



Youth Housing and Social Exclusion in WA

Final Report

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1 BACKGROUND

What is a young person?

What are young people's housing issues?

What is homelessness?

How many homeless young people are we talking about?

How does homelessness fit with all the other problems facing young people today?

What do young people and community youth agencies see as the major issues to be tackled?

In order to develop an integrated response to the key challenges facing marginalised young people, the Youth Affairs Council of WA (YACWA) and Shelter WA co-hosted a consultative forum on 11 April 2002 titled "Youth Housing and Social Exclusion in WA". As the peak community based housing organisation in Western Australia, Shelter WA holds several community forums each year. The forums are supported by Homeswest and inform Shelter's work in representing the views of consumers and community groups on major housing issues.

The aim of this forum was to:

- identify and prioritise issues for young people throughout WA;
- develop strategies to respond to issues; and
- establish ongoing links between Shelter WA, YACWA, young people and relevant organisations.

This final report, which compiles a preliminary issues paper and the strategic outcomes of the forum, will be presented to the appropriate authorities, including the Minister for Housing, for further consideration.

2 SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN WA

Most young people in Western Australia live happily at home with parents or are successfully established in independent lifestyles with adequate income support.

But some don't even have a place to live.

An estimated 4305, or 1.3 percent of 12-24 year olds, were homeless at the 1996 Census¹. Yet their relatively small number limits their visibility to the general public and impedes reasoned community debate. Young people do not avoid or succumb to homelessness in a vacuum; youth homelessness results from, and contributes to, a complex interplay of "social excluders". Understanding such complexity requires integrated approaches that avoid seeing youth homelessness as an isolated, stand alone issue. Hence this paper describes the extent and nature of social exclusion among WA young people and how homelessness and other "excluders" impact on them.

The importance of integrated approaches to homelessness is emphasized in a European Commission paper titled *Housing for All*²:

To be "homeless" - that is, without access to adequate accommodation - is probably the most serious manifestation of social exclusion. If you are homeless it is almost impossible to realise your potential as an active member of society, such as by getting a job or by raising children. Therefore, ensuring an adequate provision of decent housing is one of the basic foundations for building a society in which everyone can play an active part. In this sense, one can say that access to housing is the principal key to social inclusion.

So what is social exclusion? While for some the term is merely a politically convenient euphemism for poverty, its usefulness depends on how clearly it describes the complex interaction of problems that impact on the life chances of individuals and communities. The British Social Exclusion Unit³ defined social exclusion as:

A shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown.

When does someone become socially excluded? The inter-generational effects of children raised in socially excluded households have been widely documented, describing forms of disadvantage that many young people carry into adult life. In a British study Houghton⁴ found that:

The four (of 12) most powerful and consistent childhood predictors of adult outcomes are childhood poverty, family disruption, contact with the police, and educational test scores. There are frequent specific life-course and intergenerational continuities in the transmission of social exclusion:

- Social housing is more common if parent lived in local authority housing
- Poor children have lower income as adults
- Parental interest in schooling is a powerful predictor of educational success
- Anxious children experience more malaise (risk of depression) as adults.

So how do WA young people measure up on social exclusion? A Joseph Rowntree Foundation report titled “Monitoring Poverty and Social Exclusion 2001”⁵ used the following indicators to monitor youth social exclusion:

- Unemployment
- Low rates of pay
- Not in education, training or work
- Substance abuse
- Suicide
- Criminality

Given the clear linkages with these indicators, homelessness has been added to the list; WA data is used for each indicator. Each of the indicators is examined in more detail below.

2.1 Homelessness

- Who are “young people”?

Given the array of opinions over what constitutes a young person, and that increasing numbers of children as young as twelve are becoming homeless, it is useful here to clarify that this paper sees “young people” as those aged 12-24 years.

- What is homelessness?
The ABS publication “Counting the Homeless”⁶ categorised homelessness into three stages:

Primary homelessness is the least contentious category because it accords with the common sense assumption that homelessness is the same as ‘rooflessness’. It includes all people without conventional accommodation, such as people living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting in derelict buildings, or using cars or railway carriages for temporary shelter. In the census, people in these circumstances are recorded under the category ‘improvised dwellings, tents and sleepers out’.

