

# REDUCING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Advice from young people on how to reduce homelessness in Tasmania

*"Even though you're in a shelter, it's still classed as being homeless. And you've got a roof over your head, but it's still not a nice feeling."*

(Samantha, 17 years, not pictured)

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The research findings and recommendations presented in this report are those of Anglicare Tasmania and should not be attributed to research funders, contributors, partners or reference group members. Any errors are the responsibility of the authors.

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Flanagan, Jo, author. Law, Margie, author. Hughes, Ann, author.

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For further information contact:

The Social Action and Research Centre

Anglicare Tasmania

GPO Box 1620

HOBART, TAS 7001

Tel: 1800 243 232

Web site: [www.anglicare-tas.org.au](http://www.anglicare-tas.org.au)

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# GLOSSARY AND DEFINITIONS

**Ashley – Ashley Youth Detention Centre.** Ashley is Tasmania's only juvenile detention facility. The purpose of Ashley is to provide secure care and custody for young men and women detained or remanded by the courts in accordance with the principles of the Tasmanian *Youth Justice Act 1997*. The Centre is managed by Children and Youth Services within the Department of Health and Human Services and houses up to 51 males and females aged 10 to 18 years of age (DHHS 2013a).

**Bail hostel.** Supported accommodation for people charged with offences who have been released on bail but have no fixed address. Currently young homeless people on bail in Tasmania are detained at Ashley Youth Detention Centre or an SHS (Specialist Homelessness Service) facility.

**Better Housing Futures.** A Tasmanian Government initiative that involves the transfer of public housing stock to community housing providers with the stated aim of improving management of these assets and better supporting the social housing needs of residents with complex needs.

**Child and Family Centres.** Established by the Tasmanian Government in 2009, these are community centres offering a range of programs and services for the health, education and wellbeing of children aged 0-5 years.

**Child protection.** Throughout this report references to 'child protection', 'the child protection system', 'Child Protection Service' and 'child protection workers' all refer to statutory child protection services as defined by the *Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act 1997* (Tas), administered by Children and Youth Services (DHHS). They do not refer to the broader service system which carries responsibilities for ensuring the protection and wellbeing of children in Tasmania (Hinton 2013, p.8).

**DHHS.** Department of Health and Human Services (Tasmania).

**DSS.** Department of Social Services (Commonwealth). Established in 2013, it has responsibility for many of the functions formerly administered by FaHCSIA.

**FaHCSIA.** Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (Commonwealth). This department was disbanded in late 2013 with many functions and programs moved into a newly created Department of Social Services.

**Family case management.** The case management process of assessment, planning, implementation, monitoring and review applied to a whole family (Hinton 2013, p.9). For the purposes of this report, family case management refers not just to the parents and children of a biological family, but also includes stepfamily members, other carers (such as grandparents) and foster carers. Family case management is more than 'family-sensitive practice'; it is an intentional means of including the whole family network within the case management process.

**Homelessness.** A lack of access to safe and secure housing. A housed person may be considered homeless if their housing is inadequate, unsafe, insecure or unaffordable (*Supported Accommodation and Assistance Act 1994*). People residing in emergency shelters, sleeping short-term at the homes of friends or family members, or moving from place to place may be considered homeless.

**Housing Connect.** Tasmania's new social housing and homelessness service system that commenced in October 2013. Housing Connect is to provide a 'front door' entry and assessment point for Tasmanians experiencing housing difficulty, including those on low incomes and in crisis, and connect them with long-term stable housing and support where needed. Within Housing Connect, support will be available to people with high needs to prevent a return to housing crisis (DHHS 2013c).

**Integrated Family Support Services.** A network of intensive family support services designed to prevent the separation of children from primary carers as a result of child protection concerns and to reunify families where separation has already occurred (Hinton 2013, p.9).

**Juvenile detention.** Ashley Youth Detention Centre is Tasmania's only form of detention for young people. Tasmania does not have any kind of community-based detention, nor any open detention facilities (such as those with no or minimal security measures), nor any form of semi-institutional or 'step-down' facilities to assist young offenders with their reintegration into the community (Commissioner for Children Tasmania 2013).

**Juvenile justice.** The youth justice system in Tasmania includes the police, the courts, government Youth Justice Services and non-government and community service providers. It extends from initial contact with police through to prosecution, sentencing and sentence supervision (Commissioner for Children Tasmania 2013).

**LARRC – Legislative Amendment Review Reference Committee.** An expert reference group formed to provide recommendations on the reform of Tasmania's *Children, Young Persons and their Families Act 1997*.

**Out-of-home-care.** Sometimes referred to as 'state care', this is the placement of children by government authorities away from their immediate biological or stepfamily. In Tasmania this predominantly means placements in foster care, kinship care and Therapeutic Residential Care.

**Reconnect.** Funded by FaHCSIA, the Reconnect program uses community-based early intervention services to assist young people aged 12-18 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and their families and assists young people to stabilise their living situation, including 'improving their level of engagement with family, work, education, training and their local community' (FaHCSIA 2013).

**SHS – Specialist Homelessness Services.** Funded under the National Affordable Housing Agreement, these services provide the bulk of support to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, including case planning and support services; immediate emergency accommodation; supervised accommodation and support placements for young people; transitional support services; and other services (in areas such as sexual assault support, domestic and family violence counselling, etc.) (DHHS 2013b).

**Sleeping rough.** The most extreme form of homelessness. It means living on the street or in alleys, beside garbage bins, in parks or other public spaces or in any other place not meant for human habitation. It is usually a last resort for homeless people.

**SYP – Supported Youth Program.** At the time of the research this was the name for a community-based program funded by the Tasmanian Government's Children and Youth Services in collaboration with Housing Tasmania. SYP was intended to provide intensive and sustained therapeutic case work and support for young people aged 10-18 years who are experiencing multiple risk factors such as homelessness, substance misuse and mental health issues, and are at risk of further escalation with child protection or juvenile justice service systems (but prior to statutory orders) (DHHS 2012b). The program was called TYSS in the south of the state.

**TILA – Transition to Independent Living Allowance.** This allowance is a one-off payment from the Australian Government to help young people who are leaving statutory care meet some of the costs involved in moving to independent living, under the following categories of need: informal out-of-home care; Indigenous kinship care; juvenile justice; foster care; and refuge.

**TRC – Therapeutic Residential Care.** This is an intensive out-of-home care option for young people in statutory care. The aim is to provide therapeutic care for young people living with the complex impacts of abuse, neglect and separation from family. This is achieved through the creation of positive, safe and healing relationships and experiences and a sound understanding of trauma and developmental needs (Commissioner for Children Tasmania 2013).

**TYSS – Targeted Youth Support Services.** At the time of the research this was the name for a community-based program funded by the Tasmanian Government's Children and Youth Services in collaboration with Housing Tasmania. TYSS was intended to provide intensive and sustained therapeutic case work and support for young people aged 10-18 years who are experiencing multiple risk factors such as homelessness, substance misuse, and mental health issues and are at risk of further escalation with child protection or juvenile justice service systems (but prior to statutory orders) (DHHS 2012b). The program was called Supported Youth Program in the north and northwest of the state.

# 1 REPORT SUMMARY

## 1.1 Executive summary

This report explores youth homelessness in Tasmania from the perspective of the young people themselves. Twenty-two young people aged 14 to 20 years were interviewed and asked for their views on what leads to homelessness and what can be done to reduce or prevent it. All had been homeless and most had involvement with the child protection or youth justice systems. Approximately 30 youth homelessness service staff around Tasmania were also consulted.

The research found that rather than moving from homelessness into permanent housing, services not designed for long-term housing are being used by young people who have nowhere else to go. With young people cycling in and out of short-term accommodation, our homelessness system does little to reduce the likelihood of repeated homelessness.

### Support for parents and families

The majority of young people interviewed said they became homeless for reasons relating to their parents and family life. These included lack of parental care, absent parents, abuse, parental problems such as mental ill health and alcohol and drug misuse, parents not coping, poverty and hardship, and family homelessness. Young people identified a number of strategies that would help young people and their families, such as parenting courses, practical strategies to help young people remain at home, alternative accommodation options, counselling and mediation, and extra support for unemployed parents, single parents, stepfamilies and large families.

Given a choice, many of the young people would have preferred to stay at home, even though things were difficult. They wanted to see supports brought into their home rather than having to leave to get the support they needed. However, living at home was not a safe option for everyone. These young people wanted information about accommodation options before a crisis occurred and support from a trusted adult to make well-thought-out decisions when hardships arose.

### A role for schools and vocational pathways

Education and training institutions can be vital for young people's sense of stability, identity and connection. Even when their home life was difficult, some young people wanted to maintain daily contact with their place of education or training. This highlights the critical role these settings can play in providing stability and structure and helping to reduce homelessness.

However, the mobility experienced by the homeless young people interviewed meant that their attendance at school or training often suffered. They tended to disengage from education and training, resulting in disruption to their vocational pathways. They suggested a range of strategies to assist them to remain engaged in education, including greater understanding and assistance from teachers and support staff along with being offered alternative and flexible learning options.

### Effective child protection and family support services

Young people need both support and protection and it was felt that the child protection system currently struggles to do both. Young people told us that less intervention is provided by Child Protection Services than is sometimes needed, that engagement and interventions with parents, children and young people can be lacking, and that follow-up with both families and children after removal is often inadequate. They reported that when young people are homeless and living in a shelter, Child Protection Services rarely provided support. From the young people's perspective, it is as if the State views shelters as a suitable out-of-home care placement.

They recommend that support needs to actively engage the whole family to make the changes needed to ensure a safe home environment and to maintain or improve relationships. They also pointed out that services need to ensure young people are housed so that bail or probation conditions can be met. Importantly, they requested that assistance through child protection continue until independence is reached. This may mean providing support up until age 25 for those who are not reunited with their families.

## A suite of out-of-home care options

Young people requiring intensive support found that placements for them did not exist. Some young people reported that they were placed in out-of-home care only when they reached the 'end of the road', which may be when their physical or mental health had deteriorated to the degree that they needed hospitalisation, or when they had become involved in the youth justice system.

More options are required for out-of-home care so that care settings can be better matched to the needs of each child and young person. This includes more foster carers available for longer time periods in more locations and with greater capacity to take all children from one family.

## Youth housing and support options

Young people reported that once in the homelessness system, they tended to cycle in and out of emergency or transitional shelters while they waited for, or tried to arrange, more stable accommodation. Time spent in shelters was often interspersed with couch surfing, time back at the family home, in new or previous foster care settings and in Therapeutic Residential Care. For many young people in this research, especially young men, this also included Ashley Youth Detention Centre. Only a small number who had spent time in shelters had been able to move into long-term supported housing. This reflects the relatively few medium- and long-term housing options available for young people. Many see themselves as 'filling in time' in whatever accommodation was available until they are 18, when they hope their housing options will expand.

Young people said they need support while they transition into more secure housing. This can include adequate income support payments (including for children under 16) and practical support such as the provision of blankets, warm clothing, food, electricity and basic hygiene products. Initiatives that help young people to develop emotional, social and living skills and the skills to protect themselves will reduce the risks of homelessness. They also require education and support around mental health, alcohol and other drug use, sexual health and family relationships.

## Effective youth justice services

Young people identified that a lack of basic necessities such as food, transport and shelter, a lack of positive adult role models and not having a vocational pathway were key risk factors in becoming involved in the youth justice system. They said a key way to reduce youth involvement in criminal activity in Tasmania would be the provision of housing and support for young people who are experiencing family violence, family breakdown or homelessness.

There are currently few bail options for young people, which means that those who are homeless are either placed in shelters with little support to avoid breaching bail or are remanded in juvenile detention, sometimes for long periods of time. There needs to be better exit planning that includes stable accommodation, opportunities for education, training, work experience, rehabilitation and treatment, and greater support for young people to meet bail conditions. No young person should be released from detention into homelessness. Further, a trauma-informed approach needs to be embedded in all youth justice services and supports.

## 1.2 Recommendations

### Support for parents and families

#### Recommendation 1

That the State Government develop integrated preventative family support programs in all three Tasmanian regions based on known service gaps. That these family supports include universal education and training for parents as well as targeted support for families at risk of difficulties. Areas covered should include partner relationships, parenting skills, family and step family relationships, family transitions, parent-child relationships, parenting adolescents, managing a household, maintaining mental health and managing alcohol and drug use. Respite for parents should also be made available.

#### Recommendation 2

That the State Government provide new funding to the Gateway Integrated Family Support Services and Targeted Youth Support Services/Supported Youth Programs to enable earlier and more intensive support for whole families and for young people experiencing multiple difficulties. Support should be provided in the young person's home, where appropriate.

### A role for schools and vocational pathways

#### Recommendation 3

That the State Government resource schools and training institutions to be key settings for the promotion of child and family wellbeing. This could be done by increasing the availability of psychologists and social workers to work with students and their families and providing extra training for teachers and welfare staff.

#### Recommendation 4

That the State Government adequately resource schools to better support students displaying truancy and difficult behaviours and their families, without resorting to suspension.

#### Recommendation 5

That the State Government continue to develop and resource a suite of flexible and participatory learning methods for students who need these approaches, both within schools and in alternative settings, in all three regions.

### Effective child protection and family support services

#### Recommendation 6

That the State Government provide new funding to Gateway Integrated Family Support Services and to Targeted Youth Support Services/Supported Youth Programs to ensure that family case-managed support is provided to families, and youth-specific support is provided to children/young people, for the duration of their involvement in the child protection system. This funding should include support for extended family members and foster and kinship carers.

#### Recommendation 7

That the State Government resource Child Protection's After Care Support Programs to provide 'parent-like' support in areas of financial, vocational, practical and emotional need until the young person is ready for independence, up to age 25.

#### Recommendation 8

That the State Government increase funding to Child Protection Services to enable it to meet its statutory requirements and current demand for assessments and investigations, including assessing homeless young people residing in shelters. This would enable Child Protection Services to work closely with the proposed expanded family support programs to ensure that families and children receive adequate support for the duration of their involvement with Child Protection Services.

## A suite of out-of-home care options

### **Recommendation 9**

That the State Government recruit more foster carers, in all regions and including remote areas, and provide them with specialised training to ensure they have the therapeutic skills to provide trauma-informed care for young people living with emotional, mental and behavioural difficulties. Further, that foster carers be recompensed according to their level of training and that they be supported by family case managers or another form of professional supervision.

### **Recommendation 10**

That the State Government provide incentives (such as payment and reimbursements) to kinship carers to undertake training, that kinship carers be recompensed according to their level of training, and that training for kinship carers be followed up with support from family case managers.

### **Recommendation 11**

That the State Government establish a comprehensive suite of out-of-home care options for children and young people under Care and Protection Orders in Tasmania, including as a priority the establishment of suitable placements for young people aged 14-16 in each region.

### **Recommendation 12**

That the State Government ensure that Tasmania's out-of-home care system includes the establishment of residential treatment facilities in each region with capacity to provide intensive clinical support for young people with mental health, behavioural and alcohol and other drug difficulties.

### **Recommendation 13**

That the State Government fund training in trauma-informed care for all Child Protection and out-of-home care staff.

## Youth housing and support options

### **Recommendation 14**

That the State Government commit to providing all young people on Care and Protection Orders with stable and appropriate accommodation, and that parameters relating to Duty of Care are made clear for Specialist Homelessness System staff supporting young people on Care and Protection Orders via a Memorandum of Understanding between Child Protection and Housing Tasmania.

### **Recommendation 15**

That Housing Tasmania explicitly state within funding agreements that, where there is a need and at the discretion of workers, emergency Specialist Homelessness System placements may be extended to three months and transitional Specialist Homelessness System placements to two years.

### **Recommendation 16**

That, until a suite of out-of-home care and longer-term accommodation options are in place, Housing Tasmania develop protocols with Housing Connect whereby young people aged 14 and 15 in receipt of independent government allowances and who have support may apply for direct tenancy in public or community housing.

### **Recommendation 17**

That, until a suite of out-of-home care and longer-term accommodation options are in place to provide 'exits' from the Specialist Homelessness System for young people, the State Government fund additional emergency and transitional beds in each region, including remote areas.

### **Recommendation 18**

That Housing Tasmania resource Housing Connect with brokerage funds to provide, at the discretion of workers, transport, travel vouchers, food and blankets to young people who are not able to be accommodated in an emergency facility on a given night and are therefore expected to 'sleep rough'.

### **Recommendation 19**

That Housing Tasmania establish additional long-term facilities in each region with strong links between the housing provider and other service providers in areas of health, wellbeing, education, training and employment.

**Recommendation 20**

That Housing Tasmania ensure sufficient independent one- and two-bedroom units are available in each region for use by young people and small families.

**Recommendation 21**

That the State Government ensure that public housing stock transfers to community housing providers under Better Housing Futures reforms include an allocation for young people.

**Recommendation 22**

That the State Government fund Housing Connect to provide information and resources to schools and family services in both urban and rural locations to ensure that teachers, school welfare staff, students and families know of the housing and support options available for young people who need to live away from the family home.

## Effective youth justice services

**Recommendation 23**

That the State Government establish bail hostels in the South and North of the state in a new partnership agreement between Youth Justice and Housing Tasmania, and that the hostels be provided with adequate staffing to ensure residents have the support they need to meet bail conditions.

**Recommendation 24**

That the State Government establish more initiatives to support young people to meet bail conditions, including community-based order placements and support from Youth Justice workers in collaboration with the proposed family case-managers.

**Recommendation 25**

That the Department of Health and Human Services require that Ashley Youth Detention Centre staff develop an 'exit plan', based on the young person's needs and capacities, in partnership with every detainee prior to release. The exit plan to include suitable housing and support to the level required and support from Youth Justice workers both prior to and upon release.

**Recommendation 26**

That the Department of Health and Human Services require that Ashley Youth Detention Centre staff create and sustain links with community members and services to enable community-based vocational pathways and relationships with positive adult role models for young people detained at Ashley, and that these links be supported post-release.

**Recommendation 27**

That the Department of Health and Human Services ensure that trauma-informed approaches be established in all youth justice services.



## 2 AN OVERVIEW OF THE HOMELESSNESS SERVICE SYSTEM IN TASMANIA

### 2.1 Government initiatives in homelessness

Following on from the Australian Government's 2008 White Paper on homelessness, *The road home: a national approach to reducing homelessness*, the Tasmanian Government developed a 2010-2013 plan to address homelessness entitled *Coming in from the cold* (DHHS 2010). The Tasmanian Homelessness Plan identified strategies framed by three aims: 'new supply', 'new services' and 'new ways of working', with actions focused on five objectives. The intended actions with direct relevance for reducing youth homelessness included:

- better exit planning for young people leaving state care;
- expanded alternative education opportunities and more life skills programs;
- more support for young students at risk of disengaging from school;
- the establishment of 30 Child and Family Centres statewide;
- more breakfast programs in schools of highest need;
- additional literacy and numeracy resources; and
- mentoring opportunities (DHHS 2010, pp.42-47).

