuges, government-funded transitional housing, rooming houses, hostels or motels typify the lived experience of young people experiencing homelessness (Johnson, Gronda & Coutts 2008).

A recent study suggests around 86% of young people needed to 'couch surf' with friends or family before the age of 18. 52% of young people reported sleeping rough before the age of 18. (Flatau et al, 2015, p4).

53% of young people who participated in the same study were found to have been diagnosed with some sort of mental illness – with mood and anxiety disorders being the most common experienced. 20% of young women and 12% of young men had attempted suicide and a reported 55% of this group did not receive any professional support or counselling after the event (Flatau et al. 2015).

Homelessness Disadvantages Young People in Work and Education

The first experience of homelessness for young people is usually experienced while they are still at school (MacKenzie and Chamberlain p.195, cited in Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2004). Furthermore the majority of young people who become homeless will leave school (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 2004). Young people who have disengaged from education can often find it difficult to return, not for lack of willingness but due to diminished confidence or difficulty in the learning environment. Concerns attached to young people who have not completed year 12 include lower earning capacity, more time spent without employment, two times more likely to be unemployed by 24 years of age, have less opportunities for work experience (ANTA 2001, cited in Melbourne City Mission, 2012 p. 6).

A recent study found that only 31% of young people with experiences of homelessness had completed year 12, supporting claims that this population is more likely to leave school than young people in general (Flatau et al. 2015). Thus young people with experiences of homelessness are in a position of disadvantage entering the job market (Flatau et al. 2015; Boese & Scutella 2006). The same study identified an alarming 84% unemployment rate among homeless young people in the study, with 22% having never had paid work (Flatau et al. 2015).

Employment

In Victoria around 80% of young people surveyed acknowledged the influence of education and hard work on the career opportunities that may become available to them (Fildes et al. 2014). Yet shifts in employment patterns have been identified in Australia, with more young people being employed part-time than full-time and significant increases of casual employment (Boese & Scutella 2006).

Young people who participated in the study were asked about employment status and job seeking experiences. The status reported by young people is listed in table 4.

Table 4: Employment status at time of interview

	Not currently employed	Studying fulltime	Working full-time*	Working part-time	Casual employment**	Centrelink supported work experience and training (full-time)
No. of young people	11	2	3	1	2	1
**one young person not currently working as on work cover return to work program; another with full-time work also held a separate casual job* ***one young woman was only working one shift per week*						

Responses also demonstrated that 75% of interviewed participants rely on Centrelink payments for the majority of their income. When asked what would better assist with securing employment, responses outlined a range of points. Young people described job seeker agencies auspiced by Job Services Australia (JSA) as having little to no impact on their employability. When asked what would better help an interviewee in gaining employment one young woman stated:

> "*No more resume courses. I've done it like 4 times because of different services*."

Having rewritten her resume several times, the young woman felt no closer to employment. Another participant reported a need for specialist services for young people, saying:

> "*We need more JSAs that are actually for young people - that understand poverty and what it's like*".

Individual beneficial factors listed by the young people include:

- More connections
- Experience
- Qualifications
- Training
- Education "having none, leads to more poverty"
- Knowing people
- Having a car
- Getting a driving licence
- Training and skills that help towards goal
- Specific job training
- Deciding what to do
- Would be good to get some help
- Range of jobs made known (it's hard to know what options there are in life when you're young)

Structural factors listed by young people included:

- Affordable child care
- More job vacancies
- More opportunities for young people
- Job market needs to grow
- "Harder to get jobs these days"; "not much work out here"
- More volunteering and apprenticeship opportunities

Two comments outlined grievances young people had with educational pathways into employment, with one young person saying

> "*We need more opportunities to get experience; courses that lead to somewhere (i.e. linked with job opportunities)".*

Another comment was made on the amount of training that can be supported by Centrelink, saying

> "*You can only do two Certificate III before having to pay – it's difficult to know what you want to do as a career when young*".

Opportunity was listed as a major factor. Participants felt that businesses should be encouraged to hire young people, and reported instances of not being offered an interview for advertised positions. One young man (with a refugee background) said

> "*…references are important. Work's really hard to find cos [sic] you don't know people here*".

Comments were made regarding the difficulty of living independently at a young age while being relegated to junior pay rates.

> "*Wages are really bad when you are young so you need to get lots of jobs*".
>
> "*you don't get paid full wages until 21 – it's unfair - 18 would be fairer*"

Renting

Young people in Melton and surrounds reported difficulties gaining access to the private rental properties and cited the following main issues:

- inability to pay without bond/financial assistance
- discrimination against young tenants
- demanding application processes complicated by age of consent issues
- challenges in learning how to budget
- high expenditure on temporary accommodation eroding income/savings.

Six of the participants (30%) had never had a private rental property, but the remainder had been in private rental at some stage as an independent. Young people were asked about the hardest part about getting prepared for renting or rental applications. Experiences and responses varied greatly, but some commonality emerged in responses. Bond payment, application paperwork, discrimination and managing expenses were the challenges reported.

Bond

Around 25% of participants listed gathering funds to pay the bond as the most difficult part of renting. Young people reported bond to be very expensive, most participants required some assistance to pay part or whole of bond as they were not able to provide the funding independently.

Discrimination

30% of participants listed discrimination as the most challenging aspect of securing a rental property. Responses highlighted that in making an application for rental young people detected judgmental undertones and assumptions towards them.

> "*Some people think 18 year olds are not responsible".*

Young people felt discriminated against due to their lack of rental history and feel this is a huge barrier towards being accepted into the private market.

> "*Not many people are willing to give us a go*".

Young people made reference to how social networks can make a huge difference in getting accepted for rental properties.

> "*Depends who you know. No one wants to let a kid have a house, they think they're gonna [sic] trash it*";
>
> "*It's not easy when you never rented and you're on your own. People who rent they don't give houses to you cos [sic] they see you as a risk, with a single income. Prefer to lease to 'who they know'*".

Application paperwork

Around 45% listed the paperwork as a challenge. The act of compiling and gathering all relevant documentation and understanding forms was challenging in itself for some. Forms were described as 'tricky' and demanded some time and effort to complete. Furthermore most young people completed these forms with no adult assistance. Phrases such as 'how to navigate through it' and 'having to work it out for myself' and 'not knowing how' to make applications characterised the responses and demonstrate a sense of trepidation in the process.

> "*…homeless [young people] don't have family to advocate for them [through application the process]".*
>
> *"[..language in the paperwork] assumes everyone passed year 12 and understands it, I was lucky to have someone to explain it to me.*

There were additional complications in signing forms due to being under 18 years of age, with extra paperwork required:

> *"It didn't seem fair they ask for so much information*".

Expenses and budgeting

Participants discussed income and expenditure in a range of ways. Young people with experiences in the private rental market were acutely aware of need for budgeting and the need to develop budgeting skills:

> "*Maintaining and looking after a rental property is tough on budget*".
>
> "*…it's hard to manage money when you are young*".
>
> *"…less money means less choice*"

Participants acknowledged that stable income is crucial to be able to rent in the private market. Discussing rental expenses a young woman said:

> "*Bills come all at once and it's hard - rent and bills - if you don't keep on top of it. You need to be responsible - don't buy play station straight up, you will have to save*".

The expenses of temporary accommodation and shared accommodation were labelled to be too high by participants. One young woman had been paying $200 per week for temporary shared accommodation.

The cost of paying for temporary accommodation while searching for a rental was listed as a big challenge by 15% of participants.

> "*…money gets spent on trying to stay somewhere temporary and by the time you get a place your savings are reduced*".
>
> "*…before getting a private rental your money gets spent on hotels and food*".

Naturally these expenses are exacerbated the longer it takes to find long-term accommodation. In one case a young woman and her younger brother inspected and applied for 28 separate rental properties in the Melton area before getting one. One young woman attributes this success to having the support of a specialist youth housing worker when applying for the house she was finally accepted for.

Key issues that young people face when trying to gain access to private rental properties are discrimination and affordability. Discrimination is formed on the basis of age and associated stereotypes, particularly for young people receiving payments from Centrelink.

Young people often need to be supported into private rental, with many reliant on parental guarantees or letters of support from workers. This suggests a need for better support structure in the rental market, particularly for young people with no rental referees. The income levels set by Centrelink form a barrier to renting, as incomes at this level cannot cover the cost of running a household (Waters 2003).

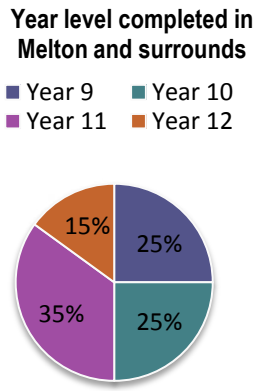
Education

In response to questions around education young people from Melton and surrounds reported:

- they did not leave high school because they wanted to but left because the pressure of housing instability or supporting themselves was too great (60%)
- they were engaging in some sort of training or higher education at the time of this study (60%)
- they had finished year 12 (15%)
- While there is some capacity of schools to deliver successful early intervention/prevention programs to maintain engagement, 50% of participants did not feel their secondary school adequately supported them to remain at school
- overwhelmingly that school was a place of connection for them.

Of the participants, eight young people were not enrolled in any study. The remainder of participants were either newly enrolled[16] or continuing their studies at TAFE. One was engaged in online studies, and another was working full time as part of a traineeship. One young man stated he was looking to enrol but cost and travel distance had created barriers as there were no options in Melton

.**Table 5: Year level completed at school**



Participants discussed their experiences at school positively and negatively. Positive aspects listed were socialising and learning. Only 10% of participants had no positive comments, but over 60% said they did not leave school because they wanted to but the pressure of housing instability or supporting themselves was too great. One young man said of school: "*I couldn't afford it*", recognising he needed to earn more to support himself.

One young woman said

> "*if you're not learning you're wasting your brain. I was doing quite well scholastically, but mental health impacted a lot on support needed and the faculty was not able to give that support*".

A different young woman had felt unsupported in her learning by her school and made the decision not to return to year 12, feeling that the pressure was too great. A young man became disengaged and: "*…left because of depression and anxiety [associated with homelessness]*".

Over 50% of participants shared this sentiment of feeling not supported by their school, but reasons varied greatly. They included:

- feeling unheard and unsupported among large class sizes
- anxiety and stress experienced in classroom settings
- difficulty with certain areas of learning
- feeling unsupported or judged by welfare staff
- feeling unsupported or judged by careers advisory staff
- bullying
- discouraged by school to continue attending due to poor attendance and complex behaviours
- expulsion
- experiencing depression or anxiety

Other participants reported positive experiences and their school provided a supportive role. A young woman said:

> *"School was good and supportive when my mum was in hospital. They helped me pass [despite poor attendance]. But I had to leave - couldn't afford to be at school, Centrelink was not enough to live off*".

Another young woman who had become homeless at 16 remained in schooling until graduating year 12. She said of her schooling:

> *"I liked it a lot - loved it - was really good. It was hard being underage living away from home though, hard to study and hard to have a social life and keep friends*".

Participants reported overwhelmingly that school was a place of connection for them. Socialising and developing peer networks were a feature in discussion in many interviews.

