Commissioner for Children and Young People
Western Australia

AUSTRALIA ECU UNIVERSITY EDITH COWAN

Policy and Support Needs of Independent Homeless Young People 12-15 Years: Service providers' perceptions

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Commissioner for Children and Young People

Perth, Western Australia

May 2018

Title: Policy and Support Needs of Independent Homeless Young People 12-15 Years: Research Design

A research project industry report prepared for the Commissioner for Children and Young People WA and funded by Edith Cowan University and the Commissioner for Children and Young People

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Key words: Homelessness; youth; Australia; policy; care; child protection

Publisher: Commissioner for Children and Young People, Perth, Western Australia and Social Program Innovation Research and Evaluation, School of Arts and Humanities, Edith Cowan University, Joondalup, Australia

DOI TBA Format PDF, online only URL TBA

Recommended Citation: Cooper, T., Heath, T. Jarvis, M. Brooker, J. Reeves, M. (2018). *Policy and Support Needs of Independent Homeless Young People 12-15 years: Service Providers' Perspectives*. Perth: Commissioner for Children and Young People and Edith Cowan University

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Acknowledgements

This research project has relied on the support and collaboration from many individuals and groups in providing research funds, designing and scoping the study, supporting recruitment, and ongoing consultation throughout the project. We would like to thank all the young people and service providers who gave their time to help us with this research.

The Commissioner for Children and Young People and Edith Cowan University provided funding for the research through the ECU Industry Collaborative Grant Scheme. This provided resources to assist participants, conduct literature reviews and engage participants. Both organisations also provided considerable in-kind contributions of staff time and administrative support.

1.2 Reference group

The project's reference group comprised:

· Trish Heath, Director Policy and Research, Commissioner for Children and Young People

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About this report

This report is one of four linked reports that relate to this project. These reports will be available electronically on the website of the Commissioner for Children and Young People and through the Social Program Innovation Research and Evaluation (SPIRE) research group at Edith Cowan University.

1) *Homelessness in young people aged under 16 years: A literature review* was conducted prior to the commencement of this project and informed the research design, the interpretation of data and the recommendations.

2) *Policy and Support Needs of Independent Homeless Young People 12-15 Years: Research Design*. This document presents a detailed account of the research design for this study.

3) *Policy and Support Needs of Independent Homeless Young People 12-15 Years: Young People's Voices*. This report presents the results of interviews with young people who had become independently homeless when they were under 16 years old.

4) *Policy and Support Needs of Independent Homeless Young People 12-15 Years: Service providers' perceptions.* (This report).

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Glossary of Terms

ABS Australian Bureau of Statistics; Australian national statistics organisation.

CHP Council for Homeless Persons; peak body representing organisations and individuals in Victoria with a commitment to ending homelessness. Our vision is to end homelessness in Victoria.

CPFS Child Protection and Family Services, now part of the Department of Communities, Western Australia. Formerly these responsibilities were carried out by the Department for Child Protection and Family Support, and before that the Department for Child Protection.

DCP Department for Child Protection, a previous name for CPFS, still commonly used by young people and service providers.

Foyer The Foyer Oxford**,** a form of supported youth accommodation which provides medium term supported accommodation to young people aged 16 years and older. The young people are accommodated in self-contained single rooms. Case work support is available to help young people re-enter school or employment and to access other services such as substance abuse services or health services.

HREOC Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission.

LIFT The Living Independently for the First Time (LIFT) program, provides long-term support for young people leaving care. Under this program young people who are in the care of the department can get additional help to transition to adult life. This support begins at the age of 15 years and can continue until the young person turns 25 years old.

NHMRC National Health Research Council

NYC National Youth Commission.

NYCH National Youth Coalition for Housing; a national youth advocacy body formed in 1982 'to end youth homelessness and create youth housing solutions' (NYCH website).

Post-vention A type of support provided after homelessness to prevent re-entry through strategies that stop the recurring cycle of homelessness.

SAAP Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, now called the National Affordable Housing Agreement [NAHA]. This program has a youth-specific stream.

1 Introduction

This purpose of this report is to document the operation of existing services provided to young people who become homeless before they were 16 years old, and to make suggestions for improvement. The report has three parts. The first part of the report describes the formal responsibilities of different organisations if a young person under 16 years old becomes homeless. It maps how these responsibilities translate into service provision in the Perth metropolitan area. The second part outlines the perceptions of service providers about the strengths and limitation of existing services and suggestions for improvement. The final part discusses barriers to change and steps that service providers can take to overcome barriers and improve services.

The report presents the themes that emerged from interviews with service providers, including both the results of a survey sent to service providers and the themes that emerged from subsequent service provider interviews.

2 Background

The purpose of this section is to provide a brief overview of the formal responsibilities of various government department in Western Australia, and an indication of the types of services currently provided in the Perth metropolitan area.

2.1 Formal responsibilities

2.1.1 CPFS

The Child and Community Services Act 2004 (WA)[1] governs CPFS in relation to its services to at-risk young people, including that it will "provide for the protection and care of children in circumstances where their parents have not given, or are unlikely or unable to give, that protection and care" s 6(d). This includes S8 determining the best interests of the child, taking into account: (1)(a) the need to protect the child from harm; (1)(f) any wishes or views expressed by the child, having regard to the child's age and level of understanding in determining the weight to be given to those wishes or views; (1)(k) the child's physical, emotional, intellectual, spiritual and developmental needs; and, (1)(l) any other relevant characteristics of the child.

Under S9, Principles to be observed, (a) states that, "…the parents, family and community of a child have the primary role in safeguarding and promoting the child's wellbeing". However, principles (c) to (e) state that "…every child should be cared for and protected from harm…every child should live in an environment free from violence…every child should have stable, secure and safe relationships and living arrangements".

Under Section 28 (2) of the Act, a child is in need of protection if (a) the child has been abandoned by his or her parents and, after reasonable inquiries (i) the parents cannot be found; and (ii) no suitable adult relative or other suitable adult can be found who is willing and able to care for the child; and if (d) the child has suffered, or is likely to suffer, harm as a result of (i) the child's parents being unable to provide, or arrange the provision of, adequate care for the child. A child in need of help can then be taken into provisional protection and care, whereby the CEO of CPFS s29 (2) "has

[1] Children and Community Services Act 2004, Retrieved from https://www.legislation.wa.gov.au/legislation/statutes.nsf/main_mrtitle_132_homepage.html

responsibility for the day-to-day care, welfare and development of the child to the exclusion of any other person". Under s32 (1) of the Act, If the CEO determines that action should be taken to safeguard or promote a child's wellbeing, then they have the option to (a) provide, or arrange for the provision of, social services to the child and, if appropriate, a parent or other relative of the child. Under Section 39 of the Act, preparing a provisional care plan includes: (a) identifying the needs of the child whilst in care, (b) steps or measures to be taken to meet those needs, and (c) decisions about the care of the child, including decisions about placement arrangements, secure care and contact with family members.

Regarding young people of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island descent, Section 81 of the Act requires that the CEO consult with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander officer, a person with knowledge of the child, their family or community or an agency with appropriate knowledge of the child, family or community. These requirements are intended to ensure that the cultural background of young people of Aboriginal and Torres Straight Island descent is taken into account when arrangements are made for their care.

