Developing models of good practice in meeting the needs of homeless young people in rural areas

authored by

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Final Report presents the outcomes of a research into models of good practice in meeting the needs of homeless young people in rural areas of Australia. The research had a number of specific objectives which can be simplified to three key questions: first, what can we learn from the international and national literature about innovative models for meeting the needs of homeless young people in rural areas? Second, which State and Australian Government policies impinge upon the needs of homeless young people in rural areas? Third, what are the experiences of homeless young people in rural areas and how do they differ from those in urban areas?

The report shows that young people living in rural areas face many of the challenges confronting urban youth, but are also distinguished by a number of factors that make their experiences of homelessness distinctive. Homeless young people in rural areas are differentiated from those living in urban regions because:

- It is often extremely difficult to find employment as a young person living in the country. Labour markets are 'thin' and a premium is placed on experience that young people lack;

- Many parts of non-metropolitan Australia are marked by tight rental housing markets and young people find it difficult to gain access to the housing stock;

- Young people in rural areas may suffer from inter-generational discrimination, based on the 'reputation' of their families. This may be a particular challenge for young Indigenous Australians;

- There are few services in rural areas for homeless young people and those that are available tend to be concentrated in the larger regional centres;

- Non-metropolitan communities may be less accepting of difference – such as race or sexuality – than those in the capital cities;

- There is a strongly developed sense of community amongst many homeless young people. They value their friendship and support networks and place considerable priority on staying within a physical environment with which they are familiar.

Our research also shows that homeless young people are affected by a range of Australian Government and State policies, ranging from the income support policies of Centrelink through to foster care arrangements, JPET services and specialist services for dealing with homelessness – such as the Reconnect program. The Reconnect program targets young people before they have left home. The program attempts to reduce homelessness by drawing on mediation services to assist in reconciling young people and their parents. Our investigations showed that early intervention programs are generally seen to be the most effective interventions in dealing with youth homelessness and this may include programs that encourage young people to return to the family home. There are, however, significant gaps in the services and policies available to young homeless people in rural areas. For

example, there is a shortage of specialist accommodation options, there are too few foster carers to cater for demand, and many rural centres lack activities and support services for young people.

The national and international literature – as well as the outcomes of our fieldwork – suggests that homelessness amongst young people is best addressed at an early stage and needs to be recognised as something more than 'rooflessness'. Much of the homelessness amongst young people in rural areas takes the form of secondary or tertiary homelessness and this contributes to its relative invisibility in non-metropolitan regions. Effective policy solutions need to incorporate life skills training – including education in the skills needed to sustain a tenancy – as well as more formal skills acquisition. The foyer model developed in France and then applied in other parts of Europe offers one potentially productive model for application in non-metropolitan Australia. Effective policy responses also need to accept and adapt to the personal dimensions of homelessness – the lived experience – and recognise that young adults need to feel empowered by the programs intended to assist them. Programs and policies also need to build upon their sense of community and their need for a role or place within society. Government actions also need to accommodate differences amongst young people, such as gender, sexuality and race, and seek to overcome the burdens these differences may create.

Our research indicates that governments can take a number of steps to provide better models for dealing with homelessness amongst young people in rural areas, including assistance to mobilise community resources. This may include community involvement in relatively informal arrangements – such as inviting real estate agents to speak at tenancy training courses offered to young people – or could involve more formal structures, such as mobilising the community to implement a formal youth homeless strategy and/or facility. Such policy responses recognise, and build upon, the higher level of social capital in many regional centres when compared with the capitals, and make use of this greater sense of community to find practical solutions.

The research concludes that the foyer models developed and implemented in Europe offer considerable potential as a practical strategy for dealing with homeless young people living outside the capital cities. While only one youth foyer has been implemented in Australia to date (Randolph, Pang and Wood 2001), such approaches can incorporate housing, education, employment and counselling assistance into a holistic service for young people. Foyers are essentially a facility (such as an apartment block with a shopfront below) that can offer young people both employment and secure accommodation. Young people gain an opportunity to work, live independently and acquire life skills. This perspective recognises the complex needs of many homeless young people and it is a policy response made more attractive by the importance afforded to community ownership in some versions of the model. As noted previously, non-metropolitan centres have higher levels of social capital and a more strongly developed sense of community than in the capital cities and the foyer model should therefore be attractive in this setting. There are, however, practical grounds for re-badging foyers as 'Structured Learning Tenancies'. It is a label that emphasises the housing component of youth

homelessness, the need for intervention and the positive learning outcomes associated with the program. It is worth noting also that Structured Learning Tenancies could be funded within existing Australian Government and State Government policy frameworks, with the Australians Working Together package able to fund initiatives of this nature. Policy makers advise that there could be substantial set up costs for each initiative of this nature. However, this should not discourage the implementation of a number of pilot projects in appropriate regional centres.

1. INTRODUCTION

This Final Report is the culmination of a research project on Homeless Young People in Rural Areas funded by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI). The research investigates new and better models of providing assistance to homeless young people in rural areas. It sets out contemporary approaches and practices for dealing with homelessness amongst rural young people, it evaluates the mechanisms for providing assistance in three states, and sets out user and provider input on alternative models of support. This research defines young people as those aged 12 to 25.

Commonly support for homeless persons is equated with the provision of shelters but current approaches to youth homelessness provide a spectrum of services, ranging from fully supported accommodation, to outreach accommodation and assistance with independent living through to holistic approaches addressing barriers to independence. This research considers the full range of supports offered to homeless young people in rural areas and how the links between them can help or hinder in meeting the needs of this vulnerable group.

The research questions embedded within this project fall within three interrelated themes: contribution to knowledge, contribution to policy and contribution to practice.

Contribution to knowledge

- What can we learn from the international and national literature about:

- Models for meeting the needs of homeless persons, especially young people, in rural areas?

- The pathways into and out of homelessness for young people in non-metropolitan Australia and are these different from the pathways in urban areas?

- The gendered nature of these models and pathways and consequences for intervention?

- Current State and Federal Government policy on young people's homelessness?

Contribution to policy

- Which State and Federal policies impinge upon homeless young people in rural areas and what impact do they have on both providers and consumers of support services?

- How can young people and support providers negotiate the shortage of exit points from formal support services, such as those provided under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)?

- What has been the impact in rural areas of initiatives such as the Innovative and Collaborative Youth Services (ICYS) funded by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services?

- Which State and Federal policies impinge upon homeless young people in rural areas and what impact do they have on both providers and consumers of support services?

- How can the policies and practices of public housing providers be improved to enhance longer-term housing options for young people in rural areas?

- How can State and Federal policies, programs and procurement processes be improved to strengthen community resources supporting rural young people toward independence?

- What challenges confront existing policies and programs and how can these be addressed to strengthen good practice?

Contribution to practice

- What are the experiences of homeless young people in rural areas and how do these experiences differ from what we know of homeless young people in urban areas?

- How are homeless young people in rural Australia supported and does their location make the delivery of services to this group more difficult? How can these services be delivered cost effectively?

- What are the personal and community constraints/barriers, which hinder young people in their journey to independence?

- What are the personal and community enablers, which assist young people in their journey to independence?

- Which strategies are available for addressing the shortage of public and private rental stock in many rural areas?

- What accommodation options are available to young people in rural areas (including emergency housing by both government and welfare agencies) and why are these options insufficient to meet the outstanding needs?

This Final Report attempts to answer these questions. In doing so it builds upon the conceptual analysis presented in the Positioning Paper and while parts of this earlier report are summarised here, readers should refer to the Positioning Paper in order to understand the range of conceptual issues underpinning our analysis of homelessness amongst young people in rural Australia. In this report we briefly review the literature on rural youth homelessness, discuss our methodology and its applications, present the results of our case studies and draw out the policy implications of our work. The policy implications of our work are an important feature of the project because there is a pressing need for more and better services for homeless young people living in non-metropolitan regions. Too often policy frameworks assume the homeless young people are willing – and perhaps even eager – to move to one of the capital cities, but this is not the case and there are strong theoretical and policy reasons for assisting them *in situ.* Farrin (2003) notes that homeless young people from the Eyre Peninsula in South Australia have a different pathway into homelessness when compared with the pathways described

by Chamberlain and McKenzie (2001). They proceed more slowly from occasional homelessness to on-going homelessness, but having made the transition (which is often associated with a move outside their region) are less likely to return to stable accommodation. Moreover, our research has uncovered a range of policy initiatives that could make significant advances in meeting the needs of homeless young people in rural areas. While some of these policies involve additional government resources, others would have little or no impact on public sector expenditures as they rely upon mobilising social capital.

1.1 Structure of the Report

This report is structured into five major sections. This section introduces the context and goals of the research. Section 2 reviews our understanding of the processes that contribute to homelessness amongst young people living in the non-metropolitan parts of Australia, and those factors that distinguish this group from their peers living in urban Australia. Section 3 reviews the methods used to complete this research. It discusses the selection of case study sites and some of the detail of how fieldwork was undertaken. Section 4 presents our findings from the case studies. It draws out the experiences of homeless young people in rural areas, and the challenges – and choices – they confront in their lives. The results of our fieldwork are presented in some detail because we felt that it was important to 'give voice' to the issues and challenges confronting these young people. In addition, there is considerable program and policy complexity surrounding youth homelessness and it is important to present this challenging environment in all its detail. Section 5 presents a discussion of current policy frameworks that are likely to have an impact on homeless young people. It suggests that the current macro-policy framework spelt out in the Australian Government's document *Australians Working Together* offers the flexibility and capacity to meet the real needs of homeless young people living in the country. However, other policy initiatives are needed also and these are discussed in this section. Finally, the policy implications of our research – and how they may translate into action on the ground – are discussed in Section 6.

2. UNDERSTANDING RURAL YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness remains a key social problem in Australia and one that has been subject to renewed attention in the policy arena (Allwood and Rogers 2001; Chamberlain and McKenzie 2001; Department of Family and Community Services 2000). However, the characteristics and experience of homelessness is not generic – homelessness differs according to social, economic, political and geographic contexts. Some of these variations have been studied but significant gaps remain within the evidence base surrounding youth homelessness. This study aims to develop models of service provision and assistance to homeless young people located in rural areas. In so doing, the study was guided by the following research questions and themes:

Contribution to knowledge

What can we learn from the international and national literature about:

- Models for meeting the needs of homeless persons, especially young people, in rural areas?

- The pathways into and out of homelessness for young people in non-metropolitan Australia and are these different from the pathways in urban areas?

- The gendered nature of these models and pathways and consequences for intervention?

- Current State and Federal Government policy on young people's homelessness?

2.1 Conceptual Framework

In investigating the research questions, the project was informed by the conceptual framework developed by Williams and Popay (1999). These authors developed four inter-linking conceptual domains that highlight the intersections of structure and agency, and their impacts on the causes, consequences and experiences of homelessness. Each domain is discussed briefly, below.

2.1.1 The welfare subject

Williams and Popay (1999) approach the welfare subject by investigating the intersections between agency, structure and social positions that mediate the intersection between the two. To fully appreciate the causes and implications of homelessness, we need to consider how young people understand their social position, their choices and opportunities, and how these interpretations are mediated through the wider social, cultural and economic context.

In the contemporary Australian context, empirical research has identified a series of relationships between homelessness and other negative outcomes. Compared to

their peers, homeless young people are more likely to suffer from mental health problems (Cauce *et al*, 2000; Kamieneicki, 2001; McCaskill, Toro and Wolfe, 1998; Unger, Kipke, Simon, Montogomery and Johnson, 1997); have poor physical health (Ensign, 2003); have higher rates of substance abuse (Unger *et al*, 1997; Diaz, Dusenbury, Botvin, and FarmerHuselid, 1997; Greene and Ringwalt, 1996); have a higher susceptibility to sexually transmitted diseases (Johnson, Aschkenasy, Herbers, and Gillenwater, 1996; Woods, 1998); be involved in prostitution (Kidd and Kral, 2002); be socially isolated (McCarthy, Hagan, and Martin, 2002; Rohde, Ferreira, Zomer, Forster, and Zimmermann, 1998); and have higher rates of offending behaviour (Bessant, 2001). In short, homeless young people face a series of disadvantages that impact upon their ability to negotiate and exit homelessness.

2.1.2 The social topography of enablement and constraint

A series of situational factors are linked to the risk of homelessness. A high proportion of homeless young people have reported physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, and/or come from backgrounds in which domestic violence was a feature of domestic life. Young people's initial decision to leave home often coincides with family conflict (Mitchell 1994). Those who have been placed in the care of the state also have a higher risk of homelessness (Cook and Lindsey 1996).

Age affects the significance of situational factors (Mass 1995). For example, clashes with or between parents are more common among those aged between 15-17 years (Delfabbro, Barber and Cooper, 2002). Younger children's homelessness is often the end result of a history of abuse and placement into care. Older teenagers often leave of their own volition and embark on a gradual pathway to homelessness marked by leaving and returning to the family home(s) and multiple, short term stays in various sources of accommodation.

Within Williams and Popay's (1999) second domain, the above patterns are part of a landscape of risk, opportunities and resources. While highlighting a series of risk factors, they also provide insight into the importance of resources. It is clear that young people often lack family support – an important emotional, financial and practical resource. This can mean that other resources – life skills for example, or the ability to manage relationships with others – are also difficult to acquire. Young people's choices and strategies are shaped by this domain.

