

Evaluation of the *Hope to Home* Model for Transitioning Young People into Private Rental Accommodation in Melton and Whittlesea

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Youth homelessness is a major concern in Australian society. In the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016 Census, 116,427 (58 per cent male, 41 per cent female) people were homeless on Census night, an increase of about 5 per cent from the same time in 2011.¹ This is despite a federal government *Road to Home* initiative in 2008, which aimed to halve homelessness by 2020. Clearly, there is a need for new directions and approaches for tackling this problem.

The increase in homelessness between 2011 and 2016 was explained by increases in 'severely' crowded dwellings. Homeless youth (aged 12 to 24) made up 32 per cent of total homeless persons living in these 'severely' crowded dwellings. In addition, homeless youth accounted for 23 per cent of persons in supported accommodation, and 16 per cent of persons staying temporarily in other households.²

Of even greater concern was that 25 per cent of all people experiencing homelessness were aged between 20 and 30 years. Nearly 60 per cent of all homeless people were under 35 years of age.³ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples made up three per cent of the Australian population in 2016 but accounted for 20 per cent of all persons who were homeless on Census night in 2016. Of those who were classified as homeless, 70 per cent were living in 'severely' crowded dwellings.⁴ It appears that homelessness among young Australians is at a crisis point.

The Need for Housing Services in Melbourne's Growth Corridors

Data clearly demonstrates a significant need and demand for housing services, particularly among youth, in both the Western and

Northern regions of Melbourne. For example, during the 2015–16 year, homelessness services in Melbourne's Metro North supported 11,493 clients, of which 2,341 (20 per cent) were under 25 years of age (the same proportion as the Western Melbourne region).⁵ It is also evident that current demands outstrip the affordable housing available in both areas.

Along with the supply and affordability issues, there are several other barriers to finding accommodation for young people in these areas. Often young people must share accommodation with others in similar positions, creating potential interpersonal problems and failed tenancies. In addition, landlords are likely to prefer to rent to couples and families. Young people are also unlikely to have a rental history and referees to support their applications. Many young people have dependent children and therefore find it particularly difficult to find suitable, affordable accommodation.

The *Hope to Home* Model

Hope Street Youth and Family Services partnered with Gandel Philanthropy, Raine and Horne, and Melton City Council Housing Services to implement the *Hope to Home* Pilot Initiative in Melton.^{6,7} In January 2017, the pilot was expanded to the City of Whittlesea, with the support of the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation, with identical aims and rationale. In each area, *Hope to Home* helped to transition 30 young people aged 16 to 25 from Hope Street in Melton, Melton City Council Housing Services, Hope Street in Whittlesea, and *Haven; Home Safe* into private rental one- and two-bedroom units. While the *Hope to Home*

model was a housing first initiative, it also aimed to help the young people maintain their tenancies by providing a range of workshops that would support young people to acquire life skills that will support them to sustain their tenancy, employment and education and connection to family and friends.

The *Hope to Home* pilots differed from other programs in recognising the need for holistic service provision for young people, going beyond securing housing tenure. There was also access to a case support worker and brokerage funds and vouchers. What was unique about *Hope to Home* was that it engaged the support of community stakeholders, including local businesses, to address barriers contributing to young people remaining homeless. Hope Street also co-signed the leases for six months to help young people build a rental history.

Hope to Home Evaluation Methodology

In order to assess the success of the *Hope to Home* pilot programs operating in Melton and Whittlesea, the evaluation team from Victoria University utilised a mixed-methods approach,⁸ using quantitative and qualitative data to understand the program. Interviews were conducted with *Hope to Home* participants and community partners to understand both processes and outcomes. A longitudinal online survey completed every three months by program participants, and service user data provided quantitative estimates on key housing outcomes.

The *Hope to Home* clients were referred from a variety of sources with Melton City Council. Housing services and services within the

City of Whittlesea being the predominant sources. The average age of clients was 20 years, with most clients relying on temporary, unsuitable accommodation with friends and family prior to entering the program.