2.1.2 Police

Under Section 37 of The Child and Community Services Act (2004), an authorised offer of CPFS or a police officer can at any time, "take a child into provisional protection and care if the officer suspects on reasonable grounds that there is an immediate and substantial risk to the child's wellbeing" (2). A police officer must notify the CEO (CPFS) of their actions and the reasons for taking those actions as soon as practicable after taking a child into provisional protection and care. An officer does not need a warrant to exercise these powers (5) and may use reasonable force and assistance (6) when taking a child into provisional protection and care.

Under Section 42 of the act, power to move a child to a safe place, an officer can move a child to a safe place if the officer finds the child at a place other than their usual place of residence and the officer determines that the child is not under the immediate supervision of a parent or an adult capable of doing so, and, "there is a risk to the wellbeing of the child because of the nature of the place where the child is found, the behaviour or vulnerability of the child at that place, or any other circumstance" (2. a, b, b-i). These powers do not authorise an officer to move a child to a lock-up or a secure care facility (3). Once the officer has removed the child to a safe place, they are then obliged to try and contact an appropriate person with responsibility for the child and place them in or return them to the care of that person (7).

2.1.3 Centrelink

According to the Australian Government, 16 is the age at which young people may be able to directly access a payment, as opposed to through their parents or caregivers[2]. However, there are some direct income support provisions for young people under 16 years of age who are homeless. Young people aged 15 can receive youth allowance under certain circumstances. These include being unable to live at home due to extreme circumstances and having parents who cannot look after them[3]. Extreme circumstances include that the emotional or physical wellbeing of the young person would be jeopardised by violence, sexual abuse (or similar) if the young person were to continue to live at home. Another extreme circumstance includes when a young person's substance abuse

[2] Australian Government Department of Human Services. *Youth Allowance.* Retrieved from https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/youth-allowance

[3] Australian Government Department of Human Services. *Dependent or Independent for Youth Allowance.* Retrieved from https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/enablers/dependent-or-independent-youth-allowance#a4

and/or antisocial behaviour is so extreme that specialised treatment has been unsuccessful, and the parent/s could not reasonably be expected to have the capacity to resolve the situation.

An investigation is typically undertaken to establish whether exceptional circumstances apply and the only grounds under which this investigation would not take place were if this involved contact with alleged perpetrators of abuse or neglect that could place the young person in unacceptable danger. Having a supportive parent can indicate to the investigator that family breakdown is not extreme.[4]. If a young person cannot establish their independence according to social security law, their allowance is means tested according to their parents' income[5].

The only income support that a young person under 15 years of age may be able to access is Special Benefit. This is available to people who are in severe financial hardship due to circumstances beyond their control. This benefit is only paid where the young person can prove their identity and prove that they are unable to live at home[6].

2.1.4 Specialist Home Services (SHS) – At Risk Youth Accommodation (ARYA)

The National Affordable Housing Agreement [NAHA] is the Australian national funding body responsible for providing Specialist Home Services [SHS], formerly known as the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program or SAAP. As part of the NAHA, new service funding models are also funded through the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness [NPAH][7]. The information provided below relates to the state of Western Australia's implementation plans for the NPAH regarding youth homelessness. This project plan covers the years 2017-2018. The stated purpose of the project plan is to "provide the public with an indication of how frontline homelessness services are intended to be delivered and demonstrate Western Australia's capacity to achieve the outcomes of the Agreement."[8]

Under this plan, the only state supported accommodation available to young people under 16 who are experiencing homelessness in Western Australia is the 'At Risk Youth Accommodation' [ARYA] service. ARYA provides overnight accommodation for young people in the care of the CEO of CPFS who are aged between 14 and 17 years and those not in the care of the CEO who are aged between 15 and 17 years. The service accommodates up to six young people per night and includes two meals and access to laundry facilities. Young people with no other accommodation options and with limited engagement with other services are targeted by this service. Young people who access this service usually receive additional support through their CPFS case worker or another youth accommodation program, which provides additional support and case management[9]

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[4] Australian Government Guide to Social Security Law. *3.2.5.40 Assessment of Extreme Family Breakdown & Other Similar Exceptional Circumstances.* Retrieved from http://guides.dss.gov.au/guide-social-security-law/3/2/5/40

[5] National Youth Commission (2008). *Australia's homeless youth: A report of the national youth commission into youth homelessness.* Brunswick, Victoria. Retrieved from https://www.theoasismovie.com.au/pdfs/Homeless_report.pdf

[6] Ibid

[7] Homelessness Australia (2012). *SAAP Reform: The National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) and funding arrangements for specialist homelessness services: An evidence-based policy paper.* Retrieved from https://www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au/sites/homelessnessaus/files/2017-07/SAAP_REFORM_Evidence_Based_Policy_Paper.pdf

[8] Western Australia Project Plan (2017). National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness: Schedule A. Retrieved from http://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/housing/national-partnership/WA_NPAH.pdf

[9] Ibid

2.2 Service provision targeting alone young people in Perth and Western Australia

2.2.1 CPFS Crisis Care

CPFS provide a 24 hour, seven days per week crisis care phone line for those in crisis or in need of urgent help. [10] Crisis situations that are within the brief of this service include: "child protection concerns, domestic violence, homelessness or a need for urgent emotional support".[11]

Crisis Care is a partner in the 'Youth at Risk Initiative", which is a collaboration with WA Police and Mission Australia's Youth Beat service to respond to young people found on the streets at night-time. The Youth at Risk initiative operates across the Perth metropolitan area on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights[12].

2.2.2 Young people in out-of-home care in Western Australia

CPFS coordinates out-of-home care (OOHC) or care arrangements/placement services, for young people who need protection and care, in accordance with the Children and Community Services Act 2004. As outlined in the act, these young people are placed in the care of the CEO of CPFS.[13] In 2017, there were 4,795 children and young people living in OOHC in Western Australia. In the 10-14 year age group, 656 non-Aboriginal and 776 Aboriginal young people were in OOHC (a total of 1432) and in the 15 and over age group, 345 non-Aboriginal and 275 Aboriginal young people were in OOHC (a total of 620 young people).[14] In 2016, the placement proportions for children and young people in OOHC were as follows: family care (44%), foster care (36%), residential care (8%), parent/former guardian (7%), unendorsed arrangement (3%) other arrangement (2%).[15] It is likely that young people occupy a larger proportion of family care and residential care placements, and less foster care placements than children.

Western Australia has a range of youth residential care facilities. In 2015 there were 41 Family Group Homes (21 metropolitan), with most of these being operated by community sector organisations; 22 Residential Group Homes (14 metropolitan), which are operated by CPFS and cater for young people

[10] Government of Western Australia Department of Communities Child Protection and Family Support. *Crisis Care.* Retrieved from https://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/CrisisAndEmergency/Pages/CrisisCare.aspx

[11] Edith Cowan University. *Emergency and after hours services.* Retrieved from https://intranet.ecu.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/162537/Other-Helpful-Contacts-and-Resources.pdf

[12] Department of Child Protection and Family Services. *At-Risk Youth Strategy 2015-2018.* Retrieved from https://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/Organisation/Documents/At%20Risk%20Youth%20Strategy%202015-2018.pdf

[13] Government of Western Australia Department for Communities Child Protection and Family Support (2016). *Speaking out about raising concerns in care: The views of Western Australian children and young people with experience of out-of-home care.* Retrieved from https://www.ccyp.wa.gov.au/media/2327/speaking-out-about-raising-concerns-in-care-website-version.pdf

[14] Department of Child Protection and Family Support, Western Australia (2017). 2016-2017 Final Report. Retrieved from https://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/Resources/Documents/Annual%20reports/Annual%20Report%202016%202017%20Online.pdf