2.1.3 The institutional and discursive context of policy formation

This domain refers to the broader social, economic and political conditions that impact upon the ability to find accommodation. Unemployment makes it difficult to meet the costs associated with the private rental market. Further, private landlords can be reluctant to rent their properties to those who cannot prove that they have the capacity to meet their on-going responsibilities as tenants. Policy decisions and priorities also impact on the types of housing available to young people. One example of institutional impacts is the SAAP system which is meant to provide short term housing and assistance to meet people's immediate needs. This focus on short term needs is oblivious to the fact that many young people need on-going support. Another example is the gap between how homelessness is understood within policy

and how it is experienced by young people. In many instances homelessness is defined in terms of physical structures and questions of identity and attachment to place are not recognised.[1] All of the above exert an impact upon how people are able to understand and negotiate their homelessness.

2.1.4 The contextual dynamics of social and economic change

Broader social and economic changes in society also shape young people's risk of homelessness. The list of contributing factors is long and includes:

- family breakdown and restructuring;

- segmented labour markets;

- reduced employment opportunities for young people, and increasingly unstable employment; significant numbers of low income families who are not able to financially support their teenage children; and

- changes in the housing market.

These contextual factors influence the landscape of enablement and constraint within which young people are located, while also intersecting with the institutional and policy context that shape people's access to housing.

In sum, Williams and Popay's (1999) framework is a useful device for understanding the manifestations and lived experience of homelessness among rural young people, and the needs that arise from their situation. In this instance, rurality would appear in all the domains identified by Willliams and Popay (1999). Rurality would help shape the welfare subject – and how they perceive themselves; it would shape the opportunities and constraints confronting the individual; and rural youth homelessness would be conceptualised within a rural or non-metropolitan policy framework.

2.2 Gender and Homelessness

It has already been noted that homelessness is not a generic or undifferentiated experience. Gender is particularly significant in shaping pathways into and out of homelessness, the services available to people, and the ways in which homelessness is experienced and interpreted. There is some suggestion that the extent of female homelessness may be increasing, although any conclusions on this score could only be tentative in light of the challenges of measuring homelessness generally (Aldridge 2001; Neil and Fopp, 1992). Irrespective of the number homeless women, there is increasing recognition that pathways into homelessness are gendered. Edgar and Doherty (2001) state that demographic and economic changes, particularly the restructuring of the labour market, have interacted with

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[1] The South Australian State Strategic Plan, for example, sets a goal of reducing the number of people sleeping rough by 2010. This focus clearly places a greater emphasis on primary homelessness – and associated physical structures, than secondary or tertiary homelessness.

political trends - such as the shrinking of the welfare state - to marginalize women and contribute to tenuous housing situations. These broader social patterns are joined by violence, addiction and mental health problems to further increase risk and differentiate women's experience of homelessness. Family violence, including sexual, physical and emotional abuse, have been identified as particular risk factors for women, and often precipitate their decision to leave their homes (Edgar 2001; Neil and Fopp 1991).

Homelessness is gendered in other ways. Gender and culture can intersect to create tensions between migrant parents and their children who aspire to 'Westernised' lives. The resulting conflict may contribute to the risk of homelessness (Webber, 2002). Neil and Fopp (1999 p.102) argue that when homeless, women face specific difficulties in gaining access to accommodation, particularly when they are responsible for the care and control of children. Homeless women also face other difficulties: women who are homeless report high rates of sexual and physical assault, pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease, and poor mental health (Crinall 1995; Mallett *et al*, 2001, p. 26; Nyamathi *et al,* 2000). In light of these differences, it is important that research and analysis is sensitive to the implications of gender.

2.3 Responses to Youth Homelessness

2.3.1 Models of Service Delivery

Given this study's aims, it is useful to consider the policy context and models of service delivery more closely. There is a vast array of services and programs aimed at meeting the needs of young people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. This report does not provide a comprehensive account of the options available; the following discussion outlines a typology of service delivery, developed by Bisset *et al* (1999), to contextualise the reported findings.

2.3.1.1 Outreach Models

Outreach models emphasise primary and/or secondary intervention, that is, they provide support to those young people who are at risk of homelessness (secondary intervention) or identify and support children before they enter high-risk categories (primary intervention. They seek to create partnerships between communities, business and governments in an attempt to address the structural underpinnings of homelessness. These programs attempt to identify needs and the risk that individuals and populations will become homelessness.

2.3.1.2 Intensive Support Models

Intensive support models are directed toward people with complex or high needs. They acknowledge the psychosocial correlates of homelessness and incorporate non-accommodation services. The level and diversity of support aims to minimize the factors that contribute to risk of homelessness, as well as meeting the clients' need for a roof over their heads.

2.3.1.3 Co-ordination Models

These models fit within a continuum of care approach, where housing is just one dimension of the support offered to individuals in need. They strengthen links between services and programs that reduce the risk of homelessness or address its occurrence, providing an integrated program responsive to clients' needs. As such, they recognise that the immediate problem of housing is only one of the issues facing clients. Co-ordination models are useful in addressing the problems faced by individuals who are seeking to gain access to diverse and possibly uncoordinated elements of the service system (see Goodall *et al*, 2001, p.9).

2.3.1.4 Generic Models

Generic models focus on the accommodation needs of clients as they arise. Programs within this model aim to meet the needs of a large client population rather than focussing on the needs of particular sub-groups. The model aims at moving people from short term, crisis accommodation into medium and long term housing and independent living.

2.3.1.5 Crisis Models

Crisis models are most evident in crisis centres which deal primarily with people with acute needs. They are reactive and do not address the underlying structural causes of homelessness. The services cannot provide long term support, facilitate independence and minimise repeat service usage (Victorian Homelessness Strategy Unit 2000a, p.9). The lack of exit points out of crisis accommodation creates its own problems, as people are not able to move into more stable and suitable accommodation, which in turn places further pressure on crisis accommodation (Department of Family and Community Services, 2000, p.17, Social Inclusion Initiative, 2002, p.13). However, services do offer a quick response in meeting the immediate needs of clients.

2.4 Current policy: primary and secondary intervention

Current policy emphasises the need for direct services and support to those young people who are at risk of homelessness (secondary intervention) or identifying and supporting children before they enter high-risk categories (primary intervention). This focus creates a significant role for families and educational institutions. For example, the federally funded Reconnect program targets young people before they have left home. The program attempts to reduce homelessness by drawing on mediation services to assist in reconciling young people and their parents (Evans and Shaver 2001). Other services emphasise the importance of schools. In Victoria, the Keeping In Touch With School program places outreach workers in schools to identify and support young people who are at risk of homelessness or who are experiencing other associated problems. Support is centred on case management and includes information on employment opportunities, social and welfare services and peer networks within the school.

Evans and Shaver (2001) argue that such approaches are useful but face a series of challenges. First, they assume that reconciliation is possible; this is not always the case. Second, they focus on those young people who are at risk of homelessness or who have only recently left home; young people who are homeless for long periods fall outside their ambit. Third, the programs are dependent on an array of services that are not always available or satisfactory; even finding appropriate housing can be a challenge, particularly in rural areas. Fourth, rural areas and small towns can make it difficult to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Fifth, schools may be reluctant to participate, particularly where the institution emphasises academic achievements and curriculum outcomes.

2.5 Rural Homelessness

The resources, opportunities and structures mentioned so far in this paper are manifest in different ways, according to context. Studies indicate that homelessness in rural areas raises a different set of issues from those attached to homelessness in cities. In rural areas private rental markets can be limited, particularly in non-metropolitan areas that are sparsely settled (Beer, Maude and Pritchard, 2003). Tenants often face high rental costs due to competition, and the stock may be sub-standard (Yardy and Thompson 2003). Caravan parks offer an alternative to houses but they are by no means ideal. For example, Greenhalgh (2003) found that caravan parks are a relatively high cost accommodation option and their numbers are decreasing. Those managing the parks are often reluctant to accept long term tenants because the holiday market is more lucrative. Further, management practices are often restrictive and the rights afforded to tenants are limited. Finally, caravan parks can be unsafe for those who live in them, in some country towns they are the focus of the drug and other counter-culture activities. In short, people in rural areas must often make do with limited and sub-standard housing options.

The problems associated with housing markets are exacerbated by the challenges of providing accommodation and support services in rural areas. These difficulties arise from a number of sources: political structure; political and economic history; economic policy; geography; and urban development all play a part. During consultations with people living outside Melbourne, The Victorian Homelessness Strategy (2000) noted a series of issues specific to rural areas:

- Changing economic conditions have lead to greater poverty and a loss of local resources and infrastructure.

- People are isolated from services.

- Policy and service provision are designed and managed centrally. There is an inadequate understanding of the needs of those living in non-metropolitan areas.

- Rural areas face staffing issues in human services, including a high turnover rate, staff shortages, and skill gaps.

- Crisis accommodation is severely limited in rural areas, forcing people to move to one of the capital cities or at the very least one of the regional cities. Relocation can dissolve important social networks.

The practical challenges listed above are compounded by the more symbolic questions of home and place. It could be argued that for many clients moving to a capital city is a potentially valuable pathway for finding appropriate accommodation and employment. However, young people born and raised in non-metropolitan regions have strongly developed emotional and social attachments to the areas in which they live. Further, the employment opportunities for unskilled young people in the cities are not much better than those in rural areas. Additionally, people may lose their social supports when they relocate to the city, a loss that is compounded if they have not developed the life skills necessary to manage this transition (Farrin 2003). In short, policy development must recognise the benefits – emotional, social and practical – that accrue from staying in rural areas.

2.6 Conclusion: Understanding Rural Youth Homelessness

Young people's pathways into homelessness are associated with the intersection of structure and agency. Researchers have highlighted a series of risk factors associated with the social and economic position of these young people, and these in turn are shaped by changes in the broader social, economic and political contexts in which people live their lives. However according to Williams and Popay (1999), it is important to include the individual within our understandings of the dynamics of homelessness. Developing models of good practice in meeting the needs of the homeless also necessitates an appreciation of how individuals interpret and negotiate their situations. In short, it is important to acknowledge that those who are homeless both act upon and are acted upon, and this is a dynamic process.

Rural areas offer a particular set of challenges to the development of models of effective service delivery. Demographic, economic, geographic, developmental and political issues can create barriers to service delivery. These combine with an individuals' own emotional or symbolic connections to particular regions, and the practical and social benefits of remaining in often under serviced areas. When developing models of good practice, both the structural and the interpretive elements of the issue need to be acknowledged and addressed.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

The research for this project was undertaken in five stages, with each stage contributing to the understanding of rural youth homelessness and the identification of the policy implications relevant to providing better services.

3.1 Literature Review

The first component of this project involved the examination of national and international published academic and policy literature on strategies to address youth homelessness; rural housing; rural homelessness; the evaluation of housing programs; and, the differing experiences of homeless young men and women. The outcomes of this stage of the research were used to inform fieldwork and to provide the context for understanding the causes of youth homelessness generally, and rural youth homelessness in particular. The literature review also shed light on aspects of rural housing markets that are likely to affect young people (see the Positioning Paper, published on www.ahuri.edu.au/publications).

3.2 The Review of Youth Homelessness Policies and Initiatives

The second stage of the research identified current initiatives affecting youth homelessness in order to determine the full range of strategies and processes used. This stage served two purposes: first, it informed our understanding of the institutional context of current practice. That is, it was used to assist the research team understand how current models of support for homeless rural youth have been developed and applied. This was an important step toward the development of policy options later in the project. Second, an understanding of current policy initiatives was recognised as being critical for our efforts in assessing the effectiveness of existing programs and actions in rural settings.

3.3 Examination of Current Models

In this stage of the research we visited youth accommodation services and other support services in Bunbury/Busselton in Western Australia, Mount Gambier and Mount Barker in South Australia, Launceston in Tasmania and Bendigo in Victoria. Each of these places served as a case study of service delivery models and challenges within that jurisdiction. In each instance we focussed on youth accommodation services and needs in a major regional centre because smaller settlements lack services and homeless young services are forced to travel to a provincial centre. The case studies were selected because they reflected diversity in

service provision, policy frameworks, the strength of the local economy, distance from the State capital and population size.

- Mount Barker was selected as it falls within metropolitan Adelaide's commuting zone but it has retained a strong rural identity. It was also a convenient location for piloting fieldwork techniques and questions.

- Bunbury and Busselton were selected because their youth accommodation service has a strong record of service provision and innovation. Bunbury and Busselton are booming coastal towns, with considerable pressure on local housing markets as a result of in-migration from metropolitan Perth.

- Mount Gambier was selected as it is remote from the State capitals of Melbourne and Adelaide, it lacks a State-funded SAAP service for youth but hosts one of the Australian Government funded Integrated Community Youth Services (ICYS) projects.

- Ballarat was selected as a major urban centre (population of approximately 100,000) that services a large agricultural hinterland. Significantly, homeless young people throughout the Wimmera and other districts either move to Ballarat to secure accommodation support or receive remote support out of this centre.

- Launceston was selected as it hosts the only non-Hobart based youth accommodation service in Tasmania. The absence of services in smaller centres – especially the relatively densely populated North West region – presents significant challenges for the delivery of assistance.

In each case study we:

a) interviewed the service provider(s) to document current practices.

b) interviewed relevant public sector officials (youth support, State Housing Authority etc) both in the rural centre and in the capital city about philosophies of assistance for homeless rural youth.

c) conducted focus groups with clients in order to gauge how they came to use these supports; what alternatives were available to them; what types of assistance were most important to them; what skills/abilities/resources they would require in order to achieve independence; their perception of the barriers to gaining access to accommodation; the impact of gender; and, the importance they attached to staying within their region. Clients were contacted through the offices of one or more service providers in the regional centre and in all cases we attempted to collect information from clients in ways that were non-threatening, that recognised that the young people may not be able or willing to articulate their thoughts and feelings verbally, and which were sensitive to differences in race, gender and sexuality. In all case studies we incorporated picture drawing – of their 'ideal house' – into the data collection. We also engaged youth consultants to help organise the workshops and manage their proceedings. In some instances we conducted male only, or

female only, focus groups, and where appropriate we recruited Indigenous youth consultants. A significant number of Indigenous young people participated in our various focus groups but no Indigenous-specific issues emerged from our research. In part, this reflected the generic scale of the research questions but it was also indicative of the common problems confronting homeless young people in rural areas, regardless of their cultural background.

