

Staying home

A Youth Survey report on young people's experience of homelessness

MISSION AUSTRALIA



We would like to acknowledge the Mission Australia staff who contributed to this report by providing helpful insights, clarity and examples of current and past programs that support young people, especially Aileen Lacey, Caroline Hanna, Jeanette Milevski, Jesse Taylor, Jodie Abrahamson, Jurek Stopczynski, Linda Richardson, Ludmila Klianov, Mario Peters, Mark Jentz, Nicole Scarman, Phil Flint, Rachelle Elphick, Robyn Fernihough, Robyn Johnson and Shiva Panchalingam.

A special thanks to the organisations that provided valuable input and support, especially YFoundations and Homelessness NSW. Their insight serves to remind us that behind the data, figures and words are young people, with their own families, experiences, culture and backgrounds.

A note on COVID-19. This research was conducted before the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Mission Australia would like to recognise the challenges faced by young people during this time, especially those who may be experiencing homelessness. It is important to note that the pandemic and its effects are likely to be long lasting and may result in increased levels of disadvantage and economic hardship for many young people in Australia, as well as an increased need for services.

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of lands throughout Australia and we pay our respects to the Elders past, present and future for they hold the memories, culture and dreams of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We recognise and respect their cultural heritage, beliefs and continual relationship with the land and we recognise the importance of the young people who are the future leaders.

ISBN: 978-1-875357-05-5
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This report may be cited as: Hall, S., Fildes, J., Liyanarachchi, D., Hicking, V., Plummer, J. and E. Tiller (2020) Staying home: A Youth Survey report on young people's experience of homelessness. Mission Australia: Sydney, NSW.

CEO Message

Many people would be shocked to learn that one in six young people aged 15 - 19 years in Australia have been homeless at some stage in their lives.

This report not only shines a spotlight on the magnitude of child and youth homelessness here in Australia, but also gives us a clearer understanding of how the experience of homelessness unfairly chips away at these young people's lives, their wellbeing and their futures.

By looking at how their experiences are different to those young people who haven't faced homelessness, we are able to identify the solutions that are desperately needed to end child and youth homelessness.

Through our Youth Survey 2019, young people who have been homeless told us they're facing a great deal of stress and mental health concerns. They're experiencing dangerous levels of bullying, lower levels of happiness, and they're facing seemingly insurmountable barriers as they move into their adult lives.

Sadly, for Mission Australia staff and others in the sector who work closely with young people, these concerns and experiences are not a surprise.

This cannot be accepted as just the way things are. We can and must take action to make real and lasting change and commit to ending youth homelessness in our country.

If we stand idle, too many young people will continue to be pushed into homelessness and will be on the back foot as they transition to adulthood. Many will miss out on crucial education and employment opportunities as they shift from one inadequate and temporary dwelling to another. Without the stability of a safe place to call home, these young people are facing the torment of bullying, mental health concerns and ongoing family conflict.

Ultimately, early intervention is key and we urge governments to do everything it takes so that young people can avoid homelessness, or move quickly out of homelessness if it does occur, so they are adequately supported to reach their full potential now, and into their futures.

I encourage you to read our report, absorb the stories of strength and resilience showed by these young people and engage with these solutions that will ultimately end youth homelessness.



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'James Toomey'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

James Toomey
CEO, Mission Australia

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Executive summary

This report provides unique insight into the experiences of young people who have an experience of homelessness through drawing upon Mission Australia's 18th annual survey of young people aged 15 to 19 years, *Youth Survey 2019*. Importantly, this report furthers our understanding of the causes, patterns, system responses, and policy context of youth and family homelessness. We use quantitative and qualitative findings throughout this report to highlight these issues.

Homelessness can be an isolating, destabilising and often traumatic experience. For children and young people, homelessness can be particularly devastating to their development and its effects are often long-lasting. Stable, affordable and suitable housing is essential for a young person's economic, mental, physical and social wellbeing. It is also connected to a positive sense of self, good health, social cohesion and educational completion.¹

The findings presented in this report deepen our understanding of the issues faced by young people who have experienced homelessness and how these compare to the issues faced by young people who haven't experienced homelessness. However, it is important to recognise that homelessness is a complex problem and that some young people may cycle in and out of homelessness or transition through different forms of homelessness over any given time period and their experience of homelessness may not be captured in the *Youth Survey*. The purpose of this report is to bring young people's stories to light, with the findings highlighting important implications for both policy and practice.

The findings show that young people who have experienced homelessness are more likely than their peers to report:

- lower aspirations for studying;
- significant personal concerns about family conflict, mental health and suicide;
- more experiences of being bullied;
- their family's ability to get along as poor;
- lower levels of happiness;
- increased levels of psychological distress; and
- less positive feelings about their future.

Whether these factors have caused, or are the result of, their homelessness, it is clear that these young people have a range of experiences that place them at a significant disadvantage to their peers who have not experienced homelessness. Intervening early to support young people to avoid homelessness where possible and move quickly out of homelessness where it does occur, will have far-reaching impacts on their current experience and their future.

There is a clear opportunity for early intervention to stem the tide of youth homelessness through changing the systems, policies and practices that impact on young people and their families.

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020

Key findings:

Among 22,673 Youth Survey 2019 respondents, more than one in six young people (17.1%) reported having an experience of some type of homelessness. Of those, 13.8% of young people were categorised as having experienced youth homelessness and 5.6% as having experienced family homelessness.

A concerning proportion of *Youth Survey 2019* respondents have experienced either time without a fixed address or lived in a refuge or transitional accommodation (6.6%) and/or time spent couch surfing (13.0%). In many cases this experience of homelessness was not an isolated one-off incident, with the majority of couch surfers reporting they have spent time away from home more than once, and a small but important minority (5.8%) suggesting they typically stay away for longer than 6 months.

Living arrangements

- A higher percentage of young people who have experienced homelessness indicated that they lived somewhere other than with their parent/s in the past three months (15.6% compared with 2.9% of young people who have never experienced homelessness).
- Young people who have experienced homelessness and had not lived with parent/s over the last three months were most likely to have *lived with non-related persons* (36.0%), followed by *friends* (34.0%) and *relatives/siblings* (24.4%).
- Compared with young people who have never experienced homelessness, much higher proportions of those who have experienced homelessness rated their housing *much less than adequate* or *less than adequate* in terms of *distance to your family/friends* (22.8% compared with 11.3%), *number of bedrooms* (11.5% compared with 3.5%) and *access to services* (9.1% compared with 2.7%).

- We recognise that overcrowding is an issue for young people. While the *Youth Survey* does not measure overcrowding as such, we note that young people who have experienced homelessness are much more likely to report inadequacy in terms of number of bedrooms.

Aspirations for study and work

- Full-time study participation rates were lower among young people who have experienced homelessness (87.1% compared with 95.0% of young people who have never experienced homelessness).
- Young people with a history of homelessness are more likely to report not studying at all (7.2% compared with 3.1% of young people who have never experienced homelessness).
- Young people who have experienced homelessness reported much lower levels of study satisfaction than respondents who have never experienced homelessness (53.7% were either *very satisfied* or *satisfied* compared with 71.4%).
- Young people who have experienced homelessness were almost three times more likely than those who have never experienced homelessness to say they were not intending to complete Year 12 (8.2% compared with 3.0%). A much smaller proportion of those who have experienced homelessness said they planned to *go to university* after leaving school (52.5% compared with 68.0% of young people who have never experienced homelessness).
- Young people who have experienced homelessness were less confident in their ability to achieve their post-school goals: 37.8% indicated that they were *extremely confident* or *very confident*, compared with 49.0% of participants who have never experienced homelessness.

(Key findings continued)

Barriers to study/work goals

- A notably higher proportion of respondents who have experienced homelessness indicated that they felt there were barriers to the achievement of their study/work goals (67.8% compared with 44.8% respondents who have never experienced homelessness).
- Compared with young people who have never experienced homelessness, much higher proportions of those who have experienced homelessness saw *financial difficulty* (20.9% compared with 10.7%), *family responsibilities* (16.5% compared with 6.4%) and *lack of family support* (12.1% compared with 2.4%) as barriers to their study/work goals.

Employment

- A greater proportion of respondents with an experience of homelessness reported that they were not in paid employment but looking for work (40.1% compared with 32.7% of respondents who have never experienced homelessness).

Issues of personal concern

- *Coping with stress* was the top item of personal concern for all participants, however a higher proportion of young people who have experienced homelessness said that they were either *extremely* or *very concerned* about it (59.4% compared with 41.7% of respondents who have never experienced homelessness).
- Much higher proportions of young people who have experienced homelessness listed *family conflict* (40.6% compared with 13.2% of young people who have never experienced homelessness), *mental health* (51.6% compared with 29.0%), *financial security* (33.7% compared with 14.2%) and *suicide* (29.3% compared with 10.9%) as issues of personal concern.

Sources of support

- Young people who have experienced homelessness were less likely than those who have never experienced homelessness to turn to close personal connections for help with important issues, particularly their *friend/s* (77.0% compared with 84.7%), *parent/s or guardian/s* (53.9% compared with 80.6%) and *relative/family friend* (48.7% compared with 59.7%).

Experience of bullying

- Compared with respondents who have never experienced homelessness, more than twice the proportion of those who have experienced homelessness reported that they have been bullied in the past year (39.7% compared with 16.7%).
- Notably higher proportions of young people who have experienced homelessness and who have been bullied reported that this occurred *at home* or *online/on social media* (33.3% and 43.3% compared with 10.2% and 29.0% of respondents who have never experienced homelessness).
- Higher proportions of young people who have experienced homelessness reported that they have experienced *verbal bullying* (75.1% compared with 70.0% of respondents who have never experienced homelessness), *social bullying* (64.9% compared with 59.8%) and *cyberbullying* (46.4% compared with 31.4%).
- Almost double the proportion of young people who have experienced homelessness said that they have experienced *physical bullying* (31.3% compared with 16.2% of respondents who have never experienced homelessness).
- Notably lower proportions of young people who have experienced homelessness reported that *ignoring it* (39.5% compared with 50.0%) and *talking to close friends or family* (29.0% compared with 38.3%) helped them most to deal with their experience of bullying.

(Key findings continued)

Experience of bullying (cont.)

- Larger proportions of young people who have experienced homelessness reported that they have witnessed bullying *at home* (17.0% compared with 4.0% of young people who have never experienced homelessness), *in my neighbourhood* (14.4% compared with 5.0%) or *online/on social media* (49.2% compared with 40.5%).

Participation in activities

- A greater proportion of young people who have experienced homelessness reported taking part in *youth groups and activities* (36.4% compared with 28.4% of participants who have never experienced homelessness), *environmental groups and activities* (17.4% compared with 12.7%) and *political groups/organisations* (11.1% compared with 6.4%).

Family

- A notably lower percentage of young people who have experienced homelessness rated their family's ability to get along very positively: 25.7% rated it as *excellent* or *very good* compared with 61.3% of participants who have never experienced homelessness.

Mental health and wellbeing

- Around half the proportion of young people who have experienced homelessness indicated that they felt *happy/very happy* with their lives compared with participants who have never experienced homelessness (34.4% compared with 67.4%).
- More than half (51.7%) of young people who have experienced homelessness indicated some form of psychological distress. This is over twice the proportion of those who have never experienced homelessness (51.7% compared with 21.1%).
- A much lower proportion of young people who have experienced homelessness indicated that they felt *very positive* or *positive* about the future (41.2% compared with 62.7% of participants who have never experienced homelessness).



List of recommendations:

General

- **Develop a national homelessness strategy** with clear targets to end homelessness with a special focus on youth homelessness.
- **Create a national framework** that places young people with lived experience of homelessness at the centre of design and implementation efforts so that services cater to their diverse needs and experiences.
- **Replicate and fund early intervention services** that prevent young people becoming homeless before they reach crisis point.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people

- **Design housing and homelessness services** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members, with delivery by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.
- **Address the over-representation** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people among the homeless population as a core component of a national homelessness strategy and national housing plan.

Rural, remote and regional housing and homelessness services

- **Increase targeted funding to provide crisis, medium and long-term accommodation** as well as early intervention, outreach and support services for young people and their families in rural, remote and regional areas.

LGBTIQA+ young people

- **Ensure housing and homelessness services are welcoming and sensitive** to the needs of LGBTIQA+ young people.

Young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds

- **Provide culturally appropriate and sensitive housing support** to young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds including easy access to language services.
- **Ensure young people on temporary visas have access to income support** and housing and homelessness services as needed.

Living arrangements

- **Fund youth-specific social housing** that provides the appropriate levels of support that young people need.
- **Adopt a whole of government approach to prevent young people becoming homeless** when they exit all forms of state care including out of home care, hospitals, drug and alcohol facilities, detention centres and mental health institutions.
- **Extend support to all young people leaving out of home care to 21 years** across all States and Territories and mandate 'care leaving plans' for all young people leaving out of home care with clear measures in relation to long-term, stable and sustainable housing.

(List of recommendations continued)

Aspirations for study

- **Fund the expansion of the Community of Schools and Services (COSS) model** that provides a place-based approach to the active identification of risk through schools.
- **Establish and fund more Youth Foyers** in metropolitan and regional areas to provide stable housing while keeping young people engaged in education.
- **Increase flexible and alternative learning options** for young people experiencing homelessness.
- **Make youth specific mental health services widely available** to young people through schools, online platforms, youth and other homelessness related services.
- **Increase university and vocational education scholarships** and fee free courses available to young people experiencing disadvantages including homelessness.

Employment

- **Fund tailored youth specific employment services** that address individual circumstances.
- **Increase funding for services** that support young people experiencing homelessness through facilitating training or apprenticeship programs that also provide case management supports.
- **Provide holistic and wrap around supports** to young people to address challenges to entering employment such as housing and homelessness, mental illness, alcohol and drug issues and domestic and family violence through whole of government coordinated service provision.
- **Increase place-based employment related supports** to young people in rural and remote areas who are at risk of or are experiencing homelessness.

Personal concerns

- **Prevent young people becoming homeless** by adopting measures to reduce domestic and family violence and family conflict, including education on healthy relationships in schools and family early intervention programs.
- **Increase access to confidential, flexible and sensitive mental health services** for young people experiencing homelessness.
- **Increase social security payments** such as Youth Allowance and Commonwealth Rent Assistance, to prevent homelessness and increase housing affordability.



(List of recommendations continued)

Sources of support

- **Increase investment in peer support networks** and peer education initiatives to equip young people with the knowledge and skills to recognise and respond to issues experienced by friends.
- **Improve access to GPs** and other health professionals by providing training and support on the needs of young people experiencing homelessness and promoting a youth-friendly practice environment.
- **Expand funding to youth services** that can link young people to appropriate local supports including outreach services.

Experience of bullying

- **Establish a new national campaign to address bullying** of young people.
- Train youth services, school staff and other agencies to support young people experiencing bullying at home, school/TAFE or other institutional settings.
- **Educate young people experiencing homelessness about mental health** and other supports available in their local communities and reliable online platforms that equip young people to address bullying.

Community participation

- **Create sustainable, community driven opportunities** for young people experiencing homelessness to participate in sports, community events and youth groups.

How well do young people feel their family get along?

- **Increase funding support services** for families including extended families of young people experiencing homelessness to facilitate family reconciliation where appropriate.

Mental health and wellbeing

- **Ensure better integration of housing and mental health support** for young people and provide stable housing as the foundation for mental health recovery.
- **Fund community services to provide long-term supports** to young people where needed to ensure their housing and mental health are stable and sustainable.



Understanding youth homelessness

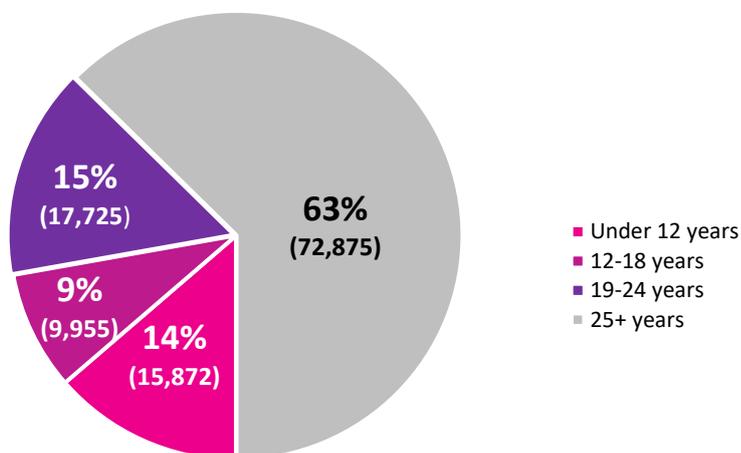
Young people undergo many changes as they go through adolescence and take on adult roles and responsibilities. During adolescence, young people must learn to cope with a range of changes: physical changes, changes to their emotions and ways of thinking, a shifting sense of identity and values, new relationships, and newly developed aspirations for their future. This period in a young person's life is critical in setting the stage for a happy and successful adulthood. To complete the transition, young people need to fulfil educational goals, become economically self-sufficient and develop and maintain social relationships.¹

All of these milestones are much more difficult to achieve, however, for young people experiencing housing instability or homelessness. This report highlights some of the main challenges and concerns facing young people who have experienced homelessness and outlines the need for coordinated, inter-disciplinary policy and service responses to address the needs of these young people and ensure that they do not continue down a path of more entrenched homelessness and are able to reach their full potential.

Prevalence of child and youth homelessness

Over 43,500 children and young people in Australia are homeless. The 2016 Census reported that almost one quarter of Australia's homeless population were aged between 12 and 24 years, with a further 14% (15,872) being children under the age of 12. Children and young people therefore account for nearly four in 10 of all homeless Australians.²

Figure 1: Total homeless population in Australia³



We know young people are over-represented in the homeless population. The rate of homelessness for young people aged 19 to 24 years is particularly high at 95 per 10,000, compared to 50 per 10,000 for the general population.⁴ It is generally accepted, however, that these figures underestimate the extent of youth homelessness. Young people who are temporarily living with others (also known as couch surfing) are often recorded as having a fixed address, despite the fact they may be unable to return there and are living in conditions that otherwise meet the criteria for homelessness.

¹ Xie et al. 2014, 29

² Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018

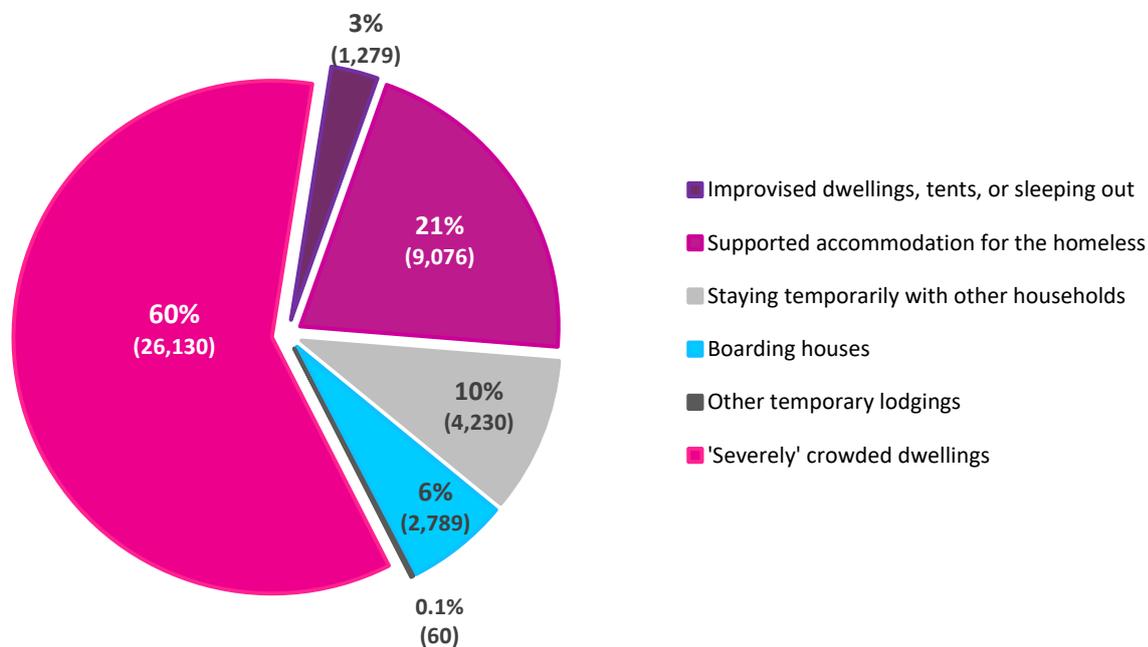
Another approach to estimating the prevalence of homelessness is to consider the number of people seeking assistance from Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS). Almost 43,000 young people (aged between 15 and 24 years) sought assistance from services of this type between 2018-2019.⁵

Many young people experience 'hidden homelessness', staying with friends or relatives because they lack other housing opportunities and not accessing much needed homelessness supports and services.⁶

Types of child and youth homelessness

The 2016 Census notes that there are many different types of homelessness. Figure 2 provides a point-in-time snapshot of child and youth homelessness in Australia as revealed by the Census. However, it is important to recognise that some young people cycle in and out of homelessness or transition through different forms of homelessness over any given time period and may not be captured in this data.⁷

Figure 2: Children and young people aged 24 and under in different forms of homelessness⁸



As can be seen in Figure 2, the largest proportion of homeless children and young people identified by the Census were those living in severely crowded dwellings (60%), a situation known to cause health, safety and child protection risks and lead to poor educational outcomes.⁹ Some groups of people are disproportionately affected by overcrowding. Around half of all people living in these severely overcrowded conditions were born in a country other than Australia (49%) and around one third were of either Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin (32%).¹⁰

Youth homelessness

A high proportion of young people aged between 15 and 24 years present to SHS unaccompanied. Almost three in four (73%) young people seeking assistance from SHS presented alone, some 43,000 young people in 2018-

⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019a, 47

⁶ Johnson et al. 2014

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018

⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018

⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018

¹⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018

19. Of these, over one in four were aged between 15 and 17 years (27%) and the majority identified as female (62%).¹¹ These figures have remained consistent over the past five years.

A common form of homelessness for young people is couch surfing. Couch surfing refers to people who stay away from their usual residence, living temporarily with other households because they feel unable to return home. They might be sleeping on friends' sofas, in spare rooms or garages for days, weeks or months, and this may happen intermittently, or more consistently. Among young people aged 15 to 24 presenting alone to SHS, three in 10 (30%) reported they were couch surfing as opposed to 17% of the total SHS population.¹² Couch surfers are more likely to have limited community support, report poor mental health, and indicate more serious histories of self-harm.¹³

Couch surfing is particularly problematic because it may foreshadow ongoing homelessness into adulthood, as indicated in findings from the *Cost of Youth Homelessness in Australia* study. The study found that 86% of young people who later became homeless had spent time couch surfing prior to the age of 18, often across multiple periods, because they had nowhere else to go.¹⁴

“Many young people couch surf for long periods with little hope for the future. I really hope this can be changed by reaching out to schools to promote services and ultimately what they can do. Like sure there is probably a homelessness service nearby, but can they provide emergency accommodation, food assistance finding cheap rentals, help setting up electricity and water for first timers... the list goes on and youth really are not aware what help is available when they are struggling.” Female, 18, SA

Family homelessness

Most children under the age of 15 who access SHS do so as part of a family, usually with their mother. Around one in five (22%) of those seeking housing support were families with children. Roughly a third (36%) of those accessing SHS between 2018-19 noted their living arrangements as lone parent with one or more children. Almost four in 10 (38%) clients seeking assistance from SHS during this period were experiencing family and domestic violence, with half (50%) of all younger SHS clients (aged under 18) experiencing family and domestic violence.¹⁵

“The government claims to have support systems for those going through domestic violence and financial issues, yet there isn't any help. I cannot stress enough the fact there is no financial help. A couple of hundred \$ a week is not substantial for a family of three.” Female, 17, QLD

Homeless families are often living with family or friends, frequently in overcrowded conditions or in short term accommodation such as hotels and motels. These living arrangements mean that these families may be undercounted in the Census. Those living in overcrowded dwellings often face multiple disadvantage including low socio-economic status, unemployment and other forms of marginalisation that contribute to and exacerbate poor living conditions and other risks.¹⁶ In households that are severely overcrowded, the privacy, health, mental health and safety of occupants are all at risk. Young people living in severely overcrowded homes often have no space to study, no privacy or stability.¹⁷ The experience of overcrowding and poor housing

¹¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019a, 47

¹² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019a, 46

¹³ Hail-Jares et al. 2020

¹⁴ Flatau et al. 2014, 7

¹⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019b, 16

¹⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020

¹⁷ Council to Homeless Persons 2018

conditions are common pathways into homelessness.¹⁸ Importantly, family homelessness often invokes parental fear of losing their children, which may discourage families seeking help from services.¹⁹

Key drivers of child and youth homelessness

In this section we discuss a number of important issues that influence and interact with youth homelessness, and groups of people who are more vulnerable to youth homelessness. These include the prevalence of family and domestic violence as a driver of homelessness, over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within the homeless population and issues around housing affordability. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to examine these issues in detail, a brief summary of these issues is provided below.