[15] Department for Child Protection and Family Support, Western Australia (2016). *Building a better future: Out-of-home care reform in Western Australia.* Retrieved from https://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/ChildrenInCare/Documents/Building%20a%20Better%20Future.pdf

with complex support needs; and, one secure care centre (Kath French) for young people who have complex support needs[16]

2.2.3 Emergency youth accommodation services

Emergency youth accommodation services are provided throughout the state of Western Australia. However, the majority of these only accommodate young people aged 15 years and above. The exceptions are Kira House, which takes in young women aged 14 years and over, The Foyer Oxford, which only takes in young people aged 16 and over, and ARYA, which takes in young people aged 14-17 who are in the care of the CEO and young people aged 15-17 who are not.[17]

Table 1: Emergency youth accommodation services in Western Australia

Service Name	Managing Service	Service Description	District	Target Group	Under 16's?
Armadale Youth Accommodation Service	Parkerville Children and Youth Care Inc	Provides supported accommodation to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.	Armadale	Young people aged 15-20 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness	Yes
At Risk Youth Accommodation [ARYA] Service (State Funded)	Life Without Barriers	Provides support for a small group of older teenagers in the care of the CEO who require placement, and chose to not engage with services. The service provides overnight accommodation, an evening meal and breakfast, and laundry facilities, and the opportunity for young people to contact their case workers or other supports.	Metropolitan	Young people aged 14-17 years who are in the care of the CEO and young people 15-17 who are not.	Yes
Calvary Youth Services Mandurah	Calvary Youth Services Mandurah Inc	Provides supported accommodation to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.	Peel	Young people aged 15-20 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness	Yes
City of Canning Youth Accommodation Service	City of Canning	Provides supported accommodation to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.	Cannington	Young people aged 15-20 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness	Yes
Ebenezer Home	Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship Family	Provides supported accommodation to young people	Mirrabooka	Young people aged 15-20 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness	Yes

[16] Department for Child Protection and Family Support, Western Australia. *Out-of-home care: Strategic directions in Western Australia, 2015-2020 Discussion Paper.* Retrieved from https://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/ChildrenInCare/Documents/Out%20of%20home%20care%202015.pdf

[17] Department of Child Protection and Family Support, Western Australia. *Services in the Community.* Retrieved from https://www.dcp.wa.gov.au/servicescommunity/Lists/ServicesInTheCommunity/AllItems.aspx?&&p_Service_x0020_Name=Family%20Group%20Home&&PageFirstRow=1&&View={2F8EA07A-5952-4004-9501-94190540A92E}

Service Name	Managing Service	Service Description	District	Target Group	Under 16's?
	and Youth Services Inc	who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.			
Foyer Oxford	Anglicare WA Inc	Service: A place to call home A purpose-built accommodation and training facility for up to 98 disadvantaged young people aged 16 to 25 years in the metro area.	Metropolitan	Young people aged 16-25 years	No
Fusion Student Household Service	Fusion Australia Ltd	Provides supported accommodation to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.	Cannington	Young people aged 15-20 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness	Yes
Household Network	Perth Inner City Youth Service Inc	Provides supported accommodation to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.	Perth	Young people aged 15-20 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness	Yes
Indigo Junction	Indigo Junction (formerly Swan Emergency Accommodation)	Provides supported accommodation to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.	Midland	Young people aged 15-20 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness	Yes
Kira House	Rise Community Network (formerly Hills Community Support Group)	Supported and/or safe accommodation to women, with/or without accompanying children, who as a result of family and domestic violence or another crisis. Breaking the cycle of domestic violence and homelessness and assisting clients to maintain existing safe accommodation where appropriate or move to stable safe long-term accommodation is a key role of Family and Domestic Violence Accommodation and Support.	Metropolitan	Young women aged 14-18 years, with/without accompanying children who are homeless due to family domestic violence or another crisis.	Yes
Kwinana Detached Youth Service	Town of Kwinana	Provides support services to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.	Rockingham	Young people aged 15-20 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness	Yes
LYNKS Counselling/Streetsyde Service	YMCA of Perth Youth and Community Services Inc	Provides supported accommodation to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.	Metropolitan	Young people aged 15-20 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness	Yes

Service Name	Managing Service	Service Description	District	Target Group	Under 16's?
Mercy Community Services Youth Services	Mercy Community Services Inc	Provides supported accommodation to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.	Metropolitan	Young people aged 15-20 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness	Yes
Moving Out Moving On (including Penny Jones House)	Parkerville Children and Youth Care Inc	Provides supported accommodation to young people 15-25 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and provides intensive case management support to homeless young people aged 15-21 who are residing in post crisis accommodation.	Armadale	Young people aged 15-25 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness	Yes
Peel Youth Programme	Peel Youth Services Inc.	Provides support services to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.	Peel	Young people aged 15-20 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness	Yes
Victoria Park Youth Accommodation Service	Victoria Park Youth Accommodation (Inc)	Provides supported accommodation to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.	Cannington	Young people aged 15-20 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness	Yes
Yes! Housing	Anglicare WA Inc	Provides supported accommodation to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.	Metropolitan	Young people aged 15-20 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness	Yes
Youth Accommodation and Support Service and Support Service for Young Parents	Mission Australia	Provides supported accommodation to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.	Armadale	Young people aged 15-20 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness	Yes
Youth Futures	Youth Futures WA Inc	Provides supported accommodation to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.	Joondalup	Young people aged 15-20 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness	Yes
Youth Place	St Patrick's Community Support Centre Ltd	Provides supported accommodation to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.	Fremantle	Young people aged 15-20 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness	Yes
Y-SHAC Youth Supported Housing and Crisis Accommodation	Anglicare WA Inc	Provides supported accommodation to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.	Metropolitan	Young people aged 15-20 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness	Yes

2.2.4 CARE schools

Curriculum and Reengagement in Education [CARE] schools educate at-risk students, "who have been unable to access or have significant difficulty in accessing mainstream education".[18] Students are offered a modified curriculum and access to programs designed to assist with numeracy and literacy issues. Low adult-student ratios, access to youth workers and counsellors on site and teachers who use a holistic approach to student needs are part of the CARE school offering.

Table 2: CARE School/Programs within the Perth metropolitan area[19]

CARE School/Program Name	Area(s) Covered	Age/Years Criteria
ALTA-1 Program	Merriwa, Joondalup, Malaga, Mullaloo, Canning Vale, Belmont	14.5-19 years
Corridors College	Midland	12-17 years
CTEC – Caversham Training and Education Centre	Caversham	14-19 years
Anchor Point	Heathridge	15-19 years
COMET	Clarkson	14.9-19 years
Port School	Hamilton Hill	Under 21 years
SMYL Community High School	Rockingham	Years 9-12
Sowilo Community High School	Kelmscott	12-20 years
Clontarf Aboriginal College	Waterford	Years 7-12
St Clare's School (for girls)	Lathlain	Years 8-12

2.2.5 Youth street services

2.2.5.1 Street Connect

Run by Anglicare WA, the Street Connect program provides youth workers who assist, support and educate 15-25-year-old homeless and street-present young people in the Perth CBD. Youth workers establish positive relationships with young people on the streets, providing information counselling, referrals, advocacy, crisis intervention and follow-up support. They provide practical support like food, water, pregnancy tests and condoms as well as information about the legal rights and responsibilities of young people on the street.[20]

