

the OASIS

A SHARK ISLAND PRODUCTIONS FILM

A FEATURE DOCUMENTARY ABOUT AUSTRALIA'S HOMELESS YOUTH

A **STUDY GUIDE** BY MARGUERITE O'HARA

The CALEDONIA
Foundation

www.theoasismovie.com.au

www.abc.net.au/tv/oasis



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the OASIS

A feature documentary about Australia's homeless youth

Introduction

On any night in Australia, 22,000 teenagers are homeless. This film tells some of their stories. OASIS is a shelter for homeless young people in Surry Hills in inner-city Sydney. It is run by The Salvation Army. This observational documentary follows the daily lives of both the young people and the Salvation Army staff who care for them and work with them to try and make a difference in their lives.

The film takes an unflinching look at the difficulties and triumphs that happen each day and night. Many of these young people have ongoing problems with drug abuse; some of them can be violent, abusive and out of control; some of them seem resistant to attempts to help; they stuff up. But, whatever is happening in their lives, Paul and Robbin Moulds are there to work with them to assist in turning lives around through supporting them, however often they fall down. They don't always succeed and unlike many 'reality' television programs there are no cash prizes or instant celebrity for any of these people.

When you see Paul and Robbin Moulds, you understand the slogan 'Thank God for the Salvos'.

'Because they're tough kids doesn't mean we should put them in the too-hard basket and believe that nothing can ever change.'

– Captain Paul Moulds, Director of the Oasis Youth Refuge



Synopsis

Darren is the kind of kid the world has written off. Abandoned by his mother at 8, bashed into intensive care by his foster carers at 10, he spiralled into drug addiction and has lived hard on the street for over a decade. But since he turned up on the doorstep of OASIS, a grimy red-brick youth refuge in inner-city Sydney, with nowhere else to go, one person has been there for him around the clock: Captain Paul Moulds.

Father figure, counselor, saviour, and an orphan himself, Paul is nothing short of a legend amongst kids like Darren, who stumble into OASIS at breaking point. No story is too horrific, no circumstance too dire, no kid too damaged. During his chaotic twenty-five years of service he has helped hundreds of young people deal with unspeakable childhood traumas, chronic drug addictions, mental illnesses, and all of street life's other

dramas. Paul is present at the birth of new babies and there to conduct the funerals of those who self-destruct prematurely. On the wall of his cluttered office in which many kids have found temporary salvation hangs his life's mission statement: 'I want to run a rescue shop within a yard of hell'.

Today he stops a kid from burning OASIS down, deals with Darren having a psychotic episode, and picks up young mum, Emma, and her new baby from hospital, and moves them into his family home until he can secure suitable accommodation. Tonight he is forced to kick a group of boys off the property, sets up Owen in his first ever independent

apartment, and walks the streets with the Salvos outreach van intercepting a fifteen-year-old girl who has naively arrived in Sydney's notorious red-light district, Kings Cross, in midwinter with nowhere to stay. Tireless and non judgemental, his life's passion is to salvage this wasted generation from the wreckage of their lives.

Often it's hard to comprehend what keeps Paul buoyant when positive change is so painstakingly incremental amongst his extended family. But he's prepared to stick with Haley for the long haul, even if she has failed to show up for several appointments to book into detox. 'Every kid deserves a thirteenth chance', he shrugs with a smile.

Charting Paul's struggle to improve the fraught lives of the OASIS kids, this raw observational documentary filmed over two years, is a tribute to the power of one man's persistence in the face of seemingly unrelenting darkness. As time unfolds, some kids pull themselves out of misfortune and aspire to greater things, while others sink deeper into addiction and desperation. In the midst of all the chaos Paul battles unflinchingly on to save these lost children, and reflects on his own past along the way.

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Curriculum Relevance

This is a confronting and moving observational documentary about the lives of people many Australians often only see and avoid on the streets.

It would be an excellent film to show to middle and senior secondary students of Society and Environment (SOSE / HSIE), Values Education, Religion and Society, Health and Human Development, Community Development Studies, Psychology, English and Media Studies. The film is rated M.

This picture of one aspect of contemporary society is stark; the language is confronting and some scenes are distressing, though the film is not at all depressing. It raises a number of issues about social responsibility and commitment; the consequences of both substance abuse and homelessness and how solutions to these problems might be best funded and managed. For Media Studies students, the skilful editing and placement of stories drawn from filming over more than a year offers a fine example of the power of observational documentary making, where the commitment of the filmmakers is clearly expressed through their film, rather than through



either narration or leading the subjects in interview.

The activities and information in this guide are designed to help students to:

- Develop an understanding of the dimensions of homelessness.
- Encourage them to see how committed and caring management and intervention can make a difference in people's lives.
- Empathise with the individuals and the challenges they face.
- Understand how an observational documentary can be constructed to present a detailed and complex picture of a relatively hidden aspect of society.