3.4 Data Collection

It is important to recognise that we could not be entirely systematic in our data collection processes because they young people we sought to collect data from live relatively unstructured lives. In all case studies we conducted at least one, and sometimes multiple workshops with young people and this depended upon the willingness of young people to participate in the workshops; the degree to which service providers were willing and able to assist in organising focus groups; and, the nature of the issues raised by the participants. Throughout the research we did not attempt to force all workshops into a single structure but instead, began with a set of common questions and then pursued individual lines of enquiry as the focus group proceeded. In some instances the researchers focussed on particular issues or groups of issues as opportunities arose. For example, the Western Australia case study developed a specific focus on issues of gender and sexuality, while the Mt Gambier case study had a strong focus on guardianship issues and Indigenous youth. The focus groups were not taped because we felt that this method of data collection would prejudice the conversation within the focus group.

3.4.1 Data Collection Protocol

A protocol for collecting data was established prior to fieldwork. Its key elements included:

- The point of contact for the agencies was the lead academic. The Research Assistant made initial contact in determining relevant people for the academic to speak with, as well as organising the travel/accommodation arrangements to attend the focus group;

- Lead academic spoke with the service provider prior to the focus group day regarding how the focus was to be run, the age groups and genders represented, where the members of the focus groups are from within the region, the role of the Youth Consultants and any other information relevant to the study;

- Focus groups were to have approximately 17 people – two academics, three youth Consultants, 12 participants. Lead academic will make contact with the agency to organise best dates for focus group, payment arrangements, types of issues to be discussed, discussion of service provided. The researcher spoke with the Youth Consultants prior to the focus and provided some

training;

- An Information Package was sent to the agencies prior to the running of the focus groups. This allowed the Youth Consultants to have as much information as possible on what the project was concerned with, what their role was to be, specific tasks we wished them to undertake, paperwork to be completed (such as the Informed Consent Form), as well as who to contact in the research team if problems arise;

- The Youth Consultants were recruited several weeks in advance by the service providers;

- Local policy makers were identified and invited to the workshops at each case study;

- The researchers met with the Youth Consultants before the focus group began. The Youth Consultants helped with organisational matters such as ordering the pizzas for the focus groups;

- The focus groups were to start with an informal talk whilst eating the pizza. The researchers and the youth consultants explained the purpose of the project, followed by a general discussion about how the focus group would be run. An informal laminated poster was presented at each focus group that offered information on what we hoped to achieve. Discussion in the groups was to be flexible in order to allow the young people to talk. The focus groups had a limited number of structured questions but focussed on the key themes identified in the project plan.

- The information collected from the focus groups was recorded on notes taken by one of the two researchers, as well as on butcher's paper. The written outcomes of the focus groups was a combination of the information provided by the youth consultants; the notes taken by the researchers; and the information recorded on butchers paper;

3.4.2 Questions for Focus Groups

A series of questions were developed for the focus groups with young people and the discussion with service providers and policy people in each case study.

1. Questions for Young People

(A) Generic

- How do young people end up needing housing support?

- How do young people first learn about support?

- What type of support and help do young people need? – What supports are available?

- In using housing support do young people have an end in mind?

- What stops young people from getting a place to live?

- What do young people do to get by?

- In a diagram form describe the different stages of their pathway to being homeless.

- What would home look like?

- Map where you have been for assistance?

(B) First person

- What do you want? What do you hope will happen a. tomorrow; b. in 3 months; c. in 1 year?

- How important is it for you to live in this town or region?

- What would you change? What would you get John Howard to change?

- What supports help you? How could they be improved?

- Who has made a difference in your life? Who has made it?

- What are your next steps for housing and how are you going to make that happen?

2. Questions for service providers

- Ask all (A) questions and (B) questions to be re-worked.

- Can you give some examples of young people who have made it? What made that possible?

- What are the challenges for the programmes/policies they are involved with?

- What are the challenges for the rural providers relative to the cities?

- Do you have an opportunity to feedback to policy makers?

- Are you aware of Federal and State government policy initiatives? Are they compatible? For example, RECONNECT or ICYS?

- How can the policies and practices of public housing providers be improved to enhance longer-term housing options for young people in rural areas?

- Who is involved in supporting young people in housing in their region?

Overall, this stage of the research provided pivotal information on current practice in delivering services to homeless rural youth. In commencing this research we had anticipated that we would be able to identify a number of different models across the three states, each with strengths and weaknesses and to a certain degree, this expectation was realised.

3.5 Assessment of Policy Options

In the fourth stage of the project we distilled the information from the previous three stages into a series of propositions and/or models of service delivery to homeless youth. These propositions included statements to the effect that is possible to construct models of good practice where one possibility is for NGOs to work in

partnership with government funders to develop longer term accommodation options. This option could include the development of life skills training in the young person's home own home (essentially foyers) as well as an integrated program of training that develops life skills first, then learning skills. These options may require reform of Commonwealth priorities. Alternatively, service providers could act as guarantor for privately rented properties and include life skills as part of the tenancy. Other statements related to reviewing the way funds are allocated by region, rethinking the category 'youth' and strategies for achieving greater levels of co-ordination. These propositions were then presented to policy makers, service providers and consumers through a focus group held in Adelaide in October 2003. At this focus group we presented a range of policy innovations to the participants and received their comments on their appropriateness and their ability to be implemented. This stage of the research was important in helping identify the most effective policy options, but also helped us understand how best to present our findings.

3.6 Write Up of the Results and Feedback to Participants

The final stage of the research involved presenting the outcomes of the research to participants in the study – in particular the providers, but also the users of the services – with a chance to comment on the outcomes. This was seen to be essential as it provided closure for those who have assisted us, and helped facilitate the transfer of our research findings into the policy arena.

4. OUTCOMES OF THE FIELDWORK

This section presents the outcomes of our fieldwork across southern Australia. Each of the case studies is discussed in turn with the important themes and issues to emerge from each case study discussed in detail. While common methods were used in all cases, the case studies are presented in slightly different ways and consider a varying range of issues because of the different priorities and needs identified in each place. In some instances these differences reflect the characteristics of the town, while elsewhere they are a function of the clients of the service provider.

4.1 Key Themes Within the Case Studies

The case studies generated a wealth of material on homeless young people and the problems confronting them within non-metropolitan Australia. In many respects the case studies have reinforced processes and outcomes discussed in the literature, but they have also added fresh insights to our stock of knowledge. For example, the case studies have drawn out much more acutely than we anticipated the value young people place on staying within their community, as well as the role of friendship networks in supporting them. Place and community is clearly an important issue, with many of the participants expressing very narrowly defined concepts of community. For instance, young people from Mt Barker saw Adelaide and Murray Bridge as dangerous, unacceptable places, while those in Ballarat considered Melbourne and Bendigo in a similar light.

One of the interesting insights to emerge was the movement of some young people to non-metropolitan regions from the capital cities in order to 'escape' perceived risks, such as drugs, the threat of violence and former relationships. However, others see life in the country as more limited and potentially contributing to risky behaviours such as drug taking. Gay and lesbian young people appear to move to the capital cities in order to live within a more accepting society. We also observed significant differences in the social construction of homelessness between the genders. In Launceston, for example, young women were seen to be more likely to be accommodated in emergency housing because they were more persistent in their requests for help, and more accepting of the bureaucratic process. Young men by contrast, would ask once and then proceed to couch surf. A similar pattern of gender difference was evident in both Ballarat and Mt Barker.

Problems in gaining access to the housing stock were a consistent theme in all the case studies. In all centres there was insufficient crisis or emergency accommodation for young people and there were insufficient exit points, with persons under 18 essentially locked out of the rental market, and those over 18 experiencing great difficulty in gaining access to the stock. In some instances these problems in the housing market was exacerbated by limited life skills, resulting in the loss of the tenancy, financial loss and potentially further discrimination.

Many of the young people we spoke with had problems gaining access to services and dealing with the 'adult' world. Participants in the focus groups offered many instances in which they had been patronised or talked down to. They found the adults they dealt with to be 'pigheaded' and they wanted them to listen more and recognise that they hadn't lived through what the young people were going through. Many young people focused on the kind of treatment they wanted to receive rather than the types of services. They wanted 'some help, not a lot'; and they wanted to be 'shown what to do to help yourself'. They did not want to be mothered. They wished to be provided with services in a way that acknowledged their independence and facilitated their further progress.

Throughout the case studies we observed that the risk factors identified in the literature were clearly evident in the lives of the young people we met with. Key triggers for homelessness included: conflict in the family home associated with a step parent or other family member; a history of physical or other violence within the home; dropping out from school; differences with parents about their level of independence; and, coming from a background of low income. Many of the young people had multiple risk factors in their backgrounds. We also noted that many of the young people who participated in the focus groups were either currently or had been under the Guardianship of the Minister, either in foster care or in independent living arrangements because foster care arrangements were not available. The literature suggests that foster care arrangements can lead to homelessness and this expectation was reinforced by our observations. In a number of centres service providers commented on the shortage of foster care families and the impact this had on accommodating young people.

Finally, it is worth noting that the young people we spoke to tended to look for and use services **after** they had become homeless. As the Positioning Paper within this research project has emphasised, a great deal of policy attention has focussed on early intervention strategies and reconciliation with their families. However, our case studies have shown that many of the young people saw that their separation from their immediate family was either irrevocable or – at the very least – a long-term phenomenon. This attitude was summed up by Prue[2] an 18 year old from Tasmania who expressed the view that 'You and your parents shouldn't be in a house together'. Focus group members in all case studies described high and sustained levels of family conflict, both verbal and physical, which directly contributed to their leaving home, or being forced out of the family home. The dynamics included step-parents and natural parents, siblings and in one case extended kin networks. Family upheaval (losing a farm, attempted suicide of mother) and breakdown was also part of the mix. Perhaps associated with the family breakdown, it was striking how dispersed their families were, as well as the *ad hoc* nature of their on-going contact with their families. For example, Jon participated in the Launceston focus group and his family were spread across Tasmania and Victoria. He described his family as moving to get away from him.

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[2] Not the real name of a respondent.

The conflict within families that leads to many young people becoming homeless may be an impediment to the successful use of family mediation strategies and early intervention strategies designed to return they young person to their home. It may also contribute to a lack of preparedness for homelessness, as conflict is a sudden trigger to leave the family home and few young people had any understanding of the sorts of early intervention strategies potentially available to them. Young people's knowledge of services was partial, and highly personalised. Frequently they left the family home with little idea as to the services potentially available to them and found out about supports either through contacts they met on the street or via previous family experience with social supports. Very few young people were sufficiently informed to make pro-active choices about the services they would use and this reinforced the dependence upon conventional measures, such as housing support, JPET or other assistance that becomes available after homelessness has commenced.

4.2 Mt Barker Case Study

The pilot focus group with young people was held in Mount Barker, the regional centre for the Adelaide Hills region in South Australia. Located in the Mount Lofty Ranges 40 kilometres east of Adelaide, the 23,000 residents of the Mount Barker district have until recently enjoyed a rural lifestyle but the recent upgrade of the South Eastern freeway has made the region accessible to city commuters, and brought significant economic and social changes. As a result, the population has increased 15 per cent from 20,000 in 1996, compared with the State average of 6 per cent growth (Mount Barker DC 2003). Regional infrastructure is struggling to cope with this rapid expansion and young people are confronted by challenges common to many within their age group. Young people in Mount Barker, however, may be slightly better off than their peers living elsewhere as those aged 15 to 19 years have a full-time unemployment rate of 19.2 per cent compared with the State average of 28.2 per cent (Employment and Skills Formation Directorate 2003).

Young people in the region receive support primarily from their family and friends. There are insufficient support services for young people and many of the government-funded services are based outside the Adelaide Hills region, providing only minimal outreach locally. Family and Youth Services (FAYS) and the South Australian Housing Trust (SAHT) of the state Department for Human Services are based in Murray Bridge. Baptist Community Services manage two local SAAP accommodation properties and an outreach service from their base in southern Adelaide. The Murraylands Supported Accommodation Service, run by Centacare and the Service to Youth Council, commenced in Murray Bridge in July 2003 and currently has no services for young people in Mount Barker. Lutheran Community Care provides the Commonwealth Job Placement Employment and Training (JPET) program from the Onkaparinga Institute of TAFE in Mount Barker. A partnership initiative between FAYS, SAHT, SAAP and JPET, the Murraylands Youth

Accommodation Project, had successfully placed homeless young men in housing with co-ordinated support from regional organisations. This project ceased due to SAAP changes in June 2003.

The focus group was held at the Onkaparinga Institute of TAFE, Mount Barker, in June 2003 and involved eight young people who are, or have been, homeless. All participants indicated they enjoyed living in the "Hills" and many had lived in the area for most of their lives. Both Adelaide and Murray Bridge were seen as undesirable places by comparison. Most of the young people were not prepared to leave the Hills in order to seek accommodation and/or employment, and identified their close support network of friends and family as the strongest factor keeping them in the Hills. Indeed a number of the participants – male and female – saw places such as Adelaide and Murray Bridge as full of risk and danger. This was a common theme in many of the case studies where the individual's perception of self was largely shaped by their community and what could be recognised as 'bonding' social capital.

