

**The Prospect of Independence:  
A critique and proposal for responding to youth  
homelessness in South Australia**

**By**

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## **Declaration**

I am aware of the University's policy on Academic Dishonesty, and, except where appropriately acknowledged, this assignment is my own work, has been expressed in my own words and has not previously been submitted for assessment.

**Signed:** Sharyn Goudie

**Date:** 29<sup>th</sup> November 2008

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

When a young person becomes homeless, their experiences are very different to those who become homeless at other life stages or via different homeless 'pathways'. By reducing the amount of young people who become homeless and the amount of time a young person remains, it is possible to reduce the number of people who become homeless long term. For this reduction to occur there needs to be an appropriate evidence based response. Despite Australia's economic growth over the past 20 years, homelessness continues to remain a major issue. Despite clear evidence that homelessness is experienced by diverse groups of people, public policy – particularly in South Australia - continues to target the more visible 'rough sleepers'.

The lack of resources a young person brings with them to their experience of being homeless dramatically impacts on their ability to get out of homelessness. Young people who become homeless come with limited experience of successful independent living and at a life stage in which they are still developing physically, intellectually and psychologically. Johnson (2006) found that the younger a person was when they first became homeless the more likely they would remain homeless for a longer period of time. Evidence also shows that the longer someone remains homeless the more likely it is that they will develop substance use and/or mental health issues, further reducing their opportunities to 'get out' of homelessness. Youth homelessness disrupts schooling and limits future opportunities for economic participation, placing these young people well and truly at the bottom of the labour market. This paper asks "Given that young people follow a unique pathway to homelessness, what supports and services are needed to effectively respond to this group?"

Current interventions into youth homelessness focus on child protection, Reconnect and the Supported Accommodation Assistance Programme (SAAP). There is a strong link between contact with child protection services and likelihood of future homelessness. Getting this critical response right could dramatically reduce the number of young people entering homelessness. Reconnect also provides a nationwide response to young people at risk of homelessness. While successful, it is still constrained in the extent of services that can be provided. For those young people who become homeless, SAAP is the primary accommodation and support that these young people can access.

This paper is divided into three sections – a critique of the characteristics of young people who become homeless, a review of current theories of intervention and government responses, and finally a proposal for an improved response to young people who are at risk of becoming or who are already homeless.

In the first section this paper argues that people who initially become homeless before the age of 18 have characteristics that make them unlike other homeless groups. This idea of a 'youth pathway' to homelessness will be examined and the implications of this concept discussed, this will include an identification of the how and why young people become homeless and their particular vulnerabilities. Finally, this section will examine the young person's psychological and developmental life stage and how these factors impact on young people's relationship with the 'homeless subculture'.

The second section will explore four different structural issues that impact on a young person becoming homeless. These include contact with the child protection system, contact with the juvenile justice system, leaving school early and a lack of affordable housing. This section will include the practicalities of South Australian

government responses to these structural issues. This will include an analysis and critique of the current Supported Accommodation Assistance Programme (SAAP) system, the influence of the Social Inclusion Initiative and the State Government's understanding of homelessness in South Australia. It also seeks to understand the relationship between these policies and the actual provision of services primarily delivered by the third (or not-for-profit) sector.

This section includes a critique of the current South Australian Governments response to youth homelessness and the extent to which it has engaged relevant models of interventions. South Australia is well positioned and provides an informative case study of a government's response to homelessness issues. The current State Government has been a vocal promoter and utiliser of Social Inclusion initiatives, developing a State Strategic Plan that includes a goal to reduce the number of 'rough sleepers' in Adelaide, a State Housing Plan that in part addresses the housing affordability crisis and engaging Rosanne Haggerty as a Thinker in Residence to detail the New York Common Ground model and its ability to be emulated in Adelaide.

Finally, this paper will propose a framework for assisting people who are at risk of, or who become homeless before the age of 18. This will be based on the Case Management Model working within a client centred integrated service delivery framework.

Three separate evidence bases have been utilised for this critique: The Supported Accommodation Assistance Programme (SAAP) data collected by the National Data Collection Agency (NDCA); South Australian and Federal government policy documents that focus on supporting young people who are homeless or at risk of

homelessness; and a literature review of studies relating to youth homelessness and relevant theories of intervention.

The release of the Australian Federal Government's 'Homelessness Green Paper', the development of the National Affordable Housing Agreement, the release of the National Youth Commission's paper "Australia's Homeless Youth" and Ted Mulligan's Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in South Australian State Care have all been timely and important works that have influenced this paper. Other academic research utilised includes Guy Johnson's 2006 paper 'On the Move', Melbourne University's Project i study and the works of Chamberlain and Mackenzie.

## **2. DEFINING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS**

### **2.1 Literature Review**

Progress in homelessness research has helped to identify the wide range of people affected by homelessness, and challenge the myth that people who experience homelessness are a homogenous group. Despite this, strong stereotypes and misconceptions still remain. In 2006, Hanover Welfare Service completed research on the Australian public's perception of homeless people and the reasons that they became homeless. Of participants in the Hanover study, 91% believed that Drug Addiction was a key reason people became homeless. This was followed by Mental Illness (81%), Domestic Violence (81%), Drunkenness (80%) and Poor Decisions Made by Homeless People Themselves (74%) (Hanover 2006:12). Although these issues do impact on someone becoming homeless, the issue of why people become and remain homeless is much more complex.

Chamberlain and Mackenzie's 2001 census definition of homelessness as encompassing primary, secondary and tertiary levels has been widely accepted within academia as well as in government policy decision making (Chamberlain & Mackenzie 2002). This definition assists to determine between those who are most obviously associated with being homeless (e.g. rough sleepers), to those who are staying in temporary accommodation such as boarding houses.

Primary homelessness is defined by Chamberlain and Mackenzie as someone staying in an improvised home or tent or sleeping out. Secondary homelessness is for those temporarily staying in supported accommodation or staying in a private rental dwelling and who have 'no usual address'. Finally, tertiary homelessness is when

someone is staying in a boarding house and who has no other fixed address (Chamberlain and Mackenzie 2003).

Young people in Australia have increasing barriers to face before they are able to transition to live independently. In 2003, the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness expanded on the barriers young Australians face, including:

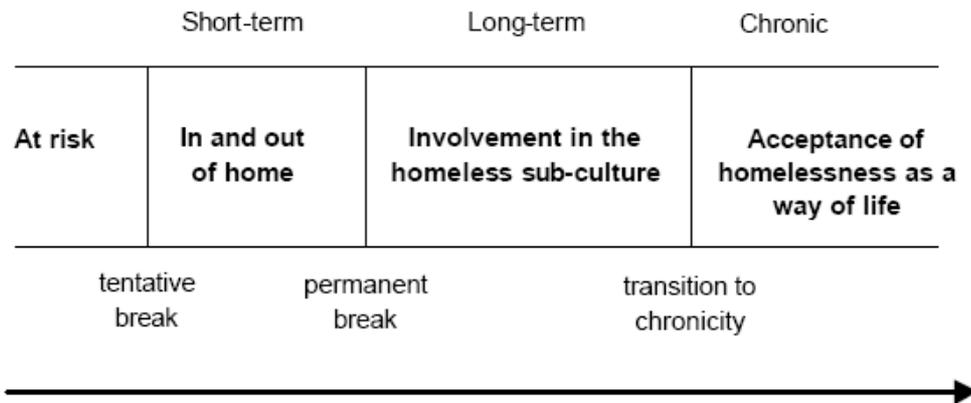
*Making the transition to independent living is increasingly difficult for young people. The disappearance of unskilled jobs and the growing demand for workers with post-secondary qualifications have led to high unemployment in this age group. Recent changes to income support eligibility have resulted in young adults being dependent on their parents for longer. Some young adults cannot live at home, find employment, or obtain secure affordable housing. A proportion have drug and alcohol abuse problems and mental health issues to deal with. All of these factors put young adults at high risk of homelessness. (Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness 2003:106)*

Research by Guy Johnson (2006), Project i (2004), Chamberlain and Mackenzie (2002 & 2003) and the 1989 Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission Report have each individually identified the varying reasons why young people find themselves without safe accommodation, and the different factors that will impact on how they move through homeless services and the housing sector. These factors include the age that they originally became separated from the family home, level of contact with juvenile justice services, history of abuse, number of extended family supports, length of engagement with school, and existence of mental health and/or drug and alcohol issues.

A key piece of research, that altered people's perceptions of homelessness, was the 1989 Brian Burdekin led Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission Report 'Our Homeless Children'. This report shed light on the 'hidden' issue of youth homelessness and prompted a federal government response to this group of people whose needs were not being met. Major changes to funding and service provision to young homeless people occurred as a result of what is now often referred to as the 'Burdekin' report. A \$100 Million Social Justice Package for Young Australians was announced by the Commonwealth in 1989. This provided more accommodation for homeless young people and improvements in the Young Homeless Allowance (Chamberlain and Mackenzie 2003)(Chamberlain 2003). Since 1989 there has been little investment in young people who are homeless. This lack of acknowledgment was the impetus for the National Youth Commission which took evidence from across Australia on the continual housing issues young people face. The National Youth Commission culminated in a report released in early 2008.

Chamberlain and Johnson (2003) provided evidence on how young people became homeless and the way the young person's identity changes depending on the stage they are at. These stages are the tentative break, permanent break and transition to chronicity and are depicted in the following figure.

**Figure 2.1 Youth Homeless Career**



*Source: Chamberlain and Mackenzie (1998: 70)*

The above figure shows that a young person will rarely experience one event that will lead them to leave the family home and move into long term homelessness. Chamberlain and Mackenzie (1998) see these events as occurring over a period of time. A permanent break occurs when a young person no longer sees themselves as part of the family unit, while involvement in the homeless subculture is strongly linked to disengagement from education. Both of these areas will be discussed further in later sections.

Young people primarily fit into the secondary homelessness definition and before moving into long term homeless will often move in and out of home, as shown in the above figure. They rely on extended family and friends to 'couch surf'; they avoid sleeping rough due to being particularly vulnerable and are often not eligible to access boarding houses. Young people's only realistic option once informal supports are broken down is the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP).

## **2.2 SAAP: The current primary response to Youth Homelessness**

SAAP is the current primary response to homelessness in Australia; it was established in 1985 as a way of bringing together the variety of accommodation and support services provided to homeless people across Australia (AIHW 2007). The SAAP Act of 1994 is a key piece of federal legislation that provided the underlying purpose of Supported Accommodation throughout Australia. These aims and goals are identified in the following excerpt of the SAAP Act:

*(2) The overall aim of SAAP is to provide transitional supported accommodation and related support services, in order to help people who are homeless to achieve the maximum possible degree of self reliance and independence. Within this aim the goals are:*

*(a) to resolve crisis; and*

*(b) to re-establish family links where appropriate; and*

*(c) to re-establish a capacity to live independently of SAAP*

*(Commonwealth of Australia 1994 Section 5: 1).*

Currently, the Australian Federal Government budget determines the amount of funding allocated towards SAAP and this amount is then dispersed to State and Territory Governments. Each State and Territory Government differs in the implementation and co-ordination of funding, outsourcing service delivery to a variety of Non-Government Organisations.