Student Activity 1

Before Watching the Documentary

- What does 'home' mean to you?
- What difference is there in meaning between 'home' and 'house'?
- Is 'shelter' more than just a roof over your head?
- What would you miss most if you could not continue living at home with your family?
- What is your image of a typical homeless street person?
- In Table 1 (on page 5), make a list of some of the reasons why people may find themselves homeless. In the right-hand column make a list of the related difficulties homelessness can lead to in people's lives.

Table 1

Reasons for becoming homeless	What else may follow?
Family breakdown	Loss of affection, company and support of family

- Who should take financial and social responsibility for helping 'homeless' people – Local, State and/or Federal Governments, charitable and religious organisations such as The Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul Society, The Brotherhood of St Laurence, Mission Australia – or should it be a whole community responsibility?
- Do you give to a charity? Have you volunteered to work for a charity?
- Have you ever bought or read a copy of The Big Issue from a street seller? What do you know about this publication?
- Table 2 (on page 6) outlines a number of situations, or scenarios, that young people may find themselves in that result in them becoming homeless. Fill in the second and third columns to indicate what options may be available to them in finding a place to live.

Table 2

The home front	Where do you go immediately?	What longer term accommodation do you find?
<p>You are fourteen and have dropped out of school. Your parents are angry about this and there is constant fighting. You walk out one day.</p>		
<p>Your mum's boyfriend is a heavy drinker and becomes violent and abusive to her and to you. After a really bad incident you decide anywhere's better than home.</p>		
<p>One of your parents has lost their job and as they are unable to pay the rent, they have decided to move to a country town. You're not prepared to do this so you leave home and school.</p>		
<p>There are so many people living on and off in your house that you have no privacy or space and there are constant arguments and fights. You leave.</p>		
<p>To support a drug habit you start stealing from your family and they kick you out.</p>		
<p>You become pregnant when you are fifteen. Your parents want you to have a termination but you are determined to have the baby. They make it clear you're not welcome at home because of the shame you've brought on the family.</p>		

About Homelessness¹

- On any single night at least 100,000 Australians are homeless, without safe, secure or affordable housing. While some find a bed in a refuge, often run by a religious organisation, many more are turned away and sleep 'rough' on the streets or under bridges or in parks or in derelict buildings or cars.
- One in every three homeless Australians (over 30,000) is aged between twelve and twenty-five. It is difficult to collect accurate figures on youth homelessness as much of it is hidden; many young people who are homeless stay with friends and family members, camp out or live in squats.
- Every day, half the people who request immediate accommodation from the homeless service system are turned away. Two in every three children who need support are also turned away.
- Where homeless Australians are staying: approximately half are staying temporarily with relatives or friends; twenty per cent are living in boarding houses and other temporary accommodation; fifteen per cent are sleeping rough on the streets of our cities and towns; fifteen per cent find a bed in the homeless service system.
- Factors changing the nature of homelessness in recent years: increased family breakdown; de-institutionalisation of people with psychiatric illnesses and intellectual

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- disabilities; increases in incidence of women and children fleeing domestic violence; decrease in boarding house and other low-cost accommodation; shifts in patterns of substance abuse and availability of illicit drugs; changes to the structure of the labour market with fewer jobs for low-skilled people.
- More women experience homelessness than men. Domestic violence is the major cause of homelessness for women.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are over represented in the homeless service system. While they comprise two to three per cent of the total population, they represent sixteen per cent of people using homeless assistance services.
- Homelessness and mental illness are closely associated with substance abuse, poor employment prospects, and the inability to secure and maintain accommodation.



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Causes of Youth Homelessness

- There are many reasons why young people become homeless, including:

Relationship and family conflict or breakdown

Physical, sexual or emotional abuse

Domestic violence

Lack of support from parents

Inadequate emotional support, being blamed all the time and unresolved grief or loss

Rejection when a parent re-partners

Eviction or time out from family situation

Ill health, alcohol or other drug misuse within the family

Pregnancy

Sexual preference

Family poverty and resulting stress

Premature school leaving, school avoidance and failing at school

Mental illness

Low income or severe economic hardship

- Many kids may experience some of these things, but often several of these factors combine to cause young people to leave home and get into situations where they feel that they are unable to return.
- Young people experience a number of negative educational, social and health consequences as a result of being homeless. They spend less time in school; often have behavioural problems such as aggression, and psychological problems including depression and low

self-esteem. Drug and alcohol abuse can compound these problems.

About The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army is a Christian Church whose primary expression of religious principles is directed to helping the poor and those in need.

Each year they conduct their Red Shield Appeal to raise funds to continue their many social programs. The new slogan for the annual appeal is 'We're all in this together'. Most of the Salvos' work is funded through public donations and, as we see in the film, collecting money on the streets and in pubs where they sell their magazines is a regular part of members' commitment to the Church.

The Salvation Army web site at <http://www.salvos.org.au> provides a lot of information about their work in Australia. It includes a Student Research Centre link. You can read a story from the *On the Scene* magazine about a successful project of the Oasis Youth Support Network. It's headed 'From City Squats to Red Carpet', and is about six homeless youths who attended their own film premiere as part of a special training program with Foxtel.



