



The Future of Youth Foyers



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Parity

Australia's national homelessness publication

Published by Council to Homeless Persons

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Editorial

Deborah Di Natale, Chief Executive Officer, Council to Homeless Persons



The aim of foyers is to respond holistically to youth homelessness, particularly for those experiencing disadvantage. By combining education and training with safe and secure accommodation, they enable drivers of structural disadvantage to be addressed, and new educational and employment opportunities to be created.

Given their relatively recent arrival on the scene, it's too soon to say Foyers are an unqualified success. Research is under way to measure the success of the model in its various forms and further research is always welcome.

It is clear that the Foyer model is working for large numbers of young people who have been homeless or at risk of homelessness. The fact we have such a new and innovative response to youth homelessness is something that should be embraced and celebrated. Research has unequivocally demonstrated that the spiralling pathway into long-term or chronic homelessness often commences with the experience of youth homelessness. Real lives are devastated by intergenerational poverty, violence, mental health issues and drug and alcohol addiction.

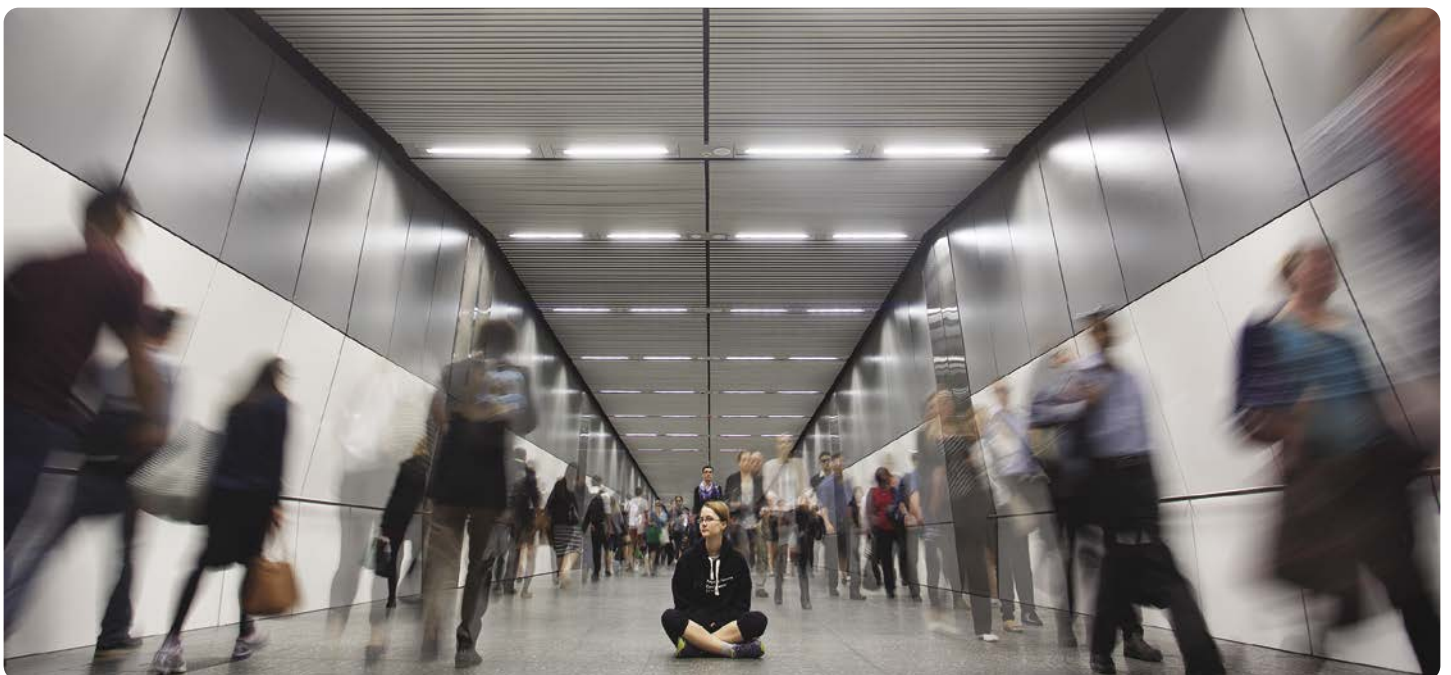
Foyers have now become an integral part of the suite of responses to youth homelessness, and should continue to be considered an essential part of the policy mix. It is worth noting that

many of the Foyer programs have been developed because of funding through the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH). Foyers right across Australia are now the beneficiaries of significant investment from both national and state governments. These need to be ongoing investments.

Of course, Foyers are not the only answer to all the issues of youth homelessness. The task for us now is to investigate the many and varied combinations of accommodation, support, education, employment training and other forms of assistance and to identify the key variables and combinations of success.

Acknowledgements

Council to Homeless Persons would like to acknowledge and thank the Foyer Foundation for their sponsorship support for this edition of *Parity* as well as their support and assistance throughout the development and preparation of the edition



Homelessness Australia Update

Kate Colvin, Chief Executive Officer, Homelessness Australia



National Housing and Homelessness Plan Submission

In October, Homelessness Australia sent our National Housing and Homelessness Plan Submission to the Federal Government.¹

The Submission maps out the changes needed to end homelessness in a decade. This includes tackling the major drivers of homelessness and creating a homelessness service system that has the tools it needs to prevent or respond effectively to homelessness.

The key recommendations include:

Providing strong foundations for reform

1. Setting a target for the National Plan to halve homelessness in five years and end homelessness in a decade.
2. Including measurable targets and indicators in the Plan and a process for review and reporting on progress.
3. Driving action across government by including

the objective to end homelessness in related strategies and legislation and monitoring action.

4. Creating a housing related Targeted Action Plan in the Australian Disability Strategy.
5. Creating a National Housing and Homelessness Agreement that drives implementation of the Plan across national, state and local government.
6. Creating an independent expert Advisory Council on Homelessness.
7. Developing national homelessness prevention legislation that creates a 'duty to assist' people at risk of homelessness.
8. Creating an evidence-based framework for the homelessness system that embeds a housing-led approach.
9. Specifying core values for the homelessness system that include the critical role of lived experience.
10. Creating a dedicated Action Plan on ending homelessness for unaccompanied children and young people
11. Resourcing and empowering the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Association to create a First Nations Housing and Homelessness Plan.

Strengthening the focus on prevention

12. Developing homelessness prevention frameworks for high-risk cohorts and key life stages.
13. Ensuring the balance of new investment under the Plan is focused on prevention.
14. Delivering 25,000 new social housing and 25,000 new affordable housing properties a year.
15. Increasing income support and restructuring and increasing Commonwealth Rent Assistance.
16. Providing tenancy sustainment support for social housing residents.

A well-functioning homelessness service system

17. Increasing funding for homelessness services to the level of need and indexing funding in line with cost increases.



- 18. Supporting a national homelessness sector and workforce capability program.
- 19. Providing the tools needed to embed capacity to deliver rapid rehousing to people without homes.
- 20. Providing the tools needed to embed Housing First as a system-wide approach to people with complex needs.

- Provide linked support so young people can be safe, pursue their goals and transition to full independence.
- Address the rental gap resulting from very low levels of income support for young people to ensure viability for providers of youth tenancies.

The campaign for increased funding also aims to prevent the homelessness funding cuts currently in the Federal Budget.

The funding at risk includes more than \$70 million to supplement the wages of homelessness services workers following the Fair Work Commission's 2012 Equal Remuneration Order for community sector workers.

We fought for this funding to be extended last year but unfortunately it was only reinstated for one year and expires on 30 June 2024.

To keep in touch with the campaign to save homelessness funding, sign up for the Homelessness Australia e-bulletin at our website.

Advocacy for more funding for youth housing and support

In November, Homelessness Australia joined youth advocates Tyler and Honey, and youth homelessness and housing advocates, including the Community Housing Industry Association, Melbourne City Mission and the Salvation Army, to meet with Federal Parliamentarians to call for investment in youth housing and support.

The three critical reforms that we called for were to:

- Develop and maintain 15,000 dedicated youth tenancies for unaccompanied 15 to 24-year-olds across Australia.

The delegation presented the call for action at the Parliamentary Friends of Housing and met with MPs and Senators across the Parliament.

Advocacy to Increase Funding to Homelessness Services

In December 2023, Homelessness Australia developed a Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) statement, calling for an increase in homelessness funding to provide urgently needed homelessness support resources.

The statement, *Housing Crisis: Homelessness Emergency*,² highlights the impact on access to homelessness services as a result of the housing crisis, with 6 per cent more people seeking help for reasons relating to financial stress, housing crisis or accommodation issues in 2023 than in 2022.

Endnote

1. Homelessness Australia 2023, *National Housing and Homelessness Plan Submission*, <https://homelessnessaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/National-Housing-and-Homelessness-Plan-Submission-2023.pdf>
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Introduction

Through the Blue Door: Advantaged Thinking in Youth Foyers

Liz Cameron-Smith, Chief Executive Officer, The Foyer Foundation



Imagine walking through a red door. On the other side of that door, everyone you meet asks you to tell them about the hardest things you've ever experienced in life. You tell your story over and over again. Many people work the phones day-after-day, trying their hardest to find a solution that will work best for you. But there are very few placements available, and the ones that are available are only an option for a few months.

You find it confusing. How can you finish school if you have to keep moving around? What if you don't like the only place available for you? What choices do you really have in this situation? All you can do is focus on surviving each day: finding a place to sleep, a meal to eat, clothes to wear.

Imagine opening a blue door instead. On the other side of this door, the people you meet are warm and welcoming. They call this place your home and you begin to feel safe again. They focus their attention on your passions, strengths and talents, and eventually you trust them enough

to share your biggest aspirations and dreams for your future. They believe in you. Together you make a deal to work together towards your goals. You are guaranteed a safe and stable place to stay for up to two years while you build your confidence, make friends, finish your studies and work on the skills you need to thrive and live independently.

Which door would you choose?

Every young person deserves a thriving future, including those who experience homelessness. In 1989, Brian Burdekin's report *Our Homeless Children* reframed housing for young people as a human rights issue.¹ Burdekin sought to ensure Australian governments — and by extension our society — would take responsibility for our next generation.

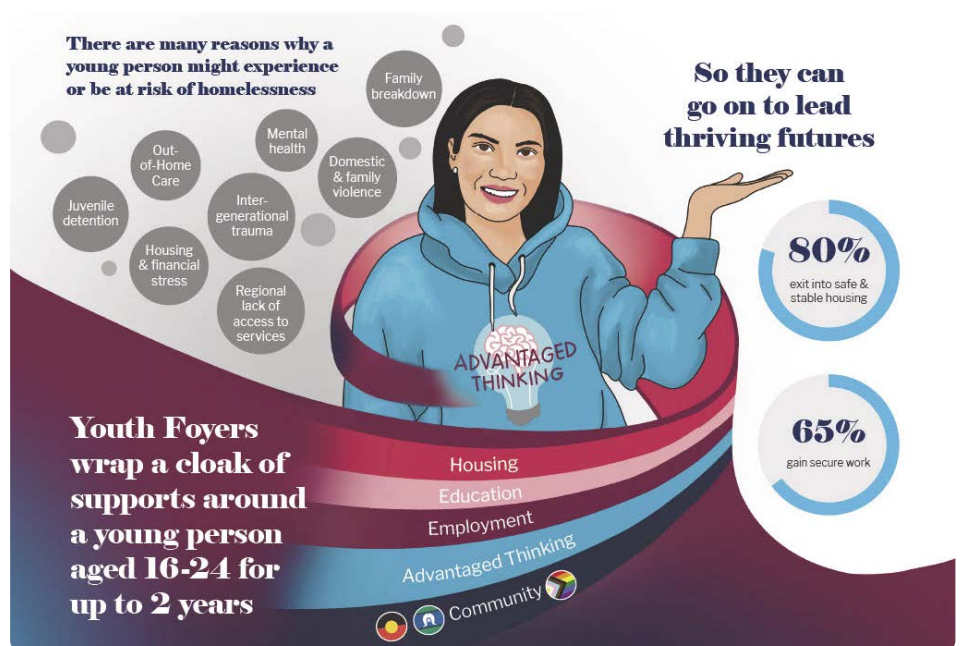
Over 30 years later, youth homelessness is still a very significant problem in Australia. More than 40,000 people aged 15 to 24 present alone for specialist homelessness services every year.² Just 25 per cent of young people asking for

medium-term support receive it, and just 4 per cent requesting long-term support are provided access to it.³

These figures begin to paint a picture of the gaps in the service ecosystem available to young people, with limited medium- or long-term housing and support options offering exit paths out of homelessness.

The short-term options that exist achieve incredible outcomes for young people, yet still only meet 50 per cent of demand for support.⁴ They operate well beyond their capacity with enormous creativity, often raising and investing private funds to make scarce resources go further for young people. At risk of burnout, these services need back up, which includes more resources as well as opportunities to reduce the demand on them in the first place.

As the cost of living in Australia rises and the rental crisis becomes more severe, young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness need our attention more than ever.



With lower incomes and limited capacity to compete with adults, our private rental and housing markets are failing young people. We need a strong public safety net that enables 15- to 24-year-olds who are unaccompanied by adults to navigate this critical transition point in their lives and set themselves up for the future they deserve.

Shifting the dial on youth homelessness starts with recognising we need a range of different options across the service continuum that can meet a young person where they are and open up ways to move through and beyond the service system towards a thriving, independent future. There is no simple solution that will work every time, for every young person, in every situation.

Imagine a pathway with different coloured doors along the way, leading to different places. On this pathway, there are yellow doors, orange doors, pink doors, rainbow-coloured doors, and more blue doors too.

Advantaged Thinking in Youth Foyers

The blue door opens up the game-changing world of Advantaged Thinking. Advantaged Thinking is a philosophy and practice that focuses on the talents, strengths, and potential of every young person, instead of seeing them as a set of component problems to be managed.

Advantaged Thinking originated in Youth Foyers and has since been adopted by many other services and policy domains including specialist homelessness services, support services for young people leaving out-of-home-care, settlement services, employment and education services, disability services and more.

Youth Foyers provide more than a roof over a young person's head. They integrate safe and stable housing for up to two years with education, employment and life skills supports. These supports are place-based, working in partnership with the local community, including education providers and TAFEs as well as employers in the local job market.

Advantaged Thinking has gained momentum in Australia and the UK over the last decade. Although it is



Tyrah and Liz Cameron-Smith at Uniting's Foyer Central, Sydney

no longer unique to Youth Foyers, it is one of the critical ingredients that make Youth Foyers succeed. Every Youth Foyer team across Australia is deeply committed to Advantaged Thinking and believes in every single young person that walks through their door.

Tyrah is a young Wiradjuri woman who walked through the blue door at Uniting's Foyer Central. Tyrah's dream is to be the first person in her family to own a home. When she talks about her family and her past, her stories describe intergenerational experiences of the child protection system, impacts of domestic and family violence, and having nowhere to live. Tyrah describes 'feeling powerless'

in a system that she believes was failing to support her and her family.

When Tyrah opened up that blue door, she found something different. She had the stability she needed to start a double degree in Criminology and Social Work. Tyrah gained her first university placement as a Social Worker, at the very institution that had once removed her from her mother's care. Next, she gained her first job as a social worker and has now moved out of Foyer Central, towards the future she aspires to.

'Foyer has been so life-changing for me,' says Tyrah. 'It not only supported me with finding employment, but also supported me in achieving my goals, particularly around education.'

Tyrah is not a one-off success story. Independent analysis undertaken by Accenture Economic Insights found that over 80 per cent of young people living in Youth Foyers in Australia exit into safe and stable housing; 65 per cent gain secure and decent employment; and Foyer residents are 60 per cent less likely to be involved in the justice system.⁵

The evidence speaks for itself: Youth Foyers are an important part of the service system because they work for young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness who are ready to learn and earn.

Lifting up young people in situations of homelessness towards independent futures prevents cycles of adult homelessness. We should be doing everything in our power to enable young people in this situation to develop the skills, confidence and capability to move towards life beyond the service system.

This includes investing more in crisis services alongside medium-term options like Youth Foyers to create more pathways to independence.

How do we scale an evidence-based solution that works?

FoyerInvest is a growing consortium of young people, community service providers, community housing providers, philanthropists, and impact investors who are committed to growing the reach and impact of Youth Foyers to 50 by 2030.

In 2024, there are 16 Accredited Youth Foyers across Australia operating in every state and territory except the Northern Territory. We have been approached by many young people, communities and service organisations across Australia seeking to establish new Youth Foyers in their communities, with at least 16 of these projects ready to build within two years.

There is demand for Foyers coming from places like Alice Springs, Broome, Albany, Adelaide, Lilydale, Inner Gippsland, Penrith, Dubbo, Tweed Heads, Caboolture, and more. Many of these projects

are part of place-based change efforts with strong connections into local TAFEs, education providers, employers and community groups.

There is both a moral and an economic case for growing the reach and impact of Youth Foyers, with governments generating a \$6 return for every additional dollar invested in Youth Foyers. Scaling to 50 Foyers by 2030 would unlock outcomes for 20,000 young people over the subsequent decade, generating \$2.9 billion in government savings in this time period.⁶

The Queensland Government has already demonstrated strong leadership by announcing their commitment to eight new Youth Foyers through the 2024 Queensland Government Housing Plan, *Homes for Queenslanders*. This is not a standalone announcement but is one part of a package of strategies including a 20 per cent funding boost to specialist homelessness services and a 'one-stop-shop' for young people experiencing homelessness in Brisbane that will be delivered by Brisbane Youth Services.⁷

Together, these commitments create pathways into, through and beyond the homelessness support system for young people experiencing homelessness. Youth Foyers are one part of the plan to transform the housing and homelessness support system in Queensland, with dedicated focus on solutions that enable young people to move from a point of crisis towards independence. Foyers play an essential role for young people ready for independence, and free up essential crisis services upstream for those who need them the most.

FoyerInvest is working to grow the reach and impact of Youth Foyers because they are proven to get results for young people and form an important part of the service ecosystem. We know that we need to put collaboration ahead of competition, keeping young people front and centre in everything that we do.

Through FoyerInvest and our broader network of Youth Foyers, I have seen people from diverse

communities across Australia come together to create a joined up national strategy that is deeply rooted in place. I have witnessed organisations that would traditionally compete with one another for funding instead engage governments with a united plan. I have seen CEOs create space for young people right beside them at tables with Ministers and senior government officials, in the corridors of Parliament House, and in board rooms.

This is what lies behind the blue door of Advantaged Thinking: a connected ecosystem of people and organisations working together to elevate the voice and power of young people.

Ash Cook, a former Foyer resident, credits his time at the Youth Foyer with enabling him '...to learn how to be an adult. To have a home. To have a space that was my own. And I didn't have to do it alone.'

No young person in Australia should have to navigate the transition to adulthood alone without a safe and stable place to call home. By putting young people first and finding new ways to collaborate across the service ecosystem, we can unlock thriving futures for more young people across Australia. This not only benefits each young person, it has positive flow-on impacts for their families, communities and our economy.

Endnotes

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3. *ibid.*
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5. Accenture, 2022 *Under One Roof: The Social and Economic Impact of Youth Foyers*, Foyer Foundation, https://foyer.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/FoyerFoundation_UnderOneRoof_FULLReport2023.pdf
6. *ibid.*
7. 2024 Queensland Government Housing Plan: *Homes for Queenslanders*

Chapter 1: Learning from Lived Experience

My Foyer Story

A Karrung Youth Foyer Resident, Ballarat Victoria

My life was not a happy one before coming to Karrung. I was homeless, scared and alone. I honestly didn't know what was going to happen to me. I wasn't safe, and I wasn't okay. It's interesting how isolated you can become in the right environment, how growing up a certain way can affect you, how the things you experience can change you, will change you.

I think I can safely say that I changed greatly, after all it is nigh impossible for me to have always been the same, the law of change applies to all things, though I find it impossible for every change to have been for the better. I discovered Karrung through someone from UnitingCare; they helped me get an interview with Karrung and I can honestly say that going to that interview was the best thing I ever did.

Ever since then my life has improved dramatically, thanks to the stability Karrung provides and the assistance freely and willingly given by the staff. I have been able to pursue opportunities that I had previously thought were denied to me. I have almost completed a course in engineering. I am going to start a welder's apprenticeship soon — I have been able to pursue my passion for writing and art and most importantly my mental state has improved.

Before coming to Karrung, I was constantly on the verge of mental collapse, I couldn't trust anyone, not even my own thoughts. It's terrifying, feeling yourself fading like that, like you're being crushed under the weight of your own thoughts, pieces of yourself dispersing like mist, your senses slipping like sand through your fingers. I found it so hard just to get up in the morning, I felt hurt and

sad and so, so alone. I felt damaged, defective and unwanted, it felt like all the people who had hurt me in my life were right. I didn't feel human, I was nothing but a broken old machine.

But then something incredible happened.

It was during my interview. I was scared and, in my nervous state, I cracked a joke. Now I don't remember the joke, not the setup, not the punchline, not even what kind of joke it was, but what I do remember is their smiles. I remember the way they smiled, the way they laughed, the way their eyes lit up like stars, and all I could think was 'wow, I did that?'

I had never done that before. Sure, I saw others laugh and smile, of course I've seen others be happy. But never have I been the one to invoke such emotion, it was such a foreign concept to me that

I almost didn't understand what was going on; that I, even if only for a single moment, had brought joy. And just like that, the interview finished, and two weeks later I moved in. That was in April. At the time of writing, it is November 4, and I happily can say that my life has changed so much I can barely believe it's mine.

I have a home, food, work and so many opportunities to improve myself. I can try to bring more joy into this world. And although it will likely take many years, I can feel myself getting better. The dents in my frame are being worked out, the cracks in my pistons are sealing, my smokestack is clearing, the coal is burning, and the steam is building.

And perhaps one day, this broken old machine will function again and help repair other forgotten souls.

Like, Karrung helped me.



Jemma's Journey

Jemma Pearce, former resident of Gold Coast Youth Foyer, Queensland

Sitting in the now comfortable familiarity of her everyday life, Jemma takes a moment to share her story; one that serves as a practical reminder of how determination and community can lead to a fresh start.

This part of Jemma's story begins during her formative years when a family relationship breakdown prompted her to leave home at the age of 17. Searching for stability, she turned to friends who introduced her to party drugs, luring her with promises of happiness, weight loss, and a way to silence her insecurities. She didn't know it at the time, but this decision set her on a path of addiction and hardship.

At the age of 18, and at her family's request, Jemma reluctantly attempted detox programs, however she wasn't ready so her struggles with addiction and mental health persisted. It was only when she hit rock bottom that she decided to take action.

On December 3, 2020, Jemma made the courageous decision to enter rehab, marking a turning point in her life. Her successful completion of rehab paved the way for her entry into the Gold Coast Youth Foyer, where her transformation truly began.

Life in the Foyer wasn't without its challenges, particularly when it came to her professional growth, but she started working part-time at Burger Urge, rising quickly to the position of Team Leader. Recognising the importance of a supportive work environment, she transitioned to Domino's, where she excelled. Enrolling in a leadership management course, she eventually became a Store Manager, managing two stores.

But it's not just about the work. The Foyer provided Jemma with a space to rediscover herself after addiction. Engaging in events and activities like game nights, Sunday roasts, kayaking adventures, and watching State of Origin games with other Foyer residents, helped her to regain her self-confidence and build essential life skills.

Jemma's story is one of community and connection and, as a Foyer alumna, she continues to make a difference. She serves as the Employment Officer Representative, working with her colleague, Cam, to create employment opportunities for current Foyer participants. They are currently planning the second annual Foyer employment day, showing a practical way forward for others.

Jemma's life was transformed again as she welcomed her son, Archie, the first Foyer baby. Reconnecting with her family allowed her to move into their granny flat and rediscover herself as a mother, partner, sister, and daughter.

Jemma's journey is a true testament to the power of resilience and determination, backed by the support of organisations like the Gold Coast Youth Foyer. It's a practical narrative of redemption and renewal, reminding us that, even in challenging times, dreams can still be realised. Her message to fellow Foyer participants is simple yet powerful: *'Don't be scared to get knocked down a couple of times, because sometimes it takes more than one go to reach your dreams.'* Her story inspires us to believe in our own capacity for change and renewal, even in the face of adversity.



A poem from a Logan Youth Foyer resident

A. Edelstein

*What's good for the goose is good for the gander.
Yet for some, women are simply naught.
The foundations for their justifications.
The prologue to my forced situation.*

*Even on our golden soil,
Veiled children are being sold
Unlike the silenced many, I breathe,
My story, at last, can be told.*

*I'm leaving, father, I left before now.
I've fled, you'll never figure out how.*

This Girl has escaped her nest,

A labyrinth of objectification, misogyny, distress.

The fear mongers, how they tried.

*To keep me shackled in the 'known'.
Comfort in the familiar is a lie.
So, I departed, with tears that I own.*

*Sceptical, I braced for void, cold, weak
Desperation ignited my will to fight.
I dared, I reached, with hope so faint and bleak.
Foyer was my beacon, the saviour of my plight*

*My battered hand, now held with care,
In lieu of parents, I find guidance, not taunt
These workers accept, they love
The antithesis to scorn.*

*They've allowed me to rise,
To live with strides newly born.*

This woman has now found her nest.

Patricia's Art

Some words from Patricia:

The first image is called 'Flower and Thing', which is one of the three artworks submitted for the Housing Choices Exhibition.

The second image is a self-portrait that Patricia, specifically for this Parity edition.



What inspires you to create?