Over the past 10 years increases to SAAP funding have been stunted. In real terms funding increased by 20% over the period of 1997 to 2006, despite Homelessness Australia requesting that current funding program levels need to increase by 35 –

40% (Homelessness Australia 2008:9). When broken down, SAAP funding across Australia increased from \$1,680 per support period in 1996 – 1997 to \$1,770 in 2006 – 07. However, funding per client reduced from \$3,150 in 1996 – 1997 to \$3,090 in 2006 – 2007 after peaking at \$3,430 per client in 2002-2003 (AIHW 2008a: 88). These minor changes display the lack of investment into the SAAP program at a Federal level over the past ten years.

As a federally co-ordinated programme SAAP provides the most realistic indication of the incidence of homelessness at any point in time. All SAAP services are required to provide detailed data to the National Data Collection Agency (NDCA) of the number of people they supported and what specific support was provided.

A support period is opened on NDCA every time a person has more than 30 minutes contact with a SAAP service (AIHW 2008a). This support period identifies basic demographic information about the person seeking, what other services were requested and the services that were provided or referred to. When case managed by a service that does not directly provide accommodation, this may mean that in one support period a person may be accommodated in a range of different SAAP services (AIHW 2008a: 83).

The 2005–06 NDCA data collection period was the first to include a statistical linkage key. The significance of this is the ability to follow who SAAP accommodates and to reduce the likelihood of 'double counting' SAAP service users. However, improvements in NDCA linkage have inadvertently made it difficult to compare separate years and therefore gain an accurate assessment of whether the service provided has improved or declined in its ability to adequately meet the needs of homeless people. The NDCA data is also heavily reliant on service providers correctly reporting their contacts with clients.

It is also important to clarify that when NDCA data shows that a young person has accessed Youth SAAP services and was only accommodated once for a week, this is not the equivalent of evidence that they were successfully supported by Youth SAAP and transitioned from there to independent living. This young person may have found the SAAP Accommodation environment threatening or uncomfortable and decided to find other resources. These resources could be beneficial ones such as extended friendship groups, or they could be negative, with people returning to violent or unsafe circumstances. This data is not always readily available as young people do not always communicate where they will go after exiting SAAP accommodation.

Despite SAAP and NDCA's efforts there will always be a group of homeless people that may not be part of the 'counted' homeless population. In an attempt to measure this group, twice a year SAAP services are required to report on "Unmet Demand", which involves counting the number of people who are seeking accommodation and, for a range of reasons, are unable to be housed (AIHW 2008a).

There are issues of the reliability of this measurement as it depends on all homeless people to know about and attempt to access SAAP services. Therefore, it is much more likely that the number of homeless people is undercounted rather than over counted. The number of young people who are homeless is particularly likely to be undercounted due to young people's tendency to 'couch surf' rather than sleep rough or rely on services. Couch surfing is when someone stays at a range of people's houses for short periods of time. They often rely on friends and extended family during this period of homelessness and it is only when they run out of people who can provide accommodation that they will seek SAAP support. Even with this undercounting of the number of homeless people, the Unmet Demand survey does

confirm that the demand for temporary accommodation consistently outstrips the supply. For the 2006 – 07 financial year it was estimated that 1 in 2 people seeking accommodation were turned away from services (AIHW 2008: 43).

Evidence also suggests that increasing the number of accommodation options would not immediately reduce the number of homeless people. This is because any increase in accommodation provided will be offset by an increase in contact from people who had previously unsuccessfully tried to access accommodation (National Youth Commission 2008: 73). Despite its shortcomings, SAAP has proven to be an effective, but under resourced, response to homelessness in Australia (National Youth Commission 2008).

The Australian Federal Government is currently reviewing the way support is provided to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The consistent problem of homelessness, rising cost of housing and a change in federal government has laid the foundation for a new way of tackling homelessness. After twenty years of SAAP, major structural changes will greatly alter how supported accommodation is provided. The Australian Federal Government Green Paper on Homelessness has opened up the possibility of a dramatic change to homelessness services. In late 2008 the Federal Government will release a White Paper, which will be a precursor to policy changes for Homelessness services across the nation. This will have a huge repercussion for the SAAP Act and subsequent delivery of services.

At the time of writing, SAAP is funded separately, however it is likely that this funding source will be changed to the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) which will come into place in January 2009 and include previous funding that was under the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (Shelter NSW 2008). With

this change it is anticipated that the SAAP Act will be abolished. There are a number of implications if this occurs.

Within the SAAP Act there is specific recognition of what support SAAP will provide for young people. The Act states that services will support "*independent young people above the school-leaving age for the State concerned*" (Commonwealth of Australia 1994). The key element of this statement is the definition of what makes a young person 'independent'.

In South Australia the State-Federal Youth Protocol was established to specify the responsibilities of government departments in determining a young person as independent. Centrelink ultimately has the role of assessing whether they believe a young person is independent through the provision of income support. South Australian Child Protection Services, Families SA, are required to provide case management support and services to any young person under the age of 15, and up to the age of 18 for any young person that is under the Guardianship of the Minister (Youth Protocol 2003). State child protection services are required to prove that there is no statutory responsibility for them to remain involved in case managing the young person.

With the loss of the SAAP Act the South Australian State-Federal Youth Protocol is placed in jeopardy and also reduces what was SAAP accommodation services ability to place the responsibility of young people under 15 onto the South Australian Child Protection Services. As the previous quote from the SAAP Act shows, SAAP is defined as providing services to assist people to transition to independence. The younger a person is when they first access SAAP services the longer that they will need support from SAAP before transitioning elsewhere.

An increase in young people accessing SAAP services in South Australia is reflected in the NDCA data. For both periods the highest users of SAAP services across Australia were single females aged between 15 and 19 years old.(AIHW 2007; AIHW 2008)

**Table 2.2 SAAP access in South Australia comparison 2005/06 – 2006/07**

	<b>2005/06</b>	<b>2006/07</b>
Number of people accessing SAAP services in South Australia	10,400	12,200
% that were young people (12 – 25 years)	34% (3,550)	36% (4,450)
% of young people that required 3 or more support periods	13% (466)	14% (603)

(Source AIHW 2007 and 2008b)

The increase in young people accessing SAAP in South Australia is concerning as young people are a predictor for continued issues of adult homelessness. This is reflected in studies examining pathways into homelessness. Young people are also shown to display needs with a higher level of complexity when accessing SAAP. In 1999 the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services released a report stating that 38% of high need support periods were provided to young people aged 15 – 19 (Bisset, Campbell and Goodall 1999: viii). The next section will look at the youth pathway and how this impacts on the likelihood of a young person remaining homeless.

### **2.3 Pathways**

In 2006 a longitudinal study of 103 people who were exiting emergency accommodation in Victoria was completed. The focus of this study was to determine when and why the participants had first become homeless and how this had affected the length of time they remained homeless (Johnson 2006).

Johnson (2006) identified five pathways leading to homelessness: Mental Health, Domestic Violence, Youth, Substance Use and Housing Crisis. He examined how each pathway impacted on the way people experienced homelessness, arguing

*... the way people become homeless effectively 'establish[es]' the foundation for later development' (Goffman 1963:45)...shared experiences have implications in terms of the likelihood that people will adapt to homelessness as a way of life, the length of time people will be homeless, and, ultimately, how people attempt to 'get out' and 'stay out' of the homeless population. (Johnson 2006: 63)*

By looking at 'Pathways' into homelessness, new opportunities arise to examine how it is that someone becomes homeless and how this impacts on their experience of homelessness. These experiences of homelessness and impacts may include the length of time someone is homeless, their ability to engage with services, the way they engage with other homeless people, and their vulnerability to issues often associated with homelessness such as substance misuse, engagement in crime and physical and mental health concerns.

The term 'pathways' highlights the fact that becoming homeless and gaining a home do not constitute end points in themselves. Some people may gain and lose their housing a number of times while on their 'homeless pathway'. The goal is to find out what it is that finally assists people to maintain stable housing and move out of homelessness. Anderson (2001) argued that:

*...the notion of pathways through homelessness is central to a full understanding of the nature of homelessness and the possibilities for alleviating homelessness. That is to say, consideration needs to be*

*given to the processes and dynamics at work in relation to the housing careers and life trajectories of individuals and households who experience homelessness at some point in their lives (Anderson 2001:2).*

A large proportion of those who go on to become chronically homeless had their initial experience of homelessness before they were 18 (Johnson 2006). Homelessness is particularly disruptive for young people. It interrupts their education and opportunities for future employment. It also demands independent living skills that they may have never experienced and may not have the cognitive ability to utilise.

Project i (2004) gave an insight into the reasons young people became homeless and what it was that helped them to secure and maintain accommodation in the long term. The research looked at the youth homeless population of both Victoria and Los Angeles and also assisted to establish the differing pathways *within* youth homelessness. Project i completed interviews and surveys with homeless young people and service providers as well as a 2 year longitudinal study of 500 experienced and 165 newly homeless young people (Keys 2004).

Project i identified two differing pathways into youth homelessness as 'running to' and 'running from'. This attempted to clarify the difference between those young people who are fleeing abuse and neglect to those who see leaving home as 'seeking independence' (Mallett 2006)(Keys 2004). This idea of two pathways was further expanded on in Johnson's unrelated 2006 study.

In this study the largest pathway identified was the youth pathway and this group made up 41 of the 103 people in the sample. All of these people had their first

experience of homelessness before they were 18. Of this group 39% were 15 or younger when they first experienced homelessness (Johnson 2006). Johnson divided people identified as being on the youth pathway into two groups – *dissenters* and *escapers*. This division assists in understanding why young people become homeless and how these reasons impact on how long they remain homeless.

### *2.3.1 Dissenters*

This definition of dissenters fits closely with Project i's 'Running To' group (Mallett 2006). Johnson (2006) defined Dissenters as young people who are experiencing family breakdown. In this group, there are no situations of significant abuse in the family - however, the family structure is such that it cannot be maintained. This can be related to intergenerational cultural issues, clashes with a parent's new partner, or a family's inability to accept a young person's sexual preferences. This means that when it is not possible for a young person and their family to reconcile, the young person is more likely to transition successfully from supported accommodation into independent living. Johnson and Project i found that this group were also more likely to engage in the communal living structure of supported accommodation, accept assistance from workers, remain in education for longer and retain other community supports. In short, those in this category are more likely to be homeless for only a short period of time.