The Plan stated that Government would ensure affordable housing was accessible to young people leaving child protection and youth justice services and to people experiencing family violence, and that five new supported accommodation facilities would be established. None of these new facilities were stipulated as youth-specific (DHHS 2010, p.51). Since the Plan, a 'foyer-style' facility has been established in the north of the State, providing accommodation for 30 young men and women. Foyer models support young people towards independence by providing suitable housing alongside support in areas of education and training, employment, health and wellbeing and social participation.

The progress report on the Homelessness Plan (DHHS 2012a) outlined achievements made across all areas, including in new supply, services and ways of working, in prevention and early intervention, improved connections to family and community, education and employment, improved access to appropriate housing, effective service responses and continuous improvement and quality. No information was offered about how these measures had affected rates of youth homelessness.

In 2011, the Tasmanian Government contracted consultancy firm KPMG to review Tasmania's *Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program* (DHHS 2011a, 2011b, 2012c) and has since involved key community service providers in developing an implementation plan for the new model, called Housing Connect, which began operation in October 2013. The final report argues that this reconfiguration of the state's housing and homelessness service system will make it easier for people to access and use services, be more responsive to a broader range of people's needs, be better able to match support and accommodation assistance to people's needs, and align with the national and state reform objectives.

### 2.2 What homelessness services are available to young people in Tasmania?

Young Tasmanians who become homeless have limited options available to them. If they have money and are old enough, they may be able to stay at a youth hostel, caravan park, motel or hotel. If they have no money and cannot stay with extended family or at a friend's house, they may have to sleep at an acquaintance's house, sleep rough, or seek a bed in a shelter. In Tasmania all forms of youth shelters are limited in number, location and scale, and do not always have a bed available for a young person on a given night.

‘Emergency shelters’ are funded by the State Government (also known as ‘crisis shelter’ and called ‘Immediate Emergency Accommodation’ by the government) and stipulate that young people can stay for six weeks while staff work with the young person on finding more stable accommodation. This can involve working on family relationships, finances, health, education, interpersonal dynamics and other issues. Emergency shelters are often the first place of intervention and support for young people who are homeless. Residents are usually required to help with cooking and cleaning, and eat dinner around a table together. Some have a small gym, games, books, TV and DVD player, computers and internet.

Beyond six weeks, a young person may be able to return home to their family or to stay with another relative or friend. If accommodation with a family member or friend is not an option, young people may move from the emergency shelter into:

- another emergency shelter in a different region;
- a transitional shelter in the same or a different region;
- primary homelessness (couch surfing, sleeping rough etc.);
- private rental if they are over 18 years of age;
- a share house if they can gain a place within an existing lease;
- a longer-term youth accommodation facility if a place becomes available; or
- public housing if they are deemed to have special needs and are thus prioritised.

Transitional shelters offer medium-term accommodation with longer and more flexible time limits, usually three to six months, but are generally accessible only after the young person has been accommodated in an emergency shelter. Some emergency shelters are linked to transitional housing.

Most youth shelters and longer term youth accommodation facilities are available for people under a specific age. As one emergency shelter worker said, ‘We say happy birthday to them on their 21st birthday and tell them they have to leave.’

In many cases, emergency and transitional youth shelters are unable to accommodate couples or young people with children, and there are no shelters in Tasmania for men with children.

The predominant issue identified by shelter staff is a lack of appropriate accommodation options for young people to ‘exit’ the homelessness system. While some young people would prefer to live independently and may have the skills to do so, this option is rarely possible due to a lack of options available: little availability in public or community housing and insufficient income to afford private rental. Shelter staff reported that the lack of exit options from shelters contributes to cycles of homelessness for young people.

### 3 BECOMING HOMELESS – YOUNG TASMANIANS TALK ABOUT WHY

Interviews with the participants in this research revealed that youth homelessness arises from and exists alongside a range of other difficult life circumstances. The experience of homelessness leads to a range of negative impacts on physical, mental, social and economic health including social life, schooling, vocational pathways and connections with community.

In some cases young people had multiple experiences of homelessness, or prolonged and even chronic homelessness. This was not caused by one incident – supports were missing in a number of areas of their lives and together compounded the likelihood of homelessness.

*Just before I finished Grade 6 I was living with my father... The lease ran out on their house so we moved out. I stayed with a friend of my father's carer with two younger guys about my age, and they were just friends of the family. I stayed with them for a while, it was about six weeks I think, and then I got sick of it cos I wasn't with me family and it was really unstable. So I went to my Mum's at [another suburb], and I ended up getting kicked out of there cos of stupid reasons, it wasn't by my mother it was by my stepfather, it was just stupid reasons, not like I did anything really wrong. And then I went to my sister's to try and get some support, and she said look, she was at her boyfriend's house so she couldn't have me there, cos it wasn't her place, so she took me to her friend's place, where she stayed when she got kicked out. So I stayed there for around seven months in [another suburb], and got into a lot of crime.*

**(Brett, 14 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

## Violence, arguments

Violence, abuse and continual arguments in the home environment frequently contributed to homelessness, according to young people. Abuse included physical violence, emotional and verbal abuse.

Young people described incidences of physical abuse by their parents.

*It escalated to Mum hitting me, choking me, scratching me and pulling my hair. She said that she didn't want me here and I said that I didn't want to be there and I didn't really feel safe being there either... Yeah, like, it would have been a whole different story if she didn't start hitting me or getting violent with me and stuff, I would probably still be home today because I can handle myself.*

**(Jason, 15 years)**

They also described incidents of physical and emotional abuse by their siblings, such as arguments, threats and 'things getting out of hand'.

*My brother threatens me... He's 13. He towers over me... I don't want to be independent, but I'm unsafe at home. I don't think you'd wanna live in a place where your brother throws knives at you and you've had to duck and dive to not be hit.*

**(Your Mum can't put a stop to that?)**

*She can't, cos he towers over her too.*

**(Jay, 14 years, out-of-home care)**

Some described parental violence in the form of control and punishments, including not being provided with basics like food.

*I did the break-ins for food. Cos I had to start working for my own food at my [parents] place. They said a dollar an hour. That's a lot of work.*

(So not much food at your parent's house?)

*Nah.*

(What else was hard about being at home for you?)

*Not going to school.*

(Why didn't you go to school?)

*Cos my parents don't want me talking to anyone really. They wanted me more isolated. They especially hated it when I chatted to girls. I was still able to get out though, I found a way out through the roof.*

**(Pete, 16 years, out-of-home care)**

Other young people described feeling unsafe, and a general atmosphere of family stress that included fights, yelling and pushing, or power imbalances such as favouritism and put downs.

*Mum and Dad would have an argument and Dad would get us all involved, like 'Isn't that right, your dog mother said such and such'... [Mum] just had enough of it, she'd go back at him and like she'd get real bad depression and cry because my Dad would have threatened to hit her, and I was like 'Mum, Dad's nothing, why the hell don't you just smash him, knock him on his arse.' If she did, she was afraid that [my brother] would stick up and bash my Mum, and I know how she feels now because we used to always gang up on her.*

**(Megan, 19 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

*[The reason I went to the shelter] was family violence, mainly. Basically, I was the cleaning person of the house, picking up after my father, his girlfriend, and the other two kids when they came. That was on top of study, and work. That made it really difficult. I barely got any sleep, didn't have much time to eat, always cleaning most of the time really.*

**(Samantha, 17 years, child protection involvement)**

Young people reported that violence and arguments in their family homes could force them into homelessness, establishing patterns where they experienced repeated homelessness, or remained homeless for long periods of time when an unsafe situation continued without intervention, or when feelings of hurt and anger remained unresolved. As one young man said, 'I'm a bit worried about what would happen and that about returning home, because I don't feel safe there'. Another spoke of leaving home and wanting to hurt people because of the hurt he had experienced. Another spoke of leaving home to live with mates 'because they were kinder' to him than his mother.

In relation to violence and anger, the young people's stories showed that the following factors can turn a one-off experience into longer term homelessness:

- having no safe place to go;
- not knowing where to go;
- continued abuse in the home;
- peer relationships that offer an alternative to staying at home; and
- unresolved feelings of hurt and anger.

## Absent parents, feeling unwanted

Lack of care shown by parents, or parents being unavailable for a range of reasons, were key causes of homelessness, according to young people.

Parental absence included parents who had left young people to care for themselves. Some of the research participants reported that their parents had moved interstate, at times without warning.

*Dad just took off, disappeared. Me and me sister stayed in the house for a while, three months or something. He paid the rent but we didn't hear from him, and we had his Pay As You Go card, so we didn't have to worry about power. Well, Housing never came. [My sister] got paid every week, and I was going out and doing a few things.*

**(Mac, 15 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

(Besides housing, is there anything else currently missing in your life that you'd like?)

*My Dad.*

**(Fiona, 18 years, child protection involvement)**

Other absences were because parents had been imprisoned, or had died. Some young people had parents who were in and out of prison, which unsettled them: 'When he went to jail I started skipping school, smoking, stealing cars'. One young man told how he started living with friends when his sole parent was sent to prison.

Grief at the loss of a parent was described by several young people. One young woman described how her mother had struggled so much after the loss of her father that she felt she'd lost her mother as well. Another young woman spoke of her sadness at having told her father she wanted him dead a couple of weeks before he had died in unfortunate circumstances.

*Mum and Dad split when I was two, hence moving in with my Dad... Dad was in prison. Mum, we didn't live with; she was in the Navy and refused to see us most of the time. Well, she lived in other states, so we didn't see her... And Dad was always out gambling and getting himself in prison... I probably would be back with him now, but he's deceased so I can't. Yeah [after Dad died] I just didn't give two hoots about anything.*

**(Jay, 14 years, out-of-home care)**

Some young people reported feelings of being abandoned and not wanted by their parents. They described parents who lived with them only transiently, parents asking them to leave home, and parents sending them or taking them to a shelter. They also described feeling unwanted as a consequence of unpredictable or difficult parenting styles, parents not keeping promises or establishing rules which were so strict they could not be met.

*My parents didn't want me to live with them any more. It was mostly my Dad's decision; my Mum just follows along with whatever.*

**(Pete, 16 years, out-of-home care)**

*When I was young, 13, Dad just came to school, picked me up and dropped me off at my Mum's place. Because they split up when I was seven. And yeah, he didn't want me anymore.*

**(Leah, 18 years, child protection involvement)**

The interviews revealed that in relation to parental care, the following factors can turn a one-off experience into a pattern of homelessness:

- parent not present;
- not having basic needs met at home;
- parent in and out of prison; and
- the death of one or both parents.

# Parent and family problems

According to young people, parent and family problems contributed to homelessness, including problems with alcohol, marijuana and other drugs, mental illness, difficulties in coping with parenting, the pressure of large families, poverty, and families being homeless.

Young people reported that their parents' poverty played a contributing role in their homelessness. They described homes in which parents were unable to afford the basics, even food, and experienced constant financial pressure.

*I mean at my Mum's house we didn't eat for about four days, and then on the fifth day we only had rice, and that's what we had for dinner, plain rice.*

**(Megan, 19 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

They also described the social isolation that was the result of remote housing and low incomes.

*I was so proud the day I got a boyfriend, cos up there it's the middle of nowhere. There's only I think less than 100 people there. So it's not somewhere where a young girl can communicate and have friends and all that, it's either work or sit on the couch smoking drugs all day. It's just not good.*

**(Megan, 19 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

Some young people reported they left home because a lack of care or lack of finances caused by their parents' problems with alcohol and other drug use.

*My Mum, she is an alcoholic. Same with her partner... When I moved out there, they would rather drink then take me to sport, so they were abusive, and then they didn't want me there anymore because I was ruining what they had, apparently, so they told me so I had to go... And after that, because I couldn't go to sport, I kinda lost my friends in that area so I ended up falling into the wrong crowd.*

**(Leah, 18 years, child protection involvement)**

Young people identified their parents' physical and mental illness as a cause of their homelessness. This was due to both the symptoms of ill health and the problems the illness created for effective parenting.

(Did you get on okay with your Dad?)

*Ah yeah sorta. I do but I don't. Me Dad's disabled, half his body's paralysed, so he's a bit depressed and shit. He drinks a bit and we just don't get along that well. We do, but not living together.*

**(Bevan, 17 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

*My Dad's a mouth; goes like 'Mahmahmah, get off your fat arse and go clean up the horseshit, oh you've done nothing'. And like he'd wake up at 6.30 every day automatically and start in, cos he's got a mental illness... Being around my Dad long enough, you would go mental.*

**(Megan, 19 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

Some of the young people interviewed believed that their parents lacked the skills necessary to manage a household and to parent children. For some, this lack of skill made childhood a feat of survival.

*We were like cockroaches, survive through anything. I mean every single one of us has been homeless except for my little brother, he's 14.*

**(Leah, 18 years, child protection involvement)**

*I was about 10 when I went into foster care... I was told that Mum and Dad couldn't look after us all. They didn't have the parenting skills apparently. I didn't find that out until I was 18. I didn't start finding out why... All eight of us were put in care.*

**(Brian, 20 years, out-of-home care)**

Some young people reported that they came from very large families and that this in itself was a factor in them becoming homeless. They felt that their parents had too many children to cope with and not enough money or time to meet their children's needs.

Some young people had grown up in homeless families. Some reported having lived with their parent(s) in a car or a shelter. Some also reported that when they faced homelessness, their parents were unable to provide support because they were also without housing.

*My Mum has all the rest of the kids. She has four kids with her, so that wasn't an option to move there. She's also at a [transitional accommodation]; she was in the shelter not long ago with all them kids. That wasn't an option.*

**(Samantha, 17 years, child protection involvement)**

Anti-social behaviour in the neighbourhood was another factor that could lead to homelessness. In some cases threats to the family caused families to give up their homes and move to new areas, disrupting the young people's social connections.

*Yeah, what happened was, my little brother had little kids after him, and they threatened to get me and [brother], so we had to move out of our house. And we had to go to [a shelter]... Yeah, the police escorted us home three nights in a row. Cos the mother had a gun. Cos they lived in our street.*

**(Fiona, 18 years, child protection involvement)**

A lack of support for parents, particularly when they are dealing with pressing personal problems, can result in a young person having no option but to move away from home. The following parental factors can lead to homelessness:

- home setting dominated by parental or family problems;
- unresolved parental problems, including parental homelessness;
- not enough time or money to meet a young person's needs; and
- home difficulties not resolved.

## Developmental stresses and changing parent-child relationships

Young people reported that pathways towards homelessness began when they reached adolescence and were experiencing difficulties relating to their developmental age and stage (such as physical growth and hormonal changes) and their relationships with parents and family members became strained. Some young people said that stresses associated with physical changes, peer relationships and becoming an adult were their main cause of homelessness; some acknowledged that they might have been 'difficult to cope with'.

*Yeah, I'd come to that age where I'd lived with my parents enough, and living with them for more than a couple of days ends up having arguments... It was just getting sick of each other. I could tell that... Being an obnoxious teenager as I was, I can't blame him for getting sick of me... Maybe back then I was a bit obnoxious. I'm a bit better now.*

**(Terry, 20 years)**

Several young people spoke of leaving home to find independence – either they weren't receiving help with transport, money and other resources necessary for independence, or they wanted more freedom than they could find at home. Some said they wanted to 'push the rules' and take risks. Several young people spoke of the bad influence their peers had been in relation to leaving home, for example encouraging them to leave home to join them.

Both their own alcohol and other drug use and use by their peers caused stresses in young people's relationships with their parents. Some young people felt their parents lacked tolerance in relation to alcohol and other drug use. One young person said, 'I came home with alcohol and cigarettes and that was it'. Other parents discouraged friendships with peers who were using alcohol or drugs, which was perceived as judgmental or as a double standard from parents who used alcohol and other drugs themselves.

*He [Dad] wasn't very happy about it [drug use]. He had real bad drug abuse himself.*  
**(Kyle, 18 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

'Falling in with the wrong crowd', developing friendships with peers who got into trouble, and at times their own anti-social behaviour or criminal activity caused problems in relationships between young people and their parents. One young man said, 'Things got hard at home when I got into trouble with the police'.

*I got up a whole crew to run through my Mum's house and riot and just take everything, smash her house up. And that's because she got a restraining order on me because she kicked me out.*  
**(Megan, 19 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

Young people said that growing up – physical growth and the development of better verbal skills – was accompanied by an increased resistance to their parents' authority. They said that reaching adolescence brought about a transition not just for them, but also for their parents and the whole family with changing decision-making dynamics. Young people reported that they became frustrated and more stressed when parents treated them like children, were too strict, gave what they felt were unreasonable punishments, were disapproving of their friends, or didn't allow them enough independence. Some reported conflicted feelings towards family members such as, 'I love and hate my parents'. When neither the adolescent nor their parents coped well with the changes in the young person, relationship difficulties contributed to their homelessness.

*A lot of things changed then [at age 13]. There was a lot more fighting in the household, there was a lot more yelling, a lot more discomfort for everybody. So I decided to run away.*  
**(Cindy, 18 years, child protection involvement)**

Some young people reported that they had been 'handed' to their grandparents or other family members because their parents couldn't cope. Young people who sought alternative accommodation, such as with a friend's family, sometimes used 'time out' from the family home to ease difficulties with their parents. However, some reported that when they enjoyed a short stay elsewhere, they became less motivated to 'work things out' with their family, and so began a pathway to homelessness. One spoke of leaving home to stay at a friend's place until he had 'overstayed my welcome', and then found he had nowhere to go because according to his parent, he'd 'burnt a bridge'.

In relation to adolescent problems, changing parent-youth relationships and continuing parent-youth problems, the following factors can turn a one-off experience into a pattern of homelessness:

- strained relationships at home;
- young people joining in unhelpful peer behaviours, including risk-taking;
- young people choosing peer relationships over family;
- parents modelling unhelpful behaviours;
- mutual misunderstanding and lack of respect between parents and young people;
- lack of support for both parents and youth in adjusting to changing relationship dynamics;
- young people's need for freedom and independence coming up against a parent's need for order and control; and
- perceived lack of flexibility and tolerance by both adolescents and parents.

## Family breakdown

Young people said that when their parents separated and their families split, the loss of the family unit was felt by all family members. Divided households and loyalties and moving between two homes were factors that contributed to homelessness. Young people described living in dislocated families with members scattered across wide geographic areas ('half were in Adelaide, half were in Tasmania'), with parents absent because of work or family separation. When their parents' relationship ended, some said their lives were 'floating' with 'everything changing' and they didn't know where they belonged.