Family and domestic violence and trauma

Family and domestic violence (FDV) is an important consideration in any discussion of child and youth homelessness. FDV and insecure housing are the two most common reasons young people aged 15 to 24 years present alone to SHS for assistance.²⁰

Across Australia, many children and young people are affected by FDV. One in eight Australian adults report experiencing physical and/or sexual abuse before the age of 15, with 94% of these cases being perpetrated by a family member or someone known to them.²¹

In the *Cost of Youth Homelessness in Australia* study, more than half (56%) of the homeless youth surveyed had to leave home on at least one occasion because of violence between parents or guardians. Of those who left home for this reason, the median age of their first experience leaving home was only 10 years. Additionally, almost half (48%) of homeless young people reported police coming to their home because of violence between parents on one or more occasions, with 14% reporting police attendance at their home more than 10 times.²² Children and young people who are removed from the care of their families due to risk of harm related to violence are particularly vulnerable to homelessness.²³

“Ensuring kids have somewhere safe to go if there is any sort of violence or ongoing conflict in their house... and that there is someone who will listen to everyone.” Female, 17, VIC

Homelessness, especially frequent moves between friends' houses, is typically highest during late adolescence and can become chronic for young adults with an experience of childhood or adolescent trauma and cumulative disadvantage.²⁴ A study on trauma among homeless youth found that young people experiencing homelessness reported having experienced numerous and varied highly stressful events during their lives, including a high incidence of being bullied (78%), facing isolation (63%), being assaulted (61%), and fearing being killed or injured (61%). The experience of, and witnessing of, physical abuse within the family was also found to be very high (58% and 55% respectively).²⁵ The study further links experiences of bullying to challenges observed frequently in young people experiencing homelessness. Challenges included alcohol and drug dependence, heightened risk of suicide, mental health difficulties, lack of trust in relationships, and difficulty creating stable conditions (such

¹⁸ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020

¹⁹ Hulse et al. 2013, 5

²⁰ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019b, 20

²¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017

²² MacKenzie et al. 2016, 11

²³ MacKenzie et al. 2020

²⁴ Parkinson et al. 2019a

²⁵ Coates et al. 2010

as the ability to concentrate in school, maintain regular contact with community services or participate in employment).

A more complicated picture of youth homelessness is presented by the longitudinal *Journeys Home* study. The study found that family background and childhood experiences (including family violence) did not appear to be significantly associated with more persistent homelessness (except experiences of custody). Instead, respondents' current circumstances were found to be a more substantial contributing factor, with the prevalence of homelessness being much higher for those who have recently experienced family breakdown and family violence.²⁶

Mental Health

It has been reported that as many as 80% of young people who are homeless have experienced trauma, with many experiencing multiple traumas.²⁷ Situations such as abuse and neglect occurring prior to homelessness, and circumstances occurring during homelessness, such as trauma, harassment, and chronic stress, as well as specific forms of discrimination, have strong associations with psychological distress, mental illness, and alcohol and drug dependence among young people who are experiencing homeless.²⁸

Having a mental illness can have detrimental impacts on wellbeing, functioning and development in adolescence and is associated with impaired academic achievement, unemployment, poor social functioning, and alcohol and drug dependence.²⁹ If young people are not provided with the necessary supports, these negative effects may extend well beyond adolescence, creating an ongoing cycle of disadvantage.³⁰

Research has shown that the link between homelessness and mental illness is bi-directional. People experiencing mental health issues are at increased risk of experiencing homelessness, and people experiencing homelessness are at increased risk of developing mental health issues.³¹

Studies have found that young people experiencing homelessness have a much higher incidence of mental health conditions, such as mood and anxiety disorders, compared with the general youth population.³² There is also a higher incidence of self-harm and attempted suicide among homeless young people compared with the general population.³³ Homelessness is traumatic and the experience of being homeless increases the vulnerability of a young person to future homelessness and mental health distress.³⁴

SHS data reveals that in 2018–19, more than two in five young people presenting alone to homelessness services reported a current mental health issue (44% or over 18,900 clients).³⁵ Further, rates of SHS clients with a current mental health issue was highest for 15 to 17 year olds, followed by 18 to 24 year olds (726.2 and 643.7 per 100,000 population, respectively).³⁶ Mental health services, including psychological and psychiatric services, were one of the most common specialised services identified as needed by clients accessing SHS services, however, these needs were frequently unmet with around three in 10 clients (34%) neither provided nor referred to these services.³⁷

²⁶ Bevitt et. al. 2015, 2-3

²⁷ Wong et al. 2016, 831-854

²⁸ Kidd et al. 2018, 7

²⁹ Kessler et al. 1998, 1026-1032

³⁰ Scott et al. 2013

³¹ Costello et al. 2013, 11

³² Flatau et al. 2015

³³ Lourey et al. 2012

³⁴ Kessler et al. 2018, 96

³⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020

³⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020

³⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019

For people already experiencing homelessness, barriers such as lack of money, lack of transportation, lack of Medicare or health insurance, awareness of available services, negative past experiences or lack of permanent contact details are all reported to contribute to low utilisation of mental health services.³⁸

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth homelessness

Within any discussion of child and youth homelessness in Australia, attention needs to be paid to the high incidence of homelessness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Homelessness in the general Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population occurs at a much higher rate than in the non-Indigenous population. One in 28 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were homeless on Census night in 2016—representing more than 1 in 5 (22%) homeless Australians. Indigenous children made up a large proportion of the Indigenous population who were homeless on Census night in 2016, with four in 10 (39%) aged 18 or under and most of these under the age of 12 (25%) considered to be homeless.³⁹

Of those accessing SHS in 2018-19, more than half (53% or 36,400) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander SHS clients were under the age of 25, compared with 41% (79,600) of non-Indigenous clients.⁴⁰ Over one quarter of young people presenting alone were of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin (28% or almost 11,400 clients).

The prevalence of homelessness among the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is higher due to severe and entrenched socioeconomic disadvantage, a severe shortage of appropriate housing in remote locations and a history of dispossession and systematic racism.

Overcrowding is a particular issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were classified as homeless in the 2016 Census, 70% were living in 'severely crowded dwellings' compared to 42% of non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing homelessness.⁴¹ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are also over-represented in out-of-home care and juvenile justice systems, which increases their risk of homelessness upon exit.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and gender diverse, non-binary, intersex, questioning, queer, asexual and more (LGBTIQA+) youth homelessness

An important discussion within youth homelessness debates is the high incidence of homelessness amongst the LGBTIQA+ population. Rejection by family and the community is a main driver of homelessness among LGBTIQA+ young people. A study found that lesbian, gay and bisexual respondents were at least twice as likely as heterosexuals to have ever experienced homelessness.⁴² Similar results are found in the analysis of the *Journeys Home* data, which notes a high level of homelessness for young people who identify as LGBT.⁴³

Young people who are LGBTIQA+ face specific factors which make them more at risk of homelessness, including discrimination, harassment, violence, family conflict and ignorance. Young LGBTIQA+ people experiencing homelessness may also find it more difficult to find housing and support services that accept and support them.⁴⁴

Young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds

There are some issues in relation to measuring homelessness among people from migrant and refugee backgrounds due to definitional inconsistencies.⁴⁵ However, existing research demonstrates that young people

³⁸ The Mental Health Council of Australia 2009

³⁹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019d

⁴⁰ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019c, 60

⁴¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2018

⁴² GALFA LGBTQ Homelessness Research Project 2017

⁴³ LGBTI Housing and Homelessness Projects 2020

⁴⁴ LGBTI Housing and Homelessness Projects 2020

⁴⁵ Kaleveld et al. 2019

from refugee backgrounds are six to ten times more likely to be at-risk of homelessness than Australian-born young people.⁴⁶ It is estimated that between 500 and 800 young refugees are homeless Australia-wide and this number is growing.⁴⁷

Housing affordability

Young people face multiple barriers and experience significant discrimination to accessing affordable and appropriate housing. High rental costs, fewer financial resources, competitive demand for rental properties, lack of rental references, insecure share housing, and the lack of long-term social housing all place young people at a disadvantage in accessing adequate housing.⁴⁸

The rental market is becoming increasingly unviable for young people. According to the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI), four out of five 'very low-income' households pay an unaffordable rent.⁴⁹ Young people tend to be low income earners.⁵⁰

The rate of youth unemployment and underemployment has increased in recent years: the current youth unemployment rate is more than double the general population (15.3% compared to 7.4%, seasonally adjusted).⁵¹ The casualisation of the workforce, a rise in part-time work and general job insecurity has led to increased employment risks especially for young people.⁵² These challenges that young people experience have been further exacerbated by the labour market changes as a response to COVID 19. In June 2020, the unemployment rate for 15 to 24 year olds increased to 16.4% (from 12.1% in 2019).⁵³

The challenge to be able to afford rent is especially pertinent for those receiving government benefits. The *Anglicare Rental Affordability Snapshot* found that in 2020, less than 1% of the properties were affordable for a single person on Youth Allowance or JobSeeker payment (former Newstart payment).⁵⁴ More than half of young people aged under 24 continue to experience housing stress even after receiving government-funded rental support.⁵⁵

Benefits of safe and stable housing

Homelessness can be an isolating, destabilising and often traumatic experience. For children and young people, homelessness can be particularly devastating to their development and its effects are often long-lasting. Stable, affordable and suitable housing is essential for a young person's economic, mental, physical and social wellbeing. It is also connected to a positive sense of self, good health, social cohesion and educational completion.⁵⁶

- Good health depends on having homes that are safe and free from physical hazards. In contrast, unsafe conditions can lead to infectious illness, chronic diseases and injuries, which can all have harmful effects on children's development.

⁴⁶ Centre for Multicultural Youth 2010

⁴⁷ Couch 2011

⁴⁸ Youth Action 2019

⁴⁹ Parkinson et al. 2019a

⁵⁰ Youth Action 2019

⁵¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2020

⁵² Stanford 2019

⁵³ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2020

⁵⁴ Anglicare Australia 2020, 9

⁵⁵ Youth Action 2019

⁵⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020

- Secure housing tenure gives people a sense of autonomy, certainty and control, which leads to lower levels of stress. It has been found to affect the mental health of parents and family stability, which is associated with children changing schools less and having better educational performance and rates of school completion.⁵⁷ Homelessness in young people is strongly associated with mental and physical health concerns.⁵⁸
- Continuity, a consistent school and a stable social network are important to support educational and social development. High levels of residential mobility have consequences for the development of the children living in such households. Evidence shows that higher rates of residential mobility (except where a new school is chosen as a positive) are associated with lower educational outcomes.⁵⁹
- Stable housing is also a platform for other support around the family, such as social services and having someone you can turn to in a crisis. Evidence shows that the longer a person lives in a neighbourhood or attends a school, the more support networks they have.⁶⁰
- Homelessness amongst young people costs Australia an estimated \$747 million extra per year in costs to the medical and criminal justice systems. This is in addition to the costs of providing specialist homelessness services.⁶¹ Providing better pathways into safe and secure long-term housing will not only benefit young people, it will also benefit governments and community in the form of significant cost savings.

This *Youth Survey* report considers the similarities and differences between young people who reported an experience of homelessness compared with those who have never experienced homelessness. In particular, we focus on their engagement with education and employment, their concerns, wellbeing and sense of efficacy over their lives, as well as their support systems. As the above discussion has demonstrated, for young people who have experienced homelessness their transition into adulthood may be much more complex. The purpose of this report is to bring their stories to light, with the findings highlighting important implications for both policy and practice.

⁵⁷ Parkinson et al. 2019b

⁵⁸ MacKenzie et al. 2020

⁵⁹ Taylor et al. 2012

⁶⁰ Keene et al. 2013

⁶¹ MacKenzie et al. 2016

Method

In 2019, Mission Australia conducted its 18th annual survey of young people, receiving 25,126 responses from young people aged 15 to 19 years.

As well as collecting valuable socio-demographic data, the *Youth Survey 2019* sought to capture the views and perspectives of young people on a broad range of issues. Topics covered by the survey include education and employment, perceived barriers to achieving post-school plans, participation in community activities, experience of bullying, general wellbeing, values and concerns, preferred sources of support, as well as feelings about the future.

A cluster of questions focussed on young people's housing circumstances: these included their living arrangements over the past three months, frequency of moving residence and experiences of homelessness over their life, and the adequacy of their housing in relation to access to services, distance to family and friends, comfort and number of bedrooms. We asked young people whether they had ever experienced a time when they had no fixed address or lived in a refuge or transitional housing, and if so, whether or not a parent or guardian was present during these experiences. We further asked young people whether they had ever spent time away from home because they felt could not go back (a proxy indicator for couch surfing) and, if so, the age at which this first occurred and the frequency and duration of such experiences.

Young people were engaged via schools, community organisations, through Mission Australia services and at youth events. Following approval from State and Territory Education Departments, as well as Catholic Education Offices, all secondary school principals were approached via email with information about the survey and how to get involved. Information about the *Youth Survey* was also distributed to Mission Australia services, local government organisations and networks, Commonwealth state/territory departments, youth organisations, and peak bodies.

Sample breakdown

From the questions we asked young people about their experiences of homelessness, we have grouped respondents into categories, enabling us to examine their responses to the other survey questions and to see where concerns and life experiences may differ or be similar amongst those who have never experienced homelessness compared to those who have. To provide greater insight into the differences and similarities among young people who have been homeless, we have further broken the data down to examine the responses of those who have experienced:

- **Youth homelessness** i.e. homelessness without a parent/guardian (either time with no fixed address, living in a refuge or transitional housing, or couch surfing); and
- **Family homelessness** i.e. homelessness with a parent/ guardian (time with no fixed address, living in a refuge or transitional housing with a parent/guardian present during at least one experience).

Among *Youth Survey 2019* respondents, a total of 3,876 individual young people indicated having an experience of some type of homelessness. 18,797 young people indicated having no experience of homelessness (the remaining respondents chose not to answer these questions). This means that more than one in six young people (17.1%) reported having an experience of homelessness (see Appendix for state/ territory breakdowns).

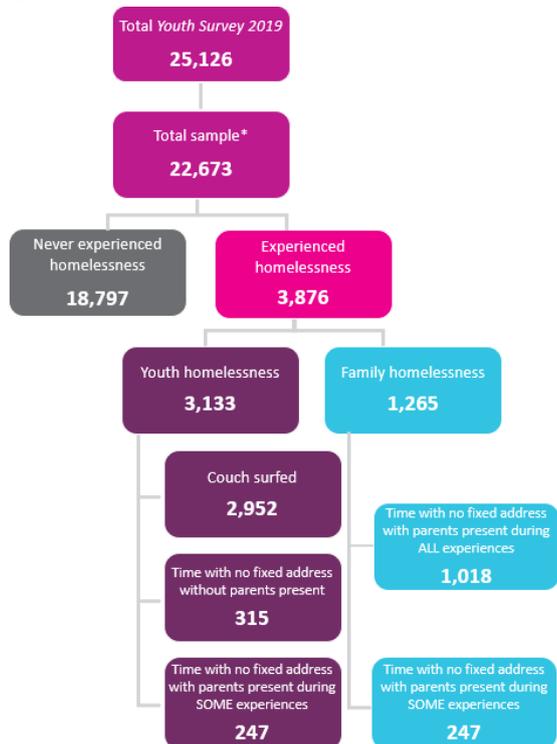
When further broken down to examine whether or not a parent/guardian present was present during these experiences of homelessness, 13.8% (n= 3,133) of respondents were categorised as having experienced youth homelessness, and 5.6% (n= 1,265) of respondents as having experienced family homelessness (as per the definitions and qualifying criteria above).

In order to understand the socio-economic status (SES) of the 3,876 young people who have experienced homelessness, the postcode information gathered about each respondent was mapped against one of the ABS' Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) to determine the relative SES of their local area. Specifically, the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD) was selected for this analysis which ranks areas in terms of relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage. Importantly, this revealed that of those who have experienced homelessness there was a spread of respondents across all SES groups, with 32.6% living in low SES areas (reporting a postcode in the bottom 40% for IRSAD), 41.9% living in moderate SES areas (reporting a postcode in the next 40% for IRSAD) and 25.5% living in high SES areas (reporting a postcode in the top 20% for IRSAD).

Further analysis of the homelessness cohort revealed a wide spread across geographic regions, as well as across participating schools, youth organisations and services. Interestingly, when the responses of young people who have experienced homelessness were analysed on the basis of SES groupings, similar trends were apparent across all groups; that is, regardless of SES, young people who have experienced homelessness reported very similar concerns, values, aspirations and behaviours.

Figure 3 below provides a breakdown of the sample and categories used throughout this report. It is important to note that young people have complex lives and may have had a range of experiences across the homelessness spectrum. As a result, some young people responding to the *Youth Survey* (n=526) met the criteria for inclusion in both the youth homelessness and family homelessness categories, meaning that these groupings are not independent. For instance, respondents qualified for inclusion in both the youth homelessness and family homelessness categories if they had a parent/guardian present during some but not all of their homelessness experiences (n=247). Similarly, if a young person who had experienced time with no fixed address, living in a refuge or transitional housing with a parent/guardian present all of the time had also couch surfed (n=279), they would again qualify for inclusion in both youth homelessness and family homelessness categories.

Figure 3: Sample breakdown



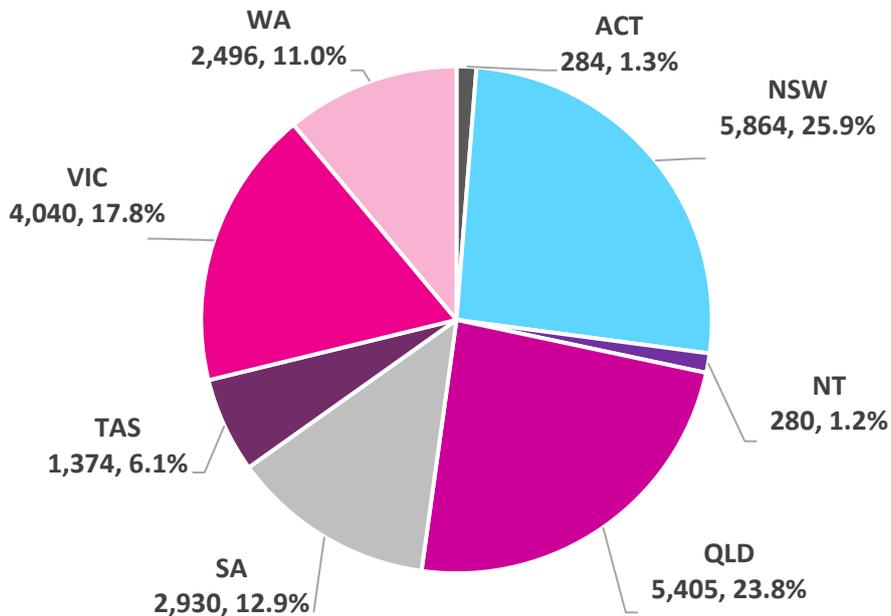
* Number of *Youth Survey 2019* respondents who have responded to the survey's questions on experiences of homelessness

Demographic characteristics of the total sample

State/Territory distribution

The 22,673 *Youth Survey* respondents making up the sample for this report came from across Australia. Figure 4 indicates the number and percentage from each state/territory.

Figure 4: Distribution of respondents by state/territory



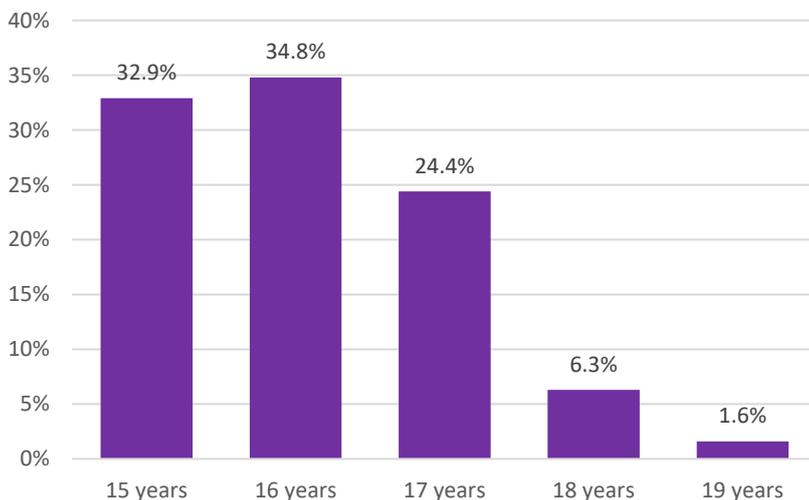
Gender breakdown

Close to six in 10 respondents were female (56.6%) and over four in 10 were male (40.7%). The remaining 2.6% indicated another gender or chose not to answer this question.

Age breakdown

The age distribution of respondents is shown in Figure 5 below. As can be seen, under one third of respondents were 15 years old, slightly over one third were 16, around one quarter were 17, and under one in 10 were 18 years or older.

Figure 5: Age distribution of respondents



Identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

A total of 1,389 respondents identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (6.2%). Of the survey total, 1,155 (5.1%) identified as Aboriginal and 128 (0.6%) identified as Torres Strait Islander (the remaining 0.5% identified as both).

Born overseas and language background

A total of 3,157 respondents (14%) indicated that they were born overseas and 3,881 (17.3%) indicated speaking a language other than English at home.