Where possible it is beneficial for a young person to remain in the family home or to sustain positive links with family members. Family provides an important level of support that continues beyond a young person turning 18. Reasons why families may have difficulty diffusing tension can be attributed to changes in the family structure and economic pressures.

### 2.3.2 Escapers

Those in the escaper category often reach primary homelessness with much higher levels of need due to previous traumatic experiences and long term disconnection with families. Johnson's study found that Dissenters made up the majority of homeless service users at any one time; however, it is the Escapers who end up using the most resources and are more likely to stay homeless for longer.

Escapers are considered to have endured *adverse childhood experiences*. This is when there is evidence of prolonged physical, sexual or emotional abuse, family poverty, drug and alcohol and mental health issues. By the time someone in the escaper category accesses homeless services they usually have been homeless longer, have had negative experiences with child protection and/or juvenile justice services and have disengaged from education. All of this means that they are more likely to engage with the homeless subculture and they are less likely to accept service support (Johnson 2006).

Due to the fact that many escapers in Johnson's study had experienced so much instability in the lead up to becoming homeless, the initial shift into homelessness was not as difficult. Once they moved into homelessness, it was even more difficult for them to get back out. These young people also often come in with a clear knowledge of services and expectations of what should be provided.

This division in young people's experience of homelessness is essential to understanding why interventions need to be tailored. For dissenters there is a high potential for programs focused on early intervention to be effective. At this point, young people are still likely to be engaged in community supports and extended family. Young people in this group may easily transition through SAAP services, if

they need this level of support at all. Escapers on the other hand are more likely to need intensive support due to having relationship and familial breakdown at an earlier age (Johnson 2006).

Despite these differences there are some issues particularly related to young people that separate them from other homeless people is their engagement in homeless subculture and their developmental stage.

### 3. The Impact of Adolescence

#### 3.1 Adolescent Development, Identity Formation and Trauma

The years of adolescence are crucial to the formation of a young person's identity. The way that a young person sees themselves is dramatically shaped by external factors and this impact can have a long lasting effect on the young person's future.

Erikson defines adolescence as when:

*The adolescent tries to answer the questions, who am I, and what is my place in society? Self-chosen values and vocational goals lead to a lasting personal identity. The negative outcome is confusion about future adult roles. (Berk 1997:17)*

The Australian Childhood Foundation identifies the transitional puberty phases as: *romantic motivation, sexual interest, emotional intensity, sleep/arousal regulation, appetite, affective disorders and increased risk taking, novelty seeking, sensation seeking (Cussen 2008)*. However the age and experience linked changes such as planning, logic reasoning ability, inhibitory control and problem solving skills will not be developed until later adolescence. Adolescence is debated as to occur between the ages of 19 and 23 (Cussen 2008). This means that when young people are forced to leave home early they are often not developmentally ready for the task of living independently and all that this involves.

Becoming homeless is often complex in its trauma. It requires young people to manage the separation from their family as well as the day to day realities of accessing services and advocating for themselves. The quote below is from NYC's *Australia's Homeless Youth* Report and shows the psychological and emotional toll that young people face when they become homeless.

*In their direct evidence about the experience of being homeless, young people also touched on the emotional toll of homelessness. They described feeling frustrated, embarrassed, helpless and vulnerable, hopeless, unhappy, worthless, scared and fearful, anxious, isolated and lonely angry, and envious of other young people with homes and families.(National Youth Commission 2008: 56)*

For young people that experience trauma they are also prone to having complex post traumatic outcomes which Australian Childhood Foundation believe may impact on their *identity*, their *internal model of relationships* and also *the way that they regulate their affect* (Cussen 2008).

If, as Australian Childhood Foundation believes, young people are building their *identity* during the time that they are experiencing these emotions and feelings then it is likely that the identity that they build will include low self esteem and a negative outlook on their future options.

The trauma that young people who become homeless carry is often complex in nature and will impact on their *Internal Models of Relationships*. They have usually been hurt by someone who they trusted to care for them and this can then impact on their ability to attach and trust other people that come into their lives. The quote below is also from the NYC report and comes from the perspective of a SAAP worker:

*...there seems to be a commonality amongst the young people who come to the refuge, a feature that is the same no matter the configuration of other issues. That is that each young person has experienced the erosion or the defeat of a significant relationship, usually with an adult and usually with an adult, who, in an ideal*

*world, has the role of providing unconditional love and care. (Quote from SAAP worker (National Youth Commission 2008: 87)*

### **3.2 Health Issues**

As stated previously, young people experiencing adolescence will be likely to engage in risk taking behaviour as they continue to develop their pre-frontal cortex. Johnson (2006) and Project i (2004) found that young people entering homelessness were more likely to increase their drug use the longer that they were homeless. They also found that drug use was rarely the sole reason a young person became homeless in the first place. In research, living arrangements have been shown to have a considerable impact on the level of drug use that one engages in. The less stable the accommodation, the higher rate of drug use. Without accommodation people are more likely to rely on drugs. This can be seen as a coping mechanism to remove themselves from the reality of their situation.

Issues around mental health are most likely to present themselves before a person turns 25. Support and assistance during this stage to understand the symptoms, diagnosis and how to manage it can assist in reducing future negative side effects. A safe, supportive environment and minimal stress are important elements of maintaining a high level of mental health.

For those young people who develop mental health issues they are particularly vulnerable compared to other homeless people and are disenfranchised not just in society but within the homeless subculture.

Young people face a number of challenging life stage issues including the emergence of mental health and drug and alcohol issues. Johnson found that for many homeless people issues related to mental health and substance misuse emerged after the

person became homeless. This challenges the conception that people become homeless due to substance misuse and mental health. It also establishes how homelessness can impact on young people and increase the likelihood of these issues occurring.

Beyond mental health and drug and alcohol issues, young people who are homeless also need a significant amount of support and assistance around maintaining their physical health. Young people who are homeless are more likely to regularly smoke cigarettes, have sex at an earlier age and also be sexually assaulted. Homeless people have a lower life expectancy compared to those who are housed, with two recent studies indicating that the death rate for homeless people is four times higher than the general population (Stratigos and Katsambas 2003).

Project i (Keys 2004) found that of the homeless people they surveyed "58.8% of young women and 45.2% of young men had experienced involuntary sex". Being too drunk or too 'high' were the main reasons young people gave for the unwanted sex occurring.

Particular support is needed for young women. Project i found that young females who are homeless are more likely than women in the general population to get pregnant and to go on to have the baby. Young people who become homeless are also more likely to engage in sexual activity before young people who are still engaged in education and living at home.

*The average age of respondents when they first experience sex was as follows: vaginal sex 14 years 4 months; oral sex 14 years 8 months; and anal sex, 16 years 2 months. A 1992 study of Victorian secondary students found that the average age for girls' first sexual intercourse*

*was 15 years 4 months and boys 14 years 11 months (Hibbert, Caust, Patton, Rosier, & Bowes, 1996). This confirms earlier findings that, on average, homeless young people have their first sexual experience at an earlier age than their home-based peers (Keys 2004:25)*

To manage this myriad of barriers they face, young people who are homeless will naturally form their own informal supports to assist them through this time. In the end informal networks have the highest influence on the young person's activities and self-development.

### **3.3 Identity Formation and Social Supports**

The issue of homeless subculture is particularly relevant to the Youth Pathway. Johnson found that, unlike those on the Housing Crisis or Domestic Violence pathway, those who became homeless before the age of 18 were more likely to identity themselves as a 'homeless person' and quickly engage with the homeless subculture. This in part can be linked to the fact that defining elements of the homeless subculture are synonymous with a person's developmental. As Johnson (2006) explains further:

*...variations in homelessness can be explained by recognising that people either 'reject' or 'embrace' homelessness depending on how they view and respond to the stigma attached to homelessness, and how they respond to the homeless subculture. How people respond to these two structures locates them in different social contexts where different routines emerge. (Johnson 2006: 35)*

By the time a young person becomes homeless they have often lost or reduced their informal supports that would help provide assistance to teach them and nurture

them into the independent person they will need to become. To fill this gap young people will need to build links with others (such as services) to assist them to make this transition to independence. Community services are unable to provide the level of care that a young person seeks. Services generally have a high turn over of staff, a responsibility to display professional boundaries and a large case load that reduces the time they can spend with each individual young person. In cases where young people rely primarily on service providers for support this will not only impact on their understanding of *Internal Models of Relationships* but also their *Affect Regulation*.

A young person who is homeless is often in extreme crisis and attempting to manage to access safe, secure accommodation as well as temper the range of feelings that were described earlier in this chapter. As discussed above, services can only provide so much, the young person may have a range of different workers that they engage with and as a result may receive inconsistent responses for similar issues. Due to this inconsistency, a young person may develop unhelpful ways of managing day to day negotiations, including using violence or aggression to get what they want or to harm themselves in order to show the level of distress that they have over a situation.

Support and assistance during the adolescent development stage to understand and manage trauma can reduce the negative side effects in the future. Unfortunately, the nature of emergency accommodation does not allow for immediate stability and support and the homeless service system is often unable to provide this without the assistance of mainstream services. Project i found that the development of positive relationships were a key factor in a young person increasing their confidence and moving out of homelessness. In the absence of family, service providers can often

play an important role in responding to these needs. However, it is difficult for service providers to engage at the same level as family, friends or partners. Therefore, service providers need to recognise the importance of client's informal relationships and to support clients to maintain them. This idea is supported by the Victorian Government Department of Human Services report (2008) into vulnerable young people:

*Young people need to be supported by positive learning and social experiences to embed the new and developing neural pathways. When these are not in place, positive brain development may not occur, leaving young people without the cognitive ability to make good judgments and decisions. (Victorian Government Department of Human Services 2008: 10)*

The above quote links both the neurological and cognitive issues young people face with the impact of their environment. Thompson and O'Connell also recognised the influence of peers on young people who had contact with the juvenile justice system. Labelled the 'Peer Influence' model this identified how peers impacted on young peoples' decision making and sought increased independent living skills programs to reduce the likelihood of homelessness for the young offender.

The basis of the peer influence model is best illustrated in Figure 3.1:

**Figure 3.1 What Influences Juvenile Behaviour**



*Source: Government of Western Australia, Department of Justice Document: "Reducing Juvenile Offending" (Thompson and O'Connell 2008)*

Once family is removed from the equation, friends are the next group that have the most influence on a young person. For young homeless people, and in particular those in the Escaper category, friends become an essential force that directs young peoples decision making. By understanding the specific role peers play in a young persons decision making it is possible to identify new ways of working.