Other organisations

Apart from The Salvation Army there are many other groups throughout Australia involved in Youth Support work. They include Mission Australia, Anglicare, St Vincent de Paul Society, The Brotherhood of St Laurence, Open Family, Wesley Central Mission, Good Shepherd Youth and Family Services, Hanover Welfare Services as well as a number of services run by state and local governments. You could search for an organisation on the internet that works with young people in your state or local area.

About the Filmmakers

The Oasis was made with a relatively small crew. As you watch the film think about why this may be the case.

Documentary crew:

Directors:

Sascha Ettinger Epstein
and Ian Darling

Producer:

Ian Darling

Editor:

Sally Fryer

Cinematographer:

Sascha Ettinger Epstein

Executive Producer:

Susan MacKinnon

Line Producers:

Isabel Perez

Mary Macrae

Music Composer:

Felicity Fox

Assistant Editor:

Hilary Balmond



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Characters:

Paul Moulds, Robbin Moulds, Ken DePena, Darren, Haley, Owen, Emma, Trent, Chris, Beau and the homeless youth of Sydney

Refer to <<http://www.theoasismovie.com.au>> for biographical information about the filmmakers.

Directors' statement:

Our inspiration to make the documentary was the awe-inspiring work of Captain Paul Moulds with the street kids of Sydney. Running through the parks, squats and boarding houses of the inner city, we were shocked and ashamed at the depths of squalor and deprivation these young people were facing at a time of apparent prosperity in Australia.

We raised funding to make the film from philanthropic

foundations who shared our concern for the plight of young homeless people. Realising the enormity of the problem, we raised additional philanthropic funding to establish an independent commission into youth homelessness.

We hope this film, backed up by the independent report and major outreach campaign, will give a confronting and moving glimpse into a part of our community largely ignored and forgotten, and have the power to catalyse significant social change.

– Ian Darling and Sascha Ettinger Epstein

When you have completed the Student Activities in this guide which give you a chance to respond to the stories in the film, you could read about the experience of the filmmakers who worked on the film in the section entitled 'The Making of *The Oasis*'.



Student Activity 2

Watching the Film

People's Lives

This film shows what a complex and difficult issue youth homelessness is. In following the lives of several young people who have been assisted by OASIS, we are taken on an emotional roller-coaster ride. Drug abuse is shown to be one of the biggest challenges in helping these disadvantaged kids. While there are some common elements in these stories, each person's story is an individual one. Before watching *The Oasis*, divide your class into several groups. As you watch the film, each group could focus their attention on one or more of the individuals in the film and make notes on what we see and hear from this person about their background, their life challenges and aspirations. Watch too for how other family members are represented.

As you follow these stories, consider how Paul and Robbin Moulds provide a continuing presence in the kids' lives.

Use Table 3 (below) to record your impressions. Later, share your observations and see what common aspects there are to these stories.

Table 3

Individual	Their story about how they came to OASIS	Particular challenges faced	Where they are at with their lives today
Haley			
Emma			
Trent			
Owen			
Darren			
Beau			
Chris			

Each of the young people whose stories are featured in the film exemplifies a particular aspect of homelessness, though for many there is more than one factor compounding the difficulties they are facing. As Paul Moulds says, 'drugs are often just the surface'.

When Beau comes to see Paul, he is suffering from some kind of mental illness and is delusional. He clearly needs professional help. Paul organises a mental health team to come in and take Beau to hospital, where he spends nine weeks in a psychiatric unit. During this time, an OASIS team goes into his flat to clean it up before Beau, who has put on eighteen kilograms in this time and looks and sounds much better, returns

home to his cat. He is now on medication and we see Paul praying with Beau that his life may be more stable now.

- Outline some of the other stories shown in the film and explain how OASIS intervention and support has helped different individuals. Keep in mind that not all kids' lives can be turned around. You could write about the individual whose story you focused on while watching the film.

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Paul and Robbin Moulds and their family

- What sort of personal qualities do the Moulds have that make them able to do this work in the refuge every day and year after year?
- When did Paul Moulds start working with young people?

For me personally faith is a sustaining element. On my worst days, it's not just about me; I believe that if you take Jesus seriously, you can't live a life that is self-centred.

– Paul Moulds

The way we can best honour God is by persevering, not giving up, not allowing this world to knock us down, to have courage and faith.

– Paul Moulds

- How do their Christian principles and religious faith underpin Paul and Robbin Moulds' work?
- What is there in Paul's childhood that he acknowledges may have influenced his choice to do this kind of work and empathise with many of the kids at OASIS?
- What do we see of Paul and Robbin's home life that illustrates how they try to maintain 'a balance' between work and home life?



- How do his own children, Nathan and Sarah, react to their parents' shared commitment to other kids?
- A wedding, a funeral and several births. How are these events shown to be part of the continuum of life for the Moulds family?
- We see Paul and Ken rattling the Salvos tin on the streets of Sydney to collect funds to keep the programs going. Why do you think they do this and is it a good use of their time? What percentage of their funds comes from voluntary donations?
- Describe any occasions shown in the film when Paul Moulds' patience and optimism are especially tested.