Drawing is my thing, you know? I can't really explain why, but it's just something I enjoy, whether I'm feeling happy, sad, or stressed out. It's my go-to way of dealing with whatever life throws at me. Nobody taught me this stuff when I was a kid; it just became my jam. Whenever I pick up a pencil, it's like finding my happy place.

Can you tell us a bit about the pieces you are sharing with us?

When others perceive you as innocent and immature, they tend to oversimplify you, not seeing the complexities that make you a real person. It's frustrating because, while people are drawn to the idea of innocence, they also



belittle it as something foolish. I like to think this artwork encapsulate this and the feeling of it. I am not really the greatest with words, but I hope that makes some sense of this drawing.

Paving the Way: My Journey Through Foyer

An Education First Youth Foyer Glen Waverley Alumnus

My journey has been one that I couldn't have achieved on my own. I've had help along the way from people and services, such as Foyer. My artwork has been inspired by my journey. Each of the people represented by the signposts in my work has not only helped save my life but has also helped me achieve the beautiful life I lead now.

It all began in high school where a handful of teachers showed me that they believed in me, and I received mental health support from the school's counsellors. Their support made

such a massive difference in my life that, from then on, I knew I wanted to dedicate my career to helping other young people.

When I was coming to terms with my LGBTQ+ identity I turned to Knox Youth Services and the LGBTQ+ support groups they run. This connected me to opportunities like Youth Parliament (where I met my partner), Foyer, affordable mental health support, and more. I was also able to meet other LGBTQ+ young people I could relate to, who are now like family to me.

My time at Foyer meant so many things to me it's hard to put it into words. I feel that I was fundamentally transformed and freed by Foyer. I was empowered on such a deep level, and I was allowed to feel that I was the master of my own destiny. Whatever challenges I wanted to tackle I knew that I would have a safe and supported space to come home to. I knew that Foyer was full of Youth Workers and students who would celebrate my wins with me or catch me if I fell. This gave me the freedom to have my education be my number one priority, to chase opportunities, and explore how I expressed myself.



Now, I live in a private rental with my partner, and I've just completed my Psychology degree. I get to spend my time supporting young people with disabilities to achieve their goals, co-facilitate the same LGBTQ+ support groups I grew up in, and amplify the voices of young people in the Youth Parliament Program. If you'd told me, before Foyer, that I'd get to lead this life, I wouldn't have believed it, but here I am and I couldn't be more grateful. I hope that someday soon I'll have the privilege to be a signpost along the paths of future Foyer students, just like so many Youth Workers were for me.

Poems

1). *Somehow, somehow,
Life finds a way
To break through the pain
That we face every day.*

*I've sat with it for so long
It's become a friend
But I've stopped fighting it
And let the pain ascend.*

2). *Standing at the piano, unable to play,
No arms or fingers, frustration in the way.
His heart sings a tune no one can hear,
A frequency that's distant, yet so near.*

3). *My thoughts never cease,
Madness is their only release.
In this chaotic space,
May genius find its place.*

4). *It hurts so much, falling into depths unknown,
Senses heightened, from head to toe,
My soul falls and shatters inside,
Parts of me that should never be broken, collide.*

5). *Inside my brain, a tangled mess,
A fear that never seems to rest.
Every thought, a potential threat,
I'm scared of what I haven't met.*

I AM HUMAN

Tarik Dallinger-Dimizio

Hey world! My name is Tarik and I'm a 26-year-old artist living on the Gold Coast. My journey through life has been far from ordinary, marked by family dysfunction and the weight of severe illness. But through it all, I've discovered my passion for art, that has become my refuge, my therapy, and my path to healing.

Anxiety and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) are my companions, born from a turbulent childhood. These diagnoses have a way of tethering me to the past, but I have found solace in my art. Painting has become my sanctuary, where I can ease my mind and alleviate the physical toll of my struggles. It's in the

strokes of my brush that I find relief, and in the vibrant colours that I reconnect with reality.

My art is more than a collection of paintings; it is a reflection of the resilience within me and a glimpse of the greatness inside that yearns to break free. I aspire to heal not only myself, but to make the world a better place for everyone through my work. I hope that those who view my art might feel something stir within them, so they can realise their own humanity in that moment.

I'm currently a resident of Foyer Gold Coast, a place that has been my guiding light, my safe haven and the sanctuary that nurtures

my creativity. My biggest worry moving forward is the limited space that restricts my artistry. I dream of having a creative space of my own, where I can continue to pour my heart and soul into my work.

My ultimate goal is to showcase my art in galleries, to share my story and my journey with the world. But I know I can't do it alone. I'm looking for help to make this dream a reality; to make sure my art finds its way onto those gallery walls.

I am Tarik, a young artist with a powerful message and a fierce determination, and I'm ready to see where the next part of my journey might take me.



Tarik Dallinger-Dimizio

Reflections on Youth Homelessness

Brea Dorsett, ex-Foyer resident of GOTAFE Education First Youth Foyer Shepparton

Reflecting on my personal journey through youth homelessness during my final year of school due to family breakdown, there were key issues that presented during my experience which I strongly feel need to be addressed as a crucial part of ending youth homelessness. In my experience, I found there was a lack of awareness regarding stable housing environments and perpetuated trauma that could be mitigated with proper education and intervention.

During my period of couch surfing, I encountered difficulties accessing appropriate services, particularly in a rural area where resources are

scarce. The fragmented support system left me feeling adrift. I felt like I had slipped through the cracks, services I was linked with didn't know where to direct me, and I was carrying the stigma of a young person experiencing homelessness.

Prevention should take precedence in addressing youth homelessness. Equipping young people with the knowledge to discern safe housing, fostering effective communication about their circumstances, and ensuring accessible resources are pivotal aspects of a preventive approach. Furthermore, recognising the disparities in support between

urban and remote communities underscores the urgency in addressing these disparities.

Breaking the cycle of homelessness involves more than securing stable housing. It necessitates comprehensive support to navigate the emotional toll and prevent individuals from reliving traumatic experiences. Once I had a safe place to call home and was out of 'fight or flight' mode I had to unpack the subconscious trauma that came to surface, and still am to this day. Mitigating trauma re-enactment is so crucial to halt the perpetuation of generational cycles of homelessness.

I cannot stress how important it is to reframe the narrative surrounding youth homelessness. By prioritising prevention, we can redirect the trajectory for numerous young individuals who are on the brink of housing instability. Early intervention, coupled with robust education on housing stability and trauma-informed support, forms the foundation of this preventive strategy.

Collaboration across various sectors — policymakers, community organisations, educators, and mental health professionals — is imperative in establishing a robust safety net for young people at risk of homelessness. Initiatives aimed at destigmatising help-seeking behaviours and streamlining access to guidance are pivotal in ensuring comprehensive support for vulnerable individuals.

In conclusion, a multifaceted approach to prioritise prevention can reshape the landscape of youth homelessness. By equipping our youth with the necessary tools and support systems, we can rewrite their stories, offering them hope, stability, and the promise of brighter futures.



Artwork supplied by Barnardos

Freedom: A Conversation with Anchor Foyer Students

Tyrell Mills, Communications Coordinator, Anchor

Wednesday night is traditionally group dinner night at Anchor's Lilydale Youth Foyer. This week it's fajitas. It's the day after Halloween and, despite some students still feeling the effects of a late night, by 5.30pm the front room of the common unit is full of life.

'Did you hear your doorbell last night? We ding dong ditched you.'

In the kitchen, someone is proudly snapping pictures of the meal being prepared with their phone. *'We're making a cookbook that shows off meals that get cooked each week. Everyone gets a turn.'*

Leigh, who oversees operations at the Lilydale Youth Foyer, also has something to be proud about: she came 12th in a game of Mario Kart on the Nintendo Switch against some of the students and shares her accomplishment as they filter in.

'Was I good?'

'12th place is last, but you're definitely the most enthusiastic.'

Before the fajitas are ready, we sit down with some of the students to hear about the sense of community they feel at the Foyer. Some have been at the Foyer for two years. One started just last July.

Their stories are all unique, but common themes come up when they get talking: a lot of moving around, instability, uncertainty, fear, isolation, and plenty of time spent wishing they had better opportunities to improve their situation.

A Big Responsibility

Tell us about when you first came into Foyer.

Kano: *'Before I moved in, I had been living in caravans and tents for a while. The tents suck because your things get mouldy.'*

I had been envisioning what a house I would live in might look like. Trying to picture the rooms and the doors in my mind. I'd imagine what the garden might look like.'

I was visualising it to be nice and modern. It felt comfortable in my head. That helped to keep me positive during some rough times.'

Ommy: *'I was excited from the start because I knew I had an opportunity to be somewhere safe.'*

Connor: *'I was a bit unsure about Foyer at first because it was a big change. I'd been moving around with my dad and living in a few different places.'*

What's presented to you is amazing, but the responsibility is scary. I would have my own house and be responsible for my own stuff. It's a completely different environment to what I had previously, moving from hotel to hotel.'

Signing the lease is pretty confronting when you're young. It's an adult responsibility and a daunting step to take. The independence hits you pretty hard.'

Ommy: *'I felt the same way. I wasn't sure I was going to sign the lease because I was worried I'd lose a key or do something wrong and I'd be doomed.'*

Connor: *'I spent the whole first night trying to get my bed built. It was interesting though. It was quiet. I had been living surrounded by conflict all the time, having people screaming at you at 2am and stuff. I hadn't had any quiet space for five or six years. Then I got here and it was just... peaceful.'*

Jamie: *'I remember everyone being really welcoming.'*

I can remember doing the dishes with another person and then a couple of the others gathered around and started cheering us



James, Home Is Where My Heart Is 2015 – Image courtesy of YACWA

on, like they were cheerleaders. It was silly, but it was fun. That's my first memory of moving in here.'

Ommy: 'Oh yeah, I was worried that I wasn't going to make friends or fit in. Actually, it ended up being easy to make friends.'

Describe the vibe...

Connor: 'The Lilydale Youth Foyer is very welcoming. At first you feel awkward because you don't know anybody. And you don't know if they're going to be arseholes, or friendly. I guess you develop that when you move around a lot. You don't know if you can trust someone, or if they are going to be nice. But it's been really easy to make friends here.'

Jamie: 'I found that everyone was welcoming, but we all have common ground and similar experiences that we have bonded over. So, everyone's very understanding.'

Ommy: 'We're very understanding humans. Not just the kids but the staff too. They get it. They're not like "I'm an authority over you", they're more likely to be like "What's up?" The staff feel like one of us, like this is a group thing. I haven't had that anywhere else.'

Kano: 'They give you choices. They ask what we want. What we need from our point of view, rather than putting something on us.'

*Ommy: 'I love the community vibe with everyone else around. You wake up in the morning and you know you have some time together later in the day. It's like "yes, I get to do this after school today!" It's like "f**k yes, we're doing shit tonight and it's going to be fun."*

*It's just f**king beautiful. I just love everyone, and I love being together. I'm very grateful.'*

Kano: 'Yeah, with the group dinners, everyone comes in and there's a good communal thing. I like that we have the garden beds where we can grow things and use as ingredients in the group dinners we have. Definitely coming into a room and eating and chatting helps to bring people together.'

Connor: 'My two-year lease is up soon. I don't want to move out. It's really nice here.'

Ommy: 'I reckon when it's my time to move out I'll cry for sure.'

Connor: 'I knew it was only for two years when I moved in, but I guess cause it's such a stable environment you kind of hope the feeling will last forever.'

Bigger Things

What is something you've accomplished at Foyer that you're proud of?

Jamie: 'I'm more social and less pissed off.'

I came in during COVID and I felt very pissed off with everyone. I just wanted to be isolated and not deal with anyone. But after a few months I softened a little and now really enjoy the people around me. Connecting with people. That's a big change for me.'

Kano: 'I've been able to make peace within myself about worrying over money. I'm less worried about the future. That's a big accomplishment for me. I guess that's because I'm a bit more stable now.'

Connor: 'I finished Year 12 and have got the skills to be able to live sustainably. My goal is to find work that helps me to live comfortably. I don't have to make millions. Just be able to pay my way and live to the best of my abilities.'

Ommy: 'I feel like I've grown into myself a lot since I've come here. There's 100 per cent been a change in my confidence and personality. But that's because I've got my shit under control and I'm not like, trying to deal with problems. I've dealt with it. I'm not stuck in the 'sorting my shit out' phase that I've been in since I was 11. I feel like I'm doing bigger things now.'

There are things that have come along that might have stopped me getting to my goals in the past, but now I get rid of them. Living at Foyer has helped me to be really focused on myself.'

The Foyer students head back downstairs to join the rest of their friends and finish off the fajitas.

After the interview, Leigh is beaming. *'They've never spoken to each other like that before: telling their stories so openly and owning them.'*

While Leigh's pride in her Mario Kart skills may be slightly exaggerated, the work her team has accomplished in creating an environment that delivers on the core promises of the Foyer model is anything but.

Providing a safe and stable place is a prerequisite for young people experiencing homelessness to be able to take control of their lives. For many of the Lilydale Youth Foyer students, a place at Foyer is the first time they have been afforded an opportunity to settle and focus on themselves and their needs.

Work with young people in the Lilydale Youth Foyer is guided by Anchor's Outcomes and Impact Framework that focuses on safe and stable accommodation, learning, education and employment, healthy relationships and connections, and well-being. Together, these four domains help create new motivation and mindsets that lead to sustainable change.

A Final Word on Freedom Baggage.

Ommy: 'Before I was here, I was living in a lot of hotels or at friends' houses. I'd try to go home and fix things, but it would never work.'

On the day that I came here I packed up my dad's trailer with all of my things. He dropped me off and left.

I spent most of my first day at Foyer unpacking it all, and then had this really strange feeling when I realised that I didn't have to carry a suitcase and a bag around with me everywhere I went. I had a place that was mine. It felt amazing. I felt free.'

The Lilydale Youth Foyer is proudly operated by Anchor Community Care. The program began operating in 2011, and became Foyer accredited in 2022. So far, the site has supported over 180 young people at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness.

Care, Careers and Connection: How Education First Youth Foyers are Helping Young People Redirect Their Life Path

Kirsty Frame, Chief Storyteller, Partnerships and Engagement, Launch Housing

As young people who have faced homelessness and other hardships know, life is never a straight road. Luke and Chrissy, former residents of Launch Housing's Education First Youth Foyers, share their many full circle moments.

When Luke, now 23, talks about his new home, his whole face lights up.

'Pretty much daily I will just stop and marvel at it, the way the light hits different parts of the walls.'

The house is also a bit of a metaphor.

'When we moved in it was not at all perfect. It had a lot of problems, a lot of holes that needed filling and things to be fixed. My fiancé and I have given it so much time and love and made it a space that we can thrive in, kind of like how the cards we were dealt weren't the greatest, but we've made the best of it.'

Luke's life has come full circle in many ways since his time living in one of Launch Housing's Education First Youth Foyers a few years ago. Now Luke has a career working in the same field that supported him when he needed it most.

Launch Housing's Education First Youth Foyers (EFYF) work to break the cycle of homelessness by supporting young people, aged 16 to 24, to build a secure and sustainable livelihood.

Young people living at EFYF have wrap-around support, with housing, education and employment opportunities at the core. There's also a strong focus on building capabilities through coaching and resourcing each young person on their unique journey over the two years in residence, creating connections to community

through opportunities to build the skills they need to thrive.

'The path that I'm on now is very much because of those people and services. The Foyer is on that list that saved my life,' Luke says.

'It's so much bigger than just youth housing; it's transformative, and deeply life changing.'

Luke thinks often of his support worker, Boz, who was not only a familiar face in his new environment but lent a listening ear.

'We would talk about LGBTQIA+ and gender stuff, and he would really sit there and listen ... he would go away and reflect on it, and then get back to me and be like, "I was thinking about what that thing you said the other day..." — it was awesome,' Luke says.

'Boz would always be encouraging me to get out there and take opportunities. I felt really heard and seen by him. He made me be like, yeah, I want to work here.'

At the Education First Youth Foyers, young people are celebrated for their diversity, their ideas, and their contribution to the community that's fostered in the halls.

'I built so much confidence, I took up lots of opportunities,' Luke says, recalling the LGBTQIA+ workshops he hosted for staff and residents.

Coming up to the end of his two-year stay, Luke had a clear pathway in mind — he wanted to get into social work himself.

'I couldn't have gotten everything together without them, because I needed to sort out a police check and get my first aid [certificate], stuff like

that. The Foyer was even able to cover some of the costs for me.' Luke says.

He also got a helpful hand when the time came to venture into the rental market, covering costs of the moving truck, linking Luke up with an organisation that provides free furniture, and helping with an application for bond funding.

Now, settled in his new home with his new career, and a fresh beginning from the place he was in those years ago, Luke can see how everything's fallen into place.

'My mission has been to be the person I needed when I was young. and now I've been working with some really cool young trans people I can see myself in so much,' Luke says, eyes softening.

'I've realised that, after all the work I'd done in getting to this place, I'm finally here.'

* * *

'The Foyer was the first place that kind of gave me a home.'

A mural hangs above the entrance reception inside the Glen Waverly Youth Foyer. It's no small piece, virtually taking up the whole wall. A gift for the upcoming 10-year anniversary.

Dots of blue, teal, red, brown and bright yellow make up weaving rivers from each corner of the canvas, coming together to the meeting place etched in the centre.

Christinaray, or Chrissy as she's often called, is a proud Warumungu Arrente woman, deeply connected to her Country near Alice Springs and Tennant Creek. She's a visual artist and draws deep inspiration from her life path and her culture.

'For me, art has always been a way for me to be able to express myself and to connect to my culture. I am only really practising contemporary Indigenous art instead of more traditional art. My art style from back home is mainly dot work. But I'm pretty fortunate in the aspect that, because of where my parents are, I can practise both dot work and line work.'

A graduate of the Education First Youth Foyer herself, she came back this year to paint the piece.

'It represents how we all have a starting point in life and how the Foyer can be that starting point for the young people passing through on their journeys. Life is never a straight line, it's full of challenges that shape us into who we are,' Chrissy explains of the mural, which will oversee residents passing through for years to come.

'Your past, trying to find your way through life, getting up when you get knocked down, the journey and embracing yourself. Those are the things that my work revolves around a lot. It's a way of getting it off my chest.'

It's been just over a decade since Chrissy lived in the Foyer, but it's left a lasting impression — one of gratitude, inspiration, and hope for others.

'The Foyer was the first place that kind of gave me a home. It gave me a roof over my head, a place where I knew that I could relax.'

Chrissy had to leave home at a young age when it became unsafe. She spent time in both women's shelters and on friends' couches before she found the Foyer program.

'The staff were my mentors. Being able to just sit down and talk to them, they all came from different lives or different experiences. It gave me that chance to kind of just really focus on myself and unpack a little bit of how I was feeling.'

Several staff at Launch Housing's Foyers are former residents themselves, providing an extra layer of connection through a shared lived experience for the young people who walk the halls.

Trauma and hardships, so often shared by the young people living in the Foyers, can fog the road ahead,



Main Mechanism by James – Image courtesy of Stefaan Bruce-Truglio

making aspirations harder to grasp. What the Foyer did for Chrissy was help guide her to her spark.

'I know more than anyone else, that it just takes one interaction, one conversation, one little thing that makes you click and think, "Maybe I can do it. Maybe I can change my path. Change where I'm headed."'

On top of being a working artist, Chrissy works for an Indigenous non-government organisation that helps young people in care or transitioning out of it.

'I support a lot of young people now to go and chase stuff up for their future, whether it's helping them find TAFE courses or helping them find stable living accommodations and just supporting them to do better for themselves,' Chrissy says.

Being the mentor is not only a full circle moment for Chrissy, but an example to her young people that their future is not defined by their past — the road can be rerouted.

'I meet a lot of young people in similar situations to what I was at that age. In a way, you kind of give younger versions of yourself that mentorship,' Chrissy reflects.

'The way I see it, I want to show these young ones that if I can, you can too — you just have to find that strength and that drive. And once you have it, the sky's the limit, anything's possible.'

Opportunities to Thrive

Eighty young people currently call the two Launch Housing Youth Foyers home, nestled next to Holmesglen Institute's Glen Waverley campus and Kangan Institute in Broadmeadows. While the big part of the first few months living in the Foyer is all about pausing, taking a breath and settling in, ultimately, young people are supported to identify goals and build life skills in a supportive environment. This leads to them engage in educational and employment pathways.

Rebecca, manager at the Broadmeadows Education First Youth Foyer, has been with the program for more than a decade.

'What people need are opportunities to thrive, with some coaching and support along the way. We have those links and can provide those opportunities... it's not one size fits all, students are on different pathways, we have people doing degrees, at high school, in apprenticeships. Their needs, their interests, their goals are super diverse.'

Eighty-four per cent of young people who graduate from the Foyers are either employed or enrolled in education. Given the barriers that these young people have faced, and how close this number is to the national Australian average of 88 per cent, it's an incredible example of how new beginnings can be fostered for people who've grown up in hardship.

Chapter 2: The Rationale and Principles Underpinning Youth Foyers: Advantaged Thinking

Passion for the Possible: Reflections on the Emergence of Advantaged Thinking Foyers

Colin Falconer, Director, InspireChilli and Your Housing Group



A significant moment in the development of Advantaged Thinking Foyers came in the unlikely setting of Foyles bookshop in London at a 2006 Foyer Federation poetry competition. One of the poems that night expressed young people's belief 'to start living again, to have a good life'. We were instantly attracted to this as an idea: if we knew the ingredients for a good life, shouldn't we ensure they formed part of the deal for everyone to access? Aristotle-like, we began to ask what 'good' looked like for young people, and how we could work together with young people to create it. After all, why talk about ending youth homelessness if we don't know how to create a world in which youth homelessness does not exist?

Together with Jane Slowey, Foyer Federation's CEO at the time, we reflected that the post-World War II origins of Foyer in France were rooted in the question of transition — of how to build an alternative induction into adulthood by which young people without a safe home might start to experience a good life. It was our step into asset-based thinking: to look towards a positive transition, you must begin with the opportunity to create rather than the problem to solve.

The fruits of our early success in leading transition-focused program design led to a research trip to the United States in 2007. There we explored a number of different service models deploying 'developmental asset' approaches, returning to the United Kingdom (UK) to express these through programs offering different funding routes to advance young people's outcomes across community connection, employability, education, health, housing and personal development — areas that defined the scope of Advantaged Thinking's future theory of change. We saw Foyers as testbeds for new ideas to work with young people, not just a set of housing services. Foyers embraced innovation to look beyond the narrow focus of housing-related outcomes to see young people's potential to thrive. The first signs of this revitalised vision saw case managers replaced with youth coaches. The paradigm began to change.

By 2009, our interest in asset-based thinking matured into a distinctive identity, inspired by a post-Wimbledon article on the then annual 'demise of British tennis'. Within this, we glimpsed our first blueprint for a more personalised approach to spot, coach, and promote people's talents. From talent development in sport to talent development in youth work, the ingredients for success depend on our ability to adapt to people's individual needs and goals. That simple insight led to a draft manifesto outlining a renewed purpose for youth services to 'Open Talent'. The manifesto offered not just a vision for UK Foyers, but a call for systems change. It was not a question of whether young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have talent — but whether the services working with them had the talent to invest in their potential.

Open Talent embraced strengths-based practice, the asset-based community development model, the sustainable livelihoods and capabilities approach, and the ethics of good youth work that underpinned the original holistic ethos of Foyers. Open Talent programs freed up Foyers to innovate with young people, focusing on their dreams and goals. But Open Talent was not always an easy sale at a time when 'poverty porn' and deficit-based provision still went largely unquestioned. It was in an attempt to answer the doubters that we developed the concepts of 'disadvantaged' and 'advantaged' thinking. We were trying to characterise the differences between problem-focused programs seeking funding for an easy fix to disadvantage, and those willing to risk exploring the 'advantages' more likely to generate real capability for people to shape their own solutions. This became the theme for a TEDx speech in April 2011.

Using TEDx as a platform, we launched an Advantaged Thinking adventure to find the 'people, places, opportunities, deals and campaigns' to develop young people's talents. We wanted to rebrand the whole narrative of 'disadvantage' — to move the dial from 'how do we help people survive and cope with problems?' to 'how can we equip people to thrive?' That meant creating and funding space for people and organisations to work together to reimagine what young people from disadvantaged backgrounds could achieve.

Advantaged Thinking's shift from a problem-centred, risk-averse response, to a solution-centred focus able to manage risk positively promoted ten principles:

1. Asset-based work

Identifying and utilising strengths,

skills, and resources. By recognising the assets at hand, individuals were encouraged to leverage these to overcome obstacles and achieve goals. This was a direct challenge to the 'medical model' widely used in society, by which individuals were traditionally identified for deficits and problems and diagnosed with a treatment. The medical model's failure to look for and invest in strengths limits its ability to deal with the holistic challenges experienced by young people, which an asset-based approach is better suited to.

2. Solution-oriented creativity

Instead of fixating on problems, Advantaged Thinking promotes a proactive approach to finding solutions. It encourages individuals to ask, 'How can I turn this situation into an advantage?' By leveraging advantages, individuals tap into their creativity to generate new approaches. This includes a focus on reframing challenges as opportunities, looking beyond immediate problems to invest in future outcomes.

3. Positive outlook and language

Advantaged Thinking emphasises a positive and optimistic vision. It encourages possibilities and potential outcomes, even in the face of adversity because, when we begin with what is possible, we can exceed expectations for what is seen as impossible. This draws on influences from the positive psychology movement popularised in the work of Martin Seligman.¹ A stress on positive language is of particular importance in Advantaged Thinking to challenge the use of negative labels describing someone as 'disadvantaged' or 'homeless', in which the potential of the person behind the stereotype is diminished. A positive outlook in Advantaged Thinking involves both a stress on positive outcomes and the avoidance of negative language.

