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**Developing models of  
good practice in  
meeting the needs of  
homeless young  
people in rural areas**

authored by

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for the

**Australian Housing  
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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACH	Australian Council of Homelessness
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
CAmhs	Child and Mental Health Service
DtI	Department of Territories, Local Government and the Regions
FISWS	Family and Individual Support Workers Service
ICYS	Integrated Collaborative Youth Services
IT	Information Technology
KIT	Keeping in Touch with School Program
RAPS	Resources for Adolescents and Parents
RAFT	Resourcing Adolescents and Families Team
REFS	Regional Extended Family Services
SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
UK	United Kingdom
VHS	Victorian Homelessness Strategy

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Positioning Paper considers the conceptual issues associated with meeting the needs of homeless young people in rural areas. The Paper begins with a discussion of the causes of homelessness amongst young people, the number of homeless young people and their pathways into and out of homelessness. It is estimated that there are just under 30,000 homeless young people in Australia, though estimates vary depending on the methods employed to calculate their number. The 'cultural definition' of homelessness is applied throughout this paper and in the conduct of this research.

The Positioning Paper then examines the factors that place young people at risk of homelessness and the models that have been used to deliver housing and other support services to this vulnerable group. The paper then goes on to consider the question of gender and homelessness and argues that this is an important dimension of homelessness that is often given insufficient attention. There has been a significant increase in the incidence of homelessness amongst women and that women are a more vulnerable homeless group than men. Finally, the paper discusses homelessness in rural or non-metropolitan regions. Drawing upon the international literature it is argued that rural homelessness is often neglected as it is 'invisible' to the general population and is not consistent with the rural idyll. Youth homelessness in rural areas presents significant challenges for policy makers and the providers of services because low population densities make it difficult to provide adequate services to all parts of a region; because many parts of rural Australia have been badly affected by economic restructuring; and, because housing and labour market conditions may make it difficult for young people to gain access to employment or housing.

This Positioning Paper develops the conceptual framework for our analysis. Through this paper we draw upon the work of Williams and Popay (1999) in identifying four conceptual domains that assist in understanding why some young people end up as homeless. These four domains are:

1. *the welfare subject* (subjectivity, identity, agency and social position)
2. *the social topography of enablement and constraint* (distribution and meaning or risks, resources and opportunities)
3. *the institutional and discursive context of policy formulation* (political discourses of welfare, professional and scientific expert discourses, local and national discourses and institutional arrangements)
4. *the contextual dynamics of social and economic change* (globalisation)
5. demographic change, household formation, boundaries of the nation state and a new welfare settlement) (1999,p. 17).

These four conceptual domains help us understand the nature, causes and consequences of homelessness. Importantly, their framework emphasises the multiple and complex pathways into homelessness and draws attention to the consequences and circumstances that maintain homelessness.

The Positioning Paper concludes with a discussion of the directions forward for the research and the conduct of the fieldwork. Focus groups involving homeless young people will be undertaken in regional centres in Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and Western Australia. The focus groups will be used to map the pathways into homelessness amongst these young people; assess the strategies they use to survive; identify their needs and housing circumstances and evaluate their use of services. Other interviews in the same locations will be undertaken with service providers.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

This Positioning Paper is the first output of a research project on Homeless Young People in Rural Areas funded by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute. The research aims to document new and better models of providing assistance to homeless young people in rural areas. It sets out contemporary approaches and practices for dealing with homelessness amongst rural young people, it will evaluate how assistance is provided by youth accommodation services in three states, and seeks user and provider input on alternative models of support. This research defines young people as those aged 12 to 25.

Commonly support for homeless persons is equated with the provision of shelters but current approaches to youth homelessness provide a spectrum of services, ranging from fully supported accommodation, to outreach accommodation and assistance with independent living through to holistic approaches addressing barriers to independence. This research considers the full range of supports offered to homeless young people in rural areas and how the links between them can help or hinder in meeting the needs of this vulnerable group.

The research questions embedded within this project fall within three interrelated themes: contribution to knowledge, contribution to policy and contribution to practice.

## *Contribution to knowledge*

- What can we learn from the international and national literature about:
  - Models for meeting the needs of homeless persons, especially young people, in rural areas?
  - The pathways into and out of homelessness for young people in non-metropolitan Australia and are these different from the pathways in urban areas?
  - The gendered nature of these models and pathways and consequences for intervention?
  - Current State and Federal Government policy on young people's homelessness?

## *Contribution to policy*

- What State and Federal policies impinge upon homeless young people in rural areas and what impact do they have on both providers and consumers of support services?
- How can young people and support providers negotiate the shortage of exit points from formal support services, such as those provided under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)?
- What has been the impact in rural areas of initiatives such as the Innovative and Collaborative Youth Services (ICYS) funded by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services?
- What State and Federal policies impinge upon homeless young people in rural areas and what impact do they have on both providers and consumers of support services?
- How can the policies and practices of public housing providers be improved to enhance longer term housing options for young people in rural areas?
- How can State and Federal policies, programs and procurement processes be improved to strengthen community resources supporting rural young people toward independence?
- What challenges confront existing policies and programs and how can these be addressed to strengthen good practice?

## *Contribution to practice*

- What are the experiences of homeless young people in rural areas and how do these experiences differ from what we know of homeless young people in urban areas?

- How are homeless young people in rural Australia supported and does their location make the delivery of services to this group more difficult? How can these services be delivered cost effectively?
- What are the personal and community constraints/barriers which hinder young people in their journey to independence?
- What are the personal and community enablers which assist young people in their journey to independence?
- What strategies are available for addressing the shortage of public and private rental stock in many rural areas?
- What accommodation options are available to young people in rural areas (including emergency housing by both government and welfare agencies) and why are these options insufficient to meet the outstanding needs?

This Positioning Paper does not set out to answer these questions. Instead it maps out the conceptual framework that will be applied through this research. The Positioning Paper begins with a discussion of the definition and enumeration of homelessness in Australia, it then considers the theoretical framework that will be used to understand youth homelessness. The Positioning Paper then moves on to examine the policies, projects and philosophies of assistance used to address youth homelessness in Australia. The Positioning Paper then turns to consider issues of gender and culture amongst homeless young people, and draws upon the recent writings of British researchers to set out a new framework for understanding homelessness. We then turn to consider homelessness in rural regions and the impact of location on pathways into and out of homelessness. The Positioning Paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of this material for the conduct of the empirical component of our research.



## **2 OVERVIEW: DEFINING HOMELESSNESS IN AUSTRALIA**

Despite several decades of research into homelessness in Australia, considerable debate nonetheless exists concerning the precise definition of the term 'homelessness', and how many people should be officially recognised as homeless. At present, perhaps the most widely accepted definition of homelessness is the so-called 'cultural' or 'conventional' definition first articulated by Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1992), and used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) in the both the 1996 and 2001 Censuses. According to this definition, homelessness is not an objectively defined construct or benchmark, but a relative concept defined with reference to a society's understanding of the minimum accommodation to which they believe each citizen is entitled (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 2001). With a few exceptions, for example, people necessarily in institutional arrangements (prisons, nursing homes, student colleges), this minimum accommodation is thought to consist of any living arrangement where people have sufficient facilities to undertake the basic functions of everyday living, such that their safety and physical health is not compromised (Centrepoint, 1995; Housing of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs, 1995; Neil and Fopp, 1992). Such facilities include a connection to utilities, adequate living space, a bathroom, food preparation areas, sleeping space, and where their tenure is secured by a lease or other similar arrangement (Badcock and Beer, 2000). At the same time, it is recognized that this definition is subject to variation depending upon the particular circumstances prevailing (e.g. family size), or the cultural beliefs or expectations of the people concerned.

In Chamberlain and MacKenzie's view, three forms of sub-optimal living arrangement can be classified as homelessness. The first, termed 'primary homelessness' is generally uncontroversial, and refers to situations where people are literally without any form of conventional accommodation, and this includes people living rough on the streets, in caravans, derelict buildings, squats, tents, cars, or any other improvised structure or arrangement. The second form refers to people who are living in insecure or short-term accommodation, where there is no lease or arrangement in place to provide security or stability. Common examples include people living with friends or relatives, and those living in hostels, boarding houses, or shelters. The third, and final form, refers to people who live in private boarding houses for extended periods (usually 3 months or longer), where the accommodation is deemed sub-optimal either because of the absence of basic amenities in the rooms (e.g. bathroom, kitchen), or because there is no formal lease in place to provide stability and security. This final category is considered controversial because, of all the three terms, it is more strongly defined with reference to culturally agreed definitions of acceptable accommodation, and because there may be variations in the nature of the amenities available (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 2001; Crane and Brannock, 1996).

Some concerns about the validity of these definitions are allayed by the recognition that homelessness can be defined in terms of factors apart from the physical quality or the security of the arrangement. As discussed by both Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1994) and Neil and Fopp (1992), homelessness has a strong temporal component. Although a person may be homeless only on a single occasion, this is more the exception than the rule, and true homelessness, of the type frequently enumerated and observed, is usually an ongoing process involving moves from one arrangement to another. It involves an identifiable series of stages. For young people, as will be discussed below, this usually involves an initial short-term departure from the family home, followed by a clear break, and then the gradual adaptation to other arrangements. Thus, point in time measures of housing status can be readily combined with assessments of longer-term life histories or trajectories as a means of identifying genuine homelessness.

