

The Future With the First Response Youth Service Model

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Hope Street Youth and Family Services had a community vision in 2015, to develop a state-of-the-art purpose-built youth centre incorporating a refuge and assertive outreach. In 2015 Hope Street Youth and Family Services commenced the planning to develop a facility that would provide young people who were experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness in the City of Melton and surrounding areas with integrated specialist youth-focused supported crisis accommodation and immediate mobile outreach support.

By its very nature — the First Response Youth Service model in particular — the purpose designed youth refuge has created a blueprint for the future of youth crisis accommodation, which has been co-designed by young people and has trauma-informed practice at the centre of the environmental design.

Today, Hope Street's First Response Youth Service is an industry-led centre supporting young people and young families in the municipality of Melton and the neighbouring outer

metro and regional local government areas. This specialist centre is a live representation of innovation, and through its very existence is expected to drive the sector towards continued adoption of innovative design.

About Hope Street's First Response Youth Service

This unique model was conceptualised, planned, designed, and established with a purpose built centre in direct response to youth homelessness in the City of Melton where increasing numbers of young people with high levels of vulnerability were identified.¹

The centre intentionally encompassed supported accommodation services of the client 10-bed youth refuge, including an independent two-bedroom unit for young families, together with crisis assertive outreach case management support via the mobile outreach component of the model. A separate consulting building as the point of entry to the centre enhances service delivery, with consulting rooms available for external specialist practitioners to meet with

clients. The physical separation of the consulting building to the primary crisis accommodation buildings where young people live promotes the safety and comfort of young peoples' experience of being in their shared 'living space'. It simultaneously protects each young person's privacy and confidentiality by meeting with workers away from other young people, and promotes ease for the young person, being located on the same site. The combined components of the design of the centre and service delivery model enables flexible and responsive place-based services to be provided for young people and young families aged 16 to 25 years.

Located in the heart of the community and within walking distance to public transport, schools, shops and health services, the facility enables young people to maintain connections and engagement with family, social, education and training, employment, as well as family and health services. The First Response Youth Service in Melton uses a place-based approach, which promotes community engagement and support of the centre and of local young people accessing the centre. The place-based approach also utilises a collaborative model of community service delivery with existing community and local government services enhancing our holistic client-centred approach. Hope Street has also seen that young people are more likely to develop stronger and lasting connections to services that are local to their community.

Funded in partnership with the Victorian Government, the centre was built on land provided by Melton City Council, supported with in-kind contributions and grants from as many as 40 local businesses and philanthropic partners, as well as



donations from local community members. The level of support received demonstrates a desire from stakeholders to invest in programs that aim to deliver positive client outcomes and community benefits well into the future, as expressed by one of the corporate partners:

*'We believe the youth of the northern and western suburbs of Melbourne deserve a place to feel safe and that all youth in Australia should have a home. Supporting Hope Street is just a small thing that we could do to contribute and we would like to thank everyone at Hope Street for the amazing work they do every day for our youth and the broader community.'*²

This emphasis on partnerships is an important principle underlining Hope Street's commitment to supporting young people within their own communities.

Progress to Date: The Success Story

Since commencing the First Response Youth Service Refuge in 2019, the program has supported 238 clients — 99 males and 139 females. Support was offered to clients from a variety of age ranges including: 25 per cent of clients aged 18 to 20 years; 63 per cent of clients aged 21 to 25 years; and 3 per cent of clients with dependent children aged 0 to five years.³

As many as 2,995 bed nights in short-term accommodation have been provided, four bed nights in medium-term accommodation and 10 bed nights in long-term accommodation.

Furthermore, 14 per cent of clients were placed into employment and 17 per cent engaged in formal study or training opportunities following their exit from the program.⁴

More broadly, community-focused relationships and partnerships continue to strengthen the services as well as the community support for the centre, and local young people utilising the services. This is achieved via ongoing community awareness-raising about youth homelessness; community participation and support; donation of materials and time enhancing the



amenities of the centre such as a BBQ, raised vegetable garden beds, garden shed, outdoor equipment, child's cubby house; donation of time to enhance services such as provision of art classes; and access to material aid for young people setting up their homes when exiting the refuge, or as an outcome of the mobile outreach support. The community is compassionate and eager to contribute for the benefit of young people and young families recognising the reciprocal benefits of our strong partnerships approach. As highlighted with the testimonial from Cr Lara Carli, Mayor, City of Melton August 2020:

*'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.'*⁵

Since commencing The First Response Youth Mobile Outreach Service, our team have supported 432 clients — 170 males and 262 females — from a variety of age ranges including: 29 per cent of clients were aged 18 to 20 years; 51 per cent aged 21 to 25 years; and 8.3 per cent

young families with dependent children aged 0 to 11 years.⁶

Of the clients who exited the program, 38 per cent reconnected with family and friends in rent-free housing, 35 per cent secured private rental accommodation, 2.4 per cent moved into transitional housing and 0.4 per cent accessed public/community housing. Nineteen per cent of clients successfully secured full- or part-time employment opportunities and a further 21 per cent engaged in formal study or further training.⁷

Through the efforts of the First Response Mobile Outreach team, 210 bed nights were secured in short-term accommodation, along with 14 bed nights in medium-term accommodation. Sixty-nine bed nights were provided in long-term accommodation.⁸

The First Response Mobile Outreach service has established valuable links and partnerships throughout the local community such as: Kirrip Aboriginal Corporation, Victoria Police Melton, Centrelink Melton, Headspace in Melton, Combined Churches, and various local real estate agents.

The program is well regarded in the local area and, with such impressive client outcomes, one can begin to imagine the lifetime benefits and impact the First Response Youth Service will continue to have for local young people accessing the program.

What's Next?: The Future

The Hope Street First Response Youth Service is an industry-led specialist youth homelessness support service model that is an integrated and essential pathway out of homelessness. This type of model stabilises a young person's situation, actively addresses their immediate needs (safety, food, shelter, warmth), teaches lifelong living skills, provides connections to community supports, and much more. This is all in preparation for young people to move to the next step: ideally affordable social housing, then private rental with the aim of preventing a return to the homelessness services system and achieving a positive future.

However the next steps are unfortunately not realistically achievable. As noted in our current submission to Victoria's 10-year social and affordable housing strategy, *'young people aged 20 to 24 years are one of the age groups least represented in any form of social housing across Australia, including public housing and community housing'*¹⁰ and *'of the current 53,962 public housing tenancies in Victoria, only 0.4 per cent, 206 households, have youth allowance as their main source of income.'*¹¹ This unacceptable situation is reflected in our internal data, with *'only 0.4 per cent of young people who have left Hope Street services, including transitional housing clients, have been able to access social housing.'*¹²

In light of our practice of submitting applications for most of our clients to access public, transitional, and social housing, the number of young people who secure this type of housing (0.4 per cent) is alarmingly low. This highlights the immediate need for models such as the Hope Street First Response Youth Service — now more than ever.

Hope Street has developed detailed documentation of the need for a First Response Youth Service in the City of Whittlesea, similar to the service recently opened in the City of Melton. An essential feature of the Hope Street First Response Youth Service model is rapid rehousing.

This will be achieved through intensive one-to-one individualised case managed support that focuses



on connecting the young person and young family to accommodation/housing options. This will be further strengthened with a dedicated private rental support worker, who assists young people and young families to access and sustain private rental. Hope Street has demonstrated a strong track record of working with young people to secure long-term housing outcomes. Since the First Response Youth Service was launched in 2018, a high percentage of clients secured longer-term stable housing.

The Hope Street First Response Youth Service in Whittlesea funding proposal is evidence-based and includes:

1. 'shovel ready' design concepts
2. land provided at a peppercorn rent by the City of Whittlesea
3. detailed capital and operational plans
4. specific support from local and state government, non-government, community sector and local business organisations.

The First Response Youth Service in Melton is a blueprint for a model that works, one that serves the needs of young people and their community equally well and with significant social and economic value. The combination of supported crisis youth refuge accommodation, together with mobile assertive outreach

services are perfectly placed to support developing communities today and into the future.

We congratulate the Victorian State Government for taking the initiative to develop Victoria's 10-Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy. With that strategy comes opportunity to continue to deliver innovative projects. With continued support from the Victorian Government, the success story that is the First Response Youth Service in Melton becomes repeatable, enabling us to continue on our Hope Street vision of a society in which all young people and all young families have a safe place to call home.

Endnotes

1. Hope Street Youth and Family Services, *Responding to Youth Homelessness in Outer Growth Corridors: A research project in response to youth homelessness in the City of Melton*, August 2015.
2. Hope Street Youth and Family Services Partner eNewsletters 2020.
3. Hope Street Youth and Family Services SHIP Client Data.
4. Hope Street Youth and Family Services SHIP Client Data.
5. The film, *The Making of the Hope Street First Response Youth Service in Melton*, August 2020.
6. Hope Street Youth and Family Services SRS Client Data.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Hope Street Youth and Family Services Submission to Victoria's 10-Year Social and Affordable Housing Strategy, April 2021, p. 7.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.