The following quote explains how different people manage the stigma that is associated with being homeless and this alters who it is that homeless people seek acceptance from.

*...while the way stigma is managed is often directed towards acceptance (Goffman 1963:19), in the context of homelessness, a crucial distinction is whether acceptance is sought from the mainstream or other homeless people...That is, rather than distancing*

*themselves, some people respond to stigma in a way that involves connecting with others in similar circumstances. (Johnson 2006: 55)*

Unlike those on other homeless pathways, young people are more likely to embrace the stigma of being homeless. Rather than try to hide the fact that they are homeless they will actively display it by remaining in groups and wearing similar clothing.

Engaging with other homeless young people and the homeless subculture can also be about safety. Homeless young people are particularly vulnerable and by grouping together they can reduce this vulnerability to an extent.

Given the psychological and developmental life stages young people are facing, becoming homeless is given an added layer of complexity. Young people are more likely to engage with other homeless people and become entrenched in the homeless subculture. Due to this it is important to have a specific range of interventions. The next section will look at four structural factors that impact on young people being at risk of homelessness. Each of these factors will be critiqued within a South Australian context.

## **4. OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERVENTION IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This paper will now move to a section focusing on specific areas where youth homelessness can be reduced and particular areas of intervention. As a basis this paper utilizes four key areas identified in a Federal Government report 'Working towards a National Homelessness Strategy' (2003) that would assist in the reduction of youth homelessness – these were.

*...reducing the number of young people leaving the care and protections system and becoming homeless*

*Reducing the number of young people leaving the justice system and becoming homeless*

*Increasing the availability of safe, affordable, appropriate and sustainable housing and associated support services for young people*

*Getting more children and young people at risk of homelessness to stay at school.*

*(Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness 2003: 95-96)*

These areas will be examined within the framework of the South Australian Government and its responses to these particular issues. The South Australian Government has a significant amount of power to alter the experience of homeless young people. It controls the Education, Child Protection, Secure Care and Public Housing Systems all of which play crucial roles in the response to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

This next chapter will examine each of these ideas in further detail and how South Australia is addressing them. There will be particular focus on increasing the

availability of safe, affordable, appropriate and sustainable housing and associated support services for young people.

## **4.2 Child Protection and Homelessness**

There is clear evidence of an association between contact with child protection services during childhood and an increased incidence of homelessness later in life.

Mendes 2007:1 found that:

*Young people leaving out of home care are arguably one of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in society. Compared to most young people, they face particular difficulties in accessing educational, employment, housing and other developmental and transitional opportunities. (Mendes 2007:1)*

Project i found that a significant majority of young people had unfavourable experiences with the Victorian DHS and that these experiences negatively impacted on their future options stating that "...Loss of control, betrayal and not being believed were common concerns." (Mallett 2006:20)

South Australia and other Australian states are also under significant pressure to provide appropriate and timely responses to children at risk. In August 2004 a bill to set up a Commission of Inquiry into the sexual abuse of children in state care was passed in South Australian Parliament. Justice E.P. Mulligan was later appointed as Commissioner of the Children in State Care Commission of Inquiry (Mulligan 2008: 4).

With the formal release of the Inquiry findings in March 2008 the South Australian Government pledged to make a formal apology to those who have been victims of child sexual abuse while in South Australian state care in June 2008.

While the Inquiry was primarily focused on issues of sexual abuse and spanned the last 100 years, Mulligan still raised clear concerns about the current state of the South Australian child protection system and the young people under its care.

*The inquiry heard evidence to suggest that the State's child protection system, like its counterparts elsewhere in Australia, is in crisis, largely because of poor past practices. The number of children being placed in care has increased; there is a shortage of foster carers and social workers; children tend to be placed according to the availability of placements rather than the suitability; and serviced apartments, motels and B&Bs are used for accommodation because there is no alternative. (Mulligan 2008: XV)*

In 2004 the Keeping them Safe Child Protection Reform Program was released by the South Australian Government, this was developed in response to significant increases in notifications of child abuse (Government of South Australia 2004:6) and aimed to implement more effective ways of working with their target group.

In 2005 The Office of the Guardian for Children and Young People was established and has endeavoured to provide a transparent, child focused Child Protection System (GCYP 2006). The subsequent Annual Reports from the appointed Guardian, Pam Simmons, have been frank in their demands for improved services in the area of child protection.

*The pressures in the child protection system are well known. There are increasing numbers of notifications of abuse and neglect and increasing numbers of children coming into care. The available places of care do not match the need. (GCYP 2006:18)*

A lack of carers and an increase in young peoples needs continues to be an issue. In the 2008/09 State Budget an additional \$190.6 million over four years was provided to improve Child Protection Services in South Australia (Weatherill 2008)

Those young people who are placed under the care of the Guardianship of the Minister are supported until 18; however, those who have previously been on temporary orders may only receive intermittent support until age 15. Families SA offices have now begun to provide Post Care Support for young people 25 and under who were previously under the Guardianship of the Minister. This is a significant forward step for services to young people (Weatherill 2008).

The services that are provided to young people who are at risk or have experienced adverse childhood experiences are integral. Poor service delivery at this level all but guarantees young people entering society with a multitude of barriers. At this level, it could be defined as prevention – preventing young people from becoming homeless or at risk of homelessness in the future.

More resources are needed to be placed in this system, even when it seems that there will never be a reduction in the number of notifications made and issues of abuse identified. Without preventative measures at a child protection level is essential to reduce young people becoming chronically homeless in the future. Without these actions even if there is an overall reduction in the number of people who become homeless, the level of complexity that those who do become homeless will be so significant that extensive resources will continue to be required.

The issues faced by the child protection system in South Australia are interlinked with those faced by young people accessing juvenile detention centres. Both of these are

managed by the South Australian Department of Families and Communities and both can be gateways to homelessness.

#### 4.3 Juvenile Justice and Homelessness

The issue of Juvenile Justice is intrinsically linked to youth homelessness. Arrest and detention in South Australia's Youth Justice System often provides a pathway for young people to homelessness. A young person's offending behaviours increases the likelihood of family breakdown. Alternatively, for those who are already homeless engagement in the homeless subculture can result in increased criminal activity or engagement in 'survival crime' to get by while homeless. Martin Giles' (2006:7) study stated:

*The research findings identified a number of poignant and disturbing illustrations of a lack of access to legitimate finance. These include: plans to deliberately commit a crime to get arrested in order to use court papers for personal identification...Also poignant were statements describing it being harder to survive when "you can't do crime 'cause then you have to rely on the services" (Martin-Giles 2006: 7)*

The Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness (2003:101) suggested two responses to the issue of juvenile justice and homelessness. The first response is focused on having a planned and supported exit plan for young people leaving juvenile detention; the second is a focus on prevention and avoiding young people being locked up in juvenile detention in the first place. The South Australian Guardian for Children and Young People Annual Report reported concern that young people were being locked up unnecessarily because of a lack of community

placement options. There was also concern raised about ‘...the deficient state of the secure care facilities’. (GCYP 2006:7) Sandstrom and Cornell (2008: 32) also raised concern that young people without stable addresses to go to are technically ‘being criminalised for their homelessness’.

South Australian Juvenile Justice Services operate two Detention Centres, one at Magill (for males and females under 18) and Cavan (for males who are incarcerated for longer periods of time), with Families SA providing case management. Due to community concerns of increasing juvenile offending in South Australia there was a push for increased intensity in case management services.

In 2007 the ‘To Break the Cycle’ report by Monsignor David Cappo led to South Australia’s Department of Families and Communities provided funding for ‘Breaking the Cycle’ program which provides intensive case management to juvenile offenders. Despite these positive steps, it is often offset by the South Australian Department of Corrections which still has a strong law and order focus with minimal focus on restorative justice. In early 2008 the Acting Premier Kevin Foley responded to issues of overcrowding in prisons with the statement that he was willing to “...rack ‘em, pack ‘em, and stack ‘em” in the cells. (Walker 2008: 1)

This paper argues that there needs to be a continued focus on a restorative justice approach. The Children and the Law Committee of The Law Society of South Australia believes that Restorative Justice

*“...can be used for a range of offending and at a range of stages in proceedings from the point of apprehension to sentencing and upon a person’s release from custody. Restorative justice has a range of applications ...It enables all parties affected by the offending to be*

*much more involved in the process of resolving the issue thereby feeling a level of ownership of the outcome (Law Society of South Australia 2007:5)*

As well as a focus on restorative justice, Thompson and O'Connell (2008) have identified that Independent Living Skills education and support is critical to assisting a young person to maintain stable accommodation post-release. This requires a service that can work with young people consistently while they are in secure care and upon release, assisting in an easier transition to local community supports.

Until some of the fundamental issues of appropriate placement on release, and the necessary support provided there will be continual issues of young offenders moving in and out of homelessness. Another element in assisting young people with offending histories is to keep them engaged in educational or vocational activities. The importance of education will be examined further in the next section.

#### **4.4 Education and Homelessness**

Schools have a powerful role in supporting young people to transition out of homelessness as well as to avoid homelessness all together. A major focus of services is on early intervention, Chamberlain and Johnson define early intervention as "*...measures taken as soon as possible after a young person has become homeless – at the beginning of the homeless career*" (Chamberlain and Johnson 2003: 16). As a result, when young people move in and out of home is a crucial time to implement early intervention. Opportunity for early intervention ends once young people make a permanent break from the home. Schools can play a critical role supporting young people both during the early intervention period and even after this period has ended.

By providing support to both the young person and their family before the young person makes a permanent break from the family home there is increased opportunity for family reunification. At the very least, there can be a planned approach to the young person leaving home. This can reduce the level of family breakdown and increase the young person's chances of successfully maintaining independent housing.

Research shows that the majority of young people have their first experience of homelessness while they are still at school. Hillier and Cornell (2005) found that that young people at risk of homelessness are likely to confide in a teacher or school counsellor, however, once they become homeless the instability associated with this means they are likely to disengage from school altogether. Schools have the potential to play a huge role in the welfare of young people as they are often the only institution that every young person will be mandatorily linked to in some way. Schools can play a role of monitoring student's welfare and this also includes the welfare of the student's family.

The Commonwealth government programme, Reconnect is estimated to assist approximately 6,000 young people a year who are at risk of becoming homeless due to family breakdown or conflict.

*One of the best ways to prevent and reduce youth homelessness is to improve family relationships. Recent initiatives such as reconnect have focused on rebuilding family relationships to prevent or quickly remedy youth homelessness. (Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness 2003: 100)*

Despite this support, Homelessness Australia (2008) has identified that there are three times this number of students that are eligible for the Reconnect service.