Secondary homelessness includes people who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another. It covers: people using emergency accommodation (such as hostels for the homeless or night shelters); teenagers staying in youth refuges; women and children escaping domestic violence (staying in women’s refuges); people residing temporarily with other families (because they have no accommodation of their own); and those using boarding houses on an occasional or intermittent basis.

Tertiary homelessness refers to people who live in boarding houses on a medium to long-term basis. Residents of private boarding houses do not have a separate bedroom and living room; they do not have kitchen and bathroom facilities of their own; their accommodation is not self-contained; and they do not have security of tenure provided by a lease. They are homeless because their accommodation is inferior to the characteristics identified in the community standard.

The Western Australian State Homelessness Taskforce based its final report⁷ on an adapted version of these definitions.

- How many WA young people are homeless?
The number of young homeless people appears to be increasing. Nationally an estimated 37 000 12 to 24 year olds were homeless on a typical night in 1996, an estimated 4305 of whom were in WA⁸. This figure represents 1.3 per cent of all WA young people aged 12-24 yrs. The difficulty in counting homeless young people is the frequency with which around a quarter of them move in and out of homelessness. Chamberlain and MacKenzie⁹ found in a study of over 1000 inner Melbourne young people that:
 - 26 percent were short-term homeless (less than 28 days);
 - 47 percent had a break of some months with their families, constituting the permanent homeless (1-11 months); and
 - 25 percent were chronic homeless (1 year or more).

- Where do homeless young people live?

Table 1 WA Homeless people aged 12-24 yrs by Living Condition

	Number	Proportion (%)
Boarding Houses	688	16
SAAP	474	11
Friends/relatives	2282	53
Imp. dwelling	861	20
Total	4305	100

Source: Adapted from "Counting the Homeless" 1999

In "Counting the Homeless" Chamberlain pointed to a funding anomaly that exacerbates the plight of homeless WA young people¹⁰:

The dominant assumption underpinning current SAAP funding arrangements is that the homeless population is distributed in the same way as the general population. In 1997 Western Australia had almost twice as many homeless people (12,250) than that of South Australia (6,840) yet both states received nine per cent of SAAP funding in 1996–97.

2.2 Unemployment

A key factor in a young person's inclusion in society is the adequacy or otherwise of their income support. Young people who are independent of parental support and receiving unemployment benefits are socially excluded, as unemployment "...is still the greatest determining factor of whether a person or family is in poverty"¹¹. August 2001 data comparing Centrelink Newstart and Youth Allowance payments (\$145 p/w) and the Henderson Poverty Line (\$278.04) for young single people show that the Federal government expects this group to live on weekly payments \$132.99 below the poverty line¹².

However as Chamberlain and Makenzie¹³ point out, increasing benefits does not lead to increased welfare dependency; indeed keeping young people in poverty only serves to exclude them further:

There has been a great deal of public debate about welfare benefits encouraging young people to leave home, but the available research does not support this interpretation... The more common problem on the ground is that homeless teenagers have been unable to access welfare benefits... They often manage by 'doing burgs', 'botting off mates', 'scabbing' in the city or, in some cases 'dealing' or street prostitution.

At the 1996 Census, there were 334,433 Western Australians aged 12-24 years, an estimated 11,577 (3.5 percent) of whom were independent young people trying to

manage on Youth Allowance or Newstart¹⁴. This group face particular problems in that young people often have reduced rights in gaining access to welfare benefits, including payments allocated to cover housing costs. Young people who are without parental support, for whatever reason, are more likely to become homeless.

The 1996 youth unemployment figure was almost twice the rate for unemployed people of all ages in Perth¹⁵. High proportions of unemployed people were concentrated in three key locations

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within the Perth metropolitan area, in the Fremantle and Port area, in the industrialised coastal SLAs south of Fremantle, and in the relatively low cost land urban areas extending from Victoria Park northwards through Stirling to Wanneroo

Between 1995 and 2000, despite the number of total jobs growing nationally by 10 percent, almost all of these new jobs went to those aged 25 years and over, with only 1 per cent more 15 to 24 year olds in employment over this period¹⁶. As Table 2 shows, the occupations with traditionally high concentrations have grown relatively slowly and those employing fewer young people had kept pace with new jobs for over 25 year olds.

