

Hope to Home: Unlocking the Rental Door: A Community and Business Initiative

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

(young person experiencing homelessness in Melton, 2015)

Despite innovative solutions that have helped vulnerable young people who experience homelessness, over the past two decades there has been a significant erosion of affordable, sustainable and safe housing options for young people across Australia. As a prosperous rental market surges, the increase of a casualised labour market continues, the incidence of family violence rises and the cost of living catapults, it is the marginalised that continue to be shut out – Australia's young and homeless.

Melton is experiencing greater levels of disadvantage than Melbourne, or Victorian averages. The Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA) index of Disadvantage indicates that the City of Melton local government area scored 1,002.1 on the SEIFA Index of Disadvantage. Melton has lower educational outcomes and lower income rates, and higher levels of unskilled employees and unemployment rates. The City of Melton population forecast for 2015 is 127,638, and is forecast to grow to 315,908 by 2036.¹ Youth homelessness is a significant symptom of disadvantaged areas and is a major concern for this area of Victoria. Without innovative solutions that offer long-term stability and opportunity to create interdependence away from homelessness, the cycle of transience and homelessness is likely to not only continue and increase but alarmingly for young people will result in long term chronic homelessness.

Hope Street is a leading youth specialist organisation responding to vulnerable young people and young

families experiencing homelessness. Our organisation has built its capacity in the area of youth homelessness service delivery and policy development over the last 30 years.

Our focus is early intervention and prevention of medium/long term homelessness and diversion from the Homelessness Service System and the Juvenile Justice System. That is, we focus on actively supporting young peoples' access and pathways for community connections, family, education, employment and training, adolescent and early adulthood development utilising a youth centred practice and strengths based approach.

Hope Street has been established in City of Melton over the last five years providing a Youth Foyer like model (Hope Street in Melton Program, (HMP), a cluster of ten units, two family units and eight single units). Young people who are referred to HMP come into the service for a variety of reasons, often they have experienced family violence, they are detached from their families and have been couch surfing for a number of months, and some have been living in their cars. Young people are able to reside in the HMP for up to 24 months.

Six months of post support is also offered. Exit pathways are as planned and as structured as they can be but due to the lack of social housing options and lack of resources available in growth corridors like Melton, often private rental is the primary option that is explored. It is a familiar story reported by young people that private rental is not always viable. This is because of their lack of rental history, lack of affordability lack of employment to sustain the lease, lack of stock, and

perceived discrimination (often young people tell us they feel like they are shut out because of their age) *'Not many people are willing to give us a go' and 'Depends who you know. No one want to let a kid have a house, they think they're gonna [sic] trash it.'*²

Hope Street believes young people require a multi-dimensional support system that requires the creation of alternative pathways to housing stability, particularly for young people in outer growth corridors. Creating a collective impact is critical, bringing together a combination of; corporate, local and state government and community agencies and clubs.

As a demonstration of that collective impact, Hope Street has been working with a diverse range of stakeholders in the City of Melton to explore collective strategies for responding to youth homelessness in local space and place.

In recent months Hope Street has initiated the *Hope to Home* project, currently in its developmental stages and about to be piloted; *Hope to Home* brings that collective impact to provide solutions via:

- rental subsidy
- joint lease signatories
- staggered case management support
- properties dedicated to young people from local Real Estate agent Raine and Horne, and
- tailored training/employment opportunities from local business for young people.

Hope to Home will act as a transition point towards independence for young people who have been homeless but through the assistance of existing Hope Street programs have reached relative stability and are likely to succeed into private rental



Image provided by Homeground Services

given initial support. Funding from a range of sources (brokerage, Hope Street funds, business partners and philanthropy) will be used towards a subsidised rent over a period of six months. Over the six months this subsidy will be staggered until at the end of the six months, the young person has the capabilities to independently pay the rent on their own.

During the six months Hope Street will be a joint signatory on the lease. This is to ensure support is directed to the young person as well as acting as a direct advocate and conduit partner with Raine and Horne Melton. Hope Street will also provide case

management to the young person and include but not limited to; tenancy management, employment, education and training, and building healthy relationships in their local community. Once the six months has lapsed Hope Street may still provide support for a further six months dependent on need and mutual agreement with the young person.

Hope to Home works on the premise that when *community* and *business* and *government* join together lasting meaningful change occurs for the benefit of the whole community. Certainly the commitment from local business and government in the City of Melton towards providing

definitive action to stop homelessness amongst its local young people is strong; they have a vision and a plan.

'No-one should be without the basics of a roof over their head, and being in real estate this is something I thought we could make a significant impact with. The Hope to Home project can achieve this...'

— Kieran Carson, Director,
Raine and Horne Melton

Endnotes

1. www.forecast.id.com.au/melton
2. Files K 2015 *Responding to youth homeless in the outer growth corridors*, Hope Street Youth and Family Services