



Australia's Homeless Youth

PROJECT SUMMARY

AN INDEPENDENT REPORT FROM THE
NATIONAL YOUTH COMMISSION • APRIL 2008



An Independent Community Inquiry

www.nyc.net.au

Funding provided by

The **CALEDONIA**
Foundation



AUSTRALIA IS FACING A CRISIS IN YOUTH HOMELESSNESS.

- Every night 22,000 teenagers are homeless - twice the number there was 20 years ago.
- One in two homeless youths are turned away from emergency accommodation every night because services are full.
- This is totally unacceptable in a country as prosperous as Australia.

THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW.

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

This Project Summary represents a snapshot of the Australia's Homeless Youth Project 2008, a collaboration between:

The National Youth Commission (NYC), the first national independent inquiry into youth homelessness since the Burdekin Inquiry in 1989. The National Youth Commission comprised of Major David Eldridge, Associate Professor David MacKenzie, Ms Narelle Clay AM and Father Wally Dethlefs. In 2007, the NYC held 21 days of hearings across all States and Territories. Altogether, 319 people gave formal evidence and 91 written submissions were received from community organisations, individuals and government departments.

The NYC's findings, including over 80 recommendations, are published in a major report, *Australia's Homeless Youth* © National Youth Commission, 2008, downloadable from www.nyc.net.au

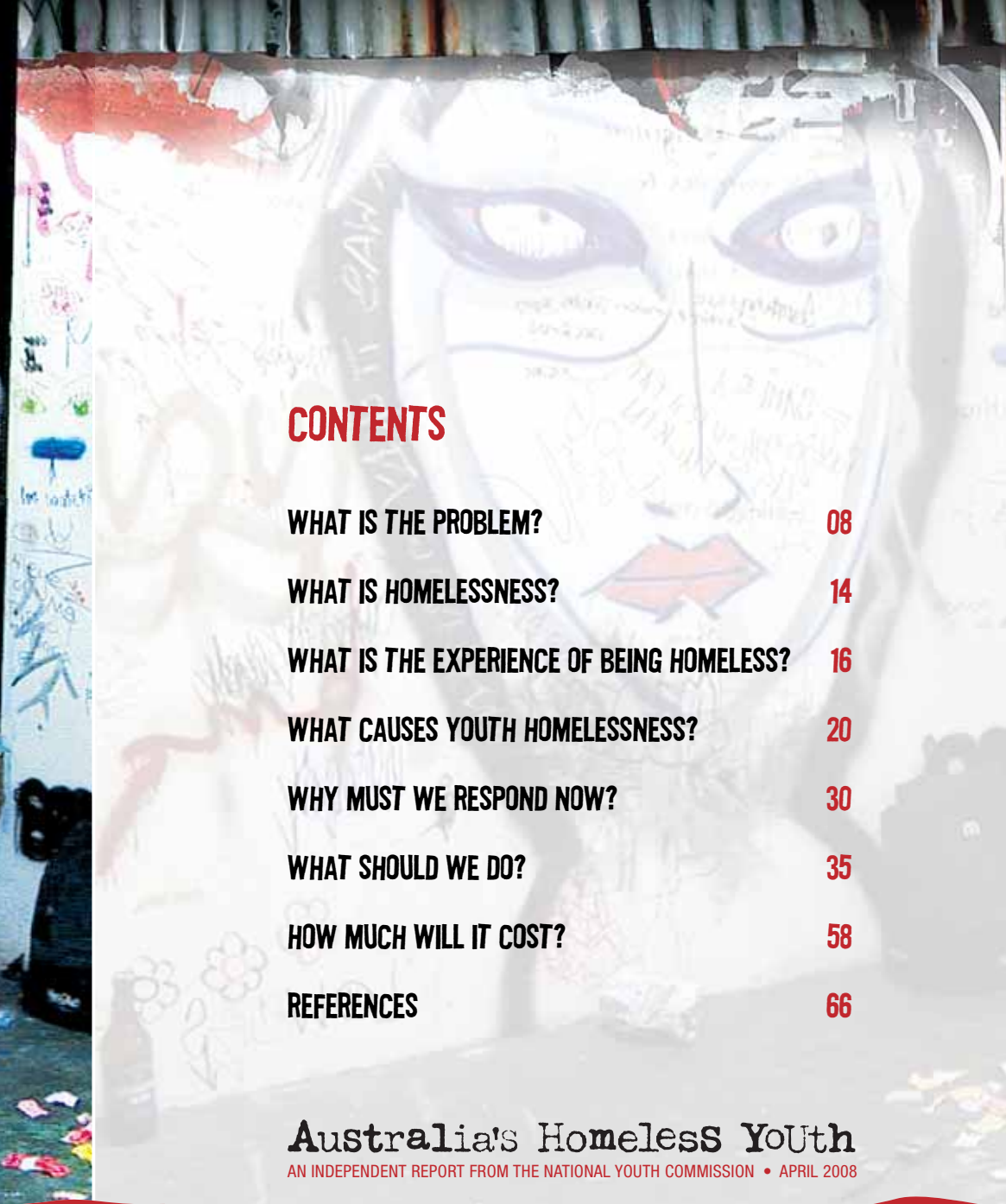
The Oasis, a major feature documentary, made by Shark Island Productions, in collaboration with ABC Television. Homeless young people participated in the film for over two years, courageously sharing their life experiences. www.theoasismovie.com.au

The Caledonia Foundation is a private philanthropic foundation with a focus on sustainable futures for young Australians, which funded the NYC, the education and outreach component of *The Oasis*, and the development of this report. www.caledoniafoundation.com.au

The National Youth Commission's *Australia's Homeless Youth* Report, and the feature documentary *The Oasis* were both launched during National Youth Week in April 2008.