2.2.5.2 Youth Beat

Run by Mission Australia, Youth Beat is a safety and early intervention program supporting young people on the streets within the Perth CBD. Youth Beat is a mobile outreach service run by professional youth workers, serving young people in Northbridge and the inner city. It provides counselling and a recreation program as well as safety, information, guidance and support for young people on the street.[21]

2.2.5.3 Passages Resource Centre

Passages is a Rotary Club initiative, providing information, referral and support service to young people on the street, aged 12-25 years. It operates out of two locations, in Northbridge and

[18] Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia [AISWA]. *Curriculum and Reengagement in Education Schools.* Retrieved from https://www.ais.wa.edu.au/curriculum-and-reengagement-education-schools

[19] The Department of Education Western Australia [DETWA]. Alternative Education Programs (Within the North Metro Education Region). Retrieved from https://www.google.com.au/search?q=alternative+education+programs+CARE+schools&rlz=1C1AVUC_enAU766AU777&oq=alternative+education+programs+CARE+schools&aqs=chrome..69i57.7712j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8

[20] Street Connect https://www.anglicarewa.org.au/get-help/youth-services/street-connect

[21] Youth Beat WA http://sd.missionaustralia.com.au/293-youthbeat-wa

Mandurah. Passages offers a kitchen, bathroom and laundry facilities, Internet access, and phone and mail collection, as well as life skill programs and information workshops.[22]

2.2.6 Other (miscellaneous)

2.2.6.1 CREATE

CREATE Foundation is a national organisation that represents the voices of children and young people who have experienced an out-of-home care experience, including kinship care, foster care and residential care. CREATE provides programs and services to this particular group of young people and works to develop policy and research that works towards developing a better care system.[23]

2.3 Literature on service provision options

A literature review was completed before the project commenced. This was used to inform the design of the research and to place the findings in context. The main findings of the literature review were that:

1) The specific needs of 12-15 year-olds who are homeless are not well researched[24].
2) Policy rarely addresses the legal and practical circumstances of this age group – policy gets lost between policy that addresses services for children (family homelessness and child protection) and policies appropriate for young people aged 16 and over.
3) The processes that precipitate youth homelessness typically commence when a young person is under 16 years old.
4) Many young people become homeless because of family conflict and on-going family problems
5) Various homeless prevention programs look promising (the Reconnect program, school-based welfare programs, and youth and community linked homelessness prevention programs) but are only suitable where the family is the best environment for the young person.
6) Current and historic options where a young person is not able to live at home include: kin-care, foster care, informal care arrangements with other families, boarding school, group homes and supported independent living (15-year-olds and older)[25].
7) Because of poor outcomes for young people leaving state care, CHP[26] has recommended an HREOC inquiry into care and protection services for young people aged 12-17 years.
8) Homelessness policy internationally is an example of a 'wicked problem'. Wicked problems are policy problems that are very difficult to resolve because they are socially complex and multi-causal, and the relationships between variables are not well understood. There is generally no single solution. Responsibilities frequently spans organisational structures, and

[22] Passages http://passagesresourcecentre.com/
[23] CREATE https://create.org.au/
[24] Cooper, T (2017) *Homelessness in young people aged under 16 years: A literature review.* Perth: Commissioner for Children and Youth People and Edith Cowan University. Retrieved from https://www.ccyp.wa.gov.au/media/2489/literature-review-homelessness-under-16-years-final-web-file.pdf
[25] Ibid
[26] Council to Homeless Persons. (2014). *CHP's position paper on the VHAP Reform Project: A Framework for Ending Homelessness* Melbourne: Council to Homeless Persons. Retrieved from http://chp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/131224-CHP-position-paper-on-VHAP-FINAL-.pdf

interventions have a high risk of making the situation worse. Usually such problems have been beset by policy failure and abrogation of responsibilities[27].

The full literature review is available as a separate report[28].

3 Methodology

The findings of the literature review were used to develop the research instruments and the research design. The research surveyed service providers who had contact with young people, including direct service providers such as youth accommodation services and indirect service providers such as CARE schools and youth advice and support services.

A full account of the survey design can be found in a separate report[29]

4 Service providers' perceptions

The survey is the main source of data about service providers' perceptions of the strengths and limitations of existing services and suggestions for improvement. The surveys were supplemented by additional data gained from telephone interviews with service providers.

4.1 Survey of youth services

The survey was sent to 153 youth services during August and September of 2017. The survey links were emailed to the CEO or another person nominated by the agency. Twenty-eight (28) youth services returned the survey and 35 surveys were completed, since some agencies run programs in different regions and staff completed the survey for their region. Two agencies submitted more than one response.

Agency Name	Area
Albany Youth Support Association	Great Southern
Albany Youth Support Association	Great Southern
Anglicare WA YSHAC	Perth
Armadale Youth Accommodation Service	Perth
Bayswater Youth, City of	Perth
Calvary Youth Services	Peel
Cambridge Youth Service	Perth
Canning, City of, Youth Accommodation Service	Perth
Crossroads West KBYAS	Goldfields/Esperance
Ebenezer Home (Aboriginal Evangelical Church)	Perth
Fremantle PCYC	N/A
Fusion Australia (Cameliers Guest House)	Midwest
Fusion Student Household Service	Perth

[27] Briggs, L. (2012). Tackling wicked problems: A public policy perspective. Canberra: Australian Public Service Commission. Retrieved from http://www.apsc.gov.au/publications-and-media/archive/publications-archive/tackling-wicked-problems.

[28] Cooper, et al. (2018) Homelessness in young people aged under 16 years: A literature review Perth: CCYP/ECU

[29] Cooper, et al. (2018) Policy and Support Needs of Independent Homeless Young People 12-15 Years: Research Design. Perth: CCYP/ECU

Agency Name	Area
HAND nor Inc. (homeless at risk needy disadvantaged)	Perth
Headspace	N/A
Horizon House St John of God social outreach	Midwest
Indigo Junction	Perth
JSW Training and Community Services	Bunbury
Mercy Care	Perth
Mission Australia	Great Southern
Mission Australia	Perth
Mission Australia Reconnect	Peel
Mission Australia Reconnect	Peel
Perth Inner City Youth Service	Perth
Perth Inner City Youth Service	Perth
Specialist Aboriginal Mental Health Service	Perth
Waroona, Shire of	N/A
Wyndham, Shire of	N/A
Your Town (Kids Helpline)	N/A
Your Town (Kids Helpline)	All WA
Youth Involvement Council	Pilbara
Youth Futures	Perth
Youth Futures	Perth
Youth Futures	Perth
YouthLink	Perth

4.2 Services Provided

In question 2, agencies were asked to identify the types of service their organisation provided. Twenty agencies answered this question and agencies could nominate as many categories as applied to them. The survey included 22 services that directly provide accommodation to young people and 28 youth services that provide other services to young people and have contact with young people who may be homeless (some services may provide accommodation and other services). Twenty-four service providers identified themselves as providing referral services to young people, 20 said they provided information, 13 said they provided counselling services, seven said they provided financial assistance and five said they provided education. Eighteen agencies said they provided other services and these were described as advocacy, outreach, diversionary services, recreation, case management, mental health and suicide support, community services, and, homelessness prevention services.

4.2 Eligibility inclusion

In question 3, agencies were asked about eligibility requirement for service users. Thirty responses were received to this question. Eligibility criteria included age, geographical location, income requirements as well as other criteria specific to the purposes of a particular agency.