The reality is that unskilled, entry-level jobs for those failed by the education system are diminishing at an alarming rate. Many apprenticeships now require final year high school qualifications from applicants. In other words it is becoming increasingly easy for young people with “complex needs” to fall through the gaps into social exclusion.

Table 2: Employment by industry and age, Australia, February 1995 and 2000

Industry	15 to 24 year olds		Aged 25 years and over	
	Employment 2000	Change since 1995	Employment 2000	Change since 1995
	(thousands)	(per cent)	(thousands)	(per cent)
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	66	18	378	6
Mining	6	-45	76	3
Manufacturing	168	-23	952	5
Electricity, gas and water supply	5	-58	54	-25
Construction	118	0	576	20
Wholesale trade	74	-33	405	5
Retail trade	522	10	816	13
Accommodation, cafes and restaurants	153	15	287	16
Transport and storage	43	-2	355	2
Communication services	24	30	158	17
Finance and insurance	48	-21	295	20
Property and business services	156	22	826	31
Government admin. and defence	28	-33	320	1
Education	47	11	526	8
Health and community services	85	-11	751	21
Cultural and recreational services	54	13	174	20
Personal and other services	69	5	293	19
<i>Total</i>	<i>1666</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>7239</i>	<i>12</i>

Source: ABS, *Labour Force Australia (February)*, 6203.0

2.3 Low rates of pay

It is one thing to have a job, it is quite another to have a job that pays the bills. For instance, ABS data shows that over the decade between 1985 and 1995 the earnings of young employees fell compared to older workers. Making ends meet for young workers appears to have not gotten easier in the meantime.

Of the 63,825 working WA young people aged 15-19, an estimated 38,295 (or 60%) are without parental support¹⁷. The majority of this group are trying to manage on incomes below the poverty line, and although they may not be strictly “socially excluded”, would be finding normal social participation a real challenge

2.4 Not in education, training or work

Although there are encouraging signs of a long-term decline in the impact of social background on education participation, it is still the case that early school leaving is concentrated among those with low levels of achievement in literacy and numeracy, males, Indigenous students, and young people from low-income and rural locations. Young people with positive self-esteem and high aspirations, and who report favourably on the school environment, are less likely to leave early¹⁸.

Education data shows that children who leave school early continue to have low rates of participation in schooling beyond the age of compulsion, and low rates of continuation to higher education. There is a danger that the pattern of inequality of opportunity will continue, with a wide range of social health implications.

The proportion of the labour force neither employed nor in some form of training is 8.4 per cent, and represents 5 per cent of the teenage population¹⁹. This represents around 7000 young West Australians. This is a substantial minority whom current public and private interventions are failing. As echoed in the Recent Federal Youth Pathways Report, young people need openings, pathways into the future. Those who are neither studying, training nor working are “pathless” and therefore most at risk of long-term exclusion with its accompanying problems.

Table 4: Labour Force Status of the WA Civilian Population aged 15 to 19: Full-time Attendance at School or a Tertiary Educational Institution, August 1998

Employment and Educational Status	Attending school	Attending a tertiary institution full-time	Neither in school nor attending a tertiary institution full-time	Total
Full-time employed	183	130	27,362	27,675
Part-time employed	20,751	13,049	7,190	40,990
Unemployed	3,196	1,519	6,706	11,421
Not in labour force	38,252	8,445	6,245	52,942
Total	62,382	23,143	47,503	133,028

Source: ABS, The Labour Force Survey, 6203.0

2.5 Substance Abuse

The link between illicit drug use and youth homelessness was first strongly recognised in 1989 by the Burdekin *Report on Youth Homelessness*. More recently, the Victorian Government's Ministerial Advisory Committee identified illicit drug use as one of the critical areas for close examination in its consultation paper for the on-going Victorian Homelessness Strategy²⁰.