People write them [the kids] off. But behind that behaviour is a person; behind that person is the journey that's led them to that point.

I go in thinking that today might be the day for someone when it's their day.

Despite everything we've got, video programs, radio programs, school, etc. they don't want a bar of it, and you've just got to keep working away, offering, believing, giving them experiences that are different to what they've known. If they can just be inspired and grab hold of one of those things then we're getting somewhere.

- What do these comments tell us about Paul Moulds' optimism, idealism and essentially realistic approach to his work?

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- Apart from providing emergency short-term accommodation, what are some of the programs offered through OASIS designed to change the patterns of many of the kids' lives?

Ken DePena

Ken has been working as a volunteer with the Salvation Army for more than fifty years. While he is obviously committed to making a difference, he does voice some of the views people in the wider community have about working with these kids. He's upset about the vandalism of the toilet, as is Paul Moulds ('don't disrespect the place') and the kids picking the roses he has tended. When Paul lends Emma money to tide her over till pension day, Ken says, 'it's a never-ending story of paying ... I wonder how much

they contribute to the Salvation Army?' When Chris Nock goes off with his money, Ken says, 'he's off to King's Cross to spend all his money and ruin himself ... sometimes they don't come back'. Chris Nock does not come back.

Ken's view of the work is:

Our job is to encourage them to move on, to get a job, to do something. You can't stay idle all your life. That's the problem with the Welfare System ... it doesn't encourage working. It's not what it should be ... they're encouraged to do nothing.

- Given his long experience working in this area, might there be something in what Ken says, considering what he does year after year?

The Oasis logo, featuring the word 'the' in a small font above 'OASIS', which is written in a large, stylized, hand-drawn font. The background of the logo is a textured, light-colored surface with some red and orange splatters.

Student Activity 3

The Heart of the Matter

- What did *you* really think about these kids and how OASIS helps and supports them?
- Living as these young people do can hardly be seen as a 'lifestyle choice'. Read the following observations made by some of the kids appearing in the film about their lives and aspirations.

'I'm worried about myself. I've been injecting ice and my life keeps going downhill.'

– Chris to his mum on the phone from OASIS

'My dream is to have kids, get married, live in my own house, become a nurse.'

– Haley at fourteen when she first came to OASIS

I was kicked out of home when I was fourteen because I didn't get on with my mother's boyfriend and I got bashed every day, and my mum was on drugs pretty bad. I hate it. I'm slowly disappearing. I'm losing it.

– Haley at 22

When I was eleven, twelve, thirteen, I smoked heaps of ice and crystal. I didn't care if I died. Nothing would make me happy. I loved getting stoned but I don't love the way it fucks you up in the head and turns you mental.

– Owen

'There's gotta be something better at the end of this.'

– Darren at the end of his interview in squat

What sorts of insights are revealed here and what are the factors that make it so difficult for many of the kids to make changes in their lives? Think about how difficult it can be for any of us to try to kick addictions, become independent and resilient and change our lives.

The drugs are just the surface stuff. If people are going to get over the addiction, it's no good just taking the drugs out of your system when the hole in the heart is still there.

– Paul Moulds

- How does the film show the importance of employment and secure affordable housing to people wanting to get off drugs or alcohol? How does it demonstrate the importance of loving relationships in mending 'the hole in the heart'?
- Several scenes in this film show Paul and Robbin Moulds responding to the kids in situations that are quite recognisable and common between parents and their teenage kids, e.g. Paul having breakfast with Darren, lending Emma money, helping kids move house, acting as an intermediary between mother and son (Chris), finding them jobs, having a heart to heart chat, minding the baby. In what ways are these daily interactions important in everyone's life?

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Student Activity 4

Confronting the realities of prejudice through role playing

- Here are a number of things you may have heard people say about homeless kids. In pairs, conduct the conversation you would have with the person making each statement. Take turns in this role-playing exercise at being speaker and respondent.

'It's their choice to be homeless.'

'Young girls who are streetworkers sell themselves because they want to.'

'No point giving money to kids begging; they'll just blow it on drugs.'

'The families should be made to take responsibility for their kids.'

'Anyone can find a job if they want one. Why should we support kids who don't want to work?'

'Nothing ever changes for some kids; they're just determined to write themselves off.'

'It's the drugs and grog that are at the heart of all this stuff. We need tighter controls.'





Student Activity 5

What are we going to do about the current situation and how can we all take responsibility in addressing the complex issue of youth homelessness?

The Moulds have vast experience in working in this area of youth at risk and use a range of approaches to helping the people who come to OASIS. Early in the film Paul says, ‘these kids are pretty damaged ... the challenge is what are we going to do about it?’