4.2.1 Age of service users

Thirty responses were received to this question. Age criteria varied considerably between agencies. Only three agencies served the whole youth age range (12-25 years), whilst one service worked with

15-17-year-olds only. Twenty-four agencies said the minimum age eligibility was 15 years or less. Six services had a maximum age requirement of 21 years.

4.2.2 Geographical location

Sixteen agencies stated that they served a particular geographical region; seven nominated a catchment area outside of the Perth metropolitan area, and nine agencies nominated a catchment area that included part or all of the Perth metropolitan area.

4.2.3 Income

Six agencies stated that there were income requirements (Centrelink, wages or other income). Two services said that they had no income requirements.

4.2.4 Other eligibility requirements

Eleven agencies nominated other eligibility requirements including risk of homelessness (5), mental health or addiction risks (2), willingness to engage with the service (1), and casual or full-time employment (1). Other eligibility requirements included leaving foster care, linked to a mental health professional, referral from the education department, and age.

4.3 Location of the service

Question four asked about the location of the service provided. Thirty-five responses were received. Seventeen agencies said they provided services in the Perth metropolitan area, four nominated the Great Southern district, four nominated the Peel region, three nominated the Midwest region or the Pilbara, two the Goldfields and Esperance, and one nominated each of the following areas: Wheatbelt, Gascoyne, and Kimberley.

4.4 Provision of services to young people under sixteen years

Question five asked about whether agencies provided services to young people under sixteen years old. Twenty-seven agencies provided services to young people under 16 years. Six did not service this age group.

4.5 Type of service to young people under sixteen years

Question six asked about the type of services provided to young people under sixteen years old. Seventeen services stated they provided information and referral, 11 provided accommodation, 10 provide counselling, six provided financial assistance and five provided education. Fifteen services said they provided other services, including case management, a school-based breakfast and mentoring program, outreach work, personalised mental health support, transport, liaison with parents, workshops on independent living skills, sports and recreational activities, and diversion services.

4.7 Numbers of young people under 16 years

Question seven asked about the numbers of young people under 16 requiring assistance with accommodation every month. The responses to this question varied considerably because of the different roles of the agencies and because many agencies did not record these numbers or did not record the information in a way that was accessible. Three agencies stated they saw 30 or more young people under 16 needing homeless assistance every month. Only two respondents said they didn't see any young people under sixteen needing housing assistance. Some were unable to provide this information because the numbers varied, or because data was not available, or could not be disaggregated. The median response was in the range of 7 young people under 16 every month.

4.8 Age of young people under 16 years

Question eight asked about the age range of the young people under 16 who sought independent assistance with homelessness. Twenty-two agencies said that the young people they saw were 15-16 years old, nine agencies also saw 13-14-year-olds, three also saw 10-12-year-olds, and two agencies had been approached by children under 10 years old seeking independent housing assistance.

4.9 Awareness of the service

Question nine asked how young people under 16 years old became aware of their service. Eighteen said this was through referral, 19 said by word of mouth and 12 nominated other means (including social media and online promotion, and young people's own social networks).

4.10 Referral strategies

Question 10 asked about the advice that services provided to young people if they were unable to provide accommodation. Twenty-three said they referred them to an alternative agency, seven referred young people to Child Protection and Family Services (CPFS) generally, and five stated they referred young people specifically to Crisis Care/Entry point, which is the specialist crisis service within CPFS. Six named specific youth accommodations services that they referred young people to (those mentioned included Kirra House, Tinoca, Ebenezer, Indigo Junction, YSHAC, YASS, AYAS, Calvary Youth accommodation), and one mentioned an agency with online vacancies. Three mentioned other services (Save the Children/Passages) that support homeless people but do not provide accommodation. One agency was unable to provide advice. The qualitative comments explained some of the responses; two explicitly noted that many young people are unwilling to engage with CPFS and that they often refuse referral to CPFS, preferring to stay in unsafe places instead. There is,

> *Virtually nowhere to refer except DCP[30] and young people will typically refuse this assistance and may leave. May advise them to stay with a friend's family if this is safe. Kids aged 13-15 will usually continue to stay in unsafe places such as with older men or other street present young people and may trade sexual favours for protection but prefer this to departmental intervention. We don't have any way of getting them to contact the department if they are unwilling.*

Three mentioned that their agency engaged with families and one mentioned family mediation and support.

Question 11 was not analysed because answers indicated confusion about the intent of the question.

4.12 Definition of homelessness

Questions 12 and 13 examined how agencies defined homelessness. Detailed answers were provided by most agencies and they appeared to reflect the definitions of homelessness most commonly used for primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness. One explicitly mentioned Mackenzie's definition. Examples of homelessness included both primary homelessness such as rough sleepers, and secondary and tertiary homelessness such as transient accommodation, accommodation lacking basic facilities, couch surfing and staying with friends. There was frequent mention of the importance of a safe, supportive environment that provides security. It was stated that definitions can be more difficult in Aboriginal communities, where it can be normal for young

[30] DCP is the previous acronym for CPFS

people to live with different relatives in the extended family for periods of time. As one respondent stated, *"Under 16s need more care, due to maybe not being on Centrelink payment so no income, no ID, and no rental history. Homelessness is the same for all clients across the board, the reasons and experiences may be different".*

4.14 Perceptions of main causes of under 16 independent homelessness

Question 14 asked about perceptions of the reasons for homelessness in young people under 16 years old. Most said that they thought young independent homelessness was multi-causal. Family violence, family conflict and family dysfunction were mentioned by 16 respondents as key factors. This included various kinds of problems including alcohol and other drugs in the home, sexual abuse or sexual danger within the family, conflict, the young person's earlier experiences of trauma, disagreement about the young person's behaviour, violence towards the young person or one of the parents, extreme religious expectations in the family, step families, and mental health issues for the family or the young person. Other comments focused on the problems that arose because of the lack of support services for young people in this age group, the lack of suitable transitional housing and the lack of any services in some areas, and the unwillingness of young people to divulge sexual or physical violence to the authorities. One youth worker explained the dilemma:

> *There are no options for them except via DCP –youth agencies generally cannot take under 16s. If the young person has had contact with DCP they may be highly resistant. Young people over 13 are often seen as too hard to place so there are few options –the young person will not go agreeably into foster care or be willing to renegotiate going home. Some young people don't want to divulge sexual or physical violence to the authorities for fear of retribution, getting a parent into trouble, causing problems for younger siblings etc. It can take a long time to build the trust necessary for intervention, during which time the young person becomes used to street life or enters an unsafe relationship and feels in control of their life to some degree, they don't want to go back into a child position in care. This is a difficult position for a youth worker. Caught between trying to get the young person into safe care but needing to build trust to ensure the young person stays in touch. While they may be too young to be living independently, this is the reality for them and may be safer than hiding on the streets.*

There was also discussion about how the options provided by CPFS did not match the needs of many of the young people in this age cohort. Lack of appropriate services, transport for young people to access facilities, post-homelessness pathways and support were some of the reasons stated. Service providers also identified the lack of maturity and the different support needs of younger homeless people (compared with older young people) and the risks present in emergency accommodation that may reinforce and normalise deviance and experiences of trauma. Deviance and traumatic experiences were reported to be common experiences for young homeless people staying in emergency accommodation.

