YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN AUSTRALIA
Numbers
Resources
Drivers
The numbers…

Australia has a population of about 23 million.

On the last census count there were over 104,000 homeless and about 5,000 rough sleepers.

This figure has remained constant for about 15 years whilst the population has increased.

There are 28,000 homeless children and young people. We think this is an ‘undercount’ and many more young people are hidden by the data methodology.

In recent years the number of young people has declined – we must be doing something right?
Australia spends a total of $3.9 billion per annum on housing and homelessness services. About a third of the budget is spent on youth homelessness. Last year, 254,000 individuals accessed the Specialist Homelessness Service system. Still, there is a big public, social and affordable housing shortage in Australia.
Only about 19% young people who are homeless use homelessness services.

The majority of homeless young people move between sleeping rough, couch surfing or unsafe/insecure accommodation.
WHY?
ARE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE HOMELESS

Family breakdown, poverty, disadvantage, discrimination, exclusion, lack of access to employment opportunity, lack of adequate income, disengagement from education, health and legal support and the effect of ‘systemic failures’ (poor exit planning from foster care / juvenile justice detention).
Short history
Before the 1970’s youth homelessness was a hidden ‘problem’ which the charities looked after.
St Brigid’s Convent and Orphanage, Ryde, New South Wales.
“Please sir, can I have some more.”
In the mid 1970s and early 1980s Youth Homelessness became a ‘public’ issue.
In an environment of public activism.. in the late 1970s and early 1980s state peaks advocacy bodies such as YAA/Yfoundations (1979) were established. The national NYCH peak was established in 1981.
“… would be a vehicle for lobbying (using simple statistics); info sharing; support and an arena for sharing ideas and new methods being implemented in the refuges”

“We decided that things needed changing outside of our services, that just talking about it amongst ourselves wasn’t going to do much and that we needed a base from which to work for change”
First youth refuges used volunteer house parents.

Then with funding came paid youth case workers.

The first refuges looked more like suburban homes, usually accommodating up to 6 young people.
The first youth refuges set up in early 1970’s like suburban homes as an explicit rejection of the bigger institutions and shelters.
The basic beliefs behind the Wollongong Youth Refuge (W.Y.R.) were:

- In times of crisis, (young) people need a sanctuary/time to focus.
- An institution cannot respond adequately to this need.
- The major services available were generally institutional.
- The W.Y.R. should provide an alternative to institutional care, in times of crisis.
- Currently institutional services are outside Wollongong.
- The W.Y.R. should be a locally based service.
- The W.Y.R. should be a sanctuary/ a "nurturing" place, although it could not be a "home away from home".
- The W.Y.R. should provide a young person with a (second...) chance to focus on how they’re to live.
Youth Homelessness was a ‘contested space’

Youth Refuges were accused of encouraging young people to leave home.

Young People were blamed for their homelessness.

There was lots of talk about the ‘system’ and workers were there to advocate for young people in regards to the ‘system’.
YOUTH
• So by the early 1980s... gradually as volunteers were replaced by paid staff .... volunteers remained involved as members of management committees and boards.

• This coincided with the emergence of government funding .... after piece meal funding was merged, In 1985 the national SAAP (Supported Accommodation Assistance Program) was funded and for the last three decades has been the key homelessness response in Australia.

• The program was also supported by a human rights/homelessness act the SAA Act.
In the early 80s they began to think creatively ‘Beyond Refuge’

During the 1980s services were arranged by into three models: Crisis (1-3mths), Medium (6-12mths) and Long Term / Multi house (up to two years)

Services did more than just provide a bed, a consolidated national program of funding enabled standards of casemanagement and outcomes to be established.
In the late 1990s and early 2000s services reported an increase complexity of needs of young people eg. mental Health, violence, AOD, ICE …

From the mid late 1990s a variety of new complimentary youth programs emerged:

Brokerage (community placement models) and outreach programs emerge.  
Reconnect programs.  
Links to learning projects  
Foyers  
Youth hubs  
… and an increased ‘desire’ for early intervention models
During the 1990s - 2000s ‘stand alone’, 24/7 and small services begin to come under threat. Some opt to merge some just disappear.

A characteristic of the Australian youth homelessness sector was ‘lots of little non institutional NGO services’ … in the 2000’s this begins to change, under economies of scale.

The ‘energy’ of volunteer community management participation begins to wane.

The youth homelessness sector became increasingly stifled by bureaucracy, regulations, economic rationalism and competitive tendering process (instead of just ‘funding’ services)
During the 2000s the sector conversation shifted from being about ‘growing’ more housing and support or innovation … to “preserving existing services and beds”.

After 25 years of SAAP, this is how we saw our response to youth homelessness – i.e. as a linear process.
What do we mean by home?

A safe place, Stability, Support, Basic needs met, Protection, Learning environment, Caring, Opportunity, Fun, Sense of belonging, Connected to community, Relationship with others, Experiment and making mistakes, Able to leave and come back, Positive and guiding relationships, Loving, Unconditional, Non judgemental, Shelter and other amenities, A place where conflict is dealt with positively, Family, Values, Trust, Boundaries, Discipline, Ethics

ITS NOT JUST ROOF - LESS - NESS
It's not just about housing ....
It's not just about a bed either
Young people need foundations…

Safety and security
Home and place
Health and wellness
Connectedness
Education and employment
National Youth Commission on Youth Homelessness (2008)

This inquiry directly informed the Federal ‘A Road Home’ White Paper which reframed homelessness on three strategic policy fronts:

1. Turning off the tap.  
2. Improving and expanding services.  
3. Breaking the cycle of homelessness.
The response to youth homelessness in Australia has reached a cross-road!
Rethinking & Reframing

- How we frame problems shapes the policies and programs developed in response.
- The homelessness response has tended to focus on ‘chronic’ homelessness.
- A place-based early intervention system reform deals with whatever incipient youth issue are manifest.
Rethinking & Reframing

For young people, homelessness is one consequence of disadvantage and the breakdown of fragile support systems especially family.

Becoming homeless all too often leads to dropping out of school; dropping out of school early leads to further disadvantage – 63% of homeless persons in Australia have left school before Year 12.
TGP – System Design Elements

- Population screening
- Flexible Practice Framework
- A rigorous longitudinal outcomes measurement plan
- E-Wellbeing community IT Platform
## A ‘Community of Schools & Youth Services’ Model of Early intervention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Common Agenda</strong></th>
<th>All participants have a shared vision for change, a common understanding of the problem(s), and joint approach through agreed actions and interventions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shared Measurement</strong></td>
<td>A consistent collection of data and measurement of results across all participants and activities – aligned effort and inter-accountability</td>
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<td><strong>AIAD/ e-Wellbeing</strong></td>
<td>Australian Index of Adolescent Development</td>
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<td><strong>Mutually Reinforcing Activities</strong></td>
<td>Differentiated activities but coordinated and collaborative through a mutually agreed plan(s) and reinforcing action(s)</td>
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<td><strong>Continuous Communication</strong></td>
<td>Consistent, open communication to build trust, keep a focus on mutual objectives and to maintain a common motivation and long-term commitment</td>
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<td><strong>Backbone Support</strong></td>
<td>Creating and managing ‘collective impact’ requires real work and skilled staff to support and coordinate the activities of participating organisations</td>
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### Collective Impact
Local System Reform

• A whole of community ‘placed-based’ cohort model;
• A strategic collaboration between the Departments of Education and Community Services especially child protection & youth homelessness services;
• New collaborative structures and process involving local schools and youth services.