- Conduct a class forum about what you think might be the best ways to address some of the problems and consequences of youth homelessness. Try to be honest about your feelings before looking at possible programs to make a difference. Consider what we see in the film about programs that can make a difference. How can the complex and interrelated issues of family breakdown, substance abuse, unemployment and the need for safe and affordable housing be unraveled? What kind of early intervention needs to be undertaken with families and kids at risk of becoming homeless? Who should intervene and how?

A place to call home

The pre-viewing questions in Activity 1 in this guide asked you to consider what home means to you. Homelessness – with its linked connections to substance abuse, mental health problems, domestic violence, poor education attainment and long-term unemployment – is at the heart of this film.

Paul Moulds spends much of his time finding safe and secure accommodation for the young people he works with. Initially, this may be in the form of short-term crisis accommodation at OASIS or other shelters, but his work is also about securing and setting up people in their own accommodation. As Darren says when he is in his own place – ‘this is home’.

At the end of the film, we see Owen, Darren, Emma and Trent, and Beau all living in their own places.

Having a place to call home is increasingly difficult for many people in Australia today. As house prices, interest rates and rents rise, many people find themselves unable to find safe and affordable accommodation. Australia has very low levels of public housing – only five per cent of overall housing stock. More people are falling between a limited supply of emergency housing and some pretty rough alternatives, including the streets and parks, the car, or couches at a friend’s place. Job-searching from any of these places is very difficult and for many people, not a priority in their daily hunt for a bed for the night.

- As a group, brainstorm as many ideas as you can come up with for creating more affordable and safe housing for those thousands of Australians who are ‘falling between the cracks’. Think about what matters to you in choosing a place to live in and call home. Be as bold and radical as you like in devising solutions, e.g. turning every city car park into low-cost or mixed housing for people, legislating that developers of apartment blocks set aside a number of apartments in each development for low-income tenants, converting empty shop-top dwellings into housing for people in need. Think outside the current solutions, many of which have failed.

Making *The Oasis*

Read through the following statements about the challenges in making this film before answering the questions in Activity 6.

Sascha Ettinger Epstein, co-director of the film, spent over a year working as the principal cinematographer on the *Oasis* shoot. Here is part of her account of the experience. (visit <http://www.theoasismovie.com.au>) to read full statements from the filmmakers)

Spending over a year immersed in the chaotic world of an inner-city youth refuge is an eye-opener for even the most hardened streetwise city dweller. Fights, drug psychoses, teenage pregnancy, police busts – the culture of the streets is one of never-ending turbulence. But OASIS is also a place rich with inspiring workers and colourful characters, who have each lived through intense experiences in their short lives, and whose stories are rarely heard but definitely worth telling.

I arrived at OASIS in December 2005 knowing no-one, and just started hanging around in the carpark with my camera, trying to fall in with the locals who congregate every day to socialize, wait for Captain Paul Moulds, ask for food vouchers, have a shower and access various support services.

The first major hurdle was to overcome the rumour that I was an undercover police agent which many kids, especially those heavily into crime and drugs, were convinced of!

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After I shook off that stigma, and proved that I could keep up on missions around the neighbourhood, the young people really began to let me into their world. Kids as young as fourteen were eking out an existence washing car windows for small change, eating at charity food vans, squatting in abandoned buildings, sleeping rough in parks in mid-winter. It was shocking that in the new millennium, in a rich western country, kids are still subject to such serious deprivation.

Days of shooting were often uneventful and there were long patches of 'hanging around' where nothing actually happened. Despite always needing basic necessities like food and accommodation,

the kids often prioritised less productive pursuits, such as drugs and alcohol, driven by their addictions and mental illnesses. Hanging around watching young people get wasted and burn their brain cells is not particularly inspiring but such is the reality of street life – unfortunately even kids this young have been through so much and find reality so bleak, that they try to escape their problems by getting 'off their face'.

Dusk was usually when things started to get interesting, as the streets come alive with 'shady activities' easier to get away with under the cover of darkness. There were food vans to visit, fences to climb, abandoned buildings to explore.

Aside from being curious adventurers with the city as their playground, the kids did need to find places to sleep and hang out where they would be out of the cold, safe from street predators, and away from the police. Things weren't all just fun and bright lights though. The streets do get wilder at night with drugs and prostitution really upping the various dangers. I generally felt safe when I was out with a crew of OASIS kids no matter where we roamed, as they often protected me if I came under attack from other 'streeties' who were paranoid about the camera.

Aside from running wild with the kids, what I found fascinating and deeply enjoyable was spending time with Paul. With him as my guide I was able

to access places (like detox centres and hospitals) I had never seen and get a great insight into the situation of youth homelessness. What frequently amazed me was the resilience of Paul and his deep belief, despite being lied to, ripped off, and abused, that every kid could be salvaged from the wreckage of his or her life, no matter how horrific the past had been. Every day he was dealing with problems on a practical level. Paul's connection with the young people was so warm it transcended any notion of

mere 'youth work'. He is literally surrogate father to a whole community of dispossessed kids.

Paul ultimately aims to keep the kids alive and safe from as much harm as possible until they can start to make positive changes in their lives. He just never gives up. And his manner of dealing with every person, from Ken to a kid in the most dire situation, was always one of absolute dignity and patience.

