



Salvation Army Youth Services – Resident submission to the National Housing and Homelessness Plan Consultation

Salvation Army Youth Services support up to 450 young people (16-25) every year across the Inner and Middle South regions of Melbourne. This includes accommodating 176 young people in crisis accommodation at our Upton Road refuge. We know from recent census data young people are experiencing homelessness at increasing rates and below are the suggestions and contributions of the young people that reside at and engage with our service who have a current lived experience of homelessness, and the information they would like to provide the government about their engagements with the current housing system.

Issue 3.1 - Homelessness

When asked whether there was any support that could have prevented residents from entering homelessness, one resident noted that there could be more work done in early intervention to prevent young people from being asked to leave their family home. This might include supports to improve communication skills, arrange mediation and conflict resolution to address in-home issues. This would be in contrast to current solutions that sometimes lead to short-term solutions to escalations, i.e. police issuing family violence safety notices removing adolescents and young people from the family home where there are disagreements and conflict in the family. Another young person noted that more support in his family home, support to make their family “better” may have prevented them becoming homeless.

Other young people noted that rent caps and limits on the how much and how often private landlords can raise rent each year helps improve the tenure of private rental. This prevents secure renters from becoming insecure, and allows young people to have greater resilience to other large expenses or emergencies when they arise.

Young people noted that youth specific housing workers and entry points had supported them to escape unsafe living situations and were glad to be supported into a refuge quickly once they identified needing help.

Young people feel responsibility for offering this support should be the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing in Victoria to make supports available and ensure current services have enough resources to address demand.

One resident noted that on entering homelessness, the largest struggle they experienced were trying to manage the trauma and mental health implications of the events preceding their homelessness. Residents described even though they knew they were in a new safe place, they had trouble relaxing or feeling at ease.

Another resident described their mental health declining while they were in the system, caused by the difficulty of trying to navigate housing entry points and the days of uncertainty around where they would go while they awaited crisis housing. This highlights the importance of a quick response and ensuring adequate resources to be available to meet demand without delay.

Residents also highlighted processes such as getting replacement IDs where they had been lost in periods of transience were also a significant barrier and led to delays in searching for longer term housing options.

Issue 3.2 - Homelessness Services

Multiple young people when consulted noted multiple episodes of homelessness prior to coming to the youth refuge. One young person suggested earlier intervention around family prior to first episode or in the first episode of homelessness could reduce the amount of young people who repeatedly experience episodes of homelessness when situations at home break down.

Young people expressed that there were various points where systems failed them and they were left without unsuitable accommodation.

One resident discussed a time where they had successfully completed a detox stay to assist in addressing substance use that had increased during a period of poor mental health. However following the detox they had been left with nowhere to reside at their exit date, which led to their return to an unstable and unsafe accommodation option. The resident attributed this unsafe situation as triggering their relapse into substance use.

Another resident described an initial experience with an entry point that they felt was unsupportive and unhelpful. The resident had left the interaction feeling that the entry point did not want to offer them help because they weren't under 18, pregnant, or vulnerable due to disability. The resident noted they had difficulties with their mental health and had active involvement from CAMHS, however neither service were able to facilitate stable accommodation to prevent further decline.

Both of the above residents shared a similar experience of feeling pressure to try and self-fund accommodation, despite not having stable employment and not having the financial capability to fund enough accommodation to cover them between pay periods. The general sense felt by these young people is that they were being 'fobbed off' once workers felt they weren't priorities for crisis housing. The young people expressed that entry points should prioritise making every person requesting assistance feel supported, and that the current system is currently unable to accomplish this for everyone.

There was agreement amongst young people that there is poor education and publicity around what housing services are available and how to first access housing support. Young people identified this delayed young people requesting help prior to a crisis situation where a housing breakdown may be avoiding.

Young people also noted that during a crisis or emergency situation there is a higher likelihood that young people may not have access to internet, phone data or even a phone at all. Young people felt that this made finding access points at the point of crisis far more difficult than if they had already been aware of what was available to them.

Issue 3.4 - Social Housing

Young people agreed that their should be priority for social housing for single mothers and families with children. Young people felt there was not a high priority for social housing for young people, despite young people being proportionately more likely to be homeless. All

young people consulted agreed that they felt social housing was entirely unattainable to them due to not being prioritised.

Young people would like to see social housing become a more accessible option to single young people on a low income wage. Young people were also keen to see more readily accessible housing made available for everyone, though were non-specific about the method for delivering this.

Issue 3.5 - Private Rental

Young people suggested that private rental access can be improved by having tighter controls around the increases of rent to prevent young people slowly being squeezed out of private rental. Young people suggested enforcing rental caps, limited increases in rent payments allowed in a year by proportion of the current rent, and expansion/increase of subsidised rent programs for young people and students. Young people felt subsidised rent could be offered to the landlords of properties where students reside, not just larger organisations that provide student housing which is typically unaffordable for those on low income.

Young people also expressed that it is difficult to currently save the required money to pay for bond due to cost of living and low income, and noted that bond loans easily accessible when moving in to already existing share-house accommodation.

Further Consultation

The residents and clients of Upton Road expressed further interest in advocacy, consultation and being able to lend their voice to any further discussion related to the Homelessness and Housing National Plan. Upton Road has a youth participation worker who helps facilitate advocacy and consultation opportunities with the young people we support. Salvation Army Youth Services would be happy to facilitate further consultation with our residents and service users for any further opportunities for consultation.