Image from the documentary *THE OASIS*

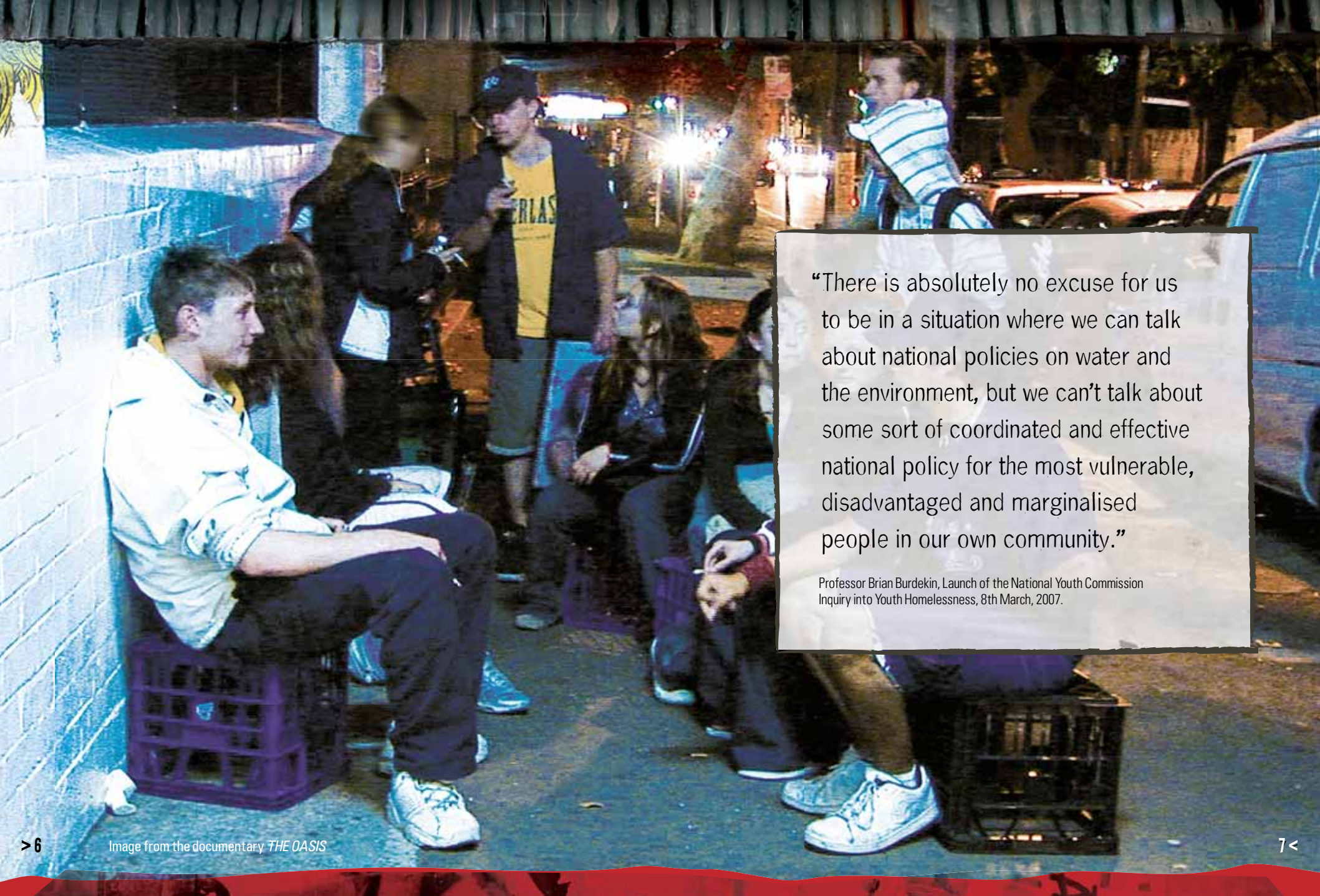


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Australia's Homeless Youth

AN INDEPENDENT REPORT FROM THE NATIONAL YOUTH COMMISSION • APRIL 2008



“There is absolutely no excuse for us to be in a situation where we can talk about national policies on water and the environment, but we can’t talk about some sort of coordinated and effective national policy for the most vulnerable, disadvantaged and marginalised people in our own community.”

Professor Brian Burdekin, Launch of the National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness, 8th March, 2007.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

Over the past 20 years, Australia has become more prosperous. Yet over that period **the number of homeless teenagers has doubled to 22,000¹** according to the latest statistics. This is an indication of the failure in Australia's duty of care towards its youngest and most vulnerable citizens.

On any given night in Australia, 100,000 Australians are homeless. More than one third are teenagers (aged 12-18) and young adults (aged 18-25) – **that's at least 36,000 homeless young people.²**

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) is Australia's primary response to homelessness. But **every night, one in two young people who seek a bed from SAAP is turned away because services are full.³**

Currently SAAP services are so inadequate that **only 14 per cent of all homeless people have access to a bed on any given night.⁴**

As a nation we have failed to use our prosperity to invest adequately in services to reduce youth homelessness.


We urgently need to invest in families and young Australians, and work together to build a community where homelessness becomes a thing of the past, by:

- 1. PREVENTING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS**
- 2. INTERVENING EARLY**
- 3. SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE IN NEED**
- 4. STOPPING THOSE ASSISTED FROM FALLING BACK INTO HOMELESSNESS**



“It is a national disgrace that there are twice as many homeless young Australians now than in 1989 when the Human Rights Commission undertook its landmark inquiry. We need to set a national aspirational goal to address this situation. No young person should be homeless in a country as economically prosperous as Australia. Part of the economic surpluses from our prosperity needs to be used to eliminate homelessness. This is an achievable national goal.”

Associate Professor David MacKenzie, NYC Commissioner 2008.



“In the last 20 years there have been some improvements to the support provided to young people and some additional new programs. However, there remain significant barriers to reducing homelessness because of the lack of adequate, affordable and secure housing, and the lack of access to adequately paid, secure, full time employment for young people who become homeless.”

Narelle Clay AM, NYC Commissioner 2008.

WHAT IS HOMELESSNESS?

In Australia, homelessness is about more than just not having a roof over your head.⁵ It is about the separation of young people from their families and communities. It is about a lack of access to the social and economic opportunities that are so vital to the foundations of adult life.

Without a stable home environment, homeless young people constantly move from place to place, becoming detached from friends and the mainstream community. If this disconnection continues, young people are at risk of being drawn into sub-cultures on the fringes of the community, with their own rules and ways of relating.

“There’s no doubt these are tough kids. They come from tough backgrounds and they’re tough to deal with. They’ve got mental health issues, they’ve got drug and alcohol addictions, some of them have spent their whole lives in State Care, some of them have been abused, some tortured, some neglected badly. But 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 from the Salvation Army in the documentary *THE OASIS*.

Image from the documentary *THE OASIS*

WHAT IS THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING HOMELESS?

Most young people become homeless while they are still at school. Without positive intervention, this usually leads to them dropping out of school and becoming detached from their community of origin.

Although their backgrounds vary, there are some things common to the experiences of all homeless young people. Those who gave evidence to the National Youth Commission Inquiry said of their experience:

“Being so young with no home, I had no money, no bed, no clothes, wasn’t able to bathe or eat and drink.”

Formerly homeless young person at 13, now aged 16 years.

“I was left out in the cold not having any warm clothes/shoes to wear.”

Young person who became homeless aged 17 years.

“Nowhere to go to sleep. No privacy. Not able to carry any belongings that are valued because you don’t know where you will put [them].”

Young homeless man aged 25 years.

“The feeling of hopelessness, like you’re not worth anything, you feel like giving up, like it’s not worth it.”

Homeless girl, aged 17 years.

“... it was strange living with people older than me using drugs in a noisy building with lots of little rooms ... I can’t breathe ... having to share toilets and showers with strangers ... I really hate it.”


Homeless male, aged 19 years.