It was inevitable that the making of this project and immersion in this world would have a profound impact on me personally. Probably the most unnerving event I filmed was Darren having his ice psychosis as he was very erratic and no-one knew what he was capable of doing after such a massive amount of drugs. The hardest thing for me as a female from a supportive family, was observing the number of young girls who fell pregnant, often to boys who didn't care about them or were too caught up in drug addictions to help out. From the journeys of the girls I witnessed it was obvious that being a young mum, without proper intensive daily support, adequate cash flow, stable accommodation and someone to share the workload, is an extremely difficult experience. Ultimately the life of the young

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mum is sacrificed for the needs of the child. Sadly it was often the case that these young mums had themselves been brought up in dysfunctional families and thus the cycle of intergenerational poverty and disadvantage was continuing. Several had their children taken away by the Department of Community Services during filming.

Ultimately the most valuable lesson I learned was not to pre-judge people. Even when meeting the most bedraggled downtrodden young person, or the toughest looking thug, you can never be sure what kind of person they are below the surface or what kind of life they have lived. Alongside the cruelty and barbarism of street culture I witnessed generosity and compassion beyond my greatest expectations, and encountered kids with enough humour and wit to keep me entertained for weeks. The really enriching thing about entering a world you are unfamiliar with is that seeing life from a different vantage point really helps to broaden your perspective on the world.

Please view <<http://www.theoasismovie.com.au>> for complete filmmakers' statements

Producer:

Our objective has been to raise awareness about the issue of youth homelessness in Australia, through the production of a feature documentary, and the establishment of an independent National Youth Commission, culminating in

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the release of a comprehensive report to accompany the film.

Directors:

Stylistically we all shared the same vision and had embarked on the project with a taste for cinéma-vérité, a flavour which we felt would most effectively show the reality of life at a youth refuge. The general desire was to create a sense of reality unfolding without too much 'artistic' intervention, to ensure the craft of the shooting and editing was as invisible as possible. The finished piece is a mixture of observational scenes, interviews with young people and insight/incisive comments from Paul, all of which unfolds over a chronological time period.

Editor:

Because of the observational nature of the film and because we wanted the kids' voices above all to be heard, we decided at the outset that we would not use a formal narrator. We are often TOLD about the lives of homeless kids – in newspaper articles and more current affairs type television programming – but we wanted the kids to TELL their stories themselves and if we needed an anchor or guide that we would use the one person whom they all trusted and who often knew them better than

members of their own family. That person was Paul Moulds. We firmly believed that we could tell our story without an outside narrator's voice and in a sense that is what Paul's voice becomes. Paul's own story and that of his family and faith was vital, but he was also the figure that would guide us through the lives of those kids whose stories we featured.

Where certain factual elements were missing we chose to use text on screen but always tried to edit this to the absolute minimum so as not to take the audience 'out' of the story.

Composer:

Stylistically the music sits in a very dark place, which is natural to me. I am usually told to 'brighten up' a cue or make it sound more up beat. This time I was told to make the music darker on a regular basis! When you hear the kids' stories and put the score into context, although it is dark, it is absolutely right. I feel we achieved a real emotional honesty in the soundtrack without going into sentimentality and the dark beauty that the directors leant towards is fortunately just about my favourite place to be, musically.



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Student Activity 6

The Making of *The Oasis*

- What do you think was the motivation of the filmmakers in making this documentary?
- Why do you think the staff and some of the kids at OASIS were prepared to have their stories told on film?
- Over what time frame was this documentary filmed?
- Who are people appearing in this film talking to – the camera, the camera operator, other film crew, an unseen and unheard interviewer?
- How might the presence of a camera and outsiders change behaviours and responses?
- How does the editing work in moving the viewer between situations and individuals? Is the narrative sequenced in a way that allows us to see both the progress and setbacks?
- The soundtrack of this film includes a lot of street background noises of ambulance and police sirens; this is layered with the raw language of the kids and interspersed with people telling their stories. There is also music in the background at some points. Is this mix of sounds distracting for the viewer or does it provide a gritty realism?
- Unlike some observational documentaries, there is no voice-over linking stories in this film. Why do you think the filmmakers chose not to use a narrator?
- How does the text information that appears periodically on screen provide background without impeding the story?
- Describe three scenes which best demonstrate the positive influence of the unshakeable support and concern demonstrated by the Moulds.
- Describe three scenes with the kids that you found especially emotionally powerful.
- How do you think watching a film like *The Oasis* might make a difference to people's lives and the work of The Salvation Army?

The challenge of managing homelessness in 'the lucky country' – political social and financial issues

During the 2007 Federal Election campaign, the leader of the then-opposition Labor Party, Kevin Rudd, now Prime Minister, visited a homeless shelter in Melbourne one night. This was not covered by the media as it was unheralded and not an official campaign activity. He was reported much later as having been moved by the plight of these people and impressed by both staff and volunteers who worked there. One of Rudd's first acts on assuming Government was to ask all Members of Parliament to make it one of their first priorities to visit a homeless shelter in their electorate and talk to the people who were staying there and those who work with them. The MPs were then to report back on their findings as a prelude to developing a national approach to effectively making a difference to this situation.

