



Speech by Donna Bennett, Chief Executive Officer, at the Launch of the Hope Street First Response Youth Refuge in Melton Thursday 6 August 2020

The launch of this leading state-of-the-art centre to assist young people and young families experiencing homelessness, is a tremendous community achievement. Over 115 people joined us, virtually, to celebrate the launch.

We have made available the video *The Making of the First Response Youth Refuge in Melton* shown at the launch as well as photographs by professional photographer Hilary Faye and other information in the lead up to the launch. I am pleased to also make available my speech highlighting key aspects of this significant achievement. [See [That's a wrap! Construction of Hope Street's First Response Youth Refuge in Melton is complete!](#)]

I acknowledge that we are on the lands of the traditional owners and pay my respects to elders – past, present and emerging including Aunty Georgina Nicholson, Elder of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people who gave such a warm Welcome to Country.

I acknowledge that sovereignty has not been ceded. I also acknowledge the aboriginal people who have joined our launch today and who have also been a part of this significant achievement.

I welcome our Hope Street team members who are the driving force of the specialist services we provide to young people and young families experiencing homelessness.

A special welcome to our Corporate Committee members who have provided immeasurable support with each step of this very special project.

As our Chair of the Board, Andrew, has outlined, in 2015 Hope Street embarked on a new journey. As a part of our strategic direction to fulfil our vision *for a society in which all young people and young families have a safe place to call home* and to grow the organisation, the Board unanimously supported the leap to undertake our first construction project.

So, the Hope Street First Response Youth Service model was conceptualised and we began planning the process to make it a reality.

Whilst a big step for the organisation, it was also a natural progression building on our expertise as a youth specialist homelessness support agency.

We had the expertise to:

- listen to what young people were telling us they needed;
- research and document the need;
- engage the community as integral participants;
- reach out to our existing partnerships asking them to take the leap with us, in particular the Andrews Government, the DHHS and Melton City Council;
- inspire new partnerships to join this new and natural extension in scope for Hope Street – directly approaching the corporate sector (building industry) to contribute to the project. They exceeded the call for help with 35 companies contributing in excess of \$500,000 worth of materials;



- reach out to existing and new Philanthropic partners – a number contributing to the capital;
- rigorously manage the process; and
- understand our limits and value the expertise of others. Engaging and learning from professionals with specialist knowledge and experience in the construction industry.

In particular, the team of experts forming the Project Control Group or providing key services and comfort throughout the trials and tribulations of the project (some services were also in kind):

- DHHS;
- Melton City Council;
- Prowse Quantity Surveyors;
- HWL Ebsworth Lawyers; and
- Brand Architects who went above and beyond throughout the project.

The First Response Youth Service project was much more than a capital project for Hope Street. With virtually no purpose-built youth refuges in the history of youth refuges in Victoria – as many are retrofitted residential homes or other buildings – this project was a major opportunity for Hope Street to integrate our youth-focused service delivery and practice knowledge and expertise with the design.

Finally, we had an opportunity to design a space/environment that will enhance and assist with young people's recovery from trauma and that will enable our program teams to excel in their practice supporting young people.

Brand Architects created an outstanding design of the centre incorporating key elements to achieve this. Elements that have created a space that is:

- secure (passive and non-passive);
- safe;
- promoting connectedness and emotional comfort;
- welcoming/nurturing; and
- much more.

This has been achieved with:

- lots of windows for lots of natural light and to see what and who at all times;
- using timber internally;
- different shapes and textures with walls;
- creating internal and external open spaces;
- creating small seating/reflection areas;
- having an ensuite attached to each bedroom;
- installation of duress alarms in each young person's bedroom; and
- much more.

A key requirement was also that the centre not look institutionalised – also achieved with the design and materials used.

The design also includes a separate building as the service delivery hub of the centre, enabling the integration of internal programs as well as external consultants and practitioners. A space designed to enhance young people's access to specialist services and to enhance the First Response Youth



Service capacity to provide a multi-disciplined wrap around response to young people and young families.

It is from this building that our [First Response Youth Mobile Outreach Service](#) program, funded in partnership with The Ian Potter Foundation, will also operate, providing services to young people who are unable to access the refuge, 7 days a week.

I also note that our builder, WP Contractors have done an incredible job with putting their all into the construction of the centre.

I am incredibly proud of this new centre and to be at this point with the Minister for Housing, Hon Richard Wynne launching it via his speech in the video.

The achievement of this leading-designed youth-focused centre is a powerful demonstration of a community doing whatever it can to support its young people and young families who are experiencing extreme hardship due to homelessness. That is, a community supporting a vision for a society in which all young people and young families have a safe place to call home.