“One of the worst things that happened was one night when a gang of guys tried to rape me while I was sleeping on a park bench. By chance a friend came by and helped me get away. Since that night I cannot sleep outside without feeling a horrible sense of fear.”

Homeless female, aged 17 years.

“Sleeping rough made it hard to stay on at school, so I eventually dropped out.”

Homeless youth, aged 15 years.

A young person is sleeping on a patterned blanket on the floor of a shelter. They are wearing a dark hoodie and a watch on their left wrist. A pair of sneakers is visible next to them. The background shows a corrugated metal wall and another person's head in the distance.

“Apart from the practical discomfort of moving around, experiencing homelessness is emotional hell. Homeless young people feel scared, frustrated, embarrassed, helpless and vulnerable. Seen as different from other young people, they have a growing sense that there is no hope for them; they become depressed, angry or both. They yearn for what everyone else takes for granted: a place to belong and people who care for them.”

Major David Eldridge, NYC Commissioner 2008.

WHAT CAUSES YOUTH HOMELESSNESS?

When interviewed about their reasons for being homeless, the two main reasons given by young people were **a breakdown of inter-personal relationships and financial or housing problems.**⁶

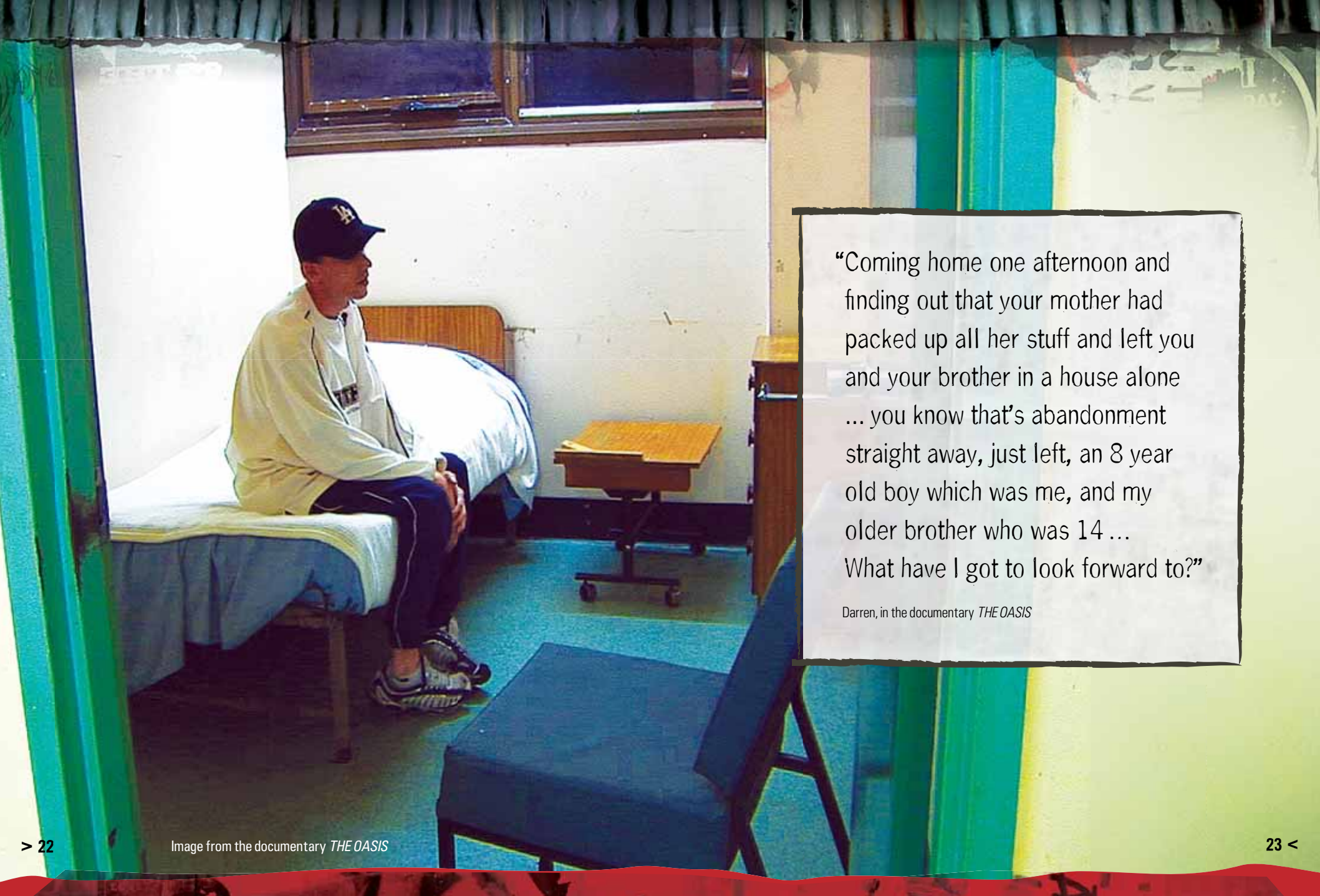
Almost half (49 per cent) of homeless youth who sought help from SAAP said that relationship breakdown with parents or step-parents was the main reason for their homelessness.⁷

Financial difficulties were cited by one in three young people (32 per cent) as the reason for their homelessness. This issue is becoming more significant as the current housing affordability crisis pushes rents far beyond the capacity of most young people.⁸

A smaller proportion (6 per cent) of young people stated that problematic drug use or mental health issues caused their homelessness.⁹


“Unfortunately some homes don’t offer young people the things they should. That’s the reality and at a later stage, when everything else has collapsed around them, we try and grab them as they fall over the cliff. I have kids in my office almost every day telling me about one of their earliest memories – seeing one of their parents sticking needles in their arms, or a young girl telling me about her mother who was a prostitute and she would be in a corner of the room and they’d be having sex in the same room – these sort of things leave deep scars.”

Captain Paul Moulds from the Salvation Army in the documentary *THE OASIS*.



“Coming home one afternoon and finding out that your mother had packed up all her stuff and left you and your brother in a house alone ... you know that’s abandonment straight away, just left, an 8 year old boy which was me, and my older brother who was 14 ... What have I got to look forward to?”

Darren, in the documentary *THE OASIS*



A significant number of young homeless people move into homelessness after being in State Care. At the NYC hearings in Melbourne, evidence was given that **a third of young people leaving State Care are case managed into homelessness services, highlighting the inadequacy of the leaving care process.**¹⁰

A recent study reported that **42 per cent of homeless adults in SAAP had been in State Care and protection programs when they were young.**¹¹ The fact that years later so many are in adult homelessness services, demonstrates that the system has failed many young people.