- Are governments the best people to initiate and fund programs to take a comprehensive approach to reducing the numbers of homeless young people and dealing with their issues, such as a lack of

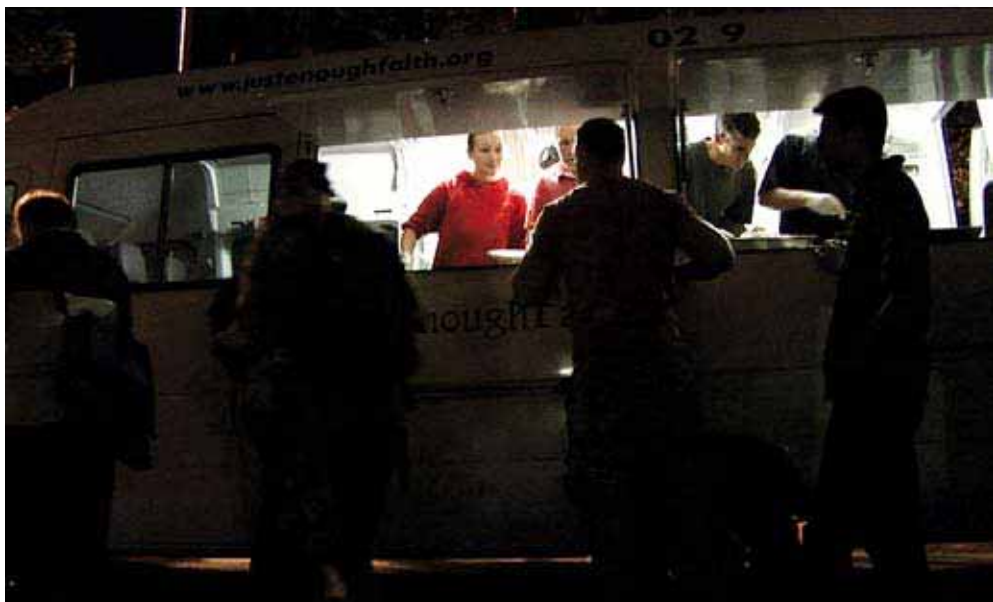
affordable and suitable housing, drug and alcohol abuse and unemployment?

- Recently, Federal Government intervention in aboriginal communities, to protect children, has had bi-partisan Government support, though not everyone thinks it is the best way to address the problems. Who is best placed to devise, fund and manage intervention programs to address the complex issues of homelessness?
- National and State issues usually have a local aspect. Think about how you could find out more about the dimensions of youth homelessness in your local area. Which groups or organisations might be best able to provide information? How could you become part of a local solution to the problems that exist in your area? Consider who might be able to speak to members of your school community about youth homelessness and how you can become part of the solution. Find out if local businesses, churches and/or other local welfare organisations have strategies or programs in place for addressing homelessness in your community. Being informed could be the catalyst for some really positive local action.

A new Inquiry

In 2007, the National Youth Commission, comprised of Major David Eldridge, Associate Professor David MacKenzie, Ms Narelle Clay AM and Father

the OASIS



Wally Dethlefs, one of the original three Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission commissioners, undertook the first independent national inquiry into youth homelessness since the 1989 HREOC report 'Our Homeless Children'.

The NYC held twenty-one days of hearings in all states and territories. Formal evidence was given by 319 individuals. Ninety-one written submissions were received, including seven from government departments. Policy forums / workshops were held in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth. The NYC report and the OASIS documentary were released in April 2008. The report is viewable at: <<http://www.nyc.net.au>> or <<http://www.theoasismovie.com.au>>.

Brian Burdekin launched the

NYC, having headed the 1989 Inquiry into this issue. At the 2007 Inquiry launch, he said:

Australia has experienced fifteen years of economic growth, unemployment is at record lows, yet the number of young people turning up to homeless services for support has remained unchanged since the last comprehensive inquiry by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in 1989.

Australia desperately needs a coordinated, coherent, national and affordable housing strategy.

Sadly we haven't made enough inroads in addressing the root causes of homelessness in our society.

Exacerbating the housing



the OASIS

crisis is the fact that we have double the number of young people on care and protection orders [that] we did in 1996 ... Young people in care have a far greater risk of experiencing homelessness than their peers.

To prevent more young people becoming homeless we need to find lasting solutions based on what works.

(Note: the establishment of OASIS in 1990 was a direct result of recommendations in

the 1989 Burdekin Report into youth homelessness.)

Many people, including kids who have experienced homelessness, have talked to the commissioners conducting the 2007 inquiry. You can read more about this Inquiry at <http://www.nyc.net.au> and download the report or summary from <http://www.theoasismovie.com.au>.

