

# 15

After leaving home, young people often return home at different times before re-entering private rental accommodation. This is normal, but for a young person without that option, a breakdown in their housing situation may well lead to homelessness. Returning home may be possible for teenagers following mediation or family reconciliation, but it is not always the most likely nor the most desirable outcome. During the hearings and in submissions, issues were raised about transitional accommodation. Some young people are not ready for such independent living. Access to fully independent rental accommodation is difficult and the level of support that many young people need is not available. SAAP agencies are not resourced to provide extensive post-SAAP support, although workers know how important this can be. The idea of post-SAAP outreach support being made available to all homeless young people moving into independent accommodation is potentially a way of improving SAAP outcomes by assisting young people to avoid another crisis and to prevent recycling back into the homelessness service system.



## Chapter 15 | Post-SAAP Transitions

*Responding effectively to homeless young people's needs means understanding developmental issues and taking a youth focused approach.<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

15.1 In Chapter 14, evidence was discussed relating to the crisis services offered to homeless young people through SAAP. In this chapter, the report examines evidence presented to the Inquiry about young people's journeys once they have left a SAAP crisis service. The evidence includes information about what is happening to young people post-crisis, what their needs are, and some of the services the system currently offers in different parts of Australia.

15.2 The Inquiry also sought evidence about the impact on SAAP services of any shortcomings in the options available to young people during their post-SAAP transitions.

### Young people

15.3 The story of young people's lives after crisis isn't simply a story of services. It is also a story about youth. Under normal circumstances in Australian culture, few young people, especially those under 18, but including those in their early twenties, are totally self-reliant and independent. The University of Melbourne Youth Research Centre's Longitudinal Live-Patterns Project suggests that the pathways image of a linear trajectory from dependence to independence does not match contemporary Australian experience.<sup>2</sup> When young people are able to return to family, and that return is stable and harmonious, their journey post-crisis is a private one. In many other cases the journey is accompanied by services and workers and takes place within a policy framework with a "... maximum possible degree of self-reliance and independence"<sup>3</sup> that

is arguably somewhat at odds with contemporary Australian cultural practices<sup>4</sup> and at odds with what is known about young homeless people's needs.<sup>5</sup> The Inquiry was interested in receiving evidence from young people and organisations about how well the SAAP system is meeting the transitional and developmental needs of young people and whether the existing policy framework impedes or supports young people's post-crisis transitions.

## Leaving Supported Accommodation

15.4 SAAP data relating to unaccompanied 12 to 17 year-olds who used services during the 2004 and 2005 data collection period at first sight, suggests that when young people leave a SAAP service, their living situation and their accommodation circumstances are not greatly altered.

**Table 6: Accommodation(%), before and after support, 2004-5**

Type of accommodation	Before	After
SAAP or other emergency housing	21.5	22.5
Living rent-free in house/flat	40.5	34.8
Private rental	4.8	7.9
Public or community housing	4.2	5.8
Rooming house/hostel/hotel/caravan	2.8	3.3
Boarding in a private home	15.9	16.5
Own home	0.4	0.5
Living in a car/tent/park/street/squat	4.3	2.2
Institutional	3.8	4.4
Other	1.7	2.1
Total	100	100

Source: Homeless Children in SAAP 2004-05

**Table 7: Living situation(%) before and after support, 2004-5**

Living situation	Before	After
With parents(s)	34	29.2
With relatives	11.6	12.4
With foster family	3.3	2.7
With spouse/partner with/without children	4.6	5.0
Alone/alone with children	7.1	9.4
With friends	17.6	15.7
With other unrelated persons	20.7	24.3
Other	1.2	1.4
Total	100	100