If we fail to offer a sustained and comprehensive response to our most vulnerable young people, **they will never be able to fully participate in the community.**

In reality, all of these issues are commonly bound together. For young people, the spiral into homelessness is caused by many factors, including:

- > conflict or breakdown in family life;
- > sexual, physical and emotional abuse in the home;
- > lack of access to employment opportunities or insufficient income to pay rent and living costs;
- > rising housing costs and the inaffordability of the rental market;
- > difficulties in accessing income support payments;
- > an absence of support when in, or moving from, State Care;
- > drug and alcohol issues;
- > mental health issues;
- > overcrowded living conditions;
- > death of a parent.





MORE EVIDENCE PRESENTED TO THE NATIONAL YOUTH COMMISSION INQUIRY

“Someone reported my problem to the Department of Human Services, DHS screwed up my life twenty times worse. I was being transferred back and forth from Victoria to South Australia... until I got some help from a community agency.”

Formerly homeless young man, aged 25 years.

“I left home because my mother and I were constantly arguing. I was having a hard time and became quite depressed. My mother was an ex-drug addict and she had a few issues that I could not cope with ... the pressure was too much.”

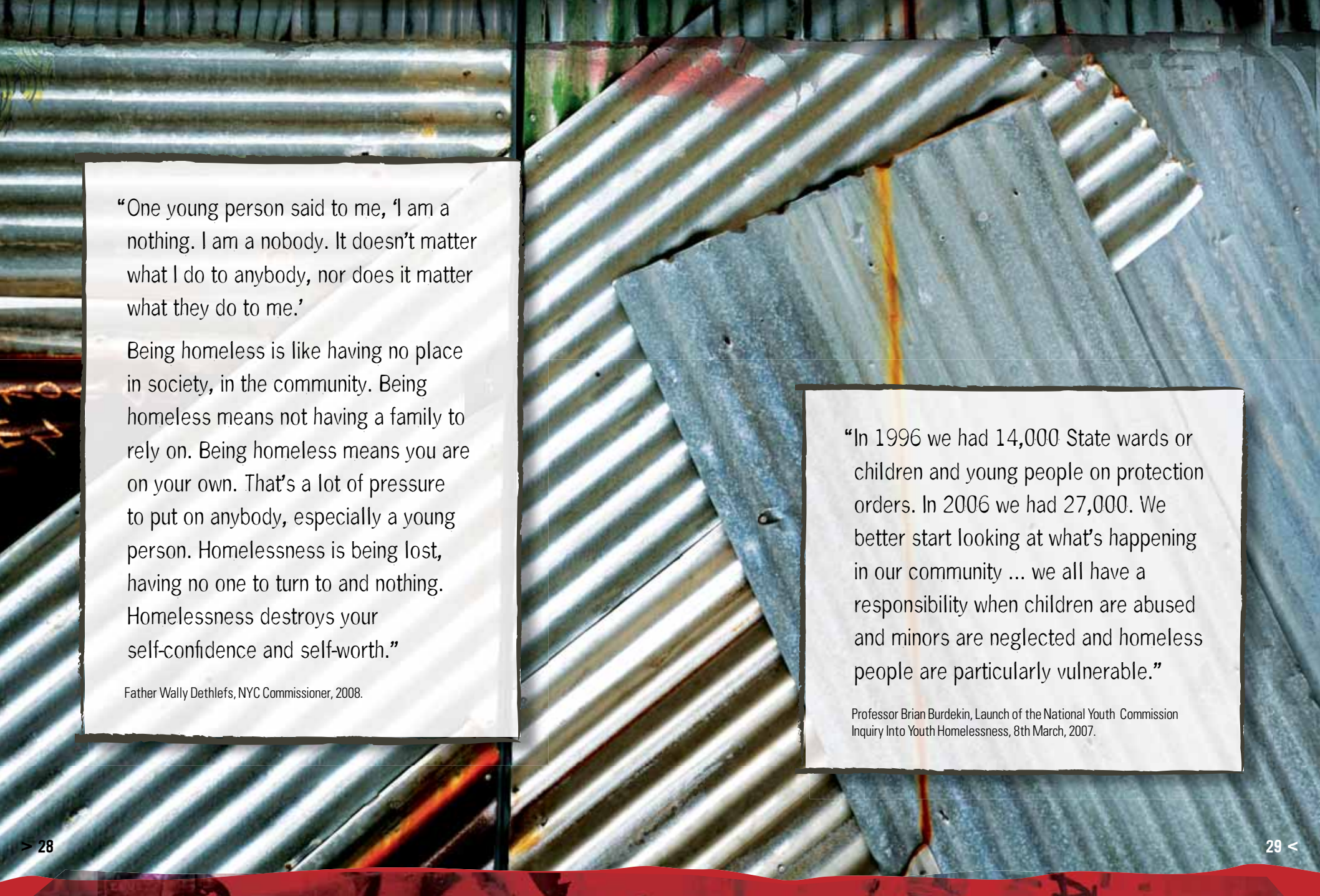
Homeless girl, aged 15 years.

“The Department of Human Services does not listen to anyone ... they believe a crazy mum over a teen when they don't know the story ... until I get a glass bottle smashed over my head ... then they wake up.”

Formerly homeless young man, aged 21 years.

“The price of private rentals is too high ... and they don't usually accept you anyway. I feel embarrassed being homeless because you get dirty looks and many people never seem to understand.”

Homeless female, aged 20 years.



“One young person said to me, ‘I am a nothing. I am a nobody. It doesn’t matter what I do to anybody, nor does it matter what they do to me.’

Being homeless is like having no place in society, in the community. Being homeless means not having a family to rely on. Being homeless means you are on your own. That’s a lot of pressure to put on anybody, especially a young person. Homelessness is being lost, having no one to turn to and nothing. Homelessness destroys your self-confidence and self-worth.”

Father Wally Dethlefs, NYC Commissioner, 2008.

“In 1996 we had 14,000 State wards or children and young people on protection orders. In 2006 we had 27,000. We better start looking at what’s happening in our community ... we all have a responsibility when children are abused and minors are neglected and homeless people are particularly vulnerable.”

Professor Brian Burdekin, Launch of the National Youth Commission Inquiry Into Youth Homelessness, 8th March, 2007.

WHY MUST WE RESPOND NOW?

There are encouraging signs that through early intervention programs, youth homelessness can be reduced.¹²

However, Australia is at a crisis point, and this progress threatens to be undone by the impact of the current housing affordability situation, and the inadequacies of the State Care and protection system.