Some young people lost contact with family members, or never got to know them. Others said they 'bounced' between parents.

*Before this year I had a real family, like a stepdad, my sister, my brother and me and my Mum. But we moved down here and everyone split up and it's like, yeah.*

**(Jay, 14 years, out-of-home care)**

*Well, I was living over in Melbourne with my Dad. We had a falling out and I started to move back to Tassie, cos I didn't want to live with my Mum again cos I just knew the same thing would happen, so I stayed with friends.*

**(Terry, 20 years)**

*Apparently I've got eight brothers on my real mother's side I've never met, and I've got two brothers on my Dad's side I've never met, and three sisters all up, which I've never met. So that's a lot.*

**(Pete, 16 years, out-of-home care)**

The young people reported that having to move meant they lost friends and activities and had to 'start again'. Having to move between parents and having little say led to frustration and feeling unwanted. All of these changes impacted on their sense of identity and connections.

*When I was born I think I floated between me Mum and me Dad a bit. And then I ended up living with me Dad until I was about 12. We were living in Queensland for about half of that time I reckon, with me Dad and his wife. Then they got sick of me cos I was such a little shit and they sent me back down to me Mum when I was about 12.*

**(Bevan, 17 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

*Mum and Dad split up when I was eight, nine. And then they were best friends for a while, and then Dad changed and got a girlfriend and that, and he wants nothing to do with his other kids. So he has nothing to do with me and my little brother.*

**(Fiona, 18 years, Child Protection involvement)**

Family breakdown can cause homelessness, and can exacerbate homelessness when new households lack cohesion and stability, or if changing relationship dynamics do not find resolution. In relation to family breakdown, young people reported that the following factors had created pathways to homelessness:

- unresolved grief and loss associated with changes to the family unit;
- physical distance from some family members;
- loss of one or both parents; and
- loss of sense of belonging.

# Pressures on sole-parent households

According to young people, some sole-parent households experience extra pressure which can lead to illness, financial difficulty, poverty, broken relationships, feelings of guilt and blame and other stresses, any or all of which can contribute to homelessness.

Young people reported that the loss of one parent made their families feel unstable and could affect their remaining parent's capacity to look after them. Some single parents fell ill or were incapacitated, making life even harder. A young person from a large single-parent family said it was very difficult, so 'I wouldn't choose to be around them all the time'. Some young people described a sense of grief associated with the loss of a parent they now couldn't live with; they felt they'd lost a role model and helper.

*Since Mum left it's like he doesn't know how to function like a family relationship. Like taking your kids out, taking them shopping, taking them to the cinemas, family time, you know. Parks, stuff like that. That doesn't happen very often... My childhood was basically stolen from me, I never got to be a kid. Was too busy looking after my own siblings and never got time to really play. Too busy always looking round, seeing where they are, worried.*

**(Samantha, 17 years, child protection involvement)**

Young people reported that there are significant financial strains associated with becoming one-parent households. One young man said, 'Dad's place was total poverty. If it was cold you'd have a shot of Jack Daniels.'

*I think that Dad was just really stressed out because he had two kids, and he was doing it by himself because he had no job. So he was on Centrelink. He used to be an electrician; he used to be really, really, really quite wealthy. He had, you know, he owned two houses, but then when him and Mum split, he lost it all. So I think he was just mad at everything and just took it out on us. Like I knew that he loved us but he was under pressure, plus I can't really stand it when people yell at me and he used to yell all the time, like all the time, lectures, that went for like hours, it was crazy, all in a two-bedroom unit.*

**(Leah, 18 years, child protection involvement)**

Young people reported that when households headed by a sole parent lack support, pressures on young people can be exacerbated and the following factors can contribute to homelessness:

- parent under financial and domestic pressure;
- parent under physical, mental and emotional strain;
- less 'buffer' for child safety if a sole parent suffers a setback (e.g. becomes ill or unemployed); and
- parent unable to provide adequate physical, emotional and material support.

# Pressures on stepfamilies

Young people reported that difficulties in their relationship with step-parents and stepfamilies led to stress, household conflict and lack of a sense of belonging.

New relationships sometimes meant that parents had less time for their biological children. This could be because of the needs of a new partner, stepsiblings, or the presence of a new baby.

*Yeah, we lived with Dad. He started doing a bit more activities with us when Mum left, but then about when I was 13 he got with his new partner who he had a baby with. That changed everything. He stopped doing all activities with us all together... She was like 'She's mine!' type of thing. It's her first baby though, so I can understand that.*

**(Samantha, 17 years, child protection involvement)**

Some young people reported that they had poor relationships with their step-parents. They reported feeling they were not respected, and were rivals for their birth parent's affection. One young man said he used to 'run Mum's partners out of the house', but that they also ran him out of the house. A young woman said 'accusations were made, and my stepmum kicked me out'. Some said their step-parents brought alcohol and drugs into the family. In some instances young people reported that their parents' new partners had been physically or emotionally abusive. A young woman said, 'Mum got a new boyfriend with kids, and there was violence'. Some reported that they felt unprotected or unsupported by their own parents in these difficult relationships: 'they didn't listen'; 'they didn't stand up for me'.

*I ran away heaps of times. I would've been about eight or something when I started. It wasn't really me and me Mum; it was mainly me and her boyfriend arguing. We was arguing constantly. He was okay, he just didn't like me or me brother. He liked me sister. Didn't like us.*

**(Mac, 15 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

*When I was in Western Australia I was on the phone with my Mum saying, 'Oh, can I stay there when I come back over,' and they said, 'Yeah, that's cool,' so I come back over, went to go to Mum's, and my stepfather was 'No you can't stay here.' So that was pretty devastating.'*

**(Brett, 14 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

The following step-parent/stepfamily factors can contribute to pathways to homelessness:

- young person receives less time, attention and support from biological parent;
- relationships with step-parent or stepsiblings can be strained or abusive; and
- changing family dynamics mean a young person loses the support they need to feel they belong (e.g. the arrival of a new baby).

## Inadequate child protection and support

A number of young people interviewed felt that Child Protection Services had been absent or ineffective when needed, and this had contributed to their homelessness. In addition, they reported that out-of-home care (including foster care) is inadequate to meet the housing and support needs of young people under Care and Protection Orders. Links between Child Protection involvement and time spent in juvenile detention were evident for participants in this research, and both contributed to homelessness.

Some of the young people interviewed reported that although their families had been struggling for a long time, Child Protection Services had not become involved until their family's problems were severe and had become quite public.

*And that's when Child Protection come into it, when I got arrested and that. I had no one to come in and bail me out, and they wondered 'What's going on, where are you living?' That's when Child Protection came into it.*

**(Mac, 15 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

(How old were you the first time you ran away?)

*Twelve.*

(And did Child Protection get in touch then?)

*Not the first time, they didn't hear about it then. They heard about it through the news or something about the fourth time I think. It was in the paper the fourth time; fifth time, TV and paper. The fifth time I survived out here for 12 days. Cos I was missing for 12 days.*

**(Pete, 16 years)**

Some of the young people felt that Child Protection had erred in their assessment of their situation. They reported that they had been assessed as safe to live with their parents when they weren't: 'Child Protection were involved but didn't do anything'. These young people felt that the answer to this problem would have been to provide more support to the family, or to have removed them from their parent's care earlier: 'Child Protection knew I was living with mates and doing crime but they didn't do anything'. Some young people reported that Child Protection's involvement with their family had not resulted in any positive changes for them.

*But I probably wouldn't have been homeless if Child Protection did take an extra step further in ensuring that none of that happened again, earlier... But yeah, if they had taken that extra step, not an extreme step, just the next one. Like checking up, doing a program with us. Child Protection could have been... a bit more helpful. I know they're busy, but they don't help the families that need it half the time. Our family did really need it, and I've been in counselling and social working since I was about Grade 6.*

**(Samantha, 17 years, child protection involvement)**

There were a number of instances when young people would have liked more effective engagement from Child Protection with their parents.

*Child Protection was involved a few times when I was a kid... cos there were like bruises on us and stuff. We used to get hit when we were kids. But yeah, nothing was ever done about it. It never got that far. Dad told us what to say and if we didn't say it we'd get hit again. Dad and Mum would be trying to cover their own tracks. It was not until I got to about 16 that I just got fed up. I used to say 'Nah, I'm not covering it'. Child Protection was involved a couple of times in high school as well. I reported to a social worker that my Dad hit me. Nothing ever got done about it, cos apparently they called him and Dad just bullshitted through his teeth and said there was only one time. Child Protection aren't really that strict I don't think.*

**(Samantha, 17 years, child protection involvement)**

Several young people described the dilemma of wanting to be at home with family, yet knowing or finding out that being with family was not always the best option for them. Asked to reflect back on what would have helped them, a number of young people spoke about their need for more support from child protection services.

(Looking back, is there anything that could've prevented you from becoming homeless?)

*Oh God, that's a big one. Yeah, there is... if I stayed in welfare. Even though that hurt so much to say it, coming back to your parents isn't always the best. Yeah, it hurt more coming back. It was better me being in foster care. It was. If I never come back, I wouldn't have never got into the drugs, I would never have got into such a down life.*

**(Megan, 19 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

The young people involved in this research said that more engagement by child protection and family support services with families that are at risk would benefit families and help stop youth homelessness. More young people in this project reported negative outcomes arising from a 'lack' of intervention by Child Protection staff rather than 'too much intervention'; indeed no young person reported that in retrospect they wished that Child Protection staff had stayed away.

While shortfalls in support by Child Protection staff were noted by young people, it was recognised that inadequacies are not necessarily the fault of Child Protection staff or even the system, but were sometimes due to a lack of referral or notification to Child Protection, or other factors. Young people often recommended more support from Child Protection services, yet the support they talked about (help with managing the house, help with parent and family problems) could equally have been provided by a service other than Child Protection. From young people's perspectives, if more support had been provided to parents and families, removal from the family home may not have been necessary.

Young people reported that the failure to provide support to their families and protect them as children could lead to them experiencing homelessness. Specifically the system failures the young people reported were:

- community failure to notify concerns about children to Child Protection;
- lack of engagement and support for children by Child Protection staff;
- inaccurate assessment of risks by Child Protection staff;
- lack of parenting support for parents who are struggling; and
- parents not engaging with Child Protection staff or not being honest with them about problems in the home.

It is recognised that such support may be more than could ever be expected from a child protection system, and that when young people reported they needed more support from 'Child Protection', they may have meant they needed more support from 'someone'.

## Lack of out-of-home care options

Some research participants who had been under Care and Protection Orders discussed their experiences of foster care and group homes. Comments about these experiences were rarely positive. Very few out-of-home care options exist in Tasmania for young people under Care and Protection Orders: conventional foster care, kinship care (foster care with extended family), a small number of homes for family groups (large sibling groups kept together with paid foster parents), and Therapeutic Residential Care.

Young people reported that there were not enough foster care placements available that met their needs. Sometimes this was their desire to stay with siblings ('a foster home might have been a good idea if all the siblings could have stayed together'). At other times, foster placements were not available to them because they were in their mid to late teens ('maybe a foster home would have been good, if I could have got a place').

*They just say cos you're an old foster child you've come back and you need our help, that's when they say like Mnehmnehmneh, sorry she is too old, it's no use, can't help her no more.'*

**(Megan, 19 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

They also reported difficult foster placements.

*Some people was good, but some were always like pushy... So I ran away when he walked out the door. I didn't wanna be there with that bloke. He was a big bloke.*

(How many foster care places did you stay at?)

*Um, probably about seven.*

**(Dale, 16 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

*They need that parenting figure kind of thing. That's probably the biggest mistake that most foster carers make. They have a relationship with the kids, but it's not really like treating you like family.*

**(Brian, 20 years, out-of-home care)**

Some young people reported that they had had unsafe, even abusive, experiences while in foster care.

*I was interfered with in foster care so I ran back to Mum, then slept on the streets before falling pregnant.*

**(Felicity, 19 years, out-of-home care)**

Some young people also reported that a lack of foster care placements had resulted in failed matches, which had in turn meant continued poor attachment and a repeated sense of failure for them.

*At 11, I started robbing houses and things like that. I dunno, I think it made me a little bit worser, being in foster care.*

**(Dale, 16 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

Tasmania has a shortage of specialised foster care options for young people who have experienced early life trauma and as a result may be displaying difficult behaviours. There is a shortage of Treatment Foster Care (specialised therapeutic placements provided by trained carers). There are no Residential Treatment Care placements (intensive clinical settings to address complex issues) for young people with mental health and substance misuse issues. There are no adolescent psychiatric care placements (residential treatment settings with capacity to medicate) and no Therapeutic Secure Care (residential treatment with capacity to medicate for young people who are engaging in criminal activities). A lack of specialised placement options for young people with anti-social and dangerous behaviours puts extra pressure on foster carers and Therapeutic Residential Care, which leads to placement of young people in short-term shelters as a 'first choice' due to a lack of other options. Due to their short-term nature and the difficulty in accessing shelter beds, young people cycle through shelters and sometimes in and out of juvenile detention.

(And where were you before here?)

*At [a group home]. About three weeks.*

(Before that?)

*I was here [juvenile detention]. About five months.*

(Before that?)

*At another [group home]. Not that long. Couple of months or something.*

(Before that?)

*At a [group home] in [another place]. Couple of months. They kept moving me.*

(Before that?)

*[group home] in [another place].*

(Before that?)

*[Group home], same one. They were moving me back and forth.*

(Before that?)

*I dunno, don't remember.*

**(Mac, 15 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

(Looking back, your Mum went to jail, your Dad was in Queensland, it sounds like you could have really done with some more help from Child Protection?)

*Yeah, I reckon ... They shoulda put an Order on me when I was younger. And put me in a foster home, cos I was essentially homeless. They knew I was just staying with me mates and all me mates was criminals. I was selling drugs and living with drug dealers and they knew all that. They just let me go. I thought I was having the time of me life. I just don't think they wanted to. I thought they thought I'd be a big hassle. I know I can be a bit of a c\*\*\* of a kid... But I would have lived there, and I don't think I would have come here [to juvenile detention] as much. I don't think I would have had as many challenges. I don't think I would have used drugs as heavily. It would have been a difference. I wouldn't have been changed but it would have made a difference.*

**(Bevan, 17 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

Young people in juvenile detention spoke of the numbers of times they'd been detained, often from a young age. Their experiences of early family difficulty and involvement in out-of-home care suggest that Ashley Detention Centre may be considered a de facto part of the out-of-home care system in Tasmania.

*In here there's three meals a day. I'm putting on weight...When I come in I was this big, I was like this big [holding up a hand to the height of a table], I was tiny. I couldn't even see over me door in the viewing panel.*

**(Dale, 16 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

Young people in out-of-home care also spoke of not knowing where they'd go when they reached 18 years of age and were 'exited' from the child protection system. Although young people on Care and Protection Orders are supposed to be involved in preparing an exit plan three years prior to turning 18, some young people nearing 18 didn't know anything about a plan, didn't know what they'd do, and they didn't know whether there would be support available beyond age 18.

*It's hard to make a long-term picture, cos like I said, I could make a huge one but a lot of it starts with getting a house... If I don't, I don't know what I'm gonna do. It's gonna be hard.*

**(Bevan, 17 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

Because Tasmania has insufficient numbers of placements available and lacks a range of out-of-home care options, homelessness can become more than a one-off event for a young person under a Care and Protection Order. In relation to out-of-home care, the following factors can turn a one-off homeless experience into a pattern of homelessness:

- lack of foster care placements, especially for teenagers;
- lack of suitably trained foster carers for young people with higher needs;
- lack of suitable out-of-home care options in Tasmania for young people affected by early life trauma (see Table 11);
- foster care issues such as poor matching, time-limited placements (resulting in multiple placements), lack of sibling co-placements, inconvenient location (distance from existing networks), and differential treatment of fostered children (e.g. treating biological children differently to fostered children);
- foster care placements that are stressful, unsafe, harmful or abusive;
- lack of follow-up support provided by Child Protection to a young person once an out-of-home care placement has been made and during transitions into a new placement;
- lack of support and preparation for young people leaving care at 18 (or earlier for young people who choose to leave a placement before 18); and
- lack of support after 18 years of age (after-care support is determined by age rather than by need).

## Criminal activity

According to the young people interviewed, homelessness can lead to criminal activity, and criminal activity can contribute to homelessness. As one said, 'All me mates are in jail, all doing a couple of years each. And they started off with the same problems I had'.

Some young people said they began engaging with criminal behaviour because they didn't have a home.

*I was in with me mates, and then just started doing crime, cos I didn't really have anywhere that was like home. So I just sat and did crime, and then came here [to juvenile detention]... That's how you get yourself into trouble, cos you're always looking for something to do. You can't just go home and watch a movie. Can't go home and relax.*

**(Bevan, 17 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

Young people may engage in criminal activity out of boredom or peer approval ('I wanted to do crime, first for money, then for no reason, just for something to do'), or because they saw no legitimate means of obtaining money.

*I did burglaries and car stealings. For money. Lots of money...*

(What did you want to do with your money?)

*Dunno. I just wanted money.*

**(Mac, 15 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

Young people also reported that once they had a criminal record and had bail behaviour requirements they were more likely to get into further trouble: 'I had curfews to keep but broke them.'

A number of young people said they engaged in criminal activity because they were homeless, and some young people said they were released from detention directly back into homelessness. Some criminal activity is directly related to young people being homeless, yet in some cases young people without support received a punitive response from police when they needed support (such as being 'moved on' from a beach or for lighting a fire outdoors to keep warm).

Criminal activity can increase when homelessness continues without intervention; likewise, homelessness can be exacerbated if criminal activity continues. In relation to criminal activity, the following factors can turn a one-off homeless experience into a pattern of homelessness:

- continued lack of legal access to money, transport, accommodation and other basic necessities;
- continued lack of engagement in meaningful legal activity such as education, training or employment;
- parental or other adult role models engaging in criminal activity; lack of positive adult role models and support;
- friendships formed with people engaging in criminal activity; criminal activity becoming a habit and way of life; and
- lack of information and support to break out of criminal behaviours.

## Lack of appropriate housing options and support

Young people reported that a lack of appropriate housing options caused homelessness, contributed to homelessness and compounded homelessness for them.

In the current housing market private rental properties are largely inaccessible to people under 18, school accommodation is quickly filled, public and community housing are difficult to access, youth shelters are often full and are time-limited and both medium- and long-term placements in youth-specific accommodation facilities are quickly filled.

