

Attachment E - Scale Youth Foyers

In a state like New South Wales, every young person should have what they need to thrive and to make good transitions into adulthood and independence. For some young people, at a critical time of lifechanging growth and development, they face extraordinary challenges such as experiences of homelessness. When homeless, young people are navigating complex transitions without the intense and varied support typically provided by family. For young people to pursue lives of value to them, to avoid chronic homelessness and exclusion, the government has a role to play in providing support, stability, and opportunity.

In 2020-21, 13,507 young people aged 15-24 presented alone to homelessness services in NSW.¹ This represents 20% of all people experiencing homelessness in NSW. It's well established that this figure doesn't represent the true extent of youth homelessness, such as those couch surfing. It also doesn't account for those who are under the age of 15 and presenting alone to homelessness services, nor does it account for young parents.

Young people have unique and different needs to adults. When considering key budget measures to address homelessness, young people require a different, youth-specific approach. And this includes housing pathways and options that cater to young people generally, and the diversity within 'young people' – diversity of age, gender, sexual orientation, culture, experience of marginalisation, exclusion and trauma. Data demonstrates that in 2020-21, 40% of young people in NSW who exited a homelessness service were unable to find housing and instead, their situation of homelessness or unstable housing was perpetuated.² This is largely due to the housing situation for young people in NSW, including the lack of age-appropriate social and affordable housing. The most recent rental affordability snapshot identified that there was not a single affordable rental property in Australia for a person reliant on Youth Allowance.³ It's clear that young people need more housing options that meet their needs and given both the rate of youth homelessness and the amount of young people who cannot find a positive housing solution a range of social and affordable housing solutions are required.

While there are pockets of innovation, many places in Australia still employ a 'stepping stone' approach to youth homelessness '...intended to transition young people from short-term crisis assistance to medium-term transitional housing and independent living.'⁴ In NSW refuge hopping is endemic, and early experiences of homelessness are likely to lead to homelessness later in life. A system focused on managing crisis, and with short periods of support, compounded by the neglect of the Child Protection system, don't do much to support young people navigating such a critical phase of life with the structural barriers that impede sustained exits from homelessness. The question is not of the quality and nature of the crisis accommodation and supports for young people so much as it is question of appropriate and affordable housing options out of homelessness.

Housing initiatives that that are specific to and appropriate for young people and that act to centre positive youth development are present in NSW. But given the size of youth homelessness in NSW, and the need to shift from crisis and 'stepping stone' like systems, the housing mix for young people needs to grow.

Housing First has had a demonstrable impact on ending homelessness for even the most complex and chronic clients through the innovation of providing housing 'first' and as a basic

foundation and right, rather than as a reward for adhering to a range of conditions or demonstrating ‘housing readiness’. It has succeeded elsewhere in shifting the entire service system and culture from risk and crisis to rapid rehousing with support as needed. Yet there is some doubt on its appropriateness for young people, largely based on the difference in fidelity of Housing First when it is delivered via congregate-site versus a scattered-site approach, as well as the suitability of mainstream services for young people, and concepts of ‘independence’ for young people.

As a result of such challenges Housing First for Youth (HF4Y) has been developed and executed across the world, an adaptation specifically for young people. A randomised controlled trial undertaken in Canada of HF4Y involving 4 sites – one which targets transition from care, another focusing on ‘Indigenous’ youth (with both the program model design and research agenda being indigenous led) - show promising early results.⁵ First year results found ‘...significant improvements in housing stability, engagement in education and employment, and in terms of quality of life — particularly in the areas of psychological wellbeing and social relationships’.⁶

In Australia, to date, there seems to be very little social housing purely for young people to exit homelessness, if any, without pre-conditions that includes young people with high and complex needs who may not be ready to engage in education, training and/or employment. What does exist in NSW shares elements of Housing First but has requirements to commit to education, training and/or employment, known as Foyers.

Foyers are a key option to improve housing pathways, with sufficient evidence of positive outcomes for vulnerable young people, and while trialled and tested in the NSW context, there are too few. Despite NSW holding the most amount of young people experiencing homelessness when compared with other states and territories, NSW is lagging in its development of Foyer-specific dwellings. The difference is stark when compared with QLD or WA for example, where QLD holds much less than half of young people experiencing homelessness than NSW yet has over double the capacity of foyer beds, or WA which has roughly 80% less young people experiencing homelessness than NSW but has almost the same amount of Foyer capacity.

