

Youth Homelessness from the CALD Perspective

Written by a 25-year-old transitional housing resident from Hope Street Youth and Family Services

My problem was financial. As a new migrant, I was like a one-year-old baby and needed some support. It was the second time I had moved to a new country and I had to start from scratch again. I needed new knowledge about work and education, experience I did not have, but that I'm now getting so I can focus on my future and getting a good job.

I never considered myself at risk of homelessness. Actually, I never even thought about it. At first when I was in private rental, I didn't have too many expenses but then the bills grew and I needed to use transport, buy books, use data on my phone and have internet at home. I had only just arrived so couldn't yet work, but Centrelink was never enough.

I haven't had experience of any early intervention. I think it would have helped, but I didn't know what to do. It was a pressure cooker at home and the stress was too much. The conflict in my family over financial pressure during the first eight months got worse. At first we could cover expenses, because we didn't know anyone or have anywhere to go. But once we got to know the country, we had more places to go, but this costs money. We wanted to have a life but the financial pressure built and built. The problems started with the bills every three months and then maybe a fine, because I didn't know the law and I couldn't pay.

This all came as a shock. I never thought I'd be in this situation. I've never been in this situation. We came for a better life with no money and needed help. I needed to redo my education, as mine is not recognised here. I knew I had to help myself but I had my family to help too. It's a lot of responsibility and the more I was in the house the more stressful it became.

The main causes of my homelessness were financial. This led to conflict, which led to stress and this led to family break up.

My view of myself was affected, as were my friendships. Asking to stay with my friends on their couch made me feel worse. I always felt embarrassed too. A couple of nights I had to sleep in a car, because I didn't want to have to ask them for a bed. I felt like I was worthless among my friends. I had always been the alpha-male. If my friends ever needed anything, they would come to me. Now it's reversed. But I don't regret it, because it taught me to be humble and to see another perspective.

The best service response was the hope that most workers gave me. The emotional help and assistance made a big difference to who I am, where I am and I what I am. I was totally lost, but then I found out about Front Yard. When I went inside, they said everything would be fine, it might take some time but we will manage it with you. I felt so relieved. They got me a motel first and then some emergency accommodation. I began to feel settled and took a break from my thoughts of hopelessness. I was feeling so bad, I had thought of moving countries, moving states, leaving my family, and just giving up. The family conflict was everywhere and I felt that if I stayed here the stress would never go, unless I do something so I had to leave the home.

The only real negative experience was at the first place I went to for assistance; an access point. A worker told my mum that they would take her kids away, if she didn't immediately accept what they offered. The same worker told me that it was my choice to leave home and this reflected badly on me. I couldn't believe it. It was as if they

were saying, just go back to conflict and be more stressed. When I finally got into a refuge, I was told I needed to get private rental immediately. I reacted very emotionally. I felt like my family stress was better than the stress this worker was putting on me. I had just arrived and before even getting to know me, the worker seemed to want me out. I just came in, I thought, I'm tired, I need you to tell me about what's happening tomorrow and then we can work on what's happening next week. I just needed a break.

Services could better respond by having more time to help people. I nearly had to go to a rooming house, as it was the only thing available, but I was lucky, I got into a refuge and my sister was able to come too. Services need more than six weeks to make a proper assessment of people, to see where they fit. I could not leave my sister to go to another accommodation on her own. There are not enough places for families or even sibling groups.

Counsellors are probably best placed to help. Housing is the first priority, but having someone to talk to is also important. Counsellors understand the person's needs and not just the practical but the mental health and emotional needs. Believe me, sometimes, bad ideas can invade and in order for someone to change these, the counsellor has to change the person's mindset. They plant the seed, provide the options and guide them to a more positive mindset.

Young people can help by telling others about what they have experienced. They just have to give honest feedback. They need to let workers know how hard homelessness is and why it happened, so then they can be a part of how it can be solved and how they can change their lives.