



28 October 2016

The Hon. Brad Hazzard MP
Minister for Family and Community Services
C/O: Homelessness Strategy Team
Strategic Reform & Policy
Department of Family and Community Services
Locked Bag 10
Strawberry Hills NSW 2012

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Dear Minister Hazzard,

RE: Foundations for Change – Homelessness in NSW

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a response to the discussion paper 'Foundations for Change'.

As the Minister is aware, Youth Action is the NSW peak body for the state's 1.25 million young people aged 12 - 25, and the services that support them. We commend the focus on young people as a priority group, and are pleased to see a clear commitment to early intervention and prevention. Given that young people are one of the highest users of homelessness services and are identified as most at risk, they require services that can intervene early and that have the skills and knowledge to provide youth-specific responses.

Our response to the discussion paper draws on our expertise in a variety of issues and their interconnectedness with young people and homelessness. This includes issues in relation to the youth specific nature of domestic and family violence, housing, education training and employment, and the use of data to improve services.

Youth Action & Policy Association (NSW)

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Youth Action has been, and continues to work with the NSW government in its reform of Targeted Early Intervention Programs, to ensure that young people get the support they need and do not reach crisis.

We reiterate that youth services are essential services in relation to preventing and intervening early for young people at risk of homelessness. As such, Youth Action brings insights into the importance of a youth specific response to youth homelessness and the role of generalist youth services at a prevention and early intervention level.

Youth Action supports the intention of the discussion paper to form a strategy that identifies problems leading to homelessness early, responds to crisis quickly and holistically, and that looks to ensure that there are a number of pathways for young people to access secure and stable housing whether it is private or community based. In addition to these core principles we would add that responses to young people need to be timely, appropriate to their life stage and circumstances, as well as be accessible.

We also note and support the focus and prioritising of young people who have had an out-of-home care (OOHC) experience and are at risk of homelessness. We further advise that this not become the sole focus of reducing youth homelessness to the exclusion of all others. In recent advice to government, Youth Action highlighted the lack of support afforded to young people, likely aged 14 - 17, by the child protection system. This issue has been raised with the NSW government since at least 2008, is characterised by piecemeal responses and there is still no overarching strategy to support young people at risk in NSW. As a result, there a many young people who are at risk, are not in the OOHC system, and could continue to fall through the cracks if strategies such as 'Foundations for change' exclude their experiences, or make them ineligible for programmatic assistance simply because the state has already failed to respond, not by virtue of their need, but by virtue of the lack of resourcing available to both the department and the sector.

We were pleased to provide advice to the government at the Premiers Roundtable on



Youth Homelessness and look forward to continuing to work with government to ensure outcomes for young people in contact with youth services, and young people at risk of homelessness. We have made some specific comments on parts of the discussion paper, which you can find following. We trust these will be of assistance to the Minister and Department and hope to expand on these various points in collaboration with the Department. Should you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Katie Acheson".

Katie Acheson

Chief Executive Officer

Youth Action

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RESPONSE TO DISCUSSION PAPER

Creating Pathways into Housing

Affordable housing must be a focus in addressing homelessness, as stated in the paper 'Access to affordable housing can prevent homelessness and provide a pathway out of homelessness' and is crucial for access to opportunities such as service support, employment and education.

Housing and rental unaffordability have increased the risk of youth homelessness. It must be acknowledged that this is a different context for young people than for generations past. It is characterised by declining homeownership rates, decreasing housing and rental affordability, a decline in the availability of social housing, and rising youth homelessness.

Introducing a broad based land tax, addressing tax levers such as negative gearing and capital gains tax, introducing appropriate first home buyer schemes will go some way to supporting young people into homeownership, alongside increasing supply of housing.

Rental structures that block young people from access to the private market must become a priority for NSW, particularly given the uncertainty in housing policy more broadly and the time it will take for change to take effect. More young people turn to renting for longer periods of time and the rental framework must address their needs and provide security. The recent review of the Rental Tenancies Act went nowhere near introducing a comprehensive framework that reflects emerging trends. Young people are also disadvantaged in the rental market, and models that address the link between landlords as housing brokers and young people could provide a source of innovative solution.

As the pressures in the private market increase, the need for low cost housing accessible to young people who are moderate or low income earners is necessary. However social housing, and the support services that often accompany social housing are hard to access, and as some would state, not a great outcome for young people.



We also need to increase availability of transitional housing that provides young people with a medium term option to help them bridge the gap to the private rental market. An approach that places young people who need stability into medium term housing in the first place, rather than a churn through crisis accommodation is likely to achieve better outcomes in the first instance, as the less time spent homeless, the less susceptible young people are to the diverse range of associated negative outcomes.

With specific reference to Housing First responses, we note that supportive staff with appropriate skill - youth specific skills - are important.