Disability

A total of 1,416 (6.2%) respondents identified as living with disability. The most frequently cited disabilities for respondents were (in order of frequency): autism, learning disabilities and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Findings

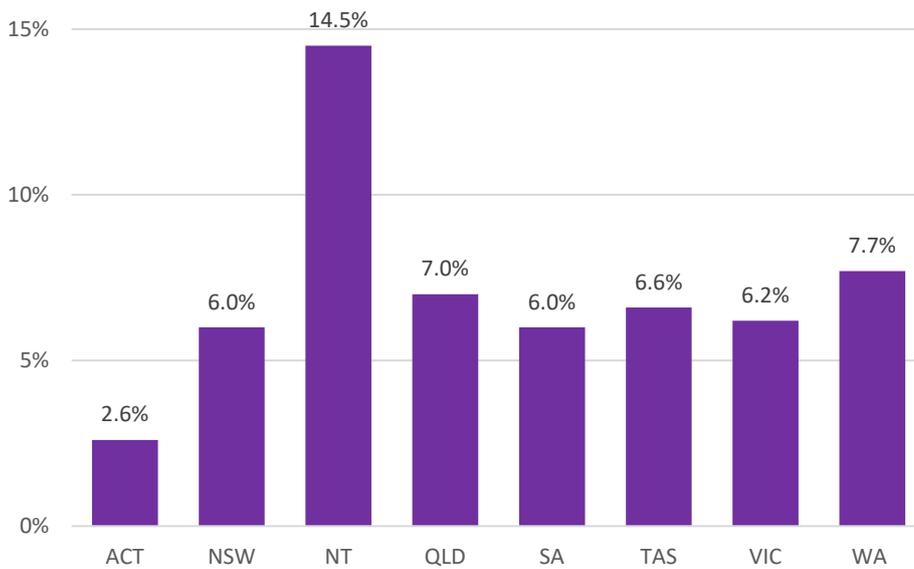
Experiences of homelessness among Youth Survey 2019 respondents

The findings below detail the housing and homelessness experiences of respondents to the *Youth Survey 2019*. They reveal that a concerning proportion of young people have experienced either: time without a fixed address or living in a refuge or transitional accommodation (6.6%) and/or time spent couch surfing (13.0%). Moreover, they suggest that in many cases this experience of homelessness is not an isolated one-off incident, with the majority of couch surfers reporting they have spent time away from home more than once, and a small but important minority (5.8%) suggesting they stay away for longer than 6 months, putting them on the path to entrenched homelessness if intervention does not occur.

Time without a fixed address or lived in a refuge or transitional accommodation

The *Youth Survey 2019* asked young people if they had ever experienced a time when they had no fixed address or lived in a refuge or transitional accommodation. In total 1,597 (6.6%) respondents indicated having experienced this at least once. Very similar percentages of female and male respondents indicated having experienced such a time (6.5% compared with 5.8% respectively). Across the age groups, reports of this type of homelessness were at similar levels for 15 to 17 year olds (ranging from 5.9% to 6.6%), while they increased slightly among 18 year olds (9.2%) and more markedly among 19 year olds (18.9%). As can be seen in Figure 6 below, proportions of young people reporting such experiences across the various states and territories ranged from 2.6% in the ACT to 14.5% in the NT. This notably higher level of reported homelessness in the NT reflects the Census findings of a disproportionately high rate of homelessness within the NT.

Figure 6: Percentage of respondents reporting having experienced a time with no fixed address or living in a refuge or transitional housing, by state/territory



Of the 1,597 young people who reported having experienced a time when they had no fixed address or lived in a refuge or transitional accommodation: almost two thirds (64.4%) indicated that a parent/guardian had been present during all of these experiences; around one in six (15.6%) indicated that a parent/guardian had been present during some but not all of these experiences; and under one in five (19.9%) indicated that a parent/guardian had not been present during any of these experiences. A slightly higher proportion of females than males reported having had a parent/guardian present during all of their experiences of homelessness (68.5% compared with 63.6%). Similar proportions of males and females indicated having had a parent/guardian present during some but not all of these experiences (15.5% and 15.6% respectively) and greater proportions of males than females during none of these experiences (20.9% compared with 15.9%).

Couch surfing

Young people were also asked if they had ever spent time away from home because they felt that they couldn't go back (used as a proxy for couch surfing). 2,952 young people (12.1%) reported a couch surfing experience. A higher percentage of female than male respondents reported having couch surfed (13.4% compared with 9.4%). Unsurprisingly, as with other experiences of homelessness, the percentage of young people having couch surfed increased with age, ranging from 11.3% of 15 year olds to 25.6% of 19 year olds. Across all states and territories, the percentage of young people reporting having couched surfed ranged from over one in 10 in the ACT (10.4%) to over one in five in the NT (22.4%).

Figure 7: Couch surfing, by state/territory

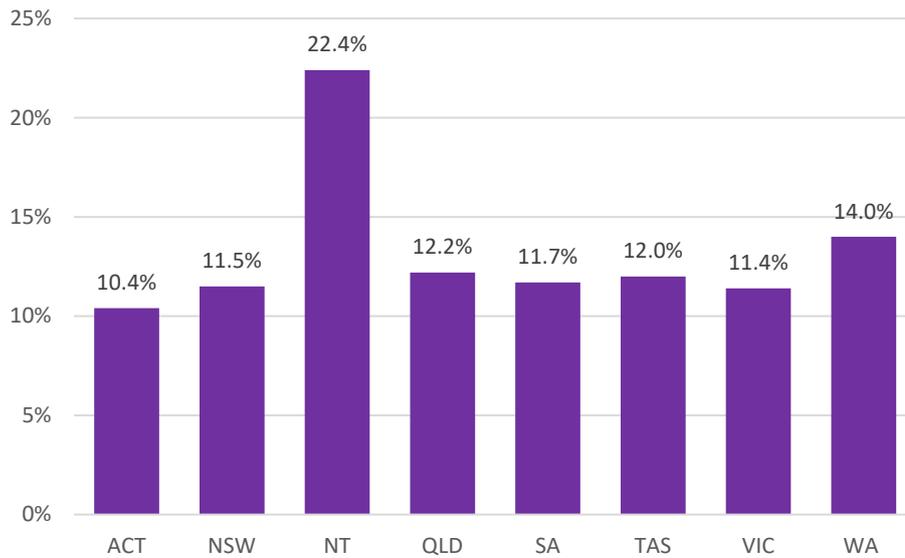
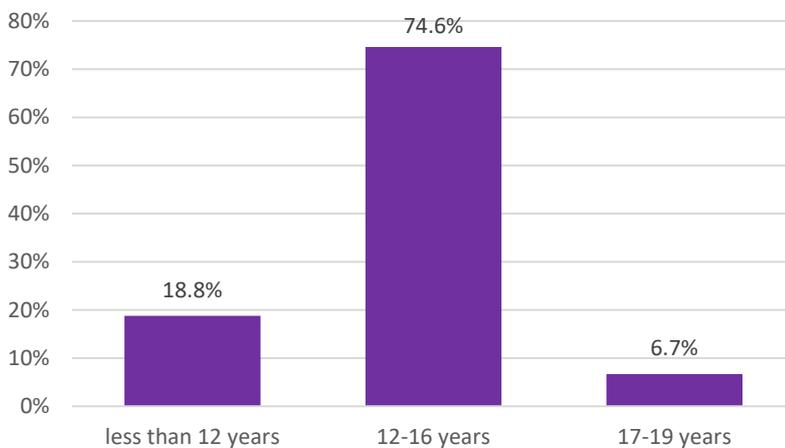


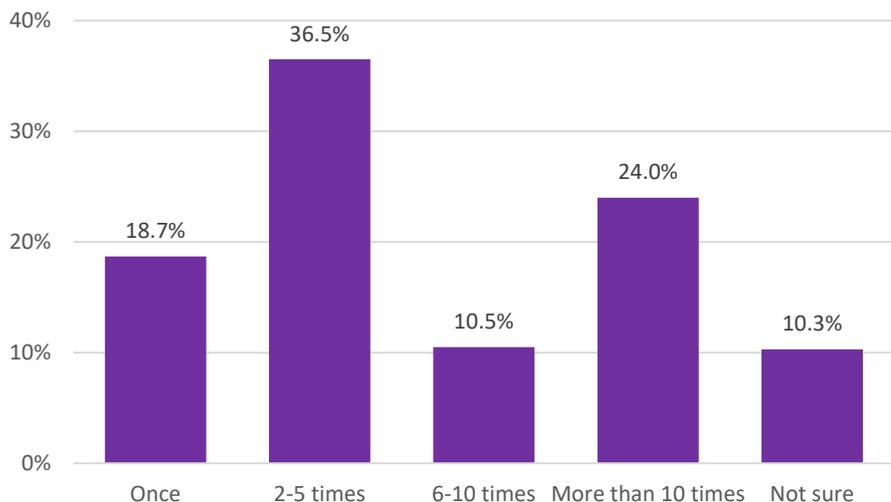
Figure 8 below indicates the age at which these young people first couch surfed. For the majority (74.6%) of young people, the first occasion of couch surfing occurred when they were between 12 and 16 years old. Almost one in five (18.8%) of those who have couch surfed, reported that they had first done so when they were less than 12 years old and 6.7% when they were between 17 and 19 years old.

Figure 8: Age on first occasion of couch surfing



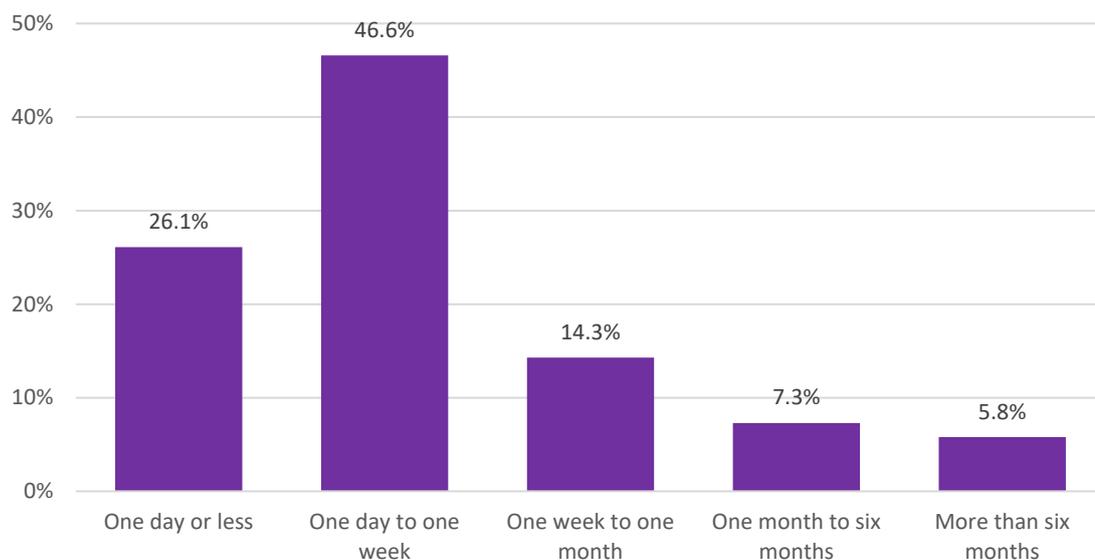
Young people who have couch surfed were asked how many times they have ever done this. Importantly, the majority had done so on more than one occasion, with under one in four young people (24.0%) indicating they had done so on more than 10 occasions (see Figure 9 below).

Figure 9: Young people who spent time away from home by the number of times ever spent away from home



Those who have couch surfed were also asked how long they typically spent away from home on each occasion. While for over one in four (26.1%) young people this experience lasted for one day or less, close to half (46.6%) of those who couch surfed typically stayed away for one day to one week and 5.8% typically stayed away for longer than six months, as shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Typical length of time spent away from home for young people couch surfing



The remainder of this report draws on the homelessness responses presented above to examine similarities and differences in the concerns and aspirations of young people who have experienced both youth and family homelessness. Results are presented from here on as:

- Young people who have never experienced homelessness;
- Young people who reported an experience of homelessness;
- Young people experiencing youth homelessness; and
- Young people experiencing family homelessness.

Living arrangements

Survey respondents were asked whether they had spent most of their time over the past three months living with their parent/s or somewhere else. A higher percentage of young people who have experienced homelessness indicated that they lived somewhere other than with their parent/s in the past three months (15.6% compared with 2.9% of young people who have never experienced homelessness). Close to one in four (18.3%) young people who have experienced youth homelessness said that they have lived somewhere else, compared with 11.6% of young people who have experienced family homelessness.

Table 1: Young people living with parents over the last three months, by homelessness status

	Never experienced homelessness %	Experienced homelessness %	Youth homelessness %	Family homelessness %
Yes, with parent/s	97.1	84.4	81.7	88.4
No, somewhere else	2.9	15.6	18.3	11.6

Of those reporting having lived somewhere other than with their parent/s over the last three months, much higher proportions of young people who have experienced homelessness than those who have never experienced homelessness reported having lived with *friends* (34.0% compared with 19.2%) and *I live alone* (24.2% compared with 13.7%). However, young people who have never experienced homelessness were more likely to report having lived with *non-related person/s* (48.0% compared with 36.0% of young people who have experienced homelessness).

Young people who have never experienced homelessness most commonly reported having lived with *non-related person/s* (48.0%), followed by *relatives/siblings* (21.6%) and *friends* (19.2%). Comparatively, young people who have experienced homelessness and had not lived with parent/s over the last three months were most likely to have lived with *non-related persons* (36.0%), followed by *friends* (34.0%) and *relatives/siblings* (24.4%).

Responses were similar among the youth homelessness and family homelessness category. However, a higher proportion of young people who have experienced family homelessness indicate having lived with foster parents (12.2% compared with 7.5% of young people who have experienced youth homelessness).

Table 2: Adult/s lived with over the last three months, by homelessness status

	Never experienced homelessness %	Experienced homelessness %	Youth homelessness %	Family homelessness %
Non-related person/s	48.0	36.0	35.9	36.1
Friends	19.2	34.0	34.7	35.4
Relatives/ siblings	21.6	24.4	24.4	24.5
I live alone	13.7	24.2	24.4	27.9
Foster parents	4.8	8.0	7.5	12.2

Note: Respondents were able to choose more than one option. Items are listed in order of frequency among respondents who have experienced homelessness.

Young people were also asked to choose from a list of options which residential setting best describes where they stayed most of the time over the past three months. As seen in Table 3, the majority of young people across all categories reported having lived in a *privately owned or rented house/flat*. However, a higher percentage of those who have never experienced homelessness indicate having done so (88.6% compared with 77.1% of those who have experienced homelessness). Twice the proportion of those who have experienced homelessness reported that they have lived in a *public/social housing house/flat* (8.6% compared with 4.1% of those who have not experienced homelessness).

Responses were similar among the youth homelessness and family homelessness category.

Table 3: Residential setting lived in over last three months, by homelessness status

	Never experienced homelessness %	Experienced homelessness %	Youth homelessness %	Family homelessness %
Privately owned or rented house/flat	88.6	77.1	75.6	76.4
Public/social housing house/flat	4.1	8.6	8.8	9.8
Boarding school	3.1	3.2	3.4	4.3
Out-of-home care	0.4	2.2	2.4	2.7
Somewhere else	3.8	9.0	9.8	6.9

In order to gauge levels of housing stability, young people were asked how many times they have moved in the past three years. As seen in Table 4, young people who have experienced homelessness were far more likely than young people who have never experienced homelessness to report having moved in the last three years. In particular, young people who have experienced homelessness were almost three times as likely as those who have never experienced homelessness to have moved three times in the past three years (10.3% compared with 3.5%), around four times as likely to have moved four times in the past three years (5.2% compared with 1.2%) and over ten times as likely to have moved five or more times (8.2% compared with 0.8%).

Overall, young people who have experienced family homelessness were more likely than those who have experienced youth homeless to report having moved in the last three years.

Table 4: Number of times moved in the last three years, by homelessness status

	Never experienced homelessness %	Experienced homelessness %	Youth homelessness %	Family homelessness %
0	71.1	44.9	45.5	36.9
1	16.5	17.3	16.4	18.8
2	6.9	14.0	13.7	14.5
3	3.5	10.3	10.4	12.9
4	1.2	5.2	5.3	6.1
5 or more	0.8	8.2	8.7	10.8

Young people were further asked how adequate their housing was in relation to access to services, comfort, distance to public transport, distance to family/friends and number of bedrooms. Responses to this question were rated on a 5-point scale that ranged from *much more than adequate* to *much less than adequate*. Table 5 shows that young people who have experienced homelessness were more likely to rate their housing as *much less* or *less than adequate*. In particular, higher proportions of young people who have experienced homelessness than young people who have never experienced homelessness rated their housing *much less than adequate* or *less than adequate* in terms of *distance to your family/friends* (22.8% compared with 11.3%), *number of bedrooms* (11.5% compared with 3.5%) and *access to services* (9.1% compared with 2.7%). While the *Youth Survey* does not measure overcrowding as such, we note that young people who have experienced homelessness are much more likely to report inadequacy in terms of number of bedrooms.

Young people who have experienced youth homelessness were more likely than those who have experienced family homelessness to rate their housing as *much less than adequate* or *less than adequate* across all items asked.

Table 5: How adequate young people’s housing is, by homelessness status

	Never experienced homelessness %	Experienced homelessness %	Youth homelessness %	Family homelessness %
Access to services you need				
Much more/more than adequate	81.5	60.6	57.4	65.9
Adequate	15.8	30.3	32.3	27.9
Much less/less than adequate	2.7	9.1	10.4	6.2
Comfort (e.g. light, temperature)				
Much more/more than adequate	85.9	65.5	62.7	69.0
Adequate	12.2	26.3	28.2	23.8
Much less/less than adequate	2.0	8.2	9.1	7.2
Distance from public transport				
Much more/more than adequate	66.2	53.2	51.4	54.4
Adequate	22.6	29.8	30.7	29.9
Much less/less than adequate	11.2	16.9	17.9	15.7
Distance to your family/friends				
Much more/more than adequate	61.5	44.3	42.7	46.5
Adequate	27.2	33.0	33.5	31.7
Much less/less than adequate	11.3	22.8	23.8	21.8
Number of bedrooms				
Much more/more than adequate	72.9	53.7	51.6	54.6
Adequate	23.6	34.8	35.9	34.6
Much less/less than adequate	3.5	11.5	12.5	10.7

Aspirations for study

Participation in education

While the majority of survey respondents were studying, full-time study participation rates were lower among young people who have experienced homelessness (87.1% compared with 95.0% of young people who have never experienced homelessness). Young people with a history of homelessness are more likely to report not studying at all (7.2% compared with 3.1% of young people who have never experienced homelessness).

Table 6: Young people’s participation in education, by homelessness status

	Never experienced homelessness %	Experienced homelessness %	Youth homelessness %	Family homelessness %
Studying full-time	95.0	87.1	85.9	88.1
Studying part-time	1.9	5.8	6.2	5.7
Not studying	3.1	7.2	7.8	6.2

Study satisfaction

Table 7 shows that more than half (53.7%) of young people who have experienced homelessness said that they were *very satisfied* (9.1%) or *satisfied* (44.6%) with their studies, which is much lower than for young people who have never experienced homelessness (71.4%). Over twice the proportion of respondents who have experienced homelessness were either *dissatisfied* or *very dissatisfied* with their studies (14.1% compared with 5.8% of participants who have never experienced homelessness).

Of those who were still at school, the vast majority of young people across all categories indicated planning to complete Year 12. However, young people who have experienced homelessness were almost three times more

likely than young people who have never experienced homelessness to say they were not intending to complete Year 12 (8.2% compared with 3.0%).

Table 7: Young people’s satisfaction with studies, by homelessness status

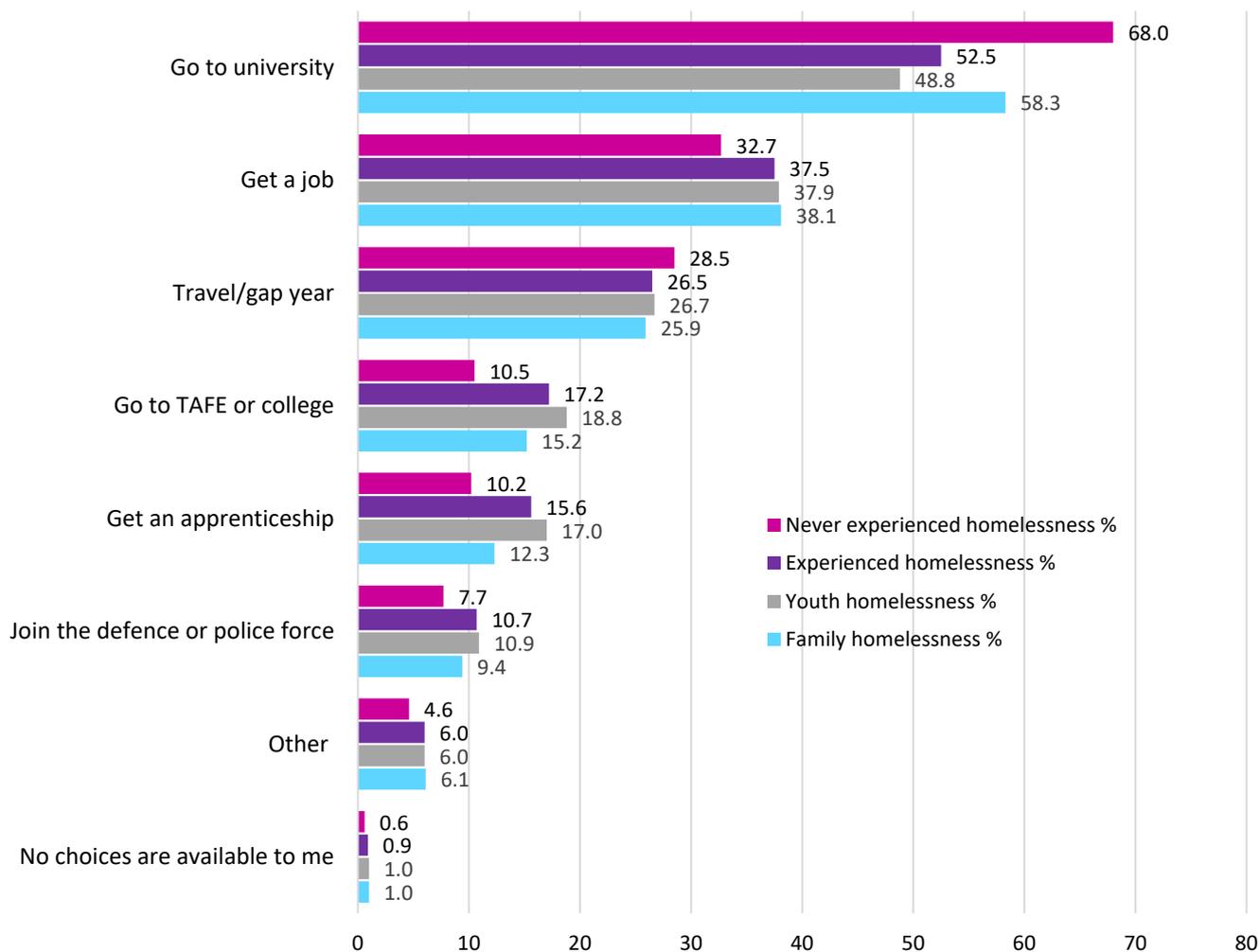
	Never experienced homelessness %	Experienced homelessness %	Youth homelessness %	Family homelessness %
Very satisfied	13.0	9.1	8.8	10.8
Satisfied	58.4	44.6	42.4	47.8
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	22.8	32.3	33.0	29.2
Dissatisfied	4.6	10.1	11.3	8.4
Very dissatisfied	1.2	4.0	4.5	3.9

Plans after leaving school

The most frequently reported post-school plan for all young people was to *go to university*, followed by plans to *get a job* and travel or *gap year* plans. Despite the order of choices being consistent across all young people, a much smaller proportion of those who have experienced homelessness said they planned to *go to university* after leaving school (52.5% compared with 68.0% of young people who have never experienced homelessness). Conversely, higher proportions of young people who have experienced homelessness said they were planning to *get a job* (37.5% compared with 32.7%), *go to TAFE or college* (17.2% compared with 10.5%) or *get an apprenticeship* (15.6% compared with 10.2%).

Young people who have experienced youth homelessness were the least likely to indicate plans to *go to university* (48.8% compared with 58.3% of young people who have experienced family homelessness).