Interviews were held with service providers who had indicated on the survey that they were interested in talking further with the research team. A predominant theme that came from these discussions was that many homeless young people under sixteen years are homeless due to issues they have with their families at home, with many parents not knowing how to cope with this age group and often responding to issues inappropriately. Service providers cited the intergenerational impacts of ineffective parenting, where families engage in dramatic arguments rather than talking issues through. According to service providers, parents of some young people 'don't fight fairly' and are unable to curb their anger.

4.15 Perceptions of challenges in meeting needs

When asked about the challenges of meeting the needs of this population of young people, service providers offered four main responses. One respondent said that there were no challenges, implying that the existing arrangement were acceptable. All other respondents thought that there were challenges, and three were identified. Firstly, the services offered had to be appropriate to the circumstances of these very young people, and these were not necessarily the same as those needed by older young people who are homeless. Differences included legal issues such as guardianship, financial issues such as difficulties in gaining support from Centrelink, and obtaining support suited to their developmental needs. In particular, the need for longer term solutions leading up to the young person becoming fully independent were identified. Secondly, the lack of services generally was mentioned, including the lack of drug and alcohol services, and the difficulties of getting transport to services. Finally, the services had to be perceived by young people in this situation as an acceptable option, and foster care was not seen by most homeless young people to be appropriate.

> *Homelessness for 15-year-olds can be challenging due to our responsibility to them. When a 15-year-old is asked to leave the property, there is a level of duty of care which may not exist with a 16+ young person. Often, we might need authorisation from family or the department* [CPFS] *to house a 15-year-old with the understanding they would take them back if their accommodation broke down. This is not always possible when a 15year old is fleeing an abusive family.*

4.16 Demand for service

Questions 16 to 23 asked about demands for services by this population of young people. When asked about whether they thought their service adequately met the needs of this group, 17 services said they did not, four services said they did, two services said this question did not apply to them, and one service said they try. One service that thought they adequately met the needs of this group of young people said they provide the support necessary in conjunction with community agencies, and that they teach life skills and try to link them to education. The agencies were then asked whether they felt the demand for services by this population group was adequately met by other services. Seventeen agencies said they were not, three agencies were unsure, and two agencies said that they were adequately met. When asked about how other agencies met these needs, one agency was of the view that, *"some of the responses from other agencies have been good"*, without specifying what was provided. Other comments suggested how other services ought to meet the needs of this client group but did not specify how they should do so. For example,

"Child protection need to assist more with the 15-year-olds who are not in care, they need to ask why this child is homeless at this age, what is going on in this child's life, be accountable and help services to help the young 15-year-old."

When asked specifically whether they could recall whether young people under 16 years had been turned away by their agency, 16 respondents could recall young people being turned away and six agencies could not recall any specific instances. When asked about why the young people had been turned away, most answers suggested operational reasons; for example, that the hostel was already full, and they did not have any available beds. Others mentioned structural barriers to access including that the young person did not fit the funding criteria for the agency, that they needed the involvement of CPFS or the guardian before accommodation could be offered, an inability (because of lack of staff) to offer the kind of close supervision required when young people from this age cohort are accommodated, and concern about accommodating young people under 16 with older young people up to the age of 25 in the same house. Other responses suggested that there were

reasons pertaining to the individual which meant that they could not be accommodated, such as their previous conduct, or the impacts of a particular young person on other young people already accommodated. For example, one service provider stated that,

> *They are turned away as they have only just turned 15. We can only house a young person for three months. Taking on a young person at 15 years-old when they don't turn 16 for many months can be problematic. There are almost no medium/long term options for 15-year-olds and we would have to exit them after 3 months. This is babysitting at best, this does not help to fix the issues of homelessness.*

When asked about whether their agency recorded when young people under 16 were turned away, 15 agencies said they did record this, five agencies said they did not. When those who recorded this data were asked how many young people under 16 had been turned away in the previous year, several agencies were unable to give precise numbers, even when they said these were recorded. Where numbers were provided, they did not seem to relate to formal recordings. One service provider reported that 30 young people had been turned away, another said the number was 'under 20', another said the coordinator 'could recall three in the last year', another said, "approximately 1-2", and one said they were unable to access the information on the day. One agency said two young people under 16 had been turned away, *"due to incorrect referrals to the service, even geographical error".* From these statements it seems that record keeping was either not readily retrievable or it was informal.

Service providers who participated in an interview identified that there are effectively no emergency housing services for 12-15 year-olds with the statutory organisation doing little to assist these young people.

4.17 Perceptions of strengths of existing services

Question 24 asked about the strengths and limitations of existing services. The answers to this question were varied. Four service providers felt that there were few strengths in the existing arrangements. One stated that existing options (reconnect outreach services or departmental care) were not sufficient to meet the needs of young people under 16 years, and they felt that more diverse options were needed. Some focused on the strengths of their organisation, such as advocacy, understanding of a high-risk cohort, flexibility, commitment to wrap-around care, commitment to early intervention, and diverse staff. Others felt that drop-in services such as Passages were valuable. One stated that 15-year-olds were in a better position because they could access emergency youth housing services. Two agencies considered staff to be a great strength, together with sound policies and procedures that protect the age group.

> *…[a] highly committed work force who try to meet the needs of this group with flexibility and presence in some key locations. Long established services that young people trust. Some culturally appropriate services servicing Aboriginal Youth. Well established links between most services and Youth Mental Health services, which facilitates appropriate referrals.*

Service providers who provide accommodation where young people can stay reported on the importance of having staff members staying on site overnight and staying awake. However, funding limits the agencies to only one staff member on site and this has risk management implications.

4.18 Perceptions of gaps

Question 25 asked about perceived gaps in services. Of the 21 comments in reply to this question, 11 service providers felt that there was insufficient accommodation available for those under 16 years. Several of these comments discussed the difficulty of meeting the needs of this group within existing structures. A significant concern was that young people aged 13-15 often need more intensive support and itis not possible to provide this under existing funding models. The complex needs of many young people in this age group were mentioned by various respondents including mental health needs, drug usage and borderline intellectual disability. One respondent outlined situation as follows:

> *For young people aged 13-15, the situations that drive them on to the streets and into homelessness are often long-term and entrenched. There may be a lifetime of neglect, family violence or substance abuse and departmental intervention. The young person is often quite street smart by their early teens, already sexually active or using a range of drugs, and is unwilling to enter fostering, group homes or other systems designed to provide safe care, because they feel too old for this – especially if family life has been chaotic, neglectful or otherwise dangerous or unpleasant. While adults might disagree, they may feel competent on their own and wary of being under the control of adults. Their behaviours are likely to bring them into clashes with the house rules and they find it easier to avoid contact.*

Other suggestions made were that there should be special accommodation for this cohort, ready access to homelessness services through school and funding to allow one-to-one work with these homeless young people. One service provider mentioned the need for better staff training and safer hostels.

4.19 Perception of the role of statutory child protection services

There were 20 responses to the question about what role statutory child protection services should have with independently homeless young people aged 12-15 years. Only one response said that the role should stay as it currently is. The remaining responses made a variety of suggestions about how things could be improved. Two suggested that CPFS ought to be more engaged with families to prevent family violence and family breakdown and to support young people to return home. However, it was recognised by some respondents that the family was not always the best (safest) place for the young person, especially if there is on-going danger of harm. One suggested better coordination between homelessness services and the Reconnect program. However, many preferred a model whereby CPFS would provide support to other agencies that would then support young people. Several responses argued that homelessness agencies should be better supported by CPFS when they take on young homeless young people, especially when it comes to working with families and providing follow-up. The need for flexibility was stressed in several replies. One respondent said that, *"family-style care may be ideal, but it isn't always useful if the young person is unwilling. Pressure from parents to maintain control of their children is a political football and is not helpful."*

Several participants discussed whether CPFS should automatically open a case on every young person who is independently homeless under the age of 16? In other words, should every young person in these circumstances be considered to need protection because of their circumstances? There was disagreement on this issue. Most respondents thought that CPFS should play some role in supporting young people in this situation, and that CPFS should never leave a young person on the street or in an unsafe situation. Two respondents argued that a case should always be opened. One

respondent disagreed, because the cause of homelessness does not always arise from child protection concerns.