Young people in the focus group described their experiences as a series of places they have stayed, and shared a sense of having no control in overcoming their homelessness. Some of the young men resorted to living in tents in friends' backyards, sleeping on different friends' couches (couch surfing), living in a tent in the bush for three weeks, and sleeping among the bushes of the TAFE garden. Accessing public housing was seen to be very difficult. A young woman in the group spoke about waiting for the past two and a half years to obtain SAHT accommodation, despite having three letters of support. As a young, single mother who may not dress the 'right' way she felt that private rental places were virtually impossible to obtain. At the time of the focus group this young woman and her child were in temporary SAAP housing, which she was soon required to vacate without any further SAAP support.

The young people commented that to obtain a house in the region a person must be over 18 and able to gain access to private rental housing and even then it is difficult. Private rental houses in the area average approximately $180 per week. Young people may be considered irresponsible by real estate agents and landlords, and frequently refused properties in the private real estate market. All agreed that their network of friends helped them get by as they stay at friend's places and that if that friend was later without accommodation they would offer accommodation in turn. There was a very strong commitment to trying to help each other out in times of hardship.

4.2.1 Personal and community constraints/barriers hindering journey to independence

Further to the difficulties identified in accessing housing, and support services, some of the young men in the group indicated that transport to work was a problem. They seemed able to find employment, frequently out of town, but found it difficult to travel to work, as most of them did not own a vehicle. They relied on public transport that

was infrequent or they relied on friends to transport them to work. Young women in Mt Barker did not see this to be as great a concern as many were able to find employment in retail outlets within the township. Health was also big issue to these young people. Most of the participants seemed to have unbalanced diets due to their lack of housing and money. They felt it was expensive to receive good medical attention, with a 5-year waiting list for public dental services. Some of the young people (21 years of age) had recently had teeth removed.

4.2.2 Personal and community enablers assisting the journey to independence

The only support service identified by these young people was JPET, which had been recommended to most of the participants by Centrelink and/or friends. Although some of the young people had stayed in SAAP housing, they did not mention this as a support service. Many of the young people spoke of their training and/or studies at TAFE, or the new Adelaide Hills Vocational College (alternative education) based at TAFE. The sorts of services and supports provided by JPET are discussed in Box 1.

The **Real Life** program is offered at Mount Barker and aims to help young people overcome barriers to gaining entry into private rental housing. It is an independent living skills training package, written by young people for young people, and is facilitated by young people to ensure the message is relevant and can be heard by participants (Star 2003). Topics covered in the **Real Life** program include the rights and responsibilities of landlord and tenant, how to complete lease and inspection forms, presentation for rental interviews, respecting neighbours, budgeting, and affordable cooking. The program has community involvement from local Real Estate agents who serve as guest speakers. Participants receive a Certificate of Completion, which they can use as a reference to help them obtain a rental property. Two young people have successfully obtained rental properties since completing the course. In addition the program has increased the reality of moving out of home, and hopefully encouraged more young people to stay at home for longer.

The Murraylands Supported Accommodation Service (MSAS) is a general SAAP service run by Centacare covering a large area including Mt Barker, Murray Bridge, the Coorong and Mallee regions of South Australia. They have a broad client range and support young people with accommodation and other activities, such as living skills, counselling services, training and eduction. Often young people refer themselves to the service or they are referred by other services such as FAYS or the Housing Trust. The support service provided by the MSAS is driven by young people who take control of their lives. The MSAS connects, engages, supports and develops a plan with the young person and an Outreach service is provided to help young people remain in their existing housing and to prevent them from entering a cycle of homelessness. The service supports an increasing number of clients with high and complex needs, often with clusters of issues such as emerging mental health problems, fleeing domestic violence and drug and alcohol problems. These clients need individualised plans of assistance.

Generally the properties provided by the MSAS are a mix of 1, 2 and 3 bedroom dwellings covering a range of houses, attached houses and units. The leases for MSAS properties fall under the jurisdiction of the Residential Tenancies Tribunal but evictions are rare. The MSAS has a philosophy of trying to support the young person through the problems that are causing them to breach the Act rather than evict them immediately. MSAS has separated the counselling service from the accommodation service so that the social worker dealing with a young person's complex issues are not also dealing with issues such as possible eviction. However, due to funding shortages, this is often difficult as there is insufficient staff to cover both tasks.

The MSAS tries to avoid a "waiting list" for their houses even though the demand for housing is high due to the lack of suitable rental properties in rural areas. When a young person first contacts the MSAS they are assessed to determine whether the MSAS can support the young person in private housing, in their current housing or via an outreach service. The MSAS has few dwellings available for young people who are experiencing an accommodation crisis and removing young people from remote areas such as the Mallee is difficult due to the absence of public transport.

The MSAS run a program known as the Rent Club to help young people access private rental properties and it is very similar to the Real Life Program. It is a one day intensive program where young people learn about the issues related to renting. The topics covered include leases, rights and responsibilities, budgeting, paying rent on time, applying for rental properties and personal presentation for rental interviews.

Box 1. How Agencies Seek to Assist Young People in Rural Areas

SCENARIO: JAKE AT SIXTEEN

Jake[3] is sixteen years old and living in a regional centre four hours from the nearest capital city. He has been living on and off with his younger siblings, mother, and her new partner, in one of the small local towns, and staying with local mates for a night or two as time out in between stays at home. He has recently been sleeping among the bushes along the railway line into the regional centre 45 minutes from his Mum's home, and visiting different acquaintances in the town for food or a shower from time to time. The conflict with his step-father had finally 'blown up' and he no longer felt safe, wanted or happy to remain there.

Jake approached Centrelink in the regional centre for help with money and to find a job. Centrelink gave him some forms to fill out so he could start receiving payments in a couple of weeks, and referred him to a local youth service, Jobs Placement Employment and Training (JPET) for more help. Jake had heard about JPET from some of his mates, so decided to check it out.

Jake approached JPET for assistance with finding employment. He was hoping that by securing work he would be able to afford to share a rental property with mates. JPET was able to put him in contact with the local youth accommodation service funded by SAAP and they worked with him to look at options for public and private

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[3] Not the real name of a respondent. This box is simply indicative of the challenges confronting homeless young people and the policies and support made available to them.

rental accommodation. They explained that because he was under eighteen it would be difficult to rent a place himself, so it might take many months to find a house for him.

JPET helped Jake understand and work through the application process with Centrelink, and worked with him on practical things like keeping in touch with his Mum, setting up a bank account and getting his health care card. At times Jake presented at Centrelink, JPET or SAAP very positive and eager to start work as soon as possible, at other times when he was feeling worried about all that was happening, or had other challenges happening around him, he missed appointments and did not return to the services for several weeks.

Over the next nine months SAAP and JPET worked together to support Jake in moving into a share rental property with friends, doing a local adventure based course where he met new friends and had a go at new challenges, developed a resume and started to look for work in some of the local businesses.

4.3 Mount Gambier Case Study

Mount Gambier is a large regional city (population 24,000), approximately 400 kilometres from Adelaide, located on the South-East coast of South Australia. The city derives most of its income from intensive primary production in the form of logging and wood-chipping, market-gardening and dairy products. Its proximity to southern Victoria and the Limestone Coast, as well as many local features has made it a popular tourist destination. It is also a hub for large Interstate transport and farm equipment companies.

Focus group interviews were conducted in Mt. Gambier with representatives from Government and non-Government agencies as well as with approximately 15 young people aged 15-20 years. Agency representatives indicated that at least 50 young people were persistently homeless in the area, but that very few were living rough on the streets. Almost all were 'couch surfing' with friends or living in temporary or supported accommodation. Most of these young people had left home because of domestic violence or abuse, conflict with parents, new partners entering the home, or their parents' unwillingness to deal with their absences or behaviour in the family home.

Ongoing difficulties in finding stable accommodation were generally attributed to three principal factors. The first of these was the very limited supply of affordable accommodation in the area for young people. Mount Gambier has no State-funded SAAP accommodation, an expensive private rental market, and State Housing Trust accommodation is restricted to young people aged 18 years and older. Other supported accommodation options are generally restricted to young families rather than individual young people. Caravan parks generally refuse to take young homeless people, and boarding houses or hostels are considered undesirable because recently released prisoners from Mt. Gambier gaol use them. A second problem was that there appeared to be insufficient support workers and outreach services to assist the transition to independent living. Young people often lacked

have the necessary skills to live independently, allowed the houses to fall into neglect, or allowed other young people to use the house as a 'drop-in' centre.

A third difficulty was that young people often did not have the financial resources to live independently. Connection fees for utility bills were considered excessive; young people were unable to secure any insurance cover on their possessions; and many reported difficulties in obtaining sustained employment. Although supermarket and shop work was available, boys reported that they were seldom able to take advantage of these opportunities. At the same time, the saw mills offered few alternative opportunities because they did not regard young people as having sufficient maturity to undertake high-risk factory or lumber work, and the Coonawarra wine-growing region required the availability of consistent transport each morning and night.

In terms of services, young people were strongly critical of Centrelink's policy of reducing allowance and entitlements in response to increased incomes, and saw this as a strong disincentive to work. They also criticised the fact that Centrelink payments were not provided until 16 years of age; considered the penalties for non-compliance with job searching excessively harsh given the limited opportunities, and resented the paperwork required to establish payments because it required the agency to interact with family members from whom they were often estranged. Young people also reported having had contact with JPET, SE Anglicare Services, Lutheran Services (St. Martin's House), The Department of Family and Youth Services (FAYS), and the Salvation Army. Most acknowledged the effort being made on their behalf, but were disappointed with the opportunities provided. FAYS was singled out for particular criticism because of the perceived problems with the foster care system. A very significant shortage of adolescent placements in the region meant that contact with FAYS would lead to referrals to placements in Adelaide, and a separation from familiar surrounds and friends. Young people preferred to return to the streets than be placed into care. Almost all expressed a very strong attachment to the region and identified with the tranquillity, predictability, comfort and safety of the city, and contrasted it with potentially harmful, over-whelming and unpredictable life that would face them elsewhere; for example, in Adelaide or Melbourne.

In response to these concerns, both young people and agency representatives expressed an urgent need to provide an emergency youth shelter in Mt. Gambier with 24-hour services to respond to crises. There was also a need for a supervised 'drop-in' centre where young people could socialize, network, and become aware of the services that were available. The idea of a service directory had been specifically identified in the recently initiated ICYS program located in the Mt. Gambier region. More broadly, agencies called for greater State support for SAAP housing in the region and a recognition that Mt. Gambier, despite its reputation for salubriousness and wealth, also contained very significant pockets of social disadvantage. As one agency reported, the difficulties experienced in Mt. Gambier, have on some cases, led to many referrals having to be made to services located on the south coast of Victoria, where youth accommodation options were seem to be better developed and funded.

4.4 Bunbury and Busselton

4.4.1 Context

The Western Australian study examined two regional locations, Bunbury and Busselton in the South West region of the state. In 1996 the Greater Bunbury region, which includes Bunbury and Busselton, had a population of approximately 24,885. The forecast is that the region will grow by a further 32,000 by 2011 with Busselton expecting to experience the greater rise in overall population – from 18,158 in 1996 to 33,000 in 2011 (Western Australian Planning Commission, 2003, p. 33). With regards to the current population profile of young people, the proportion of people aged between 15 and 29 in Western Australia is 23 per cent, while in the South-West of the state the proportion of young people in the same category is approximately 19 per cent. Bunbury has a slightly higher rate (21 per cent) of young people (Western Australian Planning Commission, 2003, p. 33).

There are a greater proportion of households in the region living on lower incomes than the Western Australian average. The 2001 Census of Population and Households revealed that the median wage bracket for all persons living in the South West was $300-$399 per week with approximately 45 per cent of individual earnings within the $160-$600 per week bracket. While 25 per cent of Western Australian households have average weekly incomes that are greater than $1000 per week only 20.5 per cent of households in the South-West have incomes in this bracket (Western Australian Planning Commission, 2003, p. 39). Employment in the South-West region relies primarily on the Retail Trade, Manufacturing, Health and Community Services sectors, and increasingly in service and tourist sectors. There is a range of government and non-government funded community services agencies operating in the South West region. A prison is located on the outskirts of Bunbury.

4.4.2 Agency

Agencies for South West Accommodation Inc (ASWA) agreed to participate in the study. ASWA commenced in 1983 and has a mission to 'provide a holistic and integrated range of services to people in the South West community' (ASWA, 2002). The organisation provides services to people across the life span with a number of programs specifically targeted towards young people who are either homeless or at risk of being homeless. ASWA receives funding from multiple sources and offers 14 programs including a substance program, prison outreach, partnership in housing, youth support and accommodation services, tenant advocacy services, emergency relief, Job Placement, Employment and Training (JPET), parenting program, rural youth information service, men's relationship program and Reconnect. ASWA has an explicit organisational culture that values action research to assist in identifying possible needs and developing appropriate service delivery to meet the identified needs (an action research approach is part of the Federal government's homelessness strategy). Interviews were held with nine service providers working through ASWA and 22 young people participated in four gender specific focus

groups. The interviews and focus groups were conducted at ASWA sites in Bunbury and Busselton over a two-day period.

4.4.3 Being homeless

One of the key issues to emerge in discussions with young people who are 'homeless' is the importance of their own capacity for self-definition. In the main 'homelessness' is much more than the absence of bricks and mortar. In response to questions about what is it to be 'homeless' a recurring theme emerged. Being homeless is:

> not having a roof over their head, not having a safe and secure accommodation, not having an emotional attachment to home, not having a choice about where home is, not having enough food to eat

> having to live portably – eating packaged food, restrictions on clothing and possessions, not being able to have pets and not belonging.