Some young people who became homeless did not know about shelters. One young man said, 'I didn't know about it; otherwise I would have come here, as early as I could.' Yet shelters, as a response to the crisis of homelessness, present challenges. Sometimes shelters are used as a first rather than a last resort, and young people reported that living in shelters could be difficult.

*It was hard because some of the people that went there, they'd been in and out of Ashley.*

**(Brian, 20 years, out-of-home care)**

However, exiting from crisis accommodation or finding long-term housing options was also difficult. Some supported housing initiatives for young people have time-limited tenancies, meaning that young people cycled through the shelter system. While these placements were valued, anxiety about finding secure accommodation was evident.

*Just the basic worry of thinking 'How long is it, what's going to happen after this stage, how long's it going to take, how long am I going to be here for?' It's so overwhelming that you're so stressed all the time. Just because, you know, you're homeless.*

**(Samantha, 17 years, child protection involvement)**

*[Worker] said that he was going to try and get it for me, to be able to stay there until I was 18 so I could get my own place after that. Because I didn't have enough to properly rent. But it apparently fell through a couple of months before I had to move out, that's when he told me.*

**(Leah, 18 years, child protection involvement)**

Young people reported a lack of access to affordable private rental and difficulties in managing tenancies in private rental properties. It was difficult to afford rent on the amount of money they received from Centrelink (Youth Allowance). Young people under sixteen are not eligible to receive Centrelink benefits.

*I just don't have the money so it's harder... Sixteen's the magic number. Yeah. At the moment I'm broke.*

**(Jay, 14 years, out-of-home care)**

They also reported that young people are not legally allowed to sign a lease until they turn 18 and that furthermore, some real estate agents discriminated against young people.

*The real estate agents, they're just judgeable, they're just so judgeable. They judge you by your looks and not your cover... I can see where they're coming from in a way, cos there's some youth out there, like, that want to get a house and want to settle down, but there's some out there that will get a house and wreck the joint, and that's why they are the way they are towards us. Because you get the rebellious teenagers out there that don't give a shit and just like to party all the time. And then you've got teenagers out there like me and my mate there that wanna settle down, wanna get a house, wanna get a job.*

**(Cindy, 18 years, Child Protection involvement)**

*A lot of people have got the idea that all teenagers are going to trash their houses. Which made it pretty hard. Everyone automatically thinks that because you're a teenager you're going to trash the place. Have parties, all that sort of stuff.*

**(Terry, 20 years)**

Young people also reported that it was difficult for them to get access to public housing. They were not necessarily categorized as being in enough need to reach the top of the waiting list for public housing. They also acknowledged that public housing was not always the best option for them. The housing provided could be in a remote suburb and make them isolated from their communities and friends. They also acknowledged that they needed some support in the development of life skills in order to successfully live independently, participate in school, vocational pathways and employment.

*I just went off the tracks... like I got to the stage where I would not leave my unit for a couple of days, wouldn't go to school, just sat there and did nothing. I got to a really depressed state of mind cos of like everything building up. I didn't leave my unit for a couple of days, didn't do anything.*

**(Samantha, 17 years, child protection involvement)**

For young people under Care and Protection Orders, limited out-of-home care options exist. Other than foster care, kinship care and Therapeutic Residential Care, Child Protection staff in Tasmania currently have no further means of housing a young person under 16.

*That's one thing I was worried about... was that if I did get [youth-specific] unit it would only be a maximum of nine months and then I'd probably be back in another shelter, and then waiting again. I was fourth on the list, and I'd been there five months... I did apply for [youth-specific supported accommodation], but they're quite full and they still had a very big line up. So that wasn't really gonna happen.*

**(Samantha, 17 years, child protection involvement)**

Several research participants said that some young people may not want stable accommodation. Explanations for this included: 'some people want to be able to move around'; 'some people have gypsy blood'; 'some people want freedom'; and 'stability feels too strange for some people'. These statements match research evidence that suggest it can be difficult for people to settle after living an itinerant life (Pryor 2011, p.35). The reality that some young people may not wish to be housed means that some may require specific support to be able to stay in stable accommodation, or that 'temporary' and 'flexible' housing may be needed.

It is clear that causes of homelessness for young people can be exacerbated by lack of access to appropriate affordable housing options. Even if not the initial or direct cause of homelessness, a lack of accommodation can mean that a one-off homelessness event can be repeated, or that a young person remains homeless for a long period of time. With so many homeless young people in Tasmania's juvenile detention centre, it would appear that Ashley forms part of Tasmania's homelessness system, if only by default.

Factors relating to housing and accommodation that can exacerbate homelessness experiences for young people include a lack of:

- suitable foster care placements;
- other out-of-home care options for young people on Care and Protection Orders;
- therapeutic residential treatment models and secure residential care models for young people with anti-social or dangerous behaviours;
- beds in emergency shelters;
- exit options and plans when someone must leave short-term accommodation;
- transitions from emergency accommodation into stable accommodation;
- information about suitable stable affordable accommodation options;
- access to transport; and
- adequate income.

Other factors include:

- time limitations on shelters and other accommodation;
- difficult social dynamics in shelters, particularly for young people who have experienced trauma;
- lack of maturity and life skills making independence difficult for some young people; and
- the transient life style of some young people.

## 4 THE EXPERIENCE OF HOMELESSNESS – WHAT WAS IT LIKE?

Young people's experiences of homelessness, of couch surfing, staying in shelters or sleeping rough, provide a picture of the stresses associated with a lack of stable housing and support.

### Couch surfing

Apart from those involved in the child protection system, young people in this study indicated that the most common place to go after leaving home is to the house of an older sibling, a friend (including older friends), or a friend's parent.

A young man whose parents separated said, 'Couch surfing. That's all I did, just couch surfed' (Terry, 20 years). Couch surfing tended to deplete relationships and what social capital young people had. Several young people spoke of feeling bad about using their friends for somewhere to sleep.

*When I didn't live anywhere, when I was living with friends, it was like I was using me friends.*  
(Brett, 14 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention).

It was also unsustainable.

*Um yeah well, so I was going between going from Dad's back to Mum's actually. I did do a lot of couch surfing in between there... I couch surfed for a few months, and it was pretty bad because I was living out of a suitcase, so sometimes I couldn't find places to stay so I slept at my school for a little bit. Yeah, it wasn't very good... So then we both stayed with my brother, all three of us in a one bedroom unit. So me and [sister] would take it in turns sleeping on the couch or sleeping on a tiny little foam mattress on the floor, it was like living in a kennel... So I went couch surfing again and ended up here [at a shelter].*  
(Leah, 18 years, Child Protection involvement)

### Shelter hopping

Some young people reported that they had gone straight from a parent's home to a shelter; others had found their way to a shelter after time spent couch surfing or living on the streets. It was common for young people to experience more than one stay in a shelter, and some time in different shelters (for example, both emergency and transitional) and in shelters in different regions.

*So I got in there, stayed there for three days and got kicked out. Just made a mistake. Went out on the balcony to have a smoke with me mate, didn't think anything of it, but we weren't allowed on the balcony and got kicked out for it... Went from the shelter back to [another shelter], went back and forth. Between times of there I was homeless full-on on the streets.*  
(Mike, 20 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)

*You don't know when you're gonna get a house... You don't know anything really. You have to wait and basically catch the ball that's thrown at ya. Take everything one step at a time.*  
(Samantha, 17 years, child protection involvement)

# Sleeping rough

Not all the young people interviewed had had to 'sleep rough' but for those who had, the stress was acute. Two experiences of sleeping rough are provided in order to provide a picture of the impacts and anxieties associated with primary homelessness.

*Before I became a street kid I didn't know nothing about amphetamines, not really nothing about marijuana, I didn't know how to steal, I didn't know the act of stealing, I didn't know nothing about stealing cars, no crime, nothing. Then when you go on the streets, and this is to every single child, they experience stuff. They experience that stuff I just said. The people I'm real proud of are the ones that go on the streets and don't touch drugs and don't steal, cos it is hard. Sleeping in the gutter or sleeping under a bridge or right next to the water, cos that's where I used to sleep. We were so cold, we had no blankets, we had no pillows.*

**(Megan, 19 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

*Yeah, it was just an abandoned office. There was nothing happening with it, and we just slept in there. I think you get to know places you can go to sleep once you hang around with homeless people, they go 'Oh yeah, there's a squat up here.' We went some pretty good places to chill, which most of the time I was pretty happy that I wasn't in the gutter... The most stressful thing is no stability. Not knowing where you're going to sleep at night, or thinking, trying to work out what you're going to do that night... The worst thing about it was staying in an abandoned house and thinking 'Hopefully I don't go back there and it's boarded up and I can't get in there.' You gotta think about things like that, and if that does happen, 'Where am I gonna go, do I have the bus fare to get back to town?'... Yeah, try somewhere else. Just not knowing what's going to happen.*

**(Mike, 20 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

## Cycles of homelessness

Young people reported experiencing cycles of homelessness. This included those who had moved from out-of-home care to shelters, those who had moved from shelters to juvenile detention and back again, and those whose families have also experienced homelessness. The young people's statements provide insights into inefficient and ineffective aspects of Tasmania's homelessness system, with implications for the youth justice system, the out-of-home care system and the provision of youth housing in general.

It is apparent that emergency shelters not only form the backbone of the homelessness service system, but also of Tasmania's out-of-home care system; that by default Tasmania's juvenile detention centre may be considered a substitute or 'secure' shelter; and that patterns of homelessness extend across families, where, without adequate intervention, homelessness cycles are perpetuated between parents and children. The reality that family homelessness all too often leads to child and youth homelessness has implications for the intersection of many service systems.

### Out-of-home care into shelters

Young people who had lived in out-of-home care said that when they had nowhere to go, including when their foster care placement broke down, they went to a shelter. In fact, shelters may be considered an integral part of Tasmania's out-of-home care system.

*Most kids, they go to shelters, and the reason why they come to shelters is kids that are in foster care, when they are in foster care all they want to do is go back to their real parents, but once they go back to their real parents they don't realise oh, maybe it wasn't the best thing I come back.*

**(Megan, 19 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

## From shelters to juvenile detention and back again

Interviews with young people in juvenile detention illustrated links between young people's homelessness, criminal activity and incarceration. The following quotes highlight the reality that the Ashley Juvenile Detention Centre may be considered, by default, an integral part of Tasmania's youth homelessness service system with a number of young people describing a well-worn pathway between out-of-home care, shelters and juvenile detention.

*I was in Ashley, then a mate's place then a shelter then Ashley then a mate's place then a shelter then Ashley – seven times.*

**(Mac, 15 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

*I started smoking bongs, wagging school and everything. I started stealing cars and going here [juvenile detention]... I left to welfare, a group home. I was there until I came back here, for drugs and that. About three months after I got out I came back.*

**(Kyle, 18 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

Asked where they would likely go upon release from juvenile detention, a number of young people didn't know. Their answers suggested a likely pathway towards couch surfing, sleeping rough, or going back to stay in shelters.

(Have you got any ideas about where you're going to live after you get out of Ashley this time?)

*Nah I wouldn't have a clue.*

(Is another [group home] an option for you?)

*Dunno.*

**(Mac, 15 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

(Have you got some ideas about where you want to live when you get out?)

*No, I gotta find a place when I get out. Probably be on the street for a little while before I find a house. A shelter or somewhere.*

(So no plan yet?)

*No.*

**(Kyle, 18 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

## Unbroken cycles of family homelessness

Another set of cycles that emerged in this study were those of patterns around families, including early life experiences of trauma, homelessness and incarceration, and intergenerational patterns. Such anecdotes have implications for the breadth of the service system, and suggest that the capacity to prevent homelessness for one member of the family may well benefit their entire family and perhaps benefit the generation to come.

*My older sister left at 14 and my other elder one left at 14. I was the only one who stuck it to 16 with my Dad... [My Mum] she's also at a [transitional house]; she was in the shelter not long ago with all them kids... [My sister's] going down the track of Ashley soon I reckon. No one can tell her though, cos she's got her father's stubbornness.*

**(Samantha, 17 years, child protection involvement)**

*Me Mum's a criminal, so that's when I started becoming a criminal. I come here [Ashley] when I was like 14, and me Mum went to jail while I was in here. She got about a year. When I got out she was in jail, then she got out of jail.*

**(Bevan, 17 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

*I graduated from foster care to juvenile justice. I wanted to be like Dad...I got out on parole and then once I got out on parole they said 'All right, what do you want out of life? Seriously, why have you done this, why are you putting yourself in prison? You don't need this shit.' I was 'You know why? Cos I wanna be just like my Dad. My Dad's a mad black gangster, he'll kill anyone, he's the most powerfulest, he's the bestest, he's the most strongest, he can get anything he wants. He wants a plasma? He'll just go through your house and "boom" there goes you.' But what I didn't realise was my Dad told me all that but he was just a mouth. That's something he wanted to be. He wished he was that.*

**(Megan, 19 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

Of course some of those who experienced family homelessness managed to carve their way out of intergenerational patterns and not all young people who experience homelessness are part of a cross-generation cycle of pain and hardship. One young woman recognised that she didn't want to settle for the difficult life her parents had led, which included violence and homelessness. This young woman was determined to make sure her life became different from the one she had grown up in.

*Violence has been through our family for so long, but I've broken the chain 'cos I'm smart enough to know if I have kids I'm not going to treat them the way my parents treated me. Like you don't always have to be like them... I don't even have a record. I'm the only one in my family.*

**(Samantha, 17 years, child protection involvement)**

## 5 WHAT HELPS? YOUNG PEOPLE TELL US WHAT COULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Young people interviewed for this research told us there was a range of people and services that could help protect them from homelessness, including support for their families, more effective child protection services and support, more housing options, and support from services, professionals and practitioners.

Young people also acknowledged that their own attributes, health conditions and behaviours affect their movement towards or away from homelessness. The previous chapter showed how these variables raised risks that the young person would become homeless. This chapter provides a summary of what could protect young people.

### Support for parents and families

*I know the centre has family support workers, and if they [my parents] had discovered they had that, I reckon that would have helped a lot. And if Child Protection or somebody like that stepped in and come and did visits and talked, or they did something like a program with the family, like a relationship program, that probably would have helped stop it too.*

**(Samantha, 17 years, child protection involvement)**

Many young people said they might not have entered into homelessness if their parents and family had received more support. They said parents don't need to be perfect, but they do need to contribute to family harmony and stability. Parents showing they care about their children would help them feel connected and supported in the family environment. Practical support from parents, including basics such as housing, also makes a critical difference to their risk of homelessness.

If possible, parents need to maintain positive contact and communication with absent children and young people. This includes step-parents, who can have significant parent-child relationships with their stepchildren.

*I wasn't really interested in cooking but then Mum got with this guy who was a chef and ran his own business so that's what got me into cooking... I actually cooked my very first stir-fry the other day. Yeah, and that actually turned out pretty good. Yeah, they were talking about how nice it tasted. Yeah, I was really happy about that... I don't see him now.*

**(Jason, 15 years)**

*My main support would be my stepfather who lives in WA... I haven't seen him since November last year. He was around since 2007. We got on well. Better than my mother.*

**(Jay, 14 years, out-of-home care)**

Young people reported that having parents who could model a good life to their children was important, and that it was important to see their parents succeeding in something. Young people also spoke of the importance of parents being willing to allow their relationships with their children to grow and change over time, and to forgive their child if necessary.

*Well my Dad might help me now, because we didn't talk for a while. We don't really have much to do with each other but I reckon if I was in a rut, they would probably help me now. Probably now, yeah that I'm older I know more about life I guess... Anyway, we started talking again and he had noticed that I had kinda grown up apparently.*

**(Leah, 18 years, child protection involvement)**

From the perspective of young people it is clear that timely and effective support provided to parents and families will help prevent young people becoming homeless. The following table provides a summary of the kinds of actions parents and families can take to maximise their capacity to protect young people from homelessness. This has implications for the kinds of family support services that are needed.

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**Table 1** Young people describe what does and doesn't help: parents and families

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**What creates risk?**

- Unavailable parents
  - Parents unable to care for their children
  - Parents not able to support or providing inappropriate support to their children
  - Parents not stopping sibling abuse
  - Parents feeling like failures, and having low or no expectations of their child succeeding
  - Parents not coping
  - Parents being ill or incapacitated
  - Parents not having confidence they can solve problems
  - Parents not having the information they need
  - Parental poverty
  - Parents not having the support they need
- 

**What helps?**

- Parents showing they care
  - Parents helping their child in practical ways
  - Parents contributing to family harmony and stability
  - Parents engaging in supported conflict resolution
  - Parents adapting their parenting style to match the developmental stage of the child
  - Parents maintaining positive contact and communication with absent children and young people
  - Parents allowing children to maintain contact with positive adult role models (including past partners/step-parents)
  - Parents living by example for their children (e.g. succeeding at something)
  - Parents receiving support
  - Parents developing their skills
- 

## A role for extended family and friends

According to young people, extended family members such as grandparents, uncles and aunts have a key role to play in protecting them from homelessness. Friends of parents and parents of friends often had a key role to play and friendship networks were important. For those who lacked these kinds of supports, the risk of homelessness was heightened.

*The family stuck around to help out a lot, so we got through it.*  
**(Cindy, 18 years, child protection involvement)**

Grandparents were cited by many young people as being vital supports.

*I only talk to me Nan, that's the only person that I talk to in me family.*  
**(Dale, 16 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

*I can always ring Grandma up or message her and get them to call me. I get along better with my grandparents than I do my Mum and Dad.*  
**(Brian, 20 years, out-of-home care)**

The parents of friends often provided critical support. A young woman stated, '[my friend's parents] ended up loving me, and they just took me in. I was 14'.

Aunts and uncles, and ‘people who are like aunts and uncles’, provided positive safe adult role models of critical importance to some young people.

*My mentor is someone I met through indoor soccer. It was my mate's uncle, he started doing goal keeping stuff for us and then we're pretty good mates... He helped me look for the courses and stuff like that...He really helped.*

**(Brian, 20 years, out-of-home care)**

*One thing that really helped me was a mentor, which made his own business... He would go to CPS [Child Protection Services] and say “What kids do you need help with to get back into school or start doing something?” You know what I mean? And bring some kids on board. And he got me to [business], got me some work experience there for eight months. I worked with a friend of his which did photography, cos I was interested in photography, so I done some work with him. Just take me out to weight train. I don't know where I'd be, if I didn't get his help... It just seemed like he generally liked me, listened, and gave good advice. It was really clear; it wasn't too professional, very casual.*

**(Mike, 20 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

Many young people spoke of the importance of their girlfriend or boyfriend.

*My girlfriend, she's pretty supportive, and her family. And I have some pretty good friends, and I've got football mates. I've got support which is good, some people don't have any.*

**(Brian, 20 years, out-of-home care)**

Friends and mentors couldn't always help young people by providing accommodation, but they were still described as being important supports for young people.