### **2.1 Estimating the Incidence of Youth Homelessness in Australia**

The ABS recognized enumeration of youth homelessness conducted by Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2001) provides two ways of counting the number of young people (aged 12-18 years) becoming homelessness each year. The first method is to ascertain the cumulative number (CN) of young people who become homeless in a given year; the second is to take a

point in time estimate (PE) in which only those who are homeless on a specific date are counted. The former (CN) is always considerably larger than the latter (PE) because it does not consider the duration of homelessness. Many young people are homeless only for very short periods (2-3 weeks, Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 2001), so that few are consistently homeless throughout a given year. A point in time estimate will only include those who happen to be homeless at the relevant census point, and many of these may not be homeless within a month of this date. Chamberlain and MacKenzie used this latter measure and developed their estimate using a 3-stage process. First, they visited schools and asked staff members to identify homeless students as based upon the cultural definition described above (primary, secondary and tertiary). These figures were totaled by state and corrected for under reporting. In the second stage, they gained access to Supported Accommodation (SAAP) data in each state and from the standard SAAP data-collection ascertained what proportion were at school. This was then generalized to the entire homeless youth population. It therefore followed (for a given state) that, if X per cent of the homeless population (H) were at school, and S students had been identified as homeless from the school census, then  $X / 100 \cdot H = S$ . This would mean that, if  $X = 70\%$ , and  $S = 3000$ , then  $0.7 H = 3000$ , so that  $H = 3000 / 0.70 = 4286$ .

Using this technique, Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2001) estimated that 26,060 young people aged 12-18 years were homeless in Australia on the date of the census, although it was acknowledged that the figure would be considerably higher if data were available concerning the total number of young people becoming homeless at any time during the year (CN). Comparisons with figures obtained in 1994 (corrected for population increases and variations in inclusion criteria) showed that the homeless population had increased 8.4 per cent from 1994 to 2001. Their estimates also revealed higher rates of youth homelessness in South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania (a rate of between 17 and 20 per 1000 young people aged 12-18 years in the general population) compared with only 10 to 12 per cent in Victoria, New South Wales and the ACT. A problem with these analyses, however, was that there was little evidence to document regional variations in homelessness. If, for example, SAAP services were not equally distributed across all geographical areas in each State, it follows that the rate could not be generalized back to the population of each region. Thus, it is unclear to what extent these figures could be reliably generalized to non-metropolitan areas in each State, especially when there may be variation in the availability of supported accommodation services, the reference point for the estimation procedures that were used.

## **2.2 Conceptualising Homelessness: Its Causes and Consequences**

The following discussion of homelessness follows a framework developed by UK social policy writers Fiona Williams and Jennie Popay (1999). It offers a particularly useful approach to reviewing youth homelessness and other dimensions of disadvantage because it builds bridges between individual (subjectivity, identity, agency and social position) and structural factors that contribute to homelessness. Issues of individual circumstances and social structural factors are identified repeatedly in the literature as exerting an impact on pathways and experiences of homelessness, including youth homelessness (Edgar and Doherty, 2001; Mallett, 2001; Watson, 1988, 1981; 2002; Neil and Fopp, 1992; Crinall, 1995). However they are often depicted as poles with individual factors at one end and structural factors occupying the other. Such conceptualizations simplify what are messy connections between individual behaviours and attributes on the one hand and the broader social world on the other. Williams and Popay's framework offers a means to challenge simplistic assumptions of structure and agency relationships, as well as map connections within the complex interplay of factors. They outline four overlapping conceptual domains:

1. *the welfare subject* (subjectivity, identity, agency and social position)
2. *the social topography of enablement and constraint* (distribution and meaning or risks, resources and opportunities)

3. *the institutional and discursive context of policy formulation* (political discourses of welfare, professional and scientific expert discourses, local and national discourses and institutional arrangements)
4. the contextual dynamics of social and economic change (globalisation)
5. demographic change, household formation, boundaries of the nation state and a new welfare settlement) (1999,p. 17).

These four conceptual domains help us understand the nature, causes and consequences of homelessness. Importantly, their framework allows for consideration of the multiple and complex pathways into homelessness and draws attention to the consequences and circumstances that maintain homelessness.

### 2.2.1 *The Welfare Subject*

The characteristics of individuals or 'the subject' is the first of the four conceptual domains identified by Williams and Popay (1999) as critical in understanding social phenomena such as homelessness. Increasingly research, which has focused primarily on structural explanations has proven "unhelpful in so far as it implies the existence of a metaphorical scaffolding upon which we are strung like puppets pulled one way and the other by forces beyond our immediate control" (Hill and Bessant 1999 p. 44). Alternatively, research, which seeks to examine the full complexity of human action can offer a deeper, richer analysis. In seeking a more complex understanding of the nature of, and relationships between, young people and homelessness Popay and William's (1999) concept of the welfare subject is useful. The shaping of an individual's sense of self and identity is derived from and mediated by structures. These structures include globalisation, patriarchy, the family, education, political governance; and they operate within the context of formative influences such as age, sex, gender, sexuality, class and ethnicity, and through social relationships with others. As Hill and Bessant (1999 p. 44) point out:

the interface between the social world and human agency means that young people are shaped by 'society' just as they have the power to shape some of their own experiences. The actions of young people are infused with particular cultural meanings that shape the ways in which they perceive and experience the world...Agency in this sense, is not merely a conduit through which greater structural forces are played out...Rather it refers to the actual and empirically discoverable chains of mutual relationships which are based in families, markets, work organisations, neighbourhoods etc.

One important challenge to developing effective responses to youth homelessness is that many of these young people are affected by other factors detrimental to their well-being. As found in studies all over the world, young homeless people are significantly more likely to have mental health problems than their peers (Cauce *et al*, 2000; Kamieneicki, 2001; McCaskill, Toro and Wolfe, 1998; Unger, Kipke, Simon, Montgomery and Johnson, 1997); to have a greater incidence of substance abuse (Unger *et al*, 1997; Diaz, Dusenbury, Botvin, and FarmerHuselid, 1997; Greene and Ringwalt, 1996); to be more sexually at-risk both in terms of susceptibility to STDs and their involvement in prostitution (Johnson, Aschkenasy, Herbers, and Gillenwater, 1996; Kidd and Kral, 2002; Woods. 1998); to be more socially isolated (McCarthy, Hagan, and Martin, 2002; Rohde, Ferreira, Zomer, Forster, and Zimmermann, 1998); to have poorer physical health (Ensign, 2003); and to have a greater involvement in offending behaviour (Bessant, 2001).

It is likely that these findings are attributable both to the experience of homelessness, and also a 'selection effect', whereby young people with a higher prevalence of psychosocial difficulties are more likely to become homeless. Evidence from the studies above clearly indicates that homelessness significantly increases the likelihood of young people being exposed to social groups and circumstances conducive to the development of high-risk behaviours. At the same time, given the significant over-representation of former State wards in homeless populations (Cashmore and Paxman, 1996; Maunders *et al*, 1999), it is clear that many young people with previous histories of abuse, family disruption, and emotional trauma become homeless. Australian research shows that young people in out-of-home care score

significantly worse than their peers on measures of psychosocial adjustment, and have a greater incidence of offending behaviour, school disruption, and substance abuse (Delfabbro, Barber, and Cooper 2002; and Bath 1998). From a practice viewpoint this suggests that, even if interventions were successful in preventing homelessness amongst those at greatest risk (therefore avoiding exposure), there would still be a need to address a wide range of psychological and social issues relating to this population of young people.

### 2.2.2 *Enablement and Constraint*

The risks and opportunities available to young people significantly influence their propensity to become homeless and their experiences once they leave home. Risks and opportunities vary by age and other circumstances, but include the risk of abuse, family conflict and the opportunities for homelessness generated by changing circumstances in their care.

In their framework Popay and Williams (1999) describe a landscape of enablement and constraint as a domain connecting the welfare subject and social structure. This they term a social topography comprised of meanings and distributions of risks, opportunities and resources. In their use of risk as a concept they make reference to wider sociological debates. They follow Beck and Giddens's notions of risk and uncertainty generated in part from complex changes in economic, social and political circumstances. They also draw attention to how risks are distributed across population groups, communities or within a society. Popay and Williams's discussion is particularly relevant because it enables an understanding of what these risks *mean* to people or how they interpret them. Neil and Fopp (1992, pp. 97-98) in a discussion of vulnerable populations and homelessness made a similar point regarding the term 'risk'. They suggest that whilst risk can be a useful marker in understanding the issues and flagging paths of intervention, it can also mask people's own choices about their life courses and situations where the presence of risk factors does not lead to homelessness.

Popay and Williams also draw attention to a topography of resources which can enable young people to negotiate their circumstances. Popay and Williams take a broad interpretation of resources as intrapersonal coping abilities, communal and family supports and strengths, social services and economic resources (Popay and Williams, 1999). For example Averitt (2003 p. 83) in a discussion of homeless women with preschool children, of whom she notes many are adolescents and young adults, identifies the absence of social supports as a resource which distinguishes these homeless women from other women in arguably similar circumstances.

Numerous national and international studies have documented the many situational factors that contribute to youth homelessness (e.g. Auerswald and Eyre, 2002; Bridgman, 2001; Ensign and Panke, 2002; Morgan and Vincent, 1987; Neil and Fopp, 1992). Although caution must be applied in not confusing correlation with causation (Fopp, 1995), or over-estimating the importance of the personal characteristics of homeless young people, a consistent set of situational factors have emerged in the research literature (Crane and Brannock, 1996). Situational factors are those relating primarily to young people's interactions with others, most notably their family and peers. One of the most commonly identified issues is abuse. Studies in Australia (e.g. Kamieniecki, 2001; O'Connor, 1989; Zabar and Angus, 1994), the United Kingdom (Centrepont, 1993) and in the United States (Auerswald and Eyre, 2002; Pfeifer and Oliver, 1997) reveal that a substantial proportion of homeless youth are victims of multiple forms of abuse, including sexual, physical, emotional and neglect, or general domestic violence. In Australia, Howard and Zilbert (cited by Crane and Brannock, 1996), for example, found that 75 per cent of homeless people were victims of domestic violence. Levesley (1984) reported that 45 per cent of cases involved neglect, whereas the Centrepont study in the UK found that a third had experienced either physical or sexual abuse. Studies have shown that sexual abuse is often a greater risk factor for homeless girls (Hendessi, 1992), and that this abuse often has a history extending back many years (O'Connor, 1989).