Source: Homeless Children in SAAP 2004-05

The young people who were in SAAP services before support (21.5%) or move to a SAAP service after support (22.5%) will typically be those moving from crisis accommodation to medium or long-term SAAP accommodation. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare suggests the movement between SAAP services and the lack of change in young people's circumstances may indicate that young people have few options in the face of their need for shelter.<sup>7</sup> The Australian Federation of Homeless Organisations has also pointed out that some SAAP service re-entries take place because of the short-term, crisis nature of the first intervention.<sup>8</sup> But remaining in SAAP is a positive outcome for young people who are not ready for fully independent unsupported housing, even if it was available to them. Altogether, 30.7 per cent move into some form of independent living arrangement. This is consistent with the core program objective of SAAP. The most common type of accommodation post-SAAP during the data period was living rent-free in a house or flat. For some this represents a return home, but the Australian Federation of Homeless Organisations suggested to the Inquiry that in many cases, when young people's post-SAAP living situation involves staying with friends or non-relatives, this outcome represents a transition to couch-surfing.<sup>9</sup> There was other evidence submitted to the Inquiry that would support this observation.<sup>10</sup> The difficulty of achieving stable living arrangements given the time of stay restrictions on SAAP crisis accommodation is formidable. Access to public housing for young people remains problematic with long waiting lists and the escalating cost of private rental accommodation.

15.5 The next most common outcome was a move to another SAAP or other emergency accommodation service. Unfortunately comparable data is not available for 18 to 25 year-olds as a distinct age group so the same analysis is not available for these young people.

15.6 While SAAP data provides a good indication of the broad movement of under 18 year-olds through the SAAP system it says little about the effectiveness of individual interventions: whether a particular young person's wellbeing was enhanced or whether someone's life was improved in the face of a return to a similar accommodation type or similar living situation or where that young person was in their life journey. What the data does show is that young homeless SAAP clients did better when supported for longer periods, with length of support reducing their chances of returning to SAAP and also having a positive impact on their likelihood of obtaining private rental accommodation, public or community housing, and on their chances of receiving an income through government benefits and employment.<sup>11</sup>

15.7 The witnesses submitting evidence to the Inquiry provided the Commissioners with a great deal of human and homelessness sector context for the broad movements described in the SAAP data.

## Returning Home

15.8 The SAAP data discussed earlier in this chapter shows that more than a quarter of unaccompanied young people aged 12 to 17 returned to live with their parents post-crisis during the data collection period. The meaning of this statistic is difficult to precisely establish. It seems reasonable to infer from the general evidence about the factors limiting young people's post-SAAP options, that some young people who

returned home after exiting SAAP did so because they had little alternative.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, reconciliation with family, if some work with the young person and their family has been undertaken is a positive and sustainable outcome for many. If problems in the family continue it is likely that relationships will again come under stress and perhaps lead to the young person leaving home on another occasion. The 'in and out' pattern has been identified by MacKenzie and Chamberlain as a common phenomenon in the earliest reaches of the homeless career.

15.9 In Melbourne, Salvation Army Crossroads spoke of young people's movements after crisis:

*In terms of where young people move to from T Street, the options are sparse. A minority return to family or move in with friends or can afford private rental. The majority stay in the homelessness service system ...*<sup>13</sup>

15.10 The Inquiry heard from YWCA Darwin that when young mothers can't find accommodation they often end up in situations similar to those that caused them to leave home in the first place.<sup>14</sup> Zig Zag Young Women's Resource Centre in Brisbane spoke of one of its clients:

*She chose to move home with her family, which was a really unsafe situation where her parents were still drug using. There were still significant amounts of violence and drug use in the home and having to return to that home as an only option. ... I can say that there are three other young women whose experiences were exactly the same in terms of staying with us for a long time, who could not access a community rent scheme or any of those methods ...*<sup>15</sup>

15.11 Some young people returning home do so because family relationships have stabilised or improved, with or without the support of services. The evidence related to the restorative work undertaken by the Reconnect program is discussed in Chapter 13 Early Intervention. Early intervention as a paradigm for practice has become well established in the homelessness sector and among youth services. Some SAAP services also operate Reconnect programs, and there is evidence of SAAP agencies doing 'early intervention' for homeless young people through referrals or directly.