4. Growth mindset

Adopting a growth mindset is crucial to Advantaged Thinking support. It means believing that skills, abilities, and circumstances can be developed and improved upon — that positive change is possible through personal growth. This mindset enables individuals to embrace challenges, learn from failures, and develop capabilities.

5. Proactive action

Advantaged Thinking practice stimulates proactive steps to capitalise on opportunities. It involves setting clear goals, developing action plans, and taking decisive action to move forward — elements supported by adopting a coaching approach.

6. Resource optimisation

Advantaged Thinking optimises the use of available resources, whether they are financial, human, or material, leading to more effective outcomes. This includes a better balance between resources that equip people to thrive, and those used to help people survive. Advantaged Thinking Foyers may not always be better resourced than other services, but they use their available resources better by being smart about where and how to invest.

7. Increased resilience

By focusing on strengths and advantages, individuals and organisations build resilience to navigate obstacles and setbacks more effectively. This includes a focus on investing in positive wellbeing. Importantly, Advantaged Thinking balances the need to strengthen the resilience of individuals alongside the challenge for systems to better invest in people's needs and goals. It's not just about people being more resilient — it's also about systems investing in resilience.

8. Collaborative mindset

Collaboration and cooperation are essential components of Advantaged Thinking. This means seeking partnerships, building networks, and leveraging collective strengths and resources to achieve common goals. Advantaged Thinking Foyers are rooted in their communities.

9. Continuous learning

Advantaged Thinking requires a commitment to continuous improvement. It encourages individuals to reflect on their experiences, learn from both successes and failures, and adapt positive strategies. As such, Advantaged Thinking is more of a journey than a fixed destination. To be on the journey is to learn and grow. Advantaged Thinking promotes proactive goal setting and planning, both for individuals as well as organisations. From the very

beginning, the scale up of Advantaged Thinking was supported through the UK Foyer Accreditation scheme, ensuring the ongoing development of quality provision. Accreditation plays an equally important role in the scale up of Foyers across Australia.

10. Inspirational outcomes

By adopting Advantaged Thinking, individuals are more likely to achieve success in life, whether through their personal growth, relationships, achievements, or career. It enables individuals to navigate change and make the most of resources available to them. It allows for greater resilience and long-term success. Advantaged Thinking also challenges our definition and evidence of success to be more expansive and person-centred in its focus, reflected in the emerging evidence base from the UK and the introduction of a new impact framework for Foyers in Australia.

I was first dispatched to Australia in November 2011, with a speech illustrating how the end of youth homelessness could only be achieved by knowing how to shape the beginnings of youth talent. Over a decade later, it is easy to see Australia playing a significant role in the Advantaged Thinking movement, with an emerging community of practice built through a shared understanding of the core seven tests of Advantaged Thinking — how we talk about, understand, work with, invest in, believe in and involve young people, while challenging ourselves and others to turn such questions into action.

In 2021, the UK celebrated the first ten years of Advantaged Thinking, recognising a global movement of thinkers and doers, from the UK to France, the Netherlands, Ireland, and Australia. We can talk about so many Advantaged Thinking successes — from the growth of inspiring new Foyers to the individual successes of young people finding purpose in their lives. A passion for the possible has been brought to life.

Endnote

1. Seligman MEP 2002, *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfilment*, New York Free Press, New York. See his 2004 TED speech on positive psychology at: https://www.ted.com/talks/martin_seligman_the_new_era_of_positive_psychology

Advantaged Thinking: The Unifying Practice Approach of Youth Foyers in Australia

Mark Cox, Practice Lead, Foyer Foundation



By demonstrating Advantaged Thinking (AT), Youth Foyers in Australia have chosen to depart from a welfare-centric, deficit-based approach to young people, instead challenging themselves and others to invest in young people in a more positive and innovative way.

Based on the inspiring work of Colin Falconer and the Foyer Federation in the United Kingdom, Australia has been able to adapt, apply and progress Advantaged Thinking based on its own settings and sectors.

From humble beginnings in the early 2010s, the last decade has seen the growth of Advantaged Thinking in Youth Foyers, which means it can now be applied in a way that adds value to the way service models, programs and organisational practices work to enable better outcomes for young people experiencing structural disadvantage all over the country, including in the settlement sector, out of home care, Leaving Care, and the education and employment service systems.

Enabled by organisations such as the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the Foyer Foundation, Advantaged

Thinking practice has been demonstrated, researched, refined, and extended across a range of Communities of Practice that are still actively pursuing the best version of Advantaged Thinking practice.

What is Advantaged Thinking?

Advantaged Thinking arose out of a need to look beyond seeing a young person as a perceived problem or challenge, to instead acknowledge and encourage their talents and goals. Despite Colin Falconer's inspiring vision, the shift away from 'coping' approaches has not yet fully been realised by the youth homelessness sector.

Advantaged Thinking is more than a strengths-based approach. Though it does draw on this widely used practice, whereas strengths-based approaches usually focus on the individual, Advantaged Thinking recognises the critical importance of the placed-based, institutional and structural settings within which young people make choices about their future. It sees young people experiencing disadvantage as requiring a more equitable investment of social capital, capability building and opportunity in order for them to continue building a good life. In doing so, it recognises that any effort to create change must attend to both the individual and structural contexts, making positive investment and influencing change in both. One without the other cannot result in lasting change for young people or their communities.

To promote an Advantaged Thinking approach day to day, Youth Foyers focus primarily on how they invest in young people through connection to inspirational people, places and opportunities, and how they

meaningfully include young people in the decisions that affect them.

The very best Youth Foyers are able to embed Advantaged Thinking complementarily with their existing practice frameworks, including trauma-informed and housing-first principles.

Youth Foyers continually challenge themselves to uphold Colin Falconer's *Seven Tests of Advantaged Thinking*, articulated opposite. These seven tests serve as reflection points by which Youth Foyers and their staff practice Advantaged Thinking in a way that can be challenged and built upon to deliver the service in a more Advantaged Thinking way.

How Do Youth Foyer programs Enable Advantaged Thinking to Happen?

Youth Foyers exist to provide proactive and structured partnerships with people, places and opportunities that are framed around the goals of young people.

Youth Foyers offer more than a roof over the heads of young people with case managers added on. They recognise that housing alone will not be sufficient to break entrenched policies, structures and systems that give rise to and perpetuate youth homelessness. Youth Foyers therefore prioritise access to education, training, and employment opportunities, along with chances to engage in youth-led activities related to their overall independence goals. They proactively facilitate social and community connections that endure beyond a young person's two-year stay in a Foyer.

Education, training and employment partnerships and opportunities are a particular emphasis of all Youth Foyers

Seven Tests of Advantaged Thinking	
Youth Foyers embed this into practice by:	
<p>TEST ONE</p> <p>Youth Foyers TALK ABOUT young people without stereotyping them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Highlighting the strengths and talents they observe in young people. ✓ Using affirmative language when describing young people to others. ✓ Disrupting negative or deficit labels you commonly hear about young people. ✓ Ensuring marketing and communication materials uphold dignity and rights-based language.
<p>TEST TWO</p> <p>Youth Foyers UNDERSTAND young people by what they can do and aspire to be.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Asking about and identifying skills and talents when first getting to know young people. ✓ Harnessing storytelling so that young people have the chance to tell you who they are, in their own words. ✓ Ensuring application or referral processes balance perceived 'need' with motivation. ✓ Tracking the growth of young people and their achievements throughout the programs or services you operate.
<p>TEST THREE</p> <p>Youth Foyers WORK WITH young people by coaching growth and positive risks.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Building on the strengths and goals of young people through a coaching approach. ✓ Asset-proofing processes so that Advantaged Thinking is enabled by the program or organisation. ✓ Collaborating with a wider network or partners that will add value to your program or organisational effort. ✓ Embracing positive risk-taking as an opportunity for growth and learning.
<p>TEST FOUR</p> <p>Youth Foyers INVEST IN young people and promote their potential to thrive.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Validating the strengths and achievements of young people in ways they understand and value. ✓ Promoting personalised opportunities and experiences that are shaped by each unique young person. ✓ Focusing toward thriving beyond programs, services, or systems, not just helping young people to 'cope' with their perceived 'challenges'. ✓ Stewarding program and organisational resources (brokerage, time, effort) appropriately.
<p>TEST FIVE</p> <p>Youth Foyers BELIEVE in young people and what they can achieve.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Promoting the aspirations of young people, ensuring unconditional positive regard. ✓ Ensuring high standards of program delivery at all times. ✓ Nurturing trust by offering ongoing opportunities for growth. ✓ Maintaining consistency of practice and high belief in the face of challenges that may emerge.
<p>TEST SIX</p> <p>Youth Foyers INVOLVE young people so that their experiences can shape solutions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Doing 'with' young people, not 'to' young people. ✓ Encouraging engagement by including young people in co-design and service delivery. ✓ Developing representation by creating diverse opportunities for young people to remain involved in the program and organisation. ✓ Actively listening to young people's insights and acting on them.
<p>TEST SEVEN</p> <p>Youth Foyers CHALLENGE themselves and others to promote Advantaged Thinking.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Celebrating success and showcasing achievements of young people. ✓ Mobilising networks that can build on your Advantaged Thinking efforts. ✓ Building capacity of staff to continually reflect on and embed Advantaged Thinking. ✓ Influencing change at 'higher' levels of the organisation, community, or government.

in Australia and yield transformative results. The educational partnerships of Youth Foyer providers such as the three (soon to be five) Education First Youth Foyers in Victoria and the three (also soon to be five) Youth2Independence (Y2I) facilities in Tasmania include schools, flexible learning options, or their co-located TAFE which delivers a Certificate 1 in Developing Independence.

The Certificate 1 is unique to Youth Foyer modality; it builds confidence and promotes re-engagement in formal study by focusing on a range of independent living skills and future career planning. Due to this structured access and support, young people living in Youth Foyers are 1.6 times more likely to achieve a higher level of education compared to other Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS).

The same is true in terms of facilitating employment outcomes. Youth Foyers offer structured employment partnerships with employers or pathways into employment. A recent report by Accenture Economic Insights found that at least 65 per cent of national Youth Foyer residents gained employment by the time they exited the program, compared to 51 per cent if they had gone through another SHS. Other programs in the education and homelessness sectors might offer support in either education or housing, but few integrated service models prioritise both education and employment outcomes in the way Youth Foyers do, with Advantaged Thinking at their heart.

Sustaining Good Practice with an Advantaged Thinking Lens
 Youth Foyers in Australia recognise that Advantaged Thinking is not something that you ever 'arrive at'. The best Youth Foyers continually test themselves, striving for continuous improvement in their practice by providing ongoing training and Advantaged Thinking practice reflection, taking seriously the balance of proactive and reactive approaches, and always asking themselves how they might include and better uphold the dignity of the young people with whom they work.

The Foyer Foundation accreditation process ensures high standards of Advantaged Thinking practice across the seven Youth Foyer Offer

areas of: Education, Work, Health, Housing, Financial capability, Connection, and Independence. These seven offers are reflected on, innovated and maintained over time, and form the backbone of a strong national Youth Foyer Theory of Change with Advantaged Thinking as a unifying feature.

The Foyer Foundation Community of Practice currently comprises 11 accredited national Youth Foyer members and this number is growing quickly, with a strong pipeline of emerging and establishing Youth Foyers. Discussions at the Community of Practice centre around key themes that arise through each Youth Foyer's Quality Development Plan and their young people's achievements inputted into a national Impact Framework.

The Future of Advantaged Thinking

A recent Advantaged Thinking Symposium held by the Foyer Foundation and the Brotherhood of St Laurence in Melbourne took stock of the evolution of Advantaged Thinking practice over the last ten years in Australia. Keynoted by Colin Falconer, it brought together a vibrant network of people who recognise that a different offer is still required for young people experiencing homelessness. Youth Foyers remain at the centre of this shift in practice toward Advantaged Thinking, and there is endless potential for it to further impact a wider range of programs, organisations, service systems, and ultimately (and most excitingly!), young people.



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Advantaged Thinking:

Shifting the focus of Youth Homelessness from sole welfare reliance to adopting a youth-led approach

Rebecca Boyd, Advantaged Thinking Development and Practice Lead, Wayss

Twenty-five per cent of Victorians without a home are young people between 12 and 24 years.¹ As we work to effectively address this, Wayss encounters numerous challenges that demand a steadfast commitment to innovative thinking.

Based in the southeast region of Victoria, Wayss deals with one of Australia's largest epicentres of people facing family violence or homelessness. It is also the leading provider of housing services in the area.

Youth homelessness is both complex and characterised by constant change. By embracing innovative approaches, organisations like Wayss have successfully adapted their strategies to tackle emerging challenges as they arise. Recognising the increasing demand and the rising numbers of young people facing homelessness, we understand that the supply and accessibility of such resources are insufficient, resulting in a critical deficiency in the sector. This must be addressed, both with advocacy and with innovation.

Our Services for Young People (SfYP) team has pioneered a novel approach to address the pressing issue of youth homelessness. We have moved beyond the traditional focus on resources like housing, funding, and material aid. Our approach centres around meaningful engagement, empowerment, and skill development, equipping young people to navigate their way out of homelessness and build a sustainable future.

We considered the prevailing themes and trends in the community, specifically focusing on the needs of disadvantaged young people. Our aim was to identify new

strategies and practices to prevent youth homelessness altogether. As a result, our SfYP programs have challenged the current needs-based, deficit-focused model and adopted an asset-based approach. This approach places the young person at the centre of their experience, shifting their perception from being passive receivers of welfare to active leaders on the path to well-being and independence. To effectively achieve this goal, it became evident that a unified and consistent approach to thinking and practice was essential. Extensive research into national and international programs for young people revealed that embracing a 'Foyer-like model' and an Advantaged Thinking framework was the optimal way forward.

Not only did the principles and values of Advantaged Thinking closely align with our existing beliefs, but the framework also encompassed the evidence-based approaches that SfYP sought to implement. These approaches have consistently demonstrated exceptional outcomes for young people facing disadvantages. The flexibility of Advantaged Thinking allowed us to envision it as the overarching framework for our service offerings, while still being adaptable to meet the unique needs of each program.

Contributing to 'The Campaign' is a critical component of Advantaged Thinking and the broader Foyer movement. This movement seeks to reform policies and challenge deficit models based on needs, while reshaping community perceptions. It serves as a compelling platform to showcase the untapped talent in every individual that can be nurtured and cultivated. Moreover, it shines a spotlight on the unique capabilities

of young people, empowering them to voice their perspectives with confidence and impact.

Benefits of Advantaged Thinking

Advantaged Thinking has revolutionised the way our SfYP operate across all our programs. It has empowered teams to welcome young people who might have been perceived as 'too complex' in the past. The teams now engage in collaborative efforts to co-design safety plans and strategies, always with the young person at the centre of the decision-making process, using these plans to address immediate challenges and mitigate risk productively. The change between traditional risk management and Advantaged Thinking reveals the immense potential for positive change that can be realised when we place faith in and empower young people to use their own strengths and capabilities.

At its core, Advantaged Thinking allows SfYP to empower teams and workers to identify and deconstruct the fundamental causes contributing to a young person's disadvantage. The approach promotes a holistic perspective, addressing the underlying reasons and equipping young people with the essential support, resources and opportunities to transition out of homelessness to lead stable, independent, and fulfilling lives.

Advantaged Thinking is recognised as a placeholder in the Youth sector. Recent evidence reveals that it can be successfully applied across all age groups and areas of human and community services. Many organisations in Australia are embedding this framework and

way of thinking into their practice, particularly in programs that hold 'caseloads' of young people.

A common characteristic amongst these programs is the provision of ongoing and more long-term support, allowing time for rapport building and the opportunity to offer more enduring support to young individuals, ensuring their growth and development in the long run. SfYP has been fortunate to be able to take a flexible approach to embedding Advantaged Thinking into the different programs at Wayss. This approach has had impressive outcomes, not only within programs offering sustained support but also in short stays and crisis accommodation options offered through Wayss.

Advantaged Thinking is a valuable approach when working with people in crisis. Its core principles include empowering, involving, collaborating, and connecting to the community. Bringing these principles to life involves fostering a relational approach between the worker and the client, which requires transparency and building trust. This approach aligns with the fundamentals of trauma-informed care. The recent findings *National Housing and Homelessness Issue Response*, identified that chronic and repeat homelessness is underpinned by experiences of trauma. Australian studies have found that between 91 and 100 per cent of people experiencing homelessness had experienced at least one major and/or ongoing trauma in their lives.

A trauma-informed approach in crisis is essential for providing compassionate, effective, and respectful care to individuals who may be experiencing intense distress. It not only supports immediate needs but also contributes to long-term recovery and well-being. Trauma-informed care is far-reaching across the human and community service sector yet, when people find themselves at their most vulnerable, they often recount their experiences as unpleasant, punitive, and steeped in a 'beggars can't be choosers' mentality. By combining trauma-informed care with Advantaged Thinking, people who have experienced trauma and are experiencing



Step Ahead site plan



Wayss Foyer-like facility, Step Ahead

crisis can receive not only the understanding and support needed to address their past experiences but also the encouragement and belief in their potential for a positive and fulfilling future.

By embedding this integrated approach across all crisis response and homelessness services, we have the potential to not only foster healing, growth, and resilience but, above all, to provide individuals with the tools to regain control over their lives during the most challenging periods they may encounter. Further to this, a commonality in the sector is that organisations and programs have access to very much the same resources, information, and referral pathways however they often operate in silos and independently with very different practice approaches. If all services were working together more collaboratively and consistently with similar practice and message, not only would there be more uniformity between services and their delivery, but it could be the vehicle to change that the sector so desperately needs and wants.

Lasting change will only come by shifting cultural norms, values, lifestyle trends and standards — only this will influence the community's identity and the direction it takes. Perhaps the change we need to see starts with us, the service providers — a paradigm shift from a welfare, needs-based response into asset-based Advantaged Thinking across the board.

The Importance of Social Capital

The Advantaged Thinking framework emphasises the importance of social capital

which refers to the networks, relationships, and social resources that can be harnessed to address the multifaceted challenges of homelessness. It involves the connections and bonds between individuals, community organisations, and service providers, and plays a crucial role in the efforts to prevent and alleviate homelessness. Wayss' Step Ahead program is a brilliant illustration of this framework in action. Step Ahead employs an innovative 'foyer model' which is in the local government area of Cardinia and is made up of six single units and two by two-bedroom units with Youth Development Workers on-site during business hours Monday to Friday.

Young people in the Step Ahead program have independent lease agreements that resemble private rentals. This means they are responsible for connecting and managing their own utilities, such as electricity and internet. Additionally, the program is situated within the local community, allowing young people to not only be neighbours with their peers in the Step Ahead program, but also with members of the community. This provides an opportunity to build relationships while also requiring them to independently navigate any challenges they may face. At Step Ahead, where young people typically participate in the program for about a year, they have a unique chance to collaborate closely with Youth Development Workers. These workers serve as coaches and supporters, guiding young people in understanding the importance of social capital by modelling and teaching them how to cultivate

their own social network. This resource is integral to their journey towards stability.

A recent example showcasing the power of Advantaged Thinking and the benefit of social capital involves a young individual at Step Ahead. Enduring a profound loss, this individual's journey exemplifies the transformative influence this kind of support can have. Residing at Step Ahead for approximately four months has provided them with a safe and stable living environment. They have secured employment at a local business, built a strong sense of community within their workplace and have become a valued employee. This stability allowed them to address other aspects of their life, such as their mental health. They are now linked to the local headspace and regularly receive ongoing psychological support, which they find extremely helpful. Additionally, they have had the opportunity to engage with Youth Development Workers and actively participate in bi-weekly workshops that enhance their learning and life skills. These experiences have boosted their confidence, leading them to join a local gym to improve their overall health and well-being. As a result, they have not only reaped the physical benefits but have also formed meaningful friendships and connections.

Reflecting on their journey, this young person acknowledged that while there is never a right time to experience such a profound loss, if this had happened without current supports in place they would be processing in a very different way. Although the loss for this young person is still recent, they have been able to return to work, they have kept up mental health appointments and continued to go to the gym. This highlights why social capital is vital, as supportive relationships and community ties provide emotional and practical support even in the most challenging times. Facilitating the growth of social capital in this case provided emotional and practical support and having this network of people who understood and empathised supported them



I Play Better By Myself, Tarik Dallinger-Dimizio

to alleviate feelings of despair and isolation. This has served as a buffer for the young person allowing them to reintegrate back to work and life in a sustainable way.

Alleviating Deficit Language

Advantaged Thinking's approach values employing positive language when addressing the needs and circumstances of young people. Unfortunately, it is all too common for service providers to fall into the trap of using deficit-laden language when describing young people, and this practice leads to negative stereotypes and biases. Even more disheartening is the negative impact that persistent deficit-oriented language can have on the self-esteem and self-worth of young people, leading to detrimental self-image and poor mental health and in some cases poorer overall outcomes.

The implementation of Advantaged Thinking has made a huge difference for the young people accessing Wayss' SfYP services, especially in the Emergency Youth Accommodation (EYA) program. EYA is a 10-bed refuge that provides short-term emergency housing. When a spot opens up at EYA, it's advertised on the Specialist Homelessness Information Platform (SHIP/VMS), allowing other homelessness services to refer a

young person using a general referral form called the Initial Assessment and Planning tool (IAP). The IAP covers different topics to gather information and get a comprehensive understanding. However, the way the form is completed can lack consistency and often uses language that focuses on weaknesses.

Since Advantaged Thinking has been embedded into EYA, there has been a profound transformation in its approach to receiving and processing referrals. This shift has enabled EYA staff to view referrals through an Advantaged Thinking lens, recognising that alerts, reports of challenging behaviour, substance use, and risk can co-exist with talent, abilities, and aspirational goals for change.

Wayss and Innovation

Wayss faces numerous challenges in addressing the ever-evolving needs of the community, particularly in relation to youth homelessness. Wayss is dedicated to offering secure housing and support solutions for individuals in our community who are facing family violence, housing insecurity, and homelessness. We bring an abundance of expertise, along with strong connections to community members and stakeholders. However, we must also constantly strive to find the best ways to deliver services with a personalised approach. This means adopting an agile approach, an enthusiasm for the application of new ways of thinking, and constant innovations.

By embracing innovative approaches and adopting Advantaged Thinking, the SfYP team at Wayss empowers young individuals to navigate their way out of homelessness and build a sustainable future. The implementation of an Advantaged Thinking framework has proven to be an effective strategy, challenging deficit models and highlighting the untapped talent in every individual.

Endnote

1. Council to Homeless Persons, *Data and Demographics*, <https://chp.org.au/about-homelessness/data-and-demographics/>

Chapter 3: The Foyer Model: Beyond Housing

Education First Youth Foyers: Education as a Solution to Homelessness

Emma Cull, Senior Manager Youth Service Development and Practice, Brotherhood of St Laurence

Education First Youth (EFY) Foyers are one of the key Foyer models operating in Australia, providing young people between the ages of 16 and 24, who are unable to live at home, with student-style accommodation and access to mainstream education, training, and employment opportunities as a pathway to sustainable independent living.

This evidence-based model, developed in 2002 by the Brotherhood of St Laurence and Launch Housing (then Hanover Welfare Services), was designed with an ambition of systems change — aiming to break down structural barriers that prevent young people experiencing homelessness from engaging in education and employment and to prevent them from cycling through the homelessness service system. The model also promoted a shift from the provision of crisis accommodation and case management approaches to a service response designed to build and invest in young people's potential. Through leveraging multi-sector partnerships with mainstream education, employment, housing, community and health providers, the EFY Foyer model provides access to mainstream resources, opportunities and networks that are designed to support young people not just to survive, but to thrive.

A Model That Works

With the first EFY Foyer established in Victoria now about to celebrate its 10th birthday, the model has been proven to be effective. A five-year, longitudinal outcomes evaluation of the three inaugural EFY Foyers in Victoria was conducted from 2013–2018 by the Brotherhood of St Laurence's (BSL) Social Policy and Research Centre, in partnership with Launch Housing and the University

of Melbourne.¹ One of the most comprehensive studies ever done on Foyer models, the evaluation found sustained improvements in education, employment and housing outcomes for young people 12 months post-exit, as well as improvements in mental and physical health. Over 1,000 young people across Victoria and Tasmania have now been supported to pursue their education and employment goals and the model is continuing to grow, with new EFY Foyers currently under construction in regional Victoria and Tasmania and growing interest from other states and territories.

Education is at the heart of the EFY Foyer model. At its core, the model is predicated on the notion that educational attainment is key to providing young people experiencing homelessness with a route out of disadvantage. Most young people successfully make the transition from school to further education and employment and from adolescence to adulthood, with the support of family and community networks. For those young people that do not have these supports, this transition is particularly difficult. Many are unable to finish school and then unable to find work. As a result, they risk moving into a long-term dependency on government housing and welfare payments. EFY Foyers provide secure housing as a means for engaging in education, ensuring young people can fully commit to their education and build the foundations for a sustainable livelihood.

Strong partnerships with TAFE are key to the EFY Foyer model. This partnership is activated and prioritised across all stages of the EFY Foyer model, from building design and location on TAFE campuses, and throughout a young person's stay from entry through

to exit. Education is also prioritised at the policy level with Education and Housing and Homelessness departments² co-funding parts of the model. This partnership is designed to be mutually beneficial and intentionally transformative for both education and homelessness service systems and the young people trying to navigate these systems.