Many of the young people interviewed discussed tensions and abuse within the home as reasons for being homeless. Living with abuse, family conflict and tensions emerging from a range of family arrangements i.e. step parent/step brothers and step sisters were given as triggers to pathways into homelessness. In the shift from a nuclear family unit to a range of family arrangements some young people were caught and left behind in the time/space between the dismantling of one family arrangement and the reforming of another. Young people wanting to be independent earlier than their parents wanted them to be was given as another common source of conflict within the home. In addition service providers identified an increase in the incidence of homeless young males who have experienced abuse, young pregnant women and/or mothers and young people without positive role models in their lives. An increasing trend of young people being violent to their parents was another trigger to homelessness that was noted by agency workers.

Some respondents identified 'generational homelessness' or situations where their parents experienced homelessness and now the young people are seemingly reproducing similar experiences. An example given was of parents who grew up in State care. This has impacted on their sense of 'place' and/or 'home' and the level of personal skills and knowledge gained by them. This in turn has made bringing up their children that more complicated.

Lesbian and gay young people are considered particularly vulnerable in rural areas. According to some of the agency workers interviewed, lesbian and gays inevitably leave and move to the city in the expectation that they will experience acceptance and be able to express their sexuality openly and safely. An increasing incidence of bullying as well as problems at school were raised as triggers into homelessness by both focus group participants and service providers.

In practice the young homeless people who participated in this study engaged in a range of ways of ensuring they have a place to sleep. It is not uncommon for young people to 'bed-hop' or 'couch surf'. Some reside in short term accommodation

offered by BUNYAP who also operate a crisis accommodation service for people aged between 15-19 years (staffed by support workers). Others move from friend to friend, find an older adult to take them in, or move to different locations, such as backpacker lodgings and caravan parks in the off-seasons. While there is evidence of a capacity by young people to be mobile, for some young people this is 'place-bound' because they prefer to stay in their own community. For example some young people in Bussleton did not want to relocate to accommodation options in Bunbury because this was not a place with which they were familiar.

The experiences of young homeless people are gendered. For example more young women are likely to be taken in by other families, whereas there is often a perception that young males are capable of looking after themselves on the streets. However young males and females do share common experiences. A preparedness to engage in illicit activity to either gain money or lodging, for example drug dealing or living with older people for sex, is considered to be increasing according to service workers.

4.4.4 Enabling and constraining factors

In the course of being 'homeless' a landscape of barriers, constraints and enabling factors was evident. A lack of housing options and employment opportunities as well as limited and low incomes is significant for young people. Young people revealed that finding suitable housing is made even more difficult with the increasing cost of the rental market and the diminished nature of public housing stock. Securing employment that will pay for accommodation costs is shaped by an increasingly segmented and restricted labour market. As one young person commented '*Finding a job in this town is difficult. There is a catch 22 operating – to get a job you need experience to get experience you need a job'.* Not having education qualifications is a further barrier to securing a job and an income. Education was seen as critically important to breaking a cycle of homelessness and in the words of one young person '*Education is the beginning and the end'.* The need for young people to navigate and negotiate mutual obligation arrangements, as well as understand changes to the youth allowance, has contributed to many young people not receiving income through Centrelink.

Further constraints relate to the criteria defining youth and youth citizenship rights. There is ambiguity about what is allowed to happen at what age. For example, obtaining a drivers licence requires a parent's signature. This presents problems for young people who do not have active or supportive relationships with their parents. Not having a drivers licence can impede the capacity to seek employment especially as access to public transport was seen as poor in both Bunbury and Busselton. Not only does a lack of transport restrict opportunities for work but it also limits recreational opportunities and friendship networks. Negotiating a pathway through the private rental market was also raised as an issue for young people under the age of 18 years. Securing a lease for private rental accommodation often requires parental or guardian signatures, which may not be an option where there is conflict between those young people under 18 and their parent/guardian. The amount of

bond required to secure private rental housing is an additional issue. In Bunbury it was reported that real estate agents request a large bond, sometimes in order of 7 weeks rent, which is often beyond the realm of many young people.[4] More often young people are not allowed to keep pets in rental properties and this may be a major issue for those who live alone, or who have limited family and kinship networks.

Stereotypical images of young people not being reliable, or trusting tenants hinder young people accessing private rental. There is a stigmatisation about how young people behave: young people are often constructed as 'trouble' or 'irresponsible'. For example one young couple interviewed are expecting a child and had been living in a caravan in the local caravan park. They were asked to leave by the manger once it was revealed that they were both under 18 years old. This was despite paying the rent on time and not attracting trouble or disturbing other caravan occupants. According to one service provider young people in lesbian and gay relationships often find it difficult to access the private rental market. Local real estate agents are known for not letting properties to two females or two males.

Many of the young people interviewed wanted to be heard and have a voice in decision-making. While participation in forums and working parties at the local level is occurring, it more often involves young people considered to be socially responsible and/or high achieving students. For example a youth advisory forum was established in Bunbury, yet its membership only comprised mainstream young people voicing their concerns regarding mainstream young people's issues.

4.4.5 What supports young people?

There were a number of enabling factors that assist young people in their lives as 'homeless'. Foremost was the considerable support the young people give each other. Peer relations were therefore highly important, however these have a double edge. For example, there were young people who had a history of residing in foster homes, government housing or shared housing. In a bid to fit in and belong, some of the young people interviewed joined groups that were not suitable, nor safe. One young female recounted how she became involved in a group of people involved in drugs. To belong she took up drugs. Alternatively many young people interviewed wanted to experience and learn from positive role models.

4.4.6 Rural places

Based on the findings from Bunbury and Busselton it is evident that there are unique challenges confronting homeless young people in rural areas compared with those in urban centres. At one level there is a lack of services and infrastructure. For example there is limited public transport and a lack of specialist services available (for example, mental health and support services for gay and lesbian young people).

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[4] This level of bond is not allowed under Western Australian legislation. WA, like most jurisdictions throughout Australia, allows a bond of four weeks rent. However, young people are in a relatively weak position within the housing market and may have no option but to pay the higher bond.

There is also a limited range of accommodation/referral options available for young people when crisis accommodation services are full. Some of the difficulties associated with young people being able to obtain rental accommodation have been raised previously. It was seen that real estate agents/landlords are reluctant to rent to young people under 18 years of age and this is compounded in small communities where young people are 'well-known' for the wrong reasons, or are associated with certain family reputations. Youth unemployment is also high in rural areas and limited access to transport makes finding work and fulfilling the requirements of Centrelink that more difficult.

On another level there are issues derived from the nature of 'place'. Young people identified isolation in rural places as constraining. Low levels of activity and stimulation in rural areas were connected to poor mental health. Living on a farm and feeling isolated can lead to depression and/or to drug involvement. A common perception expressed during the interviews is that rural areas are often conservative and mirror conservative views of society. Alongside these conservative and seemingly intolerant views was a perception that living in the country was a safe and welcoming place. Examples were given of young people moving from the city to rural locations in the belief that this could get them out of the cycle of homelessness and drug-taking. They believed that they would find work, obtain affordable housing and develop and belong to social networks that are safe and nurturing and not based on drugs or abuse.

4.5 Ballarat Case Study

Ballarat is a regional city of approximately 100,000 population located one hour's drive to the west of Melbourne. Ballarat is one of the largest regional cities in Australia and has a long history of industrial development. It is also an important administrative, tourism and service centre. Ballarat is the focus of many services provided in the western part of Victoria and hosts the University of Ballarat.

The Ballarat case study involved workshops with service providers as well as young people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The city has more services for homeless young people than in some of the other case studies and this reflects the highly developed policies under the Victorian Government's homelessness strategy, as well as the substantial size of this centre. Ballarat has a JPET service as well as specialist housing, this includes accommodation for young women as well as other options, some of which were not considered particularly safe. Ballarat is an important point of service delivery for a range of services – including youth services – throughout the Central Highlands of Victoria and the Wimmera region. The more remote parts of the region, such as St Arnaud, were seen by service providers to have very poor access to services and relied upon government agencies that visited their settlements two or three days in the week. This was perceived to be inadequate for the level of need within the region.

Approximately 28 young people participated in the workshops in Ballarat and they ranged in age from 12 to 22. A remarkable number of very young (under 16 years of age) persons participated in these workshops with service providers suggesting that the Wimmera region in particular had problems with high drop out rates from schools at a young age. Some of the participants in the workshop had not completed schooling since Year Seven, Eight or Nine and this was reflected in their education attainments. Clearly, this would have an impact on their ability to find employment both now and into the long term. In addition, 'dropping out' from school may remove young people from homelessness interventions that focus on delivery through the school system and this represents a significant challenge for policy.

4.5.1. 'Me, I don't know any other place'

In common with the experiences in many of the other case studies many of the participants in the workshop in Ballarat had a strongly developed sense of place, and deep engagement with their community. This was an important dimension of youth homelessness in Ballarat because Melbourne is very close and there are well developed services there for homeless people. A number of service providers noted that the Victorian Government, for example, employs youth workers to 'hang out' with homeless young people and they will let the parents of new arrivals from the country know that they are in Melbourne and in contact with government services.

Despite the better access to services in Melbourne, the young people we met with in Ballarat chose to live there. Some had left for Melbourne – or other parts of Australia – but had returned because of family networks, friends or the advantages of being in a familiar environment. Many reported that they felt that 'Ballarat is a friendly city' and that 'Ballarat is good because it has lots of trees'. The latter comment reflects a broader emphasis many young people placed on the physical environment in which they live. Indeed, when asked to draw their ideal 'home' many drew large properties on large blocks of rural land, while one participant aspired to live in a hobbit hole.

4.5.2 Policy Innovation in Ballarat

Service providers in Ballarat could point to a number of significant policy innovations they were either attempting to implement or had implemented. One of the most significant developments in the city was the use of 'lead tenants' in some of the accommodation provided to young people. This model of service provision recognises that many young people lack the necessary life skills to live independently but that formal training may be unpopular or ineffective. In this model young people who had been homeless or at risk of homeless previously and had emerged successfully from this period of crisis were paid to remain in the crisis accommodation (essentially a block of flats) to serve as a role model for younger people. In this role they were expected to advise others on the practicalities of living independently – how to budget, how to shop, how to negotiate with friends about their behaviour etc – and in return received modest payment and free rent.

Personal development training was a second significant policy innovation in Ballarat. When funding has been made available former school teachers have run a program for homeless young people and those at risk of homelessness which focuses on

personal development and confidence building. The six week program is similar in many ways to the courses offered to middle management in the corporate and government sectors. Its curriculum includes understanding differences in personality, strategies for understanding and working with others, developing inter-personal skills, performance art *et cetera*. The program was seen by service providers and young people alike to be very successful in building self esteem, enhancing living skills and providing direction in the lives of these young people. Indeed one of the youth consultants we employed who had been homeless credited the course with triggering within him an aspiration to complete a university degree in order to become a youth worker.

4.5.3 The Housing Stock

In common with many other regional centres, there is a shortage of emergency accommodation for homeless young people in Ballarat. While there are a limited number of housing options these are too few to meet demand and there are significant 'choke points' within the system. This problem was seen to have exacerbated over the last two years with the booming housing market in Melbourne encouraging commuting from the capital, or the purchase of heritage housing as weekend cottages. Rents have risen and the stock of available housing appears to have fallen.

Both service providers and young people were asked about the most appropriate accommodation for young people and significantly the two groups offered opposing views. The service providers believed that young people were best accommodated in blocks of flats or other denser dwellings and this opinion largely reflected a) their understanding of the needs of young people, b) the service efficiencies arising out of consolidated accommodation and c) the desirability of supervising the tenancies of young people. By contrast, young people wanted to live in detached houses and in many instances large detached houses that would accommodate group living. Indeed, when asked to draw their ideal home one young person from Ballarat included a ballroom for social events.

There is an important lesson to be taken from the differing perceptions of young people and service providers about the most appropriate forms of accommodation. It is reasonable to conclude that service providers and young people do not always share perceptions and this suggests that relying upon the views of those who work with homeless young people may not represent adequate consultation for future policy development. We also need to recognise that the views of both groups are coloured by other forces that may impinge upon them: service providers may prefer accommodation arrangements that allow a greater level of supervision because such arrangements reduce risk, while young people value independence and may have a limited understanding of the complexities associated with their accommodation options.

4.6 Launceston Case Study

The Launceston component of this study included two focus groups. The first was conducted with seven workers, including two social work students on placement. The second focus group included five people: four young women aged twenty, eighteen, seventeen and fifteen, and a young man aged twenty-two. The young man relied on emergency shelter, caravan parks, and also slept in his car. Two young women had secured long term rental accommodation, with which they were very happy. One young woman was living in a youth shelter and occasionally staying with friends, while looking for somewhere that would accept both her and her dog. The final participant had been placed in support accommodation. Her initial three month tenancy had already been extended, and she was hoping to stay until she turned eighteen, when it would be easier for her to enter the private rental market.

The participants identified particular events that had precipitated their initial experience of homelessness but for most in the focus group, these were placed within the context of a history of physical violence or on-going conflict in their families. The young people had clashed with siblings, parents, step-parents and their extended family. For some, other forms of family upheaval, for example the loss of the family farm or the mother's hospitalisation, were also part of the mix.

After initially leaving their family home, the young people in the study had moved between a series of accommodation options. Their histories typically included short stays and a large number of moves. They had often drawn upon a range of services, including financial, counselling and accommodation support. The accommodation services included:

- Sleeping rough and/or sleeping in cars. These were short term options for the young people in the focus groups. Only one person in this part of the study owned a car; he slept in it when shelters were full or he did not have money to book into a caravan park.

- Caravan parks. One participant had used caravan parks in an attempt to establish stable accommodation. However he had found that the costs were high, and on one occasion he had lost his belongings when he had left suddenly without informing the caretaker of his movements.