A second very common finding is that the decision for young people to leave home frequently coincides with significant family conflict (O'Connor, 1989) particularly between married partners. Young (1987), for example, found that this was by far the most significant factor identified by young people who had left home (41 per cent). In many cases, this involved

conflicts with existing biological parents, but research has also consistently documented the elevated risk of conflict in families involving separation and the establishment of new family structures as might occur when a new partner enters the household (Ochiltree, 1990). Mitchell (1994), in Canada, for example, showed that among 2033 homeless young people aged 15-24 years, those with step-parents were 2.5 times more likely to leave home due to conflict, and that step-parents are frequently the perpetrators of abuse (Angus & Woodward, 1995). Maas (1995) points out, however, that the significance of these factors varies according to children's age. Abuse is much more likely to be a longer-term cause of younger children leaving home, or being placed into State care in the interests of child protection. By contrast conflict with parents and child initiated departures from the home are much more likely for young people aged 15-17 years (Delfabbro Barber and Cooper, 2002). This point is highlighted in studies of young people who have formerly spent time in out-of-home care (foster or residential care) until the age of 18 (Cashmore and Paxman 1996; Maunders et al 1999). Children placed into care most often come into care because of significant abuse, parental problems such as substance abuse, domestic violence, or mental illness. Until these children are 18, care is provided by the State. However, once orders expire, care is withdrawn and young people must fend for themselves, often with inadequate preparation for leaving care. Unlike other young people who can rely upon family support when they leave home (Jones, 1995), former State wards do not have such supports, and very often have little ongoing contact with their former foster carers (Cook and Lindsey, 1996). They have few practical living skills (e.g. how to budget, apply for accommodation, undertake basic household chores), and often continue to bear the psychological and emotional effects of previous abuse, separation and dislocation.

This pathway differs from the route which is more common among older teenagers. Older teenagers tend to leave home largely at their own volition, or as a result of a breakdown in the relationship between them and their parents. In such situations, the pathway into homelessness may be more gradual, and involve multiple short-term departures before the final decision to leave. Furthermore, in situations where parents have separated, the departure may involve a departure from more than one home (e.g. that of the father and the mother). Smith (1995), Plass and Hotaling (1994), and Tasker (1995) found that approximately a third to 60 per cent of young people leaving home go from home to live with friends, approximately 20 per cent go to live with relatives, whereas others seek Government shelters, or begin living on the streets. Thus, the transition to homelessness can vary significantly across individuals, and does not always involve a progression from less severe (secondary) to the most severe form of homelessness (primary). There are those who proceed immediately to primary homelessness, and others who experience secondary homelessness when they first leave home. As discussed below, this finding is likely to have significant implications for the nature of possible intervention strategies.

### *2.2.3 Institutional and Contextual Factors*

Institutional and contextual factors refer to broader social, economic and political considerations that either directly, or indirectly, affect young people's capacity to obtain accommodation. Such factors include the rate of unemployment in young people without secure accommodation, the availability of a stable income, and education levels. According to the Australian Council of Homelessness (2002), 69 per cent of homeless people aged 15-19 years, and 93 per cent of those aged 20-24 years are not in education, and approximately 50 per cent of young people aged 15-24 years are without employment compared with a national average of 15 to 20 per cent.

Unemployment and related circumstances make it extremely difficult for young people (and, in particular, early home leavers) to gain access to the private rental market (Neil and Fopp 1992; Crane and Brannock 1996). Apart from the difficulty associated with being able to meet the high costs of rent in the short-term, they are also, for the purposes of ongoing tenure, unable to demonstrate the capacity to continue to pay the rent. Indeed, private landlords are often reluctant to offer accommodation to young people unless they have written references from previous landlords, proof of employment, or other documented evidence of their capacity to accept responsibilities. Many young people experience this as discrimination and give up hope of renting. They lack the confidence or resources to address these requirements of the

rental market. These perceptions are, in many cases, difficult for young people to dispel because of their limited experience with many of the procedural aspects of maintaining tenure. Young people, for example, often have limited skills in managing budgets or setting up procedures to assure the timely payment of rental commitments. They are also often unaware of the standards of household maintenance required to pass landlord inspections, their rights as tenants and the obligations they owe towards the landlord or agent (e.g. appropriate notification of household changes, modifications) (Australian Council for Homeless Persons, 2002).

Although many homeless young people are able to gain access to supported accommodation (SAAP) (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 2001; Maunders *et al*, 1999), this service may not necessarily have sufficient housing to meet the needs of all young people requiring accommodation, and may not be as readily available in some areas (e.g., regional areas of Australia). SAAP is also usually meant to be a short-term form of assistance to meet the needs of young people who are at imminent risk of homelessness or abuse, and was not intended to be a substitute for longer-term public housing (Australian Institute of Housing and Welfare, 2000).

A similar and more serious problem of supply exists in the public housing sector, which is not sufficient to meet the needs of homeless young people. Currently waiting lists for public housing extend for many years in some states (e.g. South Australia) and there are other applicants who will very likely be granted first access to this housing because young children are involved. Young people *et al* who are unable to obtain informal accommodation (e.g. with friends or relatives), tend to be accommodated by SAAP, youth shelters, refuges and boarding houses, and are likely to drift from one form of accommodation to another, with some of these transitions involving short periods of primary homelessness such as living on the streets (Maunders *et al* 1999).

Public policy is another important dimension of the institutional context of homelessness. The dominant ways that homelessness is defined in public policy and welfare debates raises practical and conceptual challenges (Robinson, 2002; Watson, 2001). The contested understanding of homelessness and the mismatch between policy concepts and the delivery of services is a recurring theme in research studies and consultation reports (Watson, 1988; 2001). MacKenzie and Chamberlin (2002), for example, suggest that for young people homelessness needs to be understood as a process rather than as an event. Policy frameworks struggle to deal with homelessness as a process rather than a phenomenon. While governments offer 'service delivery' solutions to of homelessness based on a 'cultural' definition, their understanding of homelessness is confined to the physical i.e., regarding accommodation, physical shelter and access to supports. These interventions do not take account of people's perception of themselves and their emotional attachment to the social world. There are many different understandings about what it means to be homeless and only some of these are addressed adequately by contemporary policy frameworks.

Institutional arrangements for welfare provision have an impact on the ways in which young people experience homelessness and emerge from homelessness. A number of commentators make the point that policies based on market processes have exerted a severe impact on the life experiences of homeless people and the choices available to them. For example, Oberin, Sinnappan and Tamanisau (1999) explain that, in their experiences as service providers, women wanting to leave family violence are faced with inadequate resources such as legal aid, English language classes, accommodation support and youth allowances. They write

The impact of economic rationalism - of policies which heartlessly force the community not take on extra burdens of care - directly affects the women who use our service. For example, cutbacks to legal aid often mean women are less able to achieve satisfactory outcomes for themselves and their children. There has been an increased concentration of services away from 'local' areas, including schools, family courts, health services and other vital community services, which often makes access more difficult and problematic. The women who use our services are desperate (1999 p. 67).

#### *2.2.4 The Dynamics of Social and Economic Change*

The changing social and economic environment contributes to the likelihood that young people experience homelessness. This includes changes in the nature of households and higher rates of divorce over the last three decades; growing inequality within society and the emergence of a significant stock of low income families who may struggle to support teenage children; the development of a highly segmented labour market; reduced job opportunities for young people; and growing problems of housing affordability (Government of South Australia, 2003).

The shifting social and economic environment may raise or dampen the likelihood of young people becoming homeless. As noted previously many homeless young people have experienced conflict in their family home as a consequence of family separation and repartnering. Social, economic or policy change that reduced the rate of separation and divorce may result in a reduction in the number of young people at risk of homelessness. Similarly, growth in the number of jobs available to young people could reduce the level of homelessness amongst this group. The latter is a significant concern for this study given the scarcity of accessible employment opportunities in many rural areas.

#### *2.2.5 Understanding Homelessness Amongst the Young: A Conclusion*

The discussion above has demonstrated the complex pathways into homelessness for young people. We have shown that while there are commonly accepted definitions of homelessness it remains a contested concept and there are doubts about the accuracy of current estimates of youth homelessness at the regional level. We have drawn upon the work of Williams and Popay (1999) in an attempt to understand the complex factors that contribute to homelessness amongst the young. Williams and Popay (1999) identify four significant domains within complex social problems and within these there is an evident tension between structural determinants and factors operating at the level of the individual. Importantly, the framework outlined by Williams and Popay (1999) encourages us to recognize both the individual and structural contributors to youth homelessness and directs us to a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon. Moreover, there is considerable interaction across the four dimensions of homelessness. Young people often bear the consequences of low levels of youth employment within their region; low income and conflict within the family home; limited opportunities to move into private rental or public rental housing; and personal characteristics – such as a disability – which make integration into formal labour and housing markets difficult.

