

First Response Youth Service

The Hope Street First Response Youth Service is an innovative new model designed to respond to youth homelessness via a place-based approach in growth corridors around Melbourne. The Service consists of two components – a Youth Refuge providing supported crisis accommodation, and a mobile outreach service available 365 days per year including after hours. Both components provide early intervention first response support to young people aged 16-25 years old who are experiencing homelessness in the City of Melton and neighbouring communities.



FIRST RESPONSE YOUTH REFUGE, MELTON REPORT

Construction of the Hope Street First Response Youth Refuge

Hope Street is currently constructing a purpose-built youth refuge in South Melton, with the building expected to be completed by mid 2020. The state-of-the-art First Response Youth Refuge will consist of eight individual bedrooms for young people and a two-bedroom family unit. It will accommodate 100 young people including young families experiencing homelessness each year. The refuge will be a first for the City of Melton and this North-Western growth corridor.

A turning of the sod event took place at the construction site in Melton on 21 September 2018 to celebrate the start of the construction of the First Response Youth Refuge. Hope Street CEO, Donna Bennett, MC'd and welcomed everyone to share in this special celebration marking the commencement of the build of the purpose-designed centre for young people and young families experiencing homelessness. The event included a Welcome to Country and smoking ceremony conducted by Mr Ron Jones, an Indigenous Elder. Guest speakers included the Hon. Natalie Hutchins – then local member for Sydenham and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Prevention of Family Violence, Women, and Industrial Affairs – and Cr Bob Turner – City of Melton Mayor. Kirrip Aboriginal Corporation supported the event with provision of a venue, Melton City Council provided catering, and Ecodynamics donated a tree for the tree planting ceremony. There were approximately 60 people in attendance, many who have supported the vision of this community project from the very beginning in 2015.

Funding partners

Hope Street is grateful to the following partners for enabling this project:

- The Victorian State Government, which provided major funding of the capital and recurrent operational funding;
- The City of Melton, which leased Hope Street the land for the site and provided executive officer expertise;
- The Marian & E.H. Flack Trust and The Edward Wilson Trust, which have both provided significant philanthropic contributions; and
- 32 businesses which provided either full donations of building materials or significant discounts (please see Our Partners and Supporters on p32 and p33 for a list of these donors).

Interim refuge model

Whilst construction continues, crisis accommodation is being provided via an interim model. The First Response Youth Refuge

Interim Model went live on Tuesday 12th of March 2019, thanks to funding from the Victorian State Government. Two private rental properties (with capacity to support a total of four clients plus dependent children in the families unit) were secured to provide supported crisis accommodation until the Youth Refuge building is completed.

Young people and young families who are experiencing homelessness in Melton and neighbouring metro and non-metro areas can now access emergency support and accommodation within a case management framework for up to a six week support period. Team members support young people to acquire short term (crisis) to long term accommodation (private rental) according to their wishes, needs and abilities. Young people are also linked into longer term support services, employment services and other specialised supports to assist them to sustain their housing outcome and interdependent living needs.

Our young people

Between March 12 – June 30 2019, or 111 days of operation, the Youth Refuge Interim Model:

- Assisted 48 young people aged 16-25 years old, including four dependent children; and
- Provided 147 nights of accommodation, with the average length of accommodation being 27 nights per client.

Of the 48 young people assisted:

- 19 were male and 29 were female;
- The most common country of birth was Australia (29 young people), followed by Sudan (five young people), Kenya (two young people) and Thailand (two young people);
- Two identified as being of Aboriginal background;
- The most common age groups were 21-25 years old (46%), followed by 18-20 years old (38%) and 15-17 years old (15%);
- 46% reported that they had a diagnosed mental health condition;
- Five family groups were supported – one couple, and four young people with dependent children;
- The main reasons for seeking support were a housing crisis (71%), domestic and family violence (10%) and relationship or family breakdown (4%);
- The most common sources of income when presenting to the service were :
 - o Youth Allowance (38%);
 - o New Start allowance (15%); and
 - o Parenting payment (19%).



Our impact

Of the 48 young people supported this year:

- 77% received funding to stabilise and/or maintain their private tenancy;
- 29% received advocacy or liaison on their behalf;
- 14% received emergency accommodation; and
- 8% received funds for essential items such as the purchase of medication, external specialist services or obtaining a birth certificate.

By providing funding to stabilise and maintain young peoples' tenancies, we are able to prevent young people from becoming homeless and from becoming entrenched in the homeless sector. The high demand for advice, information and advocacy/liaison correlates with the high rates of breakdown in the family unit which leaves the young people with little or no support.

The most common housing outcomes for young people on exit from this program were:

- 27% exited to rent-free private housing with family or friends;
- 25% exited to private rental (up from 17% on intake);
- 13% exited to youth shelters or other emergency accommodation (down from 21% upon intake);
- 9% exited to rent free emergency accommodation;
- 6% exited to public housing (up from 2% on intake); and
- 6% exited to other rent free accommodation.

Of the 32 young people who moved on from the service:

- 19% were engaged in part-time employment (up from 13% upon intake); and
- 28% were undertaking formal study or training (up from 23% upon intake).

Living Skills 101 program

The Living Skills 101 program is an important component of the Youth Refuge day to day activities. The program supports young people to develop

independent living skills in preparation for moving on into their own tenancies in the future. Support, guidance and encouragement is provided by residential staff on a daily basis, to allow young people to develop a sense of accountability and to be aware of the expectations when living in a communal area or share house.

All young people who are part of the Youth Refuge program are expected to cook one meal per week with staff support. The young people also have set chores to complete in the refuge home on a daily basis, as part of learning to live independently and to prepare for being tenants in private properties or public housing in the future. Young people also attend a house meeting every two weeks to discuss how the household is running and identify any challenges or issues and solutions in a timely manner.

Community connections

The First Response Youth Refuge acknowledges the following community organisations for their support and partnership:

- Western Emergency Relief Network (WERN) for provision of furniture for young people;
- ReLink Australia for provision of social and sporting activities for young people;
- Kirrip Aboriginal Corporation for their support of our young people who are of Aboriginal heritage; and
- Woodgrove Shopping Centre in Melton.

The Hope Street First Response Youth Refuge in Melton is committed to building strong and positive relationships with the Melton community to help support our young people. We aim to support young people to be proud of themselves and their community, and to develop a strong sense of identity and personal beliefs that will set them on a path towards engaging in education, employment and training opportunities and moving towards a positive future.

Report written by Steve Clark, Team Leader.