Key Findings

The major findings from the research evaluation, which can be found in the full report,⁹ were:

- The *Hope to Home* pilot housed 72 people in total, including 45 (from 73 referrals) young people and 27 dependent children. This number is greater than was expected. There were 31 tenancies across Melton and Whittlesea, with a range of living arrangements; in particular, there were predominantly one- and two-children families and single occupancies.
- Overwhelmingly, clients reported that their lack of rental history was a barrier to renting. *Hope to Home* services and lease co-signing helped to overcome this.
- Clients were successfully housed in private rental, on average, within five-and-a-half weeks of commencing the program.
- More than 75 per cent of clients found the accommodation both provided by *Hope to Home* affordable and suitable. Overwhelmingly, participants felt the accommodation was suitable for their needs and gave them access to schools, employment, services, family, and friends.
- Clients reported the important role of case managers in relieving some of their stress relating to securing housing. Case managers were reported to have gone beyond expectations.
- 27 dependent children were housed, highlighting the need for services for young people with dependent children. *Hope to Home* may take pressure off other youth and family services.
- Clients were impressed with the broad range of services offered by *Hope to Home*. The services were offered for the entire duration of their tenancies
- Clients reported learning valuable skills and knowledge related to securing and maintaining rental properties.

- *Hope to Home* operated as an intermediary and advocate for young people in their relationships with community members and organisations. In doing so, these relationships developed, raising awareness of, and reducing stigma related to, youth homelessness. As such, the 'ripple effects' of *Hope to Home* have broader social significance.

Hope to Home Model Costs

The brokerage given by *Hope to Home* was an average of approximately \$2,200 per tenancy and \$1,600 per client over a six-month period. These costs were similar to budget estimates, and similar to brokerage costs noted by previous research.¹⁰ These brokerage costs also supported 27 dependent children. The *Hope to Home* model employed the equivalent of three part-time staff (three days per week each) across both locations. The cost of staffing for the pilot was above budget estimates, but less than equivalent programs based on past research.

Conclusions

For a modest cost *Hope to Home* successfully helped young people secure and maintain private rental housing in disadvantaged areas of Melbourne. There is significant scope for models like *Hope to Home* to achieve sustained success

by engaging communities to help support young people.

Endnotes

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018, viewed 26 March 2019, <<http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/2049.0Appendix12016?opendocument&tabname=Notes&prodno=2049.0&issue=2016&num=&view>>
2. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018 viewed 26 March 2019, <<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/2049.02016?OpenDocument>>
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Gill P, Ool D and Chiodo L 2018, *Hope to Home evaluation report: a research project evaluating the effectiveness of a new model for improving the lives of young people affected by homelessness*, Victoria University, Melbourne, Victoria. <<http://vuir.vu.edu.au/36593/>>
6. Baxter M 2015, *Hope to Home: unlocking the rental door: a community and business initiative*, *Parity*, vol. 28, no. 5, pp. 39-40.
7. Bennett D 2016, Responding to youth homelessness in outer growth corridors: a research project in the city of Melton, *Parity*, vol. 29, no. 5, pp. 14-16.
8. Sarantakos S 2012, *Social Research* (4th edn), pp. 50-56.
9. Gill P, Ool D and Chiodo L 2018 op cit.
10. Zaretsky K, Flatau P 2015, The cost effectiveness of Australian tenancy support programs for formerly homeless people, *AHURI Final Report No. 252*, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, Melbourne.

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Matt's experience.

Matt (22) left home at the age of 14 and was subsequently in state care. His final childhood home was in Melton, a place which he regards as home because his friends are there. Matt describes his accommodation over the past eight years as 'pretty erratic'. The *Hope to Home* program helped secure Matt his current rental property of six months. He was very thankful to his *Hope to Home* contact person, stating that '[caseworker] was really diligent. She was just always onto everything'. *Hope to Home* helped Matt with more than just

his accommodation 'some things happened to my car... but *Hope to Home* offered and were able to cover it...my girlfriend was pregnant and [caseworker] was just offering everything for that... I didn't expect so much'. Matt is now a proud father and lives with his girlfriend and child. Matt has been working as a subcontractor for four years. When asked if there was anything else he wanted to tell us, Matt stated that 'I think if more people knew about *Hope to Home* definitely they would use the service...it should be more available to people'.