During the years of adolescence it is common for families and young people to undergo conflict, however, the fewer extended supports a family has increases the likelihood of a young person becoming homeless (Johnson 2006).

Retaining links to education has been shown to have positive impacts on young people, not only for the opportunities for them to move into employment or further education in the future, but also for the social connection and stability that it provides.

The National Youth Commission (2008:70) recognised the benefits of schools working closely with local youth agencies and that these relationships were identified as having improved substantially over the past few years.

A positive example from South Australia is a pre-crisis service that assists young people to remain engaged in school as well as support families and schools to respond to the young person's challenging behaviours. This service, Flexible Learning Options (FLO) enables non-government organisations to work with and in schools to support the young person. FLO is an initiative of the Innovative Community Action Networks (ICAN) which was a part of the Social Inclusion Initiative initial projects linked to the South Australian State Governments *Making the Connections – School Retention Action Plan*.

*FLO enrolment allows schools to provide students with individualised case management and a learning program through a Flexible Learning Plan (FLP), facilitating successful learning outcomes within a wider learning space. Through FLO, the student remains actively engaged on*

*a meaningful and accredited/recognised learning and earning pathway throughout the full school year. In order to achieve this successfully it is expected that specialised case management services will be provided to address the identified individual barriers. (ICAN DECS 2008)*

At time of writing FLO is only offered in specified regions of South Australia. One of the greatest challenges is keeping young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in school until its completion. The South Australian government is currently reviewing the South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) and seeking to increase the school leaving age to 17 in 2009. The school leaving age has already been increased from 15 to 16 years of age in 2007. This means that there is more impetus for schools and support services to ensure that young people are 'learning or earning'.

A barrier to assisting young people who are homeless to remain in education is accessing suitable accommodation. A major benefit of student accommodation is to create an environment that encourages young people to remain linked to their school, even if they are no longer able to live at home. Currently, in South Australia, there is a lack of affordable student accommodation suitable for high school students who have left home. Only one four bed accommodation service is specific to high school students on low incomes. Housing SA only offers student housing to tertiary students, and most other student accommodation is expensive and catered towards International students. If there were more affordable student accommodation options throughout metropolitan Adelaide, some young people may never have to access SAAP services.

The South Australian Government through the Social Inclusion Initiative and in partnership with the Federal Government is planning to create a service in Western Adelaide that will accommodate 40 young people and have services that assist them to remain in education (Government of South Australia 2008).

With a decrease in unskilled labour it makes it very difficult for young homeless people to transition to an independent income unless they have a worthwhile education behind them. For those homeless young people that have already disengaged from school there is still a need for a service to assist them to reengage with education, training and/or employment.

A key service that has assisted young people who are homeless and have disengaged from school has been Job Placement Employment and Training (JPET). JPET is a federally funded program that aims to support young people aged 15 – 21 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Its main goal is to support these young people to engage in and maintain education, training and/or employment. In recent years there has been a greater shift for JPET to gain 'economic outcomes' for its client base rather than simply engage them in a program structure while they are transient. This has provided motivation for JPET providers to ensure that young people are 'earning or learning'.

In 2004 Project i found that young people rated JPET services positively:

*JPET was described as a 'good place' with a relaxed environment that provided practical assistance. Workers were described as friendly and helpful and this was said to contribute to a welcoming environment.*  
*Keys 2004:24)*

As of July 2009 JPET will cease to exist and young people will access the new federal employment services model. This model will include four streams with young people who are at risk of homelessness able to access intensive employment support through Stream Four. It is uncertain how a move away from youth specific service provision will impact on young people who are required by Centrelink to access this service.

No matter what the future of services such as JPET, it is clear that there is a benefit in having services that provide support for young people to engage in and maintain school attendance. Some State and Federal government initiatives are assisting this, however, without appropriate accommodation options young people who cannot remain at home will continue to be at risk of homelessness.

#### **4.5 Housing and Homelessness**

No matter what leads a young person to homelessness part of the solution to getting them out of homelessness lies in safe, affordable, appropriate and sustainable housing. This housing needs to be delivered in conjunction with support services that provide intensive follow up and help to problem solve potential issues that may lead to the tenancy failing.

This section will look at these two issues of housing availability and then the support that needs to accompany this. Firstly, the paper will examine housing affordability and availability in South Australia, the current trends and opportunities for improvements.

As the issue of housing affordability has become more prominent in the political spectrum, particularly in the lead up to the 2007 Australian federal election, research has demonstrated that, to various extents, all Australians are vulnerable to

homelessness. As the cost of housing continues to increase, welfare agencies are being contacted by groups of people dropping below the poverty line for the first time.

*Today our homeless services are assisting not just people with drug, alcohol and mental health problems but also increasing numbers of working families who can't pay the rent. In fact, nearly 50 per cent of people coming into homeless services across Australia are private renters in trouble. (St Vincent de Paul Society 2007: i)*

Shelter SA believes that it now costs 7 times the average income to buy a median priced house in Adelaide (Goudie 2008). A lack of available housing and rising costs has also impacted on private rental with the South Australian real estate market having a vacancy rate of 1.14% in April 2008 (REISA 2008).

#### *4.5.1 South Australia's Response*

The South Australian Government has been actively seeking solutions to the issue of housing availability since it developed a State Strategic Plan in 2004. One of the elements of the State Strategic Plan was to increase the population to 2 million by 2050 (Government of South Australia 2007). This highlighted the question, where were these people going to be housed?

In South Australia currently there are not enough houses to accommodate today's number of South Australians. South Australia is at least 19,000 affordable homes short of what is required (Goudie 2008). Shelter SA (Goudie 2008) believes that if South Australia is to reach its aim of 2 million people by 2050 another 12-15,000 new homes will need to be created every year for the next 42 years, in addition to replacing old houses.

The South Australian Government has identified a number of different strategies to manage the increasing cost of housing and to reduce the number of people who become homeless.

In 2005 the South Australian Government Department of Families and Communities developed a State Housing Plan. Creating a clear strategic and housing plan has assisted in synchronising the links between government and service providers aims.

The State Government is streamlining its Housing services. The South Australian Housing Trust (now Housing SA), South Australian Community Housing Authority and Aboriginal Housing Authority have changed from independent bodies to all coming under the South Australian Department of Families and Communities (Orchard and Arthurson 2007:2).

A part of the reasoning behind this co-ordination of services was to provide one initial contact point for all people seeking housing or accommodation in South Australia. This initial entry point would enable consumers to get correct information about their eligibility for services at first contact. The theory behind this is to limit the service barriers people face and to also have a clear quantitative understanding of how many people are actually seeking services.

The federal governments National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) will provide some additional housing; however, the amount needed is well above current allocations. It is not just about an increase in the number of houses, the housing needs to be affordable.

South Australia's current social housing makes up 7.4% of South Australia's total housing. Despite this being a higher percentage than many other States and Territories in Australia it is unlikely to be sustained in the long term if funding does

not increase. This is reflected in the rapid decrease in housing stock over the past decade.

*South Australia's public housing supply continues to decline through redevelopments of social housing estates and sale – down from 56700 units in June 1997 to 45650 units in June 2005 (2005 figure taken from AIHW 2005). (Orchard and Arthurson 2007:1)*

Shelter SA, the peak body for housing in South Australia, estimates that to sustain social housing, South Australia will require an increase in funding through the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (or its future equivalent) to \$2.5 billion in 2007-08 and up to \$7 billion in real terms by 2025.

Housing SA continues to have significant waiting lists of approximately 25,000 people Orchard & Arthurson 2007: 1) and is currently not meeting the need of people requiring stable accommodation.

Those who are further down the Housing SA waiting list are encouraged to utilise Housing SA's Private Rental Liaison scheme or Home Start. Private Rental Liaison Officers were piloted in 2005, and have now expanded to a number of Housing SA offices across South Australia. With this program a Housing SA project officer supports and advocates for people to access and maintain private rental, they support people who are over 18 and there needs to be a realistic chance for the applicant to be able to independently manage the tenancy with little support.

Homestart is another program that supports low income earners and certain groups (tertiary students, indigenous) to purchase their own home through various financial schemes. Since 1989, Homestart has financed over 50,000 households into home ownership (Orchard and Arthurson 2007: 1).

One of the State Housing Plan's targets is that 15% of all new housing built are to be affordable, and that one third of this 15% to be allocated as social housing. Adelaide City Council and the State Government have been working together to provide more affordable housing options. This has been cemented with both parties entering into a Social Sustainability Partnership Agreement – a first for Australia (Reed 2007: 26). A Social Sustainability Partnership Agreement assists the State and Local Governments to work cohesively to achieve common goals. Due to its size, South Australia is for all intensive purposes a City-State. Therefore having the cooperation of Adelaide City Council is an essential element if there is going to be a range of accessible affordable housing available to all South Australians. Reed (2007: 28) estimates that \$5 million has been directly contributed to the construction of nearly 200 social and affordable dwellings. Agreement is seen as evidence of a reduction in the 'silo' approach of many Governments and a focus on gaining outcomes.

In order to provide affordable exit points for young people there has been a reliance on Housing SA's Direct Lease program, which places young people who are determined to be at risk of homelessness on Category One.

Young people have significant difficulty in breaking into the private rental market because of their age, lack of rental history and lack of income. The low rate of Youth Allowance (compared to Newstart or DSP) means that young people attempting to live in the private rental market are seriously financially compromised. Due to these limitations young people are more likely to need supported accommodation options that make them primarily users of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Programme (SAAP).

The South Australian Government has began looking at alternate solutions to SAAP that provide this ongoing support. In 2006, Rosanne Haggerty was invited to be one

of Adelaide's Thinkers in Residence. Rosanne Haggerty developed the Common Ground model in New York which provides furnished housing for people in New York City who previously were chronically homeless. These apartment blocks include a social mix of artists, people on low incomes, students and other previously homeless people. On site services are also provided with intensive support provided to people as they transition from a life of homelessness to stability and security. Rosanne Haggerty's visit was in partnership with a range of stakeholders, including the Social Inclusion Initiative and has led to the South Australian government developing a similar model in Adelaide. Common Ground is now a registered charitable organisation and financial support has been obtained from a number of private investors in Adelaide.

The South Australian Social Inclusion Initiative was established by Premier Mike Rann in 2002, and was directly linked to the Department of Premier and Cabinet. This initiative included the Social Inclusion Board and the Social Inclusion Unit that supports the Board. Modelled on Britain's Social Exclusion Initiatives, South Australia set up a system that aimed to increase Social Inclusion. Telford states that:

*The focus of the Social Inclusion Board is on preventing homelessness, intervening early in homelessness, reducing the length of time people spend in homelessness and improving the coordination and integration of services available to those who require them. (Telford 2007:21)*

There has also been the modification of street outreach services with the development of Street to Home, which is a multidisciplinary team that provides intensive case management and outreach support to rough sleepers in Adelaide city. In 2007 it was identified that within the first two years of operation Street to Home

has housed 130 chronic rough sleepers, 40 of whom had been sleeping rough for between 5 and 15 years (Weatherill 2007). The majority of the focus though for both these initiatives has been on people who are over 18 and defined as chronically homeless.