The poor housing situation appears to be both a cause and an effect of illicit drug use. Following is a partial summary of a *Parity* article by Yolande Henkel²¹ on the problems facing young homeless people with substance abuse issues:

- young homeless people seeking withdrawal cannot access home detox programs since few agencies will allow home detox despite the majority of withdrawal places being in home detox programs;
- nowhere to stay while waiting for treatment hence no contact details nor an ability to make daily calls to secure a place on the waiting list;
- their environment places them in constant contact with drugs and the need for drugs;
- they are well known to police and this adds to their criminal records in their attempts to support their habits
- their drug use is public, hurried, unsanitary and dangerous;
- they frequently have many caseworkers but no single adult responsible for their emotional well-being and development;
- their transience makes mental health problems very hard to treat; and
- withdrawal is much more difficult without safe housing.

2.6 Suicide

The suicide rate for young males more than doubled from 1978 to 1996. Although female suicide rates among both 15 to 24 year olds and the rest of the population are well below those for males, hospitalisation for attempted suicide was three times higher for young females than for males at the age of 15 to 16. The rate of suicide among Australian young people is estimated to be the fifth highest in the world²².

The dislocations that accompany the current changes in the Australian economy have had an especially severe impact on Australian youth. Both youth unemployment and indeed, homelessness are at unprecedented levels. Aggressive feelings thus engendered are compounded when young people are blamed for their own misfortune. Youth suicide, homelessness and unemployment form a complex web that, while hinging on hopelessness, belies simple causal explanations.

2.7 With a criminal record

Young people are over-represented in their contact and involvement with the justice system²³. Nationally, in 1995 29 per cent of prisoners were under the age of 25. Indigenous young people make up a disproportionate number of those in prison. Almost all young prisoners were males. A 1998 Crime and Safety Survey revealed that young people were more likely to be the victims of robbery, with rates for young males higher than those for young females. Twenty-two in 1 000 males aged 15 to 19 years, 12 in 1 000 males aged 20 to 24 years, and 10 in 1 000 females were victims of robbery. In comparison only 5 in 1 000 persons in the total population aged over 15 years were victims. Young women aged 18 and 19 years experienced significantly higher rates of sexual assault than older women - 25 in 1 000 females aged 18 and 19, compared to 4 in 1 000 females aged 20 years and over.

Life on the streets is a world away from accepted societal norms as is described in a Nation Crime Prevention report²⁴

... living day to day on the streets requires the adoption of survival strategies that may be clandestine, illegal, dangerous and even life threatening, and the need to find shelter and food may require the learning of new behaviours and attitudes that were previously alien to the young person. Property crime, drug sales and prostitution are examples of the ways in which young people survive on the streets. These authors further note that the urban homeless are more vulnerable to violence than their rural counterparts, because of the higher incidence of violence and predatory crime in the inner city areas inhabited by homeless young people.

3 KEY ISSUES

To inform the youth homeless forum Shelter WA designed and conducted a questionnaire survey to try to clarify consumer views on housing issues. Two small surveys were distributed; one for youth agencies (13 responses) and the other for young people themselves (14 responses). A summary of the results follows set out according to the proportion of each group reporting each issue as a “major” problem.

Issue	Percentage see as a “major” Issue	
	Youth Perspective %	Agency Perspective %
Lack of Income	54	77
Programme Co-ordination	8	31
Substance abuse	46	54
Program funding/flexibility	23	46
Lack of housing	23	85
Mental health	0*	36
Indigenous needs	8	46
Government policies/procedures	31	69
Lack of Early intervention	23	62
Transitional housing options	Not asked [@]	80
Disability needs	0	46
Lack of educational/training opportunities	14	31
Age discrimination	Not asked	46

* 62% of young people surveyed were affected by mental health issues to some extent

@ This question was covered in “Lack of housing”

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Perhaps even more revealing than the above were the open survey questions put to young people. The most common responses are listed below in order of frequency:

Three things I like about my area:	social network / access to services / close to shopping centres
My area needs more:	drug dealers / affordable youth social events / better public transport / better and more food shops
My three main accommodation hassles:	affordability / real estate agent discrimination / substandard housing / lack of stable long-term housing options
Three things that I want to change about my situation:	more income / stable and better housing / more job and recreation opportunities / employment / own a car / change social network / get drug-free
Other comments:	Extend YES housing to 21 year olds / more long-term supported accommodation for over 18 year olds / need more crisis, medium term and independent long-term accommodation.

