



Developing Models of Good Practice in Meeting the Needs of Homeless Young People in Rural Areas

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Introduction



Examining homeless young people in rural areas and how to meet their needs.

Key questions of:

- How do young people in rural areas become homeless?
- Are there dimensions that differentiate rural youth homelessness from metropolitan youth homelessness?
- How are the needs of homeless young people currently met, and what are the barriers to effectively meeting their needs?
- What could we do better, what are the 'good practice' models?

Methods



Standard methodology

- literature review and production of a Positioning Paper
- case studies focussed on a number of regional centres. Mt Barker (SA) as a pilot, others include:
 - Busselton and Bunbury (WA)
 - Mt Gambier (SA)
 - Ballarat (Vic)
 - Launceston (Tas)
- gender specific focus groups with homeless young people in each case study, plus interviews/meetings with service providers
- review of the 'grey' literature in each jurisdiction, plus interviews with key stakeholders

Conceptualising Homelessness: a framework



- The welfare subject
 - beyond structural explanations to consider the interface between the social world and human agency
- Enablement and constraint
 - risks and opportunities
- Institutional and contextual factors
 - broader social, economic and political considerations – unemployment, stable income, education, government policy
- Dynamics of social and economic change
 - globalisation
- Demographic change, household formation
 - shift from nuclear family – young people caught and left behind in the time/space between the dismantling of one family arrangement and reforming of another arrangement

Western Australia



- Agency
 - Agencies for South West Accommodation
 - BUNYAP, SWYFSS, JPET, PIH, RECONNECT
- Sites
 - Bunbury and Busselton
- Data Collection
 - Interviews
 - service providers
 - Focus groups
 - young people

Emerging Issues



- Defining being homeless
 - *Being homeless is not having a roof over their head, not having safe and secure accommodation, not having an emotional attachment to home, not having a choice about where home is, not having enough food to eat.*
 - Having to live portably – packaged food, restrictions on clothing and possessions not being able to have pets

Emerging Issues



- What young people are doing
 - **wide-ranging strategies young people undertake in securing a place to sleep/live:**
 - reside in short term accommodation
 - move from friend to friend
 - find older adult to take them in
 - ‘couch surfing’

Emerging Issues



- Housing
 - *material*
 - private rental market
 - public housing
 - short-term crisis accommodation
 - housing choice (rural)
 - *symbolic*
 - stigmatisation of youth

Emerging Issues



- Importance of broader social, economic, political and geographic considerations
 - (family life, unemployment, availability of housing stock)
- Identity
- Positive and negative role of peer groups

Emerging Issues



- Place
 - service provision, transport, inter-agency partnerships
- Community
 - perceptions of youth
 - values
 - connectedness

General Findings



- **Much of our fieldwork confirms what is already known about homelessness in rural areas, and in particular rural youth homelessness**
- **Many and distressing pathways into homelessness**
 - foster care/guardianship/exiting youth detention
 - mental health issues
 - leaving school young
 - repartnering of parents
 - Chamberlain and McKenzie’s continuum of homelessness - couch surfing common

General Findings



Experiences of rural young people

- **Homeless young people place great value on ability to stay within their rural communities**
- **One element of lives they can control**
- **Homelessness places young people at risk, adversely affects health and well being**
- **Current labour market systems of assistance - not necessarily most effective focus**
- **Potential gap between perceptions of young people and service providers on what is needed**
- **Issues associated with Indigenous young people may require separate consideration**

General Findings



Specific rural issues

- regionalisation of services generates gaps
 - lower service levels in non-metropolitan regions
 - inadequate exit points from housing assistance creates ‘choke points’ up and down the system
 - intergenerational discrimination in the housing market
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- Invisibility of rural homelessness, funding models do not necessarily suit
 - Policy learnings to be transferred across jurisdictions

Service Delivery Implications



Partnership with Young People

- Listening to individual young people
- Involvement in development and evaluation processes
- Strengths focus
- Longer term support
- Different support at different times in journey

Service Delivery Implications



Service Models

- Importance of key worker
- Continuity
- Higher emphasis on life skills development
- Accessibility
- Updated knowledge of other services
- Acknowledge role of non-housing supports
- Strong co-ordination with other services

Service Delivery Implications



Engagement with the Community

- Dialogue and on-going relationships with real estate agents
- Information about how service works, expectations and limitations
- Life skills as an alternative to references

Policy Learnings



Youth Partnership

- Rethink category 'youth' and conventional construction of 'homelessness'
- Moving beyond Ad hoc or Consultation models of Youth Participation
- Listening to young people to identify gaps
- Involving young people in planning housing services
- Advisory structures
- Ongoing evaluation mechanisms

Policy Learnings



Models of Good Practice

- NGOs working in partnership with government funders develop longer term accommodation options
 - include development of life skills training (essentially foyers). An integrated program of training that develops life skills first, then learning skills
 - accredited, recognised and resourced
 - may require reform of Commonwealth priorities
 - Australians Working Together package
- Service providers as guarantor
- Community-based initiatives
- Further development / funding of lead tenant model

Policy Learnings



- Early intervention models need to incorporate a range of strategies in addition to accessing housing
 - **Independent living skills**
 - **Identity formation**
 - **Social relationships**
 - Peers
 - Key workers
- Need to review funding allocation formulae in some jurisdictions

Policy Learnings



Implications for SAAP

- **Possible reworking of the SAAP model to increase skills development**
 - Personal development, then independent living skills
 - Currently an expectation, but inadequately resourced
- **May need to separate the skills development funding from the provision of accommodation. Could be controversial for SAAP providers**
- **May provide grounds for additional resources for SAAP**
 - Possibly from other portfolios

Policy Learnings



- Greater emphasis on ‘multi-agency partnerships’
 - Agencies working productively together
 - ICYS success (Mt Gambier)
- Strengthen action/evaluation research links to ‘whole of government’ policy processes
 - Quantity and *Quality* outcomes as important

Conclusion



- **Evidence of both market and policy failure in at least some places**
- **Enhanced policies have the potential to save public sector resources, by speeding the transition to a more independent life**
- **The research indicates the parameters for good practice models:**
 - recognising the limitations of the market
 - longer term solutions
 - housing as a first step, but not an only step
 - skills development
 - building upon community links