The South Australian Social Inclusion Unit is thriving with ongoing projects in the areas of housing and homelessness. A twice annual count of primarily homeless people in the City of Adelaide was coordinated in 2007 and continues to be utilized to monitor the number of people sleeping rough. 'Rough sleepers' have been a central focus of the South Australian government and in particular the Social Inclusion Units. This narrow focus hinders positive outcomes for young homeless people who are less likely to rough sleep and therefore be counted. This is a significant oversight as solving the issues of chronically homeless adults will not stem the flow of the young people who are on their way to becoming chronically homeless.

#### *4.5.2 SAAP in South Australia*

As previously stated, young people who are homeless will predominantly access SAAP services at some point. Services for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness receive the highest rate of SAAP funding in South Australia, receiving 43.2% of the overall funding. This funding is split between 22 agencies with a mean funding per agency of \$518, 800 (AIHW 2007: 3-4). This matches with the ratio of young people accessing SAAP and the level of support that they require in comparison to other homeless groups.

SAAP NDCA data (2007:11) reports that South Australia received \$27,222,000 in recurrent funding in 05-06. This was 8.4% of total Australian-state government agreement recurrent allocations. In the 2006 census 7,962 people were counted as

homeless in South Australia this amounted to 7.6% of those who are homeless throughout Australia (a total of 104,676 people) (AIHW 2007).

Despite having a higher rate of funding allocation and a lower rate of homelessness throughout Australia, South Australia has a rate of 53 people who are homeless per 10,000 South Australian which is equal to the Australian rate of homelessness per 10,000 Australians (Chamberlain and Mackenzie 2008)

As stated earlier in this paper, over the 2006/07 financial year, 12,200 people accessed SAAP Services in South Australia. It is estimated that 4,450 (or 36%) of this group were young people aged between 12 and 25 years old. Of these young people, 603 (14%) required three or more support periods in the one year to find and maintain secure accommodation. Current data shows that the highest user of SAAP services across Australia continues to be females aged between 15 and 19 years old (11.4%). (AIHW 2007:22).

In South Australia the Youth SAAP system was most recently reviewed and restructured in 1991. This resulted in a streamlined assessment process that focused on accommodating young people near their community while also providing ongoing case management support.

*Since this time Trace-A-Place and the Youth SAAP services, have developed a sector built on strong relationships and equity of access for young people. This has included the development and implementation of the Multi Agency Referral Form which is now used successfully across the Youth SAAP sector as a shared needs assessment and case planning tool. (Cornell-March 2008:11)*

One of the key elements of South Australia's Youth SAAP structure is its central referral, information and assessment service Trace-A-Place. Any young people seeking emergency accommodation in metropolitan Adelaide will go through this service which enables for a consistent response to all young people.

Once young people get to the point of entering the South Australian Youth SAAP system, SYC's Trace-A-Place Central Referral Assessment and Case Management Service allows young people to be case managed by a single service. Trace-A-Place receives intensively case manages approximately 900 young people out of approximately 1900 that contact annually (Cornell March 2008:3). This is a holistic service which is offered to anyone in the age group who is seeking accommodation even if they are not housed with YSAAP.

Other elements of South Australia's Youth SAAP system are

- 5 regional services providing both emergency and long term accommodation for those aged 15 – 17 years old, these services are independently provided by Uniting Care Wesley Port Adelaide, Centacare, Baptist Care (SA), Southern Junction Community Services and Salvation Army.
- 2 city based emergency accommodation services (one for each sex) and accommodating young people aged 15 – 25 years old are provided by St Johns Youth Services.
- 1 Counselling service for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, have experienced abuse and are aged between 12 and 25 years of age. This service is provided by Uniting Care Wesley Adelaide.
- Ruby's, an early intervention service with attached medium term accommodation service for young people aged 12 to 18 which is provided by

Uniting Care Wesley Adelaide and is encompassed by a family counselling service.

- 2 medium term accommodation services for young women with children (ages 15 – 25) the providers of these services recently changed from Young Women’s and Children’s Support Services to being provided by Centacare.
- 1 medium term accommodation service for pregnant women or women with children who are aged 18 and under, which is provided by Centacare.
- 5 Landlord and SAAP exit accommodation service or Outreach housing which are managed by Metro Access and outreach support provided to tenants by Uniting Care Wesley Port Adelaide, Centacare, Baptist Care (SA), Southern Junction Community Services and Salvation Army.
- Two emergency accommodation services for Aboriginal people that do not have set time limits for length of tenure. These services are provided by Aboriginal Family Support Services and accommodate a range of young people including young women with children.
- SASH. Partially funded by SAAP, SASH provides accommodation for 4 young people who are attending High School and are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. SASH is run by Baptist Care (SA).

On any given night in Adelaide, there will be thirty emergency beds for young people aged 15 – 25, fifteen of these will be for females, and fifteen of these will be for males (Cornell March 2008:1).

In South Australian Youth SAAP service, 15 – 17 year olds primarily access regional metropolitan services and as needed they may access the city services that

accommodate 15 – 25 year olds. Regional services can provide emergency accommodation from one night to a couple of weeks, while city services house young people for a maximum of three weeks with no medium term or long term options. For 2008 the city services accommodated young people for an average of 7 days (St John’s Youth Services 2008: 21). If the young person is unable to secure alternate accommodation within this time frame they will either be ‘moved on’ to another SAAP service or will be exited on their pay day so that they can purchase alternate accommodation such as a boarding house or hotel. Below is a brief overview of some of the places young peoples exited to from city based emergency services.

**Table 4.1 Exit Points from city based SAAP Accommodation**

Exit Point	Total
Longer Term YSAAP Service	4.2%
Returned to Family	11%
Private Rental	6%
Community Housing	2.8%
Couch surfing	9%
Lodging/Boarding House	3.5%

(Source: St Johns Youth Services 2008: 24)

The above number is only a small amount of information on where people exit to. St John’s Youth Services also identified that 56% of males and 32% of females departed their services without providing information on where they were going (St John’s Youth Services 2008: 24).

The majority of people staying in regional services are there as medium term (sometimes also referred to as long term) residents, and the location can be closer to a young person’s community. Young people will stay in ‘emergency’ beds until a

vacancy in a medium term bed is available. A young person in a medium term bed is accommodated within the structure of the regional services, the young person is expected to pay board and also assist in 'chores' around the service. Some services require young people to be out of the service during the day and/or attending an external activity such as education or employment. Young people generally remain as a medium term resident for 6 to 12 months. During this time the SAAP service is supposed to assist the young person develop their life skills, including cooking, cleaning, and managing finances. The below quote from one of the SAAP regional services websites best explains what the medium term services provide:

*...a 24 hour supported residential accommodation service to young people in crisis, and it caters for 8 young people at any one time, with support and supervision from a live-in Youth Worker. It seeks to provide a comprehensive range of personal supports for young people who are homeless as they move towards independence and interdependence within the community. (Baptist Community Services SA 2008)*

Young people will then transition out of medium term into an Outreach property. In Outreach accommodation, a young person rents in an independent house or unit that is linked to a community organisation that provides support on an ongoing basis. Some service provide an interim accommodation option which is still on the property, however the young person lives independently with the option to access staff support when needed.

Some of the current issues with the SAAP system is the length of time young people are able to stay, a lack of provision for certain demographics, the level of support able to be provided and the lack of exit points which decreases the likelihood of a young person leaving supported accommodation to a viable long term alternative.

Project i's feedback from young people accessing homeless services was the length of stay in emergency accommodation was not long enough. The evidence shows that the longer a person has been supported by SAAP the more likely that they will access and maintain stable housing in the long term (Keys 2004). Project i identified that young people believed stable accommodation was essential to them succeeding in managing the number of issues they faced. At the time of the Project i study the average length of short term supported accommodation was six weeks, this was seen as too short a period to stabilise and 'make improvements in other aspects of their lives' (Keys 2004:13)

The National Youth Commission's Inquiry heard many stories about young people having to break up their family unit in order to access accommodation. Shelter SA gave this following example to the Inquiry

*...we recently had a call from a couple who were seeking emergency accommodation. They were 15 years old and pregnant. They had been offered emergency accommodation but it required them to be separated and they didn't want that. Yet, that was the only facility available to youth. National Youth Commission 2008:95)*

Young single women with no children have only one service they can access between the ages of 18 and 21. Again this is a service that can only be accessed until their next pay day is received.

Couples, with and without children, are currently excluded from the South Australian SAAP accommodation services. Emergency SAAP services are predominately divided by gender and couples are not encouraged to stay in the same accommodation service.

The following quote includes information given by young people and how they felt when accessing SAAP accommodation.

*All but one participant stated they find it difficult to maintain YSAAP twenty-four hour supported emergency and long-term accommodation. Reasons for this included conflict with other residents, not having skills in paying rent, and their behaviours when in a service. One participant stated it was hard to maintain YSAAP accommodation as she 'was trying to find a home, but (I) realised a shelter would never be home'. Another participant stated it is difficult as you are 'forced to be an adult when you want to be a kid'. (Keys 2004:3)*

Project i suggests that the majority of YSAAP services have a strong desire to assist the entire client group, including those with identified high and complex needs, yet do not always have the resources to achieve this (Keys 2004).

The lack of resources and funding is an ongoing issue within the YSAAP system in South Australia. There is a need for increased staffing in the services, which would increase the likelihood of developing positive relationships and the ability to provide intensive case management and outreach support.

The YSAAP system in South Australia works on a continuum basis which means that people need to be moving out of Outreach accommodation and into independent housing for new vacancies to occur. If this does not happen it places more pressure on medium term and emergency beds as they have nowhere to which young people can exit. As housing affordability worsens exit points are becoming more difficult to exit.

A common theme with the above issues of SAAP is that on top of actual accommodation, support is a critical element to ensure a young person can maintain their housing, as well as grow in confidence and community interdependence.

Current housing systems are not always effective due to low resources to key people in their housing once they have accessed it, Curtis-Fawley (2006) believes that:

*Due to the fact that many services working with homeless people operate in a chronic 'crisis mode,' services are often withdrawn or reduced when a client is housed, however, temporary that housing may be. However, we need to be mindful that when a homeless person makes the transition from homelessness to housing supports need to be increased rather than decreased, as this can be a time of stress, isolation and confusion for the client. (Curtis-Fawley 2006: 3)*

To rectify this situation there needs to not only be an examination of the services that are provided but also the 'way' these services are provided. This includes an analysis of the services ability to engage with all of the client group.