These results broadly mirror those from a series of Youth Affairs Council of WA consultative forums held between August and September 2001, which informed its submission to the State Homelessness Taskforce Draft Report. The key issues that flowed from this process are listed below:

3.1 Poverty

The life chances of young people, who for whatever reason do not receive financial support either from family or through employment, are bleak. Current government measures to limit incentives for young people to leave home tend to exacerbate youth problems and hence increase demand for publicly funded supports. Some of the consequences of youth poverty include:

- Young people on study benefits are unable to access rental assistance, consequently some are forced to give up study to maintain housing thus reinforcing the issue of long-term poverty and lack of opportunities;
- Young people can experience real social isolation through lack of money and support;
- With insufficient money, young people lose their self esteem and motivation and services are needed to assist them in rebuilding;
- Young people can amass a huge amount of train fare evasion fines, which creates pressure and tension;
- Some young people have no money as they don't even try at Centrelink.

3.2 Service Responsiveness

There was a perception that young people are required to fit the needs of the services, not the service fitting their needs in relation to:

- Age
- Cultural issues including Indigenous and CaLD
- Very young mothers with children
- Emotional/educational barriers

Service inflexibility was cited in relation to:

- tension between the worker's policies and procedures and young people's needs;
- young people who have been black listed from services;
- young couples or those needing to be with a close friend or brother or sister – services can split families up;
- lack of entry points into the system ;
- services providing young people with referrals without real options;
- charging of up front fees before being able to access a service.

3.3 Lack of “Joined- Up” Solutions

The policy of competition between government agencies for scarce resources and between government and non-government and between non-government services themselves is having a negative impact on service delivery across the board. The funding model of competitive tendering has disadvantaged young people where services are not sharing information and not working closely together. There has been an accompanying decline in strategic, integrated and consistent responses to the issues facing young people.

3.4 Affordable and Appropriate Housing

Safe, secure, affordable and appropriate housing is fundamental to young people's wellbeing and capacity to participate in society. Socially dislocated young people are at risk and extremely vulnerable to long-term financial difficulties which can impact on social and cultural factors, employment, education and training opportunities, relationship breakdowns and health.

The challenges young people face in accessing housing include:

Private Rental

- Real Estate agents are reluctant for under 18 year olds to sign a lease, and see them as a financial risk. This causes young people great difficulty in accessing private rental due to discrimination based upon low income, lack of references, perceived to be unable to effectively manage a tenancy due to age/ inexperience, perceived to be potentially troublesome;

- Lack of affordable rental stock in accessible locations often results in young people being removed from their family and friends and in danger of losing their local support networks. This is evident in newer housing developments, where the emphasis is on family housing, so when a young person's family breaks down, they have to move away from friends and stable activities, such as school in order to find accommodation;
- The transient nature of young people is problematic as they move from house to house wearing out their welcome and ending up in conflict with peers, police and families. It becomes a normal lifestyle making it difficult to adapt to a more stable environment;
- The high cost of moving keeps some young people "locked into" boarding houses and other facilities as they can't save enough to move out. Yet hostel accommodation is not appropriate for a number of young people.

Public Housing

- With young people under 18 years of age who are seeking public housing independently, it is up to the discretion of each Homeswest regional office to decide on whether to accept the application, even though by the time a property was made available they would be well over 18;
- The appeals process can be intimidating and overwhelming for young people;
- The criteria for priority housing excludes many young people who are homeless due to increasingly tight criteria;
- Falling public housing expenditure is limiting exit points from supported accommodation.

Community Housing

Community housing associations and co-operatives perceive young people as less financially viable tenants as there is no subsidy or extra assistance available to cover the costs incurred by housing young people who are on a greatly reduced income due to their age; though living costs remain the same. This has resulted in less exit points for young people leaving crisis accommodation for medium to long term housing programs.