15.12 Once again, the picture for those aged 18 to 25 is less clear than it is for the younger age group. The Inquiry did not receive a great deal of evidence about returning to live with parents for this older group. However, the Inquiry was advised by Project i that there is a need for programs to work with 18 to 25 year-olds and their families regardless of whether a return home is possible or even desirable. Project i drew the Inquiry's attention to the Victorian Government's Family Reconciliation and Mediation Program, or FRMP, as an example of this type of initiative.<sup>16</sup>

15.13 FRMP, which grew out of the Youth Homelessness Action Plan in Victoria, aims at building capacity within the homelessness sector to use family-inclusive practices to work with 15 to 25 year-olds.<sup>17</sup> The program offers professional development for SAAP workers and provides brokerage funds to facilitate 'brief counselling' and other support to help young people to improve relations with their families and, where possible, to return home.<sup>18</sup> In 2006, 21.3 per cent of young people referred to FRMP had been

homeless for more than two years.<sup>19</sup> In contrast, the Australian Government Reconnect Program funds services that undertake early intervention with at-risk or homeless 12 to 18 year-olds.<sup>20</sup>

15.14 Edel Quinn, a shelter for homeless adult men in Wagga Wagga (NSW), estimates that about a quarter of its clients are 18 to 25 year-olds. The services spoke to the Inquiry about its clients having already become detached from family by the time they reach the shelter:

*... one of the questions you ask is you know, who do we contact in an emergency, like, you know, if you get run over by a bus, who do we contact? Ninety-five percent - I'd say it is as high as ninety-five percent, haven't really got anybody that they can contact.*<sup>21</sup>

*Edel Quinn described the positive difference that continued managed contact with the shelter had made in reducing the number of clients in this older age group who need to re-enter the service for crisis support. Contact included an open-ended outreach program and also involved clients returning as volunteers in the shelter's broader community building activities such as its lawn mowing service for disadvantaged community members. The service spoke of "... habitual users" who are now successfully living independently as a result of outreach support.*<sup>22</sup>

15.15 The success of Edel Quinn's post-crisis support program suggests that supportive relationships are essential for all age groups in order to sustain stable accommodation, including young people. The particular support needs of young people are examined in more detail later in this chapter.

## Transitional housing

15.16 Supported transitional housing offers young people a stepped approach towards more permanent post-crisis housing. The extent and nature of supported transitional housing is not uniform across Australia. While one of the SAAP program's priorities includes a consistent national policy on post-crisis support, different levels of available funding in different parts of the country, the varying availability of transitional housing stock through state and territory public housing departments, and the variety in the nature of services attracting funding lead to very different post-crisis support opportunities for homeless young people. While SAAP services provide a degree of post-SAAP support and regard this as important work, they are not sufficiently funded to provide needs-based post-SAAP support to clients.

15.17 The Inquiry was told that in Wagga Wagga (NSW) there is a lack of transitional housing for young people.<sup>23</sup> In Canberra, the director of the ACT Council of Social Service voiced concerns about the support aspects of transitional accommodation, questioning the current capacity of services to support young people in transitional accommodation:

*... those organisations are running pretty bare as it is.*<sup>24</sup>

15.18 In Launceston, Karinya Young Womyn's Service had similar concerns, advising the Inquiry about its frustration that a lack of support resources was effectively hindering

its access transitional properties:

*... Housing Tasmania at some stage made some commitment that they could provide more properties. But they won't release it, because there is not the outreach support to make the tenancies successful ...*<sup>25</sup>

15.19 Some witnesses raised concerns about service models. The Youth Network of Tasmania, Shelter Tasmania and the Tasmania Council of Social Service advised the Inquiry that a restructure of SAAP services in that state had had some negative consequences for transitional housing:

*In many instances, the outreach component has been separated from the housing service, and [SAAP services'] capacity to provide medium-term accommodation has been reduced or curtailed.*<sup>26</sup>

15.20 The issue of being able to offer an integrated housing and support service within SAAP as a post-crisis response was of concern in a number of locations both in terms of relationship continuity and youth work expertise.<sup>27</sup> SAAP youth agencies which have established relationships with young clients are best positioned to continue support beyond SAAP, but the capacity to do that would depend on resources. The alternative approach of public housing tenancy support being developed in a limited way in several jurisdictions recognises the same issue but applies a much more narrow range of support associated with public housing tenants, not formerly homeless clients of SAAP.

15.21 In Victoria there was a great deal of evidence provided about the Transitional Housing Management Program. In 1997, the Victorian Government established the Transitional Housing Management program (THM) aimed at complementing SAAP<sup>28</sup> and stabilising people's housing.<sup>29</sup> The program provides interim housing, information and referral.<sup>30</sup> The THM program incorporated most of the medium and long-term SAAP properties and uncoupled the management of these properties from the support for people accommodated. The expansion of THM properties over the past five years somewhat reduced demand for SAAP and Crisis Accommodation Program accommodation in that state.<sup>31</sup> However, there continues to be debate about the wisdom of this change and there remains the problem of transition to independent affordable accommodation after a period in the THM accommodation: ie. exit point issues.