- Kin. Three of the participants had stayed with kin (grandmother, aunts, an ex-boyfriend's parents). Others had stayed with friends and friends' families. Two of the participants had moved back to live with their mothers for short periods. Living with friends and family ended due to a lack of space, privacy or comfort, or conflicts between young people and the people with whom they were staying (for example, Jonah was 'kicked out' of his grandmother's house when he was accused of smoking marijuana; Rebecca left her friends' parents' house when they attempted to treat her as their own daughter).

- Emergency accommodation and state provided accommodation. One participant was living full time in a shelter while trying to find stable

accommodation, another made use of an emergency shelter on an ad hoc basis. One young woman had a unit with a three month tenancy.

- Shared housing**.** Some of the young people had lived with peers their own age in a group house.

The young people were attempting to obtain more than shelter – they were trying to find homes. When the focus group participants described the notion of 'home' they drew upon two dimensions. The first was the material elements of shelter: the ability to keep pets; goods necessary for householding; space and land; a quiet place; easy access to shops and other services; heating. The second dimension of home was expressive. It included the following attributes:

- Independence ("fits with my lifestyle", "no restrictions", "not being told how to run my life");

- Control and ownership ("a place I have control", "my own space", "safe and secure"); and

- A sense of wellbeing ("happiness", "harmony", "always knowing you are welcome", "stress free", "to feel loved, not unwanted", "forgiveness").

These definitions of home suggest that simply obtaining shelter will not necessarily meet the needs and desires of young people. The terms upon which accommodation is provided will also be important – the responses of the young people in this study suggest that they need to feel that the place in which they live is 'theirs', over which they have control, and where they can feel safe. These feelings contrast to their experiences of homelessness and often their families of origin.

The experiences of the young people and service providers suggest that housing options are limited. Returning to the family of origin was not considered to be a possibility for many young people. Most public housing stock is not configured for single or group households, there are long waiting lists and young people do not as a rule fit into priority categories. Youth shelters are a stopgap measure, and are unpopular with young people who are not "streetwise": they can find the other clients intimidating, and some have had their property stolen. Thus, young people and service providers see the private rental market as the most obvious and widely available source of housing.

There are a series of structural barriers that need to be overcome in order to obtain affordable and stable housing in the private rental market. The difficulties include:

- *Limited affordable housing stock.* The private market has high occupancy levels and rents are increasing (although they are still low, relative to those in urban areas). In smaller settlements, a few individuals may own most of the rental properties, and may be involved in illegal or discriminatory practices.

- *Limited availability of suitable housing stock.* Many rental properties are in poor condition, have limited and/or expensive heating and are damp, making them grim places to live in a Tasmanian winter. Few agents or owners will accept animals and yet for some young people, pets are an important source

of love and stability in their lives.

- *Demands of real estate agents.* Tasmanian agents will not process an application without a credit check (the costs of which are covered by the prospective tenant) and young people have sometimes generated video store, electricity, telephone and hire purchase debts. Prospective tenants must have references but young people may not have a rental history or cannot produce positive accounts of that history. All tenants are required to pay an application fee but young people may not have that money immediately available. Some real estate agents will not allow a person to sign a lease if they are under eighteen years of age. Some agencies are more likely to rent a house or unit when the young person is accompanied by a parent, who will be used as a formal or informal guarantor that the rent will be paid, and can sign a lease for a young person.

- *Discriminatory attitudes to young people.* One youth worker described a widespread rule of 'no pets, no kids, no young people'. Young people have a higher chance of success if they present a 'responsible' image and have a job. Any known connection with Anglicare or other service providers can work against successfully applying for a lease.

- *Employment.* Employment opportunities are limited in Launceston. Young people can find it difficult to make ends meet on Newstart and rent assistance, particularly when they have to meet the high costs of heating or repay debts.

- *Absence of household items.* Necessary items such as white goods or safe and reliable heating are difficult to find and expensive. Some young people have turned to hire purchase or no interest repayment options in order to furnish their homes, with financially devastating results.

In addition to these structural factors, young people can lack the life skills necessary to meet on-going tenancy responsibilities. Often they have not developed the ability to budget, protect themselves from the actions of their housemates and friends (damaging a house, leaving on short notice, refusing to pay rent), cope with the loneliness and isolation that can accompany living alone, and understand their rights and responsibilities as tenants. Young people may be suffering emotional distress caused by the loss of housing in their family situation. They may lack a detailed understanding of the types of services available to them (beyond those they have already used) and the eligibility criteria attached to the services. Further, they need confidence and staying power if they are to keep trying in the face of rejection. They also require time to search for accommodation, and this can be difficult to find if they are also trying to go to school or cope with emotional distress.

Service providers attempt to counter these barriers, but they face difficulties in doing so. Until recently, the Launceston City Council did provide services for at risk youth, and there are still relatively few non-commercial spaces where young people feel welcome. Some workers feel that funding is too often directed to pilot projects, and that some services lack accountability or the means to follow through on their initial

efforts. Services provision is not always well integrated. Further, some groups, notably young people on remand or in custody, are not adequately supported.

In short, the experiences of the young people in this study reflect the findings of earlier projects but they play out in ways that are peculiar to the local context. With few exceptions, their housing histories, education and employment status, and family backgrounds reflect those of high-risk youth in urban areas. Similarly, the housing market in Launceston reflects national trends, as do public housing policies and of course, funding arrangements and service principles. However, their impact is mediated through local practices and services.

5. THE IMPACT OF CURRENT AND EMERGING POLICY FRAMEWORKS

This section of the Final Report considers the impact of current and emerging policy frameworks on the delivery of support to homeless young people in rural areas. This section recognises that welfare policies are experiencing on-going change and that some of these developments may be directly relevant to this target group. The section begins with a discussion of Australian Government policy reforms, before turning to consider foyers as a model of assistance and the delivery of support for welfare. The final part of this section considers mechanisms for supporting children who fall within the Guardianship of the Minister.

5.1 Impact of Welfare Reform

5.1.1 Policy Background

The Howard Government announced welfare policy as a priority for major reform in September 1999 (www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/abo…/esp-welreform_backgroundofwr.ht, 15/10/2003). A Welfare Reform Reference Group, with Patrick McClure as Chair, was formed to guide this process. The resulting McClure Report provided significant new directions and principles for social security in Australia, which in turn has exerted an impact on the experiences of young people in rural areas accessing income support. The report recommends linking together income support with social and community support, to encourage the working age population to remain financially independent and actively engaged in their local communities.

The Australians Working Together (AWT) package was released in the 2001/2002 Commonwealth budget as the formal response to the McClure Report. In relation to rural young people, this comprehensive package brings together existing and new initiatives across many of the Australian Government's departments, particularly the Department for Family and Community Services and Department for Employment and Workplace Relations. Australians Working Together aims to provide a balance of incentives, assistance and requirements to ensure the social security system helps those people who are most in need.

5.1.2 Principles of Australians Working Together package

The principles underpinning the reform package include: individualised service delivery; a simpler income support system; incentives and financial assistance; mutual obligations; and social partnerships (www.together.gov.au/aboutThePackage/questionsAndAnswers.asp, 15/10/2003). Many of the findings from our research with rural young people strongly support the principles of flexible and individualised services, developing simpler, whole-of-government systems, providing incentives, and creating local community partnerships, which encourage social and economic participation. The Simple Service Solutions (www.together.gov.au/whoIsInvolved/youth/QuestionsAnd

, 15/10/2003) approach being developed through AWT aims to assist young people to more easily gain access to information, advice and support from government funded services, and is a positive contribution towards enacting these principles. The individual focus is an important principle in regard to homeless young people in rural areas. AWT recognises the importance of developing each individual's capacities and skills by responding to their unique circumstances, and claims this approach "will see more people able to achieve independence" www.together.gov.au/aboutThePackage/governmentStatement/default.asp, 15/10/2003).

The philosophies and principles that inform the AWT package are in concordance with the outcomes of our research and the research of others that suggests that homeless young people need support to assist them develop personal and independent living skills before they are able to overcome the barriers created by homelessness. The limited number of these personal skills based services and supports in rural areas are a significant barrier for homeless young people. There is potential for the AWT package to provide a useful mechanism for these services to be targeted, and managed, for young people who are most in need.

To achieve a flexibility of approaches based on individual need, AWT introduces four "pathways" to allow people to move towards independence in a flexible way that accommodates their individual needs and allows them to move between paths as their circumstances change:

- **Job Search** support acknowledges job-ready people who are able to actively seek employment and participate in Job Search Training after three months.

- **Intensive support**, as the name suggests, provides a high level of support for people who are in, or at risk of, long term unemployment.

- **The Transition support** path is only available to mature-age job seekers and carers who are not ready for active job search.

- **Community participation**, the final pathway is available to all people who have multiple barriers, such as homelessness, and need more intensive support (www.together.gov.au/aboutThePackage/questionsAndAnswers.asp, 5/10/2003).

While these pathways theoretically provide significant flexibility, young people in our focus groups seemed to be aware only of their rate of Youth Allowance and little else. They expressed no understanding of the income support system, different pathways and initiatives available to support them, nor how to negotiate through the different pathways to best meet their individual circumstances and needs. This lack of knowledge was similarly reflected in our discussions with service providers as they seemed to have limited knowledge of the various pathways, and income support services, for young people.

5.1.3 The Impact of AWT initiatives on Rural Young People

The specific new initiatives for individual young people in rural and remote Australia arising from AWT include Personal Advisors, Personal Support Program, Language,

Literacy and Numeracy Supplement, Training Credits, and Working Credit. These are additional to the consolidated Youth Allowance payment, Preparing for Work Agreements, Job Pathways Program and Job Placement Employment and Training (JPET) program as important aspects of the income support system.

Personal Advisors are specialised Centrelink staff who provide individual and in-depth assistance for a range of people in need, including young people aged 21-25 who are new claimants of Newstart Allowance and are indigenous, recently released from prison or have certain exemptions from the Activity Test (www.together.gov.au/programsAndServices/personalAdvisors/default.asp, 23/10/2003). Unfortunately there are many homeless young people who would benefit from the individualised support of a Personal Advisor, yet do not fall into this eligibility category. Our research supports an expansion of the target group to include young people receiving Youth Allowance who meet the criteria of indigenous, juvenile offenders, and/or exemption from Activity Test due to other significant barriers, including homelessness.

The Personal Support Program (PSP) provides assistance to people of workforce age, including young people, who are vulnerable to social isolation and facing multiple barriers such as homelessness or substance abuse. Service providers assist participants to work towards social or economic outcomes, including stabilised circumstances, community engagement, improved life skills, or training/employment related programs (www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf…/esp-welfarereform_whatshappening_psp.ht, 15/10/2003). While PSP has significant potential to assist homeless young people in rural areas, there are limited places and these are targeted at the most vulnerable in a particular region. This targeting of assistance means that young people in the early stages of homelessness are unlikely to qualify, thus limiting the capacity of the system to provide timely and comprehensive support for this target group through PSP.

The Language, Literacy and Numeracy Supplement aims to assist people to overcome barriers they may have in gaining employment, and provides an additional $20.80 per fortnight for people on a range of benefits including Youth Allowance and Newstart Allowance (www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/…esp-welreform_whatshappening_lln.ht, 15/10/2003). The Supplement can be used towards English language or literacy and numeracy training provided by a funded provider. None of the young people or service providers interviewed referred to this program, which suggests that the Literacy and Numeracy Supplement has had limited impact for this key target group.

Current providers assist with improving self-esteem and budgeting skills along with skills that relate more directly to finding a job. There is potential for this strategy to provide resources for the valuable personal development and independent living skills identified by our research. This would require future tenders for the provision of Literacy and Numeracy services to strengthen the development of interpersonal and independent living skills within their literacy curriculum, and to significantly improve accessibility for young people to their programs through more youth-friendly

marketing and delivery styles and stronger linkages with community infrastructure in their region.

Training Credits are awarded to participants who have completed Work for the Dole or Community Work programs as part of their obligations for income support. These credits can be used towards payment for recognised training courses in employment related competencies (www.together.gov.au, 15/10/2003). Based on our research, it seems that young people who are experiencing homelessness have significant barriers to participation in programs, and are unlikely to successfully complete Work for the Dole or Community Work and thus qualify for these Training Credits.

The Working Credit scheme was introduced under AWT to encourage people of working-age who receive income support to more easily take on employment by allowing them to retain their Centrelink entitlements while working (www.together.gov.au, 23/10/2003). This flexibility allows people to build up working credits while employed and then use them to reduce the amount of their income assessed under the income test. As with the Training Credits scheme, young people who are homeless in rural areas are highly unlikely to be able to overcome their significant barriers to secure any form of employment, and therefore this initiative has limited value for this particular highly marginalised target group.

Youth Allowance is the income support payment for young people 16-24 years who fall within a number of different criteria (15 and 25 year olds qualify in exceptional circumstances) and provides between $169.70 and $376.70 per fortnight depending on the young person's circumstances (www.centrelink.gov.au /internet/internet.nsf/payments/pay_how_yal.htm, 15/10/2003). Many of the young people interviewed during the focus groups commented on the difficulties they experience in living on this level of income. Some of the particular affordability barriers included: the high cost of rent in many of the regions; high cost of transport to access the regional centre; cost of surviving on takeaway or highly processed food in the absence of their own kitchen, refrigerator and cooking facilities; the cost of accessing training and education courses; and the costs related to job search activities. The flexibility of Youth Allowance requirements through exemptions from the Activity Test, for example for a homeless young person who is stabilising their housing status, is noted as a strength of the AWT system. There seems to be scope to introduce a supplement, or strengthen that of the Numeracy Literacy Supplement, to financially support homeless young people in overcoming their skills deficit and moving beyond homelessness towards independence and participation in their communities.