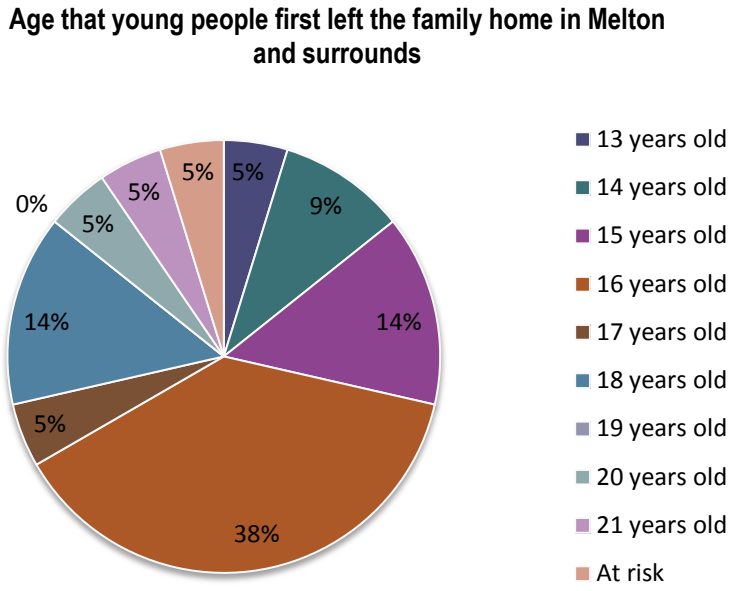
[16] Some of the participants were not currently studying but were in the process of enrolling in studies for 2015. As the interview period was in January and February when enrolment was being finalised some young people identified as 'not currently working' were actually planning to enrol, or had enrolled but were yet to begin. Those that had already made enrollment were included as 'newly enrolled'.

Family

By far the age when most participants first left the family home was 16 years of age.

66% were 13 -16 years of age.

Table 6: Age young people first left home in Melton and surrounds



Around 50% of the participants reported recurring experiences of homelessness. The above graph represents the first instance of homelessness.

The reasons for leaving the family home were vast but three strong themes have emerged. Participants cited the following reasons for leaving the family home:

- family violence (25%)
- pressure from the family to move out due to financial constraints or overcrowding (25%)
- family breakdown due to issues such as parental physical or mental illness, poor relationships and conflict (50%)

Family violence

25% of participants needed to leave the family home due to reported family violence.

Experiences of violence varied greatly, and young people reported physical, sexual, emotional and financial abuse. Abuse was perpetrated by parents in some cases, but also by grandparents, step-parents in others, and extended family.

One young woman who became homeless at 13 years old described:

> *"A lot of fighting going on [at home].Mum would lose her temper and get violent. I was sick of being surrounded by 'dropkicks'. It was a leap of faith, things might be better out of home".*

A different young woman experienced a range of abuses in her family and became hospitalised in her adolescence. Family mediation processes[17] that were implemented led to an incident where the young person reported:

> *"my dad invited me back home to discuss things, but he was drunk and made threats. I could tell things were gonna [sic] happen. I realised I had to move on to look after myself".*

This young woman experienced homelessness again, living in a shed with her then partner, who became abusive and unsafe to live with.

Pressure from family to move out

The circumstances described by 25% of the participants demonstrated that there was pressure from their family to move on from the family home for a range of structural reasons rather than intra-family breakdown. Three young people were asked to move out, or came to a 'mutual decision' with their parents when aged 18-20. In two

[17] It should be noted that while family mediation can be very effective in reconciliation in the instance of family conflict, other more protective interventions would be appropriate in cases of family violence. Family violence behaviours of one party seeking to gain power and control can undermine mediation processes and could place a victim at greater risk of escalating violence.

instances overcrowding in the family home was creating an unsustainable environment. One young woman at risk of homelessness is living with her two children in her parents' lounge room, in a three bedroom house with total of nine occupants. She said:

> "*It's very loud. The kids are taking over - creating tensions with mum".*

Another was living in a three bedroom public housing property until the family had to relocate due to poor property maintenance:

> *"[it was] dilapidated to the point of being unliveable. We were relocated to a first available [public housing] property which is only two bedrooms. I slept in the lounge*".

This situation proved untenable, and the family made the mutual decision the young person would need to move out.

Another young woman agreed to move out due to economic hardships the family was facing. Living with older siblings, it was decided that this young person was the most financially stable of the children, and in the best position to move on. She explained:

> "*The family financial situation was hard. They wanted me to be independent. I was at a point where I was ready".*

Two young men faced the separation from their families across international borders. One asylum seeker left his country of origin due to violent conflict, and became homeless after being released from immigration detention. He said of his home country:

> *"[you] only hope to get back home alive if you go out during the day - there's no guarantee - if I wasn't here, I'd have been killed".*

Another young man who became homeless at 18 had been separated from his family. His father had moved to New Zealand, but the young man chose not to leave his home in Melton stating:

> "*I couldn't leave cos [sic] my friends are here, my job is here, I'm better off here*".

Family conflict and breakdown

Around 50% of participants cited conflict and/or family breakdown as their reason for leaving. Some young people explained that conflict in their family led to relationship breakdowns and progressed into a permanent breakdown, such as the following young woman's experience:

> *"Me and mum had more conflict than a normal mum and daughter.....I couldn't take it anymore".*

Another young woman described her family circumstances as 'family drama'– her biological father moved in and out of the home frequently, creating disruptions to environment and relationships. She needed to leave when "*it all built up*". Conflict was described in other cases as consistent and ongoing: *"Me and Dad used to fight all the time"*.

Mental and physical illness contributed to the conflict in the families of three of the participants. One young woman became homeless after her father had a heart attack. The relationship between father and daughter had been fraught prior to the incident, and continued to be conflict-ridden. She was 'kicked out' by her mother who perceived the conflict too risky for the father's condition. The young woman said:

> "*Mum thought I was gonna [sic] kill him*".

Another young woman became homeless reportedly due to her mother's drug addiction. Her mother had relocated to live in a car with her then partner. The young woman was left to care for her siblings and became overwhelmed. She relocated to her father's house and was forced to return to her mother's after experiencing physical abuse from her father. Escalating conflict led to the young woman leaving home to live with her grandmother. The young woman then:

> *"…had to leave Nan's because mum had come to stay".*

Another young woman left school to care for her brother with severe ADHD, and her mother who had been caring for him but developed severe depression and became suicidal. The pressure on the family increased and the young woman reported a lot of fighting. Mediation was attempted but the young woman said:

> *"Mum became agitated, non-cooperative and left mediation".*

Another young woman was renting in Melton with her partner and young family. They became homeless for a second time when her partner experienced illness and their income was drastically reduced, impacting on their ability to maintain rental costs.

Where Did They Go?

When young people in Melton and surrounds left the family home 85% of participants received immediate accommodation from friends, extended family and partners. None of the young people found permanent long-term housing in the location they stayed in immediately after leaving the family home.

The interview responses highlighted that young people predominantly use their networks when they become homeless. Friends, extended families and partners provided accommodation for 85% of participants. This included moving in with a partner, friends of partner, grandparents, an older sibling, a cousin, staying at a friend's place for a few nights (sleeping on the couch), and staying at a friend's place longer (leasing, occupying or sharing a room for a 'few months').

Of the participants that did not use their networks one stayed in a youth refuge, one moved directly into share accommodation, a gradual process supported by the young

person's foster parents, one spent the night at a 24 hour service station - remaining awake until a time of the morning they felt it appropriate to make contact to a friend for help.

Of the young people able to relocate to other family members or friends homes, none of them found permanent solutions in this relocation. They were only able to stay at friends and families places for short periods until either asked to move on, or they took the initiative to leave recognising pressures on the household due to their presence. One participant said they had to stay "*here, there and everywhere*".

A result of the instability of such housing options meant that young people often had to stay in a variety of other settings before finding sustainable accommodation.

Other locations that young people stayed in the months or weeks after leaving the family home are listed below:

- in a car
- in hospital
- in foster care
- in a hotel
- in a shed
- interstate refuges
- parks
- on the street
- abandoned houses
- under a shade cloth at the beach
- train stations
- the casino (public area).

A tactic adopted by 15% of the participants was to remain awake, "*hanging around all hours" if they had no accommo*dation for the night.

Concerned with safety and the vulnerability of sleeping rough, this seemed to be a last resort for the young people interviewed and one young man said:

> *"I would not sleep if I had nowhere to go that night"*.

Where Did They Get Help?

As experiences were vastly different so were responses regarding who was of assistance in this period of transition. However speaking generally young people reported receiving help either from services, or from their networks.

15% of the participants reported that there was no one there to help them when they left the family home. 15% reported that their school helped. 20% did not list any service as having helped, and only viewed their friends and family networks as having assisted.

One young man said:

> "*people that got paid helped*".

At the time of becoming homeless, 35% of participants had no income at all, 15% were earning an income through work and the remaining 50% were receiving a Centrelink payment. Two of the Centrelink recipients said they had no access to their payment because a parent or guardian kept the full amount.

Emotional Responses

Young people reported a range of emotional and psychological responses to becoming homeless including:

- only negative feelings (55%)
- a mixture of feelings, some negative, some optimistic (45%)
- suicidal ideation while homeless (20%).

The range of feelings associated with becoming homeless are as vast in scope as the experiences themselves.

Table 7: Feelings experienced by young people when homeless

Some young people experienced negative feelings only and reported feeling:	**Mixed feelings included:**
• unwanted by parents • unwanted by grandparents • drained • frustrated • worthless • judged • terrified • angry • upset • hopeless • depressed • down for a while • scared and worried • sad • hungry • lost • suicidal	• excitement for independence and starting a life • endless possibilities • daunted • relieving • stressful • sometimes wanting to go home • relief • happy but stressed • scared • stressed out • overwhelmed • weight lifted • confident • in a good place • mixed emotions, confusion • pressure

One young woman said the experience was:

> *"nerve wracking, I was always worried if I had somewhere to stay that night".*

A young man said

> "*doesn't feel good, not being wanted or cared about*".

Another young man said he was:

> "*in a really bad place*".

Others reported bittersweet feelings as there was promise and hope for an independent future but marked with disappointment or grief associated with circumstances in the family home and anxiety for the future. This is encapsulated well in this comment by a young woman saying she was:

> *"…relieved about some things. Upset though - sad my mother stormed out of mediation. I felt pretty bad about myself".*

One young person said being independent was:

> *"…like going on a rollercoaster for the first time, it's exciting as you go up and then you go over the edge and it's terrifying".*

Some more serious psychological feelings were disclosed. One young mother with two children said:

> *"I would just sit and cry".*

15% of participants described dissociative tactics, with one young woman stating:

> "*You have to cut off and not feel anything to survive, otherwise you feel completely mad*".

A young man shared a similar experience saying that he:

> "*…hated the world. Had a chip on my shoulder but it turned from bad to worse.....I was emotional for about a year - depressed, hopeless, lost, abandoned. After the first year had to block out all feeling*".

Most Difficult Aspects of Homelessness

While experiencing homelessness, young people in Melton and surrounds reported the most difficult aspects to be:

- getting access to Centrelink entitlements without parental co-operation or fixed address
- high cost of temporary accommodation (hotels/motels/caravan parks)
- experiencing hunger and not being able to afford regular meals
- pressure on social connections
- difficulty building a foundation with much stability
- difficulty forging new relationships while homeless.

Access to Centrelink

Young people reported difficulties getting Centrelink support after having become homeless. Challenges faced included non-compliant or unavailable parents not signing forms; parents withholding young person's entitlements; having no fixed address; and not having sufficient points of identification.