Figure 11: Young people’s plans after leaving school, by homelessness status



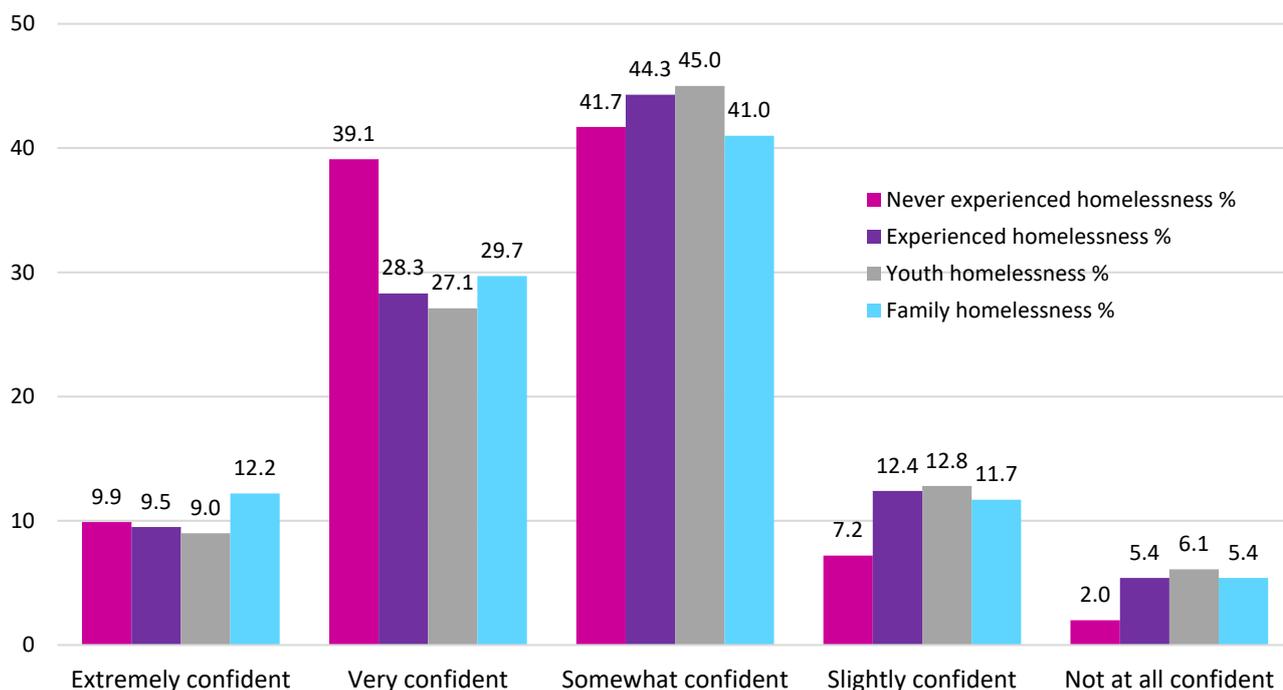
Note: Respondents were able to choose more than one option. Items are listed in order of frequency among respondents who have experienced homelessness.

How confident are young people who have experienced homelessness in achieving their study/work goals?

Respondents were asked how confident they were in their ability to achieve their study/work goals after school. As shown in Figure 12, close to four in 10 (37.8%) respondents who have experienced homelessness indicated high levels of confidence in their ability to achieve their study/work goals, with 9.5% indicating that they were *extremely confident* and 28.3% indicating that they were *very confident*. This is much lower compared to young people who have never experienced homelessness: 49.0%.

Young people who have experienced youth homelessness expressed lower levels of confidence in their ability to achieve their post-school goals (18.9% were *slightly confident* or *not at all confident*, compared with 17.1% of young people who have experienced family homelessness and 9.2% of young people who had never experienced homelessness).

Figure 12: Young people’s confidence in achieving post-school goals, by homelessness status



Barriers to the achievement of post-school goals

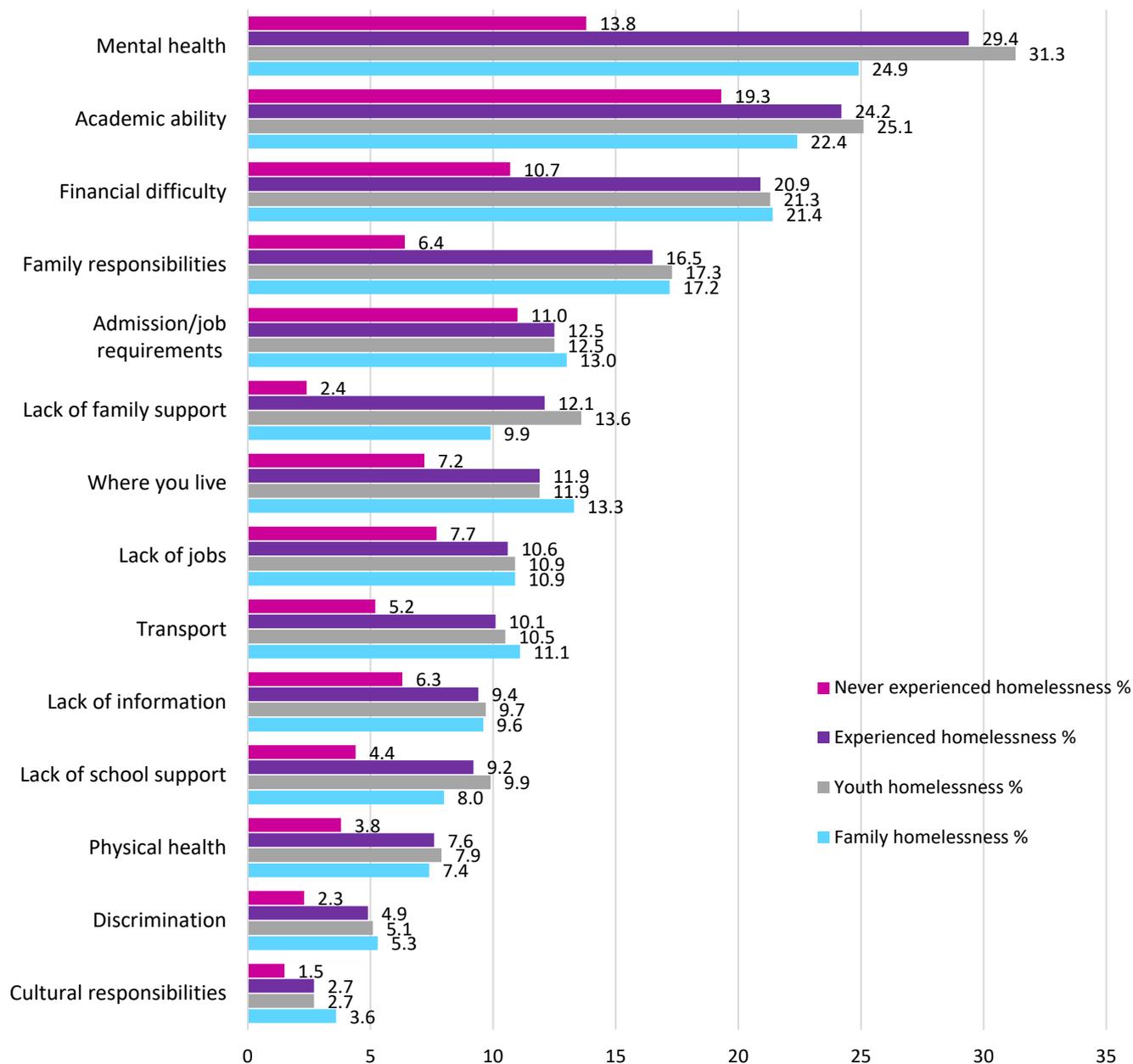
Young people were asked whether they felt there were any barriers that may impact upon the achievement of their study/work goals after finishing school. Close to seven in 10 (67.8%) respondents who have experienced homelessness indicated that they felt there were barriers that would impact upon the achievement of their study/work goals. A higher percentage of those experiencing youth homelessness perceived the presence of barriers (70.5% compared with 64.0% of young people who have experienced family homelessness). This is notably higher compared with respondents who have never experienced homelessness: 44.8%.

All respondents who stated that they felt there were barriers were then asked to indicate from a number of items the barrier/s that may impact upon the achievement of their post-school goals. Figure 13 shows the percentage of respondents who reported each item was a barrier. Overall, a higher proportion of young people who have experienced homelessness indicated that all items were barriers to achieving their study/work goals, compared with young people who have never experienced homelessness.

Over twice the proportion of young people who have experienced homelessness saw *mental health* as a barrier to achieving their study/work goals (29.4% compared with 13.8% of respondents who have never experienced homelessness). Compared with young people who have never experienced homelessness, much higher proportions of those who have experienced homelessness saw *financial difficulty* (20.9% compared with 10.7%), *family responsibilities* (16.5% compared with 6.4%) and *lack of family support* (12.1% compared with 2.4%) as barriers.

While responses were fairly similar among the youth homelessness and family homelessness category, those who had experienced youth homelessness were slightly more likely than those who had experienced family homelessness to cite *mental health* (31.3% compared with 24.9%), *lack of family support* (13.6% compared with 9.9%) and *academic ability* (25.1% compared with 22.4%) as barriers.

Figure 13: Barriers to the achievement of study/work goals, by homelessness status



Note: Respondents were able to choose more than one option. Items are listed in order of frequency among young people who have experienced homelessness.

Employment

Respondents were asked if they had paid employment and, if so, to specify how many hours they worked in an average week. Only a small number of respondents reported that they were employed full-time. Given the percentage of respondents who were in full-time education, this is not surprising. The proportion of young people in part-time employment was similar for both those who have and have not experienced homelessness (42.3% compared with 43.7%). A greater proportion of respondents with an experience of homelessness reported that they were not in paid employment but looking for work (40.1% compared with 32.7% of respondents who have never experienced homelessness). A lower proportion of respondents who have experienced homelessness reported that they were neither working nor looking for work (16.0% compared with 23.0%).

A slightly greater proportion of those who had experienced youth homelessness than those who had experienced family homelessness reported working part-time (43.1% compared with 39.1%). The proportion of young people looking for work was very similar (around four in 10) across both youth and family homelessness categories.

Table 8: Young people’s participation in paid employment, by homelessness status

	Never experienced homelessness %	Experienced homelessness %	Youth homelessness %	Family homelessness %
Employed full-time	0.5	1.6	1.7	1.2
Employed part-time	43.7	42.3	43.1	39.1
Not in paid employment, looking for work	32.7	40.1	41.0	39.7
Not in paid employment, NOT looking for work	23.0	16.0	14.2	20.1

Note: Part-time employment is considered to be less than 35 hours per week, while full-time employment is considered to be 35 hours or more.

Personal concerns

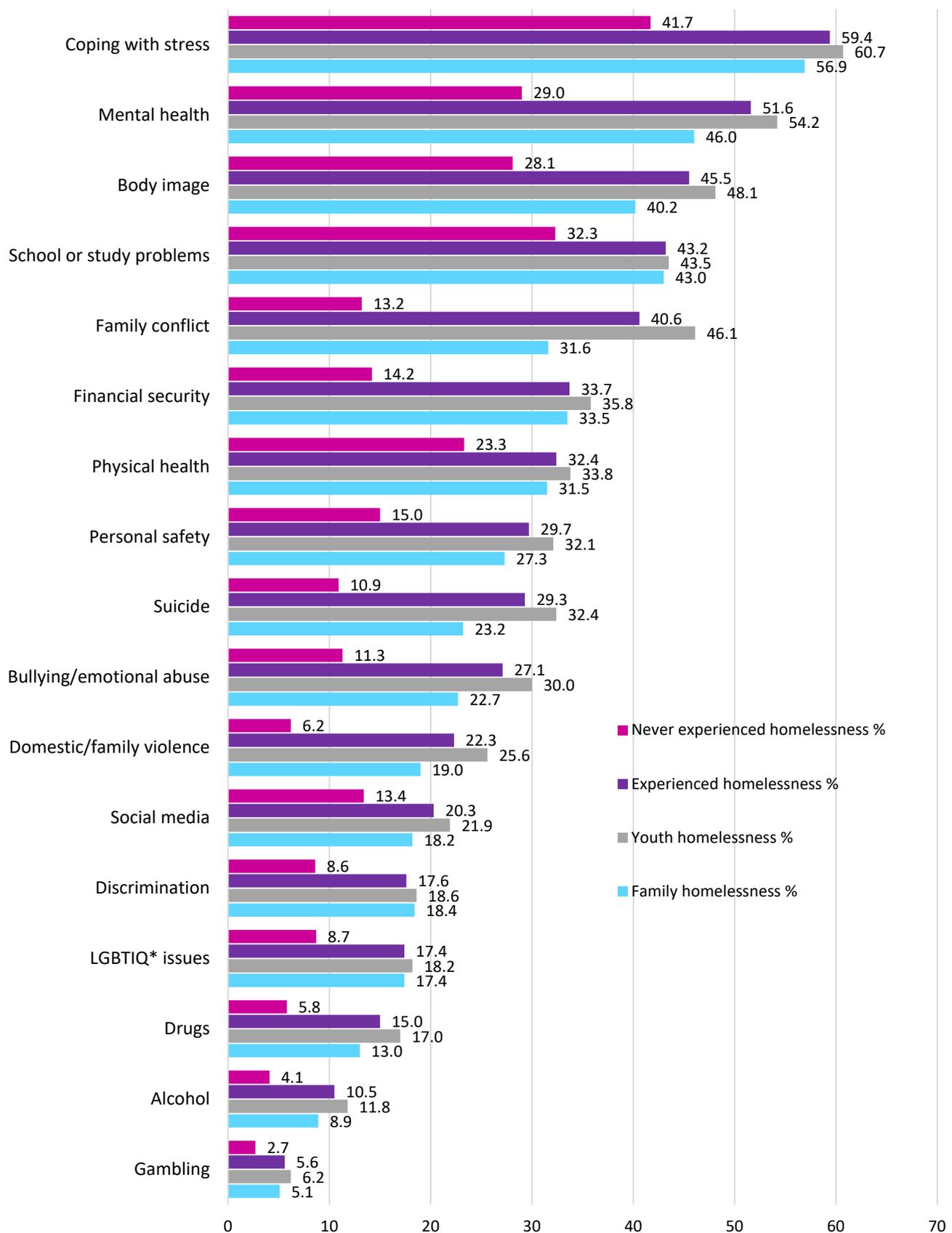
The *Youth Survey* asks young people how personally concerned they were about a number of issues. Responses are on a five-point scale (from *extremely concerned* to *not at all concerned*) and Figure 14 below combines the *extremely* and *very concerned* responses.

Coping with stress was listed as the top item of personal concern for all participants, however a higher proportion of young people who have experienced homelessness indicated that they were either *extremely* or *very concerned* about it (59.4% compared with 41.7% of young people who have never experienced homelessness). Overall, greater proportions of young people who have experienced homelessness than those who have never experienced homelessness were concerned about each of the listed items. In particular, the biggest gaps in concern occurred for:

- *family conflict* (40.6% compared with 13.2%),
- *mental health* (51.6% compared with 29.0%),
- *financial security* (33.7% compared with 14.2%),
- *suicide* (29.3% compared with 10.9%),
- *coping with stress* (59.4% compared with 41.7%),
- *body image* (45.5% compared with 28.1%),
- *domestic/family violence* (22.3% compared with 6.2%), and
- *bullying/emotional abuse* (27.1% compared with 11.3%).

Comparing the responses of young people who have experienced different types of homelessness, notably greater proportions of those who have experienced youth homelessness than those who have experienced family homelessness indicated being highly concerned about *family conflict* (46.1% compared with 31.6%), *suicide* (32.4% compared with 23.2%) and *mental health* (54.2% compared with 46.0%).

Figure 14: Issues of personal concern to young people, by homelessness status



Note: Items were ranked according to the summed responses for *extremely concerned* and *very concerned* for each item, in order of frequency among respondents who have experienced homelessness. *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex, Queer (LGBTIQ) issues.

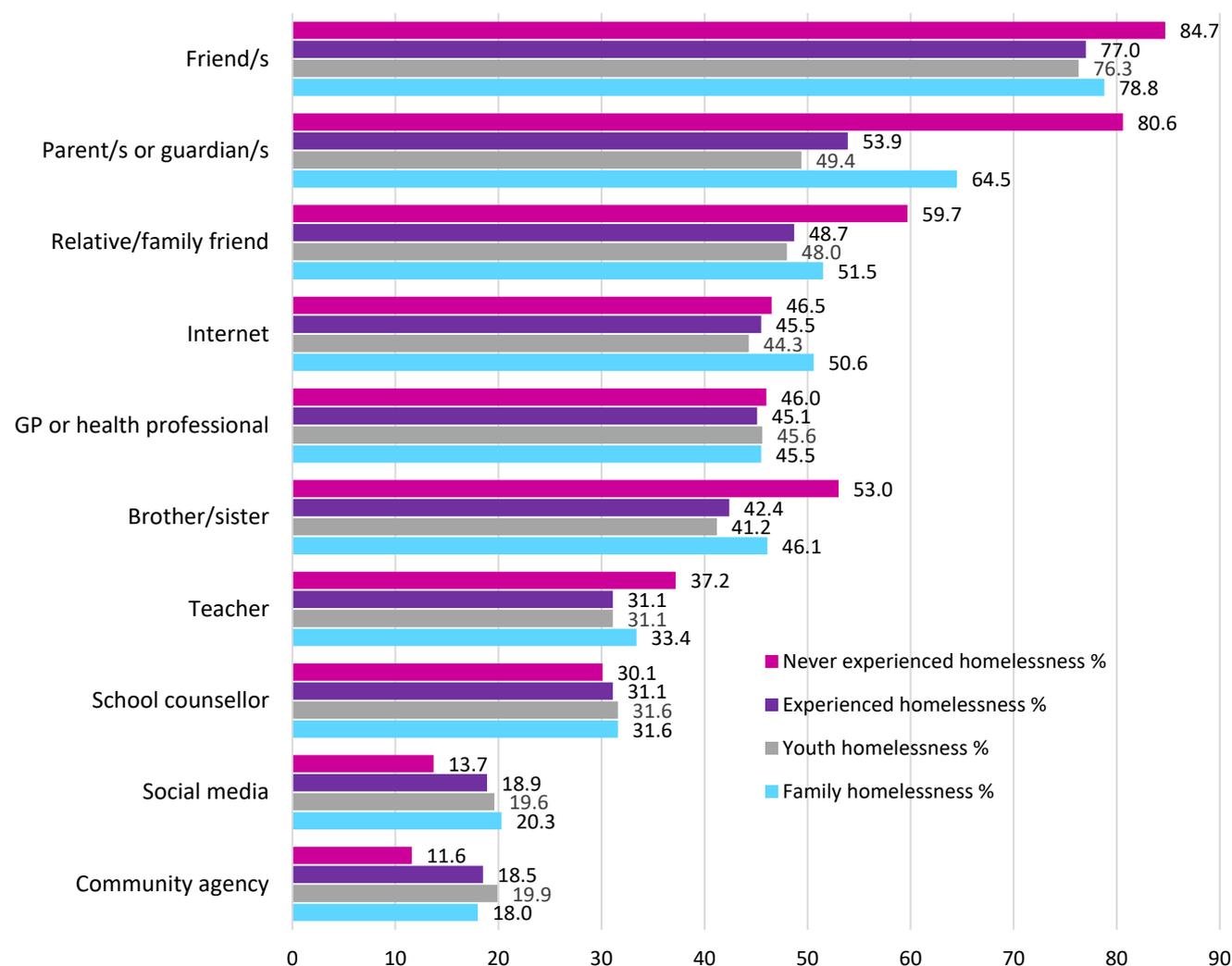
Sources of support

Respondents were asked to indicate out of a number of sources where they would go for help with important issues in their lives. Figure 15 shows the percentage of respondents who indicated that they would go to a particular source for support.

Friend/s, parent/s or guardian/s and relative/family friend were the three most frequently cited sources of help for young people across all categories. However, compared with young people who have never experienced homelessness, much smaller proportions of those who have experienced homelessness said that they would turn to close personal connections for help: *friend/s* (77.0% compared with 84.7%), *parent/s or guardian/s* (53.9% compared with 80.6%) and *relative/family friend* (48.7% compared with 59.7%).

Overall, smaller proportions of young people who have experienced youth homelessness said that they would turn to the sources listed for help compared with young people who experienced family homelessness, most notably *parent/s or guardian/s* (49.4% compared with 64.5%), *internet* (44.3% compared with 50.6%) and *brother/sister* (41.2% compared with 46.1%).

Figure 15: Where young people go for help with important issues, by homelessness status



Note: Items are listed in order of frequency among young people who have experienced homelessness.

Experience of bullying

Have young people experienced bullying?

Young people were asked whether they have been bullied over the past twelve months. Compared with respondents who have never experienced homelessness, more than twice the proportion of young people who have experienced homelessness reported that they have been bullied in the past twelve months (39.7% compared with 16.7%).

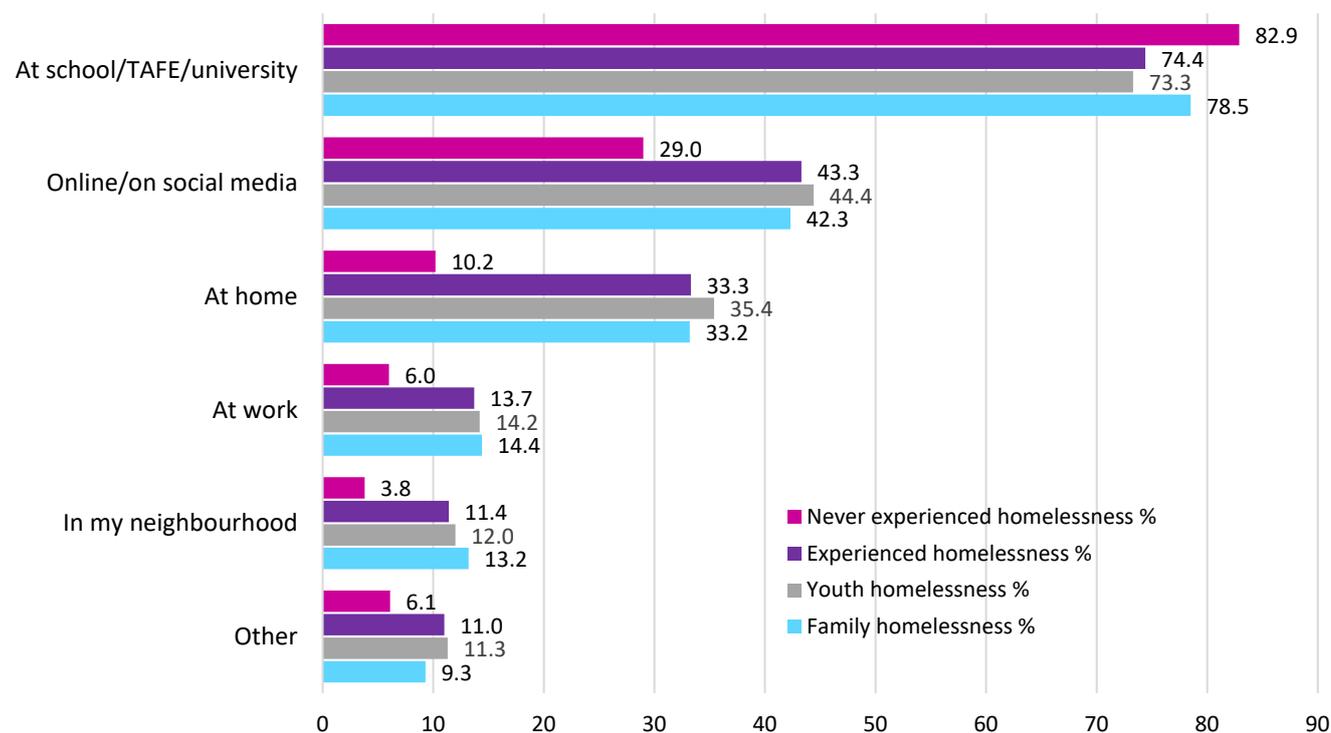
Notably higher proportions of young people who have experienced youth homelessness said that they have been bullied (43.2% compared with 33.2% of respondents who have experienced family homelessness).