15.22 A number of Victorian SAAP and other services advised the Inquiry that they had specific concerns about the management practices of some THMs and the consequences of the effective separation of personal support from property management.<sup>32</sup> Footscray Youth Housing Group told the Inquiry about its experiences with the system:

*... there was one young lass, who suffered a mental illness. Rather than actually go through the [SAAP] worker around rental arrears, [the THM] just rang her directly and her response to that was to actually pick up a knife and stab herself three times in the stomach. ... Another young woman was evicted [from] transitional housing because [of] the noise she made as she was being beaten up.*<sup>33</sup>



15.23 Family Access Network (Vic) told the Inquiry that the separation of support from property management meant that SAAP services effectively lost workers, but had to become advocates for young people in their dealings with the new system.<sup>34</sup>

15.24 Transitional housing with outreach support isn't sufficient for all young people. In Darwin, Anglicare NT spoke about the need for medium-term housing with intensive staffing:

*One of the big missing links up here I think is the staffed medium-term accommodation-type service where young people have full support, 24/7. ... In the NT there is nowhere that has medium-term intensive living skills development programs in a medium term environment. They just don't exist. They are all staffed externally, and they work great and do wonderful work. What it means though is ... we are trying to push young people into those service systems that are too dysfunctional ... So, they continue to keep reappearing in the crisis refuge or are tripped over into medium-term accommodation*<sup>35</sup>

15.25 In Canberra, Anglicare Canberra and Goulburn concurred, highlighting its concern about young people's readiness to move into transitional housing:

*A lot of the young people that access our crisis services, they're not ready to transition into a medium-term or a transitional independent setting, sometimes [for] 12 months. It can take a long time for a young person to come out of crisis.*<sup>36</sup>

15.26 In Warrnambool, Portland Housing Programme (Vic) focused on age as a complicating factor in transitional housing models:

*... the transitional housing program might look really good on paper, but it doesn't work for certain age groups. You need to go back to a hostel style or a fully funded lead tenant model ...*<sup>37</sup>

15.27 The need to revisit the value of older models was echoed in Wagga Wagga (NSW) where an employment services manager with a long history of working with disadvantaged young people told the Inquiry about an effective transitional service that no longer exists:

*It was semi-independent living... It was fantastic. It was like a half-way house for young people who ... had problems making the transition from home into independent life, and they all had their own rooms - - small, they were, but they had cooking facilities and a bathroom and they had house parents living on site with their own unit at the back ... they also had big family rooms where they gathered once or twice through the week and cooked big family meals, and everyone was involved in a big games room. ... and they gave extra support services on how to manage a budget, how to cook, how to wash, how to clean. Personal presentation. And, they also hooked into the other services around town. That was fantastic.*<sup>38</sup>

15.28 One former homelessness sector worker wrote to the Inquiry recommending a longer and more staged approach in dealing with youth homelessness. The approach included six stages with two additional stages between refuge and transitional housing: specialised hostels catering to young people with specific issues such as drug use (with

a six- to 12-month stay) and Foyer model accommodation that involved a community model of supported, semi-independent living (offering a stay of one to three years).<sup>39</sup> The Foyer model is discussed in more detail in the Chapter 16 Housing for Young people.

15.29 YWCA Darwin told the Inquiry about the Headlease Scheme, which enables the service to support a young person through transitional housing into long-term housing all in the one property:

*... the YWCA receives property allocations from Territory Housing with an agreement, which allows for a lease to be signed over to our clients on an approximate three-month ... timeframe and where the client is able to demonstrate the appropriate skills to manage independently from thereon. That particular part of the program has been quite successful in achieving a successful transition rate of around 50 percent to 60 percent of participants since its inception ...*<sup>40</sup>

15.30 Alice Springs Youth Accommodation and Support Services raised the quality and location of transitional housing stock as an issue. While the stock is available under the Headlease arrangement, the service believed its duty of care towards young people prevented it housing them in dangerous locations:

*... putting young people, or even young men, with limited problem-solving, coping abilities, would be just negligent on our part. We have had assaults in those units in the past before my time, and obviously that is not an ideal outcome.*<sup>41</sup>

## Stable housing

15.31 Lack of exit options into stable, affordable housing was raised in every public hearing in the country and in many of the submissions received, with witnesses highlighting the particular difficulties faced in their region, state or territory.<sup>42</sup>

15.32 Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation (NT) provided evidence about central Australia:

*Very little available and most that is there is in need of repairs and maintenance ...*<sup>43</sup>

15.33 The Alcoa Research Centre for Stronger Communities at Curtin University spoke of Western Australia's mining boom:

*WA is in the midst of a resource and mining boom. I don't think that I have ever been aware of a time in the State when the private rental affordability issues and lack of access and therefore exclusion of all groups, including youth, from that sector has been as pronounced as it is now.*<sup>44</sup>

15.34 The Tasmanian Government wrote to the Inquiry about the problems in its territory:

*There is a comparatively low rate of private rental housing in Tasmania of 16.4 per cent, which means that Tasmanians face greater competition when they seek to enter the private rental market. This is further compounded by the low private rental vacancy levels, which continue to be around 2 percent.*<sup>45</sup>

15.35 Young people do not enter into this housing market on equal terms with other people. A transitional housing support worker from the Salvation Army Social Housing Service in Hamilton (Vic) advised the Inquiry that young people report being discriminated against by estate agents and property owners.<sup>46</sup> A group of concerned workers from Tasmania advised the Inquiry that age and race are both factors in discriminatory practices:

*Young African men, for example, sleep on the streets while they wait for their signed leases to be “reviewed” by the landlord who has just found out their new tenant is African.*<sup>47</sup>

15.36 In terms of post-SAAP transitions into public housing, the Inquiry heard that there are problems with the quality and location of the stock that is offered to young people. YWCA Darwin told the Inquiry that public housing being offered to young people is unsuitable:

*To date, the allocations have been provided in large complexes where there are significant social issues around alcohol and other drugs, violence, high rates of welfare dependency, centred in those locations.*<sup>48</sup>

15.37 Southern Junction Community Services (SA) submitted evidence to the Inquiry suggesting that a welfare and deserving poor model of public housing provision has made public housing less accessible to young people.<sup>49</sup>

15.38 Housing is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 16 Housing for Young People.

### **Limited post-SAAP options – service issues**

15.39 Without adequate exit points, the SAAP system struggles against stagnation and against disappointing young people’s hopes of escaping homelessness. The South Australian Government highlighted the failure of SAAP to provide a pathway out of homelessness for a significant number of people engaging with the program:

*... while the SAAP system of crisis and transition housing is intended to provide pathways out of homelessness, only a minority actually achieves this in any sustainable way.*<sup>50</sup>

*However, such a comment does not condemn SAAP as a program, since to a major extent SAAP outcomes depend on access to the larger system of affordable (both public and private) in the community.*

15.40 In Darwin, Anglicare NT’s Youth Housing program voiced frustration with the lack of post-SAAP options, which sees SAAP at full capacity and young people remaining in the system:

*... they are staying longer and longer in our medium-term and short-term accommodation programs, because of the lack of exit points, so it is a huge barrier and it has a huge impact on these young people.*<sup>51</sup>

15.41 Services spoke openly about referring young people onto other services simply

because of a lack of housing. Joondalup Youth Support Services (WA) spoke about the pressure this placed on the transitional system:

*... after they've had a tenancy with us for a year, we would be hoping that they are ready to go into [the] private rental market, and I suppose that's the major difficulty, it's really inaccessible. So we tend to be referring to other medium to long-term accommodation*<sup>52</sup>

15.42 The most frequently used term raised in relation to the lack of exit points was bottleneck.<sup>53</sup> The Director of the ACT Council of Social Service gave a personal opinion, saying, '... I think we do have enough refuge beds, but they are completely bottlenecked...'<sup>54</sup> Also in Canberra, Oasis Youth Residential Service voiced a similar view:

*... here lies the problem, there are not enough exit points ... and because of a high private rental, there's just a huge backlog, and you just can't move the young people, and they're the ones that miss out.*<sup>55</sup>