At every public hearing of the NYC Inquiry evidence was given about the national housing affordability crisis, and its impact on young people who are homeless. The Real Estate Institute of Victoria reports that **the vacancy rate in Victoria was 1.2 per cent in September 2007 – a twenty five year low.**

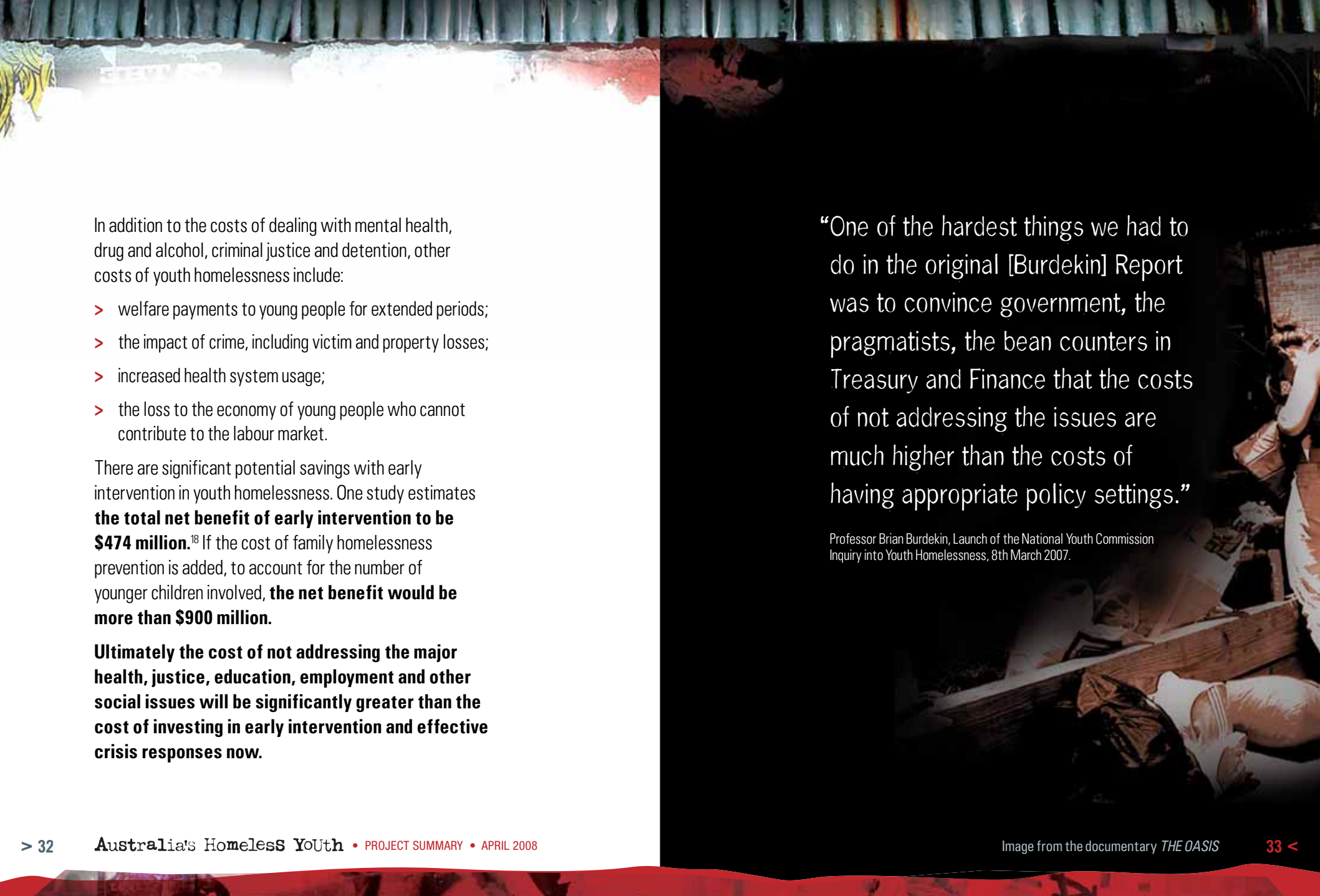
If urgent action is not taken, these pressures could lead to an explosion in the numbers of homeless youth.

There is a significant cost to the community in doing nothing. Although it is extremely difficult to estimate the economics of not responding, there are some assumptions we can make:

A recent estimate of **the number of homeless people with a mental illness is 44 per cent compared to 18 per cent in the general population.**¹³ The NYC heard evidence that young people experiencing youth homelessness have a significantly higher incidence of mental health issues, putting extensive demands on the health system.

There is also evidence that **drug and alcohol problems are significantly higher in the homeless population** than in the broader community.¹⁴ Higher rates of drug use increase the transmission rates of sexually transmitted diseases, such as Hepatitis B and C. The lifetime economic cost of Hepatitis B was estimated in one study to be \$200,000 per person.¹⁵

Homeless young people have more contact with police and the criminal justice system. A study in Victoria found that police processed homeless young people at approximately 10 times the rate of the general youth population.¹⁶ **Apart from the increased expense of policing and the court system, it costs \$70,000 per year to keep a young person in detention.**¹⁷



In addition to the costs of dealing with mental health, drug and alcohol, criminal justice and detention, other costs of youth homelessness include:

- > welfare payments to young people for extended periods;
- > the impact of crime, including victim and property losses;
- > increased health system usage;
- > the loss to the economy of young people who cannot contribute to the labour market.

There are significant potential savings with early intervention in youth homelessness. One study estimates **the total net benefit of early intervention to be \$474 million.**¹⁸ If the cost of family homelessness prevention is added, to account for the number of younger children involved, **the net benefit would be more than \$900 million.**

Ultimately the cost of not addressing the major health, justice, education, employment and other social issues will be significantly greater than the cost of investing in early intervention and effective crisis responses now.

“One of the hardest things we had to do in the original [Burdekin] Report was to convince government, the pragmatists, the bean counters in Treasury and Finance that the costs of not addressing the issues are much higher than the costs of having appropriate policy settings.”

Professor Brian Burdekin, Launch of the National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness, 8th March 2007.

“The way we respond to the needs of our most vulnerable and marginalised is a litmus test for the health of our community. For too long we have sidelined the plight of Australia’s homeless youth, hoping perhaps that they would somehow disappear.

Our homeless youth deserve a dignified, whole-of-community response. The onus doesn’t lie with governments alone; we all have a role to play. Government support, joined with the strategic private assistance of philanthropic foundations and corporations, will be imperative to achieving our ambitious goal of eradicating youth homelessness in Australia.”

Ian Darling, Chairman, The Caledonia Foundation, Launch of the National Youth Commission Inquiry into Youth Homelessness, 8th March 2007.

WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

Australia needs leadership and a new commitment from Commonwealth, State and Territory governments on homelessness, with strategies for eliminating youth homelessness by 2030.

We must develop and implement a **National Homelessness Strategy and Action Plan** setting out aspirational goals, strategies and specific targets, and with annual reportage mechanisms on progress towards those targets. The NYC Inquiry has outlined a ‘Ten Point Roadmap’ for action on youth homelessness with four key areas:

1. **PREVENTING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS**
2. **INTERVENING EARLY**
3. **SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE IN NEED**
4. **STOPPING THOSE ASSISTED FROM FALLING BACK INTO HOMELESSNESS**



1. PREVENTING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The housing affordability crisis has developed as a result of two decades of policy and funding neglect.