## **3 POLICY AND PROGRAM RESPONSES TO YOUTH HOMELESSNESS**

### **3.1 Policy Context**

According to Crane and Brannock (1996) there has been a significant change in Australian homelessness policy over the last decade, and this has significantly influenced the nature of services that have been developed. As encapsulated in the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission report on homeless children in 1989, The House of Representatives Report (Morris Report) (1995), and the Prime Ministerial Taskforce on Youth Homelessness (1998), the fundamental direction of this change has been a switch away from a sole emphasis on *ad hoc* (or tertiary) interventions, to a greater emphasis on early intervention strategies. Essentially, these involve attempts to target services either to those at greatest risk of homelessness (secondary intervention), or to examine ways of identifying and assisting children before they come to be at risk (primary intervention). Further coinciding with this policy change has been a movement towards case-management as a preferred strategy for interventions (see SAAP Strategic Directions, 1993, and the Working Nation policy framework, 1994), and an emphasis in many states on family preservation in out-of-home care (for example, SA Department of Human Services, 1996). In terms of program development, this has led to a greater focus on interventions involving families, schools, or other educational bodies because of their potentially strategic role in prevention and/ or early intervention.

Interestingly, this change in policy focus is mirrored by almost identical policy changes in other Commonwealth countries such as the United Kingdom. The UK changes are outlined in the Homelessness Act (2002) and the report 'More than a Roof' (DTLR, cited by Safe in the City, 2002). In 'More than a Roof' the British Government concedes that authorities are unlikely, in the near future, to meet the needs of the growing population of homeless people in Britain and that the emphasis should switch from a concentration on housing market failures to social exclusion, and the causes of homelessness. Indeed, one requirement of the new Homelessness Act is the requirement that all local council authorities document how they will deal with homelessness. The aim is to address the long-term causes of homelessness, to develop early intervention and pre-crisis prevention strategies and to target families at risk of homelessness. Not surprisingly, many of the strategies recommended in the most recent documents from the UK (e.g. The Safe in the City' report produced by the Centrepoint and Peabody Trust) are almost identical to those in Australia. The only difference is that Safe in the City is specifically focused on teenagers and does not provide services for young people who should be supported by statutory services (e.g. children leaving care or pregnant young women).

### **3.2 Specific Australian Projects and Strategies**

#### *3.2.1 The Program and Policy Environment*

Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2001) report that the Prime Ministerial Taskforce on Youth Homelessness has funded 26 pilot projects at a cost of \$8 million and provided \$22m in funding to programs such as Reconnect and the Full Service Schools Program. The latter was introduced in conjunction with the establishment of the Youth Allowance. The Federally-funded Reconnect project involves over 90 services Australia-wide and has assisted over 6,000 young people (Evans and Shaver, 2001). This program has mostly been targeted at young people at risk while they are still living with their parents and has reported a 75 per cent success rate. Reconnect is designed to reduce homelessness by reconciling relationships between young people and their families, predominantly via the use of counselling and mediation services (Evans and Shaver, 2001). Evans and Shaver have conducted a detailed review of four of these services in New South Wales and Victoria. Two of these services, Regional Extended Family Services (REFS) in Melbourne and Resourcing Adolescents and Families Team (RAFT) in Wollongong provide very good illustrations of how these services function. REFS was developed from an existing network of youth services and provides a 24-hour full time intake worker with a pager service to allow young people easy



access to the service. Family reconciliations involve a co-mediation model involving a young volunteer mediator in order to make young people more receptive to the service. There are also support groups for parents to teach them how to manage adolescent behaviours, training for school counsellors, and connections with local SAAP services. Young people have the opportunity to experience short periods of independent living to help them 'cool off' or make decisions while the mediation process is in place. The other major program, RAFT, is similar and, as with REFS, has a 24 hour hotline and connections with many other services, including mental health services and employment agencies.

Other services include Vinnies Reconnect in the New South Wales town of Deniliquin which provides a range of family supports, but concentrates prominently on individual and group counseling. It aims to help alleviate family conflict by giving family members the skills to work through their own problems (Evans & Shaver, 2001). Another program, Resources for Adolescents and Parents (RAPS), is a mobile family mediation service provided by Relationships Australia in Sydney to assist young people aged 12-18 years at risk. Included in this service are young people who are at risk of abuse, who have a history of truancy, or who are victims of domestic violence. The strength of this service is its capacity to respond quickly to requests for assistance, and to conduct mediation at a location convenient to the family or young person concerned. In Logan City (Queensland), services such as this have been incorporated into SAAP services via Family and Individual Support Workers (FISWs) so that any young person who comes into contact with SAAP will be considered for mediation if there appears to be some hope of reconciliation with the child's family. Other services such as the Intensive Family Based Service in Burnside (Sydney) and the Marsden Families Program in Brisbane are conducted within an out-of-home care framework and provides support staff to work with families, or short-term respite care, to help resolve conflicts. The service also works to establish a safe home environment to which the child can return (Crane & Brannock, 1996)

A second category of programs are more strongly based around schools or other educational institutions. Several school-based programs have been developed and these share many features. In Victoria the Keeping in Touch with School or (KITS) program implemented by the Directorate of Education involves the positioning of outreach workers at schools to help identify, and provide support for, young people at risk of homelessness or who experience other related problems. These workers provide case-management services for students, access to job information, referrals to agencies in the community, as well as assisting in the development of peer support networks within schools (e.g. students helping other students to make the transition from primary to secondary school). Much of the success of this program is attributable to the presence of strong community linkages which are provided by a steering committee consisting of school and community members. Other examples of this type of service include the HOME project designed by Box Hill Secondary College in Melbourne that trains teachers to recognize the warning signs of abuse and homelessness, and to assist students who are losing touch with their schooling. A similar strategy is employed by the privately funded Ardoch Youth Foundation, except that specific welfare counselors rather than teachers assume the role of support workers. This foundation backs up the counselling component with a range of resources and services, such as accommodation, personal resources and food support, for children found to require this form of assistance.

Although Evans and Shaver (2001) are optimistic about the value of these services, they also identify a number of challenges. First, most of these services, in particular the family mediation service, imply that there is a genuine capacity for reconciliation and that young people have not been homeless for long periods. There is a danger that more serious cases of homelessness may not be deemed suitable for services such as Reconnect. Second, despite the existence of service networks, the success of these programs also depends on the availability of services. In many cases services are not satisfactory. It is not always possible to obtain SAAP accommodation when required, and more seriously, mental health services such as CAMHS can be very hard to access.

Evans and Shaver (2001) considered access to services to be a particular problem in Deniliquin where there was almost no suitable accommodation for young people under the age of 16 and few viable opportunities for links with employment agencies. Third, there were

sometimes significant difficulties associated with developing relationships with schools because of the significant travel necessary in non-metropolitan regions. There were difficulties also in maintaining anonymity and confidentiality in small towns. Evans and Shaver pointed out that not all schools were necessarily amenable to this form of intervention: this form of welfare support was inconsistent with their focus upon academic achievement and school outcomes.

A final class of interventions have revolved around the provision of additional services for young people who are already homeless and where there is little hope of family reconciliation. Many of these services are provided through the community and are specifically identified as youth services. Examples include the Drum Information Café in Sydney that provides young people with a safe, non-threatening environment in which they can interact with other young people, as well as gain access to information concerning agency services, counseling, crisis support, and legal advice. Other services include the National Free Kids Help Line and other information and counselling services offered through SAAP, youth shelters and similar agencies (Crane and Brannock, 1996). The most important insights to be gained from these services are those that relate to best-practice for interactions with young homeless people. Effective services are those which provide a safe, non-judgemental environment; that have youth involvement; that are careful to protect the rights and confidentiality of information provided; that are able to provide immediate services; that have links with other agencies (mental health, employment agencies) with both practical and information support; and that are sufficiently resourced, for example with access to short-term accommodation and ongoing funding.

### ***3.2.2 Specific Models of Service Delivery***

There are many different models of service delivery that are available or potentially available and each has costs or benefits when applied in non-metropolitan regions. This section considers the typology of service delivery models developed by Bisset et al (1999). While differing in emphasis, the models are underpinned by a set of common presumptions. First, homelessness is not simply an issue of inadequate shelter; it incorporates non-housing difficulties and outcomes. Second, regardless of strategy, it is essential that workers develop a continuing relationship with individual clients in order to ascertain and address their particular needs. Third, no model can be successful without proper and on-going organisational support, including adequate funding, appropriate physical environments, staff training and support (Bisset et al 1999 p.137). Crane and Braddock (1996) note additional requirements of best practice: regardless of the models used, services must be easily available, link general and specialist programs, and encourage the client to identify and negotiate their own needs.

#### **3.2.2.1 Outreach Models**

Outreach models emphasise primary and/or secondary intervention. They seek to create partnerships between communities, business and governments, in an attempt to address the structural underpinnings of homelessness. Programs attempt to identify individuals' and populations' needs and risk of homelessness.

Early intervention and outreach is recognised as critical in reducing the risk of homelessness. However it is relatively absent in real terms. For example, only thirty-two of the 1,119 SAAP services were dedicated outreach programmes (AIHW 1997). It is more common to find outreach services as a component of larger of programmes.

Bisset et. al. (1999 p.137) identify the following as elements of outreach models:

- proactive outreach;
- flexible relational model of service;
- capacity for critical response including crisis intervention;
- ongoing support and follow-up to people residing in a variety of accommodation;
- brokerage monies to purchase essential services.

### **3.2.2.2 Intensive Support Models**

Intensive support models are directed toward people with complex or high needs. They acknowledge the psychosocial correlates of homelessness (described earlier in this Positioning Paper) and incorporate non-accommodation services. The level and diversity of support aims to minimize the factors that contribute to risk of homelessness, as well as meeting the clients' need for a roof over their heads.

When successful, this model may begin to counter some of the difficulties faced by people with complex needs. Notable problems include bans from services or community housing due to past disruptive behaviour (Victorian Homelessness Strategy 2000b p.8). Intensive support models are able to work with clients to address 'problem' behaviour rather than simply defining it as deviant and unacceptable.