3.5 Substance Abuse

Aside from the ongoing debate over whether drug abuse is a cause or effect of it's victims' circumstances, it remains that the issue is problematic and self perpetuating; leave home, use drugs, can't go back home because using drugs.

The following are key aspects of this issue:

- Lack of crisis responses in the mental health and Alcohol and other drugs areas
- Lack of services for young people who are entrenched in drug use
- SAAP services do not have the funds to deal with young people with active substance abuse issues or other complex needs
- There is an increase in polydrug use which is resulting in more young people
- being excluded from their families.

- Parents have problems dealing with drug issues, but when courses or assistance is offered, it tends to be the parents who need least help who turn up
- There is a lack of Detox and sobering up shelters

3.6 Level and Flexibility of Funding

Level:

- More support services are required to break the cycle of homelessness
- Funding of services needs to be up to a standard, not down to a basic service, especially regarding staffing levels
- Need to put more money into community supported housing than into keeping young people in gaols
- Lack of accommodation for “undamaged” young people who can be negatively influenced by other young people who are street wise
- There is an insufficient range of services to meet the diverse needs of young people, in particular, those young people with mental health issues and substance abuse problems.
- The level and quality of youth service staff is impeded by a lack of funding that does not allow services to attract trained staff.

Flexibility:

- There needs to be greater flexibility afforded in the funding arrangements to enable people to work with young people “at risk”. Funding Agreement guidelines are too rigid
- Corporate funding and sponsorship can result in the funder or donor directing service provision
- Lack of flexibility in service agreements

3.7 Mental Health

Common experiences include:

- ostracism by peers
- isolation and increased vulnerability
- discrimination and abuse
- disengagement from formal structures
- delayed assessment and treatment
- reluctance of service providers to work with this group
- lack of appropriate accommodation for young people with mental health problems.
- accommodation/support services are not equipped to address mental illness issues

3.8 Government Policy and Procedures

There was a strong perception that the system is not user friendly to young people. Many young people are intimidated by Centrelink, often not even knowing how and where to access services. Some of the problems include:

- The strict application of Centrelink breaching can force young people into homelessness. Young people often get breached and locked up through fear and ignorance. When they have been breached or owe money to Centrelink for a Centrelink Advance, they can feel overwhelmed and just give up;
- When a young person has mental health problems or is a Disability Services client or is illiterate, they have real problems and simply fall through the gaps because it becomes all too hard for them.
- Exclusions and black listing of certain young people creates real problems in their lives;
- Charging interest on late payments as a government policy only worsens people's financial situation. Young people facing a pile of fines, breached with Centrelink and with nowhere to go experience anger, depression and often just give up.

3.9 Early Intervention

The reasons behind why young people are leaving home need to be discussed, exposed and acknowledged by the community. Early intervention and prevention services are needed to support parents and in the education system for when the young person is contemplating leaving home.

- There is no data collection on the effectiveness of prevention
- Family conflict has a negative impact on young people and more early intervention is required to sort out better solutions for 14-16 year olds. There is a lack of respite type accommodation for this age group while family conflict is being worked on;
- There is a real problem with young teenage girls whose babies can be taken into care and it just becomes too hard for the young women to jump through the hoops to get them back. They simply give up
- Early intervention and early diagnosis is needed to assist young people with treatment options as soon as possible.
- Instability in family housing, with whole family groups moving around between other family members, results in young people not being able to complete their justice orders
- A balance needs to be struck between crisis accommodation, intervention and early intervention.

3.10 Indigenous young people.

Indigenous young people staying with extended families form part of the hidden homeless. Recent surveys of homelessness in WA by Shelter WA found that Indigenous people made up 41% (June 2001) and 56% (April 2002) of the sample.

- There is a lack of culturally appropriate policies, services and accommodation for Indigenous young people
- Indigenous homelessness is increasing, partly due to many families no longer taking in young people, who are often not welcome anywhere, particularly if they are substance abusers

3.11 Post-Institutional Accommodation

There is nowhere for 10 and 11 year olds to go when they leave detention or hospital.