National funding has focused primarily on rental subsidies, to the detriment of building up our nation's public and community housing stock. In times of high rental demand, young people are particularly disadvantaged in gaining access to affordable housing. More housing is urgently required that young people can access quickly when they experience homelessness.

The provision of additional housing for young homeless people must also be accompanied by access to a range of support programs and personnel who will help young people with daily living needs, and support them when required to resolve mental health and drug and alcohol issues, family issues and in finding pathways to education, training and employment.

The National Youth Commission recommends that:

- > A national affordable housing strategy for Australia is developed with particular attention to the unique needs of young people, specifically disadvantaged young people.
- > One third of the \$150 million committed by the new Commonwealth Government is directed towards assisting homeless young people through development of a new layer of youth housing closely connected to education, training and employment.





COMMUNITIES OF SERVICES

In Australia today there are many communities with very limited services for people in need.

Every community needs to be able to offer cohesive and comprehensive support to families and young people in areas such as mental health, drug and alcohol services, counselling, education and training, employment, recreation and homelessness. A strong local network of services is vital for providing resources in times of crisis, thereby preventing youth homelessness.

No young person or their family should be disadvantaged by the inability of services in the community to work effectively together. Funding providers need to bring local agencies together with a focus on improving service cohesion and collaboration.

The National Youth Commission recommends that:

- > Commonwealth, State and Territory governments work with local communities and services to clarify funding delivery models and collaborate to develop and resource 'communities of services' at the local level.
- > An additional investment of \$30-50 million per annum is provided by Commonwealth, State and Territory governments (to be offset by some savings due to improved efficiency), for the systematic building of better coordinated 'communities of services'.

2. INTERVENING EARLY

EARLY INTERVENTION FOR 'AT-RISK' FAMILIES AND HOMELESS YOUNG PEOPLE

Supporting families 'at-risk' or in conflict at the earliest opportunity is one of the best ways of preventing young people from becoming homeless. In every hearing of the NYC Inquiry, examples were given of how early intervention helped prevent family breakdown. The major concern expressed was the **inadequate coverage of early intervention programs across Australia.**

Even at this early stage of intervention, access to affordable housing with appropriate levels of support will be important for young people needing 'time out' from a stressful family situation.

The National Youth Commission recommends that:

- > The Commonwealth Government trebles the number of **RECONNECT** Programs across Australia to ensure that every community has sufficient early intervention capacity to reduce the numbers of young people becoming homeless.
- > The Commonwealth Government progressively expands the **HOME Advice Program** as a preventative response to homelessness for families at risk of becoming homeless.

RECONNECT PROGRAM

The RECONNECT program uses a community-based early intervention response to facilitate family reconciliation for homeless and at-risk young people. It aims to improve their engagement with family, work, education, training and the local community. In addition to offering counselling, mediation and practical support to the whole family, RECONNECT providers can use brokerage funds to 'buy in' specialist services to meet the specific needs of individuals. The 2003 evaluation of RECONNECT found that the program had achieved positive outcomes for young people and their families, with 75 per cent reporting an improvement in their situation. In 2008, there were 98 RECONNECT services across Australia, funded at approximately \$23 million annually.¹⁹

HOME ADVICE PROGRAM

The HOME Advice Program is a small Commonwealth program of eight agencies, one in each state and territory. When families at risk of homelessness are referred to HOME Advice agencies, they receive flexible early intervention support using a holistic, strengths-based, family-centred approach. Case management can be carried on for as long as necessary and brokerage funds are available if required. An evaluation in 2007 showed that 9 out of 10 families that were helped in this way avoided homelessness.²⁰

“I didn’t really have that good of a childhood. I spent the beginning of my childhood watching my mum get bashed and I used to get bashed too. I never met my real dad and spent time with my older brother mostly, but when I was twelve he got locked up for fifteen years and yeah my sister went missing for a little while, and then I moved out when I was thirteen. I got kicked out for sticking up for my mum.

When I was thirteen I got locked up for two years. I had twenty-seven theft of automobile charges and I had five charges for break and enter and another charge for malicious damage and another charge for home invasion and that. That’s what fu* *ed me up. I know people who have been through worse. I haven’t been through that much. That’s how it is.”

Owen, in the documentary *THE OASIS*.



YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE CARE OF THE STATE

The alarming growth in the number of children and young people in State Care – an increase of some 13,000 over a decade to a total of 27,000 – will inevitably lead to more of these young people experiencing homelessness, unless urgent action is undertaken.

Children and young people enter State Care with a set of complex needs, which are often left unaddressed, and in some cases exacerbated, whilst in the care of the State. Major reform is needed. An adequate level of care programs will assist in ensuring those leaving State Care do not become homeless.

The National Youth Commission recommends that:

- > A Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission inquiry be immediately established to explore the problems of young people in State Care and to develop proposals for a national response;
- > Urgent attention by State authorities is given to the staffing and resourcing of this critical but difficult area;
- > Appropriate levels of support for leaving State Care are provided, on a needs basis, for all young people exiting State Care and protection.

“At every hearing, serious issues were raised about the treatment of young people in State Care and protection. The cases of systemic failure were too numerous to be relegated to isolated instances. A link with homelessness has been firmly established. If we are serious about addressing the homelessness of the most alienated and damaged young people in our community then it is imperative that we rigorously examine and reform our State Care systems.”

Major David Eldridge, NYC Commissioner 2008.