Bisset et al (1999, p.138) point to the following elements in intensive support models:

- ongoing support for daily life/survival, including facilitating access to specialist support as required, eg detoxification, mental health, etc;
- key worker with a focus on relationship-building and prolonged support (implies relatively low worker: client ratios);
- capacity for intensive support and co-ordination of relevant services;
- flexible use of funds and support provision;
- continuity of support, even though clients may experience many accommodation changes, including eviction;
- extended hours availability.

### **3.2.2.3 Co-ordination Models**

These models fit within a continuum of care approach. They strengthen links between services and programmes that reduce the risk of homelessness or address its occurrence, providing an integrated program responsive to clients' needs. As such, they recognise that the immediate problem of housing is only one of the issues facing clients. People may have complex and diverse needs that will not necessarily be met through one service provider. Co-ordination models are useful in addressing the problems faced by individuals who are seeking to access diverse and possibly uncoordinated elements of the service system (see Goodall et. al. 2001 p.9).

According to Bisset et. al. (1999 p.138), co-ordination models provide some combination of the following functions:

- ongoing assertive outreach to individuals, or communities of people with high needs, with a view to assessment and referral;
- comprehensive assessment of people within a particular target group, eg, people with behaviour disorder, people with mental illness and substance disorders;
- referral and/or negotiating with agencies and the people involved to achieve participation in appropriate programs;
- regular review with individuals of the appropriateness of programs provided for them; and
- structural advocacy, i.e. identification and report on gaps in services for the target group.

### **3.2.2.4. Generic Models**

Generic models focus on the accommodation needs of clients, as they arise. One size does not fit all in the provision of services to homeless people. However, programs within this model aim to meet the needs of a large client population rather than focussing on the needs of particular sub-groups. The model aims at moving people from short term, crisis accommodation, into medium and long-term housing and independent living.

Irrespective of best practice expectations, research indicates that generic models can struggle to meet the needs of clients. When accommodation is limited to communal living “difficult” people – those with multiple needs and/or those who behave in challenging or disruptive ways - may be excluded from accommodation (Bisset et al 1999 p.132).

Bisset et al (1999 p.138) identify the following elements of successful generic models:

- flexibility in accommodation provision (eg. cluster models rather than communal living; capacity to purchase individual accommodation);
- flexibility in support (eg. worker case-loads ‘juggled’ to provide more intensive support during crisis, or as appropriate);
- negotiation of additional support (resources) from referring parties;
- maintaining a balance of client need in the service (eg. limit the number of clients with complex needs).

### **3.2.2.5. Crisis Models**

Crisis models are most evident in crisis centres which deal primarily with people with acute needs. Crisis models are reactive and do not address the underlying structural causes of homelessness. However, they offer a quick response in meeting immediate needs of clients.

Crisis services are necessary in order to meet the extreme and sometimes unexpected needs of some clients. However they are an inadequate response to the structural barriers to stable housing. The services cannot provide long-term support, facilitate independence and minimise repeat service usage (Victorian Homelessness Strategy Unit 2000a p.9). Conversely, the lack of exit points out of crisis accommodation creates its own problems, as people are not able to move into more stable and suitable accommodation, which in turn places further pressure on crisis accommodation (Department of Family and Community Services 2000 p.17, Social Inclusion Initiative 2002 p.13).

Bisset et. al. (1999 p.138) highlight the following elements of successful models:

- extended hours access (crises often occur outside business hours);
- range of service provision (needle and syringe exchange; legal aid; material aid; primary health care, specific supports, eg drug and alcohol counselling, sexual assault counselling);
- team approach
- networks to intensive support service(s), with clarity about respective roles;
- strong links to community resources (police, mental health crisis teams, other);
- community development activities;
- flexible funds (brokerage).

## 4 GENDERED DIMENSIONS OF HOMELESSNESS

The dominant way homelessness is defined in research and public debates is problematic and contested (Robinson, 2002; Watson, 2001) and especially so in accommodating women's experiences of homelessness. Historically homelessness has been equated with men either 'sleeping rough' or living within state or charitable shelters (Edgar 2001; Karkkainen, 2001; Watson, 1998; 2001). Watson in her earlier work writes:

...homelessness, particularly single homelessness, is seen as a male problem, the image of the male tramp on the park bench, the zipless torn trousers-the laceless shoes is a dominant one. Women's homelessness takes different forms and finds different 'solutions' and is thus hidden (1988 p. 141).

Whilst European and Australian research points to the ongoing prevalence of men as homeless, evidence is emerging of an increase in women's experiences of homelessness and a widening recognition of it as a social problem (Aldridge, 2001; O'Sullivan and Higgins, 2001, Neil and Fopp, 1992). A similar trend is reported in the United States of America (Averitt, 2003 p. 82). There is debate as to the extent of this increase, which in part reflects an overall problem in the measurement of homelessness, as aspects unique to women's experiences of homelessness render it especially difficult to quantify. For example, women may be without a home but not without a roof over their head, either because they have fallen back on the support of friends or extended family (Edgar and Doherty, 2001 p.3), or they have found accommodation in hospital emergency departments (Neil and Fopp, 1992 p.93). Edgar in a European survey of research on the extent of women's homelessness estimates that across Europe women make up 11-7 per cent of the street homeless and 25-30 per cent of all homeless people (2001 p. 32). These figures are at best approximations, which Edgar suggests are an under-representation. Whilst he acknowledges the complex trajectories of homelessness for different groups of women, Edgar nevertheless argues that these figures indicate an increase in women's homelessness overall and within this a shift in the composition of homeless populations. In particular there has been growth in the number of homeless young woman (2001 p. 38). Recent figures by the South Australian Social Inclusion unit (2003) estimate that there were 2394 homeless young people aged 12-18 in South Australia at the time of the 2001 census and that 37 per cent were young women.

The shape and form of these trajectories into homelessness for women and for young women are complex. At one level they are shaped by broad social changes in gender relations and associated demographic trends (i.e., delayed fertility, women's labour market participation and changing family types) that co-exist with other social trends such as the shrinking of state welfare. Edgar and Doherty (2001 p. 3-8) argue that such developments, for some women, have inhibited participation in the labour market and access to both the housing market and the resources of the welfare state. A consequence for some can be homelessness. Violence and abuse within the home, family breakdown, drug addiction and mental health problems all form part of this complex landscape (Averitt, 2003 p. 82). However women and young women are not a homogenous group and paths into homelessness need to be understood as part of a broader life course played out within a specific social and cultural environment (Crinall, 1995 p. 43; Edgar, 2001; Robinson, 2002; Nyamathi, *et al* 2000). Crinall makes the point that young women:

do not constitute a subculture because of their homelessness. They are heterogeneous; from various cultures, classes, religions, races and family backgrounds. They share, however, gendered experiences deriving from constructions of masculinity and femininity and the unequal power relationships between men and women (1995 p. 43).

### 4.1 Homelessness Amongst Women

Watson and Austerberry's (1986) study of women's experience of homelessness in London argued the concept of homelessness was multi-layered. The majority of 'homeless' women interviewed did not perceive that the accommodation that they were residing in as 'their' home, but neither did they see themselves as 'homeless' (Watson and Austerberry 1986 p.

92). Watson and Austerberry (1986 pp. 93-97) asked the women in their study to offer their thoughts about 'home' and did so in order to understand the continuum and simultaneous tenuous relationship between 'homelessness' and 'home'. Five categories emerged out of the interviews: 'material', 'physical and emotional well being', 'social relations', 'control and privacy' and 'here and now'. Briefly, the majority of women emphasized the importance of the 'material' specifically in terms of the furniture and the interior of the home. The type of furniture, the cleanliness of the home and the capacity for the 'inside' of the home to reflect their own identity were important issues. 'Emotional and physical well-being' referred to a sense of comfort, warmth and security that women believed was an important attribute of a home. This was particularly relevant for those women who had experienced domestic violence. Alternatively there were women who considered the nature of social relations within the home to be an important reference point in terms of the capacity to experience living within the 'ideal of the normative heterosexual family'. A significant number of women interviewed believed that a home represented a space where one had control over their lives. It was a place where an individual was not subject to other people's rules and regulation. Linked to this concept was that of privacy and being 'inside' offered privacy from the 'outside'. A minority of women who had experienced long-term homelessness and varied short-term accommodation considered their present lodging to be a home.

Through this study Watson and Austerberry (1986) revealed that the concept of homelessness cannot be confined solely to the physical, rather it extended to emotional associations with ideals of what a home represented in terms of relationships with others, attachment and identity. Another important insight to emerge out of this study was the layers of contradictions surrounding the concept of homelessness. Just under 50 per cent of the women interviewed did not consider themselves to be homeless. While they did not identify themselves as residing in a 'home' neither did they identify as homeless because their definition of homelessness referred to **not** having a roof over their head and four walls surrounding them.

Homelessness takes on new dimensions when race and class intersect with gender. At the conference *There's No Place Like Home* (1999) held in Melbourne three women from different cultural backgrounds told of their experience of being homeless (Oberin, Sinnappon and Tamanisau, 1999). In their narrative each woman stressed a complexity of factors; the intersections of gender, race and class and the need to situate homelessness within a history of racism and oppression and the institutional forms which they take. The three women, while offering different stories, revealed a common theme, one that revealed that for them the path to homelessness was part of a web of relations between family members involving abuse. They also showed how these violent experiences have had profound impacts on their feelings of safety within the home, the notion of being home (less) when at home and within the family relations.