Where have young people experienced bullying?

Young people who reported that they had experienced bullying over the past year were then asked to identify from a list of suggested locations where the bullying took place. Figure 16 shows that, of the 39.7% of respondents who have experienced homelessness and who have been bullied in the past year, over seven in 10 (74.4%) reported that the bullying took place *at school/TAFE/university*. Compared with young people who have never experienced homelessness, notably higher proportions of those who have experienced homelessness and who have been bullied reported that they experienced this *at home* (33.3% compared with 10.2%) or *online/on social media* (43.3% compared with 29.0%).

Responses were similar among the youth homelessness and family homelessness category.

Figure 16: Locations of bullying in the past twelve months, by homelessness status



Note: Respondents were able to choose more than one option

What kinds of bullying have young people experienced?

Young people who reported that they had experienced bullying over the past year were also asked to identify the kind/s of bullying that they had experienced from a list of suggested items. Although the three most frequently reported kinds of bullying for both young people who have and who have not experienced homelessness were *verbal*, *social* and *cyberbullying*, there were considerable differences in the results. Table 9 shows that, much higher proportions of young people who have experienced homelessness than respondents

who had never experienced homelessness reported that they have experienced *verbal bullying* (75.1% compared with 70.0%), *social bullying* (64.9% compared with 59.8%) and *cyberbullying* (46.4% compared with 31.4%). It is alarming to see that almost double the proportion of young people who have experienced homelessness said that they have experienced *physical bullying* (31.3% compared with 16.2%).

Responses were fairly similar among the youth homelessness and family homelessness category. However, a slightly higher proportion of young people who have experienced youth homelessness reported that they have experienced *physical bullying* (e.g. *hitting, punching*) (33.1% compared with 29.9% of respondents who have experienced family homelessness).

Table 9: Kinds of bullying in the past twelve months, by homelessness status

	Never experienced homelessness %	Experienced homelessness %	Youth homelessness %	Family homelessness %
Verbal (e.g. name calling, teasing)	70.0	75.1	75.6	73.7
Social (e.g. rumours, being embarrassed or excluded)	59.8	64.9	65.1	64.4
Cyberbullying (e.g. hurtful messages, pictures or comments)	31.4	46.4	48.1	43.5
Physical (e.g. hitting, punching)	16.2	31.3	33.1	29.9
Other	4.1	8.2	8.7	6.9

Note: Respondents were able to choose more than one option.

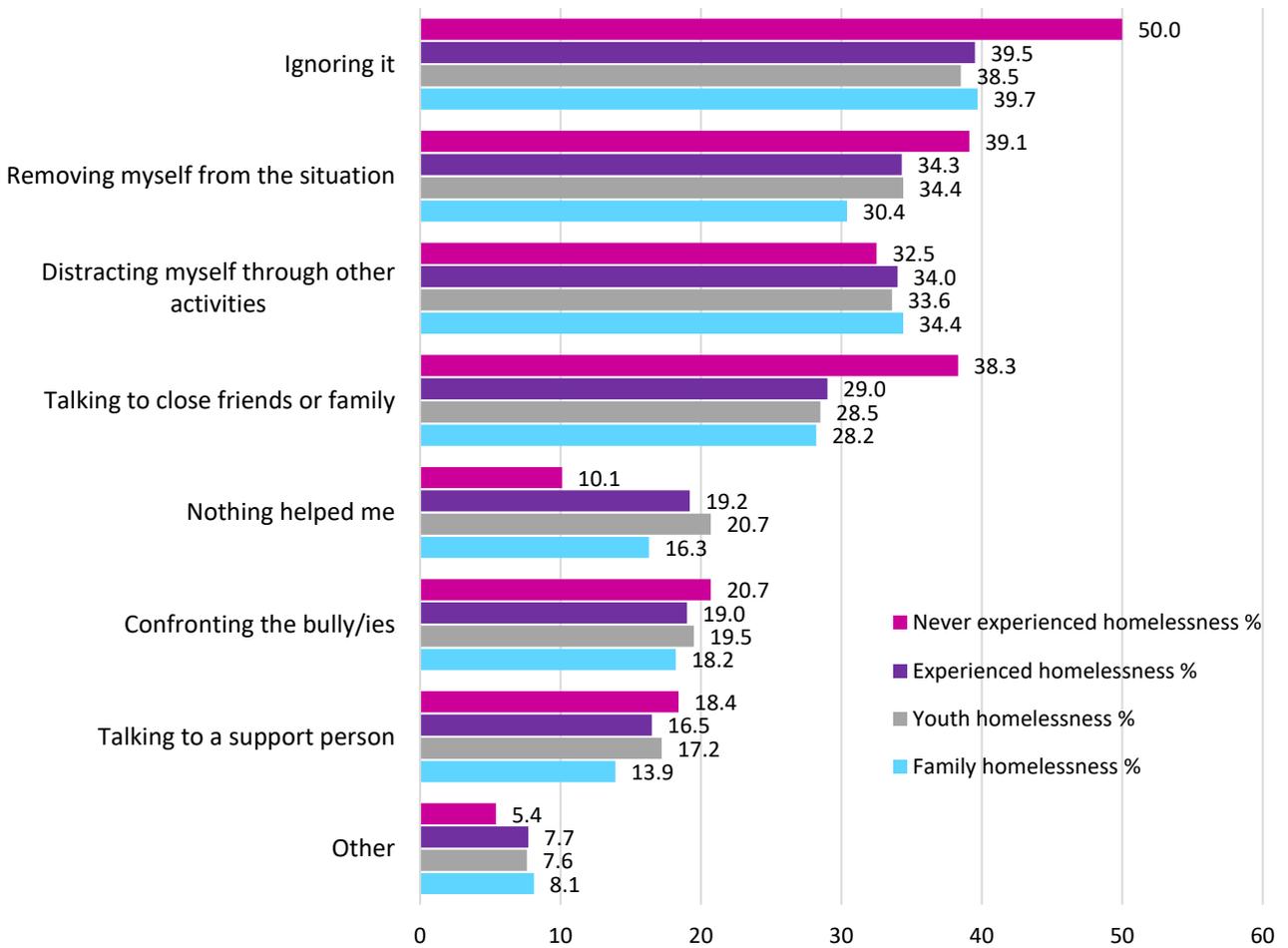
What helped young people to deal with their experience of bullying?

Young people who reported that they have experienced bullying over the past year were then asked about what helped them most to deal with their bullying experience from a list of suggested items, as shown in Figure 17. For the 39.7% of respondents who have experienced homelessness and who have been bullied in the past year, the top three methods that helped them deal with bullying were *ignoring it* (39.5%), *removing myself from the situation* (34.3%) and *distracting myself through other activities* (34.0%).

There were notable differences between what helped respondents who have experienced homelessness and respondents who have never experienced homelessness deal with their experience of bullying. Notably lower proportions of young people who have experienced homelessness reported *ignoring it* (39.5% compared with 50.0%), *talking to close friends or family* (29.0% compared with 38.3%) and *removing myself from the situation* (34.3% compared with 39.1%) helped them deal with their experience of bullying. Conversely, almost twice the proportion of those who have experienced homelessness reported that *nothing helped* them with bullying (19.2% compared with 10.1%).

Responses were similar among the youth homelessness and family homelessness category, however higher proportions of young people who have experienced youth homelessness than young people who have experienced family homelessness reported that *nothing helped* them (20.7% compared with 16.3%) and *removing myself from the situation* (34.4% compared with 30.4%) helped them deal with their experience of bullying.

Figure 17: Strategies that helped young people most to deal with bullying, by homelessness status



Note: Respondents were able to choose more than one option. Items are listed in order of frequency among young people who have experienced homelessness.

Have young people witnessed bullying?

Over six in 10 (62.5%) young people who have experienced homelessness reported that they have witnessed bullying in the past twelve months. This is notably higher compared to young people who have never experienced homelessness (44.6%).

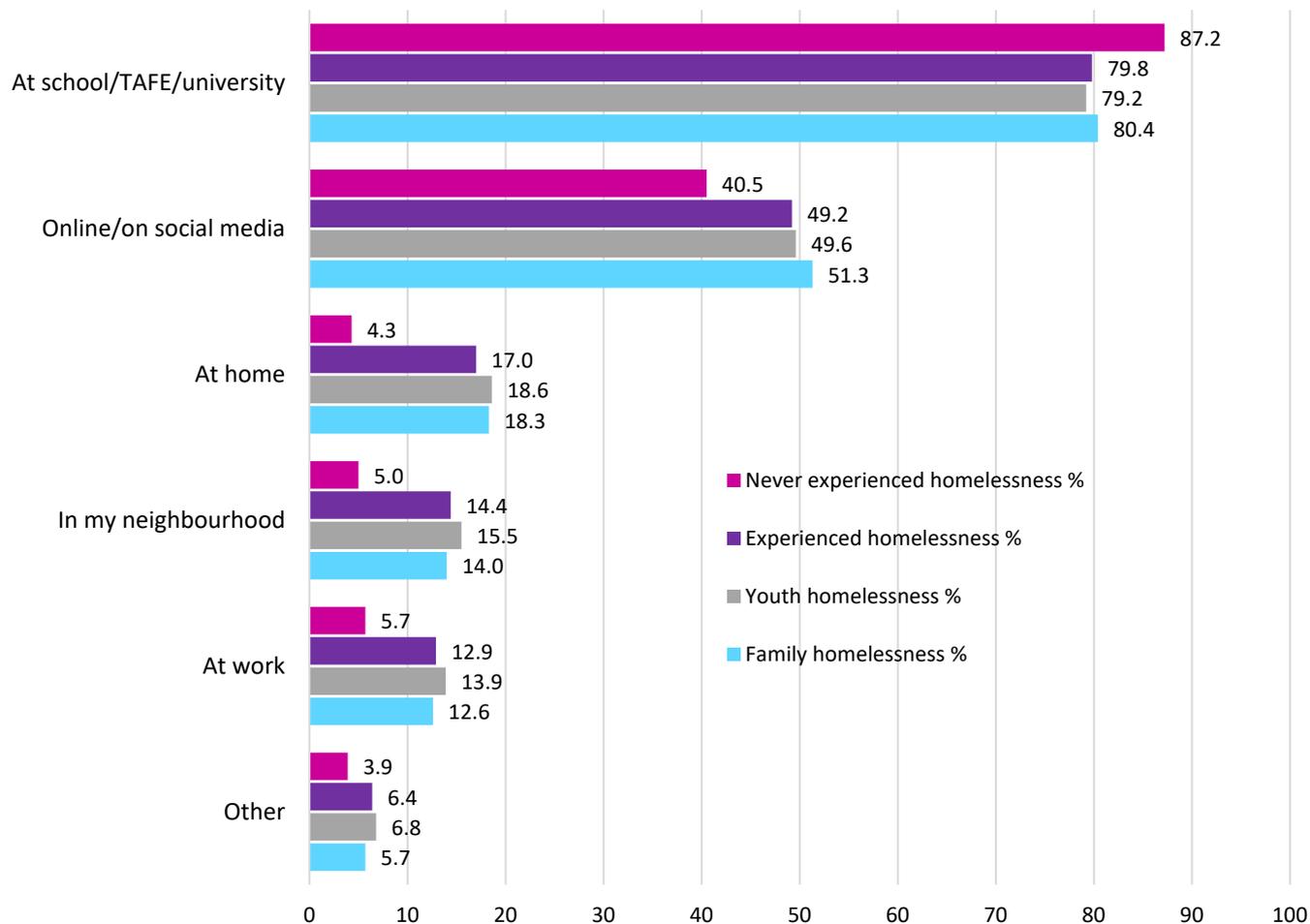
Notably higher proportions of young people who have experienced youth homelessness said that they have witnessed bullying (64.4% compared with 57.9% of respondents who have experienced family homelessness).

Where have young people witnessed bullying occur?

Young people who reported that they had witnessed bullying over the past year were then asked to identify from a list of locations where they witnessed the bullying take place. Figure 18 shows that, of the 62.5% of respondents who have experienced homelessness and who have witnessed bullying in the past year, the majority (79.8%) reported that they witnessed bullying *at school/TAFE/university*. Higher proportions of young people who have experienced homelessness than young people who have never experienced homelessness reported that they have witnessed this *at home* (17.0% compared with 4.3%), *in my neighbourhood* (14.4% compared with 5.0%) or *online/on social media* (49.2% compared with 40.5%).

Responses were again similar among the youth homelessness and family homelessness category.

Figure 18: Locations of witnessing bullying in the past twelve months, by homelessness status



Note: Respondents were able to choose more than one option.

Community participation

The importance of community participation is well established. Community participation ensures that young people have a sense of belonging, feel part of the community and are given opportunities to participate in activities and events that allow them to develop relationships with others.

As shown in Table 10, the top three activities for both those who have and haven't experienced homelessness were *sports (as a participant)*, *sports (as a spectator)*, and *volunteer work*. However, compared with participants who have never experienced homelessness, those who have experienced homelessness were less likely to have taken part in *sports (as a participant)* (60.0% compared with 70.6%) and *sports (as a spectator)* (52.2% compared with 58.0%).

Interestingly, a greater proportion of young people who have experienced homelessness than young people who have never experienced homelessness reported taking part in *youth groups and activities* (36.4% compared with 28.4%), *environmental groups and activities* (17.4% compared with 12.7%) and *political groups/organisations* (11.1% compared with 6.4%).

Sports (as a participant) and *sports (as a spectator)*, were also the top activities for young people who have experienced youth homelessness and family homelessness. A slightly greater proportion of young people who have experienced family homelessness reported taking part in *arts/cultural/music activities* than *volunteer work*.

Table 10: Activities young people were involved in over the past year, by homelessness status

	Never experienced homelessness %	Experienced homelessness %	Youth homelessness %	Family homelessness %
Sports (as a participant)	70.6	60.0	59.7	58.3
Sports (as a spectator)	58.0	52.2	51.8	51.1
Volunteer work	47.1	47.4	46.8	48.9
Arts/cultural/music activities	42.1	46.2	44.7	50.8
Youth groups and activities	28.4	36.4	35.4	40.9
Student leadership activities	33.6	30.5	29.3	33.0
Religious groups/activities	23.7	23.9	21.5	31.1
Environmental groups/activities	12.7	17.4	17.5	19.6
Political groups/organisations	6.4	11.1	11.3	12.4

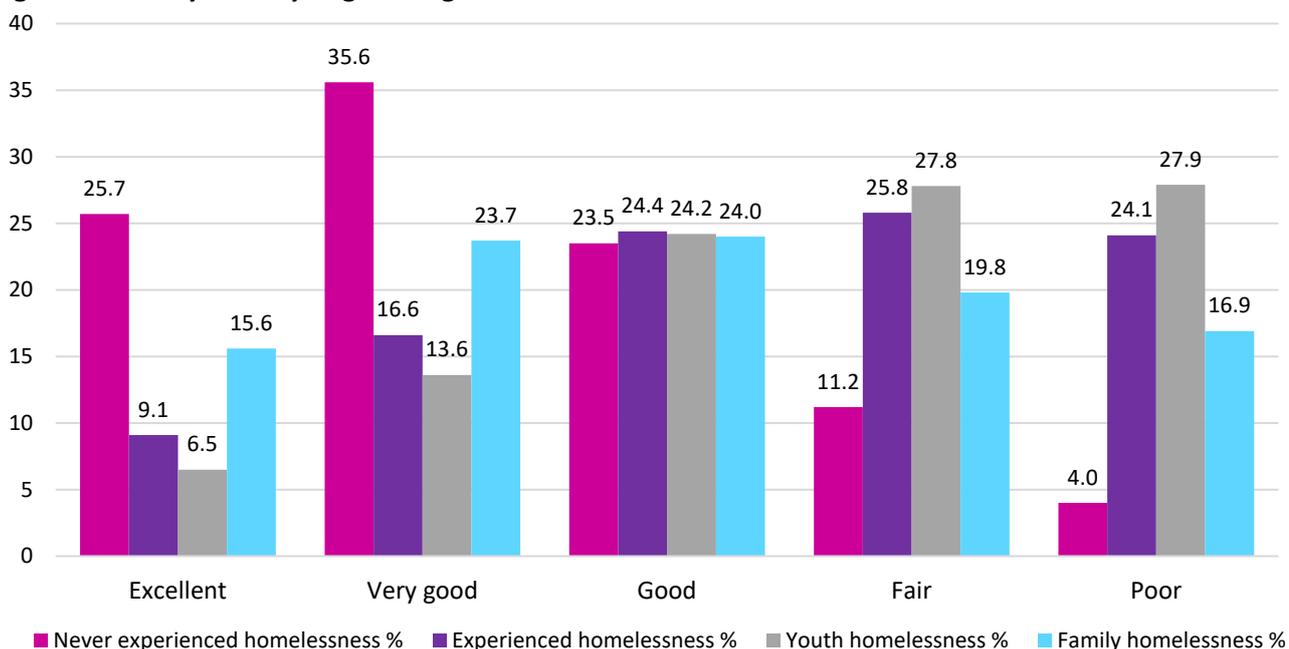
Note: Items are listed in order of frequency among young people who have experienced homelessness.

How well do young people feel their family gets along?

Young people were asked how well they felt their family gets along with one another. As shown in Figure 19, a notably lower percentage of young people who have experienced homelessness rated their family’s ability to get along very positively: 25.7% rated it as either *excellent* or *very good* compared with 61.3% of participants who have never experienced homelessness. Over six times the proportion of young people who have experienced homelessness rated their family’s ability to get along as *poor* (24.1% compared with 4.0% of participants who have never experienced homelessness).

Young people who had experienced youth homelessness gave the least positive ratings of their family’s ability to get along. Over half (55.7%) of those who had experienced youth homelessness rated their family’s ability to get along as only *fair* (27.8%) or as *poor* (27.9%), compared to over one third (35.7%) of those who have experienced family homelessness (19.8% *fair* and 16.9% *poor*).

Figure 19: Family’s ability to get along with one another



Mental health and wellbeing

Happiness

Young people were asked to rate how happy they were with their life as a whole. Around half the proportion of young people who have experienced homelessness indicated that they felt *happy/very happy* with their lives compared with participants who have never experienced homelessness (34.4% compared with 67.4%).

It is alarming to see that almost four times the proportion of respondents who have experienced homelessness felt *very sad/sad* with life as a whole (27.2% compared with 7.2% of participants who have never experienced homelessness).

Table 11: How happy young people are, by homelessness status

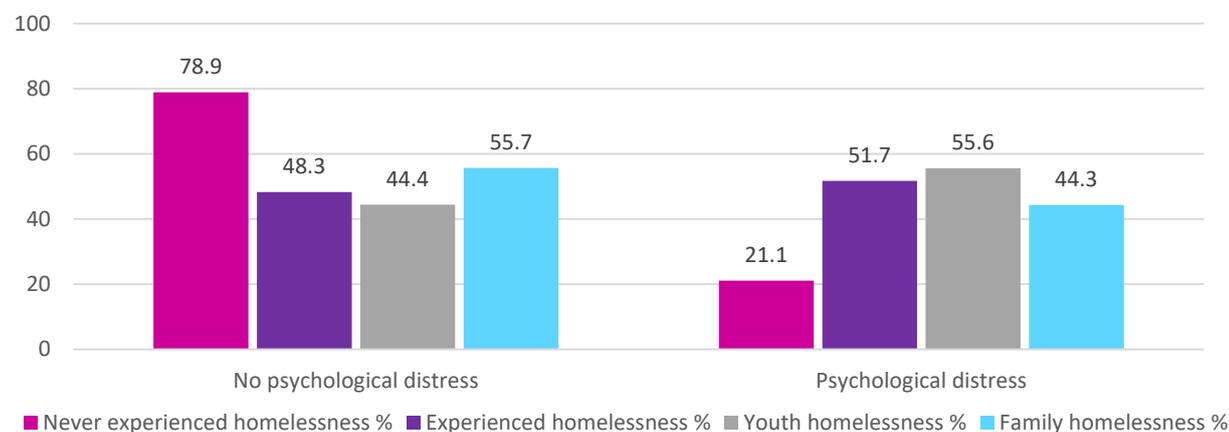
	Never experienced homelessness %	Experienced homelessness %	Youth homelessness %	Family homelessness %
Happy/Very happy (70-100)	67.4	34.4	30.7	42.1
Not happy or sad (40-60)	25.4	38.5	39.2	35.1
Very sad/Sad (0-30)	7.2	27.2	30.2	22.3

Psychological distress

The *Youth Survey* includes a measure of non-specific psychological distress: the Kessler 6 (K6). Young people were asked to indicate the frequency of particular moods over the past four weeks according to a six-item, five-point scale. The scale ranges from 1-5, where 1 indicates *all of the time* and 5 represents *none of the time*. Scores across the six items are summed to produce a total. Based on established scoring criteria, the K6 can be used to classify *Youth Survey* respondents into two groups – those who experience some form of psychological distress and those who do not.

Based on their responses to the K6, more than half (51.7%) of young people who have experienced homelessness indicated some form of psychological distress (as shown in Figure 20). This is over twice the proportion of those who have never experienced homelessness (51.7% compared with 21.1%). Further, young people who have experienced youth homelessness were much more likely to respond in ways that indicate some form of psychological distress (55.6% compared with 44.3% of young people who have experienced family homelessness).

Figure 20: Indications of psychological distress (based on the Kessler 6 scale), by homelessness status



Feelings about the future

Young people were further asked how positive they felt about the future and to rate their response on a five-point scale from *very positive* to *very negative*. As shown in Table 12, a much lower proportion of young people who have experienced homelessness indicated that they felt *very positive* or *positive* about the future (41.2% compared with 62.7% of participants who have never experienced homelessness). More than double the proportion of respondents who have experienced homelessness felt *negative* or *very negative* about the future (24.0% compared with 9.5% of participants who have never experienced homelessness).

Table 12: Young people’s feelings about the future, by homelessness status

	Never experienced homelessness %	Experienced homelessness %	Youth homelessness %	Family homelessness %
Very positive	14.2	8.8	8.0	11.4
Positive	48.5	32.4	30.5	34.9
Neither	27.9	34.9	35.6	33.3
Negative	7.4	15.5	16.5	13.1
Very negative	2.1	8.5	9.4	7.4

Implications for policy and practice

A supportive and stable home is important for young people for their physical and psychological wellbeing. When young people have early experiences of homelessness, this has impacts on their education, mental health, confidence and wellbeing.

As noted above, young people participating in the *Youth Survey* indicated a range of forms of homelessness including time spent without a fixed address or living in a refuge or transitional accommodation (6.6%) and/or time spent couch surfing (13.0%). These experiences impact on young people's lives differently depending on the level of support and interventions they receive and, in many cases, can be prevented where risk factors are identified early.

Given the prevalence of young people's experience of homelessness, it is important to understand what interventions can be put in place to prevent homelessness occurring and to prevent more entrenched homelessness following an early experience.