Foyer dwellings and capacity per state and territory								
	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT
YP presenting alone	13507	13192	5553	2872	3318	1470	757	1465
Foyer projects	2	7	3	1	1	3	1	0
Foyer dwellings/capacity	113	191	120	98	23	101	26	0

(Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2021) Specialist homelessness services annual report 2020–21., AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 09 December 2021; <https://foyer.org.au/foyers-in-australia/foyer-listing/#1637207507224-efb82131-1f0c>)

Foyers were not, historically, a response to youth homelessness and in Australia they do respond to a broader population of young people. According to research conducted by AHURI, Australia foyers in fact explicitly state they are not rapid rehousing.⁷ There are suggestions that Foyers could be linked more directly to the SHS system and operate better as a housing pathway out of homelessness.⁸

There is evidence to suggest the expansion of Foyers in NSW would likely be suitable to a wide range of young people who experience homelessness in this state. A longitudinal study commissioned by Launch Housing and The Brotherhood of St Laurence to measure the outcomes of Education First Foyers in Victoria indicated that this model, which prioritises education, is targeted to young people who are committed to pursuing education but are ‘hindered by of personal, social and economic factors. They are more likely to be enrolled in education or training than the broader cohort of young people seeking Specialist Homelessness

Services, but otherwise report similar experiences associated with homelessness.⁹ Data from the AIHW shows that in 2020-21, 29% of NSW young people presenting to SHS's were engaged in education and training.¹⁰ This would indicate that rather a large portion of young people in SHS's in NSW could be suitable for Foyers, and youth specialists in homelessness services would also be well placed to indicate suitability.

What is made clear by the recent report on foyers, commissioned by Shelter NSW, is that proliferation of will not happen without investment from governments.¹¹

There is a need for a deliberate and planned approach to scaling Foyers across the state of NSW that is better linked to the SHS system and meets the support and housing needs of young people who experience or are at risk of homelessness.

As stated earlier, Foyers are critical to expand, but sit within a mix of options including extending the leaving care age to 21, better leaving care planning and execution.

Homelessness NSW calls on the NSW Government to:

Invest in a state-wide program to provide Foyers in areas of high need to address housing demand for young people experiencing homelessness

¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 'Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2020–21' (Canberra: AIHW, Australian Government, 2021), <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/95657e24-6730-4249-93cf-64d1d284baad/Specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report-2020-21.pdf.aspx?inline=true>.

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 'Supplementary Tables - Historical Tables SHSC 2011–12 to 2020–21', in *Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2020–21* (Canberra: AIHW, Australian Government, 2021), <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/95657e24-6730-4249-93cf-64d1d284baad/Specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report-2020-21.pdf.aspx?inline=true>.

³ Anglicare Australia, 'Rental Affordability Snapshot', National Report (Australian Capital Territory: Anglicare Australia, April 2021).

⁴ Marion Coddou, Joseph Borlagdan, and Shelley Mallett, *Starting a Future That Means Something to You: Outcomes from a Longitudinal Study of Education First Youth Foyers* (Melbourne: Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2019), p.8

⁵ Stephen Gaetz et al., 'Housing First for Youth in Australia', *Parity* 34, no. 3 (2021): 58–60.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ David MacKenzie et al., 'Redesign of a Homelessness Service System for Young People', AHURI Final Report 327 (Me: Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, 2020), p.60, via <http://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/327>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Coddou, Borlagdan, and Mallett, *Starting a Future That Means Something to You: Outcomes from a Longitudinal Study of Education First Youth Foyers*.

¹⁰ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 'Data Tables 2020–21', in *Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2020–21* (Canberra: AIHW, Australian Government, 2021), <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/95657e24-6730-4249-93cf-64d1d284baad/Specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report-2020-21.pdf.aspx?inline=true>.

¹¹ Insight Consulting Australia, 'Scaling Youth Foyers for NSW', Policy Brief (Sydney: Shelter NSW, November 2021), <https://sheltersnsw.org.au/scaling-youth-foyers-for-nsw/>.