

# Youth Homelessness From the Mental Health Perspective

Written by a 23-year-old youth refuge resident from Hope Street Youth and Family Services

I would not be homeless if there were more mental health rehabilitation residences. These residences assist young people with managing their mental health conditions. That's what I needed to get into a while ago and it is still what I need. There are just not enough places.

I didn't really consider myself at risk of becoming homeless, because I thought that my household would be more understanding of what I needed and more patient with me and my episodes. It doesn't seem to matter if it's family or friends that you're living with — they just don't get how to help people with mental illness.

The early intervention programs that I was involved with have helped a lot. I was a Hope Street Boost outreach client. They supported me and provided the necessary documentation to gain further assistance, such as an updated Innovation Action Plan. The worker looked for housing and eventually put in the application for a mental health rehabilitation residence.

The main cause of my homelessness was mental health. It is still is. My housemates weren't working with me; more like against me. This meant that it was difficult for me to get the help I needed. When you have a mental health issue, outreach support is so limited that often you get worse and end up not being able to get help. It becomes a cycle that is hard to get out of.

My homelessness has made me more self-conscious and it kind of feels like the world has given up on me. I have to rethink and check myself when I want to try something independently, as I'm unsure of myself. Being homeless means there is a lot that I can't do, as I don't know

where I'm going to be living in six weeks. That insecurity of tenure has meant that a lot of the things that I'm planning have to be put on hold. Most of the applications for medical procedures, employment, or Uni placements all require a permanent address. So it's a bit like a Catch 22. You have to have stable housing to do any of these things but you can't do any of these things, because you don't have stable housing.

The Hope Street Boost program has been the most supportive and helpful so far, because it's a crisis response. Through them I've been able to use resources so that my homelessness doesn't have such a major impact on other parts of my life. When I had nowhere else to go, Hope Street helped me make the changes that could help me out.

I'd say the only negative experience I've had is that a couple of workers have been a bit judgemental in the way they interacted with me and spoken to me. This was especially true when they were trying to give me advice. This stopped me from working on anything for a little while, because I believed that people thought I was being difficult or not using the service properly. They seem to have this idea that if a housing option is not valid for you, then you are the problem.

The best way for the system to respond is that there needs to be more refuges. There are not enough of them in the areas where they are needed. Counselling should be available in every refuge too. Not every refuge has a counsellor and this is a problem. Hope Street has both youth reconciliation program and homelessness dual diagnosis initiative workers. This is the first time I've been able to access this kind of help

in the one place. They were the first ones I've met and been able to access as soon as I arrived.

There is not really any one service or worker who is best placed to effectively respond to homeless young people. Everyone should help and everyone can help by understanding, listening and asking individuals what they need and if they need help getting it.

Young people themselves can help too, by telling workers what they need and what they think needs changing. They have to do it as they go though and not leave it to build up. Suggestion boxes are great, because they are usually anonymous. This stops the young person from feeling like they're asking too much or that someone is going to pick on them for what they're suggesting. This is especially important if the suggestion is controversial and the service might disagree with it. There should be no fear of repercussions. Changes can't be made unless people know they need to be made.