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**Table 2** Young people describe what does and doesn't help: extended family and friends

---

**What creates risk?**

- Unhelpful role modelling
  - No support or only time-limited support available
  - Bullying
  - Relationship strain, relationship breakdown
  - Peers encouraging young people into risky activities
  - Lack of access to visits by friends in some shelters and youth accommodation facilities, leading to social isolation
- 

**What helps?**

- Family members being a good example (e.g. living a good life)
  - Family members taking an interest in young people
  - Support from grandparents, great grandparents, uncles, aunts, older siblings, godparents, etc.
  - Support from friends, boyfriend/ girlfriend, parents' friends, friends' parents, friends' families, etc.
  - Accommodation provided by extended family members
  - Accommodation provided by parents' friends, and friends' parents
  - An adult who cares, shows an interest, mentors the young person
  - Young people helped to stay in school
  - Adults asking young people what they want to do
-

# A role for schools and vocational pathways

Young people reported that a common result of an unstable home life and homelessness was low school engagement and subsequent difficulties in literacy and numeracy. School principals, teachers, welfare staff and school communities have a key role to play in protecting young people from homelessness. For those who lacked support from school, the risk of homelessness was heightened.

The importance of school was highlighted by a number of young people. In search of stability, connection and sense of belonging, young people may attempt to stay at school, even when the rest of their life is difficult or chaotic. School was so important to one young man that he managed to maintain schooling even when he was homeless.

*I was doing education all the time I was homeless too, so they were very supportive, and just people to talk to, to help you through things, the teachers there are pretty much like social workers as well, I'd say. They're great. Do a good job.*

**(Mike, 20 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

When teachers and school welfare staff were able to notice that students were struggling and follow up with them, it helped a great deal.

*It was hard to get to school sometimes, because I was couch surfing and you don't know where you are going to end up... One of my teachers, he noticed that I was getting really skinny and quite pale and I was shaking all the time. He was just always checking up on me and making sure that I was getting food at school.*

**(Leah, 18 years, child protection involvement)**

Some teachers and school welfare staff provided information and support and also proactively referred young people to services.

*I was crying when I walked through the doors at school, and then the teacher asked me what was going on and then I told her what was going on, and then she went up to the grade coordinator and talked to him [then he helped a lot]...I am getting help from my teachers, like they're explaining stuff to me so I understand it better... Yeah a few of the teachers know about me like being here [at the shelter] and stuff, and help.*

**(Jason, 15 years)**

Schools that offer flexible learning options such as experiential learning and participatory activities can make a big difference for some students, especially those who find it hard to focus. Some teachers go out of their way to help young people stay engaged in school by providing creative options.

*School's going well... I'm playing a bit of sport... Like three days a week. We do lots of stuff. We do heaps of stuff like trampoline, and bowling, it's good.*

**(Brett, 14 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

Young people's interest in school and learning highlights the importance of having an interest or passion and a place to engage with, and how significant feelings of progress can be.

The option to undertake 'distance education' also makes a big difference for some students. One young man, now living in public housing quite a distance from his training institution, said that flexibility meant he could maintain his schooling.

*Yeah, I'm studying... It's full time, but they send the work out and I send it back, so it's pretty much home schooling... I get to do it in my own time, and I don't have to worry about going on campus or anything. If I can't go out one day I can be at home and still do the work. The only hard thing about it is planning to study at certain times. You know, you have to be strict on yourself. So sometimes you can get a bit behind so you have to designate times to do it.*

**(Mike, 20 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

Alternative education settings that offer one-to-one support, development of personal learning plans and tailored courses also help some young people a great deal. A young man who attended an alternative school said it helped having social workers, psychologists, doctors and practical help like shower packs available. One young man who is highly motivated to complete a course said:

*I'm doing Cert III and IV in personal training. They've got a resource room here so I do it in there, or I do it upstairs... I can email my student support worker if I'm having a problem with it, and sometimes I don't understand a question and if she's free, I can say "Can you explain that question for me?" And she'll just go "Yeah, it means this, they want you to do this." She's not giving me the answer [she's just helping].*

**(Brian, 20 years, out-of-home care)**

In addition to the importance of schooling, young people said that having an interest, ideally a vocational pathway, and some form of positive connection with their community, such as training or mentoring, played a role in protecting them from homelessness. For those without confidence, motivation, or positive role models in an area of interest, the risk of homelessness is heightened. Opportunities for physical activity (fitness, sports teams, et cetera), creative expression (art, crafts, hobbies, etc.) and helping others can also help young people feel connected with a positive future.

*[As well as schooling], I'm a boxer as well now, so I'd like to become a famous boxer. That'd be alright.*

**(Dale, 16 years, both out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

*I'm doing a certificate II in Community Services, which is basically child services pretty much. The one I'm doing helps you understand like early development, basic hygiene and first aid and that type thing, and behavioural stuff.*

**(Samantha, 17 years, child protection involvement)**

Having employment meant a lot to several young people, both for the money and the sense of belonging and purpose. One young man talked excitedly about his work.

*I have been working there [fast food chain] for about six months. I have an average of about four shifts a week. I was actually thinking about quitting a few weeks ago, quitting my work but then I decided 'No, I need to think about the money side of things', like I have actually done very good, I have been working there for six months and I have saved like \$2000... I want to finish to like Grade 10 then I want to get an apprenticeship as a chef because I'm like really good at what I do at work... Um, yeah, I am probably really good at the fryer... Yeah, like I get praised a lot at work. When there are new people starting, the managers ask if I can help them out. It's good experience for me.*

**(Jason, 15 years)**

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**Table 3** Young people describe what does and doesn't help: schools and vocational pathways

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**What creates risk?**

- Lack of accommodation in the vicinity of school, training or employment site
- Frequent moves involving changing of schools/training venues
- Lack of money for uniforms and other school necessities
- Lack of transport to attend education, training or employment
- No access to a washing machine
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feeling not good at anything
- Pressures of completing tasks
- Teachers and training staff punishing or suspending young people for behaviours related to difficult home lives or homelessness
- Lack of school/training attendance seen as truancy
- Lack of educational success (completion only to year 7,8,9)
- Low literacy and numeracy levels
- Lack of access to alternative schooling, such as flexible education or training opportunities
- No adult support/ lack of help with school/vocational homework.
- Not knowing about vocational options and choices
- Lack of opportunity to try out different vocational options
- Lack of opportunities for work experience
- Difficulties in finding employment
- Losing the security of regular Centrelink benefits when even casual work is found
- Harsh 'taper rates' on Centrelink benefits with any earnings from work
- Difficulty managing both school/training and trying to have a job

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**What helps?**

- Suitable accommodation options available near school/training venue of choice
  - Access to affordable transport
  - Access to driver training
  - Teachers/welfare and training staff noticing students who are struggling and following up
  - Teachers/welfare and training staff providing information, referrals to services and help to access services
  - Teachers/welfare and training staff working to keep young people engaged in school
  - Schools/training venues offering flexible learning options such as home schooling and distance education
  - Alternative education settings and training venues providing one-to-one support, development of personal learning/training plans, tailored courses, mentoring, etc.
  - Opportunities for applied accredited learning (working with computers etc.)
  - Opportunities for army training, adventure camps, part-time jobs, casual jobs, volunteering, work experience, etc.
  - Positive settings offering meaningful activity
  - Places that provide structure and stability for young people
  - Opportunities for physical activity (fitness, sports teams etc.)
  - Opportunities for creative expression (art, crafts, hobbies etc.)
-

# Effective child protection services and support

According to young people, effective child protection services along with the provision of out-of-home care (usually called foster care by young people) play a key role in protecting them from homelessness. These include services that provide support to young people and their parents during Care and Protection processes, from notification onwards. For those who lack supports at these times of intense difficulty, risks of homelessness are heightened.

Proactive engagement by Child Protection Services helped some young people a great deal. For example, two young men stated that Child Protection were their best supports. Although only a few of the young people mentioned having good and useful relationships with their Child Protection workers, they frequently identified that proactive engagement by workers in general was helpful to them. They also said that support for the whole family would have helped prevent their homelessness.

Several young people mentioned that they lacked support when they were removed from their family home, that leaving care at age 18 felt premature, and that help – in the form of transitional planning and further support from Child Protection – would be needed beyond that age to prevent them from becoming homeless.

The anxiety of an abrupt termination of support at the age of 18 was evident in the story of one young man who knew he should have a leaving care plan: ‘I’m 18 and leaving care. They can’t just leave it at “Catch you later, good luck”. They’re not meant to anyway.’

From the point of view of the young people interviewed, Child Protection Services need to engage proactively with children and families, and support needs to be provided to families during the time of their engagement with Child Protection Services. Where appropriate, family connections need to be supported and maintained, and young people in out-of-home care need support in their placements and support to transition to independent adult life.

**Table 4** Young people describe what does and doesn’t help: child protection services

## What creates risk?

- Lack of engagement by Child Protection with families and young people
- Lack of active response from Child Protection to the needs of both parents and young people
- Lack of support at key transition points, such as when a foster placement is not working for a young person
- Young people not knowing whether a leaving care plan was being developed for them
- Leaving care plans not being developed well in advance of a young person turning 18
- Leaving care plans not being comprehensive, tailored for the individual, or involving the young person at the centre of planning
- Young people not knowing what supports will be available after they turn 18
- Child Protection After Care Support being age-dependent rather than based on readiness (i.e. potentially ending before a young person is socially and economically independent)

## What helps?

- Proactive engagement and support for children, young people and the whole family by Child Protection or another support service during the time of Child Protection involvement, from notification until cessation of Child Protection involvement
- Support for young people to maintain or improve relationships with family, whether or not reunification is likely
- Extra support provided to young people when out-of-home care placements are not working
- Support for young people to move towards independence when ready (rather than at a prescribed age)
- ‘Independence plans’ being driven by the young person rather than by workers
- Financial and emotional support provided as needed beyond age 18

# A suite of out-of-home care options

According to young people, access to some form of out-of-home care is critical in protecting them from homelessness. They also reported that some placements were unsatisfactory. For those young people who lack an out-of-home care placement that feels like home, risks of homelessness are heightened. Some young people reported that they felt they should have been placed in out-of-home care but did not meet criteria.

Many of the young people interviewed for this research had experienced foster care, kinship care, Therapeutic Residential Care and group homes. No other out-of-home care options were mentioned. Lack of access to foster care was the most frequent topic in relation to out-of-home care options. As would be expected, young people identified that out-of-home care (foster care) plays a key role in protecting them from homelessness. Involvement of Child Protection staff with the whole family was considered beneficial.

Some young people described the characteristics and actions of foster carers that had helped them. One had established a relationship with his carer whom he considered a genuine friendship: 'Yeah, she was a nice lady'. Another said, 'In each of them there was someone good to talk to. Yeah, in most of them.'

Another reflected that young people needed to think about how they related to foster families, and perhaps develop skills to live with them.

*I think the main fact is that if you're going to do foster care, you've gotta treat them like your own family. You've gotta be able to listen to them and be understanding. And yeah, you've just gotta treat them like they're your own family cos that's all they really want.*

**(Brian, 20 years, out-of-home care)**

The importance of not being treated differently to the foster family's biological children was stressed by a number of young people interviewed. It was a problem if they were sent to different schools, were required to call foster parents by different names or felt less listened to and less supported.

*There was one foster carer that I felt I was close to; I don't live with her now and I don't talk to her a lot, but if I saw her I'd still say hello and I still see her kids. She treated us like she treated her kids. I went to the same school as them and they'd say to their mates that's my foster brother... I guess they have just gotta be there if that person or kid wants to talk to them. Try and be a good role model.*

**(Brian, 20 years, out-of-home care)**

Young people valued supported long-term accommodation, with caring staff who have clear boundaries, rules and consequences, who communicate clearly and with understanding, and have longevity in their role. Where these attributes were in place, foster care could provide a supportive change from old unhelpful patterns of behaviour. One young person talked about a group home that he enjoyed:

*The group home? It got me out of [certain suburbs]. It got me away from crime and drugs and the wrong crowd, so I'd say it was good. It was okay. It was pretty good. They were pretty good people.*

**(Mike, 20 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

For young people who have no home to go to, family-like environments are needed. For those with experiences of trauma and hardship, trained carers and staff are needed, combined with the provision of trauma-informed care. For young people with extreme behaviours based on difficult early life experiences, a range of security and behaviour management strategies may be needed, alongside age-appropriate therapeutic care.

More out-of-home care options are needed. Young people identified that Tasmania needs more well-trained and well-supported foster carers and a broader range of care options that support young people with difficult behaviours and recognise the difficult experiences they have had.

**Table 5** Young people describe what does and doesn't help: out-of-home care**What creates risk?**

- Lack of access to foster care (the young person being too old, not 'unsafe' enough, etc.)
- Foster care provided in an unfamiliar location (distance from family, friends and school)
- Stigma associated with foster care/ being in care
- Not understanding why they are in foster care
- Inappropriate foster care placements (uncaring or unskilled carers)
- Poor match of foster carers to needs of the young person
- Foster carers not understanding trauma and/or not able to manage behaviours of young person
- Lack of contact with family and siblings for young person in foster care
- Lack of support for young people in out-of-home care, including at key transition points
- Lack of support to develop a leaving care plan
- Care ending at age 18, regardless of young person's capacity for independence

**What helps?**

- A range of out-of-home care options to meet the needs of young people
- Recognition of and skills to support young people with difficult early life experiences, including trauma
- Access to long-term stable foster care placements
- Effective foster carers, trained to meet the needs of children in their care (including those who have experienced trauma, grief and loss, etc.)
- Adequate containment and safety for young people who display difficult behaviours, have alcohol or drug issues, or are engaging in criminal activity
- Out-of-home care available on a needs basis (not just until age 18)
- Accommodation provided to young people leaving care on a needs basis
- Supported accommodation with appropriately trained staff (for example understanding trauma) who have longevity in their role

## A spectrum of youth housing and support options

According to young people, stable, affordable, appropriate housing and support played a dominant role in protecting them from homelessness. This section shows how different housing options – from crisis housing through supported accommodation to independent renting – had helped young people to stabilise their lives.

All of the young people interviewed said that finding affordable suitable accommodation was difficult, if not impossible.

Most young people had depended on youth-specific emergency accommodation at some point and said that access to this type of housing was critical.

*I reckon if I didn't have any friends or this place wasn't here or I didn't know about this place then I reckon I would be on the streets.*

**(Jason, 15 years)**

*I just came here on my payday. Paid for a bus and then rent for here. I was sort of organising other shelters to go to, and this one was like "Yeah, you can come up; we've got a free bed". Sweet.*

**(Brendan, 19 years)**

With a lack of support and no further housing options, at their most simple level, crisis accommodation offered basic shelter. Asked what was going well for a young woman who was staying in an emergency shelter, she said, 'I have a place over my head. A roof over my head.'

The fact that shelters provided essentials like food and security was appreciated. Asked how he felt about living at the shelter, one young man stated, 'Yeah. Love it! There's almost five times as much food here.'

Other positive aspects of shelters included providing structure and support to learn life skills. This was important as young people interviewed stated that housing for young people needs to be provided alongside support in order to teach young people how to manage a household, especially if they have not experienced a well-managed household or are lacking maturity.

*Oh, there are lots of rules here. Yeah, like curfews and TV rules, like you are not allowed to watch the TV until all the chores are done. Yeah they have chores here like vacuuming. I have actually done chores that I have never done before, like clean the toilet, clean the shower... I done the washing like put out my clothes into the washing machine, like I have never loaded up the dishwasher and added in the tablet and everything, and I got that going, so I have learnt a few new things since I have been here.*

**(Jason, 15 years)**

Young people reported that shelters also played an important role in linking them into community and services, and in helping them move towards independence.

*They really try and get you somewhere stable; they try and get you on board with a lot of things. They've got a lot of places they can refer you to – they're really good at referring you to other places. They can help you with getting your license, they help you with knowing how to make phone calls properly, communicate properly. That's one of the main things, how to get more independent... At times workers would say, 'What do you want to do, where are you headed?' They were very supportive. I reckon it's by far the best service for young males that are homeless. And if they had more of them, I think there would be a lot less, heaps less homelessness.*

**(Mike, 20 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

The social contact found within shelters could also be beneficial.

*When you first get there you don't know anybody, but then I made friends. I make friends really quickly so that helped. And all of us girls supported each other and stuff. That was good. The shelter was a really good support. It's good cos you can just go in there and talk to them about anything, and they're so relaxed and offer some of the most best advice. And the shelters aren't like what you'd imagined to be. You'd think they'd be like old run down places, and you just picture it totally different, and as soon as you get in there you're like, 'oh my god wow, it's better than the place I came from.' I was quite surprised to see how nice it was in there. I wasn't expecting it to be anything like that.*

**(Samantha, 17 years, Child Protection involvement)**

*I love being here cos I feel like I've got my own little home, my own little sisters. Everyone cares about each other. Everyone looks out for each other, you get a feed.*

**(Megan, 19 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

Young people reported how difficult it was to get into medium- and long-term accommodation facilities and programs. The few places that offer longer-term housing were quickly filled and had long waiting lists; young people felt there was no hope of getting in. When they did finally gain a longer-term placement it was a relief.

They reported that some shelters tried to offer them support even though there were limited accommodation options available. Young people reported that some shelters allowed them to stay longer than the rules stipulated (some stays are limited to six weeks).

*You're not allowed to come back again, but you can be gone for a week or two then decide to come back for another six weeks.'*

**(Jason, 15 years)**

*It's like, I go off, do my own thing, I come back, I've got a place to stay. Um, yeah, the workers here are awesome. They help me. I try not to stress. It helps. Like I know I can do what I want, and if I can't do it, it'll come to me.*

**(Brendan, 19 years)**

Young people lucky enough to get access to long-term youth accommodation reported that this form of accommodation had not just housed them; it had provided them with a sense of home. One young man with experience of out-of-home care who was finally placed in a long-term youth accommodation facility said:

*I just love having my own place. It's my own place, I mean it's not my own place in a sense because it's a community, so I am around people and I'm not by myself but, just the fact that I've got my own space... So it does make it easier on people. Especially the younger age, 16-year-old age group.*

(Are there rules here that are hard to keep, or good rules?)

*Hard to keep for some people. Not for me. I call them good rules. Just basic respect.*

(Some people have been asked to leave. Do you reckon that's a good thing?)