Budgeting

Young people reported struggling to budget with such limited income. Many reported 'learning the hard way' through experiences such as spending the majority of a fortnightly payment on groceries, and having little left for the remainder of the period. One young woman explained:

> *"Once I spent too much on food, then there was not enough for transport. Stress!"*

Other expenses young people said they struggled to meet were transport costs, laundromat costs, and in some cases the cost of replacing items abandoned or withheld by people in previous dwellings.

Food

Around 40% of the young people interviewed reported being hungry and not having enough income for regular meals as one of the greatest challenges. Of these participants three experienced this as parents and two were mothers with infant children.

Relationships

Social isolation was listed by some young people as the most difficult element of homelessness. Young people with a vehicle and license felt this less, but affected nonetheless. One young man reported *"not having any friends and not going out"* was the most trying aspect of his experience. Other young people noted that being homeless can place immense pressure on relationships:

> *"[it is] hard as it's putting a toll on relationships*".

"I had to ask friends a lot of favours and often wait to see if it's ok with their parents".

Speaking of the challenges in building and creating new relationships while homeless one young woman observed very astutely:

"when they see you're vulnerable, people either help, or you get exploited".

Building a foundation

Around 30% of the participants reported having no home and looking for accommodation options as the hardest part of homelessness. They spoke about the difficulties in finding short term accommodation, or even finding somewhere for one night:

"[it's]... hard to get stability without [having some] stability".

"*..using all your energy to get through the day you can't study, can't work, can't save, can't work towards something with no foundation or base, money comes in, goes out*".

"finding a place to stay at all. I was staying in the car while doing physical work every day....And hunger. I'd eat once per day. I would buy fish and chips to get a hot meal".

Speaking of social isolation this young asylum seeker said:

"[it was] hard to talk to people... [I am] not the sort of guy, not really an outgoing person so it was hard to talk to people and get to know people".

Another young woman said the worst part was 'having no roof':

"…when it was raining it was the worst, sleeping in wet clothes".

A young woman who had moved from her family home into shared accommodation before becoming homeless described her feelings from a different perspective. Living in supported transitional accommodation with rules and restrictions provided some challenges:

"*The fact we couldn't have anyone stay over makes it really hard, cos [sic] the first night it would have been better if my sister or partner had stayed, they can give you reassurance. Imagination runs rampant, the fact we couldn't have anyone stay over, makes it really hard, coming from a house where there's constantly noise to a house where you are actually on your own, it's daunting and intimidating and you find yourself freaking out to every little noise*".

Existing supportive community networks

One striking finding is the role of schools in addressing youth homelessness. Findings suggest that in Melton and surrounds there are a lot of early intervention strategies being employed extremely effectively, with well integrated and timely responses supporting young people towards good outcomes. Networks are in place and relationships between educational institutions and service organisations have been instrumental in supportive specialist interventions. However the proportion of young people reporting a lack of support cannot be ignored. There is potential that some challenging behaviours or biased perceptions on the part of young people were apparent in some circumstances, yet young people with complex behaviours still have a right to timely and responsive support.

The findings suggest that while there is a lot being done very effectively in Melton there is scope to strengthen and improve the integrated framework between schools and services.

The influence of social policies on youth homelessness is a vast subject which can only be minimally addressed in this research and report.

The social policies identified as having significant impact on youth homelessness are the Victorian Homelessness Action Plan, the Federal Government's Youth Connections initiative, The Open Doors Framework, the Federal Budget cuts to Truancy officers and Youth Connections and visa restrictions.

Policy gaps identified by participants included:

- the very limited availability of an Opening Doors Access Point outpost in Melton with most young people being directed to Sunshine or Glenroy over 25 km away
- the removal of funding from the effective Youth Connections program that had demonstrated success in preventing disengagement from education training and work
- concentration of liquor outlets in low socio-economic areas
- better regulation of rooming houses
- lack of understanding and commitment to community capacity building by developers/private enterprise
- school enrolment policy based solely on age of student.

These findings are discussed in more detail below.

Opening Doors Framework

The Opening Doors Framework[18] (Opening Doors) was the most prominent theme raised by participants regarding the influence of social policy. Opening Doors aims to provide an integrated and co-ordinated response by having a limited number of designated access points into the homelessness system. If someone is homeless or at risk of becoming homeless and needs help to find housing or support they go to one of these entry points. [19] The purpose of these access points is to assess needs, prioritise and connect people to the services and resources they need. Each Department of Health and Human Services division has at least one of these access points.

Young people from Melton and surrounds reported attending access points in Sunshine, Glenroy, Seddon and Melbourne CBD.

Table 8: **Approximate Distance of Homelessness Access Points from Melton**

Location of Access Point	Distance km
Sunshine	26.5
Glenroy	43
Seddon	35
Melbourne CBD	35+

There is a Housing Access Point outpost located at the Council's Civic Centre. None of the young people that participated in the study were aware of it. This is most likely a result of the limited hours of operation of the service available only Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and that service is by appointment only. People need to first call the Sunshine Office directly to arrange an appointment at the Melton outpost.

While in theory the Opening Doors initiative is to increase equitable access to the Homelessness Service System, in reality it places barriers to young people living in Melton. Most Access Points:

- are only open from 9am -5pm Monday to Friday and closed on public holidays
- require people to present in person for an intake assessment (intake and assessments are not undertaken over the phone)
- have a toll free number (which does not work with mobile phones)
- should operate a drop-in service but in reality most require people to present at 9 am in order to receive an appointment for that day

It is extremely difficult for young people in Melton to meet the early morning requirement, not only because their biology requires them to sleep longer in the mornings[20] but also because they have limited transport options- namely an infrequent VLine service from Melton to Sunshine and Melbourne.

Only one Access Point is youth specific - the Melbourne Youth Support Service (MYSS) located over 35 km away in the Melbourne CBD. Unfortunately this service only deals with crisis accommodation needs.

Barriers to accessing Access Points are highlighted in the experiences of participants with only 15% reporting positive experiences of Access Points (Refer to section Lived experiences of Young People in Melton and Surrounds.) Moreover barriers for accessing Access

[18] For an overview of the *Opening Doors* framework, please visit: http://chp.org.au/homelessness/about-victorias-homelessness-system/support-services/the-opening-doors-framework/

[19] Taken from Council to Homeless Persons website http://chp.org.au/homelessness/about-victorias-homelessness-system/support-services/the-opening-doors-framework/

[20] The Better Health Channel www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Teenagers_and_sleep

Points are further impacted by geographical isolation and infrequent public transport.

Victorian Homelessness Action Plan

The State Government of Victoria's (2011) *Victorian Homelessness Action Plan 2011-2015* values a multifaceted approach to addressing general homelessness. The service system must have the capacity to respond to homelessness in its various manifestations, as well as placing focus on early intervention and prevention.

The overarching aspiration of the service system is to place the client at the centre of interventions and to respond to the individual needs and circumstance of clients, drawing supports in mainstream health education and employment as well as specialist housing and homelessness services. Strategic innovations coupled with integrated services are required, and the strategy aims to better target resources to the appropriate area of intervention (State Government of Victoria 2011).

A fundamental approach contained in the *Victorian Homelessness Action Plan 2011-2015* is to galvanise linkages between education, work, and housing stability.

Youth Connections

Commencing in 2010 the federally funded Youth Connections Program consisted of a network of community-based organisations funded to support and assist young people who were at risk of 'falling through the cracks' to maintain or renew their engagement in education, training and employment. Contained within the *National Partnership Agreement on Youth Attainment and Transitions*, Youth Connections was an initiative to address disengagement among young people from education or workplace participation.

The data regarding client outcomes demonstrated the program made 'a measurable contribution to improving participation' (DEEWR 2012). As a national network there were 65 providers across Australia covering 113 regions, assisting approximately 30,000 young people. The cost to the Commonwealth of the national Youth Connections program was approximately $80 million a year (Senate Report, 2015, p14). However as of 1st January 2015, the Youth Connections Program was defunded.

In its Media Release on 4th February 2015, VCOSS suggested the Federal Government had taken the wrong approach by defunding Youth Connections, particularly when it came to tackling youth unemployment as it was leaving a significant gap in service provision for young people.

Data demonstrate that of the young people who exited the program in 2012, 93.4% (or 780 young people) were still engaged in education, employment, traineeship or apprenticeship six months after leaving the program. After 18 months 80.2% remained engaged in learning or employment. Prior to commencing the program young people had been disengaged from education or work from six months up to two years (Youth Connections 2014). Indigenous young people experienced good outcomes too, with 88.7% still engaged six months after leaving the program. The majority are financially independent of Centrelink assistance and have positive aspirations and future plans.

Youth Connections clients were considered one of the most disadvantaged cohorts of young people in Australia. Barriers faced by this group, linked with long-term disengagement from education, include falling behind their peers educationally, complex mental health barriers, low self-esteem and low levels of literacy and numeracy. Of this cohort there were 14.6% indigenous and 6.54% CALD young people.

Data demonstrates that Youth Connections is highly effective at supporting young people who are disengaged, increasing individual capacity to become independent and productive and fostering higher overall levels of work participation (Youth Connections 2014).

Federal Budget Implications

A federal budgetary decision made late in 2014 is likely to influence youth homelessness in Melton. The discontinuation of the *Youth Connections*[21] program has potential to foster greater disengagement among young people, as the program was highly effective. The critical nature of such a program is highlighted through the following comments made by a support services worker:

"Two significant changes have taken place which have had a significant impact on education and training retention and attendance- Education department truancy officers were defunded and it appears to be 'a no man's land' as to whose responsibility it is for children to actually attend school; it appears that it is no longer compulsory for young people to attend school. We have come into contact with many young people (and I mean 5 or 6 years of age) who have missed what equates to months of school; An example is a young man that I know (13 years of age) was withdrawn from school for a year by his parent and no-one followed this up- not the school or the Education Department; It appears that many young people are missing large chunks of school and this is not being addressed;

The other significant factor is that Youth Connections has been defunded by the Federal Government. - This was a significant referral pathway for young people who were disengaged from school and education; These young

[21] Youth Connections in the news: http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2014/07/23/4051800.htm

people will now be without the guidance that could see them linked into pathways that could significantly impact upon their futures"

Participants commented on social security policy impacting on the capacity of people to support themselves. They identified the pressures of obtaining support from Centrelink, particularly with strict eligibility criteria for receiving the 'living away from home' allowance, They also identified that the allowance received from Centrelink for young people who were homeless made it very difficult to make ends meet and equated to living below the poverty line[22].

Participants believed the Federal Government funding cuts have the potential to impact harsher on outer growth corridors, because larger services often establish outposts in growth areas to cope with the growing demand. Unfortunately these outposts tend to be the first to close as the impact of budget cuts take effect.

Visa Restrictions

Reference was made to issues faced by families who have migrated to Australia, particularly those who emigrated from New Zealand. Immigration visa policy restricts eligibility for welfare allowances for people and families arriving after 2001[23].

> "*…families from New Zealand arriving after 2001 get no Centrelink, impacting on overcrowding and pressure at home and a casualised workforce and job insecurity*".

Policy Oversights or Gaps

Feedback from support services identified a range of circumstances in the community which have not been adequately addressed in social policy arenas.