EFY Foyers leverage existing TAFE infrastructure both through the location of EFY Foyer buildings on TAFE land, as well as through young people staying at the Foyer having access to TAFE facilities including priority access to courses, career and course guidance, student counselling and support services, and access to libraries and IT support. Use of existing land has obvious benefits to government and community both in terms of cost and amenity, while also providing an enhanced offering for TAFEs that help attract a diverse student cohort and help fulfil TAFEs' role and values as public institutes with community obligations.

The design of EFY Foyer buildings themselves deliberately foster educational engagement. This includes the provision of both self-contained units with a built-in desk for private study, as well as congregate spaces that enable access to homework help, study groups and tutoring. Location on TAFE campuses also ensure students have access to necessary education supports when needed as well as mitigating geographical and financial barriers to participation.

A commitment to participate in Education

In terms of program design and delivery, education is prioritised through a requirement for young people entering EFY Foyers to



Irritation by Tarik Dallinger-Dimizio

commit to ongoing participation in education throughout their stay. This commitment is made through a reciprocal Deal agreement between students and staff before being accepted into the Foyer. As part of the Deal, young people agree to participate in education at a Certificate III level equivalent or above, in addition to participation in five other EFY Foyer service offers across key life domains, including employment, housing and living skills, health and wellbeing, civic participation and social connection. In return, Foyer staff agree to provide participants with up to two years of supported accommodation and opportunities across key life

domains that build young people's skills, networks and social capital.

The requirement to undertake a Certificate III level qualification or above was determined based on evidence about the qualification levels necessary to sustain employment into the future. Both national and international data and evidence³ show that young people with below Year 12 qualification levels experience higher rates of unemployment and are at increased risk of financial insecurity. Changing labour market requirements have seen a decline in entry level positions and a need for increased skill levels, as well as the ability to reskill to meet rapidly changing industry

needs. In prioritising educational engagement, the EFY Foyer model provides young people with the time and support they need to build this crucial foundation for their future. This was borne out by the evaluation which found that 67 per cent of participants had completed at least a year 12 or Certificate III at exit and this increased to 75 per cent a year after exit. Of those still enrolled a year after exit, about half were enrolled in tertiary courses such as diplomas and bachelor degrees and about a quarter were in Certificates III or IV courses.

A co-delivery model with TAFE enabling shared expertise

The EFY model also prioritises education through a number of co-delivery mechanisms between TAFEs and Foyer staff. Young people entering the Foyer have their first 'intake' meetings with TAFEs where they discuss their aspirations and are provided with career guidance and support. They are then enrolled into the purpose designed Certificate I in Developing Independence, giving them immediate access to TAFE services and supports. This also embeds young people's identity as a student rather than as a client of homelessness services and helps set up a culture of high expectations and aspirations for students and staff alike. EFY Foyer participants interviewed for the evaluation also spoke about how the model supported their education through the provision of a safe, stable place where education was valued. When staff prioritised a young person's willingness to participate in education over crisis and need at intake and fostered a culture that valued education, participants reported that peer influence increased their commitment to their studies.

Developing Independence and articulating a vision for the future

The Developing Independence Certificate is designed to help students develop and articulate a vision for their future and to work on goals towards achieving their aspirations. It also supports the development of core skills including goal setting and planning, managing personal relationships and dealing with conflict and stress. While some students undertake the certificate concurrently with other educational courses, from high school through

to university level qualifications, for many young people the Developing Independence Certificate provides young people with the opportunity to explore positive educational engagement aligned to their aspirations and sets them up for their education pathway throughout their time at Foyer and beyond.

The Certificate is co-delivered by TAFE teachers and Foyer staff and leverages the expertise of both, to ensure that all Foyer students are able to access, engage in and achieve within mainstream education settings. Again, there are mutual benefits and transformative potential in these arrangements. TAFE providers have expertise in developing and delivering educational programs, but often do not have the capacity to cater for the additional support needs of service-connected young people or to provide the personal, financial and structural supports required to sustain engagement. Conversely, community organisations have expertise in addressing the personal issues that impact on educational engagement, but often do not have the resources, capacity and expertise to develop and deliver high-quality educational opportunities. The co-delivery of the Certificate ensures young people are adequately supported to achieve their goals.

A sustainable and fulfilling future

The EFY Foyer model builds on the Youth Foyer approach by prioritising education and training as the foundation for a sustainable livelihood. While the EFY Foyer model also has a focus on supporting young people to transition to private rental after Foyer and to achieve sustainable housing outcomes, the model prioritises educational engagement as the most effective way to achieving this long term. A year after exit, participants showed remarkable gains in their qualifications and continued capability to pursue further education and training post exit, as well as improved housing and employment outcomes. Through providing an integrated learning environment that leverages mainstream partnerships to invest in young people's access to resources, networks and opportunities, young people are supported to build the skills they need to lead fulfilling, independent and productive lives.



Artwork supplied by Barnardos

Education First Youth Foyer Models across Australia are supported by the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) which plays an enabling role through delivering training, service development, operational support, monitoring, evaluation and learning, and facilitating Communities of Practice and working groups to support continuous learning and innovation. BSL also plays a key role in the governance of many EFY Foyers and/or as a consortia or operating partner.

Current and Committed Education First Youth Foyers

Current EFY Foyers

- EFY Foyer Glen Waverley: Holmesglen TAFE, Launch Housing, BSL
- EFY Foyer Broadmeadows: Kangan TAFE, Launch Housing, BSL
- EFY Foyer Shepparton: Goulbourn Ovens TAFE, Berry St, Beyond Housing, BSL

Committed and In Development

- EFY Foyer Wangaratta: Goulburn Ovens TAFE, NESAY, Uniting Housing, BSL
- EFY Foyer Wodonga: Wodonga TAFE, Beyond Housing, Junction Support Services, BSL
- Devonport Eveline House
- Launceston Thyne House, TasTAFE, Anglicare Tasmania, BSL
- Hobart Trinity Hill

Committed and In Development

- Hobart, TasTAFE, Anglicare Tasmania, BSL
- Burnie, TasTAFE, Youth Family and Community Connections, BSL

Foyer Oxford: An Integrated and Holistic Approach to Support

Yanthe McIntyre-Gadsby, Service Manager Youth Services, Anglicare WA

Young people are increasingly and disproportionately unable to access accommodation. Unmet demand sits at three-quarters of those experiencing homelessness.¹ Young people accounted for over 2,700 people experiencing homelessness in Western Australia (WA) according to Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2021-2022 data. The majority identified as female and were aged between 18 and 24 years.²

In Perth's inner-city lies Foyer Oxford. Operational since 2014, it is delivered by a consortium of Anglicare WA, North Metropolitan TAFE and Foundation Housing. The building contains 98 apartments, 24 of which can accommodate young parents with their children. Positioned in the sector as the exit point from homelessness, young people who access this service typically have higher levels of independent living skills and

are required to be engaged in employment, education and training or have concrete plans to engage.

Foyer Oxford is the largest project of its type in Australia and joins three other services delivered by Anglicare WA as part of a continuum of services to young people experiencing homelessness in WA, namely YES! Housing, Y-SHAC and Street Connect. These services, co-located with Foyer Oxford, are delivered



Circus Hoops by Donna Williams, 2008

across Perth's metropolitan region, creating a more integrative and holistic approach to support.

For over 30 years, YES! Housing has provided outreach case management support for young people aged 15 to 25 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. YES! Housing accommodates young families in transitional units, where they can develop their parenting abilities and gain independent living skills. It is one of the few youth accommodation services in WA that accommodates coupled young parents and their children.

Y-SHAC provides crisis and transitional accommodation services in Spearwood and Rockingham to young people aged 15 to 25. Anglicare WA has operated this service since 1997, providing short-term crisis accommodation for up to nine young people and transitional units providing medium-term accommodation for up to 17 young people each night. Young people engaged with Y-SHAC receive case-management support to help achieve their goals and move towards independent living.

Street Connect is a low-barrier response to young people who are street present or at risk of homelessness. For over 20 years, Anglicare WA has provided this support, addressing gaps in service delivery and ensuring that young people have access to safe, stable and affordable accommodation. The service uses detached youth work, assertive outreach, and brief intervention case management models to deliver support to young people.

Anglicare WA's youth homelessness services support around 250 children and young people at any one time, with more than half provided accommodation each night.

Each of Anglicare WA's youth services has different funding arrangements, placing Anglicare WA in a position to reflect on the implications and associated service delivery capabilities of each funding model. Foyer Oxford is a hybrid of state government and philanthropic funding, whereas YES! Housing and Y-SHAC are primarily state government funded services. Street Connect receives

no government funding and is philanthropically funded.

In 2022, the Foyer Oxford offer was expanded, embedding two specialist roles through funding from the Mental Health Commission and philanthropy. This was an outcome of previous years' advocacy to government with service data highlighting the need for greater resourcing in these areas. From 2014 to 2022, the self-reporting of mental health challenges at entry to the service increased from 40 per cent to over 80 per cent of young people with only 44 per cent engaged in mental health services. In 2015, Paul Flatau reported a similar finding for young people experiencing homelessness in Australia, that 53 per cent of their youth sample *'had been diagnosed with at least one mental health condition in their lifetime'*.³

The Therapeutic Specialist and Drug Education Support Services (DESS) roles have increased capacity to respond to the complex experiences of young people, delivering greater service efficacy. Since commencement, the measured impact includes: 23 young people in Foyer Oxford directly engaging with the Therapeutic Specialist, 26 per cent of whom shared that this was their first instance of accessing a mental health professional. This role has improved access to mental health support through specialist assessment, capacity to liaise with external

supports, an increase in external mental health referrals being accepted and a more coordinated response to safety concerns. One young person described the benefits of the role as:

'Having a Therapeutic Specialist at Foyer has been super helpful for me; not only does it make it easier to see someone in the building for mental health support but also for helping to further my support pathways and to help find therapists in a very confusing system.'

The partnership between the Therapeutic Specialist and DESS roles has been effective, engaging with 11 young people experiencing co-occurring alcohol and other drug (AOD) issues. Over the 2022-2023 financial year, the DESS supported 24 young people attending individual counselling, 37 group sessions and 16 referrals to higher-intensity AOD services.

The self-reported outcomes in 37 feedback forms completed by young people were:

- 83 per cent increased their knowledge of AOD to make informed decisions and safer choices.
- 89 per cent increased their knowledge of AOD risk and protective factors to delay, prevent or reduce their own AOD harms.



Photo provided by Anglicare WA

- 85 per cent increased their knowledge of how to access AOD and mental health and other specialist support services.
- 83 per cent reduced their risky or unsafe AOD behaviours.

The community development offer at Foyer Oxford provides valuable growth and connection for residents and would not be possible without additional sources of income. The Foyer Oxford service model includes complementary roles funded through philanthropic grants and donations, such as a Volunteer Facilitator, an Employment Projects Officer and a Community Development Coordinator. Together they ensure activities and events are delivered to create an integrated service offer, a positive, balanced community and a way to maintain strong community partnerships.

Some examples of community development opportunities available in 2022 for Foyer Oxford residents include the annual 'Foyer Fiesta', camping, and volunteering at an Aboriginal cultural festival. The Foyer Fiesta held in November had over 40 attendees. These larger events provide an important opportunity for residents to build a sense of community and belonging; they also tend to attract residents who are less likely to engage with other events.

Young people described the benefits of the camping trip to be a sense of participating in a normative developmental milestone, with connections to family memories and the outdoor environment:

'When I was younger, I had the chance to go bush with my grandparents regularly. When I was removed from my family environment, I was no longer able to do this. I really appreciated the chance to go to camp and have a moment to be with nature.'
— Foyer Resident.

The event coordination of an Aboriginal cultural festival at a Perth-based arts centre provided a rewarding volunteering opportunity in 2022. The team of staff, residents and volunteers participated in various tasks to assist with the running of the

event. This was an enjoyable cultural experience and built attendees' knowledge of event management.

Foyer Oxford accommodates up to 24 young parents and over the last two years has noted a steady increase in young parent applications and accommodation of young parents and their children. In response, a Young Parent Inclusion Worker position was created and commenced in mid-2023. This role links young parents to community, builds support networks and encourages civic engagement. The facilitation of a family-friendly and developmentally supportive environment for young parents and their children will build on the existing protective factors to potentially interrupt experiences of intergenerational family dysfunction.

The additional resourcing of these roles has shown positive outcomes through the provision of holistic support; these are not isolated but have a cumulative effect, with economy of scale advantages as well as operational efficiencies and synergies. A drawback of multiple co-located service streams is the need to align reporting requirements and data systems to ensure that the administrative requirements do not outweigh the direct client-focused work.

Estimates have shown that Foyers create \$89,000 per person in savings for state government. The cost to deliver Foyer Oxford, including philanthropic income, was less than \$17,000 per young person in 2022-2023, hence there is a strong argument for the long-term financial benefits to government and the whole community.⁴

Challenges have been acknowledged for a number of years with state government funding arrangements due to the lack of open tender processes, the rolling over of short-term year-to-year funding and non-contemporary reporting requirements.⁵ It is expected that the findings from the recent housing commissioning workshops undertaken by the Office of Homelessness in WA will provide important direction and learnings for other investors to overcome these challenges.

This article highlights the benefits of resource diversification through government-funded income streams and the opportunity for expansion of the model and outcomes achieved through social impact investment. Foyer Foundation's 2022 work on mapping and demonstrating the social and economic impact provides justification for combined government and private investment.⁶ Other funding types common within accommodation services can also include internally generated revenue, funding by a parent agency, in-kind support and capital funding — all with their pros and cons.⁷ It is important to remain cognisant that homelessness is a whole of community problem which has proven solutions that, however, require a whole of community investment and response.^{8,9}

Given young people are at a formative stage of development, responding to their diverse strengths and complex needs requires multi-faceted pathways for identity exploration, experiential learning, and a safe place to grow. These principles should be purposefully designed into the funding and contract arrangements of all responses to youth homelessness.

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The Annual Mission Australia Youth Survey Provides Unique Insights into Youth Housing and Homelessness

Bronwyn Boon, Research and Insights Manager, Mission Australia

Mission Australia's annual *Youth Survey* was developed to amplify the voices and experiences of young people so that they can have a say in decisions that will affect their future. This is the largest survey of young people in Australia, with 18,800 15 to 19-year-olds participating in 2022. The *Youth Survey* highlights their strengths and aspirations, together with their ideas for solutions to what concerns them. Importantly, it also draws out the perspectives of young people who have experiences of homelessness and those who cannot live safely at home.

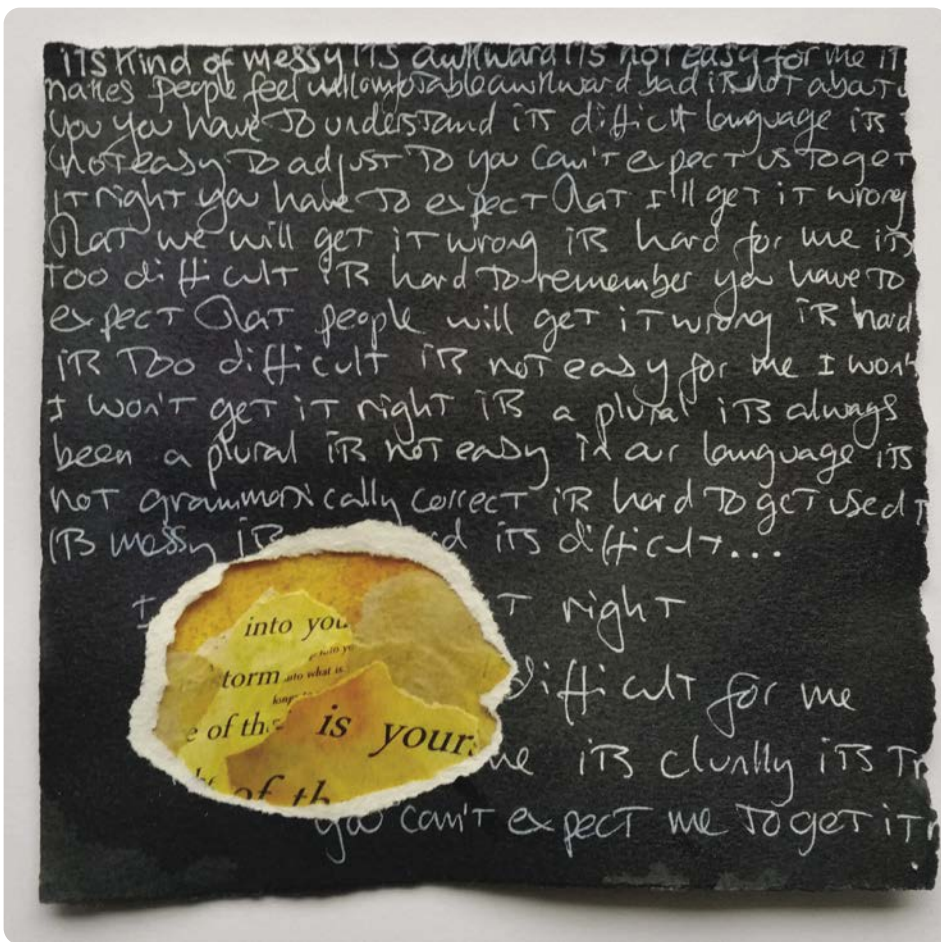
Housing challenges and homelessness are rising issues in Australia, with young people overrepresented in the nation's homeless population. Nearly a quarter (23 per cent) of all people experiencing homelessness are aged between 12 and 24, with the rate of homelessness higher than the broader population.¹ Young people are more vulnerable than adults to the effects of Australia's deepening housing crisis, due to their generally lower income levels. They are also especially vulnerable to the range of issues that

can cause homelessness, including family conflict and violence, and discrimination relating to gender identity or sexual preference.

Over one in 10 young people (12 per cent) who participated in the 2022 *Youth Survey* said that they had spent time away from home at some point in their lives because they felt they could not go back. A similar number worried about having a safe place to stay in the year prior to the survey. Eight per cent of young people reported staying away from home in the last year.



Street art



In Visibility Series # 2, 2018 by Ange Morgan – Image courtesy of VincentCare Victoria

This was higher among gender diverse young people, almost a third of whom were worried about access to safe housing, emphasising that they are a key group requiring support to secure appropriate and safe housing.²

[My biggest challenge was] being kicked out of my mum's house, and still having to struggle with school assignments and my mental health, with little to no support from my teachers.'

— Gender diverse respondent, 17, Queensland

Over 380 young people who responded to the 2022 *Youth Survey* had no fixed address or had lived in a refuge or transitional accommodation in the last year, and another 630 had prior experiences of these.³ Hearing from these young people is particularly important because research indicates that early experiences of homelessness can entrench long-term patterns of homelessness if risk factors are not addressed.⁴

'I was kicked out of home. I had to settle into my new life and manage a difficult relationship with my

family. I receive Centrelink youth allowance, but don't have enough money to pay for everything I need.'

— Female, 17, Queensland

A recent joint study between Mission Australia and Orygen investigated social exclusion and its links to poor mental health outcomes using 2022 *Youth Survey* data. It found that 16 per cent of young people had experienced some form of housing challenge, such as having no fixed address, worrying about feeling safe in their home, and/or having to leave their home for a period because they felt they couldn't go back. Alarmingly, 57 per cent of young people who experienced housing-related social exclusion reported high psychological distress, compared to 24 per cent of young people who did not experience housing challenges. Furthermore, almost half (46 per cent) of young people who reported housing challenges felt lonely 'most of the time', compared to 19 per cent without housing challenges.⁵

[My biggest challenge was] probably getting kicked out of home and being homeless at the age of 17, trying to find support and figuring out how to get my

life back on track with no job and only a bag of clothes.'
— Female, 18, Western Australia

The report made several recommendations, including addressing the impact of housing challenges on social exclusion:

Early intervention and prevention are crucial, including early screening through schools to identify young people at risk of homelessness and link them to support to help them stay in the family home if safe or to find an alternative stable and suitable home.

The National Housing and Homelessness Plan and the next National Housing and Homelessness Agreement must pinpoint clear targets and fund strategies to end homelessness, including specifically to address youth homelessness.

Far greater investment is needed in youth-specific social housing options that provide the right levels of support that young people need. For example, Youth Foyers provide vital housing, education and employment opportunities for young people.⁶

Mission Australia's latest *Youth Survey* and related reports can be accessed here:
<https://www.missionaustralia.com.au/publications/youth-survey>

'Social exclusion' refers to a lack of available resources and opportunities needed to participate in society in a meaningful way. It comprises the domains of: relational difficulties, financial hardships, housing challenges, and edu-employment issues.

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Logan Youth Foyer: The Journey to (Re) Accreditation

Rachael Holmes, Coordinator, Logan Youth Foyer and
Jasmine Lind, Manager, Housing and Homelessness Services, Wesley Mission Queensland

When we think of accreditation, we usually think of compliance, scrutiny, gaps, or challenges, when it is really an opportunity to reflect, refine and celebrate all that is going well. It should be about gathering evidence to demonstrate why a service can confidently claim to be offering high-quality services. It's often harder to 'pat ourselves on the back' or 'toot our own horn' than it is to criticise ourselves and focus on the negatives — and so the very nature of accreditation using an Advantaged Thinking lens continues to challenge the societal norms of deficit-based thinking, to move towards a positive, reflective framework for assessing where we need to focus our resources and assets so we can continue to thrive.

Logan Youth Foyer's journey through accreditation has been far from perfect and linear. We started out in 2009 by interpreting the available information about the Foyer model online and applying it to a funding submission to provide the largest youth accommodation service Logan had seen to date. In Logan at the time, there were three small youth accommodation services: one providing emergency accommodation for under 12 weeks, and two offering up to one year of accommodation. All were shared accommodation, case management supported, traditional supported accommodation and assistance program models.

The Foyer Foundation in Australia was in its own development phase and there were no Australian standards to meet at the time. But we had the foundational elements in mind: affordable, quality housing with a community housing partner which was committed to a housing offer for young people; an integrated

earning and learning offer which was supported by resourcing a registered training organisation partner; training for staff to work alongside young people to build their tools and resources; and, most importantly, youth involvement. An archived community information presentation recorded a milestone goal as 'Formation of a Tenant's Steering Group', recognising young people as partners in our journey from the very beginning.

So, we started off with a strengths-based approach, strong partnerships, youth involvement and opportunities for young people to develop their living skills and life experiences, and we were seeing some wonderful results. As the Foyer Foundation and network grew, we were confident and keen to participate in the accreditation process to certify that we were in fact a strong Foyer. But were we?

Our first attempt at accreditation was a false start! In 2016, we completed three quarters of the accreditation process, including a support visit from Colin Falconer, but in the end, there were too many internal and external pressures to be able to participate in the process as intended. Even so, the network and Colin were very supportive and agreed the foundations were evident. So, our second go in 2018–2019 must have been a breeze, right? No.

Our second attempt starting in 2018 coincided with an investment from the Queensland Government to double the size of our Foyer. Our Youth Involvement program and partnerships really shone bright during this period as we were heavily involved in consultations and designs to ensure the environment matched

the model and young people's needs, but it was an incredibly busy period again, as we were also going through HSQF assessment at the same time. It just seemed like there was never a 'good time' to complete the accreditation process.

Furthermore, the reflection and deep dive into evidence beyond the foundational elements highlighted so many areas for improvement. Maybe we were not as good as we thought? But Colin soon reassured us that our foundation was strong and that, while there were elements that could be strengthened (just like a young person's journey from surviving to thriving), our service had a good plan in place and just needed the opportunities, resources, and encouragement to keep on going, to go from good to great. And so, we were awarded accreditation.

In late 2019, Logan became one of nine Foyers across Australia which had achieved accredited status. But far from being a destination, our first accreditation was considered a stepping-stone to continued growth. Our substantial quality development plan continued to be enacted over the course of the next four years. During this time, our service also experienced substantial changes including:

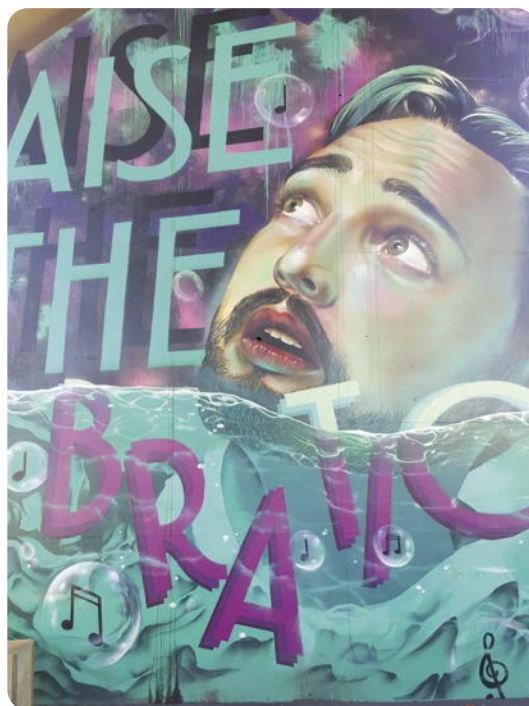
1. Completion of program expansion to reach full capacity of all 40 units. An additional 16 vacancies were added to our program including related increases in intake and assessment.
2. Our staff team grew with additional positions created to support more young people and to allow the program

to transition to 24/7 onsite service delivery.