*Yeah, for other people's safety or other reasons. I think if they're doing the wrong thing then they can't just keep doing it. If they keep doing it and they don't get a consequence for it then how are they meant to know they're doing the wrong thing? They think it's probably all right if they're getting away with it. I don't wish people to get kicked out with nowhere to live, but there has to be some common ground.*

**(Brian, 20 years, out-of-home care)**

Access to other forms of permanent housing (e.g. Housing Tasmania and Aboriginal Housing) was also appreciated by those few who could access it.

*I was surprised when Aboriginal Housing came through before [supported accommodation], and half the workers in the shelter were surprised too. It's not very often that someone gets housing before you get [supported accommodation]. They said you're very lucky... The lease says six months, but then they do their inspection and if I pass that it's every 12 months after that. Usually with any type of housing really you stay where you are unless you get evicted or you request to leave... I'm going to keep the lease going, unless there's some huge life change like I have two or three kids, that'd be the only reason I'd have to move for a larger house or something, but I don't see that happening any time soon.*

**(Samantha, 17 years, child protection involvement)**

A young man living in public housing stated:

*My housing is very stable. For the first time in a while... I've been there for roughly three months, four months. First off it's a three-month lease, then they come do an inspection and pretty much they say you can have it for the rest of your life as long as you treat it well, don't disturb the neighbours, and do the right thing. You're pretty much okay if you do the right thing. You can stay there for as long as you want. That's what Housing said to me.*

**(Mike, 20 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

The private rental market had also provided stable accommodation to some of the young people interviewed. Sharing a house with older friends was a rare opportunity, but was working well for one young man.

*It's share accommodation. I was told about it by one of the workers here. Told me to look in the paper in the rentals section cos she'd already looked in it, and I was like hey, shared accommodation places here, and she was like yeah, exactly. Everyone cooks whenever. If not, we just buy takeaway.*

(Who does the shopping?)

*Usually the 40-year-olds. They always ask me what do I want and I'm like, I can buy it, and they're no, we'll pay for it, and I'm like, here's 50 bucks. No, I'm going to put it here, under the modem, and I'm going to leave it here for you. I'm like, I put it there, I walk away, and they end up not taking it.*

**(Pete, 16 years, out-of-home care)**

Young people reported that more emergency accommodation options and long-term accommodation options are needed so that young people forced to use emergency accommodation can move on to stable housing if they need it. They needed support to develop independent living skills. Moving from shelter to shelter does not teach a young person how to create a stable home environment. They also reported that young people who are homeless, particularly those from out-of-home care, need accommodation and support to extend beyond age 18 until young people are ready to be independent.

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**Table 6** Young people describe what does and doesn't help: youth housing

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**What creates risk?**

- Unstable home environment
  - Nowhere to relax
  - Lack of information on accommodation options
  - Being dependent on someone offering you a bed
  - Being offered a bed by an unsafe person (e.g. for drugs or sex)
  - Lack of access to suitable out-of-home care placements
  - Lack of access to an appropriate bail hostel
  - Lack of beds in shelters
  - Shelter-related issues such as: time-limited, tight rules and strict consequences (e.g. eviction), lack of visiting by friends and access to Facebook (compounding isolation/ loneliness), lack of privacy, lack of a place to store belongings securely, etc.
  - Share housing can be difficult to get, intimidating and difficult to keep
  - Lack of access to public housing (or inappropriate public housing)
  - No private rental or bond assistance for people under 18 years
  - Some young people not doing the right thing and spoiling opportunities for others
  - Mistrust of agents and landlords young people
  - Private rental rates well over the 'affordable' limit of 30% of income e.g. Youth Allowance or low wages
  - Some locations (suburbs, streets) are not suitable for some people due to past relationships
  - Lack of employment for young people means low incomes
  - Lack of affordable housing in general, which impacts on youth housing
- 

**What helps?**

- Access to youth-specific emergency accommodation (e.g. shelters)
  - Access to medium and longer-term youth-specific therapeutic accommodation (e.g. therapeutic residential care, some shelters)
  - Access to stable accommodation (e.g. tenancies provided with NGO support)
  - Access to permanent housing (usually public or community housing)
  - Probation periods with support to develop skills and confidence to manage tenancies successfully
  - Opportunities to share with older friends in private rental
  - An older person being willing to be guarantor for a young person seeking private rental
  - Landlords and real estate agents being willing to give a young person private rental
  - Rental support and bond assistance for young people who need it
  - Affordable appropriate housing options for young people
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## Adequate income and support from Centrelink

As would be expected, young people identified that having enough income plays a key role in protecting them from homelessness. Predominantly they received income support payments; although a particular difficulty for young people under 16 is qualifying for benefits. Some saw an important role for Centrelink in providing not just money, but also access to support and information.

Several young people described the benefits of money they received. Specific payments were mentioned, for example the one-off Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA).

*TILA's only for people who have been in the shelter and you don't have to give that back to the government. The government gives you \$1500 and you have to go round and get quotes then give them to them and once it processes through... People who have nothing, absolutely nothing, TILA really helps.*

**(Samantha, 17 years, Child Protection involvement)**

*I've got a TILA payment, so that's great. I've put my name on a list to get some driving lessons through the Community Centre. And I'm planning to study IT next year, so I'm looking forward to that.*

**(Mike, 20 years, out-of-home care and juvenile justice)**

Other young people had suggestions for further help, for example the provision of food vouchers to top up their small allowance:

*I'm on a youth type allowance, and once my rent get taken out I get about \$260 so realistically I would at least need like, probably another \$50 a week. I think that would help a lot, just to know that that money was there would be good... If they sent out stuff like a gift voucher so they know they are going to spend it on food that would be good... There is so many kids out there that are not buying food, or things that they need... I reckon if you were able to get that extra little bit of cash it could be like that, a voucher or something.*

**(Leah, 18 years, child protection involvement)**

Both the merits and deficits of Centrelink were mentioned by young people. Young people identified the key role Centrelink could play as a first port of call in providing flexible and tailored support for homeless young people.

**Table 7** Young people describe what does and doesn't help: Centrelink

### What creates risk?

- Difficulty in obtaining Centrelink benefits for young people under 16 years
- Low Centrelink payments (not enough to live on)
- Lack of money for food and other essentials

### What helps?

- Flexibility in the provision of allowances for people under 16 who need an income
- Centrelink payments such as Youth Allowance and Abstudy
- Unreasonable to Live at Home (UTLAH) provisions
- The Living Away From Home Allowance (a higher rate of Youth Allowance where living away from is required for training or study)
- Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA)

# Effective youth justice services / juvenile detention / police

With some exceptions, young people reported that police and the youth justice system did not tend to help them when they were experiencing homelessness, and could even have a detrimental impact on their chances of stabilising their lives. Many homeless young people are held on remand in juvenile detention until their case is heard in court because they have no fixed address to be bailed to (Commissioner for Children Tasmania 2013). However, young people also identified instances where the experience of juvenile detention had played a critical role in protecting them from homelessness.

For young people who became involved in criminal activity and were caught, the question of bail was sometimes the first formal alert that the young person was homeless; sometimes this was the first time Child Protection became actively involved in protecting the young person.

One of the main positives identified by young people about juvenile detention was the stability it provided to their lives, in particular the stable accommodation and regular meals.

*The best thing? Probably the food and that.*

**(Kyle, 18 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

*It's a bit shitty sometimes, sometimes it's alright. There's three meals a day. I'm putting on weight.*

**(Dale, 16 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

Some young people described how being in detention kept them drug-free, yet they worried about whether they could stay away from drugs once released.

Other benefits of juvenile detention included engaging activities such as cooking, woodwork and fitness as well as regular schooling. One young man said he liked:

*Just going to school, doing fitness things, and just art and woodwork and things like that. Fitness... I'm on me Grade 10 and I'm nearly finished. The only thing I can't really do is maths, but I'm learning it here.*

**(Dale, 16 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

Another young man had experienced the behaviour management strategies used in juvenile detention as an opportunity to experience success; for him it was an incentive to engage in activities and manage his behaviour.

*I'm on green. I'm doing good in the gym, I'm going off property, that'll do me... Yeah it's not easy. It's really challenging actually.*

(What do you have to do to earn green?)

*Basically be an angel.*

(And that gives you privileges?)

*Yeah, I wouldn't be leaving the site if I wasn't in green. I've been on green for four weeks now. Usually people only last about a week or two. So I'm doing alright.*

**(Bevan, 17 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

According to young people, very few community services worked with young people inside Ashley Youth Detention Centre to help bridge their links with the outside community; however those services that did were greatly appreciated. Asked what might help stop young people from going from youth detention to adult prison, one young man said:

*Just support really, more intensive support... my Youth Justice worker when I was younger, I seen him every single day. If it wasn't for him, I'd be dead.*

**(Bevan, 17 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

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**Table 8** Young people describe what does and doesn't help: youth justice, juvenile detention and police

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### What creates risk?

#### Social

- Lack of access to money, and being dependent on the goodwill of others or crime to get money
- Excitement and camaraderie found in gangs (leading to a criminal lifestyle)

#### Police

- Lack of care for what police say
- Drinking and partying to relax
- Being targeted by police, being accused of things you haven't done
- Being moved on by police when you have nowhere to go to
- It being illegal to light fires for warmth in public places

#### Youth Justice

- Not having a parent to bail a young person out, no fixed address to be bailed to
- Lack of access to an appropriate bail hostel
- Lack of support for young people on tight probation conditions and curfews
- Lack of support to young people in detention
- High case loads mean young people don't get the support they need on release from detention

#### Juvenile detention

- Detention used as a bail hostel for homeless young people on remand
- Not knowing how long a young person will be remanded for
- Lack of opportunities to practice good behaviours in a 'normal' way in juvenile detention
- Lack of freedom to make future-related decisions whilst detained
- Lack of contact with community services and positive adult role models whilst detained
- Lack of confidence in personal capacity to not re-offend
- Fear of 'graduating' to adult prison
- Not knowing where to live when leaving juvenile detention
- Lack of pre-release programs and support
- No 'exit plans' for young people on remand
- Where exit plans do exist, long-term housing not stipulated
- Repeated incarceration in juvenile detention

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## What helps?

### Social

- Stable accommodation and intensive support
- Regular nutritious meals
- Access to 'good' friends and positive social connections
- Engaging activities (cooking, woodwork, schooling, etc.)
- Opportunities to practice and build confidence in behaving well
- Incentives to behave and succeed
- Opportunities for work experience, volunteering, etc.
- Time with positive role models

### Police

- Training for police to understand youth behaviours in light of difficult family experiences, including homelessness
- Police engaging successfully with young people
- Police trained to support homeless young people, including how and where to refer young people to services
- A specialist team of police dedicated to supporting homeless young people

### Youth Justice

- Frequent contact with Youth Justice workers
- Help for young people to meet their bail conditions and curfews
- Ongoing contact whilst in juvenile detention
- Involvement in preparing effective 'exit plans' prior to release
- Adequate support on release

### Juvenile detention

- Detention used only as a last resort
  - Appropriate bail options such as a bail hostel
  - Consideration by magistrate of homelessness issues
  - Links with community services, vocational pathways and positive adult role models maintained whilst in detention
  - Opportunities for the development of literacy and numeracy and other skills for life
  - Positive behaviour management by correctional staff
  - Opportunities for future-oriented goal setting and practising of positive behaviours in non-custodial settings
  - An appropriate 'exit plan' developed with every young person prior to release (including those on remand)
  - Appropriate housing stipulated in every young person's 'exit plan'
  - Help from correctional staff to prepare for release
-

## Support from services, professionals and practitioners

According to young people, services, professionals and practitioners have a key role to play in protecting them from homelessness and many existing services already play a helpful role. *Reconnect*, a program helping young people connect with their families, was described as helpful in that it provided outreach, family mediation and referrals, and helped young people with their relationships. In relation to this program, a young man stated:

*We had mediation the other day and I got out all of the stuff I needed to say and I didn't really talk to Mum outside because [worker] was asking questions and we were answering them. We weren't directly talking to each other.*

**(Jason, 15 years)**

Other programs and supports that help young people to move towards independence were also described as beneficial.

Assistance to get food was valued, whether this was through food vouchers or free food, food distribution vans, or support from services to get payments from Centrelink which enabled the young people to buy food. Several young people also talked about the importance of services providing practical support such as access to a telephone, razors, soap, washing machine, storage, swags and sleeping bags. Services which enabled young people to wash, even if they could not provide accommodation, were also valued.

*Loui's Van, they're great. Great service. And the [alternative education setting] is good. If you don't have razors or soap or anything, you can go there and have a shower, wash your clothes, you can dry your clothes, you can make phone calls to Centrelink, to other services, to try and work out somewhere stable to stay. So that's a great service, and the guys are really friendly there.*

**(Mike, 20 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

*The shelter was helpful, cos I could go there in the morning even if I wasn't staying there, and they'd let me have a shower or something. Even if I didn't have a blanket of a night time, I could go there and they'd give me a blanket. Put me out with a little bit of food if they could.*

**(Mike, 20 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

Young people also saw age-appropriate therapeutic support as useful. Counselling was described by some as beneficial. One young man spoke about a long-term relationship he had with a counsellor: 'Just talking to me about problems and issues and stuff like that and trying to get me to sort out stuff at home... We talk most days'. A young woman described the benefits of seeing a counsellor: 'Mum thought I had anger issues so I started seeing [worker]. So I have someone to talk to and someone that's going to get me out of the house so I can talk without everything'. Another stated, 'After a while I went to counselling, with my doctor. Yeah, it was useful, it just taught me to get all my problems out, on the table and just get rid of 'em.'

Medical support for mental ill health was described as critical for some:

*Counselling, I still have to do that. That's compulsory for me. Not compulsory really, but it's a thing where I take my anti-depressants and do counselling too, because they mix together well. ...It just prevents me from getting back into that state of mind where I'm gonna be back in there [psychiatric unit]... It was once a week, now it's every couple weeks to three weeks... It's basically when I need it now, and I know when I need it. I can tell the difference now, whereas before I couldn't. If I know that I'm feeling really stressed out I go and debrief to them and leave there feeling much better... They work through some things with me. The cycle of depression and how you can break it and turn it around.*

**(Samantha, 17 years, child protection involvement)**

Young people also spoke of the importance of particular individuals, including professionals, taking an active approach. One young woman described the importance of a community agency.

*I loved the centre, I loved going there. It was probably the only enjoyment of my childhood, the centre groups... Cos the centre was like my second family... All very lovely people. Very supportive. Don't know where I'd be without the centre. If they weren't there I'd be so incredibly stuck. I'd not be the person I am now, I'd probably be locked up and God knows what else. They're the ones that helped me see that I actually have a future. That I can build from myself, and that I didn't have to be following in anybody else's footsteps. They made me see that, which was good. They had a very strong influence in my life.*  
(Samantha, 17 years, child protection involvement)

Young people said that if they are homeless, it makes a big difference if care is shown to them by the staff of services they approach for help.

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**Table 9** Young people describe what does and doesn't help: services, professionals and practitioners

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**What creates risk?**

- Lack of information about services and supports available
  - Lack of support services in some locations
  - No provision of money, food, warm clothing, blankets, showers, hygiene, health services etc. by services for homeless young people
  - 'Services that are unable to help'/ services that are unable to meet the presenting needs of the young person at the time they need it
  - Reluctance by services to provide services outside of their funded service area
  - Service staff not listening or being willing help
  - Poor engagement by counsellors
  - Young people not wanting counselling
  - Mediation not helping
- 

**What helps?**

- Programs providing outreach, referrals etc.
  - Age-appropriate therapeutic support (e.g. youth-friendly counselling, children's groups)
  - Support for young people to move towards independence
  - Structured recreational settings that offer social and emotional support (e.g. alternative education settings, police youth clubs etc.)
  - Structured learning environments that offer social and emotional support
  - Food
  - Practical support such as access to phones, razors, soap, washing machines, storage, swags and sleeping bags
  - Mental health support
  - Help with getting a job
  - Unhurried access to a safe, warm environment (e.g. public libraries)
  - Friendly staff
  - Workers who are good to talk to and available over the longer term
  - Adults who are able to help young people think about positive things and plan a positive future
  - 'People who help' (e.g. youth workers, Youth Justice workers, case workers, detention case workers, welfare officers, child and family case workers, Child Protection workers, housing support workers, doctors, counsellors, psychiatric ward staff, mental health staff, church ministers, police)
-

## Personal attributes, health and behaviours

Young people spoke of being bewildered when trying to find out where they can live and where to get support. They said that their own outlook and behaviours play a key role: the risk of homelessness is increased for people who lack a positive attitude, confidence, capacity for helpful behaviours and reasonable health. Both physical and mental health was mentioned as something that impacted on their capacity to gain housing and the support they needed.

Young people said that their attitudes, skills and social resources could promote their health and wellbeing, and impact on their capacity to move away from homelessness. For example, social connections and support were critical to getting access to resources. One young man said, 'I went there and had an interview, and they liked me, let me in there because I was cool.'

Some young people had developed strengths in identifying which relationships promoted their health and wellbeing, and learnt to make difficult but self-protective decisions. A young woman spoke of the benefits of having learnt to make sure her relationships were safe.

*My boyfriend, he comes and stays every weekend with me. He's really good, treats me with a lot of respect. I wouldn't be with him otherwise. Not tolerating any of that, I grew up watching my parents beat each other up, I wasn't going to take it. Something good I got out of the bad upbringing.*

**(Samantha, 17 years, child protection involvement)**

This young woman had also made tough decisions about family relationships in order to protect herself.

*I said to her I didn't want anything to do with her until she got help to stop her addiction, and she come to me one day when I was 15 and asked for help. She went cold turkey and I looked after the kids for a couple of months and helped her get back from it, and she's been good ever since.*

**(Samantha, 17 years, child protection involvement)**

Being able to manage their stress was seen as important.

*Letting it all go. Like not bundling it all up and thinking about it all the time.*

**(Fiona, 18 years, child protection involvement)**

Practising positive self-talk strategies was also mentioned by several young people. These included repeating a personal statement, such as 'Just keep on with it', or 'Mind over matter', or strategies to reframe traumatic memories.

*I've met some pretty good people. Just because you don't live with your parents or whatever doesn't mean anything. I don't think about it so much now, but I used to think of it as like, I don't have cancer, I'm not in a wheelchair. Them things. There's worse things. Like, I'm walking, I'm talking. Why can't I do something with it?*

**(Brian, 20 years, out-of-home care)**

*Sometimes you know you just need that little bit of extra help from other people. And sometimes you've just gotta do it. Everything's a possibility. You've just gotta believe... I was devastated yesterday when I got the call saying I didn't get that house, devastated, but as I just said everything's possible, you've just gotta believe. I know that I went about it that way, I can go about it a different way the next time.*

**(Cindy, 18 years, child protection involvement)**

Some young people had been helped by having an interest or ambition. Being told that they were good at something appeared to have been helpful; in some cases this helped some young people start to believe they had worth.