They identified the need for better regulation of rooming houses. A policy outlining minimum standards for the sector was released in 2013[24] addressing this. However many young people reported feeling unsafe and unsupported in rooming houses, suggesting scope for improvement regarding regulation of tenancies.

Participants referred to the concentration of liquor outlets in low socio-economic areas. Released in 2011 by Turning Point and VicHealth[25], research identified the access to alcohol was skewed towards disadvantaged areas, with six times more takeaway outlets and four times more pubs and licensed venues than less disadvantaged areas nearby. This is also discussed in the section of this report titled '*Facets of Youth Homelessness in Melton and Surrounds'*.

Participants believed that there was a greater role for developers/private enterprise in outer growth corridor communities to contribute to community capacity building.

A worker engaged in multicultural service delivery raised an issue of migrant and refugee school enrolment policy. Also discussed in this report in the section titled '*Facets of Youth Homelessness in Melton and Surrounds'* – allocating young people from different educational backgrounds to year levels based on age alone, has the potential to further marginalise this population. The worker reported clients that are not at the same scholastic level as their contemporaries become disengaged and drop out.

[22] ACOSS report *Poverty in Australia*: http://www.acoss.org.au/uploads/ACOSS%20Poverty%20Report%202012_Final.pdf

[23] Immigration status and entitlements of New Zealand residents of Australia: http://www.nzembassy.com/australia/new-zealanders-overseas/living-australia/immigration-status-new-zealanders-australia

[24] See here for *Standards in Rooming House and Rental Accommodation*: http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/policies,-guidelines-and-legislation/standards-in-rooming-house-and-rental-accommodation

[25] The report is available here: https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/report-on-liquor-outlets-and-socio-economic-areas-in-victoria

In summary

- Statistically, Aboriginal and Torres Strait people are over represented in all aspects of homelessness including youth homelessness.
- Refugees and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are 6-10 times more likely to experience homelessness than other young people. They are more likely to have suffered trauma and to find it difficult to trust and approach services.
- Young people from culturally diverse backgrounds (CALD) experience language barriers as well as tension between their family culture and that of Australian society. They fear stigma from their cultural group as well as the community in general when approaching support and thus have a tendency to "go it alone".
- The intersection between mental illness, housing instability and homelessness is well documented with 75% of young people experiencing homelessness also experiencing mental illness. Mental illness is both a driver and a result of homelessness in young people.
- Young women have added impacts and barriers. They are more likely to have had experience of family violence and have responsibility for bringing up a child alone. Young mothers face greater social isolation and are often hesitant to approach support services. These findings are discussed below.

Young people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Backgrounds

According to Barrett and Cataldo (2012) young people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds experience the highest rates of homelessness. National data collection as part of the *Counting the Homeless 2006 Project* supports claims that Indigenous young people are at greater risk of homelessness than non-Indigenous (MacKenzie & Chamberlain 2008). The Brotherhood of St Laurence's social barometer report identified that Indigenous people generally are at higher risk of being a victim of personal crime, and thus have tendencies of feeling unsafe (Boese & Scutella 2006).

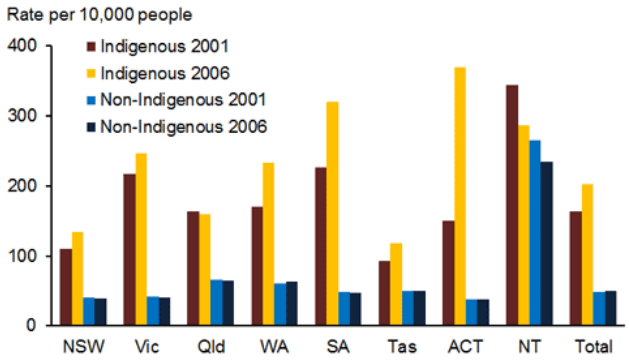
Compared with non-Indigenous Australians Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the last census:

- had four times the rate of homelessness (191 per 10,000 compared with 49 per 10,000 in the 2006
- made up 9% of the total homeless population (Indigenous people make up around 2.5% of the whole Australian population)
- were more likely to sleep rough or in improvised dwellings and shelters, than non-Indigenous Australians (27% compared with 15%). 26

Homelessness has increased for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people between 2001 and 2006. Non-Indigenous homelessness remained relatively unchanged. This was the same in most states and territories. In the Northern Territory homelessness fell for both population groups.

The following table shows the disturbing differences in the rate of homelessness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples compared with non Indigenous people.

Table 9: **Homeless population by state and territory, 2001 and 2006**



Source: Indigenous Observatory/ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare website http://www.aihw.gov.au/indigenous-observatory-homelessness/

Statistically Aboriginal and Torres Strait people are over represented in all aspects of homelessness including youth homelessness. Given the City of Melton has a large Indigenous population and one that is continuing to grow, this report puts forward the following recommendations:

Consult with the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people regarding the further exploration of youth homelessness, the impact and solutions by:

- building relationships with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and consulting with community based organisations, programs and services that already exist in the area and by ensuring that Indigenous perspectives are represented in meaningful non-tokenistic ways
- scoping out possible Memoranda of Understanding and partnerships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, programs and services
- ensure Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander representation in the membership of the Hope Street Youth Homelessness In Melton Advisory Group.

[26] Indigenous Observatory/ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare website http://www.aihw.gov.au/indigenous-observatory-homelessness/

Young Refugees

Young people from refugee backgrounds are at risk of homelessness six to ten times more than their Australian-born counterparts (CMY 2010). Systemic barriers create an inability for many to access safe and appropriate housing, and without adequate support are at high risk of homelessness impacting on success of settlement. Risk factors as part of the refugee experience include long periods living in unsafe or untenable temporary environments, separation from friends and family, extended periods in transitional refugee processing environments restricting social, emotional and physical development (CMY 2010). Young refugees face many barriers to employment including the need to develop English skills, lack of relevant Australian work experience and often no local referees (Boese & Scutella 2006).

Young refugees often grow up within a context of trauma, violence and doubt. To overcome this and successfully and safely resettle in a new home, it will require a range of factors that promote wellbeing, including housing, health care, employment, education, income support and potentially family reunification. With this practical foundation emotional wellbeing and recovery can be facilitated and young refugees can develop a sense of self, a sense of safety or security, dignity and worth, self-determination, and a sense of belonging. From this point there is potential for young refugees to process the profound grief and loss experienced (Buesnel & Fielding 2014).

Social support services are integral in fostering social inclusion and community connections and providing opportunity for this marginalised group. Seemingly simple activities such as a barbeque or soccer match have great potential to provide young asylum seekers with familiarly and regularity. Youth services can have a profound impact on the social and emotional wellbeing of young people seeking asylum, particularly those that offer flexible approaches i.e. after hours supports and service provision during periods of vulnerability for young people (Buesnel & Fielding 2014).

Young People from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds

Melton City Council identifies challenges faced by service providers, noting the need for enhanced cultural awareness among organisations in the area. Another challenge faced is developing effective modes of promoting service availability to CALD communities that may have little or no awareness of available help. (Melton City Council 2012).

While young people can be marginalised by means other than gender and ethnicity, respondents in the findings identified only two main groups experiencing marginalisation in Melton and surrounds which has guided the presentation of the findings: young people with CALD backgrounds and young women.

Community service workers in Melton reported that members of CALD communities face barriers in the Melton area due to:

- cultural minority status
- negative views of seeking help outside of the family
- lack of awareness of service availability
- language barriers impacting on capacity to engage with bureaucracies
- perceived stigma developed through CALD community members engaging with services.

All of the ten participating agencies reported working with clients of CALD, refugee and Indigenous backgrounds.

> "*…mirror the structural issues [faced by CALD groups] in the wider community i.e. poverty and poor health outcomes, Indigenous disadvantage, displacement, racism, cultural issues*".

Similarly issues faced by the whole community were also reported to impact CALD youth homelessness, i.e. family breakdown, employment availability and sustainability and intergenerational tensions. Beyond these there are a set of issues experienced by CALD communities discretely.

Cultural differences

The strongest of the themes was the issue of cultural difference. Participants referred to the challenges of multiculturalism in two ways:

- the issues CALD families experience being a cultural minority, and
- the cultural barriers towards seeking assistance outside of the family.

For refugees and migrants, challenges are inherent in relocating and handling the transition and cultural hegemony of a new place. One worker commented on challenges of assimilating into a new culture, stating:

> "*…refugees have one foot in each camp (traditional culture + aussie [sic] culture)".*

Speaking generally of people with CALD backgrounds one worker suggested fear of judgment from their own cultural community is a powerful barrier to seeking assistance beyond it. One worker listed "*cultural family pressure"* as a factor for further marginalisation, particularly in terms of societal expectations, one worker citing different "*patriarchal values and cultural gender role"* as a factor. The cultural barriers were commented on in terms of attitudes towards accessing or accepting support generally. However one worker suggested that "*gendered cultural norms of not conversing with women"* provide a formidable barrier in working with CALD communities. This is particularly of interest, as typically the ratio of genders in social services is significantly skewed towards women.

Another worker said that:

> "*....refugees from UNHCR camps are more likely to access services, others are often not likely to engage with services".*

Two workers commented on awareness and understanding of welfare culture of developed Western countries, and suggested *"lack of awareness of services available"*, and "*...not knowing of services available or the processes associated"* create powerful barriers.

Language barriers

Another prominent theme was 'language'. Many participants referred to language barriers as one of the most significant issues faced by CALD groups. Most participants commented generally on this, referring to the range of areas in life that demand communication skills to navigate the system. However some comments were made with direct reference to language as a barrier to accessing social services. One worker said:

> "*paperwork and bureaucracy is a big barrier for those not confident with English*".

Stigma and service use

The stigma faced by CALD groups was discussed in terms of the impact on groups, and how stigma has developed. A multicultural worker noted the stigma of ethnic minorities, particularly in small communities is often generated through increased visibility of CALD communities drawing community attention and scrutiny more so than other groups. Referring directly to homelessness the outcome for those attuned to this stigma is the pressure to 'hide' the problem. One worker observed that people from CALD backgrounds often:

> "*don't want to contribute to stigmatisation of community, if they speak up for help they could be viewed as asking for handouts*".

The outcome of this double-edged sword, as stated by one worker is the stress placed on minority groups to 'handle things' alone. It was noted that:

> "*In some CALD communities homelessness is invisible – people are living with relatives etc. In other CALD communities this is not the case and they end up in services, lending to perceptions that they are 'problems' that they can't fit in and it's their fault (often a background of trauma and intergenerational cultural expectations apply)*".

Cross-cultural tension

The tension between culture of origin and Australian culture was cited by many interview participants as having a profound impact on homelessness. One worker commented on a typical pathway for young people in such circumstances. Beginning with: "*inter-cultural and inter-generational tensions at home, this leads to family breakdown, then education breakdown, and young people spiralling downward*".