3. Adapting service delivery during COVID-19 including the challenges of maintaining 24/7 staffing onsite during lockdowns, managing infection prevention control measures for staff and young people as well as impacts of the pandemic on young people's earning and learning opportunities.
4. The impacts of the national rental crisis and cost of living increase on young people, seen both via increased referrals and demand on the Foyer and challenges securing affordable, stable exit options from the Foyer.

However, despite this the team was able to achieve:

1. Full implementation of 24/7 service delivery and rostering.
2. Recruitment and Training: Newly created positions, including involvement of young people in recruitment processes. Managing change processes for existing staff to adapt position descriptions and rosters to new staffing structures and ensuring Advantaged Thinking was fully reflected. This included regular Advantaged Thinking training for the team.
3. Embedding Advantaged Thinking: Including a full review and update to our suite of documentation, policies and procedures, adjustments to practice and campaigning for Advantaged Thinking out to other services and the community.
4. Community Partnerships: Building strong relationships with local community organisations and other stakeholders played a pivotal role in Logan Youth Foyer's journey to our second accreditation experience. Collaborative efforts to deliver Foyer's service



Street art

offers led to a more holistic approach and increased community engagement from young people.

5. Environmental Changes: completion of a large mural and other art to reflect the cultural diversity of those at Foyer, with the aim of creating a safe and inclusive space. Our hub space also displays a range of art works created by young people.

This meant that, by the time we reached our second round of accreditation in 2023, Logan Youth Foyer had intentionally developed in a way that evidenced its clear identity as a Foyer and could adapt to the revised accreditation standards smoothly with a strong offer to young people, whose voices were amplified within the community and included in many more operational elements of the program.

Rather than a bureaucratic audit exercise, Foyers have the opportunity through the accreditation process to mobilise not only staff, but also young people and the community on a journey of growth and continuous improvement. The eight quality standards of accreditation are the catalyst to this and the 'gold standard' for what a Foyer is and what it represents.

Accreditation also provides the opportunity to clearly define what a

Foyer is, and what it is not, which as any Foyer is aware is a major challenge when promoting its work and scouting for potential new recruits. Dilution of the model and the core principles that define it risks outcomes for Foyer's young people as it tries to spread itself too thin or shape itself into what community stakeholders may expect (or hope) it to be. Rather, the purity of the model, adapted into diverse local contexts, can only strengthen what the Foyer offers. Notably, this life changing opportunity is proven to work for young people who are ready to take up the Foyer offer.

Youth Foyers by their nature seek to collaborate and complement other youth housing solutions and youth services through partnerships with shared goals, visions, and aspirations for young people. By working with young people holistically and being part of an active campaign for Advantaged Thinking, other services are welcomed on a pathway where young people are considered assets rather than a problem to be solved. Sharing of knowledge, ideas, and practice rather than competition is a key hallmark of the Foyer network.

In conclusion, the journey to become an accredited Foyer is a transformative one, not only for the program itself but for the Foyer team, and young people and wider community who engage with it. The Advantaged Thinking framework actively challenges existing practices and systems which young people are required to navigate. It is only when staff learn of Advantaged Thinking, adjust their practice, and begin external campaigning do they realise the extent to which deficit-based narratives of young people are normalised.

The addition of accredited Youth Foyers in a community has benefits not only for the young people residing within it, but for the organisations, businesses, and community networks that they reach. There is a clear argument for the development of more Foyers as a platform for young people's positive influence on and contribution to their community which stretches into wider society over time and impacts on a healthy, connected population.

Chapter 4: Youth Foyers and the Response to Youth Homelessness

Embedding Advantaged Thinking

Georgina Kilroy, Director, Accenture Economic Insights

The Advantaged Thinking approach embedded in the Foyer model supports young people to have agency over their own future and establish positive lives for themselves.

The ages of 16 to 24 are a particularly foundational time in everyone's life. But for a young person experiencing homelessness, these years represent a critical juncture that can profoundly influence their life course. Unstable or unsafe accommodation significantly impacts a young person's ability to complete education or training and maintain employment, increasing their chance of life-long disadvantage and a reliance on government services and support.

Foyers directly combat the impact of youth homelessness by offering both a stable, safe place to live as well as integrated supports that help young people finish their studies, search for employment, and develop the skills needed to live independently. Foyer's core philosophy of Advantage Thinking recognises that young people to have a vital contribution to make and access to opportunities and social networks to facilitate social and economic participation are key to enabling this.

The stories of the impact that Foyers have on young people's lives are inspiring. To supplement accounts

of lived experience, Accenture worked with the Foyer Foundation to deliver the *Under One Roof*¹ report which quantified the fiscal benefits of the Foyer model. The study forms a key part of the evidence base demonstrating that Foyers are a successful and cost-effective part of the suite of programs and services to tackle youth homelessness in Australia.

The holistic approach of a Foyer delivers measurable improvements for young people across social outcomes including education, employment, housing, health and justice

The stable housing within a Foyer contributes to improved outcomes for young people, including:

Education and training

Young people in Foyer are 1.6x more likely to achieve a higher level of education when they go through Foyer compared to alternative housing services. This is possible due to close partnerships Foyers have with education support, with many located on TAFE grounds.

Employment and income

65 per cent of Foyer participants gain employment, compared to 51 per cent if they had gone through alternative housing services. This is due in part to the pathways to work and mentorship programs offered at Foyer.

Safe housing and living skills

80 per cent of participants enter into stable housing after leaving a Foyer, of these, 72 per cent enter private housing. Foyer supports this transition by teaching residency and living skills essential to independent living, particularly in shared tenancies.



Street art

The benefits of a young person supported through Foyer are \$172,000 in reduced lifetime costs

By modelling the outcomes of a young person supported through a Foyer, Accenture estimated avoided cost to government services over a lifetime.

The analysis found that for every young person supported through a Foyer compared to alternative housing services, the government saves \$172,000 in reduced service usage over their lifetime.

These savings are broken down across the key areas of impact. Over a lifetime, a young person exiting a Foyer will:

- Incur \$55,000 less in housing costs over their lifetime due to increased likelihood of housing stability on exit compared to similar young people supported through alternative housing services.
- Have reduced reliance on welfare by \$47,000 due to a higher likelihood of being in employment over their lifetime.

- Contribute \$8,000 more tax revenue due to employment outcomes.
- Incur \$27,000 less in health costs due to improved overall health outcomes from stable housing.
- Incur \$35,000 less in justice costs because stable housing and education reduces the likelihood of involvement with the justice system.

State and federal governments receive an approximately equal share of benefits. State government savings come from avoided housing, health and justice expenditure, which translates into an average lifetime saving of \$84,000 per person. Federal government savings come from avoided housing, welfare and health expenditure, which translates into an average lifetime saving of \$89,000 per person.

For every \$1 invested into a Foyer, \$6 in Benefits are Created

On average, supporting a young person in a Foyer costs \$26,000 more than a comparable

period supported through Specialist Homelessness Services (\$18,000 in total). This additional cost covers Foyer's place-based, integrated offering including education, training and support services on top of accommodation.

Based on the incremental cost and the individual and government benefits that accrue over a person's lifetime, Foyers generate an average \$147,000 in net benefits per person, representing a 6 to 1 return on investment. This means that for every extra \$1 invested in Foyers, \$6 are returned in savings to the government, returning the cost of service provision to the government in as little as four years.

The degree to which interventions enables improved individual and fiscal outcomes demonstrates an opportunity to expand the Foyer model across the country, significantly reducing the reliance on government supports whilst improving the lives of many.

Endnote

1. For more detail, see the full *Under One Roof* report: https://foyer.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/FoyerFoundation_UnderOneRoof_FULLReport2023.pdf



Photo provided by Anglicare WA.psd

Solutions Abound in Youth Homelessness

Jan Owen AM, Co-Convenor, FoyerInvest, Co-Chair, Learning Creates Australia



Homelessness remains an unresolved and confounding problem in Australia, the tenth richest country in the world.

Of the 116,427 people who are homeless on any one night in Australia, a staggering 27,680 are 12 to 24 years of age. These young people are largely invisible; the majority sleeping rough and couch surfing, not in school, not in education, not in work and, critically, not in a family nor contributing and benefiting from community.

I cringe when I hear of yet another conference to 'highlight the issues of youth homelessness'. Everyone from service providers, governments, and young people themselves, know 'the issues'. The fact that they must continue to advocate on behalf of young people who are homeless, often the

result of system failure elsewhere, including in child protection, continues to highlight the lack of a shared and clearly articulated social compact in Australia.

As with almost every social issue in Australia today we have been forced to turn to the business sector to raise awareness and funds, to philanthropy to fill funding gaps, to lobbyists to advocate to governments, and we rely on media campaigns and stories to 'enlighten' the broader community.

What if all that time, effort and resource were put into evidence, measuring results, and implementing solutions?



Street art

The point is, we already have the solutions. Decades of work has already been done by serious outfits like the Brotherhood of St Lawrence, St Vincent de Paul, Launch Housing, Mission Australia, Uniting Care, Anglicare, and a raft of other organisations at the local, state and national levels. These organisations have been successfully implementing evidence-based responses to youth homelessness for years.

Take Youth Foyers for example, a model brought to Australia from the United Kingdom over a decade ago. The Youth Foyer model provides student style accommodation for up to 40 young people at a time, with engagement in education and learning as a core requirement, and the chance to focus on some of the things that a traumatic or disrupted early life means you may have missed out on, like life skills, health and wellbeing, and counselling.

The young people at Foyer are not 'homeless clients' but young people who have experienced homelessness. The Foyer model focuses on their strengths and capabilities, resilience, and aspirations in a positive, holistic, and safe environment. Two years at Foyer enables young people to build social capital and create a pathway to future employment, secure accommodation, and a better sense of wellbeing. The impact is phenomenal with over 90 per cent of young people achieving their education and employment goals.

There are currently 16 Accredited Foyers across the country with an aim to build 50 Foyers by 2030. It doesn't solve for the entirety of complex needs, but it does contribute one globally evidenced solution with a view to preventing the long-term scarring effects of broken connections from family, education, and community for young people.

What is a Youth Foyer?

Foyers provide a point in time service that enable young people in transition to develop and achieve educational and employment pathways, exiting in a sustainable way from welfare and service dependence to independence. While there are programs in both the education and homelessness sectors that seek to support young people experiencing disadvantage with their education or accommodation across Australia, there are almost no fully integrated service models focused on education and employment outcomes.

The key to the model lies in the provision of stable accommodation for up to two years in a supported, congregate living environment. For young people who are unable to rely on family support in this critical developmental stage, Foyers

provide the time, personalised attention, mentoring, coaching and access to opportunities needed to build fulfilling, independent and productive lives.

A Youth Foyer is much more than a supported accommodation facility, or welfare program. Utilising an 'Advantaged Thinking' approach, Foyers seek to tap into the goals and ambitions of young people and nurture their talents while building skills for life. At its heart, the Foyer model is based on the life-changing proposition that the most constructive thing we can do for young people is to ensure they become educated, employable, and empowered so they can build better lives for themselves and achieve genuine independence.

Youth Foyers are just one response, however. Across Australia, innovative work is taking place in affordable and social housing, Housing Labs, impact investing and more, and they all have a part to play in addressing and preventing homelessness.

The future of social innovation with impact is collaboration; with consortiums and alliances being built within and across sectors to ensure the most effective solutions are implemented and embedded in government policy. The purpose of this work is the simple, non-groundbreaking proposition that every person in Australia should have a safe and affordable place to live and work, where they have a family and a community to belong to.

The only thing missing is a shared, all-Australian goal to eradicate homelessness and a genuine belief that it is possible. In doing so, we will restore hope and trust in our shared humanity and our ability to care for and about each other.



Street art

Chapter 5: The Work of Youth Foyers

Youth2Independence

Lorri Clarke, Communications Officer, Anglicare Tasmania Inc.

Trinity Hill is a Youth2Independence (Y2I) facility managed by Anglicare Tasmania and funded by the Tasmanian Government's statutory housing authority, Homes Tasmania. Trinity Hill has 46 units and is located in the centre of Hobart.

In the past 12 months, 27 students have made a successful transition from Trinity Hill into long-term, stable accommodation.

Rearna, one of these young people, says:

'Trinity Hill helped me a lot with growing my independence. When I left Trinity Hill, I still felt support with the staff constantly checking on me and asking if I needed anything. Trinity Hill is a great place where I felt safe and supported.'

Anglicare Tasmania manages two other sites including the 25-unit Eveline House in Devonport and the 50-unit Thyne House in Launceston. A second site in Hobart is set to open in December and will also be managed by Anglicare. A fourth site in Burnie is scheduled for completion in 2025.

All the Y2I facilities are based on the Education First Youth Foyer (EFYF) framework for young people aged 16 to 24.

According to the 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census, the number of young people experiencing homelessness in Tasmania increased from 405 in 2016 to 581 in 2021. Consistent with the EFYF approach, the Y2I facilities integrate education, employment and support for

young people experiencing homelessness or facing homelessness. By focusing on the six service offers, the program aims to build the young person's independence so they can successfully move onto the next phase of their life when they exit the program. The service offers are education, employment, health and wellbeing, social connections, civic participation, stable housing and living skills.

Advantaged Thinking underpins the Y2I program. It helps to create opportunities for success by focusing on the strengths of each young person. From day one at a Y2I facility, discussions begin with a young person about their existing capabilities and their goals for the future — and this information is used to create case plans. The staff at Trinity Hill describe fostering an environment where they believe in the hopes and dreams of their students and support them to achieve their goals.

Y2I facilities in Tasmania work alongside TasTAFE to provide the Certificate I in Developing Independence. This introductory certificate sees young people explore opportunities for further education with TasTAFE and other providers.

Zack's Story

Zack moved into Trinity Hill two years ago and describes his experience with the Y2I program as a crucial 'second chance'.

'When I first came to Trinity Hill, it was me and a backpack and no clue which direction to go. Trinity Hill helped me pick up the pieces and set

out a plan for my life, they helped me to rediscover my values and ambitions and gave me support to achieve each of my goals.

When I first arrived, I was disengaged with education as my biggest priorities at that time were having somewhere safe to stay, finding food and having stability. Reflecting back on the last two years, Trinity Hill and its staff have provided the safety, the stability and the role model that I never had.

'When the world gets uncertain, as it often does, knowing that I can rely on the one constant of stability through Trinity Hill has allowed me to use my two years to focus on myself, growing both personally and professionally.'

Zack is currently working full time and preparing to transition out of Trinity Hill.

'Trinity Hill provided me the beginning of a new start and all the tools and resources for me to embark on the next chapter of my life. In the near future my ultimate goal is move interstate and I am confident that the support of Trinity Hill has prepared me for that in a way that me by myself could never.'

The Y2I facilities are having an important impact for young Tasmanians: addressing youth homelessness and providing opportunities for young people to build essential life skills, self-confidence and contribute to their community.

The Gold Coast Youth Foyer – Our Journey So Far

Matthew Slavin, Team Leader, Gold Coast Youth Foyer

In August 2021, the landscape of youth homelessness support on the Gold Coast reached a significant milestone with the long-awaited opening of Queensland's first purpose-built Youth Foyer. The State Government entirely funded the construction of this \$12.3 million investment through its Queensland Housing Strategy 2017-2027.

The Gold Coast Foyer is a multi-storey complex, offering 40 one-bedroom apartments strategically placed in the heart of Southport, just a few kilometres north of Surfers Paradise. The location affords residents access to most major amenities and important access to employment and education facilities by way of well-serviced public transport.

Delivered in partnership between the Gold Coast Youth Service, Community Housing Limited, and the Queensland Government, the opening of the Foyer was much anticipated as it provided an additional 40 beds for the Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS), which effectively doubled the region's capacity for homeless young people aged between 16 and 25.

At the time of opening, the community was grappling with the emerging housing and affordability crisis, which was exacerbated by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The launch also coincided with the 2021 Census, which disclosed that, out of the 1,829 homeless individuals in the Gold Coast, 322 were young people aged between

12 and 24. The opening of the largest 24/7 supported youth accommodation facility on the Gold Coast was a beacon of hope to a sector that was going through uncertain times.

Excited, but acutely aware of the responsibility we bore, we went straight to work, going to the sector to articulate what the Foyer model was about and how it sat within our ecosystem of supports on the coast. These conversations were crucial. They fostered understanding and collaboration, ensuring that when we reached capacity it was with a diverse mix of young people from across the sector. This included individuals from Youth Justice, Child Safety, Queensland Health, local schools, rehabilitation centres, domestic violence services, and other Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS).

The task of onboarding and implementing back-of-house policies was delicately managed alongside the enthusiasm and prospects of having a new Foyer. We were fortunate to receive support from local politicians, businesses, service providers, and community members, which provided us with a platform to share our growing understanding of the Foyer model and Advantaged Thinking. This period also marked the successful launch of our mentor program, boasting a diverse group of mentors, including business owners, state MPs, and students.

While this work was being done in the background, the devoted Foyer team were working hand in hand with the young people who were embarking on this new Foyer journey too. These young individuals were not just program participants, but active contributors to all facets of the program, taking a stake in a pioneering initiative that aims to springboard young people at risk of experiencing homelessness onto thriving futures.

Their engagement ranged from contributing to the formulation of house rules to developing daily routines and programs. The early commitment we received from these young people was a testament not only to the staff's efforts but also to the genuine and tangible interest shown by community members, business professionals, and political leaders. Despite some initial scepticism from young people, the evident interest from the community soon convinced the participants that the



Carrying A Queenslander through the snow in a shirt and shorts
by Fintan Magee

community truly believed in their potential, challenging some of their preconceived notions about the community. These experiences deepened the young people's buy-in, which in turn helped drive results.

With growing momentum, the Gold Coast Youth Service decided it was important to embark on the Foyer Foundation's accreditation process to keep us accountable. It was a decision we did not regret, achieving accreditation by December 2022. The process proved to be invaluable, highlighting the necessity for our service to fully integrate all the elements that contribute to a successful Foyer. For the young people, it ensured that the theories and approaches we claimed to use were not just rhetoric, but tangible outcomes that they could see and feel. This tangibility, stemming from collaboration and accountability, helped establish a culture of genuine hope. This culture safeguarded our Foyer through hard times, inevitable in any community, not least a community of young people with unique challenges working hard to forge an advantaged future!

The journey of the Gold Coast's Foyer has been a rewarding one. To date, we have had the privilege of supporting 63 young individuals on their path to independence. Of the 23 young people who have transitioned from the program, 19 transitioned into the private housing market, while the remaining participants have either returned to family or moved on to other long-term social housing options.

The powerful stories we have seen to date have been truly inspiring — stories of young people commencing their Foyer journey pushing trollies and going on to become licensed real estate agents handling multi-million-dollar properties. We have travelled with young people who have entered the Foyer from a rehabilitation centre and transitioned some 12 months later with a diploma, employment, safe social connections, and a home in the private market.

These stories are a testament to the young people's strengths and assets and how the Foyer model alongside an invested community can help 'open talents' in young people.



Eye Hear Things, Tarik Dallinger-Dimizio

Foyer Broome Design Project

Philippa Boldy, Director Services, Anglicare WA and
Jethro Sercombe, Director Innovation Practice, Innovation Unit

'What would it take to adapt and design a Foyer specifically for young Aboriginal people from the Kimberley, to be based in Broome?'

This was the design question tackled in 2020 and 2021 to develop a proposal for an Aboriginal*-specific youth Foyer model for the Kimberley.

With nearly ten years' experience delivering Foyer Oxford in Perth, Foundation Housing and Anglicare WA partnered with Kimberley-based Nirrumbuk Aboriginal Corporation to develop a community-informed business case for a Foyer in Broome. This project was funded by the Western Australian (WA) Government's Northwest Aboriginal Housing Fund, which took a developmental approach to building business cases for potential housing projects in the northwest of WA. Although the business case with the WA Government was ultimately not successful, there was rich learning from the design process which can serve to inform the future of Foyers in Australia.

The participation of West Kimberley Aboriginal young people, community members and Elders was considered critical to ensure that the design of a Foyer model of support and the proposed purpose-built construction reflected key cultural considerations for this target group. Foyer models have demonstrated significant positive outcomes with young people in Australia with the critical mix of support, housing and opportunity allowing young people to thrive into the future. However, the consortium recognised that placing a Foyer model into Broome based on other Foyers from urban locations would not be fit for purpose in the Kimberley context.

The Innovation Unit was contracted to work alongside the Consortium team members to undertake a co-design process, applying Human Centred Design methods, to explore our design question. The process was undertaken over a five-month period in 2020 and was led by a design team of ten people, including young Aboriginal people, local community members and service providers and consortium representatives. The design process included co-design workshops, and dedicated input from local Yawuru elders. A literature review complemented this local input.

The design process revealed seven important key insights and service design principles that needed deep consideration in adapting a Foyer service model in this context:

1. Support transitions into the Foyer

This insight illustrated the need for recognition that transitioning into

the Foyer and away from family, particularly for Aboriginal young people coming from outside Broome, will be a complex and sometimes risky proposition. Codesign recommended the development of relational referral and application pathways with service providers and community leaders as well as transitional accommodation opportunities for those relocating.

2. Bicultural aspirations

When young people spoke of those people they most admire, they are people who demonstrate success in 'two worlds'. Inspired by the Recognition Space Framework which has gained traction in native title and housing contexts this proposes an adaptation to the central 'Foyer deal' to include young people's most important cultural supports in community.

3. Cultural Safety through strong Cultural Governance

This insight reflects an acknowledgement that many of the Foyer models central tenets could be conceived as holding a Western cultural bias, and that this may bring cultural risks. These risks may be mitigated through the provision of cultural navigation services to young people to ensure strong connection to kin and country, through robust cultural governance systems, and through clear engagement of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations in the Foyer delivery.

4. A calm space of my own

A calm space of my own: a response to an overwhelming desire from young people to have spaces that provide the focus they need to find their future pathways. A Foyer for Broome will ensure that the built form supports these desires, and that young



Leah moves in to her own little apartment at Foyer Broome. It's just hers, with her own bathroom and kitchen. It's really calm, no humbugging, and feels safe.

people are supported to manage the boundary of family obligation, particularly with visitor management.

5. The security of available support

The security of available support: young people in the Kimberley exhibit significant skill in navigating the complex worlds they inhabit. Nevertheless, a range of supports, including those available 24/7 are likely necessary to enable long term success for a group of young people who present with a number of intersecting needs. A focus on literacy and numeracy, independent living skills and access to the arts will be necessary to provide a holistic support package.

6. Role modelling: strength through peers

Role modelling, strength through peers: young people in codesign described the instrumental role that role models had played in their own development, and the desire for this to be a part of service delivery. Initiatives that encourage formal and informal role modelling, either by fellow residents or younger staff members, should be considered.

7. Entrepreneurial in uncovering opportunity

The same conditions that create the expressed need for a Foyer type service provision in Broome, that is, a lack of local housing, also creates one of the greatest barriers to future success. Finding secure exit points from the Foyer provision is likely to be challenging, requiring the Foyer consortium to consider entrepreneurial methods that might be employed to secure housing provision over the longer-term.

The Foyer Broome Design Project also produced additional insights on the principles that should be considered for the construction — or built form — for a purpose-built Foyer Project in Broome. These insights provided guidance on how the built form would complement the support of the Foyer program and provide a culturally safe environment for young residents.

8. A welcoming entrance

A welcoming entrance is important for a Foyer Broome to make residents feel comfortable and safe. This includes feeling culturally safe, which could be promoted through a 'Welcome to Country' message

being symbolically embedded in the building in collaboration with Yawuru Elders. The entrance should feel open, familiar, and help to map social connections. It is important that the entrance not be dominated by car parking. From the entrance, wayfinding should not rely on English literacy (signage) due to diverse language skills. This means the site must contain clear paths, visual cues, and landmarks to assist with confident navigation.

9. Social information in the building

A sense of belonging for residents can be built by embedding (ongoing) social information in the architecture. This could be through recording where residents are from (for example, on a map, on door signs, on an evolving mural), or by allowing residents to leave a permanent mark in the built environment (for example by planting a tree, contributing to an artwork, helping to design or build something). This may mean that some parts of the architecture, interior design and landscaping should be left 'un-finished', creating an opportunity for future residents to contribute to the permanent environment.





10. Not feeling trapped

The design of a Foyer Broome should help residents and visitors to feel that they have a high level of personal autonomy — including the ability to leave or take a temporary break from a situation. In the workshops, this idea was connected with easy wayfinding (that doesn't rely on written signage that may exclude residents with low literacy or for whom English is not a first language), the blurring of indoor and outdoor spaces, a feeling of 'open-ness' throughout the site, and the nesting of smaller spaces within a bigger environment. Overall, interior spaces should be 'shallow' in relation to the wider site, allowing residents to feel close to the outdoors, be near multiple exits, and access opportunities for withdrawal or to take a break.

11. Meeting and yarning options

A Foyer Broome should provide multiple meeting spaces of various sizes, levels of formality, and degrees of privacy. Workshop participants highlighted that many 'meetings' could be yarns within informal environments, for example in a garden, while walking, or around a fire pit. Privacy (both visual and auditory) should be a strong consideration in the provision of meeting and yarning spaces. This includes consideration of

the threshold between these settings and other social areas, as it was identified that residents may need time to be alone before rejoining a bigger group.

12. High and low energy common spaces

Common spaces were described as an important feature for a Foyer Broome, that could support many social and practical functions. These can be divided into two main categories: high and low energy. Participants indicated that high energy social spaces should support outdoor cooking, basketball, fishing preparation, art and creativity, and music (both playing and listening). A low energy space should help residents to feel calm (for example through sensory regulation strategies) and connected with Country. These functions should be adjacent to a calm study space.