15.43 Services provided evidence suggesting that they are active, even proactive, in their efforts to overcome the immense barrier presented by the lack of affordable housing options for young people. In Darwin, the Inquiry heard that Anglicare NT's Youth Housing program leased an on-site caravan after forging a relationship with the park's owners:

*A lot of work went into meeting with the caravan park owners and discussing the program, discussing the barriers that young people were facing and the situation in general. We found a caravan park that was quite supportive to this, and we leased a caravan for six months. The funding was only a small amount for a six-month period, and the caravan was tenanted for the full duration.*<sup>56</sup>

The project did not continue. Aside from the issue of ongoing funding, the service told the Inquiry about increased competition for caravans as a result of the general problem of rental affordability and parks being sold for redevelopment.

15.44 In Perth, the Inquiry heard about Roofs for Youth, a training package aimed at preparing young people for tenancies and therefore increasing their chances of finding private rental accommodation.<sup>57</sup>

15.45 In Brisbane, the Inquiry heard from Young Women's Place, which is based in Toowoomba, about the community support it has managed to generate to house young people. The service has entered into a partnership with a philanthropically-minded local businessman. The businessman supplies reduced rent properties; the service provides life coaching and long-term support. When the young person is ready, the service steps back and the tenancy continues.<sup>58</sup>

15.46 While the Inquiry was very interested in these innovative programs and relationships, it is neither realistic nor reasonable to expect SAAP and other services to rescue the system from the consequences of housing affordability problems.

## **Young people's needs beyond housing**

15.47 While homelessness can't be resolved without housing, housing alone isn't sufficient to resolve homelessness. People who have been homeless often need support to sustain their permanent housing and their social wellbeing. Young people who have been homeless have additional needs because their age has developmental stage implications. In addition, young people's complex personal histories and their experiences while homeless can compound their situation.

15.48 The Australian Federation of Homeless Organisations framed this issue in terms of recurring homelessness:

*Obviously leaving homelessness requires access to safe, secure and affordable accommodation. However, we also need to do more than this. Research has found that one in four people who exited SAAP into public housing became homeless again in one year.<sup>59</sup>*

The research in question, undertaken by Hanover (Vic) into homeless people who gained public housing during their SAAP support period, demonstrates that over the study period 26 per cent of these people reused SAAP services after being housed and 75 per cent of repeat users went on to move out of public housing. In 86 per cent of cases they moved out at a time when they were not in contact with a SAAP service for support. It's significant that it was single people, under 25, who were most likely to reuse SAAP services.<sup>60</sup> The research tells us nothing about tenancy outcomes of the 74 per cent of people who did not reuse SAAP services. It's quite possible, and highly likely, that the overall percentage of those people whose tenancies fail could be far greater. What is clear is that there is a pressing need to support young people in order to sustain their housing.

15.49 In Victoria, Barwon Youth, an organisation providing a broad range of homelessness services, talked about the support needs of young people who have been granted public housing under the Recurring Homelessness Segment in that state's public housing waiting list:

*... they are the most vulnerable people we have exiting our crisis and transitional housing system. That's their main point of entry into public housing. But, the regional office here expects 12 weeks of support to occur for that, which you have to squeeze into the system somehow.<sup>61</sup>*

In the case of Barwon Youth, the Inquiry was told that a new program had been funded that would provide that support.

15.50 Longitudinal research following Australian families who had experienced homelessness concluded that "... the availability of support networks had a positive influence on stable housing", with much of that stabilising support coming from extended family and from mothers in particular.<sup>62</sup> Homeless young people do not necessarily have family or parental support. Mission Australia's annual survey suggests that while the support and advice role of friends, parents, relatives and family friends is still significant for homeless young people, it is much less so than for their home-based peers. Conversely, and not surprisingly, counsellors and community agencies play a much more important support and advice role for homeless young people than for home-based young people.<sup>63</sup>

Certainly many of the young people who made submissions to the Inquiry indicated that their relationships with services are essential to their welfare.<sup>64</sup> A typical comment from a young person identifies personal networks and services as key supports:

*My friends and High Street Youth Health Service helped me through all of my tough times.*<sup>65</sup>

