

Chapter 6: Housing Responses to Child and Youth Homelessness

Announcing the Next Steps for Hope Street: Sustainable Housing Options with Long-term Solutions

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As a nation-leading youth and family homelessness service provider, Hope Street is excited to announce the next step in providing sustainable housing options to young people within the north-west regions of Melbourne and the growth corridor of northwestern regions. As a boutique service provider with over 40 years of experience in supporting young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, Hope Street is proud of its ongoing grassroots community-focused position in the northwest. Being a part of the local community is the cornerstone of Hope Street's continued success. In partnership with community collaborators who are aiming for a brighter future for its young people, Hope Street consistently engages with leading corporate businesses, local and state government, and community organisations.

After extensive research, Hope Street will endeavour to become a youth specific housing provider and engage in the application for registration. To become an official housing provider, once through the application process, Hope Street will be able to provide a lease to young people and their families experiencing homelessness. This will open significant opportunities to increase housing stock for young people, provided and managed by a youth specialist organisation. It will also enable Hope Street to actively bid for further state and federal funding as well as develop opportunities through private equity and procurement alongside philanthropy. This is a fantastic opportunity for social enterprise and community-focused development projects in Melbourne. Developing youth specialist led housing and homelessness projects in the growth corridor, including

First Response Youth Refuges, such as the new Whittlesea build project, are enhanced by opportunities for long-term sustainable housing solutions for young people that are truly youth focused when Hope Street becomes an official youth housing provider.

Hope Street Youth and Family Service supports young people and young families experiencing homelessness: the lack of safe and affordable options is reprehensible and shamefully hinders this vulnerable and growing cohort. Suitable longer-term housing options for young people need to be front and centre in the national response to homelessness.

Currently, Hope Street's young people in the northeast and northwest growth corridor are significantly disadvantaged when accessing long-term affordable housing. The Hope Street continuum for the youth refuge and transitional housing is youth specific with wrap-around support. The local data based on this area shows that more young people will need social housing in the future and that support and accommodation should be delivered in tandem.

Australia is in a housing crisis, and Hope Street witnesses that young people accessing its programs are bearing the brunt of this crisis. The rental market across Australia, including Victoria, is in an ignominious state. According to YACVic, the Youth Affairs Council Victoria, the rental market has a record low vacancy rate of one per cent, 22 per cent of all renters are facing tenure insecurity and sub-standard living conditions and rents are rising at a rapid rate.¹ Adding to this, only 0.4 per cent of social housing and public housing properties are tenanted by young people on an independent lease.

The Youth Allowance set by the Federal Government and provided via Centrelink is 52 per cent below the Australian Poverty Line.² The homelessness sector is overwhelmed by the number of young people and young families accessing specialist homelessness services, with very little options beyond the inundated youth crisis accommodation system, as was highlighted in the 2021 ABS Census data.³ In Australia, 23 per cent of all people experiencing homelessness were aged from 12 to 24 years (28,204 people). The highest rates of homelessness per 10,000 people in 2021 were those in the age groups 19 to 24 years (91 people per 10,000).⁴

Hope Street is a trusted leader in collaborating with local communities that have been neglected, which have either no or severely limited youth specialist housing and homelessness initiatives. With desire for a better response, local and state government are currently working in partnership with Hope Street to build a new site in the City of Whittlesea which will be a First Response Youth Service — a youth and family refuge with leading therapeutic architectural design aligned to trauma informed practice.

In the attempt to raise awareness, as well as develop opportunities to accommodate and support young people and young families, Hope Street engaged Dr Kate Kerkin of K2 Planning to conduct a detailed assessment of the need and requirements to establish a suitable Youth Housing Provider operating model, and to develop a detailed implementation plan to underpin the registration process. Such a process has been beneficial because it is evidence based and articulates the



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dire need for sustainable housing options in the growth corridors.

The K2 Planning report 'Assessment of Youth Housing and Registration Options',⁵ is a detailed report on the service delivery and implementation for supporting young people accessing both social and public housing. Housing responses to youth homelessness should consider existing policies and future strategies to ensure a fair proportion of social housing options are provided. The report showcases

the need for all youth housing solutions, as well as the need for specialised homelessness support in all stages from outreach, crisis, transitional and long-term housing.

The report highlighted a range of deficiencies in the current housing system for young people experiencing, or a risk of homelessness, including:

- the ineffectiveness of the current policy environment in reducing youth homelessness

- the lack of strategic or policy framework
- the fragmentation of existing support systems
- deficits in the present service delivery (particularly in intervention and prevention), and
- a lack of exit options.