The risk for young people as a result of this marginalisation was discussed in a gendered way by one participant. A multicultural worker claimed that: *"young people, particularly women are at higher risk of family violence and pregnancy impacting on housing size or safety. For young men they are often drawn into the justice system".* It was noted in the same interview that both genders experience shame in losing their housing security, often "*experienced in not being able to provide, particularly for men, and worrying about kids*"

Resettlement and trauma

Refugee and asylum seeker populations were discussed separately by some workers, identifying a discrete set of issues faced by this CALD group. Impacting on young people's mental and physical wellbeing are experiences of trauma and Post Traumatic stress Disorder (PTSD).This can exacerbate the challenges of transition and resettlement. Furthermore it was noted that refugees and newly arrived migrants have limited awareness of services available that could potentially assist. Trauma was noted to have a further impact on the capacity to trust, and in turn this decreased the likelihood of resettled young people to approach services for assistance. One worker commented on the lasting effects of trauma, identifying that those with a refugee background have a much higher exposure and experience of trauma.

Young People with a Mental Illness

The intersection between mental illness, housing instability and homelessness is well canvassed, with recent figures suggesting up to 75% of young people experiencing homelessness have experiences of mental illness (Chamberlain et al 2007; Pryor 2011: cited in Duff et. al 2013). Linking mental health and housing services is a potential strategy for promoting recovery and reducing further risk of homelessness.

There is a strong link between access to community resources and perceptions of housing security. Engagement with community resources that are informal in nature, such as a café, library, social groups, bookstores etc. facilitates social inclusion. This inclusion, or sense of belonging, can enhance perceptions of housing security, through strengthened community attachments. Thus, access to community resources is a primary tool in strengthening housing security through social inclusion. People with experiences of mental illness must have access to stable housing to foster a sense of safety and belonging, deeming it critical in their recovery. This has implications for policies and practice in the housing sector as supported housing locations should consider proximity to amenities and services that help people become engaged with their communities (Duff et. al 2013).

Young Women

The impact of homelessness on women was discussed in terms of issues faced by young women, mother and child health, the impact of family violence, and social isolation.

Participants in Melton reported that young women face barriers due to:

- financial crises associated with family violence
- pressures of single parenting
- reduced capacity to care for children due to homelessness
- the impact of homelessness on the child's and on the mother's physical and psychological health.

Gender roles

Young women similar to other groups face barriers to obtaining private rental without a rental history, and a lack of accommodation options. However a worker observed an issue faced by young women from culturally diverse backgrounds, stating that often it is the man's name used on leases, leaving young women with no rental history despite the experience of managing private rentals.

Young mothers

Issues faced by young mothers experiencing homelessness were raised including: lack of parenting skills, lack of family support, and lack of affordable child care. Another worker commented on the need for young mothers to be educated on the impact of drug and alcohol use on children. A family services worker noted that child protection is involved in many cases.

Income

Economic factors including the rising cost of childcare combined with financial constraints were listed as issues faced by young parents. Young single mothers face many financial problems associated with parenting on a single income. Characterised by a low earning capacity and often reliant on Centrelink payments, single mothers face an added barrier to secure housing.

It should be noted that issues by young women were discussed discretely by some participants, and concomitantly by others, highlighting that some young women will have experienced homelessness as a result of family violence and income insecurity, while caring for young children.

Mother and child health

Health and development were discussed in two ways, focus on the child, and focus on the mother. When discussing young mothers' health, participants cited psychological impact as significant. Responses included impact on self-worth, hope and motivation, as well as feelings of shame for self and for community. One worker noted the burden of 'carrying stigma' as a welfare dependant single-mum.

Mental and physical health were discussed further in relation to the great stress of being a homeless parent, or being pregnant and homeless. One family worker noted poor outcomes in homeless "*young mothers' general and sexual health*". A family worker noted that:

> *"Critically stressed/traumatised parents are unable to address needs of children because they're trying to find housing and meet basic needs every day*".

While two comments made reference to the potential for intergenerational trauma the impact on children was discussed predominantly in a more immediate sense. One participant stated potential for "*influence on children to accept poverty and disadvantage*".

The major concern of the participants was health and development of the children of young homeless mothers. One worker noted:

> "*High levels of stress during pregnancy impact mother and baby health*".

Other responses regarding impact on the child include lack of consistency (housing environment and routine), child developmental issues, behavioural issues and disruption of education through moving or staying in out-of-area refuges. Another observed disengagement through homelessness can impact on the "*child not getting health checks, with lack of structure and engagement with early learning* ". The risks children face mostly boiled down to the impact of homelessness on the mother, creating difficulties and disruptions in bonding and attachment.

Family Violence

Income support and family violence were predominant points of discussion. There were significant reports of young women having family violence perpetrated against them. One worker observed that homelessness would occur

> *"…often towards the end of a relationship when family violence is involved".*

As another worker noted, in these instances the

> "*…offender removed is often the breadwinner which really impacts on all other aspects of life*".

Beyond the physical and psychological harm resulting from family violence young women face a range of other associated complications. A family violence worker reported that often young women have bad rental records due to family violence resulting in property damage and associated costs. The same worker observed young women facing fines, "*often not incurred by the young woman, but traffic fines, parking fines, property damage, phone bills and debt collection and legal fees incurred by the perpetrator – sometimes ongoing*".

Social isolation

Community connections are inevitably impacted by homelessness. This social isolation not only refers to connections on a social level but also in terms of engaging with social services. Firstly, as one worker commented, homelessness impacts "*ability to get employment and be financially stable - and education*". Or as another worker put it: "*homelessness leads to financial crisis and fall out of education, perpetuating the dreadful cycle*". This disengagement also manifests in lack of connection with parenting and child services.

IMPACT OF HOMELESSNESS ON THE WIDER COMMUNITY

The full impact of homelessness on the wider community requires research beyond the scope of this project. However the limited findings of this study suggest the impact of youth homelessness ripples through society to have indirect impact on all people, of all ages, not just those with lived experience of homelessness.

Community service workers reported the impact of homelessness to be twofold:

- firstly the financial cost to the wider community
- secondly the social impact of negative perceptions and development of stigma towards disadvantaged people.

Financial Cost to the Wider Community

The wider community is impacted fiscally by the monetary cost of homelessness and associated interventions. The education and training of a populace has obvious links with better standards of living and disengagement of a particular group has bearing on the whole community. ANTA (2001, cited in Melbourne City Mission, 2012, p. 6) estimates the individual cost of disengagement from education as around $15,000 per year in lost income. Projected nationally, the estimate is $2.6 billion per year.

Social Impact

Societal impact was reported in terms of stereotyping and perpetuation of negative views. Workers identified prejudice and racism towards CALD communities and suggested that homelessness in these already marginalised populations strengthens negative perspectives in the wider community. Some points were made regarding diversity across cultures, with some cultural groups being more likely to access welfare than others, highlighting that a one-size-fits-all approach to multicultural interventions will not be effective.

Regarding young women experiencing homelessness, stigma and prejudice impact negatively on the wider community. Generally there are negative judgements towards single mothers and young mothers, particularly towards teenage pregnancy. Identifying homelessness among young mothers, as many agencies noted builds stereotypes and stigma towards this group.

Fiscal Benefits of Stable Housing

The provision of stable housing for people experiencing homelessness can be viewed as a cost saving device in terms of reducing reliance on other support services. Another fiscal benefit of providing housing is the link between stable home and employment and the higher earning capacity, leading to higher income levels and diminished need for governmental income support (Barrett & Cataldo 2012).

The white paper *The Road to Home: a national approach to reducing homelessness* considers the financial burden of homelessness, stating "*homelessness programs produce positive outcomes for their clients at relatively low cost and deliver whole-of-government savings in avoidable health, justice and police outlays*" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008 p. 10).

Most Effective Approaches

The most effective approaches to addressing youth homelessness would involve:

- access to accommodation that is safe and stable
- support to repair or build family connections
- enabling and supporting ongoing engagement with schools and education
- information and access to independent living skills aimed at reducing dependence
- recognition of diversity of people and experience
- valuing relationships between young people and support workers
- providing services in a timely and responsive manner (Council to Homeless Persons n.d.)

The Benefits and Limitations of Foyer Models

Foyers have gained attention in recent years, with Melbourne City Mission developing the first Foyer pilot in Victoria in 2004, and expanding and diversifying the models through the years. Identified in the National Youth Commission (2008, cited in O'Brien 2014) '*Which way home? A new approach to youth homelessness*' paper, the Foyer model is considered as best practice in responding to homelessness because it provides holistic support linking employment, training or education with accommodation and supports.

Foyer models focus on aiding young people to transition from dependence to independence (O'Brien 2014). As mentioned earlier Hope Street already operates a Foyer like model in the local government areas of Melton and Whittlesea with demonstrated positive outcomes for young people who have been homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

Other models can be termed foyer-like services, one example is the Step Ahead program auspiced by Melbourne City Mission, which links 'intensive motivations casework coupled with a structured program of learning activities' with accommodation. Evaluation of outcomes identified over half of the young people that 'graduated' from the program were well protected against homelessness two and a half years after leaving the program. Another 34% were protected and developing better protective factors through remaining engaged with supports or engaging in vocational learning (Grace et al. 2011).

Foyers and similar models are able to integrate the key elements needed to deliver a strong and supportive system for young people including:

- life-long support options
- early intervention at all ages or stages incorporating diverse supports
- collaborative service delivery drawing in supports not only from youth services, family services and schools
- services accessibility and inclusiveness, to ensure that all young people have options
- well evidenced programs and support services that are built on identified needs in communities (Grogan et al. 2013).

While Foyer and Foyer-like models are effective in the longer term they are unable to respond effectively to crisis situations. Specifically foyer models:

- do not provide emergency, crisis accommodation
- cannot receive and accept same day referrals from agencies whereby a young person requires a crisis option and becomes homeless in emergencies including natural disasters. Foyers have less movement in and out of properties and thus longer waiting times
- do not provide an appropriate response for young people with high or complex needs as they are designed for young people with low-medium needs whose skill base enables them to either be linked in with or willing to link in with education, training, employment.

A Holistic Approach

Grogan et al. (2013) argue strongly for a holistic approach to addressing youth homelessness:

> *"It is only by addressing the systemic issue more holistically that longer term changes can be implemented and service gaps filled at the local level"* (Grogan et al. 2013, p. 9).

Looking to local level strategic planning young people should have access to safe and affordable housing options, primary and mental health services, education at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, flexible education options, generalist youth services, public transport, recreation opportunities, mentors, disability support and culturally appropriate supports (Grogan et al. 2013). Grogan et al. (2013) argue for developing the capacity of the workforce that supports young people, noting the need for workers engaging with young people to be able to non-judgmentally, appropriately and ethically engage with them. Moreover there is a need to plan for pathways out of homelessness. The temporary or transient nature of homelessness means that the provision of temporary accommodation has much use in developing resilience and making pathways out of homelessness (Barrett & Cataldo 2012).

The 2013 study produced by YacVIC and VCOSS (Grogan et al. 2013) identified particular gaps in services. The report highlights gaps in the sector such as:

- the availability of generalist youth support services
- the availability of specialist youth services, particularly housing, disability, mental illness and flexible education options
- public transport accessibility in outer metropolitan areas
- after-hours and weekend support availability
- availability of services in population growth areas
- rural program delivery and staffing (Grogan et al. 2013).

Ongoing funding challenges create a significant gap in the homelessness and allied services' ability to support people. Partnerships between key players should be strengthened and adequately resourced and coordinated, i.e. schools, youth and family services, and specialist services. A particularly salient point, this report notes the need for more robust needs assessment and subsequent strategic planning discretely targeted at local, regional and state levels. Generalist youth services also have a significant role to play, given the focus on overall personal wellbeing, and ability to coordinate between specialist services and agencies (Grogan et al. 2013).