One of the Commonwealth funded programs that young people may be referred to as part of their Preparing for Work Agreement while receiving Youth Allowance is Job Placement Employment and Training (JPET). JPET aims to assist students and unemployed young people aged 15-21 years who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless (www.jpet.facs.gov.au/index.asp, 24/10/2003) by providing a range of services to assist them overcome barriers and move towards independence. JPET was mentioned as a positive and helpful service by several of

the young people and service providers interviewed. The personal and flexible services provided were identified as key aspects in the success of JPET for this target group. Recognition of JPET as an Approved Activity as part of Youth Allowance requirements adds to the value of the program for homeless young people. There is scope to build on this success by providing personal and independent living skills training as complementary supports through community services providing JPET or similar youth programs for marginalised young people.

An evaluation package for Australians Working Together has been developed, and is undertaking a macro-level evaluation and specific initiative evaluations. The package will be evaluated against the objectives of increasing self-reliance through participation, encouraging social partnerships, and delivering a system that is responsive to individual circumstances (www.together.gov.au/aboutThePackage/questionsAndAnswers.asp, 15/10/2003). The findings of this research suggest that the principles of AWT provide a supportive and individualised framework to assist homeless young people in rural areas to overcome their barriers to independence and move towards participation in their local community. However, in order to deliver real outcomes for this highly vulnerable target group, it is necessary to improve the accessibility and relevance of AWT initiatives such as Personal Advisors and Literacy and Numeracy Supplement. It would also be pertinent as part of the AWT evaluation process to examine the respective roles of PSP and JPET in providing timely and effective services for homeless young people in rural areas.

5.2 Foyers as A Policy Solution for Homeless Young People

The Foyer movement began in France after World War II when young people moved from rural to urban areas to find work. They are now an accepted part of many French towns (Wade and Maher 2003). The French model emphasises accommodation for mainly young workers and trainees. Unemployed young people have tended to be under-represented in French foyer schemes. A job search initiative was only added to the French concept as recently as 1987 - 1991 (Shelter 1992 in Randolph et al 2003). The foyer sector acts as a point of reference for young people on a range of issues that affect them and also for young people moving from country areas to the city or between provinces. Many Foyers have restaurants attached to them, which are open to the public and residents. The restaurants contribute significantly to both the running costs of the foyers as well to the social capital of the broader community of the local area (Randolph et al 2001).

The foyer movement has grown rapidly and is successfully established in France, Germany and the United Kingdom. Shelter UK imported the concept from France and in 1992, assisted by corporate sponsorship, developed an umbrella organisation called the "Foyer Federation". This organisation established five pilot Foyers in existing YMCAs. By 1996 there were 40 Foyers in the UK and present estimates suggest 120 foyers are operating in the UK. Each foyer scheme is distinctive in terms of structure, design, location and strategic aims (Clay and Coffey 2003).

5.2.1 French and UK models

The philosophy of the UK and French Foyers are similar however differences between the two schemes are evident (http://www.foyer.net). While both models emphasise accommodation, French foyers operate within a broader framework compared to its UK counterpart. Differences between the two models relate to the management structure running the foyer, the range of services provided by the foyer, the profile of people (clients) accessing the foyer and how the foyer is financially sustained. The French model has a management structure that involves local community, elected representatives and business people and professionals interested in assisting youth. It provides a broad range of services, training and advice, i.e. health, employment, relationship guidance, independent living skills. French foyers accept a broad social mix of unemployed, students and young worker groups as well as providing peer group support. The clients living in the foyer, and to a lesser extent government subsidy, financially support each site within the French model. By contrast, UK foyers have a client group that is comprised primarily of unemployed young people between the ages of 16 and 25 years old. The focus of activity of UK foyers is on issues of youth homelessness and unemployment. Hence UK foyers concentrate on assisting young people access accommodation, training and employment opportunities. Historically, UK foyers have worked closely with housing associations and the supported housing sector. A distinguishing feature of the UK model is the 'individual formal agreement or contract' between the individual and foyer management which sets out the 'Action Plan' of activities the client is required to participate in while a foyer resident (Clay and Coffey, 2003). This mutual obligation approach is reflective of the political environment in Britain.

The funding model for UK foyers is very complex with significant funding coming from the Social Housing Grant and the supported housing funding system. Each scheme operates with its own set of funding arrangements and partner relationships. Some commercial activities take place on Foyer premises to assist with their funding. Housing associations provide the development expertise and retain ownership of the property as well as taking responsibility for on-going repairs. Management of the foyers is often passed onto to specialist management agencies. The national foyer Federation provides wider support in the form of training, networking and policy development (Randolph et al 2001).

The physical form of UK foyers varies in size and origin. Some have been created from existing homelessness hostels while others are purpose built new schemes. Accommodation is usually provided in single rooms with communal cooking and bathroom facilities, however some foyers provide flatlets with cooking facilities. The most important aim is to encourage independent living skills in young people. Staff are available on a 24 hour basis with floating support for training and counselling needs (Randolph et al 2001).

5.2.2. Evaluation of foyer schemes

While the number of foyers is increasing across Europe, the UK and to a lesser extent the United States, information pertaining to, and or evaluation of, their

effectiveness is relatively scant. There is limited documentation in English relating to French foyers. Evaluations of UK foyers are emerging (see Allen 2001). The Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions in partnership with the Department for Education and Employment commissioned the Institute for Employment Studies and the London Research Centre to evaluate UK foyer schemes in 1998. The findings of the study included:

- Considerable variation among foyer schemes ranging from an emphasis on vocational skills and qualifications to the delivery of in-house/on-site services;

- Success in securing revenue sources to maintain foyers;

- Client profile was predominantly under 21 year old males;

- Evidence of an increase in employment and housing opportunities for clients

- Collection of data relating to output and outcomes was generally poor

- Comprehensive local needs analysis needs to be undertaken to ensure foyer scheme is appropriately responsive to local needs (Maginn, Frew, O'Regan and Kodz 2000).

5.2.3. Australian foyer schemes

In Australia the foyer concept is new. The Live 'N' Learn Campus at Miller in New South Wales is the first of its kind and was officially opened in March 2003. Initiated by the NSW Department of Housing the board of Live 'N' Learn has comparatively broad representation: peak youth (YAA), employment and trade union organisations, the Department of Housing as well as representation from the marketing and financial planning sectors. Live 'N' Learn emphasises "independent and productive" lifestyles through three key fundamentals:

- **Living**: provide a safe and stable living environment;

- **Learning**: Support the development of life skills and education opportunities;

- **Earning**: Provide employment opportunity links, enabling the development of life skills, esteem, networks and ultimately a transition to independence (Wade and Maher, 2003).

Referral to the program can be made through an agency, school or young people themselves can request to participate. Once they are accepted into the program they are provided with accommodation, mentoring, training and employment opportunities, which will assist them realise a financially independent lifestyle. An important component of the program is the role of Live 'N' Learn staff. They live on-site with the participants so as to provide support, guidance and mentoring relating to personal, budgeting and independent living skills, as well as assisting participants connect to employment opportunities. Another key to the potential success of the scheme is the motivation and responsiveness of those young people participating in the scheme. For this reason potential participants are required to undergo a series of interviews by Live 'N' Learn staff to 'assess their level of personal commitment' to the program. Promoting a range of partnering opportunities between government,

business and community has been identified as providing a more long term and sustainable program (Wade and Maher 2003).

The Miller Live N Learn Foundation's campus is an example of a foyer and was established in conjunction with corporate partners. The Department of Housing donated the building and renovation costs of $500,000 for a 30-unit facility. The set up costs were:

Building and renovation costs	$500,000
Pre-operating costs	$84,000
Pre-operational costs per bed	$19,500

The ongoing costs work out as:

Estimated ongoing costs	$144,000
Estimated ongoing costs per bed	$4,800
Fully funded costs per bed for 3 years	$22,000

The Miller Live N Learn scheme has been designed to require only a modest subsidy of $50,000 per year and it is hoped that this could be achieved through corporate sponsors. European examples have shown how corporate partners have funded bursaries, mentoring, work skills and even clothing. In New South Wales corporate partners have donated all of the furnishing (including soft furnishings), white goods and computers.

Some criteria, which enable the concept to work, are:

- Addressing which young people the concept is best suited to, for example it would not work for young people with drug and alcohol problems. That is not to say the concept could not be adapted to accommodate such a group at a later stage.

- Finding the right location that is close to a transport hub

- Ensuring the right people are in place as support workers. They need to be well trained and well qualified.

5.2.4. Relationship between foyer schemes and public policy

In 2001 the Positioning Paper 'Evaluating the Miller Live 'N' Learn Campus Pilot' was released outlining the importance of foyer schemes intersecting positively with both Federal, state and local government policies and programs. In terms of the Live 'N' Learn program three inter-connecting policy areas were identified: "youth housing and homelessness, youth unemployment, and the social issues surrounding the transition from school into independent living" (Randolph, Pang and Wood, 2001). At the national level the National Homeless Strategy and Centre Link programs aimed at youth (i.e. Reconnect, JPET, New Apprentice Access Program, Green Corps, Austudy, ABSTUDYand Newstart Allowance) were important support mechanisms. At the state level the New South Wales Office for Children and Young People and the Affordable Housing Strategy, while at the local level, youth services available through the Liverpool Local Government area were identified.

Randolph, Pang and Wood are presently undertaking an extensive evaluation of the Live 'N' Learn program. This includes assessing the nature of the funding model and management model, the effectiveness of a range of government agencies working together to ensure a 'multi-agency partnership' to provide and deliver funding and services, the nature and effectiveness of the integration of services especially in linking accommodation services to training and employment, the nature and extent to which the private sector is involved as well as the role of support agencies play in the program.

The foyer concept is an initiative that can move young people forward to become participating members of society. It is a scheme that has considerable potential for adaptation to any setting / culture, as examples have shown in Europe and America, see http://www.foyer.net and http://www.commonground.org

5.2.5. Considerations for Foyers operating across rural Australia

The evaluation of the Live 'N' Learn program will offer important insights and lessons from a distinctly local needs basis. Foyer schemes offer a potential positive mechanism for assisting disadvantaged young people. However foyer schemes need to be culturally, socially, economically and geographically sensitive to the region that they are set up in. The viability of operating foyer schemes across rural regions also rests on the willingness of all levels of government, business and the local community to embrace the concept, as well as become involved in the development of a program that addresses local needs and issues. The participation of young people in planning the program is key to both their positive involvement and to positive outcomes. The challenge for developing 'multi-agency partnerships', arguably a key component of the foyer scheme, rests on agencies working productively together. With an increasing emphasis on agencies having to tender for funding, thus creating a competitive environment amongst agency organisations, this provides challenges. Specific public funding could be tied to intra-agency collaborative partnerships that are working together on a foyer scheme.

In addition the foyer model most likely to gain broad institutional support is that which connects youth housing, youth homelessness and youth unemployment. While most young people are keen to gain access to the labour market there should not be an expectation that they will accept being placed into any job. Foyers should be evaluated not only on the number of young people that gain access to employment and housing but equally the quality and nature of the 'match' between the foyer participant and the job and accommodation. The goal of foyers therefore should be to develop young people's capacity to gain sustainable meaningful employment and housing options. Foyers have been criticised for being a relatively expensive solution and unlikely to result in a significant reduction in youth homelessness. On the other hand, this approach offers such potential benefits that it needs to be investigated fully via pilot projects in a number of settings – including non-metropolitan Australia. More detailed research and trials may demonstrate that positive outcomes are generated through the adoption of just some elements of the Foyer model, such as

the use of lead tenants. This question, however, will remain open until the model is put into operation and further evaluated.

5.3 Supporting Young People in Out of Home Care

A significant number of young people interviewed during the course of the study indicated that they had experienced some time in out-of-home care (usually foster care). As noted previously, out-of-home care often resulted in limited living skills, a disrupted adolescence and a disrupted sense of belonging. Although most young people interviewed had not been in care for some time, their experiences are consistent with previous studies that have documented a link between foster care and homelessness (e.g., Cashmore & Paxman 1996). A concern raised in the Cashmore and Paxman report is the inadequacy of most care systems in preparing young people for independent living. When young people turn 18, government departments usually have no further statutory responsibility for providing support. At this point care and support is withdrawn and young people must begin to fend for themselves often without adequate training in the basic skills required for independent living (Layton 2003). In South Australia, some attempts have been made to remedy this situation by the development of training programs (e.g., the Independent Living Centre); however, such services need to be extended to a greater number of young people. The Layton review endorses recent legislative changes in NSW (The Children and Young Person's Care and Protection Act 1998) that provides that the Minister's responsibility to extend Government services and support to all young people leaving care above the age of 15 years and to do so until the young person is 25 years of age. It is recommended that long term planning for young people's transition from the case system begin well before their Guardianship orders expire, and that formal integrated service models are developed to facilitate the transition from care. These recommendations also reflect similar legislative developments in Britain (The Leaving Care Act 2000) that provides that all young people must be allocated a personal advisor at the age of 16, and that this person must be available to provide ongoing support to the young person until the age of 21, or 24 if they are undertaking higher education or training (Layton 2003).