Two respondents discussed the importance of the type of relationship between the young person and the worker. These respondents suggested that a youth work-based relationship might be more productive than current relationships, especially where young people have had previously unproductive relationships with DCPFS. As one pointed out,

> *…it's often the 'key people' outside of state care that have a productive, progressive and safe relationship with the young person, especially if the young person has been in state care…walking alongside a young person is often a different experience than we have heard from young people who have engagement with child protection services and staff. The starting point of the relationship comes from a youth work perspective rather than a child protection [perspective], yet safety is always present.*

Practical suggestions for change in the way that young people who were already homeless are responded to include the provision of supported independent single person units (including one-to-one educational support), better support for young people to stay in school, better financial support for young people (including items like 'Smartriders' or transport payment card), and the provision of therapeutic interventions to support young people before they return to school. One respondent also suggested that school psychologists needed better training and that trained youth workers should provide support services in schools instead of chaplains. Another suggested a more streamlined assessment process.

4.20 Perception of needs for prevention

Twenty people provided suggestions for what could be done to prevent homelessness in this age-group. The answers overlapped to some extent with the previous question. Five service providers suggested improvements to early intervention strategies, starting as early as primary school age children, including work with families and young people to prevent crises such as family breakdown and family violence and four suggested greater funding of services was required. Other suggestions included a holistic approach to young people, more accommodation for young people who cannot live with their families, cooperation with emergency accommodation services and Reconnect, workshops for young people on independent living skills, family-oriented placements for young people who can't be with their parents but can't manage on their own, supporting young people to stay in school, preventative work by other professionals including youth workers in schools, and counselling for families and young people. One felt that nothing could be done, and another did not know what could be done. One respondent thought that some things cannot be controlled, and this area is one of them.

One of the recurrent themes that came from the interviews was the need for CPFS to consider more options for this age group. Service providers felt that CPFS was not sufficiently aware of what is happening to young people and the current system does not respond sufficiently to their needs. One said, "*If life at home is so unbearable then there must be something going on".* A suggestion was made that CPFS needs to invest in families earlier, by working with families to address the issues that have become entrenched.

4.21 Suggestions for improvements to services

Fourteen respondents answered question 28. The answers overlapped to some extent with the previous question. Several comments indicated that the service providers felt that they could respond effectively to the special needs of this group if they were adequately resourced.

Improvements to preventative work with families and reconnection recurred as themes. Mental health and literacy were identified as significant issues for some young people. Increases in funding to homelessness services was mentioned by three respondents. Better support from CPFS for exit plans was mentioned by one respondent.

Other suggestions focused on the need to relate to young people better. Several comments included the recommendation that services should listen to young people, co-design services with young people, ensure that services made young people feel culturally secure, and that they should ask young people about their needs. Other ideas included holistic and 'wrap-around' services for young people, and the use of social media to communicate better with young people. Another suggestion was that services should better understand the real-life experience of young people. One respondent also said that some young people want to maintain connections with siblings and parents even if they are homeless. Another respondent suggested that service providers need to be more realistic about the position and life experience of young people. This respondent suggested that,

> *…young people tell me that since year 7 students have been placed in high school there is massive participation by 11-12-year-olds in the activities of older children, including drug-use, porn access and sexual behaviours. If a young person becomes homeless their exposure to dangerous activities rapidly escalates and it is reasonably likely that they will already be experimenting before deciding to leave home. For some young people placement in a group home or similar will be difficult to sustain.*

This statement regarding year 7s in high school is a sincerely held belief and may be true for some individuals, but it does not align with research about young people and risky activities in this age cohort or with the research into the dynamics of induction into risky activities, which usually occurs through family connections and older siblings. In a previous study, youth workers found some children who were still in primary school were accessing porn on the internet from their phones[31]. The assertions about risky activities, however, are valuable as a reminder that the intervention offered must be sustainable in the context of the realities of the young person's life.

Another suggestion was for better support for young people to remain in school. Within the research literature, it common wisdom that schools are useful for early intervention because they are a universal non-stigmatised service. However, a different respondent questioned whether schools are the best place for early intervention services to be located. One respondent supported access to counselling services but questioned the assumption that schools were an appropriate location for the service, because of confidentiality concerns.

> *Get better access to counselling support for young people using adults young people can feel safe with to connect them to supports. School-based support can be tricky because young people are highly suspicious of confidentiality and believe that others will know and talk about their private issues*.

Other respondents mentioned developing better relationship and counselling supports for young people and their families, and the importance of gaining trust of young people who are homeless.

[31] Trudi Cooper and Jayne Jarvis (2017). "Research into efficacy of program processes and evaluation of the 'Ballajura Connect' program" Department for Communities (WA) https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323393080_Research_into_efficacy_of_program_processes_and_evaluation_of_the_'Ballajura_Connect_Project_Final_Report

Improved assessment tools and policies, more options and funding, and suitably trained youth workers working alongside specialist services were recommended as better ways to meet the needs of homeless young people under 16 years.

Service providers were divided in who they thought should lead changes to the system with half suggesting that changes should be led by the funders (CPFS) and the other half claiming that the changes should be led by the industry/community. Several suggestions centred on the lack of communication between government departments. "*Many issues with the system could be sorted if government departments talked to each other,"* which "*would free up agencies to do what is needed to deliver."* Respondents recommended that communication should to be free flowing since it is currently non-existent, with each department operating in a silo and never talking to other departments.

4.22 Other comments

Seven service providers added comments in this section. The views were varied but the overall view was that youth accommodation services are now more likely to see young people under 16 years old than they used to be. They were divided about whether they were an appropriate service to meet these needs. Most felt that early support was important and that with adequate resources they could support young people under 16 years old. One expressed concern that emergency accommodation was becoming a holding area for young people when other arrangements had broken down, but that this was not working because there was no effective long-term planning.

> *Homeless services have not [enough] accommodation resources to work with children (sic) under the age of 15, there are also [no] transition accommodation options for young people 15 years of age and crisis accommodation becomes a holding place for these young people until they are old enough to access transitional accommodation. Multiple young people who are in care are ending up in crisis accommodation due to poor planning and placement breakdown despite MOU with housing, this adds to the bed blockage at crisis accommodation due to no other available placements.*

A recurrent theme was the way services are funded, which has some detrimental connotations. Firstly, annual funding does not allow for forward planning. Secondly, the current model of agencies competing for funding makes them wary of other service providers. This means that shared learning is non-existent since they are not comfortable about sharing what is working and what isn't working.

5 Young people's voice: main findings from interviews with young people

Interviews were conducted with fifteen young people who became independently homeless before the age of 16 years. The full account of these interviews is reported separately.[32] The main findings were:

- Young people's stories are all different.
- Most did not have family to whom they could be safely reconnected.
- Young people had often experienced greater autonomy prior to homelessness than others their age because of family circumstances.