Policy changes are required to prevent youth homelessness and intervene early as well as to provide appropriate housing and wrap-around supports when homelessness does occur. It is crucial that interventions happen early, ideally before a crisis eventuates and homelessness becomes long-term. Early identification and intervention is also cost effective. One key study concluded 'intervening early to stop children and young people becoming homeless could save taxpayers millions of dollars in health, legal and custodial services'.⁶²

Harnessing young people's perspectives and insights is essential to the development of concepts, design, implementation and effectiveness of the programs offered. As experts in their own lives, it is imperative that young people's voices are embedded in services and supports that are designed to benefit them. Young people should be engaged in the design and development of services and programs that are not only evidence-based but also youth-friendly and appealing.⁶³ In particular, there should be meaningful engagement of young people with lived experience of homelessness in the development and implementation of programs that can assist them.

Canterbury Bankstown Youth Service's (CBYS) Youth Advisory Group

The CBYS Youth Advisory Group was set up to engage young people to develop a social platform framework that could be used to create stronger and inclusive activities to create social bonds, strengthen young people's capacity in leadership roles, provide a safe and understanding space for them to raise concerns, share resources and knowledge with other young people and receive their input into service delivery. CBYS provide financial assistance for expenses to the Youth Advisory Group who decide on initiatives, priorities and activities they want to run. Following are some of the achievements of the Youth Advisory Group.:

Service Strengths and Opportunities

In March 2019 during the first Youth Advisory Group, facilitators asked the young people to identify the strengths and opportunities for the service. Specifically, the Group explored strengths and opportunities regarding case management, adolescent and family counselling, financial counselling and gambling counselling. It became clear through this discussion that employment was a key concern for many young people. This inspired the Youth Advisory Group leadership to organise a forum focused on employment and they shared the feedback from young people with the CBYS team to better understand the needs of young people who are accessing the service.

⁶² Telethon Kids and Mindaroo Foundation 2020

⁶³ McGorry et al. 2013

RUOK? Day event

The Youth Advisory Group identified mental health as an important issue impacting young people as well as issues relating to gambling. They discussed applying for the Odds on Youth grant as they believed it would be helpful for young people to learn about gambling at an early age. These insights were incorporated into the proposed grant application which was then successfully approved by the Office of Responsible Gambling.

Effective, youth friendly programs to assist young people to overcome a multitude of barriers and reach their full potential should also consider individual circumstances and life experiences and tailor the services to meet individual needs. The specific support needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people; young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds; young people with disability; those living in rural, regional and remote areas; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and gender diverse, non-binary, intersex, questioning, queer, asexual and more (LGBTIQA+) young people are taken into account when designing and delivering these vital services.

The Commonwealth should develop a national homelessness strategy in conjunction with the States and Territories and in collaboration with people with lived experience and the sector. The national homelessness strategy should have a strong focus on prevention and rapid access to supports, including for young people.

Recommendations

- Develop a national homelessness strategy with clear targets to end homelessness with a special focus on youth homelessness.
- Create a national framework that places young people with lived experience of homelessness at the centre of design and implementation efforts so that services cater to their diverse needs and experiences.
- Replicate and fund early intervention services that prevent young people becoming homeless before they reach crisis point.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people

As a consequence of colonialism, racism, the impact of stolen generations, and the dispossession from land, culture and traditional social structures, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities experience disproportionately high levels of homelessness, contributed to by social stressors such as poor housing or overcrowding, poverty and unemployment.⁶⁴ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are overrepresented in all areas of homelessness including overcrowding.⁶⁵ Addressing this over-representation needs to be a core component of a national homelessness plan and national housing strategy.

Improving the housing supply for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and their families will not only reduce homelessness, but also improve health and education outcomes while ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people can receive the benefit of strong support from their families and communities. Culturally appropriate services should also be available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.⁶⁶

To address housing and homelessness issues, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities need to be genuine partners in solving the complex problems they experience, including issues around

⁶⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019

⁶⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016

⁶⁶ MacKenzie et al. 2020

homelessness, poverty, disadvantage and access to appropriate housing.^{67 68} Therefore, housing and homelessness services designed to benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be co-designed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members and delivered by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

Recommendations

- Design housing and homelessness services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members, with delivery by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.
- Address the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people among the homeless population as a core component of a national homelessness strategy and national housing plan.

Rural, remote and regional housing and homelessness services

A much higher level of young respondents in the *Youth Survey 2019* reported homelessness in the Northern Territory⁶⁹ (14.5%) compared to other states and territories, which reflects the census data and the need for priority investment in both housing and homelessness services.

People living in regional, rural and remote communities who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness have specific challenges to seeking support including social and geographic isolation and a scarcity of housing and other services.⁷⁰ In these areas, lack of appropriate resourcing for vital services usually means that efforts are focused on crisis response and risk management at the expense of outreach and early intervention work.⁷¹ Measures to address housing and homelessness related issues of young people should take into account these geographical challenges and increase funding to ensure demand can be met.

“There are significantly small proportions of funded youth crisis accommodation in rural and remote areas. Because of the lack of crisis accommodation, there are also limited housing options for larger families experiencing homelessness with young people. In some cases, we see young people, particularly young men being separated from their families when accessing crisis accommodation.”
Mission Australia, Regional Leader, WA

“In our regional area there is only one homelessness service to cover a large geographic area. Due to high demand, they are only able to support young people with some form of an income. This results in young people moving through a range of unsustainable crisis accommodation options.”
Mission Australia, Case Manager, Regional SA

Recommendations

- Increase targeted funding to provide crisis, medium and long-term accommodation as well as early intervention, outreach and support services for young people and their families in rural, remote and regional areas.

⁶⁷ Memmott et al. 2015

⁶⁸ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2019d, 7

⁶⁹ NB: Australian Bureau of Statistics classifies whole of the Northern Territory as Remote Australia or Very Remote Australia. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016

⁷⁰ Holder et al. 2017

⁷¹ ARTD Consultants 2013; Wendt et al. 2017

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and gender diverse, non-binary, intersex, questioning, queer, asexual and more (LGBTIQA+) youth homelessness

Housing and homelessness related issues are demonstrably more complex for LGBTIQA+ young people who are experiencing other intersecting issues such as discrimination, barriers to economic participation and lack of support at home, work, school or other places. Whilst there is mounting evidence that the risk of and potential consequences of homelessness among LGBTIQA+ people is heightened compared to the general population, there has been limited systematic research in Australia that can inform a more targeted response.⁷²

LGBTIQA+ young people who have experienced homelessness are at higher risk than their cisgender heterosexual counterparts of bullying at school, poorer mental health, experiences of trauma and childhood abuse, substance abuse issues, and multiple experiences and longer periods of homelessness. Moreover, family conflict and rejection because of their sexual orientation or gender identity has been identified as a major cause of homelessness for this group.⁷³

All policies and services targeting youth homelessness should be able to provide confidential, sensitive and targeted supports to LGBTIQA+ young people who may not feel comfortable to approach mainstream housing or homelessness services due to their previous negative experiences or perceptions. It is also important that the services and supports including schools, physical and mental health professionals, community services and other sports and recreation services create welcoming environments that are sensitive to the needs of LGBTIQA+ young people.

Recommendations

- Ensure housing and homelessness services are welcoming and sensitive to the needs of LGBTIQA+ young people.

Young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds

Additional challenges young refugees and migrants face include adjustments to language, culture and education when settling into Australia.⁷⁴ Family relationships may be more complex amongst refugees with added burdens of trauma, overcrowding, high expectations and differing acculturation.⁷⁵ Disconnection from family, school and community are major precursors to homelessness for young refugees, and family reconfiguration and overcrowding contribute to this.

Due to eligibility constraints, young people who are not permanent residents or citizens of Australia may not be able to access some services including social housing and other related housing supports.

Where required there may be a need for young people and their community services to work with the Translation and Interpreter Service (TIS National). Understanding the language needs, importance of language groups and dialects is important when interacting with people who have limited English language skills.

Multiple reports have demonstrated the significant impact COVID-19 had on young people who were on various temporary visas, particularly young international students.⁷⁶ The inability to access social security payments, loss of employment and limited financial security increased their risk of homelessness.

⁷² McNair et al. 2017

⁷³ McNair et al. 2017

⁷⁴ Couch 2011

⁷⁵ Centre for Multicultural Youth 2010

⁷⁶ Whiteford 2020

Targeted, culturally sensitive and appropriate supports are necessary to ensure young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds do not fall through the cracks and receive housing and homelessness related supports to prevent homelessness.

Recommendations

- Provide culturally appropriate and sensitive housing support to young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds including easy access to language services.
- Ensure young people on temporary visas have access to income support and housing and homelessness services as needed.

Living arrangements

It is important to note that young people who have experienced homelessness and had not lived with parent/s over the last three months were most likely to have lived with *non-related persons* (36.0%), followed by *friends* (34.0%) and *relatives/siblings* (24.4%). Staying with family and friends are often not long-term solutions and young people need access to safe and adequate housing.

Young people who experienced homelessness were much more likely to indicate that their living conditions were less than adequate. In particular, higher proportions of young people who have experienced homelessness than young people who have never experienced homelessness rated their housing *much less than adequate* or *less than adequate* in terms of *distance to your family/friends* (22.8% compared with 11.3%), *number of bedrooms* (11.5% compared with 3.5%), *access to services* (9.1% compared with 2.7%) and *comfort (such as light and temperature)* (8.2% compared with 2.0%). Inadequate housing is associated with increased risk of emotional and behavioural problems and reduced school performance among children and young people, likely due to the stressfulness of the environment, disrupted sleep, lack of space to study and the impact of noise levels on concentration.⁷⁷

Of those reporting having lived somewhere other than with their parent/s over the last three months, young people who have experienced homelessness were more likely to live alone than young people who had never experienced homelessness (24.2% compared with 13.7%). Although young people under 18 years are able to rent properties in limited circumstances, landlords in private rental market may prefer other applicants over a young person under 18 years.⁷⁸

Young people account for only 2.9% of principal tenants in social and public housing in Australia.⁷⁹ In addition, there is a lack of consistency in relation to the eligible age to access social housing across different jurisdictions. For instance a young person over 16 years is eligible for housing in the ACT⁸⁰ and in NSW, in general, a person needs to be over 18 years of age.⁸¹ Applicants under 18 must furnish a range of documents that they may not have access to which can be a reason to reject the application.⁸²

Due to the increasing demand for social and affordable housing, young people are less likely to qualify for priority access to social housing. Considering this gap in demand and access to social housing, there is a need to develop youth-specific social housing options that provide the appropriate levels of support that young people need, while scaling up rents over time as young people progress through education or training and gain access to employment.⁸³

⁷⁷ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020

⁷⁸ Youth Law Australia 2019

⁷⁹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2018

⁸⁰ ACT Community Services 2020

⁸¹ NSW Communities and Justice 2020

⁸² NSW Communities and Justice 2020

⁸³ MacKenzie et al. 2020

Mission Australia as a member of the Everybody's Home campaign⁸⁴ is calling for an investment in 500,000 new social and affordable homes by 2030. There is a current opportunity for government investment in social and affordable housing to not only address the rising rates of homelessness, but also provide economic stimulus as the Australian economy recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Case Study

Brian* was linked with one of Mission Australia's Specialist Homelessness Services in mid-2019. Brian had struggles with his family about his sexual identity and was referred to the service by his school principal. His mother and 8 siblings were opposed to him coming out and he was threatened with physical abuse if he mentioned anything about his sexual identity to other people.

Brian received continuous support while he was at crisis accommodation with school engagement, mental health related supports and independent living skills. In December last year, he was able to move into an independent transitional property. Brian struggled with living independently. He was hospitalised a number of times for attempted suicide or suicide ideation. He also experienced seizures which were linked to emotional distress.

As the medical staff determined it was unsafe for him to live by himself, his case manager offered for him to temporarily move back into the crisis accommodation facility where he can interact with staff and other residents. Brian agreed to move back as he believed it was in his best interest. After moving back, he experienced suicide ideation and was hospitalised at a mental health unit at a hospital. His case manager and others continued to provide him with support.

In addition to mental health related supports, the case manager provided practical assistance including visits to the hospital, accompanying him to various cardiology and neurology appointments and the local LGBTIQ+ services where he was able to form new friendships. He was also linked with faith based services that welcomed LGBTIQ+ community members which made a huge impact in his life.

Since the beginning of the year, Brian has made numerous positive strides and has informed his case manager that he is happier with his life. Brian has reconnected with his old friends and hopes to reconnect with some of his siblings in the future.

**Name has been changed for privacy*

Young people in out of home care

Young people leaving various institutional settings including hospital, mental health facilities and the juvenile justice system need intensive supports when integrating back to the community. State and Territory governments should adopt a 'zero tolerance' approach to young people becoming homeless when they exit any form of state care. Supports need to be provided to young people well before they exit these institutions and governments, as designated guardians of young people, should be held accountable for these outcomes over the medium term.

Of the 2019 Youth Survey participants who experienced homelessness, 2.2% were in out of home care. Care leavers often struggle with finding housing due to lack of family supports or supportive social networks, limited financial resources and high rates of mental illness and/or issues related to past trauma. They also had lower than average levels of school attainment, low levels of employment, low incomes and high levels of financial stress which can contribute to increased risk of homelessness.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Everybody's Home 2020

⁸⁵ Muir et al. 2019

The *Cost of Youth Homelessness in Australia* report found that 63% of the homeless young participants had been placed in some form of out-of-home care before the age of 18, a significantly higher proportion than a comparable group of young disadvantaged job-seekers (18%).⁸⁶ More needs to be done to ensure that young people leaving out-of-home are not exited into homelessness as a matter of priority. This includes improved exit planning, increased availability of wrap-around supports, the option to extend care placements and affordable and appropriate independent accommodation options.

Navig8 Western Australia

Operating throughout the South West and Great Southern regions of Western Australia, this service assists young people aged 14 to 25 to successfully transition from the care of Department for Child Protection and Family Support to independent living.

Case Study

Clara* is an Aboriginal young person who was linked with Mission Australia's Naviga8 service in Western Australia when she was 17 years old. From a young age, Clara has been in out of home care. She has had multiple placements and when she was 13 years old, she was placed in a group home. She was sexually assaulted when she was in the group home. Due to the experiences of trauma and other challenges, she became dependent on alcohol and drugs and her engagement with education was sporadic.

She was engaged in a vocational education program. Clara was diagnosed with anxiety and depression and there were days where she could not leave the house and catch public transport due to her anxiety. When she turned 18 years old, she left the group home and moved in with some of her friends with the support of Navig8. However, due to financial difficulties, the tenancy ended.

Navig8 case workers assisted Clara to apply for a social housing unit. Pending the approval for housing, Clara had to couch-surf with her friends and relatives. After being allocated a unit, Clara moved in with her boyfriend. As she felt that her life was on track and confident in managing everyday life, the services slowly phased out.

However, when the relationship ended, Clara felt overwhelmed and felt that she had no support system to turn to. This impacted on her mental health and she became dependent on drugs and alcohol. She also found the rent unaffordable with her income and was unable to pay for utilities or food. She left the unit and resorted to couch surfing as she was unable to afford rent. During this period, she found out that she was pregnant. As she did not have any community support or a safe place to raise her child after giving birth, she reconnected with the Navig8 service. At the time of reengagement, she indicated that she was concerned about her mental health and alcohol dependence.

Navig8 case workers supported her to apply for priority social housing, access to crisis accommodation and a range of referrals to other medium term accommodation. She was also referred to a pregnancy support service, mental health supports and financial counselling. Clara was encouraged to reengage with a trusted person who cared for her in the past. Under medical advice, she resumed medication for mental health issues and continued to engage with her mental health support team.

Clara was offered a house early in 2020. Navig8 and other community support services worked together to support her settle in to her new house which is safe, affordable and appropriate to raise her child.

Mission Australia uses the Personal Wellbeing Index as one of the tools to measure outcomes of people that we support. At the time of reengagement with Navig8, Clara's score was 32.82 out of 100. However, after the supports were in place and she found safe accommodation, the score increased to 87.1 out of 100.

⁸⁶ MacKenzie et al. 2016

**Name has been changed for privacy.*

The extension of support for all care-leavers until 21 years would have a significant impact on a major stream of vulnerable young people becoming homeless.⁸⁷ Mission Australia is a member of the Home Stretch campaign⁸⁸ which advocates for such an extension in each state and territory, and provides specific services for young people leaving out of home care. Considering the success of this initiative, the community sector has called for an extension of Home Stretch program to be made available to every young person leaving care.⁸⁹

Better Futures

Better Futures is a new way of supporting care leavers, engaging with young people and their support networks, including case managers and care teams early in their transition from care from age 15 and 9 months through to 21. The Better Futures program aims to support young people to have an active voice in their transition planning and provides individualised supports across a range of life areas including housing, education, employment, and community connections.

There are three levels of support offered by Better Futures and this is dependent upon the circumstances of the young person and current support arrangements. The Better Futures program incorporates the delivery of sub-programs and activities including Community Connections and Home Stretch.

Community Connections

The Community Connections program aims to broker access to new pathways, opportunities, networks and resources within the community, so that young people can build enabling and sustained connections. Community Connections focusses on improving young people's social capital, with an emphasis on building support networks outside of the service system that provide opportunities for community participation and access to new pathways.

Home Stretch

Home Stretch provides young people leaving care with a more gradual and supported transition to independent living. Through Home Stretch, young people and their kinship and foster carers will have the option of the young person remaining with their carer up to the age of 21 years, supported by an allowance.

Young people transitioning to an independent living option will be eligible for an allowance to support them with their housing costs up to 21 years of age. As well as an allowance for accommodation, casework support and flexible funding is provided to facilitate the young person's access to education, employment and health and wellbeing supports, and help them to reach their goals for independence. Mission Australia delivers Better Futures across the Southern and Northern metropolitan regions of Melbourne.

Case study

Justin* was 18 years old when he was linked with the Better Futures program and he was living in a public housing property, with extra supports from a community services organisation, which he was expected to vacate soon afterwards. Child protection services have had episodic involvements when he was 10 and again at age 14.

Justin was sexually abused by his father when he was a young boy, and he manifested his experiences of trauma in abuse towards his mother and siblings, self-harm, suicide ideations and psychosis. Thus, he had to be removed from the family when he was 14 as he posed a threat to himself, his mother and siblings.

Justin was receiving professional support for psychosis, however he experienced episodic psychosis which led him to believe that someone was going to poison him. He would then barricade himself in the house and not allow support staff to

⁸⁷ MacKenzie et al. 2020

⁸⁸ See further: Home Stretch Campaign, accessible at <http://thehomestretch.org.au/about/>

⁸⁹ Victorian Council of Social Service 2019, 14

visit him. There were also issues with him inviting other people experiencing homelessness into his home when he felt afraid of being alone.

He insisted that he wanted a property close to his mother and siblings as he had rebuilt those relationships over the years. He acknowledged that it would be difficult to find an appropriate place by the time he was required to vacate his current unit, but was not willing to accept a property in another area.

With the impact of COVID 19, it was difficult to source accommodation. Justin did not have a rental history which posed an additional challenge. His Mission Australia Better Futures case manager tried to negotiate with the public housing authority to extend the deadline to vacate, but these attempts were unsuccessful. All of his social housing applications were rejected irrespective of the support letters from various individuals and services.

A few weeks ago, his case worker was able to secure a temporary housing in a share house. This is a short term option and the case manager is still working with Justin to find suitable and stable long term accommodation.

**Name has been changed for privacy*

Recommendations

- Fund youth-specific social housing that provides the appropriate levels of support that young people need.
- Adopt a whole of government approach to prevent young people becoming homeless when they exit all forms of state care including out of home care, hospitals, drug and alcohol facilities, detention centres and mental health institutions.
- Extend support to all young people leaving out of home care to 21 years across all States and Territories and mandate 'care leaving plans' for all young people leaving out of home care with clear measures in relation to long-term, stable and sustainable housing.

Aspirations for study

Participation in education

Young people who have experienced homelessness are more likely to be disengaged from education and employment which can have significant impacts on their future.⁹⁰ On the other hand, continued engagement with education can provide avenues to access vital services as well as improving prospects for further education and employment. For some young people school is the only source of support available or a safe place if their housing situation is unsafe or unstable.

Over double the proportion of young people who had experienced homelessness reported not studying (7.2% compared with 3.1%) and they were also more likely to be studying part-time (5.8% compared to 1.9%). Young people who have experienced homelessness were almost three times more likely than young people who have never experienced homelessness to say they were not intending to complete Year 12 (8.2% compared with 3.0%).

Disruption of education can have significant impacts on life trajectory and economic outcomes for young people. Students who complete Year 12 tend to have more successful transitions from education to work and are more likely to gain employment and/or continue onto tertiary education.⁹¹ Evidence also demonstrates that

⁹⁰ Youth Affairs Council Victoria 2019, 28

⁹¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017

when teenagers experiencing homelessness drop out of the education system, they may become unemployed and some make the transition to chronic homelessness.⁹²

For young people experiencing homelessness who are engaged in education, school is the point of stability in their life that also determines their ability to complete education.⁹³ Schools can also provide an important platform for early identification of risk factors for youth homelessness.

Education Support Worker Model

Mission Australia trialled an Education Support Worker in our Wagga Wagga (NSW) Youth Residential Service and saw great benefit. This flexible and socially inclusive practice not only saw improved outcomes in terms of sustainable and secure accommodation, but improvement across many life domains, including education, training and employment. The education support worker focused on the education, training and employment domain of a young person's case plan, working with the young person and their support network to overcome barriers and increase motivation and capacity to re-engage in education, training and employment.

The Geelong Project⁹⁴ pioneered a universal screening of young people and the provision of support to schools, young people, and their families through a collaborative network of the partners. Between 2013 and 2016, the number of adolescents entering the SHS system in Geelong declined by 40%.⁹⁵ The Community of Schools and Services (COSS) model has since been replicated in other locations and has potential for further expansion.

Where young people have already disengaged from education, tailored engagement programs that can address underlying issues are important. There is also a role for alternative education environments that provide ongoing casework support to ensure continued engagement with services and education.

Young people, particularly those who are disengaged from education may access alternative education and/or training options such as Flexible Learning Options (FLO) and other similar training programs. FLO is designed to address the root causes that result in disengagement including mental health concerns, bullying, homelessness, intergenerational poverty or low literacy levels. These services also provide supportive and individualised environments that are more conducive to learning for some young people than mainstream schooling.

Flexible Learning Options

Flexible Learning Options (FLO) is a successful program in South Australia that provides casework support and individualised learning programs for high school students who have disengaged from mainstream schooling. The learning that FLO students access can be on-site or external to their schools i.e. in dedicated co-located or off-site flexible learning centres (FLCs), at VET courses or apprenticeships. In addition, their attendance is supported by active case management that helps students to work out personal learning plans, addresses barriers to learning and re-engagement supports them to access the services they need and links them to employment opportunities or social activities. Caseworkers advocate on behalf of students and their role is critical to motivating FLO students to achieve attainable learning and employment goals.

Mission Australia has been providing FLO in SA since 2007 and currently supports over 500 students through 32 different schools and locations. University of Adelaide's evaluation of FLO shows the successful outcomes which are achieved for young people who are disengaged from school in South Australia.⁹⁶ It demonstrated that, as a result of attending the program and receiving casework support, the majority of FLO students are able to identify educational or job-related goals, as well as discover their ambitions and put strategies in place to achieve them.⁹⁷

⁹² Chamberlain et al. 2004

⁹³ Chamberlain et al. 2004

⁹⁴ The Geelong Project has modelled a 'community of schools and youth services' approach to early intervention by using population screening, a flexible practice framework and youth-focused, family-centred case management as well as a collective impact approach. See further: Mackenzie et al. 2013

⁹⁵ McKenzie 2018

⁹⁶ University of Adelaide and Mission Australia 2018

⁹⁷ University of Adelaide and Mission Australia 2018

Case study

Abby* is a 19 year old from South Australia who joined Mission Australia's FLO program when she was 15. Abby disengaged from mainstream education when she was in Year 9. She stated that she did not enjoy school and the structure of the education system. She was also couch surfing at the time.