5.4 Policy Options: A Preliminary Conclusion

This section has considered current and emerging policy frameworks that have a real or potential impact on the delivery of supports for homeless young people in rural areas. It has shown that the AWT package released by the Australian Government in 2003 has the potential to deliver appropriate programs and assistance for homeless young people. However, we noted that few service providers – and virtually none of the young people – we spoke with were aware of the program and its potential flexibility. This is a gap that needs to be addressed. The section also considered the conceptualisation and implementation in foyers in France and the United Kingdom. Foyers are essentially a form of youth

accommodation that is able to incorporate life skill training with job opportunities and safe housing. In the UK model they build upon existing government programs but in all instances community participation and engagement is an important feature of their implementation. This is an important factor when considering the possible application of foyers in non-metropolitan regions, as these areas have higher levels of social capital – and more cohesive communities – than the cities. We would conclude that foyers are potentially a very attractive model for meeting the needs of homeless young people living outside the capitals. The funding of the foyers could fall within the framework of the AWT. Finally, the section considered ways to reduce the risk of homelessness amongst persons who have been out of home care. Recent developments in NSW provide an important sign post for future policy, with the Minister taking some responsibility for the well being of the children under their care until the age of 25. This is a policy framework that better allows for the transition from childhood to adulthood and which encourages longer term planning for the individual.

6. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This research is rich in policy implications in many areas of government activity. There are policy lessons in housing, labour market programs, income support policy and in community development. Some of these policy implications relate directly to the operation of governments, while others call for a facilitative role, with public sector agencies mobilising the resources within the community to produce better housing outcomes for young people. Identifying who is responsible and how initiatives could be funded is one of the challenges in developing policy responses for homeless young people in rural areas. We believe that there are solutions to these problems and part of the answer may lie in looking for greater community awareness and ownership of youth homelessness issues, as well as the development of a number of pilot projects.

Rethinking youth homelessness is an important policy challenge. Currently youth homelessness is dealt with through a variety of mechanisms and while many of the available programs are well structured and well implemented significant gaps remain. For example, rigid categorical definitions of 'youth' can limit the responsiveness of the income support system to the needs of the individual. Many young people, for instance, struggle to understand the differences between the live at home allowance, youth allowance and other forms of government-provided income support. They also find it difficult to understand why they can drive a car and/or sign paperwork without a guardian, but may not be able to sign for a lease. This is an important policy dilemma and one that reflects the challenge of dealing with persons in transition to adulthood. There is also a need to rethink the conventional construction of the public policy problem of homelessness to include those aspects of self definition (i.e. belonging, connections etc) that appear so critical to young people. Through our research we have found that young people place a great emphasis on their community networks and social supports.

There other policy dimensions to how we think about 'youth' and 'youth issues' including the desirability of finding ways in which young people can be valued and respected within their communities, regardless of their race, sexuality, gender or other circumstances. This latter principle should guide the development of all policy dealing with homeless young people, especially those that live outside the capitals. Widening the means of supporting young people to develop their identity in constructive ways would be one strategy for implementing this objective. For example, Bunbury implementing a community arts project for young people that was considered highly successful. There is also a need to develop social relationships that are constructive rather than destructive as some young people enter into the world of drugs primarily as a way of belonging to a peer group. Alternatively, some young people move to rural areas to escape these peer influences.

6.1 Supported Learning Tenancies

International experience and the insights gathered through the case studies suggest that foyers are a valuable model for dealing with the problems confronting homeless youth. As noted previously, foyers appear to be especially appropriate in non-metropolitan regions because community engagement is an important feature of foyers communities are more strongly defined outside the capitals. France and England have differing models of foyers and there is scope for Australia to develop its own perspective. Indeed, the 'lead tenant' model advocated by some service providers in Ballarat has many of the aspects of a foyer, without the formal labelling. That said, there are strong grounds for developing and launching a new model of housing assistance for homeless young people in rural areas as the processes of establishment would work to build community and government support.

Foyers are an integrated service model with significant promise but their application in non-metropolitan Australia would need to overcome a number of hurdles. First, some of the participants in the policy workshop suggested that the term 'foyers' is alien and unattractive for policy makers. The believed that they would have trouble persuading governments to fund an initiative whose title – and therefore purpose – few people understand. We therefore suggest that the foyer model is implemented, but badged as a 'Supported Learning Tenancy' (SLT). This title is relatively self evident, pro-active and consistent with contemporary bureaucratic language. Second, there is a need to find adequate resources for the SLT. Participants at the policy workshop indicated that such an initiative could be funded within current Australian Government policy frameworks but would need to be approached on a case-by-case basis. In some instances additional funding would be required from State Governments, as well as corporate or community sponsors. The SLT initiative in each place would need to engage with a range of partners in order to be implemented successfully. For example, local governments or regional development boards may have a role in identifying the types of business that could be associated with the SLT. Restaurants are traditionally associated with foyers in France, but an Internet Café or other enterprise may be more appropriate in Australia. There is a range of 'third sector' organisations in Australia and they could be important partners in implementing an SLT. Clearly, SLTs are feasible but their implementation needs to be tailored to each location. Third, SLTs would probably only ever find application in the larger regional centres because of the need to a) have sufficient demand from young people; b) generate community support and resources for the project; c) are of sufficient size to attract and retain skilled staff and d) have one or more viable enterprises that could help support the initiative.

Through our practitioner workshop we concluded that it would be feasible – with modest State Government support and access to the AWT package - to implement a SLT in a regional centre such as Whyalla. The AWT package has the potential to produce tailored solutions that meet the specific needs of a city, town or more rural region. However, it should be recognised that it could be difficult to establish a foyer program (i.e. more than one foyer) using this model, as each location would need to

be treated as a unique set of circumstances. There would be few economies of scale available in establishing such a program. That said, there are strong grounds for using the AWT to test the feasibility and outcomes of the foyer model in non-metropolitan Australia and Whyalla is an attractive potential first pilot because it has an excess stock of public housing; a relatively large population of young people; and a strongly developed community.

6.2 Working With and Through the Community

The incidence of homelessness amongst young people in rural areas does not simply reflect failings in the housing market or in government provided housing services. In large measure, it reflects one or more gaps in the functioning of the community and the ways in which young people interact with others. Some of these failings are specific to the housing market: for example, young people may be excluded from rental housing by legal barriers (i.e. being too young to sign a lease) or by discrimination. Other barriers reflect wider community attitudes and expectations that often leave young people feeling powerless. The private rental market is not currently a viable mechanism for providing young people with housing in rural areas. There are structural barriers around the lack of appropriate stock and individual barriers regarding life and tenancy readiness. Both are significant hurdles to overcome but it may be possible to address them by harnessing the positive aspects of social capital to address the structural barriers and by providing life skills to address the individual dimensions of this problem.

Governments should look to include the community as part of the solution to youth homelessness in rural areas. Rural communities have many social groups and governance bodies (local governments, regional development organisations) that could be mobilised to address the problem of rural youth homelessness without committing significant cash resources. These groups could act as a facilitator to change attitudes and preferences within the housing market, as well as raise broader community awareness of these issues. Community ownership and engagement with youth homelessness would generate both first order and second order benefits and some of the options include:

- Working with religious organisations or service clubs such as Rotary, Jaycees, Lions to develop a youth homelessness strategy and specific initiatives that the organisation could undertake. Such initiatives could include the funding and building of specialist housing options, providing employment opportunities for homeless young people, community awareness raising campaigns, outreach services, visiting and support for families with a child at risk of homelessness;

- Including local real estate agents in courses for young people on how to secure and sustaining a tenancy. It may even be possible to have the local chapter of the Real Estate Institute participate in co-ordinating these events and take some responsibility for addressing youth homelessness;

- Demonstration projects that have a 'strength focus'. That is, community based programs that show young people how to help themselves;

- Development of a range of flexible models that are developed by the community, and tailored to uncover the 'untapped' housing in region. Examples could include:

- Developing housing coalitions between government and community services, including both SAAP and non-SAAP supports

- Lead tenant model

- Guarantor model

- Young people advertising as 'tenants seeking rental property'.

- The community could take responsibility for life skills training for young people, particularly in relation to successful tenancy guidelines (rights and responsibilities, preparation and presentation for tenancy interviews, building positive relationships with landlord and with services). Given the use of shared households, it would also be useful to develop their communication and negotiation skills;

6.3 Modifying the Actions of Governments

The need for co-ordinated action is one of the persistent themes throughout the national and international literature on youth homelessness. This message was reinforced consistently through our fieldwork. Footprints to the Future the Report from the Prime Minister's Youth Pathways Action Plan Taskforce (2001) argued that

> There is a critical need to put in place an interconnected and co-ordinated youth transitions system that has a focus on promoting positive pathways for young people as its core responsibility

(Eldridge in Footprints to the Future 2001, p. 94)

The vision arising from the case studies is the need for policy drivers to encourage integration of transition supports for young people, from inter-governmental and Commonwealth, State and Territory levels, through to coordinated youth networks at the local level. Numerous researchers and practitioners argue that youth homelessness is a complex phenomenon with complex causes and integrated solutions are needed. Governments in their actions also need to empower young people and give them the sense that they can have a real impact on achieving a positive outcome in their life. One of the clear conclusions of this research was that the homeless young people we met with and talked almost always commenced their search for services and supports after they had become homeless and often after they had been away from the family home for some time. This finding does not necessarily suggest that early intervention strategies do not necessarily work, but rather, that they do not work for a proportion of homeless young people. Many also reported that it would be difficult or impossible for them to return to the family home. Of course, many do return to the family home, but some do not and cannot. Further

policy development in youth homelessness needs to recognise these factors and should seek to first, develop effective mechanisms for the communication of the range of supports available to young people in that region. In many of the case studies the young person's search for support was *ad hoc* and chaotic and more effective means of communication need to be found. Second, adequate resources need to be directed to interventions that take effect after the young person leaves home. This includes providing adequate support via JPET, SAAP and initiatives such as the Real Life program.

Structured Learning Tenancies are one solution to these policy challenges but other actions can also be taken and these would include:

- Involving young people in planning housing services, advisory committees and the evaluation of various policies. This should also embrace participation in program planning and delivery;

- Provision of clear and youth-friendly information to all young people in the community on the range of services and supports available to them to address different needs. This will enable young people to have a clear knowledge of where to go for help when they need it, and to make informed, proactive and timely choices in the resources they access. Some of the participants in the Ballarat workshop went further and argued that information needs to be provided through alternative communication channels as many homeless young people have trouble reading. Brochures and pamphlets are not likely to be effective for this group, instead services need to advertised on the television and radio;

- Reviewing the housing assignment policies of State Housing Authorities. Public housing is almost impossible for single people to obtain and they therefore need to be homeless in order to be awarded any priority in gaining access to this stock. This policy may reinforce the incidence of homelessness amongst young people in rural areas as many see public housing as a long term solution to their accommodation and life challenges. It may be possible to allocate a larger number of dwellings in rural areas to medium term accommodation – thereby generating an exit point for crisis accommodation – and link that housing to support services geared to generating positive labour market, life skills and private housing market outcomes;

- The integration of housing services within a holistic community support network. Such a framework would recognise that homelessness is not simply a concern of housing provider but instead needs to be addressed by community centres, schools et cetera. A significant percentage of homeless young people become homeless while they are at school. As the work of Chamberlain and McKenzie has shown, protocols and strategies need to be developed that identify school students at risk of homelessness and help them find secure accommodation and a worthwhile future.

- Informing young people about their rights and responsibilities – in accessing services and in accessing housing support and resources. For example, what

are their legal rights and requirements in signing a lease?

- Provide clear explanations of the principles and processes of resource allocation that guide relevant programs. This may begin to address the confusion many young people feel over their successes and failures in having their needs met;

- State Youth Action Plans that take a holistic and integrated view, co-ordinating whole of government responses. The South Australian Government, for example, has just released such a plan to integrate services. Footprints to the Future also recommended the development of a Commonwealth Youth Action Plan;

- Establish and implement community based models to address barriers to accessibility in rural and remote areas:

- Mobile outreach support services

- Facilitating community transport networks

- Building on local community and service centres. Encouraging partnerships with these smaller organisations.

- Recognise the need for longer term housing support. The need for a longer term view in supporting young people in rural areas is evident in the case studies. This covers the two areas of long term support in their transition to independence and provision of a pathway from medium to long term housing stock. The blockages in the present SAAP system due to a lack of exit points must be overcome;

- Provide models of service provision which incorporate the scope to provide targeted follow up support to young people up to 25 years of age;

- Support households with children**.** Early intervention programs to support parenting and families in negotiating with one another represent one potentially valuable policy solutions. The skills to enable conflict to be mediated and possibly resolved are non-existent in sine households and this has contributed to some young people leaving home;

- Award greater attention to the issues of difference, for example gay and lesbian young people, Indigenous youth and people of ethnicity in rural areas. Concrete actions could include:

- Supporting the development of specialist organizations in this area;

- Increased skill development for services in this area

- Community awareness and community development programs

- Extend the mechanisms for making use of action research. For example, formalize mechanisms or feedback loops from action research to the policy arena.

- Attend to the issue of public transport in rural areas. Transport was repeatedly

a major issue in gaining access to employment/meeting the requirements of Centrelink. Young people who cannot physically reach employment opportunities may lose access to income support.

6.4 Policy Conclusions

There are a number of actions governments can take to improve the well being of homeless young people living in rural areas. We would argue that – at least in part – policy makers need to step into the shoes of homeless young people living in rural areas in order to see how these people understand their circumstances and current living conditions. The development and implementation of appropriate policy responses needs to be responsive to the desirability of empowering young people, developing their abilities and reinforcing their self worth. It is also highly desirable to include the community in identifying and acting upon new programs and policies. Structured Learning Tenancies offer one model for meeting the needs of homeless young people and we strongly recommend policy makers investigate this option. However, other options exist and governments and communities need to work together – with young people – to identify the most appropriate solution for each place. Effective intervention in rural youth homelessness offers potentially very substantial benefits for society as a whole and for rural communities in particular. Policies and strategies that reduce the incidence of rural youth homelessness will add to the productive labour force, reduce the health costs that arise out of homelessness; help maintain population in rural areas; contribute to stronger families and stronger communities; and, help reduce welfare expenditures in the long term.

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