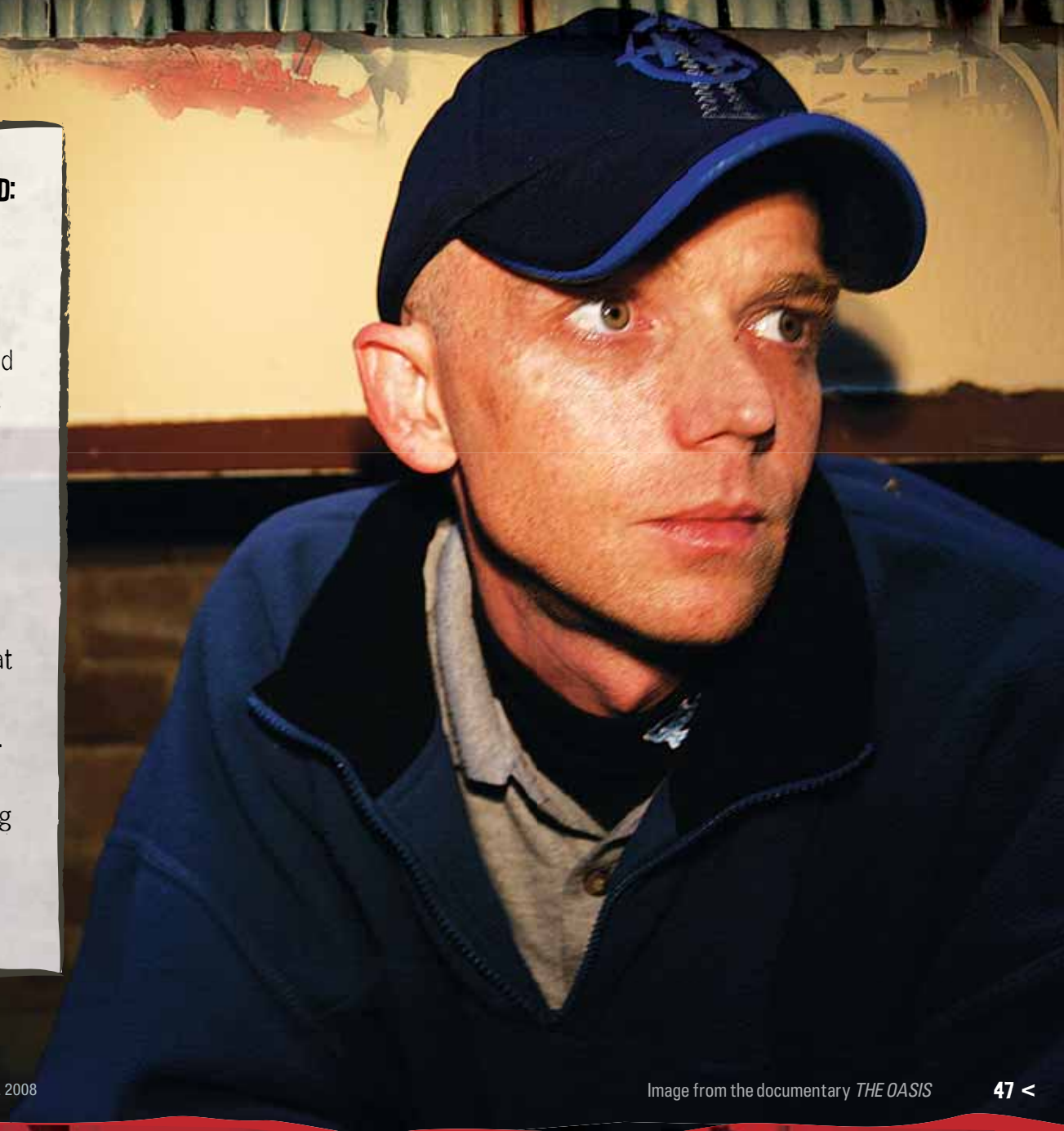
AN EXAMPLE OF STATE CARE INTERVENTION THAT FAILED:

"I can remember things when I was about 3 years old, and that's like getting shifted from one place to another. You know I was in and out of children's homes, foster families, so they sent me to a so called Sergeant in the Army and I sent him round the bend, that's how bad I was. And I got flogged when I was 10 years old. I mean flogged to a fu**ing pulp, you know I ended up in hospital.

Something was taken from me from that flogging. Honestly it fu**ing was.

I had my first shot of heroin by the age of 14 and that heroin really just let me just shut down you know. Helped me shut off all my feelings, all my thoughts. It was as close as being dead you could get except for being dead. You know there's gotta be something better than this, there fu**ing has to be."

Darren, in the documentary *THE OASIS*.



3. SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE IN NEED

SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) remains a core component of Australia's response to homeless people. Although **there has been zero real growth in dollars spent on SAAP over the past decade**, it is still one of the best examples, internationally, of government responses to the primary needs of homeless people.

However, not every community has access to supported youth shelters and there are critical concerns arising out of the underfunding of SAAP, which were highlighted in the NYC hearings. The NYC's responses to these concerns are reflected in detail in its report and in the following recommendations.



The National Youth Commission recommends that:

Commonwealth, State and Territory governments immediately address the accumulated resource deficit of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program to ensure that:

- > Every community where there are homeless young people has adequate capacity for a supported accommodation response.
- > Funding levels in this program are able to provide appropriate infrastructure for delivering quality services to homeless young people.
- > Improved remuneration for staff becomes a government priority in order to urgently address the economic and program disadvantages owing to high staff turnover and loss of experienced staff.



A TOOLBOX OF OPPORTUNITIES AND RESOURCES FOR MOVING OUT OF HOMELESSNESS

Much of the evidence submitted at the NYC hearings related to the barriers homeless young people must overcome before they can actively participate in the social and economic life of the community.

Evidence to the NYC suggests that **mainstream services, such as Job Network, have not provided effective responses to the needs of homeless young people.**

For many young people, their literacy/numeracy levels are well below accepted labour market standards and they are deeply impacted by personal issues such as substance misuse and mental health concerns.

Systems in the community that have been set up to assist young people with foundation education, vocational training, employment access, mental health and drug/alcohol interventions are significantly under-funded, and are often inaccessible for young people who are homeless.

Access to affordable housing with appropriate levels of support is also vital for young people undertaking counselling and preparing for employment.

The National Youth Commission recommends that:

- > The Commonwealth Government works with youth agencies to construct a continuum of employment support programs for disadvantaged young people incorporating Jobs Placement, Employment & Training (JPET) programs and offering appropriate education, training and vocational opportunities, as well as innovative models of supported employment.
- > A national network of accessible drug and alcohol services is developed and funded by the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments based on best-practice models identified by existing service providers. This network should have a credible national coverage.
- > Commonwealth, State and Territory governments develop and fund a national program for supporting homeless young people with mental health issues based on good-practice models identified by existing service providers.

A man in a white Salvation Army uniform with red epaulettes stands in a cluttered, graffiti-covered environment. The background features a wall with red and white graffiti, a metal fence, and various items of debris on the ground. The man is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DEALING WITH A YOUNG HOMELESS PERSON'S UNDERLYING ISSUES

“The drugs are just the surface stuff. It’s the stuff underneath you’ve got to get to. If people are going to get over this stuff they can’t just deal with the addiction. It’s no use just taking the drugs out of your system because when you go back out in the world the same issues are there. The “hole in the heart” is still there from not knowing your dad, or being abused or neglected or having a terrible relationship with your mum or whatever. That’s there, so you’ve got to work on those things.”

Captain Paul Moulds from the Salvation Army in the documentary *THE OASIS*.



**THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORTING HOMELESS
YOUNG PEOPLE INTO EMPLOYMENT:**

“I got a job about six weeks ago. I was applying for about six months. It’s fun. Like you’re never bored. You’re always doing something and it’s good pay too, it’s not that bad. I thought I’d never work eh. But it feels good when you get paid because I didn’t steal it, I didn’t get it off Centrelink. So it’s mad, it feels mad when you spend the money. You know what I mean.”

Owen, in the documentary *THE OASIS*.