*There's no point sulking about it. But I'll tell ya I've about had enough of it now. I just wanna get on with me life. Hoping to play football. That's why I want the [long-term housing] people to come and see me, I'm gonna sign up for football and all sorts of things, if they'll take me seriously.*

**(Bevan, 17 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

*My sport, yeah, I play touch and a lot of different sports.*

**(Brian, 20 years, out-of-home care)**

Strongly related to having an interest was the capacity to see a future they wanted, and having some ideas about how to get there.

*I'm smart enough to know if I have kids I'm not going to treat them the way my parents treated me. Like you don't always have to be like them.*

**(Samantha, 17 years, child protection involvement)**

*Long term, what I wanted to do was be a personal trainer. Might be pretty hard but... I've had other jobs and stuff, and I've always enjoyed sport. I might not be the best trainer but I'm willing to try and I'm gonna get better at it... I've finally got the course started and I'm doing that.*

**(Brian, 20, out-of-home care)**

Looking after personal health was a challenge being actively taken up by some young people. Making decisions not to smoke or drink, or to use substances only in moderation, was mentioned by several young people. One young woman said health was the most important thing for her.

*I used to get tonsillitis a lot, so I got my tonsils took out. And I have quit smoking and I don't drink very much now, at all. I smoked for like five years, yeah so that's a big one.*

**(Leah, 18 years, child protection involvement)**

Some reported that learning practical skills, such as how to effectively budget and manage their money, had benefitted them. One young man had decided that paying the rent was his most important priority.

*Finding a way to access and budget money — paying rent and bills before anything else. It's not that hard. Not if you budget properly and don't waste money on takeaway and alcohol. Quitting cigarettes is a good thing to do, which I've done.*

**(Mike, 20 years, out-of-home care and juvenile detention)**

Another prioritised food in her well-organised budget.

*I spend probably about \$60 - \$80 a fortnight. I know how to shop well. Buy home brand, and specials. Best way to go... With my \$402 when I get paid, \$98 comes out for a fortnight's rent, \$50 goes away for Hydro, cos it's billed to me every three months, another \$50 for my other savings account, which I cannot access by ATM, I have to go and sign off for, so I don't get tempted. I want to eventually buy a car when I have the money.*

**(Samantha, 17 years, child protection involvement)**

**Table 10** Young people describe what does and doesn't help: personal attributes, health and behaviours

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**What creates risk?**

- Lack of support from adults (having to work everything out, not knowing what to do or how to do it)
  - Being dependent on the goodwill of others
  - Lack of physical, emotional, social and sexual safety while homeless
  - Experiences of cold, hunger, insomnia, difficulty keeping warm, difficulty getting enough nutritious food, etc.
  - Feelings of fear, loneliness, hurt, anger, paranoia, isolation, anxiety etc.
  - Mental ill health (e.g. depression, anxiety, psychosis)
  - Self harm and suicide risks
  - Physical ill health, need for medical attention and medication and lack of access to medical help (e.g. respiratory infections, seizures, scabies etc.)
  - Lack of opportunities for intimacy (girlfriend/boyfriend)
  - Lack of driving license
  - Unable to get a job
  - Lack of resources to cope with accidents and bad luck
  - Getting into trouble with the law
- 

**What helps?**

- Being able to make friends
  - Being able to find safe people to help and safe places to sleep
  - Choosing to look after personal health
  - Making decisions to smoke, drink, or use substances only in moderation or not at all
  - Practising positive self-talk
  - Personal confidence, determination, coping skills, stress management skills, etc.
  - Noticing what you're good at and practising being good at things
  - Asking for help from the right person if you need it
  - Finding a way to get essential needs met, e.g. money, blankets and warm clothing, shelter, food
  - Having a passion, interest, something you want to do
  - Knowing some good adults who are succeeding
  - Being able to see a future you want
  - Knowing how to work towards things you want
-

# Summary of advice from young people on how to prevent and reduce homelessness

## Advice from young people

Young people were asked ‘What would you do to reduce youth homelessness in Tasmania?’ and ‘What would you do to make sure young people never became homeless in Tasmania?’

### Expansion of family support services

- More support from Child Protection for parents and the family
- More parenting courses
- Support for parents and young people to work on their relationship
- More support for parents to prevent violence and fighting
- Anger management courses for parents
- Parents given advice on available support services
- Financial advice for parents

### Expansion of support available through schools

- More support and information provided to students who are at risk
- Support services to keep students at school and engaged

### Expansion of youth support services

- More safe places for young people to get information and receive support
- Services advertised in media that young people use
- Help for people to be drug-free
- Support to develop interests and skills ‘to keep them on track’

### Expansion of the out-of-home care system

- More foster carers
- More care options, such as group homes
- Removing children from homes that have violence, abuse or dangerous alcohol and other drug problems

### Expansion of the youth housing system

- More private rental houses available for young people
- More supported youth accommodation
- More houses
- More non-housing services to help young people find stable housing, including public housing, community housing or private rental

### Expansion of the specialist homelessness system

- More shelters
- Youth shelters providing a home, but also structure and support for young people

### Practical support for young people who are homeless or at risk of it

- Financial support

# 6 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## Support for parents and families

Although recent reforms in the Family Support Services sector have been useful (see DHHS 2012b), more is needed to reduce youth homelessness. In particular, preventative interventions, such as mental health programs, and targeted early intervention services, such as parenting skills programs, are required to support families before their situation becomes desperate or dangerous. By supporting families early, later involvement with services such as Specialist Homelessness Services, Child Protection and juvenile justice may be avoided.

The majority of young people interviewed said they became homeless for reasons relating to their parents and family life. These included lack of parental care, absent parents, abuse, parental problems such as mental ill health and alcohol and drug misuse, parents not coping, poverty and hardship, and family homelessness. This highlights the potential preventative effects of early support and intervention, and matches recommendations of the committee reviewing the Children, Young Persons and their Families Act that called for increased universal family support services, an expanded scope for Gateway services, and improvements in how risk factors are identified and conveyed to families (DHHS 2013d). Young people stated that providing information before they become parents is worthwhile, and that offering information and training for parents about parenting may mean positive outcomes for the next generation.

Young people identified that parenting courses, such as education and skills for how to manage the home and household, will help whole families. For parents who are struggling to parent adolescent children, specific support may be required, such as practical strategies to help young people remain at home, or information about alternative accommodation options. Young people identified the importance of extended kin relationships such as aunts, uncles and grandparents, as well as other adult role models. The support offered by these adults could potentially help families cope with changing parent-child relationships.

The pressures within single-parent households and the difficult relationship dynamics found in some stepfamilies, particularly between step-parents and stepchildren, were mentioned. These pressures point to the potential benefits of providing information and support to families as they move through key transition points such as separation and stepfamily formation, and to the merits of services offering family counselling, mediation and practical support. According to young people, extra support for unemployed parents, single parents, stepfamilies and large families will make a big difference.

Given a choice, many of the young people would have preferred to stay at home, even though things were difficult, with supports brought into their home rather than having to leave to get the support they needed. However, some of the young people interviewed said that living at home was not a safe option for them.

### Recommendation 1

That the State Government develop integrated preventative family support programs in all three Tasmanian regions based on known service gaps. That these family supports include universal education and training for parents as well as targeted support for families at risk of difficulties. Areas covered should include partner relationships, parenting skills, family and stepfamily relationships, family transitions, parent-child relationships, parenting adolescents, managing a household, maintaining mental health and managing alcohol and drug use. Respite for parents should also be made available.

### Recommendation 2

That the State Government provide new funding to the Gateway Integrated Family Support Services and Targeted Youth Support Services/Supported Youth Programs to enable earlier and more intensive support for whole families and for young people experiencing multiple difficulties. Support should be provided in the young person's home, where appropriate.

# A role for schools and vocational pathways

Research participants described the importance of education and training for their sense of stability, identity and connection. Even when their home life was difficult, some young people wanted to maintain daily contact with their place of education or training. This highlights the critical role these settings can play in providing stability and structure and helping to reduce homelessness.

The mobility experienced by the homeless young people interviewed meant that along with physical, mental and social impacts, their attendance at school or training also suffered. They tended to disengage from education and training, resulting in disruption to their vocational pathways.

Strategies other than suspending students who are finding attendance difficult or are misbehaving due to family problems are important. Where students must be suspended for their own or others' safety, extra support needs to be provided both to the young person and to their family to ensure a speedy and successful return to school or referral to a more suitable learning environment.

Teachers and school support staff such as psychologists, social workers and counsellors can play a key role in providing information and referring students to special supports if required. Young people reported that school staff who understood the causes behind poor behaviour and truancy were better able to provide initial support. There were examples where teachers had noticed they were struggling and schools had followed up when students had stopped attending.

Young people said that physical activity, creative expression, hands-on learning and opportunities to develop relationships with other adults in the community were additional ways that schools and vocational settings could support young people who are homeless or at risk of it. They reported instances where being offered alternative and flexible learning options had helped them stay engaged and connected during difficult, even traumatic, times in their lives.

Young people identified that having an interest, a skill, or 'something you're good at' could not be overestimated in the task of preventing and reducing youth homelessness. Research participants' pride in having a vocational identity (e.g. 'I'm going to be a builder') appeared significant, and matched the benefits they described from being on a pathway towards a vocation. In this way, teachers, welfare staff, trainers, employers and others involved in the education and vocational pathways of young people have a key role in supporting them to stay connected and helping them build a positive future.

## Recommendation 3

That the State Government resource schools and training institutions to be key settings for the promotion of child and family wellbeing. This could be done by increasing the availability of psychologists and social workers to work with students and their families and providing extra training for teachers and welfare staff.

## Recommendation 4

That the State Government adequately resource schools to better support students displaying truancy and difficult behaviours and their families, without resorting to suspension.

## Recommendation 5

That the State Government continue to develop and resource a suite of flexible and participatory learning methods for students who need these approaches, both within schools and in alternative settings, in all three regions.

## Effective child protection and family support services

Young people believed that child protection workers sometimes made inaccurate safety assessments. They felt that less intervention is provided than is sometimes needed, that engagement with parents, children and young people can be lacking, and that follow-up with both families and children after removal can be inadequate. They reported that when young people are homeless and living in a shelter, child protection services rarely provided support. From the young people's perspective, it is as if the State views shelters as a suitable out-of-home care placement.

Young people said that when difficulties are happening in the home, support needs to:

- encompass the whole family;
- actively engage parents and young people in a positive process of change;
- support parents to make the changes needed to ensure a safe home environment;
- enable families and young people to maintain or improve their relationships with each other, either towards reunification or, if reunification is not appropriate, while living independently of each other;
- work closely with providers of out-of-home care (or other specified youth worker) to ensure the housing and support needs of the young person are met;
- work closely with Youth Justice workers to ensure that bail or probation conditions of the young person are met (or with a specified youth worker to ensure that Youth Justice requirements are met);
- engage with and supports parents while their children are in care; and
- continue for the length of the young person's involvement in child protection until independence is reached, including up until age 25 for those who are not reunited with their families.

Under the Tasmanian Children, Young Persons and their Families Act, the child protection system is mandated to protect children as the Department's highest priority. Unfortunately, from all accounts, child protection staff are too overburdened with new notifications and assessments to provide support to parents to make the changes required under Care and Protection Orders (DHHS 2013), let alone providing support to young people.

In its review of the Act, the Legislative Amendment Review Reference Committee (LARRC) listed concerns about the Tasmanian child protection system that included:

- the need for the child protection system to move away from what is seen as a punitive child protection model;
- the contradictory demands on Child Protection to support families at the same time as they are supposed to protect children from often ambiguous risks;
- the need for increased respect to be demonstrated by Child Protection staff for children and young people, families, foster families, volunteers and other professionals;
- a lack of sufficiently skilled staff to manage the increasingly sophisticated requirements of Family Group Conferencing;
- the need for stronger processes for monitoring and supporting families that will keep children safe without removing children from their families and communities;
- the ongoing challenge of problem-solving with families whose experience of intervention is dominated by fear, risk and surveillance; and
- major concerns about court proceedings being commenced prematurely, not seen as in the best interests of the child, and leading to early alienation of families (DHHS 2013d, p.10).

From young people's experiences, it would appear that another service type or system would be better placed to provide the support that families and children need while involved in the child protection system. If the role of support were separated from the role of protection, the statutory child protection system would be freed up to advocate for the protection needs of children, allowing the family support system to provide the emotional, psychological and practical support that families and young people need to meet Child Protection requirements.

One recommended approach is the provision of family case-managed support alongside child protection involvement, and youth-specific support provided to children/young people by a specified youth worker in close collaboration with the family caseworker. Family case management is an integrated response to better support families who intersect with a number of government agencies and community service organisations. The approach may be suitable for families where there are young people who are not at risk of immediate significant harm. Through this framework the whole family is actively supported by cross-sector locally based teams. This approach would require the development of a highly skilled family case management workforce, the cost of which could be met by lower costs associated with the provision of later interventions.

Services well placed to offer that support include programs such as the *Integrated Family Support Services* and *Targeted Youth Support Services/Supported Youth Program*<sup>1</sup> working together to meet the needs of both parents and young people in a family case-managed approach. Currently, support to families from the *Integrated Family Support Services* tends to cease when Child Protection becomes involved, and support from the *Targeted Youth Support Services/Supported Youth Programs* can cease when a young person is detained at Ashley. Such programs would need to be expanded and resourced so that they could support families and young people for the length of their involvement in Child Protection, including the length of a young person's involvement in out-of-home care and potentially youth justice.

It is essential that youth-specific support operates in seamless collaboration with the proposed family case-managers and out-of-home care providers, and it is important that, whoever delivers these proposed family- and youth-specific services, continuity of workers is maintained as a high priority, and that support includes practical skills-based support (for example, how to manage a household) alongside therapy or counselling.

## Recommendation 6

That the State Government provide new funding to Gateway Integrated Family Support Services and to Targeted Youth Support Services/Supported Youth Programs to ensure that family case-managed support is provided to families, and youth-specific support is provided to children/young people for the duration of their involvement in the child protection system. This funding should include support for family members and foster and kinship carers.

## Recommendation 7

That the State Government resource Child Protection's After Care Support Programs to provide 'parent-like' support in areas of financial, vocational, practical and emotional need until the young person is ready for independence, up to age 25.

## Recommendation 8

That the State Government increase funding to Child Protection Services to enable it to meet its statutory requirements and current demand for assessments and investigations, including assessing homeless young people residing in shelters. This would enable Child Protection Services to work closely with the proposed expanded family support programs to ensure that families and children receive adequate support for the duration of their involvement with Child Protection Services.

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<sup>1</sup> In 2.5 years of operation, TYSS/SYP has supported 100 young people, 90 of whom were homeless, to make significant gains in a number of areas. In addition to helping young people secure accommodation, the number of Child Protection notifications or re-notifications reduced. On referral to SYP, 80% of young people had one or more notifications to Child Protection, but since engagement with the program this has reduced by 60%. The program has also helped young people to reduce their offending and re-offending rates (on referral more than 80% were offending or reoffending, but since engagement this has reduced by 50%). Involvement in SYP has also increased young people's levels of connectedness with their family, community and schools (on referral less than 10% of young people were connected with family, community and school but since engagement with the program 80% of young people are now connected with family, community and school). The program has also positively impacted on young people's development and increased their sense of personal wellbeing and safety (Anglicare Tasmania 2012).

## A suite of out-of-home care options

An expanded range of out-of-home care options for children and young people is recommended, with all agencies supporting young people involved in Child Protection to be trained in trauma-informed care. The establishment of a comprehensive suite of out-of-home care options would allow for care settings that are better matched to the needs of children and young people. It would also enable therapeutic residential care programs and shelters (which are not really out-of-home care options) to become more specialist services. At the same time, this may alleviate costs associated with youth justice and juvenile detention. The following table sets out the comprehensive suite of placement options needed in Tasmania.

**Table 11** Proposed suite of out-of-home care options for Tasmania

Shaded options currently do not exist in Tasmania

**Independent living** – opportunities for young people with high levels of maturity and independence to live in public or community housing, or in private rental accommodation.

**Kinship care placements** – with extended family members or family friends.

**Foster care placements** – provided by a diverse range of trained foster carers in all regions, including in regional and remote areas.

**Emergency foster care placements** – in all regions. These placements should be staffed by specifically trained foster carers because children would come into these at a time of crisis following a placement breakdown.

**Treatment foster care (specialised foster care)** – provided by highly trained foster carers for young people with complex psychological and behavioural issues.

*Note: This does not currently exist beyond some advanced training undertaken by individual carers.*

**Family group care** – provided by trained adults, either in a home environment or in a facility, supported by staff working shifts.

**Therapeutic residential care (TRC)** – trauma-informed residential care, provided by direct-care workers and support staff, staffed 24/7, is currently available in all regions.

**Residential treatment care** – operates under a common clinical supervisory structure and provides treatment programs as required. This is more specific clinical treatment than offered by TRC – a distinguishing element would be that children and young people would be following specific and documented treatment plans, with progress being monitored by a clinically trained supervisor.

**Secure adolescent psychiatric care** – is available for young people who need medication and containment for mental health reasons.

**Secure care (community-based detention)** – is provided in a community setting for young people who need containment. Examples interstate include settings that are geographically isolated or that have capacity to physically ‘contain’ young people. Staffing levels are higher and skill sets different from other residential services.

Ashley Youth Detention Centre – if the suite of options above was in place, this could be downsized to focus on providing containment only for young people who pose continued risk to the community.

These proposals are consistent with recommendations made in the Legislative Amendment Review Reference Committee report for more therapeutic services and therapeutic residential care options for children and young people under Care and Protection orders in Tasmania (DHHS 2013d, p.9). In the current research, some young people reported that they were placed in out-of-home care only when they reached the 'end of the road', when their physical or mental health had deteriorated to the degree that they needed hospitalisation, or when they had become involved in the youth justice system.

Tasmania has a shortage of trained therapeutic and specialised foster carers and other workers who have the capacity to meet the needs of young people with complex psychological and behavioural difficulties. Family group homes exist in Tasmania, but are predominantly for sibling groups and are not necessarily staffed by adults trained in therapeutic care. Therapeutic Residential Care placements exist in limited numbers in all three Tasmanian regions, and tend to be the only option for young people with extremely difficult behaviours. However, none are fully resourced to provide clinical treatment for young people with cognitive, mental health, substance misuse or trauma-related issues that manifest in severe psychological and behavioural problems.