These stories reveal that for non-English speaking and immigrant women who suffer from violence in the home:

sense of comfort, safety and well-being is repeatedly denied them. Sadly they regard their homes as jails. They are homeless even in their own homes, and stranded unaware of the services that may be able to assist them. When they finally escape they discover they are further disadvantaged. Sometimes they lack language skills-which reduces significantly their employment prospects-and an independent financial status. These are some of the consequences of their immigration status (Oberin, Sinnappon and Tamanisau 1999 p. 70).

## **4.2 Gender and The Risks of Entering Homelessness**

Mallett *et al* in their paper entitled 'Providing services to homeless young people in Melbourne' summarise research on risks, or in Neil and Fopp's terms 'markers' that might result in pathways into homelessness as:

...family breakdown and conflict; lack of employment or educational opportunities; loss of parental support; physical, sexual and emotional abuse; severe economic hardship while achieving independence; learning difficulties; drug and alcohol

dependency; and mental health issues (Victorian Department of Human Services 2000) (Mallett, *et al* 2001 p. 26).

A number of reports and studies draw attention to risks faced by young girls and women by family violence in all its forms. For example, the Australian Institute for Criminology (2001) report that victims of sexual abuse are more likely to be girls age 10-14 followed by young women aged 15-24. Their figures under-estimate the number of offences because only a small percentage of sexual abuse crimes are reported. According to their research it is estimated that the majority of sexual abuses (around 85 per cent) are not reported to police (The Australian Institute for Criminology 2001). Recent South Australian figures show that the sexual assault rate for young women 15-17 years is three times more than a rate for all women (Department of Human Services, 2000 p. 18). As discussed earlier, the incidence of abuse and violence raises issues of safety within a 'home' and indeed the very idea of home is considered a risky place. Watson writes about the gradual erosion of safety and security that can lead a person to homeless paths as a '...depletion of household resources' (2000 p. 161). For instance studies on youth homelessness have revealed a relationship between the presence of a step-parent and subsequent homelessness for young woman (Department of Human Services, 2000).

Edgar in his survey of European research highlights a strong connection between homelessness and decisions to leave situations of family violence and homelessness (2001 p. 41). Neil and Fopp have also examined the impacts of women fleeing family violence and the difficulties that can result in securing safe, affordable accommodation (1991 p. 99). Sexual and physical abuse or family violence is a critical risk factor (Neil and Fopp, 1991; Crinall, 1995).

Issues within the family are recurring themes in the literature (Edgar, 2001; Ling, 2000 p. 17). On the one hand family breakdown and a lack of safety and support can be triggers for homelessness for young women. Alternatively family support can be a resource to buffer against homelessness. Edgar observes family support is gendered (2001 p. 41). In pursuing this theme he refers to the work of Lanello who writes:

If a family is willing to welcome back a son with the justification that it was external factors that 'ruined him', there is much less likelihood of them welcoming back a daughter, especially if she is addicted to drugs or been in prison (Inello, 1997 p. 13).

The relation of school environments and homelessness are further significant factors. MacKenzie and Chamberlin suggest connections between young people dropping out of school and homelessness are very strong and that once young people drop out of school the likelihood of young people becoming "deeply involved in the homeless subculture" is even greater (2002 p. 24). While MacKenzie and Chamberlin found that more young female students experienced homelessness than male students there was no attempt to unpack possible reasons why this was the case. However, they suggest that family breakdown is a major reason for students leaving home and this is exacerbated by household problems including family violence and intergenerational cultural clashes.

Webber (2002) examined the inter-generational tensions for young Vietnamese people aspiring to and seeking the 'Westernised lifestyle' and different relationships - kin, social relations, consumption and parental expectations for their young. Vietnamese families like all ethnic groups living in Australia are not a homogenous group and vary in the ways that they adapt to a new society based on personal, family and socio-economic capital. While Webber focused on reasons why Vietnamese young people engage in illicit drug use his conclusions can be extended to offer insights into why immigrant young people might enter homelessness. For example "disagreements and rebellion over parental authority...family isolation...family disruption associated with traumatic refugee experience...and or loss of parental control due to different acculturation" are themes that can constitute risk pathways into homelessness (Webber 2002, p. 18).

Risks are also evident in the intersection between traditional Vietnamese and Australian youth subcultures. Opposing pressures from parents and peer groups create dilemmas for

young people that affect all aspects of their lives. In effect they are travelling two worlds - at home parents pressure their young to work hard and achieve scholastically, while on the street they are coached to rebel against authority and reject achievement goals (Webber 2002). Simultaneously Vietnamese young people have higher consumption expectations than their parents (this is generational and occurs across class, gender and ethnicity).

Discrimination in the private housing market is also a factor that can precipitate a situation of homelessness and this has been canvassed earlier in this literature review. Research shows that women face particular issues in accessing the housing market and in finding suitable supported accommodation. Neil and Fopp highlighted that young women are not as able to secure accommodation in the same way as young men (1992, p. 102). They especially highlight the difficulty for women who are pregnant or young women with children, and the fear and discomfort of using shelters and accommodation frequented by men.

Mallett *et al* further note the social, economic, physical and mental health risks that can result from being experiences of homelessness, such as pregnancy and sexual assault for young women, HIV and suicidal behaviour (2001 p. 26). The findings of a large North American study conducted between 1994 and 1996, of 1051 homeless women living in shelters and on the streets in Los Angeles, revealed the extent to which homeless woman experienced victimisation and poor health status (Nyamathi *et al*, 2000). A high proportion (48 per cent) of the women in sheltered accommodation and almost all women (93 per cent) living on the streets reported poor mental health, leading the authors to conclude that ‘...the streets are becoming a congregating place for persons with poor mental health’ (200 p. 569-570). They also found that one third of women reported sexual assault and physical violence. Equally disturbing was that 73 per cent of women living on the streets had been robbed and 57 per cent physically assaulted. The findings of this study are not reported by age but Australian reports point to similar trends affecting women and young women. Crinall’s (1995) experience as a worker in emergency and temporary accommodation for women, as well as studies, by others present compelling evidence that sexual assault and violence continue to be part of women’s lives in shelters, supported accommodation and living on the streets (Burdekin 1989; Claudia Hirst 1989).

### **4.3 Social and Economic Change and Young Women**

Harris (2002 p. 33-34) argues that social, economic and political changes have created a different world for young people, and arguably young women have been more affected by these changes than young men. Globalisation, information technology and an increasing emphasis on a casual, flexible labour force have altered employment practices and opportunities. Increasingly it is young women who are located on the fringes of the formal economy, specifically in part-time, casual service sector employment. It is young women who are more likely to have a tenuous relationship to new technology – less likely to have their own computer, to learn and keep abreast of new IT skills at home. This is especially the case for young women who live in low socio-economic and rural areas (especially for Indigenous young women) (DETYA 1999). Dwyer and Wyn (2001 p. 132) argue that young women have traditionally undertaken unskilled work, and it is this sector that has been disadvantaged with the emergence of different forms of work in the new economy. This has meant that education and training for young women is even more crucial. And while young women are strongly represented in education it does not necessarily translate into employment success (Dwyer and Wyn 2001 p. 134). Bulbeck’s (2001) study revealed how young women continue to aspire broadly to traditional social pathways – to be educated, obtain full-time well-paid employment and combine this with family. Yet while more young women are participating in secondary schooling the traditional conceptualisation of the transition from school to work is increasingly out of step with the reality of young women’s lives (Dwyer and Wyn 2001).

### **4.4 Gender and Homeless Young People: A Conclusion**

This section has shown that gender remains an important dimension within homelessness amongst young people. Importantly, women continue to be relatively invisible in public debates on homelessness and public policy may fail to appreciate the ways homelessness is differentially constructed and perceived by men and women. Homeless young women face



greater risks than homeless young men and may be more likely to be affected by shifts within the institutional and contextual environment.

## 5 RURAL HOMELESSNESS

Homelessness is often presented and discussed as a problem of the cities. Homeless people tend to be more visible in urban areas with 'rough sleepers' and degraded housing an acknowledged feature of most urban areas. There is far less awareness of housing problems in rural or non-metropolitan regions (Beer 1998; Minnery and Greenhalgh 1999). There are, however, acute housing problems in many rural or non-metropolitan regions and these problems include relatively high construction costs (Beer, Bolam and Maude 1994), the 'redlining' of rural areas by some financial institutions (Office of Regional Development 2002) and lower housing standards when compared with metropolitan regions (Burbridge and Winter 1995). Many of the housing problems in rural regions arise out of the lower incomes and reduced job prospects in non-metropolitan regions, as well as the more limited housing opportunities. There are simply fewer resources – accommodation options, support services etc – and this may severely limit an individual's or household's ability to meet its housing needs.

International research has highlighted the reality of homelessness in the countryside. Cloke *et al* (2000) have estimated that there are 15,000 homeless rural persons in England. American researchers have also reported significant levels of homelessness in rural USA (Fitchen 1991, 1992; Lawrence 1995). In their book 'Rural Homelessness: Issues, Experiences and Policy Responses' Cloke *et al* 2002 discuss the critical issues surrounding homelessness in rural areas. They argue that the *invisibility* of homeless people in rural areas is a critical issue, as is the dominant discourse surrounding rurality and 'country living'. Homelessness does not fit the rural idyll and this affects the capacity of both communities and policy bodies to develop solutions.