In response to this, Hope Street is further enhancing its service delivery and advocacy by applying to become

an official youth housing provider. This official registration enables greater funding opportunities for Victoria and follows up on the recommendations of the K2 Planning report for long-term housing solutions. The report also identifies the need for a youth specific homelessness strategy and service response in Victoria for young people and young families. The key components are:

- a youth specific lens
- developmental approaches in the service system to ensure young people develop the capacity to live independently
- alignment to other key sectors including youth justice, out-of-home care, mental health, and an intersectional perspective with a person-centred approach.

The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) highlights (6) that the lack of appropriate, secure, and safe housing options affordable for young people is a key contributor to homelessness. AHURI also reports that the longer young people stay homeless, the higher the risk they will continue to experience it over the course of their life. For many, it's a struggle intensified by the burdens of trauma stemming from family violence, neglect, poverty, homelessness, and social isolation.

Hope Street stresses the urgency of redressing this housing crisis and its shameful disproportionate impact on young people. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) Specialist Homelessness Services data reported that 25 per cent of Victorians without a home were aged 12 to 25 years.⁷ Aboriginal Australians are overrepresented in the homelessness system. Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) reported that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up 0.8 per cent of Victorians and 10.2 per cent of homeless service users. Young people and young families who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander represent 12 per cent of the overall Hope Street data,⁸ while 22 per cent of young people were born overseas.⁹ In response, Hope Street remains a steadfast pillar of support in the local communities of Melton, Hume, Merri-Bek, Whittlesea

and neighbouring peri-urban local government areas. The Hope Street commitment goes beyond mere day to day survival for young people; it's about redressing the housing crisis head-on to ensure that young people are pro-actively supported to find the stability and security they need to thrive.

The K2 Planning report details the responses from consultations with community and government stakeholders, young people, and Hope Street staff, which in summary identify the key components required for a supported housing model for young people.

The Youth Focused Service Model must be attached to the young person and not the tenancy; it must be integrated and continuous, trauma informed, culturally specific, place based, and outcome focussed. It is also recommended to have a continuum of intensively and publicly available services on site, self-determination for young people, partnerships with community, and flexible service hours including times that suit young people. These service models need to be close to public transport, education and employment opportunities, and shops. The Youth Focused Service Model needs to include a range of tenancies (limited stay supported housing, transitional, longer-term social housing, private rental), as well as dwelling types (single, two-bedroom, cluster models, enhanced refuge step up models, hub and spoke models, studio apartments).

Hope Street Youth and Family Services is growing as an organisation and continues to create initiatives to provide housing and support services to the most vulnerable young people and young families who are experiencing homelessness. It recognises the need for an increased rent gap subsidy for young people and an increase to the Youth Allowance to address some of the challenges young people face that impact their opportunities to gain social housing and other long-term housing.

The K2 Planning report has provided the compelling evidence for the need for a youth specific housing model, including Hope Street's

own evidence of the downstream cost savings of such a model, which has led Hope Street to progress an application for registration as a Registered Youth Housing Provider. Hope Street acknowledges that, alongside applying to be registered, advocacy is essential to lobby government to increase the rent gap subsidy to support young people living on Youth Allowance, and to fund case management dollars to support young people in both social and public Housing properties. Inclusive of this is the advocacy to government that housing is a human right and that social housing funding should have a designated youth specific allocation and funding to tackle the high rates of youth homelessness in Australia.

Hope Street is deeply committed to increase all possible opportunities for young people and young families to live in a society in which they have a safe place to call home.

Endnotes

1. Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic) 2023, *Victoria's Rental Crisis and Young People*, <https://www.yacvic.org.au/advocacy/rental-crisis/>
2. Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) and UNSW 2022, *Poverty and Inequality: New Report Highlights Depth of Poverty for People on Income Support*, <https://povertyandinequality.acoss.org.au/poverty/new-report-highlights-depth-of-poverty-for-people-on-income-support/>
3. Hope Street Youth and Family Services, *Annual Report 2023*, <https://www.hopest.org/publications>
4. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2021, *Estimating Homelessness: Census*, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/housing/estimating-homelessness-census/latest-release>
5. K2 Planning — Assessment of Youth Housing and Registration Options, <https://www.hopest.org/>
6. AHURI 2023, *What Are the Real Costs of the Housing Crisis for Australia's Young People?*, <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/analysis/brief/what-are-real-costs-housing-crisis-australias-young-people>
7. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2024, *Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2022-23*, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/homelessness-services/specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report/contents/young-people-presenting-alone>
8. Council to Homeless Persons 2022, *Victorian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Homelessness Factsheet*, <https://chp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Victorian-Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-Homelessness-Factsheet.pdf>
9. Hope Street Youth and Family Services, *Annual Report 2023*, <https://www.hopest.org/publications>