Preventing Disengagement from School and Education

As an intervention, and as a protective factor, education is crucial for ending youth homelessness. Education provides a source of intellectual development, but also social and emotional development crucial for navigating adulthood (Fielding 2014). Young people are much more likely to experience poor outcomes if they disengage from school early. Higher rates of criminality, detrimental social attachments, poverty, welfare dependence, employment instability, poor social and emotional health and housing instability are experienced (Grace, Gronda & Coventry 2009; cited in Fielding 2014). Schools provide a community setting in which young people are supported and free to develop social connections and to develop their sense of self (Fielding 2014).

Preventing early school disengagement is central to reducing long term homelessness. Prevention requires intervention models that engage young people and families at the early stages of conflict and breakdown, and facilitate family reconciliation where possible. "It is irrefutable that education is a protective factor against homelessness" (Fielding 2014).

SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS

A set of dynamic and comprehensive solutions and recommendations has been presented by participants. Drawing on the strengths and vibrancy of the community in Melton and surrounds these findings suggest an existing innovative and thoughtful community with significant capacity to engage with complex issues.

Key Recommendations from participants include:

- implementing strategies for fostering social connectedness through sporting clubs, community groups and local businesses and enhancing the role of the private business sector in addressing youth homelessness
- developing an integrated youth services hub in Melton including a youth crisis response and accommodation service with wrap around youth specialist services
- strengthening existing services to provide more holistic interventions
- more initiatives to support the transition to adulthood
- state and federal governments take action to:
  - improve availability and affordability of housing options that do not disadvantage young people
  - invest in more youth specific crisis accommodation and wrap around support services
  - develop the capacity of schools
  - address lack of public transport to access employment and education opportunities

These solutions and recommendations are discussed in more detail below.

Strategies for Social Connectedness

Sports clubs and community groups

Participants identified potential for established community and sporting clubs to be part of the solution/s. It was suggested that there is scope for educating people facilitating community groups:

> "*....people should have a better awareness of services*".

> "*Sports clubs need to know how to deal with kids they are concerned about, like how and where to access help and how to deal with diversity*".

Local business enterprises

Agencies identified scope for higher levels of involvement from the business sector. Participants identified different ways business could be supportive. Firstly there is the potential for local enterprise to contribute funds, goods or services:

> "*It would be nice to see more businesses give back to the community and get involved - similar to Bunnings in Melton*"[27].

Secondly business could participate in addressing stereotypes and stigma through equitable employment policies that create more job opportunities for young people to gain experience.

Stop being silent

Agencies urged local communities to: "*…stop being silent – silence does not acknowledge that there is an issue and can't impact on how police are trained [regarding the intersection between family violence and homelessness]*".

Youth Services Hub in Melton

Agencies identified scope for new services that could be supported or initiated by council including a youth crisis response and accommodation service with specialist services available on site:

> *"an integrated services hub, including early intervention services, mediation and counselling*".

Another view prioritised the need for a youth refuge to house young people experiencing crisis, incorporating the hub model:

> *"....provide a youth refuge that has in house services (i.e. health, medical, and psychologist) as young people often won't engage or follow through with services*".

One view was that local Council has an obligation to:

> "*…lobby for other services to move into the area - not just satellite posts we have*".

Expand and Develop Existing Services

The expansion and development of existing services in the area was put forward. Acknowledging the range of excellent service delivery already occurring in Melton, more resources for existing services were recommended. Suggestions included better equipped crisis intervention services, and for better linkages between services to provide for more holistic interventions. The value of specialist services was acknowledged with the recommendation that they are more responsive to the needs of young people:

[27] Bunnings 'Local Community Support' initiative: http://www.bunnings.com.au/about-us/in-the-community/local-community-support

> "*…quicker streamlined access to some services specific for young people, for example going to the GP to get a mental health access plan to book a psychologist to get help is a lot to follow through".*

Agencies also made recommendations including suggestions for local Council to:

- focus on early prevention
- provide more affordable houses for youth
- address job creation for secure employment for young people.

Transitioning to Adulthood

Young people offered recommendations and suggestions for initiatives that would better support young people to transition into adulthood. Recommendations are listed below.

1. Driving lessons – young people should have better access to driving education in the community. Many parents are unavailable or unable to give lessons, and L to P programs have waiting lists.
2. Affordability – not only referring to housing, young people recommend policymakers understand not everyone will have a high enough income for everyday things
3. Age limits – a review of age limits on wages, eligibility for utilities and services and consent processes is needed, as the policy assumes young people are supported by families, whereas many homeless young people are largely independent and current practice creates barriers.
4. Crisis Accommodation – young people reported a need for more crisis accommodation options, listing funding for refuges and drop-in centres as a priority. One participant suggested there is scope for longer-term refuges, suggesting eight weeks is insufficient
5. Free education – many young people feel free education should be a right rather than the current situation where it is only readily accessible to those with capital.

Action for State and Federal Governments

Increase funding to address Youth Homelessness

The most predominant theme emerging from interviews was for state and federal government to increase funding and financial support to address youth homelessness. The funding of services, infrastructure and education and research were discussed as priorities:

- participants recommend urgently revising decisions to defund 'Youth Connections', a program that ceased operation in December 2014 due to Federal budgetary decisions.
- focus group discussions raised the need for funding of more early intervention programs (like Reconnect)
- it was suggested the state government invest in youth specific crisis accommodation particularly in the City of Melton
- participants identified the urgent need to fund and develop crisis intervention services for young people that are well resourced i.e. shelter or refuge with units with workers connected to provide wrap around holistic services
- one recommendation suggested allocating

> "*…funding towards [investigating] the link between mental illness, youth justice with homelessness".*

Improve access to housing intake system

Establish a fully functioning and accessible Opening Doors Access Point in the City of Melton that is responsive to the needs of young people.

Increase housing availability and affordability

Agencies reported that housing infrastructure needs to be developed, with a range of alternative housing options offered, in recognition of the varied range of experiences in our communities. Some agencies recommended the need to fund preventative measures, and there was agreement that providing more affordable housing was in itself a preventative measure against homelessness.

A worker engaged in housing services suggested the gazetting of transitional housing managed (THMs) properties for young people. It was also suggested that the state government ensure property developers are providing adequate social housing lower cost options through stricter quotas. A strong and recurrent theme in all responses was the need for state government to address infrastructure shortfall:

> "*…you can always find a counsellor, but never a house".*

Other suggestions included exploring housing co-ops for young people.

Employment

Recommendations to the federal government surrounding employment were centred on outcomes of more employment availability, and a breadth of opportunities stating we need more manufacturing and low skills employment options.

Solutions suggested by young people include more chances for employment and more supportive hiring policies towards young people lacking job experience.

One young woman speaking about employment said young people need *"more chances given*". She went on to relay something she had heard *"through the grapevine"* about a local enterprise that has a policy of hiring young people. Described as a 'gen y' hiring policy the young person recommended this as an excellent mode of facilitating young people's work experiences. Furthermore the young woman recommended workplaces recognise the pressure

placed on young people, and *"offer work experience, support and guidance for work, and career planning"* to facilitate their development.

Centrelink payments

Acknowledging the correlation between housing options and income and that Centrelink Youth Allowance payments are almost 46% below the Henderson Poverty Line[28], participants recommended an urgent increase in Centrelink payments. Also it was recommended that the current government reassess the 'earn or learn' focus of welfare policy directions.

Address family violence

Some more detailed comments were made regarding the need for government intervention into family violence. The following programs were recommended:

- education about family violence for the community, from primary to secondary level
- separate education sessions aimed at women about their rights
- separate sessions to identify violent behaviour.

One focus group identified:

> "*Bacchus Marsh hospital conducts men's behaviour change programs, there should be more. We need to address broader community attitudes to family violence with campaigns, and a women's refuge is required (no refuge currently)".*

Build the capacity of schools

Funding for education was recommended generally to enable more school welfare staff to intervene in youth homelessness. Engaging and working collaboratively with schools was another recommendation to Government. It was suggested that there was much scope for welfare programs to operate within the school system:

> **"***Welfare workers in schools should engage more with issues young people are facing, for early intervention*".

Another recommendation was for house/home management skills being placed on curriculums, stating we should be:

> "*…educating young people about how to rent including rights, consequences, application processes and getting references*".

A young woman discussed access to learning and recommended the expansion of schools for young people who have disengaged from the mainstream schooling system. Referring specifically to her own experiences with The Pavilion School[29] the young woman said "*we need more places like this with amazing staff, psychologists, and that are open to disadvantaged young people*".

Young people wanted more opportunities for education for those with histories of expulsion, complex behaviours or disengagement from typical educational models.

Public transport

Address lack of public transport to enable young people access to employment and education opportunities in the City of Melton and surrounds.

[28] Henderson Poverty Line https://www.melbourneinstitute.com/downloads/publications/Poverty%20Lines/Poverty-lines-Australia_Dec2014.pdf

[29] For some information on The Pavilion School refer to: http://thepavilionschool.com.au/about/

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate a complex and multifaceted situation extremely difficult to summarise or encapsulate succinctly. However some prominent features of youth homelessness can be commented on. A significant amount of young people, identified in both the literature and the findings, will experience homelessness due to untenable living situations in the family home. Young people did however want to stay in the Melton area where they had supportive networks. A commonly reported response among young people experiencing homelessness is to engage with their networks, and couch surf with friends or other family. Unfortunately in many cases this initial solution is also unsustainable.

Young people in the City of Melton are significantly disadvantaged by geographical isolation, inadequate public transport and access to services. The municipality has a strong youth focus for its services but broader structural issues tremendously undermine the capacity of available services to intervene (e.g. lack of housing infrastructure, insufficient income and Centrelink payments, defunding or inadequate funding of services). These impact on clients' individual situations making it difficult to break their experience of homelessness. It is only by addressing issues for young people holistically, coupled with a whole of community approach, that long term changes addressing the rights of young people can be met.

This report has outlined a set of discrete challenges and needs presented by the local communities in Melton.

Key Findings

1. The literature review identified that while youth homelessness is not a pre-determinate for poor outcomes later in life it is nevertheless an indicator of future disadvantage and homelessness in adulthood. Accordingly there needs to be an increased focus on youth homelessness prevention/protection strategies. Such support is likened to 'scaffolding' that is adjusted over a time as the person's capacity increases.
2. The research identified the need for free specialist youth and family counselling, mediation and reconciliation services as an integral youth homelessness prevention and protection strategy.
3. Rapid population growth in the City of Melton brings with it increased numbers of young people and the increased possibility of homelessness or risk of homelessness. Existing services are not adequate to deal with this growing problem.
4. Generic Opening Doors Access Points are not effective for addressing the needs of young people. These barriers are exacerbated for most people in Melton who have to travel over 20km to an Open Doors Access Point to access the Homelessness Service System. There is a clear need to improve the opening hours of the outpost in Melton and make it more accessible and responsive to young people. Participants believed the best solution would be to fund a youth specific Access Point in Melton.
5. Young people want to stay in the Melton area to maintain connections with their support networks. This highlights the demonstrated need for a youth crisis response and accommodation service in the City of Melton enabling young people to stay in the area and maintain community connections and relationships. A young person's connections and relationships are a part of their 'scaffolding' which is vital to enable them to move through their situation of homelessness in the short term.
6. Participants and young people in Melton and surrounds value a youth 'hub' model where comprehensive support services are integrated and available on premises including family violence support services.
7. There is a growing population of young people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds in the City of Melton. With state and national statistics showing that this cohort has the greatest level of homelessness there is a compelling need to build relationships with the local and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, consult with services that already exist in the area and ensure Indigenous perspectives are represented in meaningful non-tokenistic ways.
8. There is a growing diversity of cultures in Melton and surrounds requiring more intensive culturally appropriate interventions.
9. The general community in Melton and surrounds demonstrates a great strength and integrity in their willingness to house young people experiencing homelessness on their couches or in their homes. This is an opportunity to explore further and collaboratively work alongside and support a community that demonstrates profound capacity and goodwill in assisting young people who experience homelessness.
10. There is capacity to strengthen the linkages and responses between schools and the service sector to bolster engagement in education and foster protective factors to prevent recurring homelessness.
11. Young people's primary source of income is Centrelink Youth Allowance which is significantly below the poverty line. Without employment young people are not able to sustain the cost of

independent living, thus perpetuating homelessness.