15.51 The SAAP data examined earlier in this chapter suggested that young people derive measurable benefit from longer support periods. Research into mentoring, a relationship that is arguably comparable with the relationship many homeless young people have with sector workers, suggests that when mentoring relationships are short-term they cause harm whereas longer-term relationships of at least 12 months are positive for young people who report improvements in their sense of self-worth and general functioning, including reduced substance use.<sup>66</sup>

15.52 Service to Youth Council (SA) suggested to the Inquiry that government and non-government systems need to act as 'good families' in their approach in the sense of being persistent and being present:

*I think the difference between young people and adults is little understood in the way that services [are provided]. ... When you have come from chaos, and you are going through that stage in your life, which can be quite chaotic for all of us, there are additional needs for them to be well supported through that period.*<sup>67</sup>

15.53 The Bridge Youth Service (NSW) described the support work it is able to offer as an example of good practice:

*Currently our service is fortunate through having a range of funding inputs that allow us to provide day programs, family therapy and an intervention approach, which is therapeutic and receives ongoing training and development. The day program and the family therapist are not funded through SAAP. There is no planning within SAAP to provide this level of support ...*<sup>68</sup>

15.54 In Melbourne, Project i pointed out that different young people have different needs and that those needs can vary from a rapid response to a 10-year commitment.<sup>69</sup>

15.55 One of the developmental stage implications of the homeless youth population is that they do not necessarily have the life skills they need to live independently. In Darwin, one young person spoke to the Inquiry about the general needs of young people:

*... it's the things like you know, you don't do the dishes or you don't wash your own clothes. You're too reliant on your parents... It's not good. And then when you do move out, you don't know how to take care of yourself, so you end up being like us, living on the streets.*<sup>70</sup>

15.56 Another young person agreed, voicing fears of being dependent on services: *And there's no real transition, you go from living with your parents to crisis accommodation and then you go basically to independent living. ... there is no real transition ...*<sup>71</sup>

15.57 While young people spoke of their desire for independence, Melbourne City Mission voiced doubts about the goal of independence:

*... is this realistic, appropriate or desirable for 18 year-olds? ... If, at the policy and practice level, we're serious about exiting, we need to move beyond output measures to outcome measures, which need to be thought through from a position of social inclusion, not merely independent from a statutory income or a SAAP service. ... There needs to be greater precision at the policy level around the different developmental issues and therefore responses for young people between the age of 15 to 25 ...*<sup>72</sup>

15.58 Salvation Army Crossroads (Vic) described post-crisis support in terms of relationship stability:

*... it's about having a client-focused service which recognises that those relationships are established and you can create some sort of stability as people move on their journey by being able to provide support when they want it, just as with our own children. Sometimes they need a bit more attention and care and sometimes they can go on their way fairly comfortably themselves ... and the service system as it is, is too rigid and doesn't provide for that.*<sup>73</sup>

15.59 Overall, services reported a lack of capacity within SAAP to provide the sort of transitional and post-SAAP support they believed young people needed.<sup>74</sup>

## Findings and Recommendations

15.60 One issue is that when young people become homeless, but cannot return to a family situation, they need to be able to move onto some form of independent accommodation and the problem of exit points for SAAP has been an issue for many years. One way that government departments have tried to deal with this issue has been the creation of priority lists for access to public housing, such as the Segment One list in Victoria. However the overall amount of public housing stock has remained relatively static. Rental assistance was seen as a flexible way of buying access to the larger private rental markets. The 'affordability crisis' which burst into the media during 2007 has been accepted as a serious political issue in political circles.

### Recommendation 15.1:

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that state and territory housing authorities together with the Australian Government fund a progressive increase in public and community housing stock suitable for young people.**

15.61 The development of housing responses has long lead-times because major government funding depends on the CSHA cycles and because of the large capital expenditure and the time it takes to build new stock. The NYC is concerned that attention should be given to the long-term but also to shorter-term initiatives. The new Federal government has committed \$150m for housing for homeless people over five years. One third of the homeless are young people, so it might be expected that about

one third of the new housing would be directed to meeting the needs of homeless young people.