- There is a high rate of recidivism back into detention or prison due to lack of stable housing and support options for young people post detention;
- For some Aboriginal people detention is still seen as a rite of passage
- Young people are being kept in detention and prison as there is no suitable accommodation available; the Department of Justice needs to accept some responsibility

3.12 Community Perceptions

There has been a general hardening of community attitudes toward young people stemming from age discrimination and ignorance of adolescent developmental issues. This makes it difficult for young people regarding:

- Housing
- Going to the shops with friends
- Recreation

Community education is needed to develop supports within the community, to get the community involved with young people, building networks and developing protective behaviours. There is a need to acknowledge and listen to young people to enable them to provide their own opinion on what is desirable.

3.13 Education and Training

Education is costly and difficult to access for many young people. Young people get excluded from schools when they are having problems that exacerbate the problem.

- More non-academic education needs to be offered, assisting young people in problem solving and life skills. This would encourage young people to remain at school;
- School counsellors are limited to dealing with school issues, and cannot work on family issues;
- Homeless students drop out of education and are disadvantaged from this point forward.

3.14 Transport

- Young people need accommodation close to transport;
- Young people cannot get to jobs, interviews, schooling etc, as they can't take their bikes on peak hour trains.

3.15 Under 16 year olds

- There is a real gap in accommodation for young people under 16 years old and lack of exit points, especially for 15 year olds;
- There is a declining number of foster carers, increasing the demand for accommodation for younger people;
- Income support causes problems when the level of youth allowance is tied to parents income and is hard to get if 15 or under.

3.16 Case Management

Continuous changing of case workers and the lack of continuity of workers impacts on young people and can increase the rate of homelessness.

- Case management can become a form of accountability to government rather than a way to assist young people
- Casework options for young people are not available in some areas

3.17 Long-term needs

There needs to be externally supported, long-term services to support young people through their development;

- More services are needed to provide a "continuity of care enabling young people to move incrementally to independence, such as children with "normal" families can do;

3.18 Complex Problems

There is a lack of intensive support services for young people with mental health problems and substance abuse problems. There are no appropriate services for young people with dual diagnoses.

3.19 Other Issues

- The Disability Services Commission is unable to keep up with the demand for services and housing
- Lack of rural and semi-rural services and young people coming in from the country arrive with no jobs and no accommodation
- Generational welfare dependency is growing
- Parents are tired and there needs to be respite services for worn out mums

- Need mobile doctors as many young people who have been sleeping rough or moving around have health problems
- There is a lack of employment opportunities for young people
- Perth's size is problematic-not big enough to encourage zonal responses and too big to enable a metropolitan wide response. Need to examine the role local government can play in planning and zoning
- The definition of young person is problematic, 12- 24 or 10 to 18 years old?
- There is a lack of services to deal with young people's sexuality
- Assessment procedures are inadequate where people are measured according to chronological age, not maturity;
- There is a gap in services for 18-25 year olds and a need to identify who is responsible for serving them.
- Young people need more safe places to hang out with shower facilities and day time support
- Need to be mindful that for this group of young people the number is small and the issue is fairly silent. It is difficult to raise a reasoned community debate around the issue when it is not always visible.

4 PRIORITY ISSUE MATRIX

The issues outlined in Section 3 informed the initial discussion at the Youth Housing Forum. Forum participants from a cross-section of community youth agencies then collaborated in workshops to develop a set of perceived priority issues and relevant strategies to address them. The following matrix summarizes the workshop outcomes; Shelter WA will forward this report for actioning by the relevant agencies. Where an issue has been covered in the State Homelessness Taskforce (SHT) Final Report, the SHT action item number (*italicized*) is included.

Abbreviations: WA Municipal Association (WAMA), Housing Industry Association (HIA), Department of Housing and Works (DH&W), Shelter WA (SWA), Department of Local Government (DoLG), Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FACS), Department of Community Development (DCD), Office of Children's and Young People's Policy (OCYPP).

