

## Support for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness – Summary of the Homelessness Action Plan Evaluation Findings

The Homelessness Action Plan (HAP) Evaluation Strategy captured evidence of the effectiveness of different service approaches used by HAP Projects. This evidence note is a summary of the evaluation findings for projects that provide services to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

### Key points

- Due to a lack of awareness of the services available, young people tend not to access support services until they are already homeless.
- Early intervention responses for young people are essential to prevent them becoming entrenched in the homeless service system.
- Family mediation strategies were found to be helpful but family reconciliation may not be appropriate in some cases.
- Multi-agency approaches that enable coordinated service delivery were effective for young people with complex needs.
- A holistic approach including accommodation, education or skills training, independent life skills and job search support was found to be necessary for long-term success.
- Access to intensive support delivered in stages over at least 12 months allowed young people to move towards independence, especially those leaving care and Juvenile Justice institutions.

### Description of service approaches

There are a number of youth-specific projects included in the HAP, including: a Dubbo project focussing on young Aboriginal parents; two Illawarra projects, one involving young Aboriginal people leaving care as well as a foyer-type service; an Inner City Sydney project for young people at risk; and two projects on the North Coast, one for young people leaving care and the other for those leaving Juvenile Justice settings. These two North Coast projects have been included in the extended evaluations for people leaving institutions (see Evidence Note 3).

**The South West Sydney Youth Hub Project** was also selected for extended evaluation. This service provides an integrated model of housing assistance and support for young people who need assistance transitioning to independent living. The Hub Project provides three areas of service: a foyer-type residential service (the campus), supported accommodation for those exiting the Juvenile Justice system and an outreach stream.

### The issues

Young people between the ages of 12 and 24 are over-represented in the homeless population.

Youth homelessness is commonly a result of family breakdown, domestic violence or limited support when leaving out-of-home-care or the Juvenile Justice system.

The experience of homelessness varies for young people, as it does for adults. Research suggests that young women are more likely to become homeless because they are escaping family and/or sexual violence, while young men show higher levels of mental illness and substance abuse.

Young people at risk of homelessness are less likely to access assistance and are more likely to need distinct service responses and supported accommodation options than older people. This requires a comprehensive case planning process that includes the personal goals of young people.

Young people also face several additional barriers to accessing accommodation including low income, limited appropriate and affordable housing options and a lack of skills required for independent living.

A large number of people who become chronically homeless initially experience homelessness before the age of 18. Homeless young people who are not assisted at an early stage tend to remain homeless for longer periods.

The cycle of repeat offending and imprisonment for young people leaving Juvenile Justice can be broken with the timely provision of housing and support, along with planning and case management prior to release.

Evidence suggests young people leaving care transition more easily into medium and long-term accommodation when supported by a suite of services and case managers who help them identify, plan and achieve their goals. Young people leaving care need transition plans in place long before they move to independent living.

## Findings

The 36 self-evaluation reports completed by HAP projects for the period July 2010 to March 2012 show that approximately 2,000 young people aged 16 to 24 years were assisted by these projects, representing approximately 20 percent of the total number of clients assisted.

Positive outcomes identified by projects working with young people included:

- improved relationships, increased likelihood of a family reuniting as well as reduced exposure to domestic and family violence
- more stable housing with less incidence of couch-surfing
- better awareness and engagement with services including health and Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) rehabilitation services.

## Youth Hub Project

The evaluation of the Youth Hub found that between July 2009 and June 2012, the Hub Project assisted a total of 145 clients, comprising 105 campus clients, 23 Juvenile Justice clients and 17 outreach clients.

Of these clients, there were slightly more young women (54 percent) than young men (46 percent), and 46 percent were born in Australia with 14.5 percent of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds (with the highest representation (39 percent) in the Juvenile Justice stream).

### Success factors for the Youth Hub

The Hub Project worked very well through the campus stream. Key success factors were:

- adopting a comprehensive use of action planning as a tool for achieving young peoples' aspirations specifically through intensive case management
- the fostering of strong relationships between young people and case managers who were consistent and available to the young person on an as-needs basis
- preventing young people entering the 'no home, no job' cycle through provision of safe, affordable social housing linked to education, training, employment and life skills programs supporting their transition to independence.

Success factors identified through other projects included:

- delivering a client-centred approach incorporating intensive case management and tailored brokerage funding
- having the flexibility for medium to long-term client engagement (up to 24 months – typically 40 weeks)
- differentiating between tenancy management and support roles among project partners
- involving Aboriginal workers in mainstream services to secure program engagement among Aboriginal youth
- building relationships with real estate agents, facilitating young people's access to the private rental market
- adopting a prevention and early intervention approach; providing young people and their families with support to address issues that contribute to the risk of homelessness.

### Challenges

The challenges identified across the projects included the need to allocate sufficient time to establish elements of the support services such as the duration and intensity of assistance, partnership arrangements with other services, initial identification of eligibility requirements for young people appropriate for the program, and transition planning and support structures to enable young people to exit the service.

The challenges for the Youth Hub related to the location of the main campus which was isolated and not easily accessed by public transport. With three different service streams, the complexity of the Youth Hub project was also identified in the evaluation as creating some challenges. However for the period from the service establishment to the HAP evaluation, the campus approach was identified as the most successful delivery model within the Youth Hub.

Accessing appropriate affordable housing was identified as a major problem across all projects. Issues specific to young people included age barriers to signing lease agreements (under 18 years of age), as well as young people's lack of rental history and low incomes.

For further information on the HAP Evaluation Strategy please visit [www.housing.nsw.gov.au](http://www.housing.nsw.gov.au)