12. Young people face significant barriers in accessing and keeping private rental tenancies including affordability and discrimination due to negative perceptions of young people as irresponsible tenants.

Key Challenges

Five key challenges in Melton are:

1. Keeping young people engaged and connected to networks, community activities, education, training and employment.
2. Ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities within the local region are involved in decision making processes relating to Indigenous youth homelessness in the area.
3. Finding ways to engage young people of all ethnic backgrounds into supportive service environments when the tendency for many CALD communities is to handle experiences of homelessness privately among their own networks.
4. Securing adequate investment from state and federal governments to provide appropriate public and social infrastructure including extending current service levels to meet the demands of this rapidly growing population
5. Fostering engagement and collaboration within the Melton community to address youth homelessness and the barriers impacting on young people such as negative perceptions, discrimination, unemployment, income significantly below the poverty line.

Key Recommendations

1. In collaboration with local council pursue the development of a youth crisis response and crisis accommodation centre in Melton to provide timely, safe and responsive crisis accommodation options with wrap around support in collaboration with community services.
2. Secure government resources to establish a youth specific Access Point to the Homelessness Service System in Melton that also provides afterhours response and addresses the immediate needs of young people who are homeless.
3. Consult with the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people regarding the further exploration of youth homelessness, the impact and solutions by:
    - building relationships with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and consulting with community based organisations, programs and services that already exist in the area and by ensuring that Indigenous perspectives are represented in meaningful non-tokenistic ways
    - scoping out possible Memoranda of Understanding and partnerships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, programs and services
    - ensuring Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander representation in the membership of the Hope Street Youth Homelessness In Melton Advisory Group.
4. Consult with people (and organisations) from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds:
    - ensuring their perspectives are represented in meaningful non-tokenistic ways
    - ensuring their representation in the membership of the Hope Street Youth Homelessness In Melton Advisory Group
    - ensuring interventions to address young people's experiences of homelessness are culturally appropriate
5. Increase resources provided through the federal and state government's National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness Youth Initiatives to extend the Youth (Family) Reconciliation Program to growth corridors.
6. Explore community engagement strategies, including linking with established social and sporting clubs and local businesses to:
    - effect greater employment , training and social opportunities for young people and
    - reduce stigma and prejudice associated with being young and homeless.
7. Lobby for federal funds for early intervention initiatives aimed at preventing youth disengagement from education, training or employment similar to the former Youth Connections Program.
8. Explore the potential of youth-driven positive image campaigns to generate awareness and address barriers that further disadvantage young people and perpetuate their homelessness.
9. Consider ways to strengthen already existing support pathways and linkages between schools and the community services sector with a focus on prevention of youth homelessness and disengagement from school.
10. Lobby for increased funding to support more welfare programs in schools to prevent disengagement of young people, particularly those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
11. Continue and extend the collaboration across services and government sectors in Melton to ensure holistic, early intervention and preventative strategies are implemented.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: HOPE STREET ALL OF PROGRAM CLIENT DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW 2013 – 2014

In the 2013 – 14 financial year Hope Street provided 435 episodes of support to 405 individual clients: 251 female (61%) and 156 male (39%). Hope Street staff documented they provided clients with 13,897 individual support contacts during the year.

Of the 407 clients who received assistance overall 11% were accompanying children, 8% were clients aged under 18, 42% were aged between 18 and 20 years, while 38% were aged 21 years and above.

26 (6.5%) clients identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders while 128 (30%) episodes of support were provided to clients who were born overseas. Hope Street provided assistance to young people from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds. During 2013 – 14 clients were born in 31 different countries outside of Australia. Of these clients:

- 69% were born in 11 countries located within the African continent
- 13% came from 8 countries within the East Asia Pacific region
- 10% from 6 different Middle Eastern region countries

The table below provides the Hope Street Client Demographic data for 2013 – 2014. It shows that, during 2013 – 2014, 13.7% (1,909 contacts) of all recorded Hope Street contacts were in the Melton area.

Individual clients *(not episodes of support)*	Melton	Whittlesea	YSS	Resi/Boost	YRP	Totals	Percentage
Distinct Persons	39	42	49	204	73	407	
Total Recorded Contacts	1909	2933	387	8263	405	13897	
Payments Made	$9,604	$240	$5,776	$5,507	$0	$21,127	Not accurate
Males	15	20	17	73	31	156	39%
Females	24	22	32	131	42	251	61%
Children	5	9	2	27	0	43	10.70%
15-17 years	4	5	2	8	12	31	7.60%
18-20 years	22	19	21	78	32	170	42%
21+ years	8	9	24	89	22	152	37.50%
Missing age				2	7	9	2.20%
ATSI	3	4	3	13	3	26	6.50%
Born in Australia	28	33	18	123	59	261	64.40%
Born overseas	8	8	19	65	12	112	27.60%
Missing country of birth	1	1	12	16	2	32	8.00%
Episodes of care	Melton	Whittlesea	YSS	Resi/Boost	YRP	Totals	
Episodes of care by program	39	42	49	232	73	435	
Born outside of Australia	6	8	18	84	12	128 (30%)	
African continent represented by 11 different countries						69%	
East Asia Pacific region represented by 8 different countries						13%	
Middle Eastern region represented by 6 different countries						10%	
31 Different Countries in total = 30% of all episodes of care							

APPENDIX 2: CITY OF MELTON POPULATION TABLES

Table 1: 2006 and 2011 Melton Population

Service age group (years)	2006		2011		% Change
	#	%	#	%	
Babies and pre-schoolers (0 to 4)	7,015	8.9%	10,123	9.3%	**44.3%**
Primary schoolers (5 to 11)	8,811	11.2%	12,155	11.1%	**38.0%**
Secondary schoolers (12 to 17)	7,162	9.1%	9,240	8.5%	**29.0%**
Tertiary education and independence (18 to 24)	7,646	9.7%	10,048	9.2%	**31.4%**
Young workforce (25 to 34)	14,464	18.3%	18,765	17.2%	**29.7%**
Parents and homebuilders (35 to 49)	17,700	22.4%	25,464	23.3%	**43.9%**
Older workers and pre-retirees (50 to 59)	9,266	11.7%	11,765	10.8%	**27.0%**
Empty nesters and retirees (60 to 69)	3,831	4.9%	7,276	6.7%	**89.9%**
Seniors (70 to 84)	2,557	3.2%	3,771	3.5%	**47.5%**
Elderly aged (85 and over)	451	0.6%	651	0.6%	**44.3%**
Total population	**78,903**	**100.0%**	**109,258**	**100.0%**	**38.5%**

Source: ABS Census, 2006 & 2011

Table 2: Population Projections - 2014 to 2031

Service age group (years)	2014		2024		2031		% Change
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Babies and pre-schoolers (0 to 4)	11,269	8.9%	15,342	8.3%	20,054	8.3%	**78.0%**
Primary schoolers (5 to 11)	14,312	11.3%	20,260	10.9%	26,028	10.8%	**81.9%**
Secondary schoolers (12 to 17)	10,134	8.0%	14,950	8.1%	18,751	7.8%	**85.0%**
Tertiary education & independence (18 to 24)	12,002	9.5%	16,937	9.1%	22,027	9.1%	**83.5%**
Young workforce (25 to 34)	21,583	17.1%	30,806	16.6%	40,120	16.6%	**85.9%**
Parents and homebuilders (35 to 49)	29,216	23.1%	41,827	22.6%	54,191	22.4%	**85.5%**
Older workers and pre-retirees (50 to 59)	13,067	10.3%	19,832	10.7%	26,118	10.8%	**99.9%**
Empty nesters and retirees (60 to 69)	9,208	7.3%	13,580	7.3%	18,022	7.5%	**95.7%**
Seniors (70 to 84)	4,860	3.8%	10,207	5.5%	14,259	5.9%	**193.4%**
Elderly aged (85 and over)	788	0.6%	1,433	0.8%	2,128	0.9%	**170.1%**
Total persons	**126,440**	**100.0%**	**185,173**	**100.0%**	**241,699**	**100.0%**	**91.2%**

Source: Forecast id, 2014

APPENDIX 3: ADOLESCENT PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH IN MELTON

The 2010 Adolescent Community Profile for Melton shows the following results:

- 16.9% of adolescents in Melton eat at least the minimum recommended serves of fruit and vegetables each day (compared with 19% across Victoria).
- 4.5% of adolescents always wear sun protection when exposed to the sun (3.1% across Victoria).
- 58.9% of adolescents brush their teeth at least twice per day (67.4% across Victoria).
- 17.1% require a special type of health care related with chronic medical, developmental, behavioural or emotional conditions (15.3% across Victoria).
- 13.5% of adolescents have asthma (11.6% across Victoria).
- 88.8% rate their health as good, very good, or excellent (89.2% across Victoria).
- 13.1% engage in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day (12.3% across Victoria).
- The incidence of hospitalisation for self-harm among young people living in Melton has decreased slightly between 2006 and 2010, consistent with the Metropolitan Victoria and Victoria overall trends.
- 12.1% of adolescents in Melton reported very high levels of psychological distress (13% across Victoria).
- 1.8% of adolescents in Melton have been diagnosed with anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa (compared with 2.4% across Victoria).
- 54.6% of adolescents in Melton scored at least a 5 (out of 9) on a basic needs psychological scale, indicating a high level of psychological wellbeing (compared with 61.1% across Victoria).
- The Melton teenage fertility rate has increased from 11.1 per 1,000 young women in 2004 to 14.1 in 2008, this is considerably higher than 10.6 per 1,000 across Victoria.
- 2.8% of adolescents aged 12 to 14 years in Melton had used marijuana in their lifetime (3.7% across Victoria) and 13.8% per cent of 15 to 17 year olds had used marijuana in their lifetime (16.0% across Victoria).
- 30.8% of adolescents in Melton were exposed to tobacco smoke in the home (24.5% across Victoria).
- 81.3% adolescents in Melton were residing in a family environment free of conflict or poor management (83.1% across Victoria) (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) 2010).

APPENDIX 4: EDUCATION, TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

The average number of days absent from school was higher across all year levels in Melton when compared with Victoria overall, especially in Year 9 (Adolescent Community Profile, 2010).

On a five point scale, students rated their level of school connectedness as slightly lower than the average Victoria level, with year 11 raking the lowest (Adolescent Community Profile, 2010).