13. Water as part of built environment

Water is an important consideration for the design of a Foyer Broome. Discussions in the workshops suggest that water should be considered in terms of practical management of extreme weather (for example the need for significant drainage capacity during heavy rains), sensory properties (for example for cooling off during hot weather, creating a

relaxing soundscape), and for its social value (feeling a connection to Country, creating a point of interest to gather around). There may be opportunities for the strategic design of drainage in the built environment to also deliver the described therapeutic and social benefits.

14. Independent living and outdoor spaces

Living spaces within a Foyer Broome should promote independence and strong personal boundaries. Units should be single story (though possibility for two story if there is no upstairs balcony) with high ceilings, natural lighting, views to nature and good ventilation. These spaces should feel light, open and 'warm' (in a symbolic sense). Residents should have access to private outdoor space that allows casual social interaction with neighbours when desired. This outdoor space should be strategically designed so as to provide a buffer between units to accommodate (though not promote) likely smoking habits. While most participants expressed a strong preference for independent living, some young people may struggle with social isolation. This should be accommodated through flexible sleeping/sharing options.

There are still hopes that there will one day be a Foyer in Broome, based on these design principles. The voices of young people and Aboriginal community members are strong through these elements, and when applied will create a culturally safe, aspirational community for young people in one of the most remote, culturally unique and beautiful regions of Australia.

Full design reports for service design and the built form can be found at the links below:

Foyer Broome Design Report: https://www.anglicarewa.org.au/docs/default-source/who-we-are/research--housing-and-homelessness/foyer-youth-housing-project-kimberley-2022.pdf?sfvrsn=91d80685_2

Foyer Broome Design Principles for the Built Form: https://www.anglicarewa.org.au/docs/default-source/who-we-are/research--housing-and-homelessness/foyer-broome-design-principles-2022--a5-bonus-booklet.pdf?sfvrsn=ea211db1_4

* Aboriginal people in the West Kimberley involved in this project requested the use of the term 'Aboriginal' as opposed to 'First Nations' or 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' for this project.

Junction-Tiny Homes-Foyer

Claire Taylor, Senior Manager, Growth and Innovation, Junction

Young people leaving care require a home that makes them feel safe, nurtured and provides them with the skills needed for adulthood. Young people leaving care should be held and supported by the community, given opportunities to heal and learn and move on to successful and fulfilling adult lives.

Without integrated support that helps young people transition to independence, poor outcomes are likely to continue for young people leaving out-of-home care. One in three young people who leave care become homeless, some become involved in justice systems, unemployed, or new parents before they are ready. The termination of care at 18 is not consistent with parenting in the community which sees most young people remaining in their homes until much later.

Junction has designed a unique solution to provide housing and support through the Tiny Homes

Campus so that young people can flourish into adulthood. Through Junction's experience in the housing sector, as well as residential care service delivery, we are uniquely positioned to provide an integrated housing, support and place solution for young care leavers. Junction's intervention proposes innovation done simply in three prongs:

1. Housing typology

Junction is investing in a Tiny Homes Campus which will be used to provide a housing, support and place-first Foyer response for young people leaving out-of-home care in South Australia. Stage one of the campus will consist of 10 self-contained pods, a community hall, social pavilion, storage and communal open space on land leased to Junction by the SA Housing Authority. The support is delivered through the Supported Independent Living Services (SILS) program which is funded by the Department for Child Protection (DCP). Junction

will evaluate the success of stage one to determine whether stage 2 will be delivered on the same site with an additional 10 tiny homes.

The site will be safe for young people and will only be able to be accessed with swipe cards. With the assistance of the CREATE Foundation, Junction will work with the first cohort of young people to live in the Tiny Homes to set the expectations for how the site will run. The tenancy management aspect of the Tiny Homes will be provided by Housing Managers from the Housing and Communities Team with service provided by the SILS team in the Child and Youth Portfolio. This separation of functions is useful in operationalising The Deal — the agreement between young people and Junction.

As a community housing provider, Junction have a commitment to provide housing for young people across the portfolio, so that once young people reach 18 years old,





they can transition to a home in the community. This means that Junction can support more young people aged 16 to 18 to transition from residential care or foster care into the tiny homes.

2. Support — Foyer model for out-of-home care

The support will be based on the highly successful Foyer model which has all of the right ingredients to ensure that young people have a place to belong, learn the skills they need and be valued through the Advantaged Thinking Approach. Young people will be able to access a 'menu' of options to support their self-directed learning and employment journey to underpin their strengths and talents. This will be delivered in partnership as a learning alternative for young people who require something different than your average school.

The education offering is designed for young people who want to change their world, to dare to dream and discover who they are, as well as their unique gifts, talents and strengths.

To figure out what a meaningful, fulfilling and joyful life is to them. The Tiny Homes Campus has the community hall for learning onsite and is partnering with a Special Assistance School in the city.

3. Place-based solution

The site of the Tiny Homes Campus has been carefully chosen to be adjacent to the Tonsley Innovation District with a TAFE and University and innovation start-ups, close to a transport corridor including trains and buses and to other amenities such as a hospital and services.

First Nations young people represent over 30 per cent of the population in out-of-home care. Junction are partnering with the Kaurna Living Cultural Centre to provide an 'On Country' approach for all young people so that they can learn about Country before colonisation and so that they can feel culturally safe. Kaurna Elders are providing Junction with the story of place, and will advise us about Kaurna language that might be relevant to the site and for the name of the Campus.

This will also influence the design of the site and provide ideas for public art using First Nations' artists.

Impact Measurement

Alongside the delivery of the program Junction will be measuring the hypothesis of the program and the activities that sit under:

1. Housing
2. Support
3. Place through the Impact Framework.

The information will enable Junction to evaluate the success of the program and whether it has had a positive impact on the lives of young people.

About Junction

Junction is a social enterprise working with over 10,000 South Australians every year through housing, community services and through place-first initiatives. Junction is ambitious in making a real impact in the lives of children, young people, families and communities. As a community housing provider Junction recognises that safe and decent housing is at the heart of positive life outcomes for young people.

'Our Place': A Modified Foyer Model in Canberra — 12 Years On

Nicole Molyneux and Siobhan Cosgrave, Community Development Officer and Manager at Our Place, Barnardos

In 2012, Siobhan Cosgrave, the Manager of 'Our Place' Youth Foyer in Canberra, penned an article for *Parity* to introduce Our Place as a modified foyer model.¹ This current article serves as a follow up to that article: a report of where we are now, 12 years on. Looking back, there are mixed feelings that 'a lot has changed and not much has changed,' as Siobhan puts it. In terms of what has not changed, Our Place continues to strive for its mission to empower young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness in developing fundamental life skills, achieving their educational aspirations, and enhancing their economic and social involvement. In terms of what has changed, Barnardo's partnership with Anglicare concluded in 2016 and Our Place has recently transitioned from its status as 'foyer-like' to now achieving official Foyer Foundation accreditation.

For those unaware, Our Place is a medium-term accommodation service located in an apartment complex in Braddon, ACT, with 13 shared units that can accommodate up to 25 residents at a time. To qualify for residency, young people must be aged between 16 and 23, experiencing or at risk of homelessness, capable of living independently, motivated to work towards their educational and employment goals, and receiving Centrelink benefits. Referrals to Our Place are made through OneLink and applicants must undergo an interview assessment with our staff. As a part of their tenancy, residents must engage in full-time education or work-based training and can stay for up to two years. Beyond providing a roof over their heads, Our Place strives to offer a stable living environment and support to residents in acquiring the life skills they need

to make a successful transition to independence. This support includes case management and tenancy assistance, provided by dedicated Youth Support Workers, and a community development program facilitated by a dedicated Community Development Officer.

As outlined in Siobhan's previous article, a mere eight weeks after its launch in 2011, Our Place had achieved full occupancy, hosting a heterogenous range of residents including young people from diverse cultural backgrounds, young parents, and an equal distribution of young cisgender women and men. At the time of writing, Our Place is currently accommodating 20 young people; by contrast, our current cohort is rather homogenous, consisting mostly of White-Anglo, young cisgender women aged 16 to 19 years old. Another aspect that has changed at Our Place is that transitioning out has become more challenging, which is primarily attributed to the cost-of-living crisis and the fact that the private rental market has become largely unattainable for the majority of Our Place residents due to housing affordability in the ACT.

Notably, as previously outlined by Siobhan, Our Place has faced some distinct challenges over the years that distinguish us from conventional

foyer models. For instance, Our Place still lacks the typical features of purpose-built foyers, such as dormitory-style accommodation or on-site educational facilities. As a result, our residents live in two-bedroom shared apartments and travel offsite to attend their places of study or work. At the time of writing, most of our residents are in high school working towards completing their Year 11 and 12 certificates, while some others are engaged in vocational training or university. At times, due to our residents' busy schedules and the need to travel to their places of study or work, we find it quite challenging to engage them in community activities or case management. A recent concern that has arisen for us at Our Place is the potential for residents to become disengaged from their education due to a variety of factors, including mental health issues, underscoring the need for proactive efforts from our staff to help re-engage them in their educational goals or helping them to explore alternative educational paths to ensure they meet the requirements of the Foyer program.

The context of living in shared apartments continues to present persistent challenges for Our Place. The absence of dormitory-style housing not only hinders the development of an authentic Foyer



Photo supplied by Barnardos

experience but also leads to further issues for young people who have already endured complex trauma. These additional issues include the potential for heightened conflict and tenancy-related issues. For instance, Our Place residents are responsible for paying their own rent, gas, and electricity bills, which are shared between housemates, which sometimes raises issues when bills are not paid on time. Furthermore, disputes between housemates can arise due to several factors, such as disagreements over the cleanliness of shared spaces, excessive guest visits, or the unauthorised use of a housemate's possessions or food. Consequently, our Youth Support Workers invest a significant amount of time in resolving conflicts between residents, in addition to more broadly mediating disputes between neighbours and addressing apartment maintenance concerns. Most unfortunately, these issues can be so severe that they often divert the attention of young people away from their primary objectives of the program.

Turning to more positive developments, we are delighted to share that, in 2017, Our Place obtained an additional space that now functions as our Community Room, and our staff office has been relocated to a roomier onsite space. The Community Room is now equipped with a couch, bean bags, large television, Nintendo Switch, table tennis table, art materials, 'study nook' with laptop and printer, food pantry, kitchen facilities, and bathroom. There is also a second room that serves as both a meeting room and storage area. In this room, we recently upcycled a circular table, which was artistically embellished by one of our talented residents. Hosting events and activities, as well as using the room for leisure and study, has become significantly more common since the opening of the Community Room.

Furthermore, since arriving in May 2023, the new Community Development Officer — Nicole Molyneux — has worked hard to make the Community Room more functional and accessible for residents and staff to use by introducing a booking system. However, constraints still exist with the co-use of the



Photo supplied by Barnardos

space, in which it is difficult to use the room as both a community and meeting room simultaneously.

Since her arrival, Nicole has further dedicated significant effort to introducing additional social and community-based activities while incorporating an Advantaged Thinking approach into the broader Youth Homelessness program, which operates within a case management framework. Nicole has forged collaborations with numerous local individuals and organisations, such as local art therapist Sally Holliday, who has been conducting art workshops for Our Place residents covering mediums such as collage and clay. Nicole has other programs in development, including a creative conflict resolution program that has been dubbed 'HOPE' (Helping Our Place Evolve). Drawing inspiration from non-violent communication principles, this program's objective will be to empower and educate residents on handling life's challenges and conflicts in a peaceful manner. The proposed program will encompass one-on-one mentoring, in-house mediation, circle work, and conflict resolution action plans. At the time of writing, this program is in the initial planning phase, and Nicole is upskilling through the completion of the Basic Alternatives to Violence (AVP) workshop and aspires to finish the Advanced and Train the Trainer training by early 2024.

As Siobhan further outlined in her 2011 article, The Rotary Club of Canberra had initially expressed interest in providing mentoring services to young people at Our Place's inception; however, the mentoring program consequently had limited success and evolved into other forms of support. Now, with Nicole onboard, we have plans to implement

a new mentoring program for Our Place residents. While this program is still in the works, we have plans to engage Our Place alumni as well as community volunteers to provide strengths-based mentoring and coaching to our residents. We have further planned to become an Award Centre for the prestigious Duke of Edinburgh Award, which will further focus on fostering and nurturing the interests, hobbies, and skills of Our Place residents.

Over the years, Our Place has held strongly onto its core mission while adapting to challenging circumstances. Our commitment to providing a safe and supportive environment for residents, helping them develop essential life skills, pursue educational goals, and enhance their economic and social participation, remains unwavering. The challenges posed by the ever-shifting landscape of youth housing and homelessness have underscored the need for continuous adaptation and innovation. As Our Place navigates various complexities, we remain dedicated to overcoming these hurdles. Our determination to provide essential support, both in terms of case management and community development, signifies a commitment to the holistic well-being of the young people we serve. The future of Our Place holds exciting prospects, including plans for a creative conflict resolution and mentoring program.

While the road ahead may be challenging, it is also filled with the potential for positive transformation and the empowerment of those we serve.

Endnote

1. Cosgrave S 2012, 'Our Place', *Parity*, vol. 25, no. 3, p. 41.

Foyer Central: An Innovative Youth Housing Program Providing Flexible and Trauma-Informed Support to Young People with a History of Care

Dr Victoria Flanagan, Principal Policy Officer, Uniting NSW.ACT

There are a number of Foyer programs currently operating in Australia, but Foyer Central is the first (both in Australia and overseas) to work directly with young people who have a history of out-of-home care. Foyer Central opened in March 2021 and is run by Uniting NSW.ACT in partnership with St George Community Housing, Social Ventures Australia and the New South Wales (NSW) Government.

The program provides affordable accommodation to vulnerable young people, while also offering targeted education, training and employment support. The aim is to help residents establish a pathway to a successful, independent life. Located in the inner-Sydney suburb of Chippendale, Foyer Central contains 53 modern studio apartments where young people aged 18 to 22 can live independently for a period of up to two years.

In addition to being the first Foyer for young people with a care history, Foyer Central is also the first Foyer to be funded by a social impact bond (also known as an outcomes-based contracting arrangement). This bond, which was established by Social Ventures Australia, enabled private investors to contribute \$7 million of upfront capital to fund the delivery of the program.¹ Uniting then entered a contract with the NSW Government to deliver the Foyer Central program over a 10-year period. Performance is measured against a set of outcomes achieved by a specific cohort (that is, young care leavers at risk of homelessness). The program's success — which is linked to outcome payments from the NSW Government —

is thus based on the number of young people who achieve stable housing, engage in education or are sustainably employed for the 12-month period after they exit.

Past Trauma and Complex Needs

Most of Foyer Central's young residents have experienced trauma and significant disruptions in their lives. Although the numbers of children and young people in out-of-home care have been slowly decreasing in NSW over the past decade, this has resulted in a situation where children are removed at a later age and with more pronounced and complex trauma. Very few of the young people at Foyer Central have been able to maintain connections with their families and many have physical, mental health and developmental issues as a result of experiencing abuse and/or trauma. The 2018 *Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study: Outcomes of Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care* found that at the time of leaving care:

- over 30 per cent of the young people who participated in the study had clinical behavioural problems
- over 50 per cent had language development delays
- just under 50 per cent had below the normal range of non-verbal reasoning skills.²

These types of cognitive impairments, coupled with trauma, affect a young person's self-care and coping skills. Without a substantial amount of support, it is difficult to make a successful transition to independent living. For young people at Foyer Central,

the trauma caused by childhood experiences is often compounded by the circumstances immediately preceding their enrolment — where they have been homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Adapting Practice: Integrating Advantaged Thinking with Trauma-Informed Care

Foyer Central uses the Advantaged Thinking model developed by Colin Falconer and endorsed by the Foyer Federation. Advantaged Thinking focuses on identifying, developing and investing in the skills and capabilities of young people so that they can establish productive and successful lives.³ Young people at Foyer Central are provided with individual support from a dedicated Youth Development Coach. Coaches use Advantaged Thinking to assist young people to access opportunities for their personal development, health and wellbeing, education and employment.

The prevalence of trauma and mental health issues in residents means that coaches need to find a way of incorporating Advantaged Thinking with Trauma-Informed Care. Identifying the most effective way to do this is still very much a work in progress — but it signals an innovative and exciting development in the evolution of Foyer Central's practice and service provision.

The key principles of Trauma-Informed Care are neatly aligned with Advantaged Thinking. Trauma-Informed Care involves meeting client needs in a safe, collaborative and compassionate manner, as well as building on the strengths and resilience of clients in the context of their

environments and communities. Both models are underpinned by the concepts of agency and empowerment and are inherently strengths-based and person-focused.

However, trauma can have a profound impact on a young person and their experience of the world. Individuals who have experienced trauma are 'at an elevated risk for substance use disorders, including abuse and dependence; mental health problems (for example, depression and anxiety symptoms or disorders, impairment in relational/ social and other major life areas, other distressing symptoms); and physical disorders and conditions, such as sleep disorders.'⁴ Within a residential housing program like Foyer Central, which is dependent on young people being able to think positively about their goals for the future, these behaviours and issues can present a challenge. Working with young people who have experienced the care system requires a clear understanding of complex trauma, and even service providers working in the sector may misinterpret trauma-related symptoms as 'challenging behaviours'. As a result, staff may experience increased stress and emotional reactivity themselves in response to exposure to vicarious trauma. This adds to the complexity of service delivery in this space.

A significant challenge at Foyer Central is that young people affected by trauma frequently develop 'disadvantaged mindsets'. This type of thinking is characterised by negative self-talk and feelings of worthlessness, and needs to be acknowledged, respected and addressed before young people can move forward with their lives. John McPhilbin, a coach at Foyer Central, observes that, *'time and again, fearful and avoidant behaviours get in the way of young people engaging in the Advantaged Thinking domains that coaches use to support the transition to independence. Applying a trauma lens can help coaches find ways to address and respectfully challenge trauma-related thinking and behaviours, as well as encourage positive risk taking. But this can be very challenging, especially when the young person has complex needs, such as co-occurring mental health and drug or alcohol issues.'*

Amba Freestone, also a coach, adds that many young people are simply in survival mode when they arrive: *'Advantaged Thinking is very future-focused, but working in a trauma-informed way means that we can play a role in helping young people acknowledge their past and understand how it has shaped them. The majority of our young people need to address their health and wellbeing before they can even start to think about the future.'*

Complex trauma can lead to the development of sleep disturbances or feelings of worthlessness/ helplessness, or anxiety and hypervigilance in the long term. Furthermore, trauma can subside or reduce only to be re-triggered in the future. Coaches consequently need to develop a deep understanding of their young person's trauma background and triggers.

Coaches need to be patient and persistent in their efforts to support young people in their journey towards a more optimistic world view. This is where 'The Deal' (the ethos behind the Foyer model) comes into play. It reinforces the concept of 'something for something': young people are provided with affordable housing in exchange for actively participating in the program.⁵ The challenge for coaches, says John, is in overcoming any barriers or resistance that arise from mental health and/or trauma related issues, hence the need for trauma-informed practice.

Foyer Central has introduced a number of measures to address the impacts of trauma. We are the only Foyer to use therapeutic in-house supports as part of our service model and young people can access onsite psychological and counselling services. A drug-and-alcohol counsellor also visits on a weekly basis. We have also established a Complex Needs Panel, which enables treating psychologists to work collaboratively with Foyer Central staff. However, linking residents to external support services (for complex mental health or drug and alcohol issues) is often problematic because of the high demand and long waitlists.

Coaches have shown considerable initiative in the ways they use to blend Advantaged Thinking with a trauma-informed lens. This includes using psychoeducation, a technique that helps people understand trauma and its effects on the body — with the ultimate aim of managing it more effectively. One coach is also currently in the process of developing a trauma self-assessment tool for staff, which would enable coaches to reflect on their own trauma-informed practice and identify areas for improvement.

Conclusion

The long-term impacts of being removed from birth parents as a child and placed in care are complex and varied. It is therefore essential that services delivered to this cohort of young people are trauma informed. Foyer Central is committed to delivering a program that integrates Advantaged Thinking with Trauma-Informed Care and provides young people with the skills and support they need to negotiate choices about living independently. A necessary part of this process is assisting young people to recognise and manage their trauma — which, together with other supports available at Foyer Central, can help set them on a path towards a stable and happy future.

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From Surviving to Thriving: The Impact of Foyer on Young People's Wellbeing and Future

Mikhaela Hamilton, Case Worker, Melbourne City Mission Foyer Program

The Melbourne City Mission (MCM) Foyer program grants an opportunity for early intervention to long term homelessness. Young people between the age of 16 to 25 are provided three years of stable accommodation and wrap-around support. It incorporates Advantaged Thinking and the Healing Orientated Framework (HOF) to take an optimistic view through positive action and consistent support.

These frameworks assist youth development coaches to be able to support young people to access and advance their education and career journey. Taking up these opportunities can be challenging because of young people's circumstances. Foyer provides the

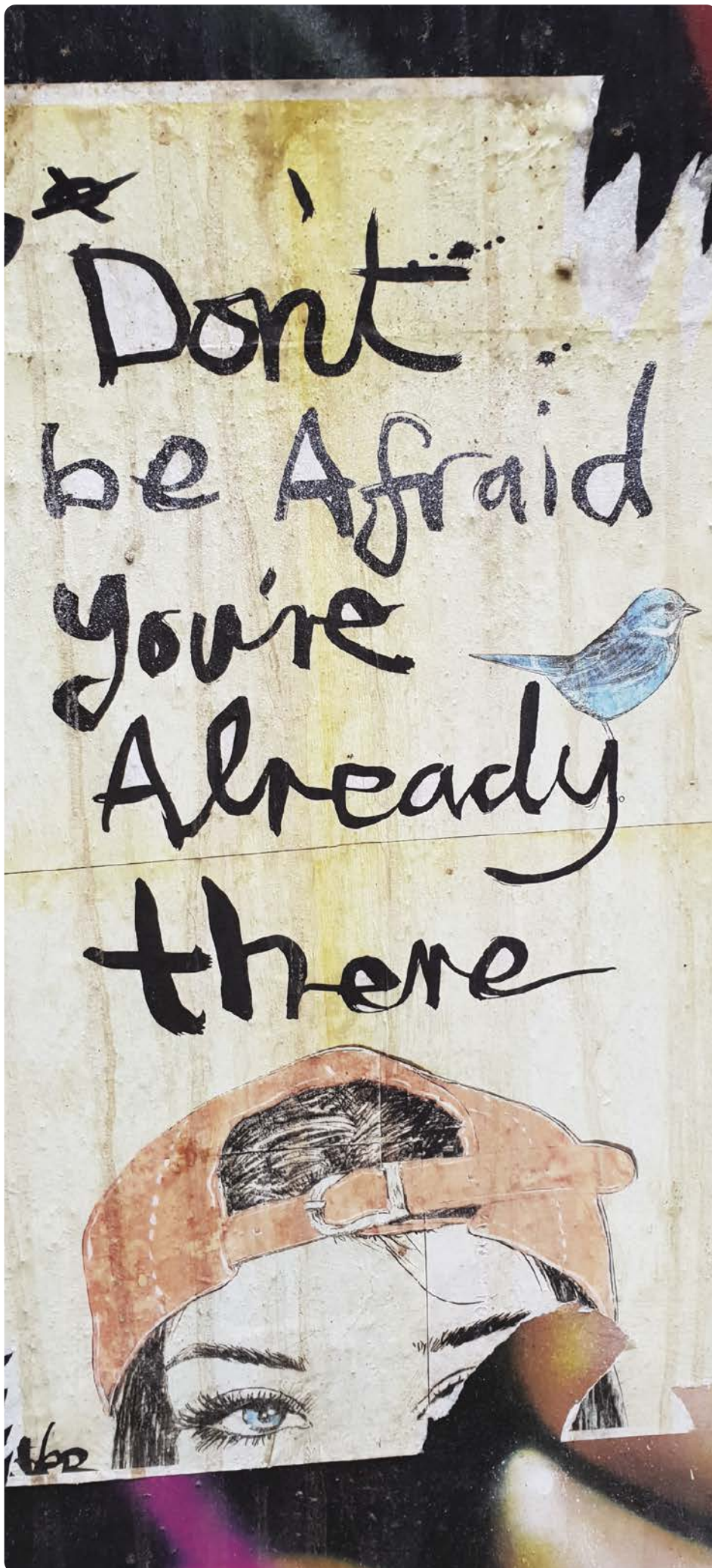
opportunity to build up healthy communities and develop valuable life skills such as budgeting, cooking, self-esteem, and access to mental health support.

Many young people who access the program have experienced trauma and mental health challenges, which can disrupt their ability to maintain school attendance or seek out and sustain employment. MCM Foyer is an intervention that catches these individuals and can link them in with supportive education and therapy programs and recreational activities.

The team work together, recognising the importance of highlighting the young person's unique abilities and level of resilience to promote

attainable achievements and an inspiration for more. The focus on strengths is to empower young people, whilst understanding that this may be difficult and is regularly in contrast to the young person's presenting perception of their self-worth. It is through purposeful coaching from a strengths-based healing-orientated approach that MCM Foyer staff provide an opportunity for the young people to start to shift their own perspectives about themselves and their past, present and future circumstances. We utilise this knowledge to explore goals around accommodation, education, employment, recreation and community whilst harnessing the capabilities that young people possess.