#### **Recommendation 15.2**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that state and territory housing authorities and departments together with the Australian Government develop and fund initiatives for new models of youth housing which combine education, training and employment with a package of accommodation and support, such as the Foyer model, and accommodation linked with schools and other education and training programs, as part of a short-term supply side youth housing contribution, but also as a significant component of youth housing provision over the longer-term.**

#### **Recommendation 15.3:**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that one third of the \$150 million for housing for the homeless, promised by the Labor Party in the 2007 Federal election campaign, be allocated by the Federal Government for housing for homeless youth.**

15.62 The importance of support after a period in SAAP accommodation was raised in evidence provided to the Inquiry. A more limited and narrow version of this concept can be found in tenancy support workers in public housing in Victoria or the SHAP program in Western Australia. Currently some post-vention support happens where SAAP workers undertake a certain amount of support to the client or their family at the point of leaving a SAAP service but this support is not resourced to the extent that some people require, and is not able to be delivered for any extended period of time. A significant capacity for outreach post-SAAP support would be an important enhancement of the transitional supported accommodation process, where the support is constructed at the point where relationships have been developed – i.e. In the SAAP services. In the 2005-2006 NDCA report 468 SAAP agencies were designated for young people (about 36% of all agencies) and these agencies received \$114,783,000 per year recurrent allocation or 34.4 per cent of the total SAAP funding. To fully implement the proposed outreach capacity in all youth agencies and in all jurisdictions could cost an estimated \$30,000,000 recurrently for one worker per agency. On a properly developed needs basis, this expenditure might extend to \$50,000,000 per year if implemented across the youth sector of the homelessness service system.

#### **Recommendation 15.4:**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that all SAAP youth services be funded for an outreach support worker specifically designated to provide needs-based support to former clients who have moved to independent accommodation.**

15.63 Since the mid-nineties, early intervention has become a well-established position in the policy debate with a number of initiatives such as Reconnect, School Focused Youth Service in Victoria, the Youth Support Coordinators program in Queensland and significant improvement and expansion of school welfare services in a number of jurisdictions such as Victoria, South Australia and the ACT. Beyond



early intervention and well after a young person has become homeless, there are still opportunities for family reconciliation, which may be a physical return to live with family or 'family reconciliation' in terms of a psychological resolution of outstanding issues that frees a young person to get on with their lives. The Family Reconciliation and Mediation Program in Victoria, which has been developed and implemented by Melbourne City Mission, provides brokerage funds to SAAP services to fund professional brief counseling. Evaluation data suggests that this initiative is a valuable enhancement of what SAAP services can do. Nearly every young person who becomes homeless has unresolved family issues and this type of support option ought to be considered for broader national implementation. An underpinning proposition is that 'family reconciliation' should not be considered as only appropriate for recently homeless young people.

**Recommendation 15.5:**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that family mediation or counselling for all homeless young people in supported accommodation be considered for national implementation, with an allocation of brokerage funds according to specific individual client needs.**

15.64 Transitional accommodation or what was formerly referred to as medium and long-term supported accommodation under SAAP have not been uniformly developed across Australia.

**Recommendation 15.6:**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that the amount of medium and long-term housing stock be expanded across Australia with an appropriate balance between crisis and medium-, long-term, and transitional accommodation.**

15.65 In 1997, by means of an innovative restructure, Victoria moved to unpack the property management side of transitional accommodation from individual and family support by setting up a Transitional Housing Management (THM) program. While this was accompanied by a substantial expansion of transitional accommodation properties in Victoria, and work done to establish a SAAP compatible data collection for people in THM accommodation, there has been a frequently expressed concern from agencies and workers about whether the current Victorian SAAP-THM dichotomy is the best arrangement for delivering supported accommodation to homeless people, particularly young people. Thus far, the THM arrangements in Victoria remain unique to that state. The tendency for states to pull away from the broad parameters of SAAP nationally seems to have its roots in the weakening of Commonwealth states cooperation under the Liberal Government from 1996 to 2007 and the positive yield was a greater number of accessible properties but it is questionable whether the support for homeless young people is as it needs to be. The issue of what support quotient is required for people in transitional (medium to long-term accommodation) is across all jurisdictions.

**Recommendation 15.7**

**The NYC Inquiry recommends that all jurisdictions review the provision of support for young people moving beyond crisis services into SAAP medium and long-term accommodation.**

## ENDNOTES

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