[32] Cooper (2018) *Policy and Support Needs of Independent Homeless Young People 12-15 Years: Young People's Voice*

- Young people felt that their non-homeless peers did not understand them.
- Young people who spoke to us showed great resourcefulness and bravery.
- A relationship with a trusted adult (youth worker, extended family, case worker) was very important to them.
- Exiting a guardianship arrangement unintentionally keeps young people homeless for longer and exposes them to greater risks.
- CPFS interventions were mostly perceived to be too inflexible or 'too little too late.' However, the LIFT program was highly regarded.
- Most young people had aspirations to continue their education. Some had succeeded but it was difficult, and most had not managed to stay in school.
- Specialist services are needed to support young people who become parents at an early age (like the Nest program, Youth Futures WA) to build parenting skills and avoid having the baby removed from their care.
- There is a need for exit pathways to permanent accommodation.
- There is a need for emotional support (not necessarily mental health service, just someone who cares).
- It is difficult to live in emergency accommodation long-term (young people can't build friendships because of transience; no day-time access, sitting on public transport all day during school holidays).
- Young people stated spontaneously that they wanted a better life for themselves and their children.
- For some young people becoming a parent provided access to permanent accommodation

6 Summary of implications for future service planning and policy

These reports have implications for services and for policy. The interviews with young people demonstrated that pathways into and out of homelessness are varied and young people have varied support needs. This summary follows the approach taken in recent youth homelessness policy reports[33] and discusses implications for prevention of youth homelessness, service provision to young people who are homeless, and support for pathways out of homelessness. To maximise the likelihood that any changes would be successful, further detailed consultation about the implementation practicalities would be needed.

6.1 Prevention

The main implications of this study for prevention of independent homelessness amongst young people under 16 years old are:

- Prevention of homelessness is not always safe or possible.
- School is a non-stigmatising universal service and could provide a base for youth workers to provide community support services to those at risk of homelessness. This would allow informal family and community supports to be harnessed safely and referrals to formal services to be made (noting concerns about confidentiality).
- Reconnect services are useful where it is safe for young people to return to their families.

[33] Homelessness Taskforce (2008) *The Road Home A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness.* Government White Paper, Canberra: Australian Government

- Additional support is needed for young people in kin-care and for grandparent kin-carers, to prevent breakdown of kin-care placements as children become teenagers.

6.2 Support services

Young people under the age of 16 years can access some youth accommodation services but few services take young people under 15 years old. Youth homelessness services said guardianship arrangements cause problems if they accept young people who are under 16 years old, because the agencies are in an ambiguous position. Guardianship arrangements are intended to protect young people but the existing arrangements are leaving young people more vulnerable if they become independently homeless under the age of 16 years. Their lack of independent status means that they have very limited access to homelessness support services and may rely on informal options that have greater risks associated with them. In addition, homelessness can make it difficult to fully participate in school and obtain medical care. A lack of income also causes problems, as does the lack of exit pathways.

- Action is needed on guardianship to give independent minor status to suitably mature young people, irrespective of their age. Further consultation is needed about how this might work and how arrangement could be improved for those who are not yet sufficiently mature.

- Timely access to income support (form Centrelink, or other sources) is necessary to reduce the risk of poverty leading to further harms, such as begging, theft or sexual exploitation.

- Youth accommodation agencies could provide appropriate support if they were resourced to provide suitable accommodation, but changes would need to be made to allow appropriate levels of supervision and care. Further consultation is needed about how existing services should be adapted to meet the needs of a younger age cohort who may need greater support than is currently offered.

- Greater support is needed to help young people remain in education if they become homeless. This could be offered in mainstream education through school-based youth workers. More CARE schools are needed to offer additional support, especially for young people who had previously disengaged from school or who had experienced trauma or drug or alcohol abuse prior to homelessness.

- Support may be needed to help young people move out of emergency accommodation and into long term accommodation as soon as possible. Intensive wraround will be needed for some young people to address drug and alcohol use, trauma, physical and sexual abuse, mental health, or disability issues.

6.3 Exit Pathways and postvention

The main issue identified was the lack of exit pathways. The LIFT service provides a possible model for support.

- Provide a variety of exit pathways -single accommodation, family boarding, school boarding and supported transitional accommodation.

- Provide on-going flexible extended support that good parents might otherwise provide into adulthood (similar to the LIFT program model).

- Provide practical –life skills, mentoring, drivers' licence, and employment networks.

- Emotional support –mentoring, youth work, support sibling connections if wanted.
- Holistic care coordination –activate any suitable informal community supports.

7 Postscript: Validity checking with service providers

The results of this survey and the interviews with young people were synthesised and various discussion points and suggestions for change were presented to a workshop of youth work on Youth Homelessness Matters Day on the 18th April 2018. Service providers were asked for feedback on the suggestions for change. The suggestions for changes were broadly supported. Several people made additional suggestions about practical considerations, or detailed suggestions about possible implementation solutions, including arrangements for the assessment of mature minors and how additional support needs should be addressed within the youth accommodation sector. This indicates that further detailed consultations should occur as soon as any changes to the policy direction have been agreed. This would improve the success of change implementation.

A youth worker from one agency said that there used to be a Protocol between CPFS and youth accommodation services detailing how each party should collaborate to support young people under 16 years old who are admitted to youth accommodation services. The Protocol has been attached as Appendix 1. The value of a reinstatement the Protocol is illustrated by the following example provided by a youth worker and reproduced here with their permission.

> *The agency accommodated a 15-year-old female who was in the care of the Department of Communities. The young person displayed aggressive and violent behaviours on different occasions, with the last incident requiring an exit from the program. The youth accommodation agency contacted the Department for Communities to discuss possible options to support the young person. The youth accommodation agency worked with the young person and the Department to exit her into ARYA House for 3 nights. Over this period, the youth accommodation agency had daily contact with the young person and supported her to think about her behaviour and the impacts it was having on her as well as others. The young person was able to return to the same youth accommodation agency after the 'time out' period and was supported to finish the twelve weeks and move on to more stable accommodation. With ongoing support, her behaviour improved and the outcome was positive. The support received from the Department of Communities to refer the young person to ARYA House provided the youth accommodation agency with an alternative option to exit into homelessness, and resulted in a positive outcome for the young person.*

This illustrates that with appropriate support youth accommodation agencies are able to offer support to young people, even when problems arise. When this support is provided, good outcomes can be achieved for young people.

In summary, the main additional points raised during the consultation with youth workers were:

- Reinstate the Protocol between CPFS and youth accommodation services for CPFS to provide support to young people under 16 in emergency accommodation. This existed previously for many years but is now no longer applied.

- Consider separate non-government hostel/housing arrangements for under 16-year-olds, operated on a relational youth work model, with stays of up to two years, and active preparation for independent living.
- Staff need to be better qualified, preferably with a youth work degree.
- Concern was reiterated about the time delays in the present system that leave young people with no income and no access to support for 28 days or more.
- Exit pathways and support must be established urgently to avoid young people being exited back into homelessness.

8 Appendix 1: Protocol drafted to improve collaboration between Youth Accommodation Services and CPFS

Forging stronger partnerships to address homelessness: Protocols between SAAP services and Department for Child Protection in order to improve linkages between Department for Child Protection and SAAP services

This agreement was signed in 2008 by Terry Murphy the Director of the Department of Child Protection and informed collaboration for a number of years. Youth accommodation agencies reported that many CPFS staff are now unaware of the Protocol.