Endings and beginnings

You wouldn't continue this work if every kid you invested yourself into ended up in jail or you

never saw a glimmer of hope. But that's not the reality of the work. You have to be realistic.
– Paul Moulds

At the end of the film we see images of some of the kids with superimposed text showing what has happened in their lives:

Haley has not yet shown up for rehab. Robbin tries to remain in regular contact.

Darren still lives in his own apartment and does regular volunteer work at Oasis.

Owen is attending a film & TV training program and wants to be a cameraman.

Beau is studying at TAFE. He continues to live in independent housing with his cat.

Emma and Trent are busy caring for Destiny and Malakai. They are in weekly contact with Paul at Oasis

How is Paul Moulds' optimism vindicated by what we see and read on screen about some of the kids at the end of the film?



Further reading and viewing

DVDs, CDs and magazines

The Choir of Hard Knocks – ABC DVD and CDs showcasing the performances and lives of the Choir of Hard Knocks, a choir based in Melbourne, established for disadvantaged and homeless people by Jonathon Welch. It has performed nationally, including in a concert at the Sydney Opera House and their CD won a 2007 ARIA award.

The Big Issue – a monthly magazine sold nationally on the streets by disadvantaged and sometimes homeless people, featuring stories written by and about the homeless, as well as mainstream stories about politics, the arts and society. Half the cost of each magazine sold goes to the seller.

Books

Justin Healey (ed.), *Issues in Society, Homelessness*, volume 243, The Spinney Press, 2006.

Justin Healey (ed.), *Issues in Society, The Homeless*, volume 159, The Spinney Press, 2002.

Andrew Byrne, *Homeless: true stories of life on the streets*, New Holland, 2005.

Helen Sykes (ed.), *Youth Homelessness: Courage and Hope*, Melbourne University Press, 1993.

Web sites

<http://www.theoasismovie.com.au>

The film's web site where you can read more about both the film and the people who appear

in it; view short films on other characters; read statements from the filmmakers about aspects of the filmmaking process; hear the soundtrack; view updates to characters over time; download the report and view many links to government and community service agencies.

<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/oasis>

The ABC hosted site for the film screening on ABC on 10 April 2008. You can view a streamed copy of the film here.

<http://www.nyc.net.au>

The National Youth Commission into Youth Homelessness web

site outlining the Commission's terms of reference and method and download the report.

<http://www.salvos.org.au/need-help/youth-issues/>

The Salvation Army site giving an overview of the range of services they provide for young people.

<http://salvosoasis.org/salvosoasis/indextwo.html>

The Oasis Youth Support Network site with information about the range of programs offered to young people.

the
OASIS



the OASIS

<http://www.salvos.org.au/about-us/news-and-resources/documents/OTSAUT06web.pdf>

Stories profiling the work of The Salvation Army, including the work of Robbin and Paul Moulds.

http://www.salvoaudio.com/sermon/captain_paul_moulds.htm

Watch a video of a talk Paul Moulds gave in 2007 about the 1989 Burdekin Report into youth homelessness and about the new 2007 Report being prepared. Hear his views on what happens at OASIS and his hopes for this documentary to raise awareness and lead to better targeted and funded programs.

<http://www.afho.org.au>
Australian Federation of Homeless Organisations.

<http://www.mission.com.au>
Mission Australia

<http://www.documentaryaustralia.com.au/da/index.php>

Documentary Australia's web site outlining their principles and guides to assist in making issue based documentaries.

http://www.lifeline.org.au/find_help/24_hour_counselling_service

Lifeline 24 Hour Counselling – 13 11 14

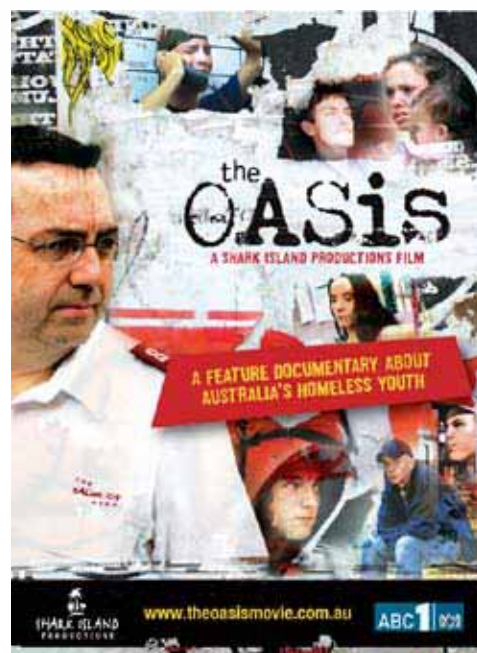
http://www.kidshelp.com.au/home_KHL.aspx?s=6

Kids help Line – 1800 55 1800:

<http://www.getup.org.au>
Getup! – Action for Australia

All websites accessed 27 March 2008.

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Endnote

- 1 From Justin Healey (ed.), *Issues in Society*, Homelessness, volume 243, The Spinney Press, 2006, <http://www.spinneypress.com.au/243_book_desc.html>.



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