For young people with trauma-related mental health difficulties or dangerous behaviours, in need of out-of-home care, placement options are very limited. Youth shelters are designed for older young people and are not specifically resourced to provide an intensive therapeutic approach. Ashley Youth Detention Centre tends to house a high proportion of young people with cognitive, psychological or behavioural problems. It could be argued that juvenile detention fills an out-of-home care service gap that may be better met, and more cost-effectively so, by the establishment of a broader suite of out-of-home care placement options.

Young people interviewed for this research reported that they found out-of-home care to be limited in range and quantity, and not necessarily available when they needed it. They reported that if their behaviour was more extreme and they needed more intensive support, placements for them did not exist. For a range of reasons, out-of-home care can involve a series of short placements for young people rather than a long-term stable placement. Young people reported that these transitory care arrangements increased their feeling of not being attached to anyone and not being cared about. The experiences of young people interviewed shows that out-of-home care shortages and short-term placements mean young people under Care and Protection Orders are just as likely to become homeless as those not involved in the child protection system.

Young people suggested that the following changes to the out-of-home-care system would help to provide safe homes and prevent young people from becoming homeless:

- more out-of-home care options;
- more foster carers available for longer time periods in more locations, with greater capacity to take on all children from one family;
- more training for foster carers to be better able to support young people with difficult past experiences, including trauma, and associated problematic behaviours; and
- opportunities to continue with schooling and vocational pathways.

Children and young people need the best possible long-term, well-supported care that helps them to maintain and strengthen their attachment to family, community and society.

## Recommendation 9

That the State Government recruit more foster carers, in all regions and including remote areas, and provides them with specialised training to ensure they have the therapeutic skills to provide trauma-informed care for young people living with emotional, mental and behavioural difficulties. Further, that foster carers be recompensed according to their level of training and that they be supported by family case managers or another form of professional supervision.

## Recommendation 10

That the State Government provide incentives (such as payment and reimbursements) to kinship carers to undertake training, that kinship carers be recompensed according to their level of training, and that training for kinship carers be followed up with support from family case managers.

## Recommendation 11

That the State Government establish a comprehensive suite of out-of-home care options for children and young people under Care and Protection Orders in Tasmania, including as a priority the establishment of suitable placements for young people aged 14-16 in each region.

## Recommendation 12

That the State Government ensure that Tasmania's out-of-home care system includes the establishment of residential treatment facilities in each region with capacity to provide intensive clinical support for young people with mental health, behavioural and alcohol and other drug difficulties.

## Recommendation 13

That the State Government fund training in trauma-informed care for all Child Protection and out-of-home care staff.

# Youth housing and support options

Young people reported that once 'inside the homelessness system', they tended to cycle in and out of emergency or transitional shelters while they waited for, or tried to arrange, more stable accommodation. Time spent in shelters was often interspersed with couch surfing, time back at the family home, in new or known foster care, Therapeutic Residential Care, or for many young people in this research, especially males, Ashley Youth Detention Centre. Only a small number who had spent time in shelters had been able to move into long-term supported housing. This reflects the relatively few medium- and long-term housing options available for young people. Many see themselves as 'filling in time' in whatever accommodation is available until they are 18, when they hope their housing options will expand.

This apparent cycling within Tasmania's youth shelters matches Australia-wide data reported by the AIHW that around one in six (15.7%) people (of any age) enter specialist homelessness services from another homelessness service, one in seven (13.4%) exit into another homelessness service and around 5% leave specialist homelessness services to return to the streets (AIHW 2008, p.74).

In the Tasmanian context, the few placements available in long-term youth accommodation facilities are usually already taken, public housing requires a long wait without any assurance of an eventual tenancy, and private rental is expensive or unavailable. For these reasons homeless young people without support say their only safe option is to seek a bed in a shelter, yet youth shelters are often full.

Emergency shelters are time-limited, and few options exist for young people to move into long-term accommodation. Some must move on from emergency shelters to allow space for others, including younger people, but do not always have an alternative place to go. Some young people are turned away from shelters without any practical assistance. Transitional shelters support young people for longer, but are not suitable for those who want long-term stability, for example to finish their schooling. With a lack of exits, shelters are under pressure from several directions, including from the same young people time and again.

Shelters support young people from the child protection system who cannot be placed or are considered too old for foster or kinship care, young people from the out-of-home care system whose placements have failed, and young people from the youth justice system who have nowhere else to go and who may have bail conditions to meet. This means that shelters help people with both simple housing needs and more complex social and psychological needs, of varying ages and levels of independence, and whose capacity to live in a communal environment may be compromised.

Shelter staff do their best with few resources; however shelters have limited capacity to provide specialist support in mental health, substance misuse, family mediation and other issues prevalent amongst homeless young people. Nor do shelters currently have the capacity to medicate, contain or secure young people whose mental ill health and behaviours mean they require more intensive support.

Trained staff or carers are needed for young people with experience of trauma and hardship. For young people with extreme behaviours based on difficult early life experiences, a range of security and behaviour management strategies may be required, along with age-appropriate therapeutic treatment.

The challenge for the Specialist Homelessness System (SHS) is to provide both emergency accommodation for those who need it and transition towards independence for all young people. Supports need to be in place to help young people move towards independence according to their needs, maturity and capabilities. Housing Tasmania needs to ensure that blockages are removed and that 'exits' into stable long-term accommodation are available for young people so they can leave the Specialist Homelessness System.

For young people who are ready for greater independence, support to gain private rental is beneficial, including support to rent a room in a share house or an independent unit. Having an adult over 18 willing to share a private rental property with a young person can be beneficial; in such situations, incentives could be provided to adults willing to mentor young people in how to shop, clean, cook, pay bills etc. Tenancy support where an agency leases a house and supports young people to build independence and readiness for private rental is an effective model.

It would be helpful and appropriate for some young people under 18 years of age to be rented properties by real estate agents and landlords on the basis of having an adult guarantor (such as a worker or agency). Commonwealth Rent Assistance and bond support programs are important supports. Probation periods for private rental, public and social housing that include training in how to manage and maintain a household (for example working out a budget, shopping and paying bills) will help prepare young people for independence.

The provision of housing for young people must go hand in hand with support for those who need it. In families where parents are able to support their child, this usually continues until the young person has reached independence, often until the child is in their mid-twenties or older. Young people who have experienced a difficult or dangerous home life also need support towards independence, perhaps until a similar age, at least in the form of mentoring.

Young people highlighted the importance of income support payments through Centrelink. These provide a safety net for those who lack financial support from parents or families. However, allowances, concessions and vouchers should be provided to all young people who need them, including those less than 16 years of age. Financial support needs to be adequate and timely, in some cases even before a young person has left their family home. Practical support is also essential, such as the provision of blankets, warm clothing, food, electricity and basic hygiene products by shelter staff. These help to reduce risks associated with homelessness, including criminal activity.

Young people also noted that their own attributes, behaviours and health played an important role in helping reduce risks of homelessness. When young people can be supported to remain active, eat nutritious food and get adequate rest, their risks of homelessness will be reduced. Initiatives that help young people to develop personal care, health, safety, emotional, social and living skills will reduce risks of homelessness, as will education and support around mental health, alcohol and other drug use, sexual health and family relationships.

**Recommendation 14**

That the State Government commit to providing all young people on Care and Protection Orders with stable and appropriate accommodation, and that parameters relating to Duty of Care are made clear for Specialist Homelessness System staff supporting young people on Care and Protection Orders via a Memorandum of Understanding between Child Protection and Housing Tasmania.

**Recommendation 15**

That Housing Tasmania explicitly state within funding agreements that, where there is a need and at the discretion of workers, emergency Specialist Homelessness System placements may be extended to three months and transitional Specialist Homelessness System placements to two years.

**Recommendation 16**

That, until a suite of out-of-home care and longer-term accommodation options are in place, Housing Tasmania develop protocols with Housing Connect whereby young people aged 14 and 15 in receipt of independent government allowances and who have support may apply for direct tenancy in public or community housing.

**Recommendation 17**

That, until a suite of out-of-home care and longer-term accommodation options are in place to provide 'exits' from the Specialist Homelessness System for young people, the State Government fund additional emergency and transitional beds in each region, including remote areas.

**Recommendation 18**

That Housing Tasmania resource Housing Connect with brokerage funds to provide, at the discretion of workers, transport, travel vouchers, food and blankets to young people who are not able to be accommodated in an emergency facility on a given night and are therefore expected to 'sleep rough'.

**Recommendation 19**

That Housing Tasmania establish additional long-term facilities in each region with strong links between the housing provider and other service providers in areas of health, wellbeing, education, training, and employment to accommodate.

**Recommendation 20**

That Housing Tasmania ensure independent one- and two-bedroom units are available in each region for use by young people and small families.

**Recommendation 21**

That the State Government ensure that public housing stock transfers to community housing providers under Better Housing Futures reforms include an allocation for young people.

## Recommendation 22

That the State Government fund Housing Connect to provide information and resources to schools and family services in both urban and rural locations to ensure that teachers, school welfare staff, students and families know of the housing and support options available for young people who need to live away from the family home.

## Effective youth justice services

The provision of more out-of-home care placements and more support for families and youth involved in the child protection system would have direct benefits for Tasmania's youth justice system. Young people involved in the youth justice system need appropriate accommodation and youth-specific support until either reunified with family or ready for independence. This change in emphasis would help to reduce costs associated with juvenile detention.

Young people interviewed in this research said that a lack of basic necessities such as food, transport and shelter coincided with their involvement in the youth justice system. Young people who had positive adult role models and were engaged in a vocational pathway of some kind were more likely to be protected from involvement in criminal activity. Based on what young people said, a key way of reducing youth involvement in criminal activity in Tasmania would be the provision of housing and support for young people who are experiencing family violence, family breakdown or homelessness.

Compounding the issue of homelessness in Tasmania is the lack of bail hostels, meaning that limited bail options exist. Young people with bail conditions who are homeless are either placed in shelters, with little support to avoid breaching bail, or are remanded in juvenile detention, sometimes for long periods of time. One important factor in the detention of many young people is the lack of alternative placement options and support.

It is widely recognised that very few positive post-release outcomes can be achieved if young people are released into homelessness, yet information from a range of sources reveals that young people leaving juvenile detention do not always have an exit plan in place to ensure they are stably housed. Reasons given for this by staff working in Ashley detention centre are that the *Youth Justice Act 1997* does not require that young people on remand have exit plans and that when exit plans are developed they are not always carried out by young people. Adequate exit plans and appropriate after care, including connection with community-based support structures, should be considered core business for juvenile justice and begin at the outset of detention, with young people engaged in developing the plan.

Police, youth justice workers, magistrates and juvenile detention staff play a key role in assisting young people who are homeless. There is a need for people within these service systems to recognise the impact that absent parents, family problems and homelessness can have on a young person's behaviour.

The findings of this research suggest that the following changes to the youth justice system will help prevent young people from becoming homeless:

- consideration by the police and magistrates of family and homelessness issues that young people may be experiencing;
- access to a bail hostel (stable accommodation and regular nutritious meals in a community-based setting) for young people on remand;
- adequate support to meet bail conditions, which may require more frequent contact with Youth Justice or other support workers;
- the creation of opportunities for education, training, work experience, volunteering, rehabilitation, treatment, and the establishment of positive links with the community;
- exit planning, with the young person's involvement, beginning on the first day of detention and with a plan completed before release; and
- a commitment that no young person be released from detention into homelessness under any circumstances.

To ensure that young people involved in the youth justice system are not re-traumatised, a trauma-informed approach needs to be embedded in all services and supports. This involves a cultural shift and training of staff to understand the physiological and neurological effects of trauma, the importance of emotional and physical safety, the benefits of positive secure relationships, and the importance of providing therapeutic and rehabilitative options for young people with strategies to prevent re-traumatisation. In a trauma-informed approach staff focus on 'what happened to' a young person rather than on 'what is wrong with' the young person. The focus is on creating a sensitive environment within which specific trauma-focused psycho-education interventions can be carried out, where possible in conjunction with family members (Bloom & Yanosy Sreedhar 2008).

### **Recommendation 23**

That the State Government establish bail hostels in the South and North of the state in a new partnership agreement between Youth Justice and Housing Tasmania, and that the hostels be provided with adequate staffing to ensure residents have the support they need to meet bail conditions.

### **Recommendation 24**

That the State Government establish more initiatives to support young people to meet bail conditions, including community-based order placements and support from Youth Justice workers in collaboration with the proposed family case managers.

### **Recommendation 25**

That the Department of Health and Human Services require that Ashley Youth Detention Centre staff develop an 'exit plan', based on the young person's needs and capacities, in partnership with every detainee prior to release. The exit plan to include suitable housing and support to the level required and support from Youth Justice workers both prior to and upon release.

### **Recommendation 26**

That the Department of Health and Human Services require that Ashley Youth Detention Centre staff create and sustain links with community members and services to enable community-based vocational pathways and relationships with positive adult role models for young people detained at Ashley, and that these links be supported post-release.

### **Recommendation 27**

That the Department of Health and Human Services ensure that trauma-informed approaches be established in all youth justice services.



# APPENDIX 1. BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

## Aims of the research

This research looked for answers to the following questions:

- How big is the problem of youth homelessness in Tasmania?
- What are the causes, characteristics and implications of youth homelessness in Tasmania?
- What will help to prevent homelessness for young people involved in the child protection and youth justice systems?

## Research methods

The project design was based on the research questions and involved a combination of data collection methods, including:

- a review of policy and research literature;
- a review of relevant social and psychological literature;
- consultations with approximately 30 service staff involved in the area of youth homelessness;
- interviews with 22 young people who have been homeless and have had involvement with child protection or youth justice systems; and
- data analysis and development of recommendations.

## Interviews

Interviews were conducted with 22 young people aged between 14 and 20 years. The reason for this target age group was to ensure the research included young people under Care and Protection Orders, including those in pre-transition, transition and post-transition from out-of-home care, and those who were entering adulthood.

With assistance from youth agencies statewide, young people with direct experiences of homelessness and out-of-home care or juvenile detention were invited to participate in an in-depth interview of around one hour. Interview questions are provided in Appendix 2.

Project information and invitations to recruit research participants were made available to all relevant youth and homelessness services in Tasmania. The invitation was made as widely as possible to ensure that participation was open and not weighted towards one type of service agency.

The aim was to recruit young people of approximately equal numbers from each gender, from each region, from two sets of age groups (ages 14-16 and 17-20), and include Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders, culturally and linguistically diverse young people, and some young parents.

Consultations with workers in each region contributed the observations of workers about young people's experiences of out-of-home care, the youth justice system and the specialist homelessness system. To ensure the whole of Tasmania was included, phone consultations were undertaken with a range of workers supporting young people with housing difficulties in regional and rural areas.

## Profile of the research participants

Young people who had experienced homelessness were interviewed across the state, and across a range of age, gender, culture and service system experiences. The 22 young people interviewed had the following characteristics:

**Table 12** Age and gender of participants

Age/gender	Males	Females	Total
Age 14-16	7	2	9
Age 17-20	6	7	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>22</b>

Two participants in the research each had a child and nine identified as Aboriginal.

**Table 13** Region and gender of participants

Region/gender	Males	Females	Total
North West	4	1	5
North	3	4	7
South	6	4	10

**Table 14** Participants' experience of services

Young person's experience of services	Males	Females	Totals
Child Protection involvement but no out-of-home care	0	5	5
Child Protection involvement including out-of-home care	10	3	13
Experience of juvenile detention	7	1	8
Both Child Protection involvement and juvenile detention	7	1	8
Child Protection involvement but no juvenile detention	3	7	10
Neither Child Protection nor juvenile detention	3	1	4
<b>Total with either child protection or juvenile detention experiences</b>			<b>18</b>

## Ethics

The ethical procedures relating to this project were based on National Health and Medical Research Committee (NHMRC) guidelines for the ethical conduct of research with children and in particular the *National statement on ethical conduct in human research (2007)* (NHMRC 2013). The design of the project also took account of advice documented by Spriggs (2010) for the Murdoch Children's Research Institute. Ethics approval for this project was sought and gained through Anglicare Victoria's Research Ethics Committee (AVREC), an NHMRC-approved ethical review body.

## Limitations

This was a qualitative piece of work based on interviews with a small number of young people. Because of this, there are several limitations to this study.

First, young people were recruited into the research using purposive sampling. This meant that the sample was selected in a systematic way based on both what is known about young homeless people and the purpose of the research. It is acknowledged that purposive sampling means that the study cannot claim to be truly representative of all young homeless people.

Second, it was acknowledged that asking young people about their experiences of homelessness would be occurring quite soon after, if not during, the difficult experiences they are recounting. For this reason research participants may not have the degree of perspective that might be gained after time.

Third, while the project sought to gain views from a diverse group, including gender, age and region, the sample is limited. It comprised just 22 young people, with, for example, only one young woman from the North West of Tasmania, and no interviews conducted directly with young people on the West Coast or Bass Strait Islands. While common themes emerged, a larger study with more interviews may have strengthened the information provided in this report.



## APPENDIX 2. RESEARCH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### *Introductory questions*

Please tell me about your current situation, for example where are you living, who is helping you out and how is that going for you?

### *Pathways into homelessness*

What are the things that led to being homeless for you?

### *Current supports*

Who is helping you with housing and other things at the moment?

### *Gaps and barriers*

Is there anything missing in your life at the moment, if so what?

### *Recommendations*

What would it take to make sure no other young person became homeless in the way that you did?

### *Closure*

Thank you for sharing your experience and advice, please talk with your worker about what we talked about, and let them know if you need some more help with what we talked about, etc.

- Prompts: What is your current housing situation? Is anyone helping you with day to day living? What are your biggest pressures at the moment? What is going well for you at the moment?
- What do you think might have stopped you from becoming homeless, if anything?
- Prompts: What supports did you need, and when did you need them? What was the worst thing about being homeless? Did you know of others in a similar situation? Did you get some special support from anyone? How did you cope?
- Is any one person or service going out of their way to help you in a special way at the moment?
- Is anyone helping you with your long-term hopes and plans?
- What do you consider to be the best (most helpful) supports available to you currently (which initiatives, services, programs, people, etc.)?
- What helps you get the support you need?
- What's currently not available to you that you would like in relation to housing and having a home?
- Can you see a way that you might be able to gain those things that you feel you're missing?
- Do you have anyone who might be able to help you with gaining those things? (Who would you like to have to help you with those things?)
- In Tasmania, what do you think gets in the way of making sure young people are housed and have a home?
- If you were the Prime Minister and could make some decisions to help to stop young people from ever becoming homeless, what you would do?
- What's the most important thing to you at the moment?
- What would you like to be doing in the future? (1 week, 1 month, 1 year, 5 years, 20 years from now?)
- What would it take for you to be able to make that happen, and what supports would you need to help make that happen?



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