She was supported to find appropriate accommodation and was provided with a range of supports. With the support of FLO team, she was able to complete Year 11, a Certificate II in hospitality and a few other complementary training courses. She indicated that she enjoyed the pace of learning and the fact that there were less people in the learning space compared to mainstream schools.

Abby was also supported to find work at a local fish and chip shop. The team assisted her with her plan to pursue tertiary education. Currently she is undertaking University of Adelaide's University Preparatory Program (UPP) and will continue her undergraduate study in a Science/Arts double degree.

**Name has been changed for privacy.*

The Navigator Program

The Navigator Program is a Victorian State Government funded program aiming to support young people aged 12 to 17 years who have disengaged from education. Mission Australia delivers the Navigator Program in the Bayside Peninsula region, covering seven Local Government Areas.

The Navigator Program provides intensive outreach case management support that is individually tailored to assist young people to re-engage with education. Case Workers assist by providing: holistic preliminary assessment of the young person's learning needs, their capabilities and aspirations; coaching and mentoring to enhance wellbeing, develop resilience, self-efficacy and social skills; and referrals to other community service providers.

An impact evaluation of the initial Navigator pilot was conducted between March and July 2017.⁹⁸ The evaluation found that the program provides an outreach model that is valued by many schools and is reported to complement their efforts. Following this positive evaluation, the 2018 Victorian State Budget committed \$44 million over four years for expansion of the Navigator Program, to help young people aged 12 to 17 who have been disengaged get back into education.

Case study

When Jason* was engaged with Navigator Program two years ago, he was experiencing severe anxiety and was reluctant to engage with services. He was living with his mother and the younger brother. At the time, he was completely disengaged from school, rarely left his house and was socially isolated. He had been exposed to domestic and family violence over an extended period of time and his father was in jail.

He had a negative opinion of mental health services due to previous experiences and he refused to reengage with mental health professionals. As he was anxious about the first meeting, the case manager visited him in his house and had the first session with him sitting under the kitchen table. After building rapport with him over a number of sessions, he was encouraged to try different education options that he felt did not meet his needs.

Jason's case manager helped him to have a positive outlook by focusing on them as different learning experience. Although he was linked with a mental health service, he felt that he was being misunderstood by mental health professionals.

With the support of the services over a few months, Jason slowly build confidence to engage with people outside his immediate circles. The case worker supported him to obtain a basketball scholarship, linking him to a local fitness program,

⁹⁸ Victorian Department of Education and Training 2017

provided him with informal counselling and supported him to source other material aid. After supporting him through different education options, he decided to try a community based Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning course. He received ongoing support over the past two years.

At the end of the two years, Jason's mental health has significantly improved as he was able to access a community mental health service that he was comfortable with. He is much more independent and is able to use public transport to attend his classes. He felt better supported by the education institute and the teachers as they were able to understand his needs. His engagement with the Navigator Program is minimal as he becomes more confident.

**Name has been changed for privacy.*

Considering the successful outcomes produced by these programs, similar support models should be replicated across the country to assist young people who have or are likely to disengage from education.

In the *Youth Survey 2019*, young people who experienced homelessness demonstrated lower levels of aspirations to enter university education with only 52.5% indicating they *plan to go to university* (compared with 68.0% who have never experienced homelessness). They also demonstrated a higher inclination to *go to TAFE or college* (17.2% compared with 10.5%) or *get an apprenticeship* (15.6% compared with 10.2%).

Service models that combine accommodation and education along with other holistic, wrap around supports are likely to be more effective in sustaining housing for young people while they remain engaged in education.

The Youth Foyer model assists young people, usually aged 16 to 24 years, to engage in education and employment, and gradually to reduce their dependence on social services. Youth Foyers generally have self-contained accommodation, on-site support workers, education programs, variable levels of support where a young person can progress to more independent living, onsite facilities and employment supports. Participation in education, training and employment is a condition of the accommodation. In these ways and because of their focus on independence, Youth Foyers are different from traditional supported accommodation models.⁹⁹

An evaluation conducted on the Youth Foyer model found significantly improved outcomes for young people. For example, Youth Foyers enabled participants to pursue the education qualifications necessary to sustain employment. The percentage who had completed at least Year 12 or a Certificate III increased from 42% at entry to 67% at exit and to 75% a year after exit. By exit, about 30% of participants had completed an education qualification higher than at entry, and a year later about 46% had done so.¹⁰⁰

Mission Australia is funded by Queensland Department of Housing and Public Works to deliver a Youth Foyer in Townsville that will support housing for up to 40 people, aged 16 to 24 years upon completion in mid to late 2021. Further investment in Youth Foyer models and other early intervention supports for young people at risk of homeless, is warranted and should be linked to their education and their wellbeing.

For young people with more complex needs, other interventions may need to precede re-engagement with education and employment such as drug and alcohol detoxification and rehabilitation or intensive mental health supports. Young people who have experienced trauma and hardship in their past may need intensive case management supports.

Barriers to achieving post school goals

⁹⁹ O'Shaughnessy 2014

¹⁰⁰ Coddou et al. 2019

Young people experiencing homelessness are more likely to experience challenges to achieving post school goals. Close to seven in 10 (67.8%) respondents who have experienced homelessness indicated that they felt there were barriers that would impact upon the achievement of their study/work goals.

Over twice the proportion of young people who have experienced homelessness saw *mental health* as a barrier to achieving their study/work goals (29.4% compared with 13.8% of respondents who have never experienced homelessness). This was followed by *financial difficulty* (20.9% compared with 10.7%), *family responsibilities* (16.5% compared with 6.4%) and *lack of family support* (12.1% compared with 2.4%).

Young people who experienced homelessness also indicated that *lack of school support* was a challenge to achieving post school goals at a higher rate than young people who have not experienced homelessness (9.2% compared with 4.4%). They were also more likely to be concerned about *physical health* compared to young people who have not experienced homelessness (7.6% compared to 3.8%).

Increased stress related to their housing situation can have negative impacts on young people experiencing homelessness including their mental health, physical health and their ability to focus on education.¹⁰¹ Youth homelessness related supports often work with the young person as well as their families where possible to address their housing issues and other related issues in the family such as family conflict. However, more funding is required for youth services to support young people to access mental health and other requisite supports in order to overcome barriers to post school goals.

Many courses, apprenticeships, traineeships, or first jobs require young people to pay up front costs (e.g. course fees, uniforms and licenses).¹⁰² This is a huge barrier for young people who have low or no incomes. Young people often do not have the financial capacity to pursue these employment or education opportunities.¹⁰³ To ensure more equitable outcomes for young people, the barrier of financial difficulty should be addressed by addressing the adequacy of Youth Allowance to allow ongoing study and through the provision of fee-free or scholarship opportunities for university, TAFE and apprenticeships.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Chamberlain 2004

¹⁰² Brest et al. 2019

¹⁰³ Brest et al. 2019

¹⁰⁴ Mission Australia 2019

Case Study

Jack* is a young man aged 18 years from regional Victoria who was experiencing homelessness after leaving out of home care. He has been couch surfing at friends' places and staying in emergency accommodation. On several occasions, he has approached different housing providers to find stable housing, but was told there were no appropriate housing options available for him.

Being on Youth Allowance, he cannot afford to secure accommodation that is affordable and in an area with access to public transport. After the basic expenses of food, travel and other essentials, Jason is unable to save enough money towards a bond for shared rental accommodation. He is worried that he will be judged by employers for a range of reasons, including not having a permanent address and therefore is reluctant to attend job interviews.

Jack has to rely on public transport as he does not own a vehicle. This coupled with limited public transport options, limit his employment opportunities as he is unable to start early in the mornings or finish work late in the night as there is no transport available. Although he is applying for a substantial number of jobs, he has been rejected due to his travel limitations. The case managers have observed a decline in Jack's mental health due to mounting financial pressure.

The lack of appropriate and affordable accommodation and low level of income support present serious barriers to Jack achieving his goals.

**Name has been changed for privacy.*

Recommendations

- Fund the expansion of the Community of Schools and Services (COSS) model that provides a place-based approach to the active identification of risk through schools.
- Establish and fund more Youth Foyers in metropolitan and regional areas to provide stable housing while keeping young people engaged in education.
- Increase flexible and alternative learning options for young people experiencing homelessness.
- Make youth specific mental health services widely available to young people through schools, online platforms, youth and other homelessness related services.
- Increase university and vocational education scholarships and fee free courses available to young people experiencing disadvantages including homelessness.

Employment

Youth unemployment rates are twice the proportion of general unemployment rate and young people are more likely to be underemployed.¹⁰⁵ These rates are likely to rise in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic as young people make the transition from education to work at a time when there are few jobs on offer.¹⁰⁶ The Grattan Institute estimates that younger Australians and women are likely to be hit hardest, because they are more likely to be employed in occupations and industries most affected by the response to COVID-19.¹⁰⁷ Increasing youth unemployment rates may exacerbate the situation of young people experiencing homelessness.

The data demonstrates that a higher proportion of young people who have experienced homelessness said they were planning to *get a job* (37.5% compared with 32.7%) as a post-school plan. A higher proportion of young

¹⁰⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2019

¹⁰⁶ Borland 2020

¹⁰⁷ Coates et al. 2020

people who experienced homelessness reported that they were not in paid employment but looking for work (40.1% compared with 32.7%). Some young people, particularly those experiencing homelessness, may need the income from employment to support themselves or their family to meet their needs. However, balancing study and work can be challenging for some young people and can add pressure at a stressful time in their lives.¹⁰⁸

Young people should be able to access flexible transition to employment options that take into account their individual circumstances and needs. These could include supporting them to participate in education or employment while they are being supported to address housing and homelessness.

Young people in rural, remote and regional communities experience further disadvantages due to their geographical location and limited employment opportunities.

“Options are limited in rural and remote areas to start with. Young people in these areas have very limited vocational educational opportunities, like apprenticeships and traineeships available locally ... For a young person to access such programs as a precursor to employment they need to leave their communities, and of course there is a cost associated with this as well.”

Mission Australia, Area Manager, WA

Young people who experienced homelessness were much more likely to cite access to transport as *much less or less adequate* (16.9% compared with 11.2%). Poor or limited transport options have been highlighted as a particular challenge for obtaining and maintaining sustainable employment, especially in rural and remote areas.¹⁰⁹ Without access to transport, it will be challenging for many young people to find employment or simply commit to search for employment.

L2P Learner Driver Mentor Program

The L2P Learner Driver Mentor program pairs young people with a volunteer mentor who assists them to learn to drive and build up their driving hours required to secure a license. It supports young people to achieve their working or education ambitions and targets. Mission Australia delivers this service in Gippsland areas like Yarram, Sale, Bairnsdale, Lakes Entrance and surrounds, where driving is essential for young people to get to work as public transport is lacking.

A review of Learner Driver Mentor Programs (LDMP) found that well planned and implemented LDMPs afford benefits beyond helping individual Learners gain a licence.¹¹⁰ There are wider social benefits with opportunities for communities to develop a sense of engagement through volunteering and to provide positive role modelling for young people. Longer term there is also potential capacity building in disadvantaged communities as the numbers of licence holders grow and they in turn are in a position to supervise other new Learners.¹¹¹

Commonwealth government services that provide tailored and targeted supports, particularly for young people to ensure engagement with education and employment have been successful. Early intervention and pre-employment programs are useful in seamlessly transitioning young people from education to employment. Pre-employment support programs such as Transition to Work (TtW) assist young people to transition into employment or re-engage with education.

Transition to Work

The Transition to Work (TtW) program focuses on young people aged 15 to 24 years who are facing barriers to enter the workforce to pursue employment or further education. Youth Employment Specialists assist young people in the development of practical skills, connection with education or training providers, engagement with work-experience

¹⁰⁸ Mission Australia 2019

¹⁰⁹ Rosier et al. 2011

¹¹⁰ McRae et al. 2014

¹¹¹ McRae et al. 2014

opportunities and local community services, as well as identifying job opportunities to suit their aspirations and skill set and the needs of the local job market.

By intervening early to help young people stay in school, engage in training or find work, they can be better prepared for future employment. The program offers practical intervention to assist them in finding work including apprenticeships, traineeships or education.

Mission Australia delivers TtW in a number of locations across Victoria, New South Wales and South Australia.

Case study

Mandy* is a 21 year old young person from regional NSW. She completed year 12 and started a 4-year degree in psychology. However, due to growing cost of living, she was unable to pay her rent or afford other essentials. Therefore, she deferred her degree to find employment. Although she was applying for a large number of jobs in a day, she was only able to secure a few interviews. She was unsuccessful in securing a job despite her best efforts.

She was referred to Mission Australia's TtW service. Mandy was provided with a range of supports including interview preparation, clothes for interviews and assisting with budgeting on a lower income. With the support of her TtW case worker, Mandy secured an interview at a well-established real estate agency. Her case worker followed up with the organisation after the interview and she was offered a traineeship which then turned into employment. Mandy stated that "I'm doing quite well there [at the real-estate agency] and have moved up fairly quickly. I'm really happy in this job and could see myself doing this until retirement."

**Name has been changed for privacy*

However, there remains a significant service gap for the majority of young people accessing mainstream employment services such as jobactive. Currently, participants are streamed into different categories from Stream A to C with jobseekers requiring little support in Stream A and jobseekers who need ongoing additional supports in Stream C.¹¹² Stream C participants under the current employment support system receive additional supports but are unlikely to receive targeted youth specific supports. These young Stream C participants are ineligible for the TtW program, although they are likely to be experiencing significant disadvantage in the community. A targeted and youth-specific program that can provide comprehensive wrap-around supports to young people experiencing complex challenges when accessing employment including homelessness is required to complement TtW, especially considering the increasing youth unemployment rate as a result of COVID-19.

Some social enterprises are also designed to provide holistic supports to young people to ensure they are able to access training and are provided with case workers who are able to support them through their journey to independence including addressing homelessness and any underlying issues.

Charcoal Lane

Charcoal Lane is Mission Australia's social enterprise in Fitzroy, Victoria that combines a restaurant specialising in native flavours with a comprehensive training program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who have experienced vocational and non-vocational challenges to employment. Charcoal Lane enables students to gain both accredited hospitality qualifications and professional experience within a supportive developmental environment. On completing traineeships at the restaurant, young people are well prepared to move into careers in hospitality, or other related industries.

Housing related assistance is part of the case management support the young people receive under this program. Across the 2019 intake, every student had experienced some form of homelessness including overcrowding, rough sleeping or

¹¹² Department of Education 2020

couch surfing prior to joining the Charcoal Lane training intake. During this period, 19 out of 30 students were directly supported with housing and homelessness ranging from linking them with more appropriate housing services, rent support, maintaining tenancy and support with priority housing applications for public housing.

Case Study

Jim* is a 17 year old who was voluntarily referred to Mission Australia's Disability Employment Services (DES) program. Jim was diagnosed with Autism and had two separate youth justice related matters pending at the time. Jim indicated that he was interested in working in the brick laying industry. His DES employment consultant was able to link him with Youth Learning Pathway, an education and training service co-located in the same building as Mission Australia's services in Dandenong.

Jim contacted the employment consultant and informed them that he has a court appearance and that his parents were not supporting him to attend the appointment. The employment consultant accompanied him to the court hearing to provide support.

Jim was in contact with the police as he was sleeping rough near a train station. The police, together with a case worker from Embedded Youth Outreach Project drove Jim back to his parent's place as it was too late in the day to find appropriate accommodation. When Jim came to meet the employment consultant the next day, it was evident that he had not had a proper meal. He was taken to a restaurant and was also provided with food vouchers. When the employment consultant took him home, Jim was confronted by his father who stated that he was not welcome at his house anymore.

Jim was linked with a youth housing service, provided with a phone and transport card top-ups and more food vouchers. He was also accompanied to Centrelink to apply for financial support and to the bank to update his information. He was assisted to set up his myGov account.

While Jim was in temporary accommodation, he was supported to secure long-term youth accommodation through another youth homelessness service. In addition to learning brick laying, he is currently participating in the Changing Gear program to obtain his Learners Permit. He has also updated his resume and received coaching on interview techniques. The employment consultant is currently working with Jim to obtain employment in his chosen field. He would have not been able to progress with his employment pathways if he was not successful in securing accommodation.

**Name has been changed for privacy.*

For many young people experiencing homelessness, the challenges they experience are complex and require ongoing engagement with mental health services, justice system, alcohol and drug related services, support with their physical health and in some cases rebuild relationships with their families. The current social security payments are linked to employment related mutual obligations which may be difficult to meet in this context. For young people experiencing homelessness, until they are in stable, long-term housing, they are unlikely to be able to focus on employment.

Once young people are in stable housing and their other immediate issues have been addressed, they should be provided with supports to focus on their future. Some young people who were disengaged from education or had intermittent engagement with education due to experiences of homelessness may have other issues such as limited literacy and numeracy skills when engaging with employment. More introductory courses and supports should be made available to these young people with one on one support to ensure they are able to receive the full benefits of the government investment into vocational education and training.

Recommendations

- Fund tailored youth specific employment services that address individual circumstances.

- Increase funding for services that support young people experiencing homelessness through facilitating training or apprenticeship programs that also provide case management supports.
- Provide holistic and wrap around supports to young people to address challenges to entering employment such as housing and homelessness, mental illness, alcohol and drug issues and domestic and family violence through whole of government coordinated service provision.
- Increase place-based employment related supports to young people in rural and remote areas who are at risk of or are experiencing homelessness.

Personal concerns

Young people experiencing homelessness expressed much higher levels of concern across all areas of personal concerns compared to young people who have not experienced homelessness. It is also important to note that young people who were experiencing youth homelessness were more likely to indicate their personal concerns at a higher rate compared to young people experiencing family homelessness.

Young people who experienced homelessness indicated that they were most concerned about *coping with stress* (59.4% compared with 41.7%), *mental health* (51.6% compared with 29.0%) and *body image* (45.5% compared with 28.1%). In addition, these young people were almost three times more concerned about *suicide* (29.3% compared with 10.9%). As these concerns relate to mental health, it is important to identify and provide targeted mental health supports to young people who are experiencing homelessness and other significant stresses during their formative years.

Young people who experienced youth homelessness were also more concerned about *family conflict* (46.1% compared with 13.2%) and *domestic and family violence* (25.2% compared with 6.2%). Children and young people can experience homelessness when leaving home alone or with a parent or guardian to escape domestic and family violence.¹¹³

Our service experience suggests that many young people seeking homelessness related services may have experienced or had exposure to domestic and family violence either directed at them or at other family members. However, some of them may not divulge these due to stigma, shame or fear of retaliation by the perpetrator and in some cases the continuous exposure has normalised this violent behaviour. Thus, there should be more support at the school level to educate young people about respectful relationships, personal safety and support services available in the community. Providing violence prevention education in adolescence when an understanding of relationships is being developed is an important measure to break the cycle of violence and has strong prospects of success.¹¹⁴ It is vital that the supports extend to parents and families where appropriate.

“I [need to] leave home to reduce exposure to family violence...” Female, 18, VIC

Love Bites

LOVE BiTES is a Respectful Relationships Education Program for young people aged 15 to 17 years. It consists of two interactive workshops: one on Relationship Violence, and one on Sex and Relationships, followed by creative workshops and community campaigns. Love Bites is a flexible model with options to use a full day or multi session delivery approach. The program emphasises the importance of a whole-of-school commitment to respectful relationship education.

LOVE BiTES aims to provide young people with a safe environment to examine, discuss and explore respectful relationships. All Love Bites programming takes a strength-based approach and views young people as active participants who are able to

¹¹³ Youth Action and Policy Association NSW 2019

¹¹⁴ Youth Action and Policy Association NSW 2019

make choices for themselves and their relationships when supported with information and opportunity for skill development. LOVE BiTES education is focused on three critical areas for learning:

- Knowledge: youth-led collaborative learning
- Attitudes: critical thinking and decision-making and
- Behaviours: problem solving and communication skills

The overall aims of the program are to equip young people with the knowledge needed to have respectful relationships, encourage and develop their skills in critical thinking and assist them in being able to problem solve and communicate effectively. When equipped in these areas, young people can make the right choices for themselves and their relationships that are free from violence and abuse.

Respectful Relationships Education¹¹⁵

Respectful Relationships Education is the holistic approach to school-based, primary prevention of gender-based violence. It uses the education system as a catalyst for generational and cultural change by engaging schools, as both education institutions and workplaces, to comprehensively address the drivers of gender-based violence and create a future free from such violence. A whole of school approach to respectful relationships education not only provides in-class education, but addresses school's culture, policies and procedures, and promotes gender equality among staff.

A toolkit has been created by Our Watch to support schools in delivering Respectful relationships education and was developed as part of the Respectful Relationships Education in Schools. The tool kit draws on the experiences of the 19 Victorian schools that participated in the Respectful Relationships Education in Schools pilot as well as the decades of work in this area that has been led by many schools and women's sector leaders. The tool kit provides clear implementation steps and tools that are flexible and adaptive to meet the specific needs of different schools.

Another major concern for young people who experienced homelessness was *financial security* (33.7% compared with 14.2%). Young people without family support have the same expenses as others and have less family and community support. For young people who are studying, the low rate of Youth Allowance makes them more likely to be reliant on paid work, non-cash assistance and loans to meet their daily needs and pay for accommodation, all of which adversely affect their capacity to focus on education. This issue is further compounded for those young people who are forced to live away from their families.

"I can't financially support myself and I'm homeless. I'm just breaking really..." Female, 16, VIC

The *Anglicare Rental Affordability Snapshot 2020* indicated that nationally, there were just three properties (out of close to 70,000 properties) that were affordable and suitable on the Snapshot weekend for people receiving Youth Allowance.¹¹⁶ The current supplement to Youth Allowance and other payments as part of the responses to COVID-19 has gone some way to alleviating rental stress for some young people. However, it must be noted that even with the increase, only 624 or less than 1% of the properties were affordable to young people. We should not go back to the low levels of payment that pushed many young people into poverty and we need a permanent increase to income support. We also need more affordable housing options for young people, including young people reliant on income support while they study or search for work.

Obtaining various social security payments can be challenging for young people who have not directly engaged with formal processes. Another challenge young people experience is the lack of access to identification

¹¹⁵ Ourwatch 2020

¹¹⁶ Anglicare Australia 2020

documents which can be an impediment to obtaining social security payments. Young people may not have access to their birth certificates or other documents to prove their identity which are crucial for accessing education, obtaining a drivers licence, opening bank accounts, accessing Medicare cards and obtaining tax file numbers.

Youth Accommodation Support Service and Centrelink Community Engagement Team

Over the years in Western Australia, Youth Accommodation Support Service (YASS) staff worked towards establishing a structured support system to assist young people accessing the YASS service. Often the young people who access YASS have not previously engaged with Centrelink supports. Therefore, YASS has made an arrangement with the Centrelink 'Community Engagement Team' (CET) where the Community Engagement Officers visit the service every fortnight to provide practical support to young people as the Centrelink application processes can be challenging to navigate. In addition, these officers are also able to escalate claims of young people depending on their circumstances.

The officers take time and explain the different solutions and options available to young people, provide advice on steps they have to undertake to continue receiving the payments such as reporting, completing reviews, uploading documents and notifying changes such as change of address.