The effects of displacement can largely impact the progress a young person makes. MCM Foyer provides a stepping-stone to achieving the fundamental right of safe, stable, long-term accommodation. Often accommodation is the first thing that young people identify as their biggest barrier and that having stable accommodation would make an immense difference in being able to maintain education or employment. Entering the program lifts the stress caused by displacement and decreases mental load for young people to seek support with education, employment, detox, mental health and living skills. The priority of these types of goals is determined by the young person as they build up confidence and community through their Foyer Journey with MCM.

Here is a personal account from one of our young people.

If Foyer hadn't accepted me into the program, I'd definitely be homeless. All the workers' support with clothes, food, appointments, have led to a much better headspace. Abilities I never knew I had have been seen and shown to me by them generously. The couple of friends I have made here have been accepting unconditionally as we all understand we're basically in the same boat. Guess I have to say thanks to all!

— Anonymous

MCM Foyer provides support through a personalised approach that uses coaching, mentoring, activities, community, and access to opportunity to lead independent lives. Based on the 2021 census, 23 per cent of the homelessness population were aged between 12 and 24: amounting to 28,204 out of the overall population of 122,494.¹

A recurring factor that presents in the stories of our young people is instability. Some research states that factors that contribute to instability are from a lack of employment and education, family breakdown, the breakdown of community supports, and neglect.² MCM Foyer's focus is to break the cycle and provide young people with the opportunity

to achieve goals that potentially have not been supported previously.

Timing and readiness are factored in by youth development coaches during goal planning and the development of care plans, as we understand that entering the workforce and studying can be challenging and often fragmented due to previous experience. MCM Foyer program uses techniques such as role play and problem solving to help young people boost their confidence and overcome their nerves. Ways to be punctual, present for an interview and to professionally communicate are taught through one-on-one meetings and workshops with external providers so young people are able to communicate with their employers and achieve their employment and educational goals.

Alongside individual supports, MCM Foyer aims to create a community that fosters independence, self-reliance, and openness for a prosperous future. Staff observe young people sharing and exploring work options with each other over dinner, leading to successful employment, including through services that partner with MCM Foyer. Through honest dialogue with staff, young people have shown initiative and resilience in overcoming their challenges to work. Young people have also progressed their education, whether by adding another subject or attending school more often. MCM Foyer has witnessed positive outcomes for those who are supported by the program and are always seeking services to collaborate with.

Here are some reflections from young people and a staff member at MCM Foyer:

'Game of life'.

*Foyer is like an hourglass.
It's like the piece missing
from some games.*

*It's there when you need
it and sometimes it's there
when you don't.*

*Sometimes you don't feel like you
want it but it's still there to help.*

*The grains of sand are the
support you have even if
life flips head over heel.*

*You don't always know what to
do but workers have your back.
When you have problems,
they sit there and listen to
suggest what might help.*

— Ciel

*MCM Foyer's use of Advantage
Thinking decides to readjust a
deficit lens that sees a 'homeless
person' as 'someone who is
experiencing homelessness'.³
What this does is it separates
someone's situation from their
identity and no longer frames
the person as the problem.
We recognise that trauma can lead
to lower esteem and confidence,
we hope to provide a breathable
space that shows a genuine
interest in learning about young
people. It means implementing
an approach that rephrases
questions from 'what's wrong with
you?' to 'what has happened/
what is happening to you?'⁴*

*This shows value to a young
person and empowers them to
tell their story without judgement
and for workers to provide a
person-centred approach. Through
my work in a Foyer I have been
able to build strong rapport with
young people and watch as their
self-confidence and self-exploration
increase. We know that young
people are the experts in their
life and are progressing through
an important developmental
stage. The MCM Foyer program
is one that can support and catch
young people who otherwise
would be disregarded and left
feeling powerless. It provides
our young people with a safe
and personalised environment
to gain autonomy and gain
control over their decisions.*

— MCM Foyer Staff Member

*As a kid growing up, I never really
had somewhere to call 'home'.
A place where I felt safe and
happy. But here, I feel at home.
I have a place to call my home
even if it's just for a few years.*

*Having a place where I can call
it my home and being my own
person in my own house. Where
it's safe and comfortable and
I can do whatever and decorate
it however I want. It's something
that one cannot explain.*

*I used to think that I wouldn't
be able to make any friends
with my time here and in fact
I've met amazing people here,
made some cool friends that
I appreciate, and amazing
workers and I think I'll always be
grateful for this part of my life.*

— Anonymous

Homelessness is a complex and multifaceted issue that affects thousands of young people in Australia. Many of them face barriers to education, employment, and social inclusion due to their lack of stable and secure housing.

The MCM Foyer program is an innovative and holistic approach that addresses these challenges by providing not only accommodation, but also wrap-around support and opportunities for personal and professional development. It is a community that nurtures a young person's potential, empowers their choices, and supports their aspirations for a life after Foyer. It is a place where they can heal from their past traumas, develop their skills and talents, and pursue their goals.

By providing stable accommodation and wrap-around support, the MCM Foyer program helps young people to overcome the barriers that prevent them from accessing education, employment, and other opportunities. The MCM Foyer program is a testament to the resilience, courage, and creativity of young people who have faced immense challenges and hardships.

MCM Foyer is a valuable opportunity that is seized by young people and staff to transform lives and together create a brighter future for themselves and for society.

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Chapter 6. The Future of Youth Foyers

Introducing the Foyer Foundation National Outcomes Framework

Katy Cornwell, Head of Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning, Brotherhood of St Laurence

The Foyer Foundation National Outcomes Framework sets out the shared approach to understanding and measuring the impact of Youth Foyers accredited with the Foyer Foundation. It will support the generation of a broad evidence base that can be used to demonstrate the collective value of Youth Foyers, inform learning and practice, and continually strive for better outcomes for young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. This will be critical as the network grows to 50 Foyers by 2030.

Key components of the Framework include:

1. A Theory of Change.
2. An approach and indicators to measure progress towards that change.
3. A Data Governance Framework outlining how data is to be collected, used and shared.

A Common Impact Narrative and Consistent Measurement at Scale

The Framework articulates a shared impact narrative for the Foyer approach through a Theory of Change (Figure 1). Underpinned by the accreditation framework and reflecting the seven Foyer Service Offers, the Theory of Change reflects a common journey and ambition amongst Foyers, translated to short, medium and long-term outcomes in line with standard discourse. The Theory of Change reflects the 'core ingredients' of the Foyer approach, set amongst many contexts, models and emphases across the Foyer network.

The measurement approach defines indicators and other data concepts to measure reach and progress towards change, setting out when

and how these are measured and reported. Common definitions, tools and processes for collecting the data ensure it can be aggregated across Foyers, allowing exploration of questions such as: Who are Foyers collectively reaching? What outcomes are young people achieving? What's contributing to this change? Where could we do more? What is the broader social impact of Foyers?

As the network expands to 50 Foyers by 2030, this will provide a richness through varied data at scale and a key tool for us to speak compellingly about the social impact of our work.

Built on previous work, co-designed with the wider Foyer network

The Framework has been a collective effort led by the Foyer Foundation, Brotherhood of St. Laurence (BSL) and the FoyerInvest Consortium — a collaboration of young people, service providers, impact investors and philanthropists seeking to develop an impact investing solution for Foyers. Building on a wealth of literature and previous work in this space, the Framework has been co-designed with the broader Foyer network, including the expertise and insights of young people.

Attuned to individual Foyer reporting systems and practices

The measurement framework has been designed to work with existing and varied reporting systems, collection and reporting requirements, adaptable to the needs and circumstances of each Foyer. For example, most but not all Foyers report into the Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) collection. Rather than duplicating, the measurement approach draws on the existing SHS data collection and fills any gaps by supplementing with new data collection.

A common core set of outcomes, with optional additions

The amount and complexity of data collected is flexible, recognising the diverse capabilities and maturity in data collection among Foyers. Collection is structured around a base level of data collected through the Foyer journey (that is, a core set of data collected at intake and exit across all Foyers), plus optional additions: an extended set of outcomes, post-exit surveys and a data linkage project to measure social impact.

The core set collects at least one key indicator across each of the seven long-term outcomes, while the extended set includes some additional indicators across short, medium and long-term outcomes. In particular, the core set includes indicators that are currently collected by most Foyers for reporting into SHS, supplemented by other data identified by the consultation network for being most important, relevant and measurable.

Information is collected through combining an extract of relevant data from SHS (for Foyers reporting into SHS), with the remaining key demographic and outcomes collected through surveys of young people at intake and exit. Depending on individual Foyer needs and capabilities, Foyers can self-host these surveys or utilise the platform hosted by the Foyer Foundation.

An annual partnership survey will be completed by Foyers to capture information on active partnerships and other Foyer-level operational data, to be refined through review of the accreditation process in 2024. Post-exit surveys and data linkage will be implemented in future iterations.

This allows each accredited Foyer to participate in outcomes measurement in ways which reflect their needs and capability, and to increase their commitment as they mature. In practical terms, the choices are:

1. Will you collect extended outcomes, or just the required core data?
2. Will you conduct post-exit surveys?
3. Will you measure comparative social impact?

Clearly Defined Roles for Stakeholders to Protect Shared Data: Adhering to Five Core Principles

The Framework's Data Governance Framework is underpinned by the 'Five Safes'¹ principles:

1. *Safe projects*: Is the use of the data appropriate, lawful and ethical?
2. *Safe people*: Can the users be trusted to make use of the data in an appropriate fashion?
3. *Safe data*: Is there a disclosure risk in the data itself? For example, has it been anonymised?
4. *Safe settings*: Do the systems managing the data limit unauthorised use or mistakes?
5. *Safe outputs*: Are the data outputs shared for the project non-disclosive and non-identifying?

The Data Governance Framework defines roles and responsibilities for stakeholders involved in the collection, access and use of shared data and outputs (summary PowerBi reports). Stakeholders sign formal agreements to only access, use and share information in accordance with the strict responsibilities outlined in the Data Governance Framework. A Data Governance Group will meet regularly and review impacts on both Foyers and young people.

Foyers Manage and Control Their Own Data

Individual Foyers manage their own Foyer's data — they are responsible for obtaining informed consent and collecting data from young people. They then release it to the Foyer Foundation (and in the initial set-up phase, BSL)

as data intermediary, where it is securely stored, anonymised and summarised in interactive PowerBi reports. In line with current practice around accreditation reporting, individual Foyers can only see the summaries for their own Foyer compared to the aggregate summaries across all Foyers, unless they explicitly choose to share it with others. In accessing and using the reports, there is a commitment to a principle of learning and reflection, not performance management.

Routine Collection and Reporting, Supporting Continuous Learning, Reflection, Adaptation and Collaboration

The Framework has been designed as a tool primarily for learning from, improving and promoting the Foyer approach and recognises that the Foyer network is a diverse community. Producing the reports is just the beginning. Regular Communities of Practice for accredited Foyers will provide a forum and safe space

for continuous learning, reflection, adaptation and collaboration.

The Road Ahead: A Staged Roll-out Across the Network

For the current group of accredited Foyers, the first phase of implementation relates to collecting and reporting on demographics and pre/post outcomes for young people through the Foyer journey. We expect that some initial data for this group will be available in reports in early 2024, with data continuing to populate as more young people move through Foyers and complete surveys.

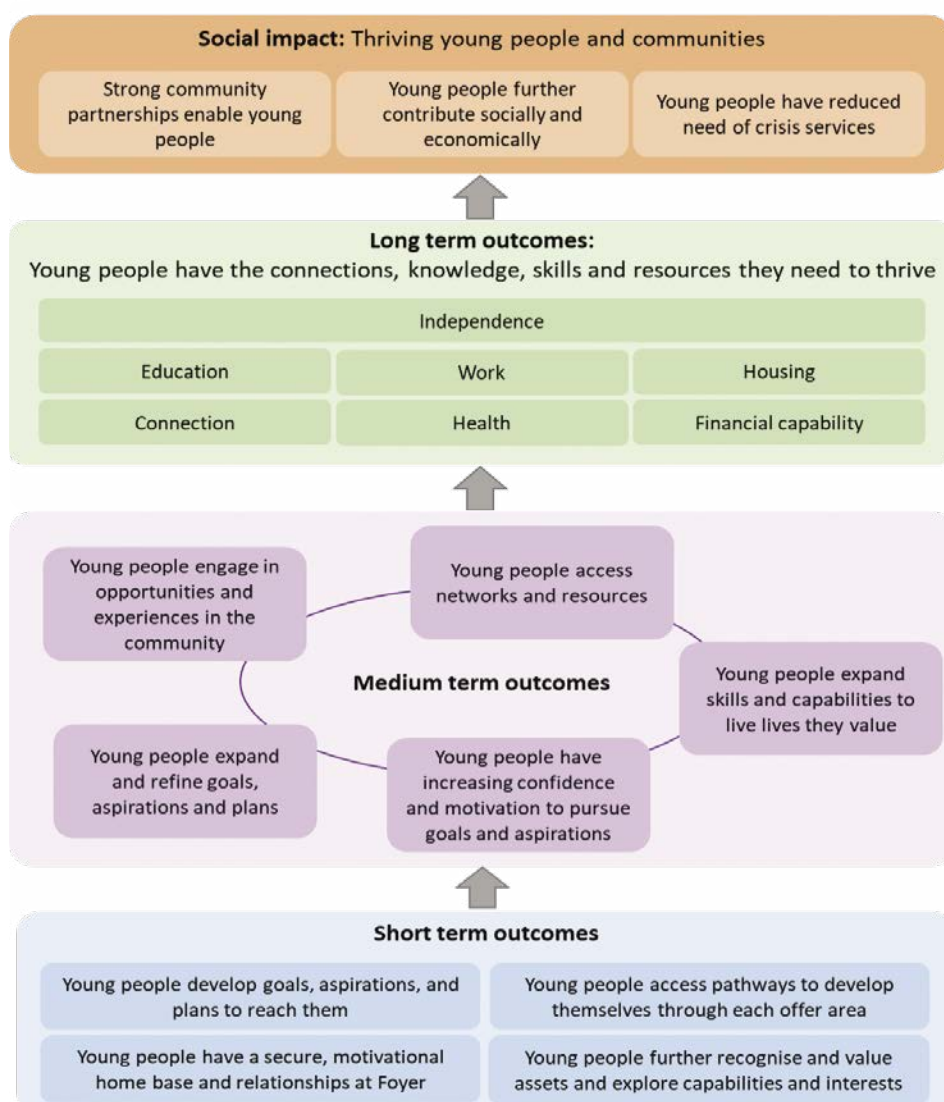
We look forward to the process being extended to newly accredited Foyers in mid-2024, and future accrediting Foyers on a rolling basis after they are set up.

For further information, contact info@foyer.org.au

Endnote

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Simplified Theory of Change for the Foyer Approach



Fix Youth Homelessness: Vote for Foyers

Annie O'Rourke, Chief Creative Officer, 89 Degrees East

Over the years, youth homelessness in Australia has been approached by policymakers and politicians as either a complex, multifaceted enigma with no clear solution or as a straightforward problem where young people should simply return to their safe, middle-class families.

My perspective was shaped in the late 1990s in Scotland, where I led a youth homelessness prevention program. Walking through Edinburgh's Meadows, I was starkly confronted by the devastating reality of many young people sleeping rough in the cold.

The economic situation in the United Kingdom was dire, especially in Scotland, with unemployment painfully palpable. The despair in the streets was the very image that inspired Irvine Welsh's literary hit *Trainspotting*.

Shelia McKechnie, a formidable advocate for the homeless and director of Shelter, fought tirelessly for the development of the Foyer model, a beacon of hope for breaking the cyclical trap of unemployment and homelessness.

Visiting the new Foyers, especially the Aberdeen Foyer, was an eye-opener. I was struck by their ethos of being 'philosophically agnostic' and 'outcomes focused.' Their manager quipped, 'passion out, pragmatism in,' aptly describing Foyers as the Swiss Army knife of social solutions.

Returning to Edinburgh on the train, I was inspired by the possibilities Foyers presented. Despite various local initiatives in Australia, such as the Local Government

and Community Housing Program initiated by Keating/Hawke Housing Minister Brian Howe, a comprehensive response like the Foyer model was absent.

National efforts to address youth homelessness, like John Howard's Youth Homelessness Taskforce, were well-intentioned but often missed the mark by focusing narrowly on family reconciliation and limiting access to income support.

After returning to Australia, working alongside Netty Horton and Chris Black, we set out to shift the national dialogue at the second national conference on homelessness. We aimed to illuminate that we were not just discussing runaways or difficult kids, but young Australians with legitimate needs.

By 2002, the first official Australian Foyer opened in Liverpool, Sydney, signalling the growth of a movement. Today, the statistics speak volumes: 80 per cent of Foyer-supported youth find stable housing, 65 per cent gain employment, and they're 60 per cent less likely to encounter the justice system.

With a Treasurer who recognises their value and an Impact Investment taskforce that sees Foyers as an exemplary case study, we're moving beyond the stigma of the past. Youth management groups and co-designed initiatives now empower young people to take charge of their futures.

Yet, the need for a more systemic approach persists. Almost every local government could benefit from a Foyer, considering the scale of today's youth homelessness. It's time we reconsider our investment priorities and recognise the long-term community benefits of education and employment for young people.

Foyers represent an excellent opportunity for philanthropic investment, yielding significant social returns. As we face the reality that nearly a quarter of Australia's homeless population is young, the urgency of a widespread rollout of Foyers cannot be overstated.

Foyers work. They are the tangible solution that brings together housing, support, and opportunity. It's time for us to rally behind Foyers, funding and supporting their rapid expansion to uplift our young citizens.



Keith Bryant

Chair of the Foyer Foundation



Growing Youth Foyers — Innovation and Investment Models

Have we got the right
institutional structure?

Many of the questions that confront us in driving social change address the question about what the right model or program is to deliver that social change. We discuss whether there is sufficient evidence for a particular model: is it achieving outcomes, and what is the quantum of government support for that particular model? In that discussion we occasionally wander into the capacity of the institution that is tasked with delivering the model; whether the non-government organisation has sufficient capacity and capability to deliver and evolve that program effectively.

But there is a deeper question about whether, as part of a system, we have the right institutional structure to drive that change? This is a question we rarely ask. By institutional structure, I am thinking not just of the service agencies that

deliver the programs and the government and philanthropic partners that fund them but also the plethora of intermediaries that sit between those two groups.

In Australia we are used to the important role that peak bodies play for their member organisations. 'Peaks' fulfil a key role in building and sustaining the networks of organisations and individuals that make up their 'cause', typically through sharing information across that network and holding regular get-togethers and conferences. They also help build capacity in their member organisations and provide policy and advocacy support that is directed to government and other important stakeholders. And they play an important role in securing ongoing funding for their members' programs.

The funding that lets peaks operate is mostly collected through membership fees (and sadly less and less through government), plus occasional enterprise or fee-for-service income. The royalties of peaks are therefore quite appropriately directed to the needs of their members.

But the peaks' ability to drive innovation and with it, systems change, is limited.

Over the last 25 years we have seen the social enterprise movement try to address that innovation shortfall. This has resulted in a changing institutional structure across the globe. It has led to the creation of a very broad range of new intermediary bodies that are not peaks, but that sit between the funders and the agencies delivering the change. In Australia in the last

25 years, we have seen the creation of: the Centre for Social Impact, Social Ventures Australia, SEFA, the Social Impact Hub, Social Traders and White Box Enterprises, to name a few that now sit in this middle ground looking to facilitate and support innovation and change.

We continue to learn that funding and identifying instructive research about what works in particular settings, and then letting the system take its course, *does not usually change much*. In fact, our inability as a society to deal with so many intractable problems despite compelling research and pleas to apply that research through new methods and ideas is most likely not only about an implementation or a program failure, but also a failure of institutional structure.

The enthusiasm and commitment for a social enterprise approach that has evolved in the last 25 years in Australia is a very good development, but I argue we need more. As these new enterprises grow, someone must keep an eye on the systems piece that sits above these enterprises. We have to recognise that letting a thousand flowers bloom, on its own, will probably not cut it.

There are too many pilot programs, or small-scale one-offs in the system. Many of these are often momentarily successful, yet fail to sustain themselves, let alone multiply themselves. Philanthropy and government are both guilty of allowing these opportunities to pass us by.

Government is still too risk averse to understand how to take good ideas and scale them up effectively. It has obvious capabilities in

following through once the scale up has proven itself, and in then normalising a new approach, but government very rarely takes the middle step, the scale up, between pilot and normalising.

Philanthropy should have the risk appetite for this middle stage. It is starting to do more. Australia's larger philanthropic agencies are now comfortable around the language of systems change. They want to move their funding on from just providing short-term fixes to systematically addressing the multiple factors that will drive more sustainable change.

At the Foyer Foundation we have never identified ourselves as being a peak body. When we were formed in 2008, our purpose was to establish a fidelity around the Youth Foyer model and then to grow that model. We aimed to do that by setting standards and sharing learnings about what constituted a Youth Foyer. To this day we have never operated any Youth Foyers and still don't see ourselves being a large or even a medium sized agency. But we take very seriously our role in building and managing a Youth Foyer movement that will collectively and collaboratively take this concept to scale. We see ourselves as the catalyst for this change.

In 2008, this wasn't a concept or a purpose that grabbed the attention of funders. We struggled with how to fund ourselves for nearly a decade. Seven years ago, we had per annum funding of less than \$10,000.

Today, Foyer Foundation's annual funding is around \$3 million per annum. It is mostly philanthropically derived. Philanthropy is interested in 'the scale up with fidelity model' that an intermediary like us sets out to make happen.

Seven years ago, we had not accredited (made faithful to the model) any of the eight or nine existing Youth Foyers that were operating around the country at the time (though the Brotherhood of St Laurence had successfully trialled a standardised subset of three Education First

Youth Foyers, a process that we continue to learn from).

By the middle of 2024 we will have 20 accredited Youth Foyers, with seven more under construction.

We have done this by systematically laying the groundwork of:

- setting the accreditation standards
- building a community of practice around those standards
- attaching an impact framework — where all our accredited and accrediting Foyers support the drive for consistent data
- being deliberate in how we manage the pathway for any new Foyers
- presenting widely the evidence that Foyers work, that they help transform the lives of young people, and in the long run they save governments significant sums of money.

Agencies that operate Youth Foyers work with our pathway and voluntarily join our accreditation and data collecting process. They can see that the standards learnt from others help improve the outcomes they seek, and the standardised data gives confidence to their (mostly government) funding partners. We listen when they come across something new that seems to work, we share it with the network and begin to build the evidence base for that variation. Governments are increasingly listening to our standard setting, our ongoing adaptations to the model and the outcomes that the Foyer movement is creating for young people.

It is an advantage that we are not the Government, that we are not responsible for funding Youth Foyers, and that we have to justify our existence and our own funding to all our stakeholders.

In this evolving world of non-government intermediaries, the four key messages from our journey at the Foyer Foundation over the last 15 years include:

1. For funders, governments and philanthropic partners: be critical of the number of pilots you support, and plan from the start how these pilots will be scaled up if they are successful.
2. Appreciate that the system needs and can sustain different types of intermediary agencies. Governments should include them more in their discussions and peaks should be less mistrustful of their role.
3. Ask philanthropy to fund new intermediaries that address the scale up. Ask them for both funding of the intermediaries and use those philanthropists to encourage government to come to the table. Social Impact thinking is valuable in this space. It is a much better investment to undertake the considerable costs of impact analysis and investment for something that is going to scale, than something that is still at the pilot stage. Use the presence of the private sector inside an impact investment framework to get the different tiers and arms of government to work with one another.
4. Facilitate learning environments. We have always had individual learning. Over the last 25 years, business and non-government organisations have done a lot of organisational learning. To address society's most pressing problems, systems learning is the next frontier. How do we facilitate a whole system that wants to learn how to do things better?

It's almost incredible that a small-scale concept like Foyer Foundation has shown itself capable of facilitating this type of systems change. That is what makes institutional structures interesting and worthy of discussion. The answers are not always in very large organisations that allow some small innovation on the side. But, as mother nature constantly reveals to us, the best systems are ecosystems of interdependence: of small, large and all the organisms in between, that collectively allow the whole system to thrive.

Tammy Hand and David MacKenzie

Upstream Australia and the Gonski Institute for Education, University of NSW



Strengthening Youth Foyers as Part of the Youth Homelessness Reform Agenda

Introduction

Thinking about 'The Future of Youth Foyers' is timely. The alignment in Australian politics, the forthcoming National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) and the promised development of a 10-year strategy is arguably a once-in-a-decade opportunity for overdue reform. Following the 2007–2008 National Youth Commission (NYC),¹ the White Paper in December 2008 foreshadowed a strategy to end homelessness. In the sector, there was an outpouring of optimism — 'it's a once in a decade opportunity'. But no strategy was produced and, in retrospect, it was a lost opportunity.² The Productivity Commission review of the NHHA, *In need of repair*, has strongly argued the need for reform.³ But what reforms exactly?

In 2019–20, we led an AHURI research project on redesigning the homelessness service system for young people,⁴ and since then



have been subjecting homelessness policies, programs, and practices to an appreciative critique, mainly those concerning young people.^{5,6} An appreciative critique considers the strengths of a model or program, while at the same time critically thinking about its place in a homelessness strategy, about how effective it is, or whether there is something more efficient and/or effective that should be considered.

