

# New Innovative Place-based Model of Youth Homelessness Response Targets Outer-suburban Growth Corridors

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Hope Street Youth and Family Services ('Hope Street'), one of the longest established specialist youth homelessness services in Victoria, launched an innovative place-based model of youth homelessness response in June 2018 in the City of Melton, and plans to take the service to the City of Whittlesea next.

## The Model

The **First Response Youth Service** consists of four key aspects:

1. supported crisis accommodation (Youth Refuge) for 100 young people and young families per year
2. mobile emergency response (Youth Mobile Outreach Service) available 24/7 to 100 young people per year, enhancing the supported crisis accommodation response
3. holistic, wrap-around case management and integrated support
4. prevention and life-long diversion from homelessness.

The service will be delivered out of a purpose-built centre that enables the co-location of a range of support services to provide a seamless local response to young people

who are experiencing homelessness. The building design is based on leading specialist youth-focused practice.

The model is place-based and targeted at outer-suburban growth corridors with high rates of youth disadvantage and homelessness, and no or little existing specialist youth homelessness services locally.

Donna Bennett, Hope Street's CEO, said the strategy of the First Response model is to keep young people connected in with their local communities. 'We want young people who are experiencing homelessness to be able to remain in their local community and find the support they need there, enabling them to maintain their community connections with friends, family where possible, school and other activities. A sense of place is important for young people, particularly when they are going through a hard time and lots of change. Currently there are no or very few locally-based support options for young people who are experiencing homelessness in outer-suburban growth corridors. Hope Street's First Response Youth Service is set to change that,' she said.



Donna Bennett, Minister Natalie Hutchins and City of Melbourne Mayor Bob Turner

The Hope Street First Response Youth Service targets young people who are:

- aged 16 to 25 years
- from the local government area
- individuals or part of a couple or family (for example, siblings, single parent and child, couple and child)
- homeless or at risk of homelessness (including through family violence or mental health needs)
- in crisis
- in need of a range of support responses, in-particular those most vulnerable with multiple and complex needs
- at risk of becoming, or already, disconnected from family and/or community.

In addition to providing supported crisis accommodation and mobile outreach services, the program aims to improve outcomes for young people as part of a homelessness prevention approach by:

- diverting young people from the service system where possible
- making appropriate referrals to specialist support
- responding to complex issues and needs
- assisting with the transition to new living arrangements
- linking young people with supports in their local communities.



## First Response in Melton

In Melton, construction of the purpose-built First Response centre is currently underway and due to be completed in September 2019.

A turning of the sod event took place in September 2018 at the site of the new centre and included a Welcome to Country and smoking ceremony conducted by Mr Ron Jones, an Indigenous Elder. Guest speakers included the Hon. Natalie Hutchins — local member for and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Prevention of Family Violence, Women, and Industrial Affairs — and Cr Bob Turner — City of Melton Mayor. Some 60 community members, councillors and supporters from the Melton area were in attendance.

Donna Bennett said getting to this day had been a journey. *'This day has been four years in the making, and it's a real joy to be able to celebrate this moment. Today is the culmination of research, fundraising and community awareness events, engaging all levels of government in the solution and a lot of negotiating,'* she said.

Donna explained the project is a true collaboration of various stakeholders coming together to provide a local solution for young people experiencing homelessness in Melton. *'This is an inspirational example of collaboration and partnership within local community – the coming together of government, council, businesses, philanthropists, community groups and generous individuals – all who share our passion to end youth homelessness in Melton,'* said Donna.

The State Government have provided major funding of the capital expenses and recurrent operational funding; The City of Melton have leased Hope Street the land for the site; The Marian and E.H. Flack Trust and The Edward Wilson Trust have both provided significant philanthropic contributions; and some 32 businesses have provided either full donations of building materials or significant discounts.

The purpose-built centre will consist of three separate buildings:

- an eight bed communal living building with an additional bedroom for staff providing support overnight

- one two-bedroom unit for young people and their children/families
- administration building and offices, working space for the First Response Youth Mobile Outreach Service team and a service delivery space.

## Youth Mobile Outreach Service

In June 2018, the First Response Youth Mobile Outreach Service launched in Melton thanks to a four year \$1.8 million grant from The Ian Potter Foundation, operating out of Hope Street's existing transitional housing site in Melton until its future move across to the new First Response Youth Service once the building is complete.

Available seven days a week from 10am until midnight, the First Response Youth Mobile Outreach Service provides local mobile crisis support for young people and young families experiencing (and at risk of experiencing) homelessness. After contacting the outreach team via phone, the young person will be met by an outreach worker who will drive to their preferred location to provide support and ensure they are safe. Outreach workers take time to speak with the client to understand their situation and determine what kind of help they might need to feel safe. Next, the outreach worker will organise emergency accommodation and a meal voucher and arrange for the client to meet with a Hope Street case worker the next day.

From here, a plan can be made to provide additional support and referrals to relevant services designed to help the young person get the assistance they need. They will get access to help navigating and accessing the Homelessness Service System, health services, finding emergency accommodation, and assistance getting food and/or material aid, and more.