MEAN SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS SCORE FOR ADOLESCENT STUDENTS ATTENDING GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS IN MELTON

	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12
Melton	4.3	4.2	3.8	3.3	3.4	3.3	3.2	3.3
Victoria	4.3	4.3	3.9	3.5	3.4	3.4	3.4	3.5

Source: DOED, Attitudes to School Survey 2010, Schools & Children's Services Performance Data, unpublished

Children in Melton are around the same or slightly below the standard level of reading, writing, and numeracy when compared with the Western Metropolitan Region and Victoria as a whole, with 2010 students scoring slightly higher than previous years.

PERCENTAGE OF YEAR 5, 7 AND 9 STUDENTS AT OR ABOVE THE NATIONAL MINIMUM STANDARD FOR READING, WRITING, AND NUMERACY

		2008			2009			2010		
		Year 5	Year 7	Year 9	Year 5	Year 7	Year 9	Year 5	Year 7	Year 9
Reading	**Melton**	89.4	95.4	93.0	90.8	94.1	89.0	91.2	94.6	91.0
	Western Metropolitan Region	90.3	94.8	93.6	92.0	94.4	91.7	92.2	94.3	91.4
	Victoria	92.0	95.6	94.1	93.3	94.7	93.0	92.6	95.3	92.3
Writing	**Melton**	92.0	92.3	85.3	91.3	90.7	83.6	92.7	92.0	88.8
	Western Metropolitan Region	91.7	92.7	89.3	92.8	92.6	88.8	93.9	92.7	89.6
	Victoria	92.7	92.8	90.3	93.5	92.6	89.9	93.8	92.8	89.4
Numeracy	**Melton**	91.1	96.5	92.3	94.1	95.0	94.4	93.4	95.6	92.6
	Western Metropolitan Region	92.2	95.8	94.1	94.3	95.4	95.5	94.5	95.5	93.3
	Victoria	94.1	96.8	94.8	95.6	95.9	96.2	95.1	96.2	94.4

Source: Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority (VCAA) NAPLAN data, 2010

In 2011, 46.5% of Melton residents completed year 12 or equivalent level of education. Between 2006 and 2011 this proportion increased by 6.2% while all other year completions have stayed constant or decreased slightly.

The following table shows the highest level of schooling attained, City of Melton - 2006 to 2011

Level of schooling	2006		2011		% Change
	Number	%	Number	%	
Year 8 or below	4,037	6.8%	4,706	5.7%	**-1.1%**
Year 9 or equivalent	4,721	7.9%	5,852	7.1%	**-0.8%**
Year 10 or equivalent	11,184	18.8%	13,958	17.0%	**-1.8%**
Year 11 or equivalent	9,227	15.5%	11,295	13.7%	**-1.8%**
Year 12 or equivalent	23,962	40.3%	38,247	46.5%	**6.2%**
Did not go to school	533	0.9%	817	1.0%	**0.1%**
Not stated	5,834	9.8%	7,385	9.0%	**-0.8%**
Total persons aged 15+	59,498	100.0%	82,260	100.0%	**0.0%**

Source: ABS Census, 2006 & 2011

APPENDIX 5: EMPLOYMENT STATUS MELTON

Employment status - Melton 2006 to 2011

	2006		2011		
Employment status	Number	%	Number	%	% Change
Employed	37,095	94.1	50,936	94.0	**-0.1**
Employed full-time	25,189	63.9	34,015	62.7	**-1.1**
Employed part-time	10,599	26.9	15,519	28.6	**1.7**
Hours worked not stated	1,307	3.3	1,402	2.6	**-0.7**
Unemployed (Unemployment rate)	**2,333**	**5.9**	**3,275**	**6.0**	**0.1**
Looking for full-time work	1,489	3.8	2,020	3.7	**-0.1**
Looking for part-time work	844	2.1	1,255	2.3	**0.2**
Total Labour Force	39428	100.0	54211	100.0	**0.0**

Source: ABS Census, 2011

While the above table shows there is little change in the percentages of people who are unemployed in the City of Melton it shows the increase in the numbers of people in part-time work. Also it shows the increase in population has led to an increase in the numbers of people looking for work.

APPENDIX 6: INDEX OF RELATIVE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE 2011

Index of relative socio-economic disadvantage 2011

City of Melton's small areas and benchmark areas	2011 Index
Hillside	1053.5
Caroline Springs	1051.4
Taylors Hill	1051
Melton East	1043.4
Interface Councils	1008.3
Brookfield	1007.6
City of Melton	1002.1
Burnside - Burnside Heights	1000.1
Rural Balance	994.5
Melton West	984.7
Diggers Rest	973.2
Kurunjang	972.1
Melton Township	953.4
Melton	899.5
Melton South	893.8
Greater Melbourne	1020.3
Victoria	1009.6
Australia	1002

Source: ABS Census 2011

APPENDIX 7: DEFINITIONS

Asylum Seeker	An **asylum seeker** is a person who has fled their country and applied for protection as a refugee in another country. An **asylum seeker** is a person who seeks international protection. An **asylum seeker** is someone whose claim has not yet been decided by the UNHCR or authorities of the country in which that person has requested refugee status. Not every **asylum seeker** will ultimately be recognised as a refugee, but every refugee is initially an **asylum seeker**.[30]
Citizen Participation	**Citizen participation** is a process which provides private individuals with the opportunity to influence public decisions and be actively and meaningfully involved in shaping their communities.
Early intervention	Early intervention is the process of providing specialist intervention and support services to a person or persons based on their need for either early in the life course, and/or early in the development of an issue or problem. The term may be used in slightly different ways across different sectors. In everyday welfare practice early intervention includes young people who are 'at risk' as well as those who are actually homeless (Chamberlain & McKenzie, 2003, p. 16). Early intervention is about providing assistance to young people who are either in the early stages of the homeless career or perceptibly 'at risk'. Early intervention refers to actions taken as soon as possible after a young person has become homeless, at the beginning of the homeless career.
Greenfield Development	Greenfield development is the creation of planned communities on previously undeveloped land. This land may be rural, agricultural or unused areas on the outskirts of urban areas.[31]
Family Violence	Family violence occurs within the family context, including intimate partner relationships. Family violence is behaviour that is either/and/or physically, sexually, emotionally, psychologically and economically abusive that threatens, is coercive, and/or controlling causing fear of safety or wellbeing of another person/s within the family context.[32] It includes exposing a child(ren) to hearing or witnessing abusive behaviours.
Homelessness	For the purposes of this report, the Chamberlain and Mackenzie (1992) definition of homelessness is used as it encapsulates the diversity of experiences of homelessness: • **Primary homelessness** includes people without conventional accommodation, which includes sleeping rough or in makeshift dwellings • **Secondary homelessness** refers to people without stable ongoing housing options, such as people moving frequently from one temporary living situation to the next, such as crisis accommodation, refuges and 'couch surfing'. • **Tertiary homelessness** is experienced by people residing in accommodation beneath community standards, such as rooming houses or caravan parks.
Mental Illness	A **mental illness** is a health problem that significantly affects how a person feels, thinks, behaves, and interacts with other people.[33] A mental illness is diagnosed according to a standardised medical assessment. There are different types of mental illnesses. Some of the major types of mental illnesses include depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, bipolar mood disorder, personality disorders, and eating disorders.[34]
Migrant	A migrant is a person who has chosen to leave their country of origin not because of a direct threat of persecution or death but to migrate to another country for reasons aside from seeking asylum.[35]

[30] UNHCR, (2002-2015) *The UN Refugee Agency*. Retrieved from http://unhcr.org.au/unhcr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=179&Itemid=54 , accessed off the World Wide Web 09/4/2015.
[31] http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-greenfield-development.htm accessed off the World Wide Web 09/07/2015.
[32] Department of Human Services (2015) *Family Violence – The Facts* Retrieved from http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/for-individuals/children,-families-and-young-people/family-violence/what-is-family-violence/family-violence-the-facts, accessed off the World Wide Web 09/04/2015.
[33]Australian Government: Department of Health (2007) What is Mental Illness?, Retrieved at http://www.health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/mental-pubs-w-whatmen-toc~mental-pubs-w-whatmen-what , accessed from the World Wide Web 09/04/2015.
[34] Australian Government: Department of Health (2007) What is Mental Illness?, Retrieved at http://www.health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/mental-pubs-w-whatmen-toc~mental-pubs-w-whatmen-what , accessed from the World Wide Web 09/04/2015.
[35] UNHCR (2014) *Protecting Refugees and the role of UNHCR*, Retrieved from http://www.unhcr.org/509a836e9.html, p.8, accessed from the World Wide Web on the 09/04/2015.

Definitions Continued…

Personal Crimes	Personal crimes are physical in nature, involving assault, threat of assault, robbery or sexual assault. See http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4530.0Chapter2002011-12
Poverty	Poverty is a complex societal issue. There are multiple definitions of the term poverty. For the purpose of this report the Henderson Poverty Line has been used as a bench mark to determine poverty. Households and individuals whose incomes are below the Henderson Poverty Line are considered to be living in poverty.
Prevention	Prevention focuses on enhancing protective factors to 'prevent' homelessness. Preventative strategies focus on the development and implementation of policies, practices and strategies to tackle structural or external factors contributing to youth homelessness. The idea of prevention is to build protective factors and strengthen relationships/social supports.
Refugee	A refugee is a person who has fled their country and is unable or unwilling to return to their country because of a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of their: race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion [36] Refugee status is determined by the UNHCR or authorities of the country in which that person has requested refugee status. Prior to being granted refugee status a refugee is considered an asylum seeker.
Social Inclusion	In the Australian policy context social inclusion is understood as four key "domains" of opportunity. They are the opportunity to: 1. participate in society through employment and access to services 2. connect with family, friends and the local community 3. deal with personal crises 4. be heard. [37]
Trauma	Trauma is experienced as a deeply distressing or disturbing experience when an individual witnesses and/or is confronted with an event/s that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or threat to the physical integrity of self or others - and the person's response involved intense fear, helplessness and/or terror.
Underemployment	Underemployment refers to an employment situation that is insufficient. For example when a worker is employed in a part-time job yet desires full-time work. Underemployment can also be when the education, experience, or skills of an employee are well beyond the requirements of a job
Unemployment	In Australia unemployment is based on the number of people without work who are actively seeking work, who are available for work and who are over the age of 15-years-old yet are unable to secure employment.[38]

[36] Australian Human Rights Commission (2015) *Asylum seekers and refugees guide*. Retrieved from https://www.humanrights.gov.au/asylum-seekers-and-refugees-guide#who, accessed off the World Wide Web 09/04/2015

[37] McDonald, M (2011) Social Exclusion and Social Inclusion: Resources for Child and Family Services, from the Australia Government Australia Institute of Family Studies: Child Family Community Australia. Retrieved from https://www3.aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/social-exclusion-and-social-inclusion-resources-child, accessed from the World Wide Web on the 09/04/2015.

[38] Australian Bureau of Statistics (2014) *The Employment and Recipients of Government Unemployment Benefits – Difference Explained*. Retrieved from http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/6105.0Feature%20Article54July%202014?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=6105.0&issue=July%202014&num=&view=, accessed off the World Wide Web 09/04/2015.

Hope Street acknowledges the Wurundjeri People as the traditional owners of the land on which we work

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