#### **4.6 Conclusion**

This paper has examined specific areas where youth homelessness can be reduced and particular areas of intervention in South Australia. This has been based on four key issues Child Protection, Juvenile Justice, Education and Housing.

These areas were examined within the framework of the South Australian Government, the crucial role it plays and its responses to these particular issues with a particular focus on increasing the availability of safe, affordable, appropriate and sustainable housing and associated support services for young people.

This leads to the final section which focuses on potentially new or under utilised ways of working that could increase the support that young people experience while homeless and go on to reduce the length young people remain homeless.

## **5. The Proposal for an Integrated Case Management Framework for young people who are homeless**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Young people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless require an integrated, accountable approach to assistance. This is due to their life stage and their particular support needs. Even within the group of young people who are homeless - different support is required depending on how they became homeless and how long they have been homeless.

Rather than creating a range of different services to meet the shifting needs of young people this paper argues that a model based on Integrated Service Delivery and Case Management provides the flexible and holistic framework needed for both early intervention and ongoing support to those who become homeless.

A structured, holistic response is required due to the complexity of issues that young people who are homeless face, and the fact that they will be managing a variety of needs at different times. The 2008 release of the Australian Federal Governments Green Paper on Homelessness, *Which Way Home* (2008: 3), identified the need for integrated service responses for people who are homeless.

The preceding chapters have identified that young people may need to access a range of services while they are at risk of or already experiencing homelessness. These may include health, mental health, drug and alcohol, education, employment, juvenile justice, life skills and financial assistance supports.

This paper argues that this response needs to involve two integral elements. Firstly, young people need to be assisted from a model of case management. Secondly, this case management model needs to be delivered within an Integrated Service Delivery

framework. This section will further breakdown these ideas and explain why they are an effective intervention.

Case management has already been recognised by SAAP funding bodies as a beneficial approach to working with people accessing supported accommodation services. By providing case management to young people who are homeless it can be a core element of stability and an opportunity to set out clear goals and identify supports that are available. Guransky, Harvey & Kennedy (2003) believe that case management is a consistently successful model as it:

*“...focuses services on individual need, maximises the use of resources from informal networks and existing services and provides consumers with choices about services. In addition, in case management, the service arrangements with consumers and the various providers make explicit the outcomes desired and formalise the accountability of all parties involved in service provision” (Guransky, Harvey & Kennedy 2003:19)*

On another level Integrated Service Delivery is defined by Curtis-Fawley (2006) as providing a service that is co-ordinated within the same agency or team. Curtis-Fawley believes that a multi-disciplinary team is essential for the Integrated Service Delivery framework to work, with each team member needing to be able to work with the client across various issues.

The case management model and integrated service delivery framework are a beneficial fit that provides an optimal outcome for young people who are homeless. This paper will now break down these elements further and explain how utilising

these elements it ensures that the service providers, funding bodies and (most importantly) clients needs are met.

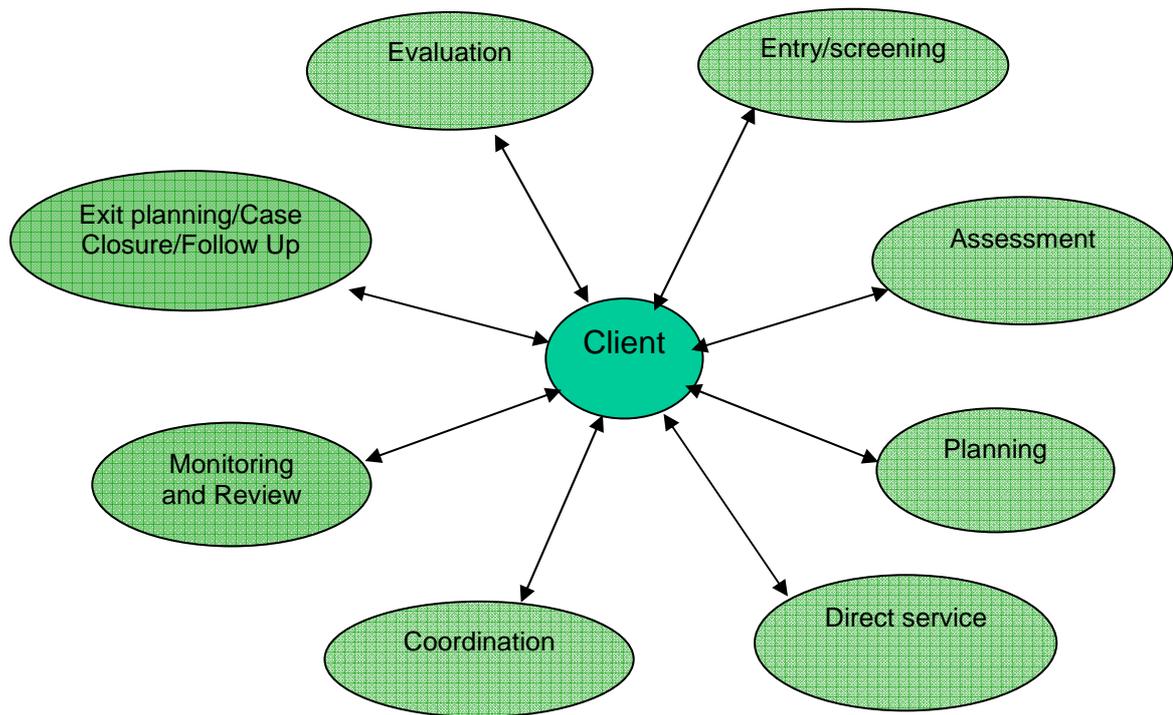
The case management model provides the opportunity to plan and identify supports. By having an integrated service delivery framework linked in it creates a direct opportunity to action the identified needs and plans of the client.

## **5.2 Case Management Model**

For case management to be delivered effectively there are some clear structural elements that need to be addressed. The way that case management is provided can have a dramatic impact on the efficacy of the integrated service delivery model.

Case management has already been identified by SAAP services as a useful model to support clients. The Case Management Resource Kit for SAAP Services was produced by the National Case Management Working Group in June 1997 as a best practice model for SAAP Services. The key elements of this case management model are illustrated in Figure 5:

**Figure 5.1 The Elements of Case Management**



*Source: National Case Management Working Group 1997: 6*

### *Entry Screening*

A comprehensive intake process ensures that clients are getting accurate information at the first contact. This requires a clear understanding of service eligibility requirements and alternate referral points if required.

The youth sector is particularly problematic to navigate for young people due to varying eligibility and age restrictions that are in place. Some services will provide intensive support to young people up until they reach the age of 25, other services will expect young people to access 'adult' services from the age of 18. This is particularly pertinent for mental health and drug and alcohol services.

### *Assessment*

Once young people have been directed to the most appropriate service a comprehensive assessment needs to be completed. Assessment is an ongoing, collaborative, planned form of intervention (Guransky, Harvey & Kennedy 2003).

*Assessment should be seen as a longitudinal process with this client group, as additional information is continually gleaned and interpreted through ongoing client contact and as client circumstances change. (Curtis-Fawley 2006:5)*

This information gathering is essential to moving on to the planning stage with the client. Youth SAAP services in South Australia currently use a Multi Agency Referral Form that was developed by the Department of Families and Communities. This form attempts to create a consistency in the way young people are assessed and the specific needs that are identified as being relevant to a successful accommodation placement.

### *Planning*

Clear goals allow both service provider and client to identify current issues and come up with realistic ways to overcome them. Creating a plan should focus on the clients identified needs and what actions will be implemented to assist them.

### *Direct Service*

Within the integrated service delivery framework there is the question of a focus on providing direct service or referring on. Evidence has shown that integrated services that provide direct service rather than brokerage of external services, result in more beneficial outcomes for the client (Guransky, Harvey and Kennedy 2003). This will be discussed further later in this chapter.

### *Co-ordination*

Co-ordination is a key element of the case management model as the 'buy in' from relevant support services is integral to the clients needs being met. This may require significant advocacy by the lead case manager on behalf of the client. Young people that become homeless are significantly disenfranchised as they attempt to navigate a complicated service system with little to no experience in advocating for themselves and little understanding of their rights. They are also still developing their cognitive abilities and may have difficulty planning beyond day to day needs. They are just like every other adolescent in Australia except they are expected by services to behave and respond like an adult. Co-ordination of services assists the young person to have a range of resources available to them to advise them and support them to have their needs met.

Curtis-Fawley (2007) found that helpful strategies to assist mainstream services to understand the needs of homeless people included education, service visits, increasing Information Technology Department's capacity to collect relevant data and identify homeless people, collaboration with community agencies, practical methods of delivering chronic disease management to homeless people, and building relationships with accommodation providers to ensure that there are options for homeless people being discharged from hospital.

### *Monitoring and Review*

By closely monitoring the plan of intervention case management ensures accountability for the workers and the client that everything possible is being done to ensure the young person can move successfully out of homelessness. Where an impasse is met, whether it be due to poor service response or lack of material

assistance these can be clearly identified and the gaps addressed at both a ground level and, if needed, a sectoral level.

Monitoring and Review also ensures previously developed case plans are still relevant and allows the young person to reach and reflect on intended milestones.

### *Exit Planning*

*“Successful exit from homelessness requires that people are reintegrated back into the community. This not only includes the steps taken whilst clients are in designated supported accommodation agencies but also includes connecting and engaging with institutions in areas of employment, education and recreation, as well as family relationships and social networks when they leave agencies and move into independent tenancies”. (Fopp, Carson, Parker, Talbot, & Quinn 2006:10)*

Any work completed between case managers and clients can be quickly undone if an appropriate exit plan is not completed. Clients may exit the case management process for a number of reasons, including: having met all of their identified case plan goals, deciding to disengage from the process and/or no longer fitting the service providers’ eligibility requirements due to age or identified needs.

When the case manager is required to withdraw support it is important that everything possible is done to ensure that the young person has linked in with or at least identified alternate supports and that they have a clear understanding of how to access other assistance when needed.

### *Evaluation*

As this is a living model, the service provided should be continually re-evaluated and altered to meet the client's needs. Having a clear evaluation process ensures that interventions remain effective and where they are unsuccessful changes can be made.