Since its launch in June 2018, 151 young people and young families have accessed the service and received emergency accommodation, material aid and outreach support. These figures include:

- 59 male
- 92 female
- 108 young people aged 16 to 24-years old
- 43 of their children.

This has far exceeded the anticipated 100 clients in the first year of the service. Of the 151 young people supported by Hope Street:

- 56 had experienced or were experiencing family violence
- 36 were assisted to engage in employment or education opportunities
- 46 received material aid
- 63 were supported to stay with family and friends
- 14 were placed into crisis accommodation
- nine were placed into short-term accommodation
- eight were placed into supported accommodation
- eight were placed into transitional housing
- three were placed into shared space accommodation
- four were placed into foyer accommodation
- four received housing from the Office of Housing
- eight were sleeping rough.

## Insights from the First Response Youth Mobile Outreach team

We spoke to Tegan Tregear, Team Leader for the First Response Youth Mobile Outreach Service, to get some insights from the team on the service and the need in Melton.

**Q:** The client numbers for the Youth Mobile Outreach Service are far above the annual target of 100. Why do you think this is?

**A:** Homelessness is very real and alive in Melton. There's lots of people under socio-economic pressures, lots of family violence and relationship breakdowns, and a growing population which community infrastructure and job availability hasn't kept up with. We are the only youth homelessness service provider in the area, so anyone who is young and homeless in Melton and surrounding areas is coming to Hope Street. The closest refuge for homeless youth is 30 kilometres away from Melton in Sunshine.

The team were taken aback by the response from young people seeking support when the program first launched. We weren't sure how many young people were going to access the service initially and it started out slowly as the community were still getting to hear about



the service, and then we had 24 young people come forward for support in the first four weeks of operation! And at the moment we're really only serving central Melton. We know there's a big need for youth homelessness services in the eastern corridor region too, and we haven't yet touched that.

**Q:** The service is mobile outreach. What are some examples of locations/places your team has been to in order to meet a young person who is in need of support?

**A:** The mobility of the service is a critical factor. We are truly mobile. We get calls from young people from all sorts of places and we go to wherever they are and provide the support we need. We've picked young people up from out the front of their houses, we've met them at Woodgrove Shopping Centre or Coles, we've gone to Centrelink or the Melton City Council Youth Services, local secondary schools and even the local Hungry Jacks.

**Q:** Could you see this program being replicated in other areas? Do you think it's best suited for outer-suburban areas such as Melton or could it also work in the city and/or in rural areas?

**A:** Yes, the program can and should be replicated in other outer-suburban areas and rural/regional areas where there are not existing services for youth homelessness. The cities have lots of services available, so the focus should be on outer-urban and rural areas where the need is great and the response has barely started.

**Q:** You are working in partnership with a couple of local accommodation providers to provide emergency accommodation for young people. Tell us about the journey of bringing these accommodation providers on board.

**A:** To be honest, it's been a struggle to find accommodation providers who are happy to accept young people who are experiencing homelessness. Many of our clients are under 18 years old and many private accommodation providers won't accept them because of their age. Even with the older ones who are over 18 years, the accommodation providers tell us they don't have rooms available when we know they do, and they have said things like 'we don't want those people staying here.' There's a lot of stigma and discrimination made against young people who experience homelessness. However, we do have two accommodation providers who readily accept our clients whenever we need a bed for them. They have both been incredible and every young person we have placed with them has been a real treasure and caused no issues at all. Hopefully more accommodation providers will realise that these are just young people in need of a roof over their heads and they will give them a chance.

### First Response in the City of Whittlesea

Hope Street has its sights set on the City of Whittlesea next, and plans to bring the First Response Youth Service to this local government area in the next two years. The City of Whittlesea is a growth corridor outer-suburban area that reports high rates of youth disadvantage, disengagement and

homelessness. There is currently no youth refuge in the area.

Hope Street has been providing specialist homelessness housing and support programs in the City of Whittlesea since 2008, and the First Response Youth Service will complete the local place-based offering. The City of Whittlesea has committed to the long-term lease arrangement of 2,500 square metres of council-owned land to Hope Street, on which the First Response Youth Service will be built. Hope Street now needs to mobilise funding partners from the government, philanthropic and business sectors to fund the capital building costs and then the ongoing program costs.

Russell Hopkins, Director of Community Services at The City of Whittlesea, said the Council is looking forward to the project coming to fruition. *'Hope Street is a trusted partner with a strong track record of meeting the needs of vulnerable young people. Given the rates of issues such as youth disengagement, youth suicide and youth mental health in municipalities such as Whittlesea, Hope Street's proposal to work with Council in the provision of much needed emergency accommodation is particularly important,'* he said.

### Journey with Hope Street

Hope Street issues a quarterly *Partners eNewsletter* that updates partners and friends about Hope Street happenings, including the development of the First Response Youth Service at Melton and Whittlesea. To subscribe, please link to: <https://eepurl.com/cUN9gz>.