### 5.1 Access to the Housing Stock

Access to the housing stock is one of the critical issues affecting homeless people in rural areas. While declining rural areas may have excess housing stock, many non-metropolitan regions have a shortage of housing, especially rental housing (Beer, Maude and Pritchard 2003). Work by O'Dwyer (2002) suggests there has been growing pressure on rental housing markets in many parts of rural Australia, especially in the more densely settled areas. Yardy and Thompson (2003 p.27) articulate this situation in a forthright manner

So what about this housing drought? The simple fact in CQ (Central Queensland) is that there is not enough accommodation; there is a chronic lack of affordable housing, and increasing issues about the standards of existing houses. CQ is not unique in experiencing these issues; they are common throughout rural Australia. There is a declining investment in building houses in rural areas, declining standards of some houses and diminishing resources for the provision of social and public housing. Yet at the same time across the region there is an increase in population, in some areas a slow and steady build, in some a slow decline, some are boom/bust and others are just BOOM.

Moreover, recent economic growth projections for Australia's regions (Adams, 2002) suggest that all of Australia's non-metropolitan regions will continue to grow over the period leading up to 2008, thereby placing extra pressure on non-metropolitan housing markets. The shortage of affordable housing options in rural areas and regional cities has important implications for young people who leave home or other care arrangements. They may be forced into homelessness because affordable accommodation simply is not available. They are then faced with the alternatives of sleeping rough, 'couch surfing', returning to unacceptable circumstances in their parental home or previous living arrangement, or being forced to leave the region.

Cloke *et al* (2002), and our previous discussion, highlighted the importance of concepts of 'home' for understanding the accommodation needs of homeless persons and those at risk of becoming homeless. However, there are evident problems in meeting the needs of this group, even if we reduce their requirements to the provision of the most basic shelter. Caravan parks are one potential low cost source of housing. Greenhalgh (2003) examined

the role of caravan parks in meeting the needs of low-income households in search of long-term accommodation. While her work was based in the Central West of Queensland there are strong resonances between her findings and more anecdotal evidence about the nature of caravan park accommodation in other parts of rural Australia. Greenhalgh (2003) reported a number of problems with caravan park accommodation as a low cost solution to the housing needs of people in need or at risk. These difficulties included:

- The relatively high cost of caravan park accommodation, with many residents spending more than half their income on rent. People at risk of becoming homeless may not be able to afford caravan park accommodation;
- The reluctance of caravan parks to take on long term tenants. A large and growing percentage of caravan parks focus on the more lucrative short term and holiday markets. Park managers may be unwilling to provide accommodation for persons outside the paid workforce, thereby excluding most people at risk of homelessness;
- Greenhalgh (2003) found that in rural areas the number of caravan parks appears to be contracting, possibly as a result of local governments shedding 'non core' functions. In many rural areas there simply may not be space in a caravan park for persons at risk of homelessness;
- Management practices in many caravan parks are seen to be restrictive and unwelcome by tenants. As Mowbray (1994) has noted previously, caravan park managers may impose quite rigid controls on tenants, who may have few if any rights under tenancy or other legislation<sup>1</sup>. Homeless people may therefore be deterred from using this accommodation source;
- Caravan parks may be unsafe and insecure, especially for vulnerable groups.

Overall, the shortage of housing in many regional areas is a significant problem. It may force young people into homelessness simply because there are no affordable housing options available to them. It can also make the transition out of homelessness more difficult. Accommodation shortages can result in young people becoming trapped in shelters or other temporary housing forms because of limited exit points.

## **5.2 Place and Home: What Role the Region?**

To date our discussion of rural housing has focussed on the problems confronting young people seeking affordable accommodation in rural areas. Migration to a capital city is one potential solution to the housing problems confronting this group. If housing isn't available locally they could move to one of the capitals where the stock of housing is larger and there are more opportunities for employment.

Potentially there are a number of significant barriers stopping young people from rural areas moving to the cities. First, there are often strong emotional and other ties that bind to their region young people raised in a country town or regional city. There is empirical evidence to suggest that social capital is more strongly developed in Australia's rural areas than in the cities (Onyx and Bullen 2000) and there is a considerable body of work on the strength of community ties in rural areas. Young people often place a high value on being able to live in the communities they were raised in and may be reluctant to move away. Second, while the employment prospects of unskilled young people in rural areas may be poor, they may be little better in the cities. Rural regions have lower levels of educational attainment than the cities and young people whose schooling has been disrupted are unlikely to have the formal skills sought in urban labour markets. Poor job prospects in the cities may deter some homeless young people from moving. Third, young people from rural areas may lack the social networks and/or skills needed to successfully negotiate a transition to life in a capital city. Farrin (2003) notes from her work with young people from the Eyre Peninsula that young people reported concern about the absence of support networks in the city for those moving

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<sup>1</sup> This is a complex area. South Australia's Residential Tenancies Act (1995) does not extend coverage to caravan parks or mobile home estates, but the equivalent legislation in Queensland does under certain circumstances.

for employment or education; the lack of available accommodation in these areas, poor knowledge on how to gain access to services; and a general lack of information on the resources and facilities available in cities.

Clearly, there are strong practical and emotional reasons why homeless young people in rural areas would be reluctant to move to one of the capitals. Being homeless is more than being without shelter. Homeless young people living in rural areas are able to maintain the broader community or locality dimensions of 'home' and moving to a larger urban centre is often not a realistic option. Policy development therefore needs to focus on developing solutions in the regions and places where homelessness is expressed.

### **5.3 Delivering Services to Homeless Young People in Non-Metropolitan Regions**

Previous research and consultancies has recognized that there are particular problems in providing services to homeless people in rural areas. While some of these difficulties reflect the sorts of generic or international challenges discussed by Cloke *et al* 2002, others reflect Australian conditions. O'Toole (1994), for example, noted that many of the challenges confronting human service delivery in rural areas reflected their 'lack of adequate infrastructure' rather than any specifically 'rural' dimension to these places. While rural areas across national boundaries have less infrastructure compared with the cities, many of the challenges facing homeless services in non-metropolitan regions in Australia reflect our political structure, recent political and economic history, economic policies, geography and patterns of urban development.

The Victorian Homelessness Strategy considered the specific needs of homeless people in rural areas and undertook consultations outside Melbourne. The Victorian Housing Strategy (2000) noted a number of key issues specific to non-metropolitan regions:

- Changing economic profiles in non-metropolitan regions has resulted in an increase in poverty and a loss of local resources and infrastructure. These processes have contributed to homelessness;
- People in non-metropolitan regions often experience isolation from services;
- There may be additional pressures on homeless services near state borders as other jurisdictions have fewer, or less well developed services;
- The homeless service delivery system, along with policy development, is designed and run centrally. 'Decision making that is not locally driven often fails to meet local needs' (VHS 2000 p. 1);
- There is a high turnover of staff in rural areas, combined with inadequate numbers of staff. Staff shortages and changes adversely affect client continuity, skill gaps and relationship building. Staffing problems adversely affect the ability to deal with more serious and long term issues arising out of homelessness;
- There is an acute shortage of crisis accommodation in rural areas. In most cases clients must move to the capital city to gain access to crisis accommodation and this forced move cuts their community and support networks;
- The SAAP service delivery model 'reflects a lack of understanding of rural needs and commitment to responding appropriately' (Victorian Homelessness Strategy 2000b p. 2);
- There is inadequate knowledge of housing needs in non-metropolitan regions and a need for greater awareness of best practice in meeting these needs.

The consultations were able to suggest a number of potential solutions to the problems confronting homeless people living outside Melbourne. These included:

- The establishment of local homelessness strategies and a specific rural homelessness strategy;
- Commitment to a continuum of care across homelessness services;

- Provision of additional crisis accommodation, especially for youth under 15 years of age;
- Using funding more flexibly, such as head leasing properties to provide alternative housing for homeless people;
- The introduction of more flexible and responsive property management;
- Strengthening local context and the development of community supports for 'at risk' clients;
- The development of a whole of government response to finding ways to use resources more flexibly;
- The introduction of a local planning approach to ensure the best possible use of resources;
- A focus on prevention.

The outcomes of the Victorian Housing Strategy's consultations draw attention to a number of important themes. First, models of service delivery are, in large measure, generic. The types of services applied in rural and remote areas are a variant on those available in the capital cities. Collingridge (1991) argues that the delivery of human services in rural areas has been beset by the problems of *urbocentrism* with high service costs per client resulting in a poorer level of support in non-metropolitan regions. These models of service delivery do not account sufficiently for the specific problems of non-metropolitan regions and often result in poorer outcomes for clients living outside the capitals. Second, there is a clear need for local planning and local co-ordination of services. The need to co-ordinate services in rural areas is even greater than in the capitals precisely because there are fewer resources and fewer staff 'on the ground'. Agencies therefore need the ability both to co-ordinate their efforts and allocate resources in a flexible way that is responsive to the needs of the local community. The development of local or regional plans to meet housing needs brings with it the possibility of mobilizing more substantial community resources. Hill (2002), for example, reported on the outcomes of an innovative public/private partnership in Portland, Oregon that addressed the needs of homeless young people. Interestingly, the project involved public sector agencies, the non-government sector, but also the business community and the project demonstrated the capacity to achieve greater levels of community engagement with homelessness issues. Local ownership is also a key feature of the Victorian Government's Victorian Rural Human Services Strategy (KPMG Consulting 2002). Third, in common with many other professions, staff in non-metropolitan regions often feel isolated from their peers and this contributes to higher levels of staff turnover. Other research (Collingridge 1991; Wilson 1995) also note that there are absolute shortages of highly skilled staff, further compounding the problems of service provision. Fourth, the challenges of scale, isolation and the need to service a critical mass of clients mean the few – if any services – are provided in genuinely rural settings. Most services are located in regional centres where they can meet the needs of a wider client base. However, the location of services in regional cities does not ensure all needs are met. Foskey (1998), for example, noted that 'regionalisation' is one of the key assumptions underpinning the delivery of human services but that transport infrastructure from small communities to larger centres is often inadequate. Moreover, she noted that 'the size and implications of these gaps in service provision increase as population density decreases' (p. 1). Inevitably, some needs within very small communities or towns are not addressed.

