



**MEDIA RELEASE**

**28 JULY 2020**

## **Ground-breaking new youth homeless refuge helping Melbourne's most vulnerable**

A state-of-the-art youth homeless refuge is about to open its doors in Melton, as part of the fight to tackle the growing homelessness problem plaguing Melbourne's suburban growth corridors.

The facility, called the Hope Street First Response Youth Service, will provide short-term crisis accommodation and 24/7 support to more than 100 young people (16-25 years old) and young families experiencing homelessness each year. Prior to now, the nearest refuge for homeless youth from the Melton area was 30 kilometres away in Sunshine.

There are over 6,000 young people and children aged 12-24 years old who are homeless in Victoria, representing 24 percent of all people experiencing homelessness.<sup>1</sup> On any given day almost 3400 young people and 6100 accompanying children present to Victorian specialist homelessness service agencies in need of support, with many being turned away.<sup>2</sup> The main contributing factors to youth homelessness are Australia's housing crises and domestic and family violence.<sup>3</sup>

The First Response Youth Service is an initiative of specialist youth homelessness service Hope Street Youth and Family Services. It's funded by the State Government, built on land provided by Melton City Council and supported with cash and in-kind contributions from some 40 businesses and philanthropic partners as well as donations from local community members.

The facility incorporates an eight-bedroom refuge, a two-bedroom family unit and an integrated consulting centre. It also provides a base from which a mobile outreach service will operate, providing support to an additional 100 young people per year. The first four years of operation of the mobile outreach service is funded by Hope Street and The Ian Potter Foundation.

While parts of Melbourne's CBD are well publicised as homelessness hot spots, growth corridors are where the problem is at its worst and where some of the most vulnerable individuals are found, according to Hope Street CEO Donna Bennett.

"The CBD is widely seen as the centre of Melbourne's homelessness problem, and that's where majority of support is seen to be focused. However, this doesn't address the larger issues in outer suburban areas," Ms Bennett said.

"This is exactly why we've invested in this Melton facility. Our services will provide critical homelessness support to young people in Melbourne's north-western growth corridors at a time when it is needed most, allowing them to receive the support they need whilst remaining connected to their local community."

Hope Street's First Response Youth Refuge has been operating out of temporary accommodation for the past 15 months, and in that time, it has supported more than 140 young people (83 female, 53 male), some with dependent children.

"Hope Street has been supporting the community for nearly 40 years and will continue to do so. We want people to know that we are here and listening, as we know so many people are in need of help during the COVID-19 recovery phase and beyond," Ms Bennett said.

Hope Street intends to take their First Response Youth Service to the City of Whittlesea in Melbourne's north next, on land that has already been committed by the Whittlesea City Council.

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<sup>1</sup> ABS, 2016

<sup>2</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2019

<sup>3</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2017



**Quotes attributable to key stakeholders:**

- **Hope Street**

*"The CBD is widely seen as the centre of Melbourne's homelessness problem, and that's where majority of support is seen to be focused. However, this doesn't address the larger issues in outer suburban areas. This is exactly why we've invested in this Melton facility. Our services will provide critical homelessness support to young people in Melbourne's north-western growth corridors at a time when it is needed most, allowing them to receive the support they need whilst remaining connected to their local community."*

**Donna Bennett, Chief Executive Officer**

- **Young people who are experiencing homelessness**

*"My life has been quite a rollercoaster. With help from Hope Street, I was able to reclaim my life and succeed in many areas. I have a deep passion to help raise, inspire and lead young people out of the position I was once in. Being part of Hope Street allows me to return the kindness I received from the people who rescued me, and to now have a more direct influence and involvement in the organisation that I know, first hand, works effectively to move young people out of homelessness."*

**Nick, Hope Street Youth Ambassador and former client**

- **State Government**

*"This new facility shows what great partnerships between state and local government and the community sector can deliver. This project will ensure young Victorians who need support will receive the comfort and security of a bed and a roof over their heads so they can get back on track."*

*"Getting a job, studying and participating in the community is much more achievable with a safe and secure roof over your head. This new facility will help break the cycle of homelessness so young people can get back on their feet."*

**The Hon Richard Wynne, Victorian Minister for Housing**

- **State Government in Melton**

*"This is an exciting moment for the Melton community. For the first time ever, young people who are experiencing homelessness in our local area will now have a purpose-built youth refuge to turn to for crisis accommodation, support and care. Hats off to Hope Street, who have advocated and mobilised support for this project, determined to provide young people with the services they need within growth corridors such as Melton."*

**Mr Steve McGhie, Local MP, Melton**

- **City of Melton**

*"We're proud to have partnered with Hope Street on this outstanding project which we know will help ensure the best possible outcomes for our residents who need it most. To have safe and supported local accommodation for people to turn to when they're in need is so important to our Council. This new facility will make a meaningful difference to vulnerable young people in our community who are experiencing homelessness and hardship."*

**Cr Lara Carli, Mayor, City of Melton**

- **Philanthropy**

*"The Ian Potter Foundation is pleased that the construction works of Hope Street's First Response Youth Service centre in Melton are complete. The Foundation is proud to support the Hope Street Youth Mobile Outreach Service, an innovative service that fills an important gap in homelessness services in outer Melbourne. The service will now operate from the newly completed centre, allowing for full integration of support and holistic care of young people in Melton."*

**Dr Alberto Furlan, Senior Program Manager, The Ian Potter Foundation**



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Media release: Ground-breaking new youth homeless refuge in Melton

**ENDS**

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