In addition to the Community Engagement Officers working directly with young people, they also collaborate regularly with the Case Manager. This partnership ensures claims are responded to seamlessly and efficiently supporting young people at YASS to achieve positive financial outcomes in a timely manner. This in turn enhances their opportunity of accessing appropriate housing services and being able to manage their basic financial needs.

Rent Choice Youth Subsidy

The Rent Choice Youth Subsidy program is one of several rental subsidy programs being run in New South Wales through the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ). It works closely with a network of local service providers that provide ongoing case management support for the duration of the three-year subsidy. Young people aged 15 to 24 years who meet financial criteria for the subsidy are eligible to receive support under the program.

This enables young people to secure private rental properties within their community. Across the three-year period the subsidy is tapered to enable the young person to work towards financial stability at a rate that accounts for the completion of training and education, and the progression from temporary and casual workforce to career focused opportunities. Regular quarterly reviews ensure that income changes and goal progression are accounted for and the ongoing support and liaison that occurs between the young person, case manager, DCJ and real estate agent assists in ensuring the tenancy is successful.

Unlike other programs, as the young person is already the main tenant within the lease, completion of the program does not result in the young person having to move as the tenancy and private accommodation has already been secured and maintained for the period of the subsidy.

Case Study

Jessica* is a 20 year old from New South Wales who has experienced homelessness and has been residing in a range of specialist homeless services over the past years. While she has successfully moved from crisis or emergency accommodation to a transitional property, the 12-month period in which she was able to reside in that property was reaching a close.

Jessica was engaged in tertiary education, however, she chose to defer the last semester to refocus on her own wellbeing and mental health. She has actively engaged with mental health supports. For the last year she also worked on a casual

basis within the hospitality sector. Due to her variable income she continues to receive additional financial support through Centrelink.

While she has goals of completing her Bachelor in Primary Education and finding work as a teacher, she currently has very limited income to be able to afford private rental. She works with her case manager and identifies her current affordability for moving into private rental is extremely low as she can only afford to pay \$150 per week, pricing her out of the rental market within the region that she has lived since she was a child. Due to her past experiences in homeless services and mental health concerns she is wary of sharing with people she does not know.

Her case manager assisted her to access the Rent Choice Youth program. This allows Jessica to remain engaged with case management and enables her to increase her affordability to \$350 per week which is enough for her to secure a private rental property in the region. During the program she is able to return and complete her Bachelor course, and through course placement is able to find more stable work as a Teaching Assistant. As a result, she is able to sustain the tenancy, and remains in her accommodation once she her income has increased to the point that she is tapered off the subsidy.

**Name has been changed for privacy.*

Recommendations

- Prevent young people becoming homeless by adopting measures to reduce domestic and family violence and family conflict, including education on healthy relationships in schools and family early intervention programs.
- Increase access to confidential, flexible and sensitive mental health services for young people experiencing homelessness.
- Increase social security payments such as Youth Allowance and Commonwealth Rent Assistance, to prevent homelessness and increase housing affordability.

Sources of support

It is important that young people have a strong support system to turn to in times of need. Support can come from a range of sources, such as family, friends, teachers, peers, community and government agencies. Although friend/s, parent/s or guardian/s and relative/family friend were the three most frequently cited sources of help for young people across all categories, young people who had experienced homelessness were less likely to turn to these sources for help.

When life events and stress within family dynamics increase, young people may leave their family and home for periods of time, usually to couch surf for intermittent periods with friends or non-immediate family. As demonstrated in the *Cost of Youth Homelessness* report, as well as other research, this can be a common occurrence for many young people.¹¹⁷

Young people experiencing youth homelessness were much less likely to go to their *parents/guardians* for support compared to young people experiencing family homelessness (49.4% compared with 64.4%). Those who experienced youth homelessness were also less likely to reach out to other family members such as *brothers/sisters* (42.4% compared with 53.0%) or *family friends* (48.7% compared with 59.7%) as well. The data demonstrate that they are more likely to rely on their peers and external networks for support. Therefore, it is important to ensure that young people are made aware of support services available in the community so they are able to help peers who may experience homelessness.

¹¹⁷ MacKenzie et al. 2016

More than one in six young people who are experiencing family homelessness are likely to turn to their family for support. At a time of difficulty, family members may not have the capacity to support young people with their issues. Therefore, additional supports should be made available to both young people and their family.

A *Journeys Home* study found that people experiencing homelessness with no contact with family are the least likely to exit homelessness, suggesting that not only are families important in preventing homelessness but they also appear to be important in assisting individuals out of homelessness.¹¹⁸ It found that families play an important role in reducing the duration of homelessness and assisting individuals to sustain their exits from homelessness.

Specialist services can assist young people and their families with reconciliation and reconnection. These services provide wraparound supports and assistance with conflict resolution and resilience, to enable the family to get along better so that the young person can return or stay at home.

Reconnect

The Commonwealth funded Reconnect program uses community-based early intervention services to assist young people aged 12 to 18 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and their families. Reconnect assists young people to stabilise their living situation through early interventions including counselling and mediation (where appropriate). Reconnect is also able to broker support from other services to provide additional resources to the young person, including accommodation and specialised mental health services.

Several of our Reconnect services have embedded themselves in local schools to identify young people needing support before they disengage from education.

Mission Australia's evaluation of the Reconnect program found that young people who participated in this program demonstrated positive outcomes in relation to control over life, housing permanency, and relationships within families and with the community¹¹⁹ and an improvement to their level of engagement with family, work, education, training and their local community.¹²⁰

Mission Australia's Impact Measurement program shows that for data collected to June 2020, young people surveyed when exiting Mission Australia's Reconnect services have, on average, higher wellbeing than those entering. Of the participants, 82% of young people who completed both entry and exit surveys had improved wellbeing when leaving the service. Most young people surveyed when exiting had suitable housing (86%), felt in control of their lives (83%) and felt better equipped to deal with the issues they had sought support with through Reconnect (90%). Staff feedback also indicated that 79% of the young people exiting the service had reached or made good progress towards their goals.

Case Study

Tim* was 15 years old when he was linked with one of Mission Australia's Reconnect services in SA. Tim's mother was in Queensland and his father was in prison. He was couch surfing at the time and had no income. Tim had been disengaged from school, had issues with alcohol and drug dependence and had unresolved legal matters.

As Tim was not receiving any financial support from the government, the Reconnect case workers worked with his father to ensure Tim was able to receive social security payments and coordinate with local housing services to find appropriate youth accommodation.

Tim's case worker accompanied him to obtain necessary identification and other documentation such as his birth certificate, bank account, tax file number and Medicare card among other things. Once Tim's father was released from prison, they were supported to access housing by arranging and attending a range of appointments with them with different authorities and bodies.

¹¹⁸ Brevit 2016

¹¹⁹ Mission Australia 2016

¹²⁰ Mission Australia 2016

His case worker also engaged with a number of schools to assist Tim to re-enter education. The case worker was able to secure a place for Tim with additional support in place to meet his needs while at school. He was also provided with brokerage funds for school uniforms and other supplies.

He received a range of supports and referrals for his alcohol dependence and was provided with strategies to refrain from interacting with people who had a negative influence on his life. He also wanted to learn different recreational activities and the case worker taught him how to fish and catch crabs and provided Tim with fishing gear so that he could continue to fish.

Tim and his father were offered a house by Housing SA and the family was referred to the Building Family Opportunities Program for ongoing support.

**name has been changed for privacy*

Encouragingly, close to half of the young people who experienced homelessness indicated that they would go to *GPs and other health professionals* for help with important issues. Given that some generalist medical and health professionals may not have had experience working with young people or know what referral pathways are available where there are risks of homelessness, they may not be able to provide the necessary supports for young people experiencing homelessness.

“I think once youth are on their own, they need more options and abilities to allow them to access the care they need. I have been denied dental treatment because I don’t have a guardian to give me consent. Instances like these are frustrating for us kids who are going on with their life alone“ Male, 17, NSW

Health professionals should be well equipped to provide necessary supports or further referrals to appropriate housing and homelessness services and supports including providing services in youth friendly environments. However, some young people can face difficulties accessing GPs and other health services due to high costs, long waiting times, and in certain instances discrimination due to their housing situation.¹²¹ The long waiting periods to obtain services, especially from mental health professionals can result in significantly deteriorating mental health or discourage young people from seeking help.

Young people who experienced homelessness were more likely to go to *community agencies* for help with important issues compared to young people who have not experienced homelessness (18.5% compared to 11.6%).

Community services play an important role in assisting young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Youth services for young people experiencing homelessness vary from early intervention, outreach to long-term housing and family reconciliation. Community services with well-established links to the local services and communities are likely to be able to support young people with challenges that are beyond their control. For instance, young people face further challenges when competing with other potential renters, including lack of a rental history, discrimination and assumptions about unstable incomes. Community services, especially youth homelessness services have built relationships with local real estate providers to support young people find suitable housing options.

More funding should be dedicated to housing models that have achieved positive outcomes that incorporate a range of sources of support for young people under one roof. Housing first is a rapid-rehousing model that can be effective for young people who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness. This model provides access to long-term housing stability complemented by access to a range of support and services to address other ongoing issues young people may experience.

¹²¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017

“[There needs to be] publicity for youth homelessness and the available services as I was so unaware of where to go for help and what was even available.” Female, 18, SA

Outreach services are particularly useful in reaching children and young people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness as well as in areas they frequent. Outreach services aim to develop rapport, care for immediate needs, and provide linkages to services and resources to help young people navigate the services system.¹²² Outreach programs can build connections with local communities and develop relationships with children and young people due to their more informal service delivery model.

Recommendations

- Increase investment in peer support networks and peer education initiatives to equip young people with the knowledge and skills to recognise and respond to issues experienced by friends.
- Improve access to GPs and other health professionals by providing training and support on the needs of young people experiencing homelessness and promoting a youth-friendly practice environment.
- Expand funding to youth services that can link young people to appropriate local supports including outreach services.

Experience of bullying

Bullying can be a cause and a consequence of homelessness.¹²³ Bullying has been defined as an ongoing and deliberate misuse of power in relationships through repeated verbal, physical and/or social behaviour that intends to cause physical, social and/or psychological harm. It can involve an individual or a group misusing their power, or perceived power, over one or more persons who feel unable to stop it from happening.¹²⁴

Experiencing bullying at such a formative time as adolescence can have long-term negative impacts on self-esteem, mental health and wellbeing.¹²⁵ It can also hinder young people’s educational attainment, participation in the community and employment prospects.¹²⁶

More than twice the proportion of young people who have experienced homelessness reported that they have been bullied in the past twelve months (39.7% compared with 16.7% of respondents who have never experienced homelessness). Notably higher proportions of young people who experienced youth homelessness said that they have been bullied (43.2% compared with 33.2% of respondents who have experienced family homelessness).

Young people reported experiencing different forms of bullying in the past 12 months. These included cyber bullying, verbal and physical bullying, social and other forms of bullying. Physical bullying included hitting and punching and alarmingly, almost double the proportion of young people who had experienced homelessness said that they have experienced *physical bullying* (31.3% compared with 16.2%).

In terms of the location of bullying, young people experiencing homelessness were likely to indicate much higher rates of bullying *online/on social media* (43.3% compared to 29.0%), *at home* (33.3% compared to 10.2%), *at work* (13.7% compared to 6.0%) and *in my neighbourhood* (11.4% compared to 3.8%). Over seven in

¹²² Collaborative Community Health Research Centre 2002

¹²³ Australian Human Rights Commission 2012

¹²⁴ Council of the Australian Governments 2018

¹²⁵ Mission Australia 2019

¹²⁶ Alannah and Madeline Foundation and PwC 2018

10 (74.4%) young people experiencing homelessness reported that the bullying took place *at school/TAFE/university*.

The increased pressure of bullying at educational institutions can result in young people experiencing homelessness disengaging from education. This can in turn hinder the opportunities to connect with services to receive appropriate supports as education institutions can be an effective point of early intervention.

Measures to combat bullying in any setting can be a combination of both proactive and reactive supports and measures. Schools need the resources to address bullying in their schools and to engage effectively with students who are being bullied and require help from the school or other education institution.¹²⁷ Further professional training on anti-bullying for teachers would also be beneficial, as would the evaluation of specific anti-bullying programs.¹²⁸

These approaches can set a tone in which inclusion of all students is expected and no form of bullying or harm of students will be tolerated within or outside the education institutions. It is also imperative that these approaches stem from the leadership of institutions such as schools, through to all levels of staff and students.¹²⁹

There are numerous campaigns on various online and other platforms to provide information about confidential support services for young people experiencing bullying. Given that young people experiencing homelessness are more likely to experience bullying, they should be informed about mental health and other supports available in their local communities and reliable online platforms that equip young people to address bullying.

In addition to individually targeted supports to address homelessness, there is a need for a broader national campaign to address bullying, particularly at schools and other educational institutions. This should include personal stories of young people who are victims of bullying and positive portrayals of young people experiencing various challenges including homelessness.

Recommendations

- Establish a new national campaign to address bullying of young people.
- Train youth services, school staff and other agencies to support young people experiencing bullying at home, school/TAFE or other institutional settings.
- Educate young people experiencing homelessness about mental health and other supports available in their local communities and reliable online platforms that equip young people to address bullying.

Community participation

Young people benefit from positive interactions with adults and peers, and involvement in their communities provides a sense of belonging, shapes their attitudes and perceptions and creates opportunities.¹³⁰

Research demonstrates that meaningful and accessible activities like sports and arts can have significant impacts on youth social connectedness, better developmental outcomes, improved mental health and recovery from trauma.¹³¹ However, young people who experience challenges such as homelessness, domestic and family

¹²⁷ Glover et al. 1998

¹²⁸ Glover et al. 1998

¹²⁹ Coloroso 2004

¹³⁰ Brennan et al. 2007

¹³¹ Hopper et al. 2017

violence, mental health issues and financial difficulty may not have the necessary supports to participate in the community despite the numerous positive benefits they can potentially gain from those interactions.

Sports as a participant or a spectator were the highest participated activity for young people. However, young people who experienced homelessness were less likely to participate in these activities (60.0% compared with 70.6% in *sports as a participant* and 52.2% compared with 58.0% in *sports as a spectator*). These lower proportions can be a reflection of financial challenges of young people experiencing homelessness. Cost of memberships, uniforms and other associated fees can be prohibitive for young people who are experiencing homelessness.

Encouragingly, irrespective of their experiences of homelessness, young people had similar levels of community participation. A greater proportion of young people who experienced homelessness reported taking part in in *youth groups and activities* (36.4% compared with 28.4%), *environmental groups and activities* (17.4% compared with 12.7%) and *political groups/organisations* (11.1% compared with 6.4%).

Given the importance of these interactions, there needs to be creative ways of engaging with young people who experience homelessness. For groups of young people who may be less engaged with services, the key lies in identifying trusted intermediaries such as youth outreach workers who understand how to promote opportunities in a way that is appealing to the target audience.¹³²

In addition to participation in general community activities, some services that provide youth housing and homelessness services organise community activities to encourage young people to interact with their peers and others who are going through similar experiences.

Youth Week Beach Bash Whyalla SA

Mission Australia held a series of events for National Youth Week which provided opportunities for the young people to attend together, share ideas, showcase their talents and have fun at the beach. The young people from the Reconnect service took an active role with planning, organising and coordinating the events and activities with other community organisations. These activities included kite making, stand-up paddle boarding, healthy wrap-making competitions, come and try sports, sand castles, spray painting and flying 40 kites. This was followed by an acoustic night in the youth week theme 'Imagine, Create and Inspire to Celebrate' to showcase the musical talents and skills of young people in Whyalla.

Young people were mentored by Whyalla Music Reunion committee (consisting of veteran musicians entertaining Whyalla and the upper Eyre Peninsula for three decades) over several weeks leading up to the event to prepare young people for their performances. Since Youth Week ended, the youth mentoring program continued for young people who have formed bands, duos or solo and are currently entertaining at various events including weddings and birthdays.

Recommendations

- Create sustainable, community driven opportunities for young people experiencing homelessness to participate in sports, community events and youth groups.

How well do young people feel their family gets along?

Family functioning has direct impacts on all young people's quality and enjoyment of life and family breakdown is a well-documented pathway into homelessness for all young people.¹³³

¹³² Bell et al. 2008, 146

¹³³ Howell 2013

As young people make the transition from childhood to adulthood, strong family connections are critical for support, providing freedom to seek out independence. When young people are estranged from family networks, exposed to unsafe environments or experience abusive relationships, they risk falling further into crisis, which can have a detrimental impact on their transition to adulthood.

A lower proportion of young people who have experienced homelessness rated their family's ability to get along very positively (25.7% compared with 61.3%). As discussed above, family conflict is a significant concern for young people who experienced homelessness.

When families can access support, including that offered by community agencies, this may prevent a child or young person leaving home. Programs focussed on family reconciliation are an essential component of preventing and addressing youth homelessness. As discussed above, Reconnect has been positively evaluated and this model should be expanded to provide greater reach and build on successes.

While it is not possible for all young people to reunite with family, programs that draw on extended family networks to support people post-crisis have shown great progress in reducing rates of repeat homelessness.¹³⁴

Open Doors – Mirrabrooka WA

Open Doors supports young people aged 12 to 18 and their families living in the Mirrabrooka area and surrounding suburbs in Western Australia. Support is provided to young people experiencing issues with drug and alcohol abuse, family breakdown, unemployment, homelessness and mental health. The program is an outreach based service which means service staff meet with the young people on their terms including at school, home or anywhere that is suitable for the young person.

Recommendations

- Increase funding support services for families including extended families of young people experiencing homelessness to facilitate family reconciliation where appropriate.

Mental health and wellbeing

Feelings of unhappiness over extended periods of time can contribute to low self-confidence and mental health issues.¹³⁵ Almost four times the proportion of young people who have experienced homelessness felt *very sad/sad* with life as a whole (27.2% compared with 7.2% of young people who have never experienced homelessness).

Where young people are linked with community services, it is imperative that the services have the capacity to provide holistic, wrap-around supports to ensure they are both physically and mentally healthy.

It is concerning that more than half (51.7%) of young people who have experienced homelessness indicated some form of psychological distress and this is over twice the proportion of those who have never experienced homelessness (51.7% compared with 21.1%). These findings are supported by other research that finds young people experiencing homelessness have a much higher incidence of mental health conditions, such as mood and

¹³⁴ Baldry et al. 2013

¹³⁵ Anderson 2018

anxiety disorders, than with the general youth population.¹³⁶ There is also higher incidence of self-injury and attempted suicide among young people experiencing homelessness compared to the general population.¹³⁷

There is a complex relationship between housing, homelessness and mental health.¹³⁸ When experienced early in life, mental illness can derail pathways into adulthood as it impacts on academic performance, higher levels of school disengagement and absenteeism, unemployment, interpersonal problems, increased risk of substance use and an increased likelihood of self-harm.¹³⁹

Secure affordable and appropriate housing allows people to focus on mental health treatment and rehabilitation while precarious housing and homelessness make it difficult for people to access mental health treatments and supports.¹⁴⁰ Currently, housing, homelessness and mental health are separate policy systems with little integration, which contributes to poor housing and health outcomes for young people with mental health issues.¹⁴¹ Thus, there needs to be better services integration of housing and mental health for young people and appropriate measures should be in place to provide trauma informed care.

“We see most mental health issues de-escalating after young people have stable housing because housing is one of the biggest stressors that impact on their mental health.”

Mission Australia, Case Manager, NSW

The relationship between both homelessness and mental illness requires collaboration between services to address the complex needs of a young person.¹⁴² The ability to access secure, quality and appropriately located housing helps to prevent mental health issues and enables better management of, or recovery from, existing mental health issues.¹⁴³

For young people who experience mental health issues, living in safe, secure and stable housing is an important part of their road to recovery. Where the mental health issues are cyclical or triggered by external stressors, a person’s capacities for independent living and needs for support can fluctuate and be unpredictable leading to increased risk of homelessness.¹⁴⁴ Therefore, young people experiencing mental health issues should be provided with long-term assistance where necessary to ensure continuity of support until their mental health and housing needs are stable and sustainable.

Community mental health services work with young people within their community, encouraging social inclusion and holistic support directed by the individual. These services should be responsive to cultural backgrounds and personal experiences and provide support that is integrated, holistic and tailored to meet individual needs for recovery.

More than double the proportion of respondents who have experienced homelessness felt *negative* or *very negative* about the future (24.0% compared with 9.5%). Uncertainties and housing instability can have a significant impact on young people’s outlook on life. It is imperative that community services, supports and youth programs are easily accessible and navigable for young people and cater to their specific needs as and when they arise.

¹³⁶ Flatau et al. 2015

¹³⁷ Lourey et al. 2012

¹³⁸ Brackertz et al., 2018

¹³⁹ Brackertz et al. 2018

¹⁴⁰ Brackertz et al. 2020, 11

¹⁴¹ Brackertz et al. 2018, 29

¹⁴² Morisseau et al. 2020, 258-270

¹⁴³ Brackertz et al. 2018, 29

¹⁴⁴ AHURI 2020

A trauma informed approach should also be taken that assumes that young people who have experiences of homelessness have a concentration of complex trauma and uses this as the starting point for service delivery.

Rapid rehousing is vital for young people to provide a foundation for their future. This is particularly important for young parents as stable housing impacts on the young person's future as well as their children's future. Some forms of youth accommodation services may not be appropriate for young parents and there needs to be targeted supports for them to rapidly rehouse young parents.

Case Study

Carina* is a young woman in her early 20s from a migrant background with a very young child. After experiencing domestic and family violence, Carina separated from her partner and obtained a family violence restraining order. Soon after, Carina was diagnosed with a medical condition and as a result returned to her country of origin for surgery.

When she returned after her surgery, she was able to stay with a friend for a short period of time. As this was a temporary measure, she was at risk of experiencing homelessness with her child. She was also experiencing financial hardship and ongoing medical challenges as she was still recovering from the surgery and the side effects of the medication. Carina was referred to the Family Accommodation Program and was supported to find appropriate accommodation. In addition to tenancy support, she was assisted to obtain social security payments as she was not familiar with systems and the payment processes were hard to navigate.

As Carina was unable to drive to various appointments due to side effects of the medication she was taking, the case manager drove her to and from the appointments. She also requested support with independent living skills such as making phone calls to various government departments, energy companies and the like, including requesting for interpreters where necessary.

While she was in the transitional housing property, she was offered long-term housing through a local community housing provider. The property was located in a convenient location with access to shops, schools and other amenities including a language support school. Carina was linked with a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) outreach worker, local GP, dentist, a child health nurse and playgroup. She was also supported to access a counselling service to address trauma related issues she experienced while she was in the previous relationship.

After an additional three months of working with Carina to assist her with settling into her long-term property and enhancing her independent living skills, she exited the program. She was provided with a comprehensive exit plan which listed a wide range of services she was already accessing, in addition to other community services she may require for future support. Carina is now living independently with her child and indicated that she feels safe and happy with her life.

**Name has been changed for privacy.*

Recommendations

- Ensure better integration of housing and mental health support for young people and provide stable housing as the foundation for mental health recovery.
- Fund community services to provide long-term supports to young people where needed to ensure their housing and mental health are stable and sustainable.

Appendix

Appendix: Youth Survey 2019 respondents reporting an experience of homelessness, by state/territory

State/territory	Total no. of respondents who answered homelessness questions	Total no. of respondents who have experienced homelessness	% of respondents who have experienced homelessness
ACT	284	37	13.0
NSW	5,864	933	15.9
NT	280	89	31.8
QLD	5,405	962	17.8
SA	2,930	481	16.4
TAS	1,374	227	16.5
VIC	4,040	656	16.2
WA	2,496	491	19.7
National	22,673	3,876	17.1

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