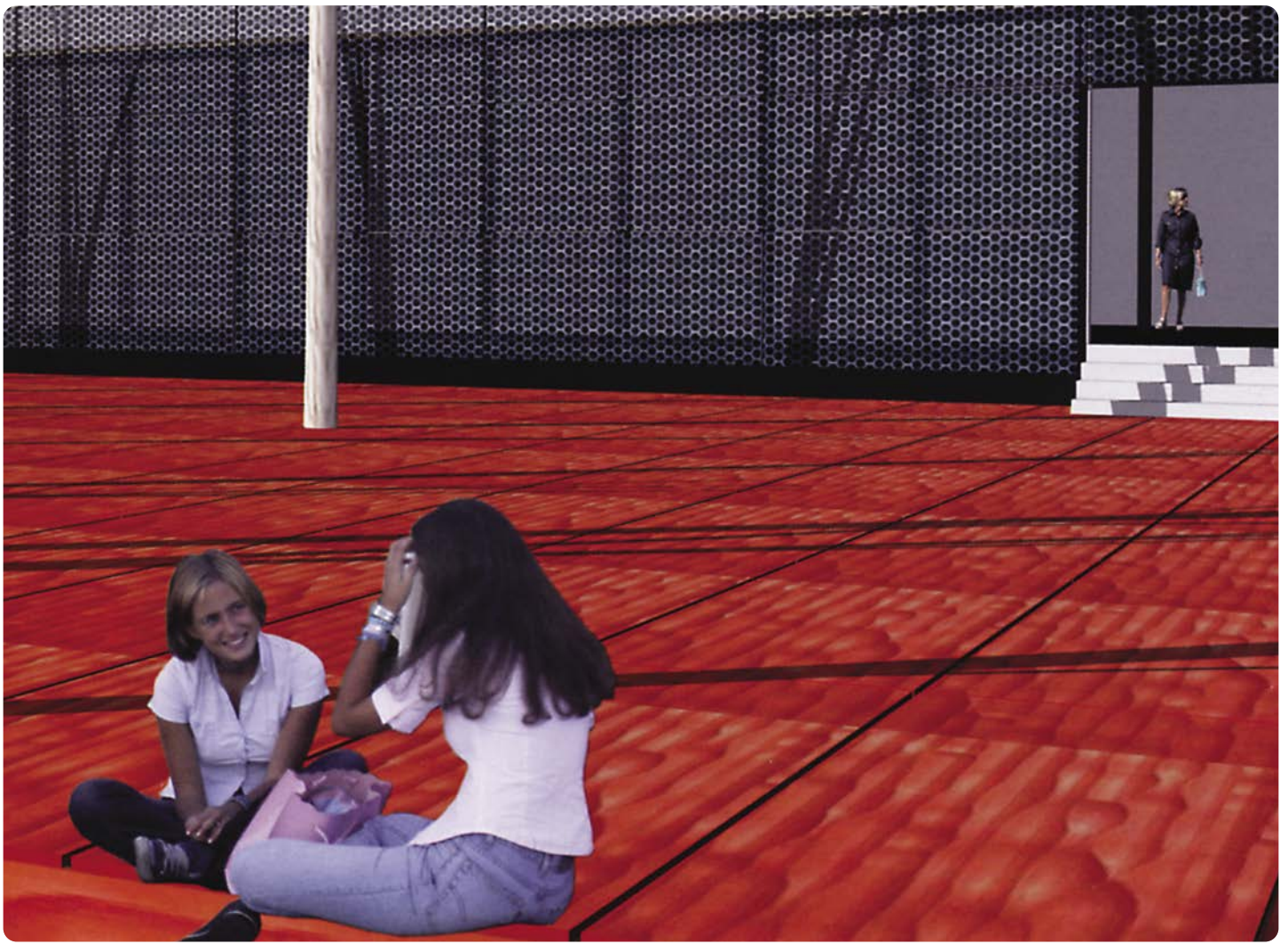
Towards a Youth Homelessness Reform Agenda

If we place young people at the centre of the response to homelessness, this leads to thinking of the 'system' as not narrowly framed in terms of Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS), but the entire support and services system around homeless and at-risk young people — a place-based approach to youth homelessness. Another way of thinking about this is that there needs to be a cultural shift from a program-centred approach to services and an agency-focused service system to a community-focused and place-based system. Of course, programs and agencies would not be abolished but the relations amongst agencies and programs would be radically changed.

Since 2008, advocacy around Youth Foyers has been extensive and they are the one area which has become a notable post-White Paper success. There are now some 15 Foyers, with a few more in the funding pipeline. Foyers in the United Kingdom (UK) and France were primarily a response to the youth employment crisis of the early 1990s, whereas the Australian Foyers have been funded as a response to youth homelessness.⁷ What was so attractive about the Foyer model was the strong nexus between pathways to education, training, and employment and supported accommodation, hitherto a problematic area of youth and homelessness policy in Australia. But, in 2024, what reforms of the funding and operation of Youth Foyers might need to be considered?⁸

Operationalising 'at-risk of homelessness'

The dire problem of housing affordability in Australia means that many young people find the rental market difficult and expensive, especially for those wanting to engage in further study which can minimise their time to engage in paid employment. However, a young person dealing with such issues is not necessarily 'at-risk of homelessness' if they can receive support from their family or have the option of returning home for a period which many young people need to do these days. If a crisis service takes in at-risk young people who actually do have options or for whom prevention is possible and family issues resolvable, then an adverse consequence is that other young people who realistically have no other options are turned away or find it more difficult to get the help they need. The same issue arises for Foyers: how is 'at-risk of homelessness' defined and operationalised by Youth Foyers?



A conjoint issue to the operationalisation of 'risk' is whether Foyers are appropriate only for young people with relatively low support needs. On the basis of evidence and representations provided to the *Inquiry into Homelessness in Victoria*, the final report noted that:

...there are a cohort of young people with higher support needs for whom this model may not be suitable. This means the Education First Youth Foyer model is not suitable for application as a standard youth homelessness response across the state.⁹

During earlier research fieldwork in the UK, Foyer staff explained that Foyers were suitable for young people with low-end not high support needs. Around the sector and from informants in the AHURI research we hear comments such as 'we can hardly ever get any of our clients into the foyer' even in cases where the young people are keen to do courses, despite their extant issues. Apparently, their support needs were considered too high.

Youth Foyers and Prevention

Prevention will be one of the major reform issues. In terms of 'prevention', a key premise is that youth homelessness is different to adult homelessness. The majority of young people become homeless due to dysfunction of some kind in their family situation. As such, prevention includes both support for young people, but also interventions with their families, focused on resolving family dysfunction, if that is possible. From a place-based systems perspective, Youth Foyers should be connected more strictly with crisis and prevention programs so that when family issues cannot be resolved or it is not safe or possible for a young person to remain living with their family, then a Youth Foyer may be the most appropriate accommodation option. This is the challenge of ensuring that services and programs are appropriately and efficiently targeted.

Managing Targeted Intakes

One way that efficient targeting has been addressed is the development of the Victorian Opening Doors

entry point model which implements local community accountability and coordinated entry into the SHS system.¹⁰ Another way is a transparent selection process such as the My Foundation Youth Housing Co (MFYH) intake process that involves an intake review panel, including independent members:

The role of the panel is to review all applications received and to make nominations to MFYH based on: (a) eligibility; (b) suitability; and (c) priority. This is a rigorous, but transparent tenant allocation process that ensures tenancies are allocated to young people best suited to the THP [transitional housing plus] model. The process removes any element or possibility of 'creaming' — that is, selecting the 'easiest' young people to house and support.¹¹

The Youth Foyers could be developed to scale as an affordable accommodation model open to young people undertaking a range of education and/or training or in

an early stage of their employment, and who need affordable accommodation. But, in this case, funding ought not to come largely from the homelessness budget.

Foyers are an Expensive Model?

Foyers have been criticised as an expensive model. Youth Foyers are most often purpose-built multi-story buildings which are not cheap to construct nor maintain. However, the costs of an extended period of homelessness and SHS support are higher. This is not an existential criticism if there is demonstrable evidence that Foyers are significantly contributing to reducing homelessness. Nevertheless, there is an opportunity cost issue as to whether the same or even better outcomes could be achieved at a lower cost in Australia than building Foyers in the same way as the UK.

Questions for Reform

Simply pitching for more of the same is not reform. The next NHHA and homelessness strategies need to build on the strengths of the existing services systems but implement a series of changes that will over the next decade measurably reduce youth homelessness, something not achieved in the past decade, nor in fact the past 40 to 50 years.

In terms of reform, there are several relevant issues in planning the future of Youth Foyers:

- Should Foyers take in a wider population of at-risk youth? Or should Foyers strictly provide a pathway for young people recovering from homelessness?
- Should Foyers use a more transparent and accountable intake system?
- Should Foyers be integrated within place-based local youth homelessness support systems?
- Should Foyers be congregate facilities, as it currently the case? OR Could Foyers be developed as dispersed units connected to a nearby community hub?

In our view, the Foyer model and a range of Foyer-like education-training/employment models are an important component of the future support

system for vulnerable youth. But there needs to be changes. A priority would be integrating Foyers into place-based and collective impact reform across the SHS and positioning Youth Foyers more strictly as a post-homelessness ('breaking the cycle') option with intakes restricted to an appropriate cohort of young people exiting the SHS system.

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Michael Trail*



The Foyer Solution: How Outcomes Payments Can Drive Program Efficiency

The announcement of a \$100 million Outcomes Fund by the Federal Treasurer at the last budget is most welcome. This core recommendation from the Commonwealth Government Social Impact Investing Task Force, which was initially commissioned by the Morrison Government in 2019, provides scope for a simple outcomes payment arrangement to encourage the kind of service delivery that can generate cut-through results in the critical area of exclusion, homelessness and long-term disadvantage. The Task Force report specifically mentioned the Foyer program as a case study example of how an Outcomes Fund could make a difference.

How so?

At its core, the Outcomes Fund aims to simplify and draw on 13 years of local and global experience of

over 230 Social Impact Bonds (SIBs). The first of these was implemented in the United Kingdom (UK) in 2010, targeting reduced recidivism at the Peterborough Prison. The simple but powerful premise was that investors provide long-term capital to fund the delivery of a social program and get repaid with modest returns subject to the program achieving targeted outcomes. If the program doesn't meet its objectives, investors can lose capital.

The economic underpinning is that government is on the hook to pay for outcomes that benefit the public purse — for example by reducing the cost of keeping prisoners in gaol — only if the program works. For service providers, the opportunity to access long term funding with a clear focus on outcomes can be highly attractive. It creates both greater certainty of funding and a clarity of focus on desired results, including the incentive to continue to innovate and improve practice to achieve clear objectives. The intent of SIBs is generally to encourage greater outcomes and focus on some of the more challenging social policy areas of exclusion and disadvantage. Think prison recidivism; cohorts in long-term unemployment and homelessness; children in out-of-home care.

For programs like the Foyer, where there is documented evidence of a high degree of program efficacy in successfully graduating young people into pathways to safe housing, education and employment, an effectively implemented Outcomes payment could provide a smart pathway to scale. The Task Force identified the power of the kind of integrated, client and family centred models that potentially lend themselves to Outcome payments.

The New South Wales (NSW) Government is also adding to the evidence base and demonstrating how outcomes funding can be applied to the Foyer model through the Foyer Central SIB, which is a partnership with Uniting, St George Community Housing (SGCH) and Social Ventures Australia (SVA).

It needs to be acknowledged that few initiatives in the social policy space have attracted the attention and sometimes controversy that SIBs have received. In part this has been a product of how challenging and bespoke many of them have been to document and implement. As the Hon Nick Hurd, former Minister for Civil Society in the UK shared memorably with the Task Force: *'Social Impact Bonds when they work are great. The problem is they are like a Faberge Egg... very complex and difficult to make. The point about an Outcomes Fund is we need to create a Cadbury production line to simplify the process.'*

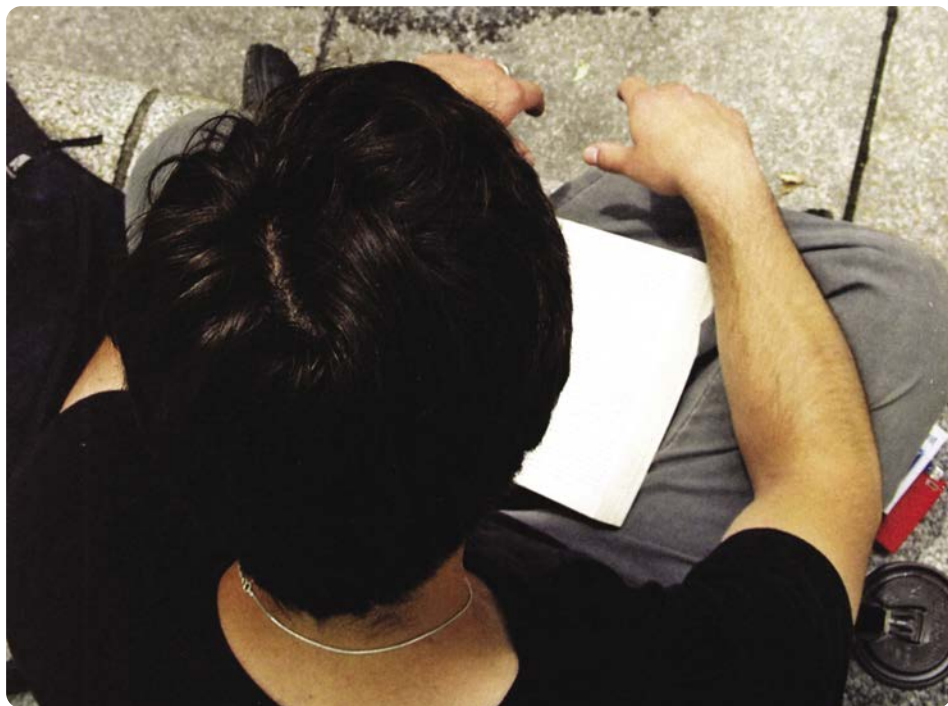
Let's look briefly at some of the learnings that need to be factored into effective and practical design for an Outcomes Fund as applied to a program such as Foyer to make it work and avoid the Faberge Egg design problem.

1. *The data needs to be clear and compelling.* The starting point for any outcome payment is clarity about datasets. The anchor for a reasonable calculation of avoided cost is the ability to determine the likely cost of supporting the target cohort over the long term in the absence of the program's intervention. Experience suggests there can be much time wasted in either accessing or agreeing such data and costs.

The use of reasonable proxies and an approach of not letting the perfect get in the road of the good is common sense. There is rich and generally accepted data for the at-risk youth cohort aged 16 to 24, which is the Foyer's target group, that should lend itself readily to a reasonably accepted outcome payment.

2. *Focus on programs that have a track record of success which is likely to be repeatable.* When SVA launched Australia's first SIB in partnership with Uniting and the NSW Government in 2013, the Newpin program had delivered promising results in reconnecting children aged 0-5 with their birth parents in both the UK and Australia. The hypothesis was that a SIB would enable the program to be scaled up and delivered in multiple locations over an extended period, creating shared learning, a sharpened practice model and a deeper understanding of the real impact generated by the program. That proved to be the case. The Foyer model has similarly been applied in a range of circumstances, with data indicating that a high proportion of graduates move into safe/stable housing and significantly increase their education levels, suggesting repeatability across a broader network.

3. *Flexibility is important.* Model fidelity and a focus on long term positive outcomes should not be negotiable — but so should flexibility, and an understanding that measurement and target setting is not a perfect science. As a practical example, the governance committee for the Aspire SIB homelessness program, comprising SIB arranger SVA, service deliverer Hutt St Centre and the South Australian Government, found that the assumed baseline for a key outcome measure of the number of days participants spend in hospital, which was



determined by analysing historic hospitalisation patterns, was much lower than the level of hospitalisation previously experienced by those actually enrolled in the program. This made it very difficult for the program to demonstrate an improvement relative to the baseline. An open conversation in the context of a program that was overall working effectively, along with clear contractual processes, led to a variation of the baseline against which program outcomes were measured. As noted by Elyse Sainty, who has documented SVA's extensive experience on SIBs in the SVA Quarterly, there should be recognition that parties should be held accountable for what they are delivering... but no more.

4. *Strong partnerships are key – especially in our federated system of government.* The Task Force recommendation on Outcomes Funds made clear the critical role of the states in overseeing and supporting service delivery. An appropriately designed outcome payment from the Commonwealth should provide the right level of top up or incentive to encourage external social impact investment and increase the pipeline of viable

projects. However, given the complexity of multi-party documentation, care needs to be taken to ensure that the level of engagement does not lead to the 'Faberge Egg' design problem. Partners need to trust each other to deliver their piece of the puzzle, and standardisation of processes and documentation is important to reduce the effort involved in developing each project.

So where next?

In an environment of housing crisis and extreme exclusion for a significant number of Australians, there is a real sense we should heed the voice of Nick Hurd. The appetite for State Governments to engage exists, and the capacity to implement a simple, clear outcome payment structure has been put in place for the Commonwealth. Programs like Foyer provide a natural platform for streamlining the development of outcomes-based contracts so that they can create impact at scale without unnecessary complexity — with the kind of goodwill that is critical to any multi-party agreement.

* Michael Traill was Chair of the Commonwealth Government Social Impact Task Force. He currently holds a range of social purpose and business roles including as Chair of the Paul Ramsay Foundation; Chair of the Investment Committee of Australian Retirement Plus and co-founder and Executive Director of For Purpose Investment Partners. Elyse Sainty, formerly a Director of Impact Investing with Social Ventures Australia, also contributed significantly to the article.

David Pearson

Chief Executive Officer, Australian Alliance to End Homelessness (AAEH)



Homelessness is Solvable: How We Can End it in Australia

Ending homelessness is not just a hopeful aspiration for me; it is a tangible and achievable goal. This conviction stems from the research I undertook during a Churchill Fellowship where I travelled through six countries and 12 cities, participated in over 80 meetings, visits, and events and met with over 112 people over eight weeks.

During my travels I asked everyone two simple questions — whether they be philanthropists, academics, CEOs, social workers, heads of government agencies, or people previously or currently living on the streets: *'Is ending homelessness possible?'* and *'Based on your experiences, what are the three most important things you think it would take to end homelessness?'* The overwhelming consensus was that ending homelessness is indeed possible.

In summary they answered that we need:

- Community and political leadership.
- Reliable, quality, real-time, person-centred data.
- Collaboration at all levels, including service delivery, improvement, and governance.
- Providing preventive care before it is needed.
- Instilling a sense of hope.
- Funding to address homelessness.
- Better coordination of health and support services with housing.
- Permanent Supportive Housing that provides stable and supportive housing.
- Person-Centred Approaches.
- Curiosity, Improvement, and Ongoing Learning
- Addressing the economic factors contributing to homelessness.
- Recognising and addressing trauma.
- Affirming a fundamental right to housing.

Despite the optimism and positive attitude among those working to address homelessness, the reality is that, in most places, it is a bad situation getting worse. A particular low point was during a roundtable meeting in Los Angeles when staff

members dedicated to helping the homeless were themselves experiencing homelessness due to the challenging housing market and low wages in the sector.

Homelessness is not the problem itself; it is the result of other systemic failures. When mental health, corrections, child protection, drug and alcohol, private rental, social housing, family violence and other systems fail, homelessness results. More housing, case management or outreach will not solve the problem. Homelessness is a complex problem that requires solutions that match its complexity.

One of the simple realisations from my Fellowship was the lack of a clear definition for an end to homelessness. Despite homelessness having been around for some time, little thought or effort has gone into defining what exactly an end to homelessness entails. Of all the countries I visited, Australia is the only country without a housing and homelessness strategy. The Albanese Labor Government has thankfully committed to developing a new national housing and homelessness plan but to date, there is no word if this plan will have an ambition to end homelessness or if it will simply add up to a range of measures that ultimately just manage it a bit better.

In Australia not only do we not have a national strategy, but we also have no national systems in place to measure the rates of homelessness across the country. It is currently measured every five years through the Census and the day the latest Census was released, it was already

19 months out of date. Imagine how we'd manage problems like unemployment if we estimated the rates every five years and then took 588 days to release this information.

This is why communities in Australia, inspired by the successful efforts in the United States (US) and Canada, have begun to collect their data — known as a by-name list. It is called a by-name list because it literally lists everyone experiencing homelessness by name and identifies their needs. Importantly this is done with the consent of the people experiencing homelessness, for the primary purpose of supporting them into housing. We not only need to measure the rates of homelessness, but we also need to be able to measure if our efforts are working. As homelessness is a complex, constantly changing problem, we need to track our progress dynamically.

Ending homelessness requires system change because homelessness is not merely a single-issue challenge but a complex outcome of various interconnected factors. System changes entail addressing the underlying structures, policies, and interactions that contribute to homelessness. Various stakeholders in the homelessness system often see only a part of the whole picture. To end homelessness, we need to step back and view the entire system comprehensively — this is what a by-name list helps with, and what a collaboration or zero project enables in terms of the various players in the system being able to 'see' the complete system.

Once you can see the system, you need a plan of action or 'theory of change' to drive collective impact

towards a shared goal. A theory of change can help illustrate what has been described as the 'missing middle' between what a change initiative does and how these activities add up to the desired outcome being sought. It does this by first identifying the desired long-term goals and then working back from this to identify all the conditions that must be in place (and how these relate to one another) for the goals to occur. The Australian Alliance to End Homelessness has developed a theory of change called the Advance to Zero Framework to help guide efforts to end homelessness in Australia, based on what is working around the world and what we've learned from efforts so far in Australia. It is our theory of change that has evolved based on what we are learning.



No More War, Tarik Dallinger-Dimizio

My Fellowship also highlighted for me that we need the whole of government and whole of society system change. Government and society need to work together to change the way local systems operate. Coordination and integration across homelessness services is crucially important, but if the goal is to end homelessness, then the homelessness service system alone is insufficient, as this system can't solve the problem alone.

Generally, no one is responsible for the whole system. A backbone focuses on supporting the system change with a specific measurable aim of the collaboration being to make homelessness rare, brief, and once off — our definition of an end to homelessness. Backbones take many forms and can be in local governments, in service delivery agencies or in independent agencies like think tanks, universities and

other dedicated system change agencies — but wherever they sit, their role is to think of the system.

Figuring out what the role of Housing First is in ending homelessness was probably the most contentious issue I discussed when I met with people. Australia doesn't by and large have the problem of very large-scale crisis accommodation in the way that colder climate countries in the Northern Hemisphere have. We need to reduce barriers and improve the quality of crisis accommodation in many Australian communities, but I found there was no role for transitional accommodation in a Housing First system, and any services providing them should seek to transition them to permanent housing, or better yet Permanent Supportive Housing.

Youth Foyers are a good example of this. I was pleased to be able to play a small role in supporting the establishment of Foyer Port Adelaide and we could see that the model was working. Eighty per cent of young people were exiting into work or education. They are successful as young people have different needs and they can be tailored to match their aspirations.

Meeting with people in the US showed me that ending homelessness was possible. The US did it by shrinking the change, focusing on one place and a particular population group. It still surprises me that so many people's reaction to this is to downplay and diminish it. This approach resonated with politicians. So often the housing and homelessness sectors go to the government and make the problem bigger. It's no surprise then that political leaders are hesitant to prioritise the issue because it's so easy to get lost in the complexity and because no matter what they do it will never be enough. A proof points advocacy strategy,¹ as developed in the US, flips that on its head. It makes the problem smaller, more digestible and more local.



Also, in the US I saw that healthcare has been integrated into homelessness services in a way that would be the envy of many communities in Australia. In the US they treat homelessness as a public health crisis. In Australia, we need to see homelessness as much of a public health issue as it is a consequence of the housing affordability crisis.

The Canadian stakeholders I met with said that ending homelessness should be the ambition, but we must also realise that this is a long-term effort, particularly in large cities. Setting milestones along the way is the key to maintaining momentum, using milestones that measure the reduction in the percentage of homelessness per head of population is important. Prevalence is how public health issues are measured, and homelessness is amongst other things a public health crisis.

The UK is a lot stronger at integrating employment and homelessness efforts than Australia, including supporting social enterprise and social procurement, both of which provide significant opportunities for more flexible employment arrangements to aid in the recovery of people who have experienced homelessness, particularly chronic homelessness.

If there is one single conclusion that my Churchill Fellowship has left with me it is this: ending homelessness is possible, but it is not something that can be achieved by one individual, one agency, one level of government, one program, building, policy or pill.

The call to action is clear. We need to:

- Have a strategy to end homelessness.
- Define clear indicators of success and regularly measure progress.



A home beyond words by JR

- Foster collaborative effort, learning from others' experiences.
- Commit and believe that it is possible to end homelessness.

Ending homelessness has and can only be achieved by coalitions of like-minded leaders, people and organisations standing together and saying enough is enough — that we will no longer accept homelessness in our community. Not only is homelessness solvable — solving it is necessary. Having a safe, secure, affordable home is not a luxury. It is a fundamental human need. There is no time to lose and much to be done.

'You could make many homelessness responses twice

as effective if you managed the system better, but the inclination is always there to fund direct services, it's inefficient. If you want to shift the dial, fund the improvements to the systems'.

— Norman Suchar,
United States Department of
Housing and Urban Development

'To end homelessness, you need to join up government policy and community-led organising'.

— Laurel Blatchford,
Former Chief of Staff at the
US Department of Housing
and Urban Development

Endnote

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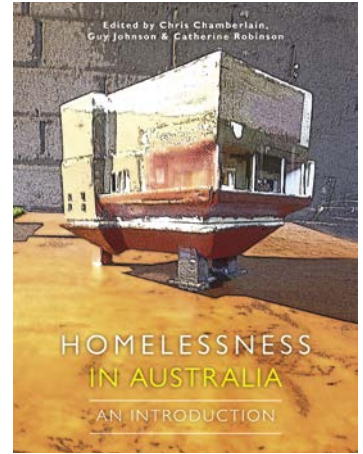
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