## 5.4 Rural Homelessness: A Conclusion

This section has shown that homeless is a real, but sometimes invisible, phenomenon within rural or non-metropolitan regions. Non-metropolitan Australia has experienced profound social and economic change over the last two decades and this has contributed to the homelessness problem. Worsening economic conditions have resulted in a greater number of individuals and families who are vulnerable and has made the deliver of services to this group more difficult.

Despite common misconceptions, housing beyond the capitals is often relatively expensive and difficult to gain secure. Many regions have insufficient rental housing and the difficulties

are even more acute for young people. In the past caravan parks have been used to meet the needs of low income and homeless people but they offer insecure accommodation and there has been a contraction in supply in some regions. Alternative users of caravan parks – short term visitors and seasonal workers – represent more lucrative and less problematic markets for managers and proprietors. There are significant gaps in the services provided to homeless people in rural areas and these are a consequence of the absence of economies of scale, trends toward the regionalization of health services and metropolitan determination of resources and priorities. Despite these difficulties homeless people in rural areas place great value on their regional linkages – especially their friendship and community support networks – and locally-based solutions would appear to offer the greatest chance of avoiding chronic or long term homelessness.

## 6 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CONDUCT OF THE RESEARCH

This Positioning Paper has set out the conceptual and policy matters affecting our understanding of homeless young people in rural areas. It has shown that young people become homeless for a range of reasons, some that reflect the impact of the external world on the individual, others that reflect individual characteristics. We follow Williams and Popay (1999) in recognising four overlapping conceptual domains that contribute to homelessness:

1. *the welfare subject* (subjectivity, identity, agency and social position)
2. *the social topography of enablement and constraint* (distribution and meaning of risks, resources and opportunities)
3. *the institutional and discursive context of policy formulation* (political discourses of welfare, professional and scientific expert discourses, local and national discourses and institutional arrangements)
4. *the contextual dynamics of social and economic change* (globalisation) demographic change, household formation, boundaries of the nation state and a new welfare settlement) (1999, p. 17).

Homeless young people are often confronted by issues of violence both in the home and their alternative accommodation, mental health issues in addition to limited social and educational skills. The paper has emphasised that while there are risk factors that can be seen to contribute to youth homelessness, not all young people exposed to these processes end up homeless. It has been estimated there are just under 30,000 homeless young people across Australia. These estimates, however, may under-estimate the level of homelessness in non-metropolitan regions.

How homeless people, and homeless young people, view home and homelessness is important. Current policy settings emphasise the cultural definitions of homelessness and it is clear that homeless young people are acutely aware of their 'otherness' or difference. They do not, for example, necessarily see their homelessness as a transition to a known, more settled, alternative.

Over the last decade or so there has been considerable policy innovation in dealing with homeless young people. A greater emphasis has been placed on early intervention and providing families with the skills and resources necessary to solve their own problems. Policy innovations have sought to:

- to target services either to those at greatest risk of homelessness (secondary intervention), or to examine ways of identifying and assisting children before they come to be at risk (primary intervention);
- move towards case-management as a preferred strategy for interventions;
- emphasize family preservation through out-of-home care and mediation;
- place a greater focus on interventions involving families, schools, or other educational bodies because of their potentially strategic role in prevention and/or early intervention.

The review of the literature clearly shows that the most effective support services for homeless young people are those which:

- provide a safe, non-judgemental environment;
- have significant youth involvement and are attractive to young people. Drop in centers, for example, can be an important funnel for the delivery of services and information;
- are careful to protect the rights and confidentiality of information provided;
- are able to provide immediate services;

- that have links with other agencies (mental health, employment agencies) with both practical and information support, and,
- that are sufficiently resourced that is they have access to facilities such as short-term accommodation and have funding that is on-going.

The Positioning Paper has also emphasised the importance of applying a gendered dimension to the understanding of homelessness. There is evidence that while homeless women do not fit the stereotypes normally associated with homelessness, their rate of homelessness has grown rapidly. Moreover, homeless women are at risk of sexual and physical violence may be reluctant to use support services or shelters frequented by men and may be ill equipped for the contemporary workforce.

Homeless young people in rural areas face particular challenges. Rental markets are often more difficult in rural regions compared with the city and job opportunities are frequently more limited. Both factors make securing accommodation a challenge. At the same time, rural homelessness is often invisible, so there may be less policy attention afforded to the problem. Homeless young people in rural areas may be reluctant to move to the metropolitan areas because of poor information about the services available in the capitals, the lack of support networks in the larger cities, limited employment opportunities due to more limited education, and the ties of friendship and kinship networks.

These factors will influence the further conduct of this research. We recognise that in undertaking fieldwork we will need to be:

- Mindful of the gendered nature of homelessness, and gender issues in talking to young homeless people;
- Aware of the different understandings of home and homelessness;
- Cognizant of the complex problems confronting many homeless young people;
- Careful to document the different pathways into homelessness;
- Aware of the survival strategies and exit strategies used by homeless young people;
- Careful to collect data on why homeless young people stay within their region.

Our survey of material on homeless young people in rural areas also raises discrete research questions to be explored through fieldwork. These questions include:

How effective are regionalisation strategies in meeting the needs of homeless young people in rural areas?

- What dimensions of rural life are valued by homeless young people, and how do they relate to their experiences of homelessness?
- What has been the impact of early intervention strategies in the life of homeless young people, and are these models of value in rural, as well as urban, settings?
- Is it possible to identify a different homelessness 'career' for young women in rural areas compared with their male peers? If so, why?
- Are there greater challenges in the co-ordination of services to homeless people in rural areas compared with the capital cities? Is there evidence that initiatives such as ICYS have made a positive contribution to dealing with homelessness issues?
- Do the homelessness 'careers' of rural youth differ appreciably from those in urban environments?
- Is there unmet need for housing support for homeless young people and does this unmet need reflect their rural setting?

These are important questions in developing policies to meet the needs of homeless young people. Previous research has demonstrated that homelessness is a concern in rural areas and that many homeless young people need and want their homelessness to be addressed within their region of origin. Our research will need to look at the opportunities available to young



people (employment, housing et cetera) and the constraints affecting their progression through their life course. In collecting data on the supports offered to young people we will need to be mindful of the level of intervention – primary, secondary, tertiary – the exit strategies available to clients, the level youth involvement in running the services, and the degree to which facilities meet those elements identified as conforming with best practice.

The issues and research questions identified in this Positioning Paper will be addressed through the empirical part of the study. As specified in the research proposal, focus groups will be conducted in regional centres in Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria and Tasmania with homeless young people. Youth consultants will be employed to recruit homeless young people for the focus groups and assist in facilitating the discussions. The workshops with homeless young people will be used to examine their pathways into and out of homelessness; the types of supports they have used and how they found out about these services; their attitudes to living in non-metropolitan Australia and why they choose to live in a regional centre rather than a capital city; the challenges confronting them in their daily life (their risks) and their expectations for the future (their perception of opportunities). The focus groups will be structured to explore the experiences of homeless young people in a variety of ways and using techniques that are accessible to young people. For example, while some of the issues will be discussed collectively, other issues will be considered in smaller ‘break out’ groups or via one-on-one discussions with a member of the research team, or a youth consultant. Similarly, we recognise that not all young people will be able to articulate easily their ideas, expectations and views. For this reason we will include visual communication tools, such as the drawing of an ‘ideal’ house and the mapping of current housing circumstances. The questions to be considered in the focus groups are included at Appendix A.

The focus groups with young people will be supplemented by discussions with service providers and other agencies. These interviews will take place either in workshops or as individual interviews and will focus on the issues surrounding the provision of supports to homeless young people in rural areas. In meeting with these professionals we will draw upon both their personal – and institutional – experience in delivering services and their insights into youth homelessness based on considerable experience. The broad questions to be asked of the service providers are included in Attachment A also.

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# APPENDIX A

## Developing Models of Good Practice in Meeting the Needs of Homeless Young People in Rural Areas

### *Focus Group Questions*

#### **General questions for the group (about young people in general)**

How do young people end up needing housing support?

How do young people first learn about support?

What type of support and help do young people need? – What supports are available?

In using housing support do young people have an end in mind?

What stops young people from getting a place to live?

What do young people do to get by?

#### **Questions for individual young people to consider in relation to their own experiences**

What do you want? What do you hope will happen a. tomorrow; b. in 3 months; c. in 1 year?

How important is it for you to live in this town or region?

What would you change? What would you get John Howard to change?

What supports help you? How could they be improved?

Who has made a difference in your life? Who has made it?

What are your next steps for housing and how are you going to make that happen?

Could you draw a picture that illustrates where you went after leaving home and what services or experiences you had?

What would home look like?

Map where you have been for assistance?

#### **Service Provider Questions**

Ask all (A) questions and (B) questions to be re-worked.

Can you give some examples of young people who have made it? What made that possible?

What are the challenges for the programmes/policies they are involved with?

What are the challenges for the rural providers relative to the cities?

Do you have an opportunity to feedback to policy makers?

Are you aware of Federal and State government policy initiatives? Are they compatible? For e.g. RECONNECT or ICYS?

How can the policies and practices of public housing providers be improved to enhance longer-term housing options for young people in rural areas?

Who is involved in supporting young people in housing in their region?

Any surveys or reports?

## **AHURI Research Centres**

Sydney Research Centre  
UNSW-UWS Research Centre  
RMIT-NATSEM Research Centre  
Swinburne-Monash Research Centre  
Queensland Research Centre  
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