All of these above components make up the case management model. This is one part of the framework that is argued for in this paper. The second element is Integrated Service Delivery

### **5.3 Integrated Service Delivery**

All of the case management model components are enhanced by being linked in with the integrated services delivery framework. In order to support young people who are homeless it is essential to have a range of support services that are easily accessible and non-regionally based. Young people who are itinerant are likely to seek support from a range of sources in a range of locations. The Youth Affairs Council of South Australia (YACSA) explained it best when they stated:

*A young person's 'local community', when they are homeless, is not likely to have clear boundaries in the geographic sense and may be a string of local communities, visited through need or depending on where there is an available couch or where a youth shelter is likely to have a vacancy. To be homeless is to be mobile. (YACSA 2007:8)*

By using case management within an integrated service delivery framework it is easier to address gaps in services that the client may be experiencing. One of the fundamental issues that clients have is gaining appropriate access to services. With a range of service providers working together this helps to break down the issues of access and also assists in problem solving ongoing issues within the service.

This is exemplified in the following excerpt:

*In service delivery young people are frequently relied on to make good judgments and control their impulses. Appointments and office-based approaches are based on an assumption that young people will maintain their motivation to attend, not be distracted and that they will control the impulse to do something more pleasurable than attend an appointment with a professional. This understanding of brain development provides us with guidance about how services to young people should be delivered to ensure effectiveness (Victorian Government Department of Human Services 2008:10).*

By providing integrated services in one location it provides the young person the opportunity to get the majority of their needs met without the risk of them getting distracted getting from one service to another. It also is beneficial for young people who often are without independent transportation.

There is also the benefit of gaining accurate information from both the client and the service. It will reduce the number of times a client has to tell their story to staff. Rather than expecting 'homelessness' services to support a number of complex needs, integrated, multidisciplinary teams should be established to allow a person to get all the assistance they need in an easy to access way.

With a multidisciplinary integrated team that are focused on supporting young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness it increases the likelihood that the clients will be treated fairly and with respect. Project I found that service support, provided to young people who are homeless, needs to be respectful, transparent and caring.

*Issues of trust, respect and of being believed came up repeatedly, as did matters of acceptance and rejection. Young people said they wanted to be treated as individuals to be believed and to be respected. They do not want to be categorised as 'homeless', a 'drug user', 'depressed', a 'sexual assault victim' or any other pathologising term. A good service was a friendly service and a good worker was a friendly worker, one who appeared to genuinely care (Keys 2004:28 - 29*

By linking in mainstream and homeless services it can assist in breaking down some of these stereotypes and labelling mechanisms.

#### **5.4 Justification**

There is increasing evidence of the success of these types of models throughout Australia. One example of the successful utilisation of case management integrated and service delivery is illustrated in the Canberra Turnaround model. This model encouraged collaborative practice between government and non-government organisations for the benefit of the clients.

*The key features of Turnaround are its integrated governance arrangements and promotion of collaborative practice across both the government and community sectors. Two key principles underpinning Turnaround's service delivery are the genuine involvement of young people in planning and decision-making about their lives and the importance of collaborative practice, including the sharing of responsibility across government and non-government sectors. Wyles 2008:48)*

Another part of the Canberra Turn Around model was the Centralised Referral Process. This is a key element, as differing ideas of what a young person needs or wants is a part of why services often cannot link together. By having a centralised referral service that was comprehensive, accountable and most importantly respected by all other services, reduced a number of the client's barriers in one hit.

Guransky, Harvey & Kennedy (2003) reported that for people with mental illness, utilising brokerage services is less effective than an interdisciplinary team that provides full service. This paper argues that although not all young homeless people are managing mental health issues, the transiency and uncertainty that comes with being a young homeless person makes the provision of interdisciplinary teams appropriate to this client group.

South Australia has already started to move towards integrated practice with models like Street to Home and closer service links with the Royal Adelaide Hospital, however, initial projects have focused more on the adult sector than the youth sector.

The 2008 evaluation found that with the Southern Housing Round Table project clients did receive improved access to services. This was assisted by the 'client centred' approach that was used by the range of agencies involved and the way this improved relationships between agencies and increased 'positive referral and case conferencing interactions'

## **5.5 Risks**

There is a risk that providing integrated case management may just create another layer of bureaucracy. In the Southern Round Table pilot project it was found that some client's only received services when admission or service constraints were

'bent' (Baulderstone 2008). This is a larger public policy issue that will not be solved simply by the creation of an integrated service. What it may do, however, is assist in identifying these access issues sooner and provide comprehensive evidence of systems that need to change. This is a particularly pertinent issue for young people.

Due to the crisis that a young person who is homeless presents in, their developmental stage and developing pre frontal cortex and the number of issues that they may be managing there is the potential for young people to still become frustrated and respond to services aggressively. Therefore the management of and inclusiveness of clients is fundamental to how a multi-disciplinary service is provided.

It is important that the first time a young person does reach out to services, they find a welcoming and understanding environment. The NYC Inquiry (2008) identified that some young people did not initially access services because they did not know what was available to them, while others reported that they found it difficult to access services and comply with "shelter expectations, rules and restrictions" (NYC 2008:59). If young people do not feel comfortable accessing services it places them at greater risk of remaining homeless.

Therefore an ineffective integrated service delivery system may be simply a quicker way for young people to be excluded from services. The best way to overcome these risks is to ensure that services work within a client centred framework. Curtis-Fawley (2006:7) reported that:

*A comprehensive review of service models for homeless people with mental health and substance abuse disorders conducted by the United States Department of Health and Human Services in 2003 found that a common element of many successful programs was a person-centred approach (Curtis-Fawley 2006:7)*

Curtis-Fawley (2006:7) goes on to report that the key components of a person-centred model include *choice, voice, empowerment, dignity and respect*, and *hope*. With these elements incorporated into the case management model and integrated service delivery framework this reduces the risk of excluding client groups and increases the likelihood of successful outcomes for young people.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This paper has argued that the experiences of young people who become homeless are very different to those on other homeless pathways. Young people who become homeless come with limited experience of successful independent living and at a life stage in which they are still developing physically, intellectually and psychologically.

Johnson (2006) found that the younger a person was when they first became homeless the more likely they would remain homeless for a longer period of time. Evidence also shows that the longer someone remains homeless the more likely it is that they will develop substance use and/or mental health issues, further reducing their opportunities to 'get out' of homelessness. Youth homelessness disrupts schooling and limits opportunities for economic participation in the future, placing young people well and truly at the bottom of the labour market. This paper has asked "Given that young people follow a unique pathway to homelessness, what supports and services are needed to effectively respond to this group?"

Young people primarily fit into Chamberlain and Mackenzie's definition of secondary homelessness. They rely on extended family and friends to 'couch surf'; they avoid sleeping rough and are too vulnerable or not eligible to access boarding houses. A young person's only realistic option once informal supports have broken down is the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP).

SAAP is the current primary response to homelessness in Australia, it was established in 1985 as a way of bringing together the variety of accommodation and support services provided to homeless people across Australia. Over the 2006/07 financial year, 12,200 people accessed SAAP Services in South Australia. It is estimated that 4,450 (or 36%) of this group were young people aged between 12 and 25 years old.

Of these young people, 603 required three or more support periods in the one year to find and maintain secure accommodation.

Research by Guy Johnson (2006), Project i (2004), Chamberlain and Mackenzie and the 1989 Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission Report have each individually identified the varying reasons why young people find themselves without safe accommodation. These factors include the age that they originally became separated from the family home, their level of contact with juvenile justice services, history of abuse, number of extended family supports, length of engagement with school, and the existence of mental health and/or drug and alcohol issues.

Chamberlain sees the time when young people move in and out of home as a crucial time to implement early intervention. Opportunity for early intervention ends once young people make a permanent break from the home. Schools can play a critical role supporting young people both during the early intervention period and even after this period has ended.

By intervening early there is the opportunity to reduce or avoid the long term effects of homelessness on young people. For some young people, early intervention support such as family reunification services that focus on both the parents and the young person are the best option. This timely intervention can assist in mitigating issues before they become crises and lead to a permanent break.

Schools have also proven to play a crucial role in the early intervention for young people. Support at this critical point, where young people are still engaged with their peers and may have not experienced a permanent break with family, is highly effective. Research has shown that young people will seek assistance from

education providers, therefore it is important that a realistic, collaborative and client centred support plan is put in place when and if this occurs.

In cases where young people become homeless and it is determined that family reunification is not an immediate option a similar response is required. This response, however, needs a different infrastructure and framework. Many of these young people will have already had some contact with child protection or juvenile justice services. Generally, they will have generally already experienced periods of instability and feelings of rejection and low worth. The most important thing for a young person in this situation is a stable, safe environment. By providing this, a young person can begin to build relationships, develop a new set of social boundaries and manage any other issues that may be impacting on them.

Support and assistance during the adolescent development stage to understand and manage trauma is identified as a key way to reduce negative side effects. A safe, supportive environment and minimal stress are important elements of maintaining a high level of mental health.

Four key areas have been identified that would assist in the reduction of youth homelessness – Reducing the number of people leaving the care and protection system and becoming homeless; Reducing the number of young people leaving the justice system and becoming homeless; Getting more children and young people who are homeless to remain at school; and Increasing the availability, of safe, affordable, appropriate and sustainable housing and support services for young people.

There is clear evidence of an association between contact with child protection services during childhood and an increased incidence of homelessness later in life. While the issue of Juvenile Justice is intrinsically linked to youth homelessness.

Retaining links to education has been shown to have positive impacts on young people, not only for the opportunities for them to move into employment or further education in the future, but also for the social connection and stability that it provides.

Overall, though, no matter what leads a young person to homelessness the solution to getting them out of homelessness lies in safe, affordable, appropriate and sustainable housing. This housing needs to be delivered in conjunction with support services that provide intensive follow up and problem solve potential issues that may lead to the tenancy failing.

Due to the complexity of need that young people who are homeless face, and the fact that they will be managing a variety of needs at different times there is a need for a structured, holistic response. This paper argues that this response needs to involve two integral elements. Firstly, young people need to be assisted from a model of case management. Secondly, this case management model needs to be delivered within an Integrated Service Delivery framework. Case management has already been identified by SAAP services as a useful model to support clients.

The youth sector is particularly problematic to navigate for young people due to varying eligibility and age restrictions that are in place. It is important that the first time a young person does reach out to services, they find a welcoming and understanding environment. Once young people have been directed to the most appropriate service a comprehensive assessment needs to be completed. This

information gathering is essential to moving on to the planning stage with the client. By closely monitoring the plan of intervention case management ensures accountability for the workers and the client that they are doing everything possible to ensure the young person can move successfully out of homelessness.

In conclusion, in order to support young people who are homeless it is essential to have a range of services for support. Young people are itinerant and they are likely to seek support from a range of sources in a range of locations. By using case management within an integrated case management framework it is easier to address gaps in services that the client may be experiencing.

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