

HOPE STREET IN WHITTLESEA REPORT

The Hope Street in Whittlesea program is based on the foyer model of supported transitional housing for young people and young families who are provided with safe, secure and affordable accommodation for 12 months to two years. Support is provided within a model of seven self-contained units in Thomastown, including two family units, as well as four family units in Preston. Youth-focussed case management assists young people to identify their goals and work towards their transition out of the homelessness service system.

Our young people

This year, the program team has continued to support young people to engage with education, employment and their community. The program supported 38 young people, including six dependent children aged under ten years old. Of the 38 clients, 22 were ongoing from last year and 16 were new clients this year. Some client demographics of note were:

- The most common age brackets were:
 - o 20-24 years old: 50%
 - o 18-19 years old: 21%
 - o 16-17 years old: 11%;
- 50% were born in Australia;
- Two young people identified as being of Aboriginal heritage;
- Overseas-born young people originated from 11 countries, with the majority born in Somalia (13%), Afghanistan (8%) and Iraq (8%);
- The most common reasons young people sought assistance were:
 - o Housing crisis (29%);
 - o Housing affordability stress (26%);
 - o Domestic and family violence (26%);
 - o Lack of family or community support (8%); and
 - o Financial difficulties (5%).

Our outcomes

During the year, 15 young people exited the program, with 86% transitioning out of the homelessness service system. The most common housing outcomes were:

- Public housing (40%);
- Private rental housing (20%); and
- Rent-free private housing (20%).

The youth foyer-like model, upon which this program is based, has demonstrated that providing

people experiencing homelessness with stable accommodation and links to education, training and employment can break the cycle of homelessness. Hope Street recognises the importance of therapeutic programs and activities that support young people's personal growth and development, and assist them to develop social skills and foster positive relationships with others.

OzHarvest

Every week OzHarvest, a food rescue charity, provides the young people at Hope Street in Whittlesea with fresh produce salvaged from supermarkets that would otherwise go to waste. This is a huge help for the young people, who are all low-income earners working in part-time or casual work and/or receiving government income such as the New Start allowance. Purchasing fresh fruit, vegetables and meat is challenging on their budgets, but the OzHarvest partnership ensures their nutrition needs are being met.

Living Skills 101 program

Throughout the year, we ran a weekly Living Skills 101 program for the young people, whereby they all came together to prepare, cook and eat a meal. This brings all the young people together in a relaxed environment that results in open discussions and a noticeable improvement in mental health, social connectedness and general wellbeing. It also allows the staffing team to impart important lessons on food preparation, cooking methods and healthy nutrition.

L2P Learner Driver Mentor Program

We enjoy a continuing partnership with Darebin and Whittlesea L2P programs. The L2P Learner Driver Mentor Program assists learners who are under 21 years of age and do not have access to a supervising driver or vehicle. Two of our staff members have

trained and registered as volunteers to mentor young people on learner permits. We had two young people successfully obtain their probationary licences during this year. This is a huge milestone in a young person's life that is otherwise unattainable for many of our client group.

Group outings

Several group outings occurred during the year. The highlight was an end of year Christmas outing on a punt, thanks to Captain David of "The Punt", who kindly let us come aboard for a private tour of the waterways around the Docklands. This was a fantastic and memorable way for our young people to experience their city.

Christmas at Hope Street

Our young people enjoyed Christmas at Hope Street, made special by a Christmas Eve luncheon complete with Christmas foods, bonbons, a Christmas tree that they enjoyed decorating, and Christmas gifts contributed by Hope Street's corporate partner, Ecodynamics.

"I DON'T FEEL HOMELESS WHEN I'M HERE. THIS PLACE IS MY HOME. I LOOK FORWARD TO GETTING HOME EVERY SINGLE DAY."

21 YEAR OLD HOPE STREET IN WHITTLESEA RESIDENT.

Networks and partnerships

The Department of Health and Human Services owns the properties utilised by the Hope Street in Whittlesea program, whilst VincentCare provides tenancy management for the properties.

Hope Street in Whittlesea values our wonderful community partnerships as a part of our place-based response to youth homelessness in the City of Whittlesea. We would like to acknowledge the following community partners:

- Mental Health Legal Centre (based in Carlton but outreach to Thomastown);
- Melbourne Polytechnic;
- Darebin Information Volunteer Resource Service (DVIRS);
- Bolton-Clarke Homeless Persons Program provides a registered nurse who visits our young people regularly and provides support, advice and referrals on a range of health related areas;
- Reservoir Library;
- Blak Dot Gallery;
- Whittlesea Community Festival;
- Whittlesea Community Connections;
- IDAHOBIT (International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Intersexism and Transphobia);
- Diamond Valley Learning Centre; and
- HYDDI Homeless Youth Dual Diagnosis Initiative.

The Hope Street in Whittlesea team is proud to be a part of the amazing achievements of the young people in our program. We look forward to another successful year.

Report written by Sue Watt, Youth Residential Team Leader.

JESSE'S STORY

Jesse* is 21 years old and has been living in a Hope Street supported transitional housing unit (youth foyer-like program) for the past three years. He became homeless at the age of 16 when his family kicked him out because they couldn't accept his identity as a transgender male. He spent the next two years couch-surfing at extended family and friends' houses. He was sleeping in a school when teachers discovered him. They allowed him to sleep in an empty classroom and connected him into homelessness services, which led him to Hope Street.

Within two weeks of connecting with Hope Street, Jesse was moved into one of the supported transitional housing units. Jesse arrived at Hope Street aged 18, with no driver's licence, having failed year 11, being unemployed, estranged from his family and never having lived alone. Now, three years later, he has completed year 11 and year 12 through VCAT, he has his driver's licence, he knows how to live independently and cook (he is known as the residential chef) and clean (though he says he doesn't like cleaning much). He also has a close group of friends, he is reunited with his family and visits them regularly, and he has performed at a number of Hope Street events – he is a gifted self-taught singer, song-writer and guitarist.

When asked what Hope Street means to him, Jesse struggled to hide his emotions. "I don't want to get emotional . . . I can't even put it into words how grateful I am for this place. Hope Street was the first place I ever found that really accepted me. Hope Street is always there for you, no matter what," he said.

"Homeless is neglect from your family. It's never easy, no-one ever wants it. Be open to help. As a young person you're not homeless for no reason. You've been kicked out of your home and your family and the neglect you feel is always heavy – you think who else would want you if your family doesn't. But the people who are here to help, they are not like your family. When people are willing to help, just try your hardest to open up and let them help you. They're not going to leave you or kick you out – they will help you."

*Name changed to protect client's identity