4. STOPPING THOSE ASSISTED FROM FALLING BACK INTO HOMELESSNESS

LIVING IN THE COMMUNITY

Many young people return to refuges or the streets after they have been placed in housing, because they have not been well supported in their new accommodation. **Complex issues involving years of neglect cannot be resolved during a limited stay in a youth refuge.** Most SAAP services are over-stretched and have no capacity to provide an adequate level of outreach – or what is called ‘post-vention’ support, once young people have left the service.

Appropriate ‘post-vention’ services will make it more likely that homeless young people will retain their housing and stay connected to their local community and participate in education or work.

The National Youth Commission recommends that:

- > All young people moving from SAAP into some form of independent living receive needs-based outreach support.
- > The Commonwealth Government urgently develop a significant stock of Foyer-type housing for at risk and homeless young people, with links to education, training and employment programs as a key strategy in preventing young people from falling back into homelessness.



HOW MUCH WILL IT COST?

The extensive problem of youth homelessness cannot be fixed overnight. The sector will need time to prepare and plan, in order to effectively manage the significant increase in resources that will be required.

Early intervention is crucial, and two specific programs with demonstrated effectiveness need to be expanded. The first program is RECONNECT, which currently costs about \$23 million per year.

The NYC estimates that annual funding of \$60 million per annum would deliver national coverage for the program and reach most highly at-risk young people. This could be achieved over 10 years by increasing the current funding by \$4 million annually.

Every Australian community needs the capacity to provide family reconciliation and mediation for young people and their families.

The second program, HOME Advice, reaches at-risk families early and prevents homelessness. Potentially this intervention can divert children from entering homelessness services. Currently, HOME Advice is a small program of eight services costing about \$2 million per year. The effectiveness of this kind of intervention has been established.

An immediate injection of \$8 million for this program and an increase of \$5 million per year for 10 years would achieve the target of an estimated \$60 million per year required for full national coverage.

Assistance for young people who are homeless needs to be strengthened. Overall, SAAP is currently funded at the level of about \$328 million per annum, with about a third of this budget allocated to youth services. Over the past decade, the increase in SAAP funding has not kept pace with the real costs of providing supported accommodation for homeless youth, and the capacity of communities to provide supported accommodation is uneven.

The NYC estimates that an additional \$5-7 million for youth services each year over 10 years would be necessary to ensure an adequate national network of supported accommodation for homeless young people.

Supporting young people after homelessness (ie. post-vention) is currently not resourced to any extent. **The NYC estimates that it would ultimately cost at least \$35 million each year to ensure every youth service and community can adequately support young people exiting SAAP. Implemented over 10 years this would be an increase of about \$3.5 million per year in order to establish the appropriate funding levels.** However, the cost benefits for such investment would be substantial, preventing young people from falling back into homelessness, by providing intensive support and connecting them with their local communities.

The new Commonwealth Government has promised \$150 million for housing for homeless people over the first term. One-third of the homeless are young people. **One third or \$50 million of this funding should be explicitly expended on housing for homeless young people.**

A total investment of around \$100 million in new funding is needed in the first three years. Beyond that the rate of expenditure will need to increase by approximately \$20 million each year, for at least ten years. This equates to over \$1 billion in new funding required over the next decade.

These estimates exclude funding required for the larger affordable housing response or funding investment for the education, training and employment programs for homeless young people and other specialist services provided in the health sector. Significant funds in Job Network and mainstream health services and education already exist but need to be targeted for homeless young people.



RESPONDING URGENTLY

“In 20 years time we will be held accountable as a community for the cost, in economic and human terms, of our failure to act. The NYC’s National Action Plan provides us with a realistic and practical way forward and we must commit ourselves to clearly targeting and achieving change.

Failure to act will diminish the integrity of Australia’s national core value of ‘a fair go’ for all. We are at a moment in time which will either be seen in retrospect as a watershed for change, or an opportunity lost forever.”

The National Youth Commission Inquiry Commissioners 2008.



ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

This publication represents a collaboration between the National Youth Commission (NYC), The Caledonia Foundation, Youth Development Australia and Shark Island Productions. The full report of the NYC is available on line at: www.nyc.net.au or www.theoasismovie.com.au

THE NATIONAL YOUTH COMMISSION (NYC)

In 2007, the National Youth Commission, comprised of Major David Eldridge, Associate Professor David MacKenzie, Ms Narelle Clay AM and Father Wally Dethlefs, one of the original three HREOC commissioners, undertook the first independent national inquiry into youth homelessness since the 1987 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission report 'Our Homeless Children'.

The NYC held 21 days of hearings in all States and Territories. Formal evidence was given by 319 individuals. 91 written submissions were received, including seven from government departments. Policy forums/ workshops were held in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth. The NYC released its findings on 8 April, 2008, viewable at: www.nyc.net.au

THE CALEDONIA FOUNDATION

The Caledonia Foundation is a philanthropic foundation which focuses on sustainable futures for young Australians. Through strategic funding partnerships, The Caledonia Foundation seeks to assist the advancement, wellbeing and welfare of the children and youth of Australia, particularly through education and training. The Caledonia Foundation funded the National Youth Commission and the Australia's Homeless Youth report, and also funded the Education and Outreach component of *The Oasis* documentary.

The Caledonia Foundation Advisory Board: Ian Darling (Chairman), Fiona Higgins (Executive Director, Sydney), Penny Richards (Executive Director, Melbourne), Min Darling, Louise Nelson, Mark Nelson, Jane Vicars, Will Vicars, Sue Reed (Administrative Officer). www.caledoniafoundation.com.au

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AUSTRALIA

Youth Development Australia Ltd is a new national not-for-profit organisation dedicated to 'youth development' and in particular, to ameliorating the situation of the most disadvantaged young Australians. The Caledonia Foundation provided the resources for the National Youth Commission and Youth Development Australia was responsible for the inquiry process.

www.yda.org.au

SHARK ISLAND PRODUCTIONS

Shark Island Productions is an award-winning Australian documentary production company. Shark Island's credits include *The Oasis*, *In the Company of Actors*, *Alone Across Australia* and *Woodstock for Capitalists*, all of which have screened on ABC Television and on a variety of television networks around the world. Their films have won over 30 international awards and screened at approximately 100 film festivals worldwide. *The Oasis* screened nationally on the ABC on April 10, 2008.

www.sharkisland.com.au

THE OASIS DOCUMENTARY

A Shark Island Productions Film. Produced by Ian Darling, Directed by Sascha Ettinger Epstein and Ian Darling, Edited by Sally Fryer, Cinematographer – Sascha Ettinger Epstein, Music Composer – Felicity Fox, Executive Producer – Susan MacKinnon, Line Producers – Mary Macrae and Isabel Perez, Assistant Editor – Hilary Balmond, Commissioning Editor ABC – Dasha Ross.

www.theoasismovie.com.au

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Australia's Homeless Youth

PROJECT SUMMARY

AN INDEPENDENT REPORT FROM THE
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An Independent Community Inquiry

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