Youth Housing and Social Exclusion in WA

Objective	Strategy	Outcome	Action Agency
<p>1 Adequate access by young people to appropriate, affordable and secure housing .</p>	<p>1.1 Local governments (1.2.6):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement affordable housing strategies • Conduct small area needs analyses • Receive expanded planning powers <p>1.2 Government incentives be provided to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage private sector investment in appropriate housing for young people. • Access some of the estimated 13% of vacant residential buildings in metro Perth²⁵. <p>1.3 Increase access to under 18 yr public housing applicants by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adhering to clear policy guidelines rather than depending on regional office discretion in making application decisions. • Expanding the YES and FRESH youth housing support programs. • Simplifying the appeals process for young people. • Broadening priority housing criteria for young homeless people • Raising public housing funding . 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased housing appropriate for young people. • Identification of the housing requirements of young people by locality. • Increased flexibility to respond to the housing needs of local young people • Expanded private sector affordable housing • Better utilization of currently vacant housing • A Homeswest allocation policy that does not discriminate against young people. • Adequately resourced Youth housing programs • A “youth friendly” appeals process • A fair and accessible priority housing criteria. • Sufficient public housing exit points from supported accommodation 	<p>WAMA, HIA, DH&W</p> <p>Local councils, S WA</p> <p>DoLG</p> <p>DH&W, HIA</p> <p>DH&W</p> <p>DH&W</p> <p>DH&W</p> <p>DH&W</p> <p>WA Treasury, FACS</p>

Youth Housing and Social Exclusion in WA

Objective	Strategy	Outcome	Action Agency
2 Income support sufficient to ensure effective social inclusion of all young people	2.1 The Commonwealth government increase youth support payments and minimum youth wage levels. (1.5.2) 2.2 The State government introduce a means tested and well-targeted housing allowance for young private renters.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent young people provided with a living wage set at the Henderson poverty line and linked to the CPI. • No young private renter in housing stress 	FACS DCD, DH&W
3 Every young person has support appropriate to their individual needs	3.1 Make service contracts more flexible 3.2 Increased funding for intensive long-term support (2.1.8, 2.2.1) 3.3 Establish a “continuity of care” 3.4 Expand long-term case management (2.3.7) 3.5 Appoint a Child Advocate or Commissioner for Children 3.6 Commission an inquiry into the state of care for young people [including all govt. and community carers] 3.7 Establish a greater range of supports 3.8 Strengthen the links between levels of government and NGO’s; initially by abolishing the competitive tendering process (3.4.2,3.4.5) 3.9 Early intervention through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased funding for public education and parenting programmes (3.3.1) • Adequate resourcing for early intervention programmes (eg Reconnect) • The early application and assessment of -risk indicators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate assistance for young people with complex needs • Adequate assistance for young people with low-level living skills. • Local services that allow young people to retain existing social and support networks • Greater participation in TAFE, training and employment • Effective representation for the rights of excluded young people. • Clear identification of the adequacy of, and strategies to improve, existing care arrangements for young people. • Program provision that reflects issues facing young people • Integrated responses to youth exclusion e.g. the Community Renewal Program of the QLD Department of Housing. • Heightened public awareness of the causes of youth homelessness and associated problems. • Reduced incidence of youth social exclusion • Expanded life skill programmes relevant to at risk young people. 	FACS, DCD DCD, FACS, DH&W DCD DCD, DoT DoP&C, OCYPP DoP&C, DCD, OCYPP DCD DCD, Cabinet Standing Committee on Social Policy, DCD, OCYPP FACS, DCD, OCYPP

5 CONCLUSION

The point of the forum was to work towards positive changes for young people excluded from basic social pathways; housing being the most fundamental of these. However the stark reality is that the barriers they face in attempting to obtain housing are not “breakfast table” issues. That is, relatively few W A voters are neither interested in, nor aware of, the plight of a significant minority of our young people.

Hence while youth housing and social exclusion remain on the margins of political/electoral agendas, the fortunes of this group are unlikely to improve. In fact, if public housing stocks continue to fall as a proportion of all WA dwellings, and if youth access to private rentals also keeps contracting, the situation can only worsen. Ironically, even from a purely fiscal perspective, the long-term negative multiplier effects of failing to better include and house young people far outweigh any short-term funding considerations²⁶.

Endnotes

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