Harnessing community and corporate engagement to prevent and reduce homelessness

Youth Action has long stated that housing in NSW is underutilised. We suggest that Homeshare, or homeshare-like programs be tested for feasibility in NSW youth homelessness 'hot-spots'. This model accesses community goodwill through use of underutilised rooms at less than market rent in return for assisting an ageing homeowner to age in place. This in turn provides cost savings to government due to reduced needs associated with aged care, as homeshare facilitates ageing populations to stay in the home, for longer, while providing young people with stability and space to save to move into the private market.

Education, Employment and Training

Youth Action supports the goal of the NSW government to ensure young people complete year 12, have pathways into employment and that there be support for unemployed people to transition back into work. Achieving outcomes for young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness must be broader than housing, but also broader than education, employment and training. We should look to achieving outcomes for young people that address the environmental and social determinants that are linked to homelessness which aren't factored in here, such as health and wellbeing.



Youth Action believes that there are programs in place regarding education, employment and training for 'at risk' young people could be expanded and that there are gaps that require address. Foyer and foyer like models support young people at risk via wrap around models to reengage young people in education and/or training, to transition them to independence.

School and community partnerships could be enhanced. Models such as the Geelong project and the Ryde project are making headway to keeping young people engaged.

Career guidance requires address, and Youth Action has a forthcoming paper with some suggestions that we would be happy to discuss with you.

Suspension practices can be improved and provide support to teachers to have a broader base of options regarding behaviour in order to avoid education disruption and disengagement. This impacts on young people who have experienced trauma, such as young people with an experience of out of home care or young people with recent migrant and refugee experiences, for example.

Alternative education is a core part of the system to make sure that young people have education options should they be at risk of disengaging from mainstream education. There are gaps, however.

Job networks have not catered appropriately to young people in general and especially not young people experiencing disadvantage. A holistic strategy to youth unemployment would look at the needs of young people and a reduction of the barriers they experience to work (like homelessness), as well as the training they need to get jobs. This support might need to extend to employers in providing them support to retain and train young people. Brokers have had success in the past here in linking employers to young people and maintaining the work relationship.

Strengthening collaboration and embedding early intervention.

Domestic and Family Violence

Homelessness is often the result of a range of interrelated issues. Domestic and



Family Violence (DFV) plays a large role for young people, but young people's place in DFV policy in NSW is tenuous.

Youth Action supports a whole school model to preventing DFV and in turn, the associated homelessness for the youth population. The model has been trialled internationally and is currently being trialled in Australia. One of the key components is breaking down the barriers between gendered violence expertise and schooling systems to strengthen collaboration.

Youth Action has worked with DFV NSW to formulate a model and costing for a NSW context. We would be happy to provide further information upon request.

Community of Schools and Youth Services

Again, the Geelong project, as is now being tested in Ryde, is an example of early intervention that seems to be achieving strong results.

Youth Services and Early Intervention

Youth services are essential in identifying youth homelessness early. Their role is to form relationships and provide service to enhance the protective assets in young people's lives, as well as support them intensively in times of need. These services are different to the specialist programs that provide housing and support to attain housing, such as include crisis and emergency accommodation and medium term housing and support, as well as programs linking young people experiencing homelessness with employment, education and training. Other such programs offered especially to young people experiencing homelessness include counselling, mental health support services, pregnancy and parenting support services, and drug and alcohol services.

Youth Action has collected data on the work of many of these generalist services in its Youth Work Snapshot 2011. The Snapshot provides a statistical picture of work being undertaken by non-government youth services in NSW that are funded by the NSW Government. These services are non-specialist in relation to homelessness: they are not accommodation services and they are not funded to provide homelessness-



specific services.¹

A striking finding of the Snapshot was that young people are approaching these non-specialist youth services for assistance relating to homelessness and housing. The Snapshot also shows how generalist youth services are working with correlates of young people's homelessness – particularly family breakdown, family/household violence and relationship breakdown or violence; but also drug and alcohol support needs, mental health needs, and needs associated with exclusion from education, training and employment.

These youth services became evident as sites where young people and their families seek assistance for needs around housing and homelessness at the same time as they are performing work that prevents homelessness. These services are crucial as young people who are at risk of homelessness are rarely experiencing only housing issues, do not want to repeat their story in a revolving door of services, can get lost in the service system, and provide an excellent opportunity to make sure young people get support the first time round.

¹ The *Snapshot* deliberately excluded services in NSW that are funded to provide assistance with young people's housing or other issues relating to explicitly to youth homelessness. The ways in which these services were designed and funded underwent significant change in 2011, when two distinct streams were established: Early Intervention and Placement Prevention (incorporating Child, Youth and Family Support services; Intensive Family Support services and Intensive Family Preservation services) and Community Builders (incorporating programs for which there is an identified need for particular 'communities of identity' and/or 'community of location'). Non-government, community-based youth service in NSW will now receive funding for service delivery under one or both of these streams (Government of NSW, 2010).