



## COUNCIL TO HOMELESS PERSONS SECTOR FORUM

### LEAVING CARE AND HOMELESSNESS

Tuesday 24 August 2010  
Fitzroy Town Hall

#### Breakout sessions – Where to from here?

##### Workshop Notes

#### GROUP 1 – RURAL/REGIONAL ISSUES

Facilitator: Catherine Roberts, SA Eastcare

##### *Issues identified:*

- We are operating in silos, this works against service integration and the best interests of young people
- We need to bring Child Protection to the table and work closely with them
- There is a lack of leaving care plans. These need to include independent housing and support pathways, so we can avoid homelessness occurring
- Providing accommodation post care in different geographical area to the care placement impacts poorly on many young people. It can create social and educational disconnection, risks isolation, creates travel issues, and can impact on employment opportunities. The risk then becomes about becoming invisible and forgotten. Young people need to remain in their care placement communities post-care.
- Large catchment areas can create service disconnection making it difficult to create positive connections with other services
- There is a lack of specialised resources such as mentoring and positive role modelling, resulting in social isolation and the risk of a drift into a homeless subculture
- There is a lack of rural policy for youth leaving care that addresses issues such as service connection, being accommodated in the local area, travel issues and outreach access to young people, making it more likely that young people in rural areas will remain or are at greater risk of homelessness
- Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA – DEEWR) guidelines are difficult to understand and information on the guidelines is inconsistent

##### *Recommendations:*

- More youth regional forums and training are required, including training on practice-based engagement theory. These learning opportunities should be available across all regions, not just Melbourne

- Greater connection to, and co-ordination with, child protection services (policy and practice) is required, including working cross-sector on care and placement plans and case meetings with the young person
- A greater number of flexible housing pathways are required, eg. independent living units, home-based care to lead tenant options, private rental with support and brokerage, etc. that include housing rather than just “models of stay”
- Capital projects and new models require careful planning rather than rushing in and working out the details later
- Funding for carers is required, as is funding for cleaners in a range of property options
- Clear criteria is required for leaving care housing and support models that support a range of age groups
- Support is required to age 25 where needed, including brokerage provision for eg. dental services, counselling, etc. to prevent recycling into the homelessness service system
- Specific focus is required on funding services that focus on youth with intellectual disability
- Recognition of the importance of, and support for, celebrating an 18<sup>th</sup> birthday

## **GROUP 2 - EXIT AND TRANSITION PLANNING:**

**Facilitator: Dr. Virginia Dods, Office of the Child Safety Commissioner**

### *Issues identified:*

- Increase the number of available of home based care options to enable more young people to stay within a placement post 18 years, and individual plans should be developed for the young person based on need and developmental stages rather than on an age based system
- There are not enough high quality carers
- Young people with significant behavioural problems are difficult to place in care
- Effective planning that starts early and engages the young person is required, and will reduce the levels of anxiety currently experienced by young people as they move towards their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday
- Housing type should be tailored to a young person’s needs and planned exit rather than simply taking what accommodation is available at the time
- Traumatized refugee minors should automatically be entitled to trauma counselling
- Young people learn better through experiential processes, eg. having the opportunity to attend camps, develop practical living skills
- The lead tenant program is under-resourced and under-utilised
- High staff turnover due to poor conditions and low pay in the community sector is a problem that results in the loss of strong cross-sector working relationships



*Recommendations:*

- Leaving care plans should start as early as possible and would be greatly assisted by stable placements
- Greater continuity between pre and post care is required. If the same worker is not possible, co-location of both programs would allow smoother transitions
- Greater clarity is required on the intersection but separateness between transition planning and leaving care, as two separate processes. Connections to community and mentoring options for young people should commence as early as possible
- Removal of the criteria of 18 years as the exit point for leaving care. "Exit" should be based upon developmental considerations and individual circumstances
- Allocations of a portion of public and social (affordable) housing are required to meet the needs of young people
- Increased professional development opportunities should be provided for staff, particularly those that support continuity of care
- Cross-sector secondments are needed to assist in breaking down silos that currently exist in practice

**GROUP 3 – HOUSING AND SUPPORT**

**Facilitator: Karina Hogan, SA Eastcare**

*Issues identified:*

- There is a lack of planning, including enacting plans where they do exist. Plans need to be collaborative, include the views of the young person and be consistent in format while adaptable to each young person
- There is a lack of priority housing and housing options for young people leaving care
- Inappropriate placements with family/friends increases the risk of further breakdowns

*Recommendations:*

- Recognise and support the importance of celebrating an 18<sup>th</sup> birthday
- Early prioritisation of planning for leaving care that includes housing options as well as community connections
- Specific housing allocations to young people leaving care, including continuation of lead tenant after age of 18 where needed
- Training for agencies/workers to enable a common understanding on the process and requirements of a leaving care plan that includes the young person at every stage, as well as family members
- Protocol that provides referral to a leaving care program at age 16



## **GROUP 4 – RESEARCH**

**Facilitator: Guy Johnson, RMIT University**

### *Issues identified:*

- Putting research knowledge into practice can be challenging, ie. dissemination, knowing what's new and available, having time to read and learn, develop new practice
- Smaller research samples have less policy leverage. Scale is important – policy-makers need numbers
- Locating funding sources is challenging as is sharing this information
- There is a need to distinguish between academically rigorous research and marketing activities/projects
- Large projects are time-consuming and create a time-lag when trying to apply research outcomes

### *Recommendations:*

- Training on best practice for working with young people in care
- A focus on emerging research topics that enable strong sector advocacy and clear messaging, eg. on income management
- Identification of new or existing models for disseminating research and replicating research projects using web-based technologies
- Develop and/or build on existing research networks, including capacity building for partnering (with organisations and learning institutions). This will also allow increases in samples and scale of projects

## **Group 5 – Community Responses**

**Facilitator: Christine Galea, Office of the Child Safety Commissioner**

### *Recommendations:*

Community members can do positive things to assist young people in care. These include:

- Mentoring schemes: mentoring not only enhances the life of the young person but also assists the mentor to learn more about the experiences of young homeless people and to share that knowledge with the broader community
- Advisory committees: offer young people the opportunity to participate on committees and assists them to develop skills and relationships within their communities. They can be either specifically for young people in care (eg. CREATE which can be a good first step for developing skills) or broader (eg. local government committees where skills are developed as well as networks and relationships with the broader community)
- One-to-one support: eg. taking a young person to the football, etc.
- Seek out and develop strong corporate partnerships whereby individuals function as champions of young homeless people



- Volunteering opportunities for young people: enabling young people to participate in 'normal' community activities like CFA or St John Ambulance gives them the chance to develop new skills and feel part of their community
- Stability of placement for young people (and those who support them) is essential to connecting them to the community, and to staying connected. Instability is not conducive to positive community engagement and managing routines and responsibilities
- Address community concerns and stigma. Some strategies to do this are:
  - Find champions within the community and those who are 'community-minded', eg those involved in other community activities
  - "Word of mouth" is an effective tool for doing this – eg. a mentor can share with others in the community their knowledge and what they have gained through mentoring
  - Let communities know that it is not 'too hard' and that small things can make a big difference
  - Create opportunities in the broader community to demonstrate the positive contributions young people who are in/have been in care can make to their community, eg. as CFA volunteers
  - "Good news" stories are as important as highlighting the consequences of doing nothing
- Youth workers, mentors and community volunteers must be well-supported and trained.



