

# Pre-Budget Submission

## 2020/21



1.

Ask: An immediate top-up of \$3.105 million across the four existing medium-term services and a further \$5.6 million per year to establish and maintain medium-term services in the South Coast, Western NSW, New England, Central West, North Coast, Hunter and Central Coast.

2.

Ask: NSW Government must invest in capital grants and ongoing operational costs for four Youth Foyers across NSW.

3.

Ask: The NSW Government to invest in ongoing funding for the PYI and to expand and roll out similar programs that support young people to transition to independence from SHS across NSW.

4.

Ask: The NSW Government to fund innovative, affordable housing options for young people to reduce youth homelessness and stimulate the residential construction sector.


5.

Ask: The NSW Government to invest \$260,000 to reinstate a youth-specific referral line for children and young people aged 12 to 25 years, operated by trauma-informed staff.

6.

Ask: The NSW Government to invest \$332,200 to establish a Yfoundations youth-specific Aboriginal homelessness unit to support SHS sector to provide sustainable and culturally safe practices.

Since 1979 Yfoundations has been the NSW peak body representing young people at risk of, and experiencing, homelessness, as well as representing the services that provide direct support to children and young people. Our vision is to create a future without youth homelessness. In order to achieve that goal children and young people have the right to 5 core foundations:



**Safety & Stability**

It is vital that all young people not only feel safe, but are also protected from risk factors that may affect their growth and development. It is important that a young person receives the necessary support and guidance during early childhood and adolescence. Nurture and care provided by an adult or caregiver during this phase promotes the development of resilience, self-esteem, and other social and emotional competencies necessary for a safe transition into adulthood. A young person who feels stable within their connections to others will have the confidence to positively participate in community life.

**Keywords:**  
 Access | Participation | Independence | Control | Inclusion | Stability | Physical Security



**Home & Place**

It is vital that all young people have a safe, supportive environment, which they identify with and connect to. A stable home and place support the growth of resilience, personal identity and positive connections with others. It is an environment that nurtures the learning and development needs of the young person, and supports their future aspirations and goals. A stable home and place allows a young person to build a strong foundation, from which healthy connections with others can be formed. A stable home and place promotes health and wellness, and encourages a young person to make healthy choices.

**Keywords:**  
 Shelter | Safety | Comfort | Security | Belonging | Control | Identity



**Health & Wellness**

It is vital that all young people are physically, socially and emotionally well. A young person who feels physically and emotionally strong is more likely to engage in healthy activities, seek out positive relationships, and feel optimistic about their future. It is important young people have access to support services to assure their health and wellness including access to health professionals and care. Beyond the obvious benefits of being physically strong, emotional strength and stability is a protective factor, and promotes the development of self-esteem and confidence.

**Keywords:**  
 Physical health | Social competency | Mental health | Self-worth | Safety | Access



**Connections**

Positive connections are vital to the growth and development of all young people. Connections to friends, family and community promote resilience, stability and confidence within a young person and enhance social cohesion. The establishment of positive connections during early childhood and adolescence enables a young person to build a strong foundation, from which they will be prepared to overcome challenge and adversity when encountered later in life. A sense of belonging and having strong connections to others promotes positive physical and emotional health.

**Keywords:**  
 Family and Friends | Society and Community | Belonging | Inclusion | Positive Engagement | Resilience



**Education & Employment**

It is vital that all young people are given every opportunity to gain the necessary skills and competencies to attain their educational and professional goals. It is important that education, training and employment opportunities are best suited to the needs of the individual, and support the development of relevant skills and competencies that assure young people can enter and remain competitive within the workforce. Education and training, which lead to purposeful employment, foster independence, promote self-confidence and self-reliance and assure young people can build themselves a bright future.

**Keywords:**  
 School based education | Practical skills | Life-skills | Self-confidence | Stability | Independence

## Introduction

The rate of young people presenting alone to Specialist Homelessness Services has continued to rise across NSW. Since the Going Home Staying Home reforms, there has been a 38% increase in children and young people accessing SHS. In 2017/18 alone, the youth homelessness sector provided support to over 71,000 children and young people, 22% more clients than funded to support.<sup>i</sup> In 2018-19, just over 14,300 young people (aged 15 to 24) presented on their own to a homelessness service in NSW.

Going Home Staying Home (GHS) caused significant disruption and upheaval across NSW, resulting in many Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) closures and an underfunded sector. Under the policy, 336 individual SHS (for both young people and adults) were consolidated into 149 packages operated by 69 NGOs.<sup>ii</sup> At the same time, the number of young people in need of SHS support increased above the national rate. The number of young people aged under 15 years who presented alone to an SHS rose from 1,268 in 2014/15 to 1,629 in 2015/16.<sup>iii</sup> This research, undertaken by UNSW, also found an increase in 'referral only' responses.<sup>iv</sup>

With the increase in rates of young people needing support alongside an under-resourced sector, many young people continue to fall through the cracks. We know anecdotally that, currently, young people access crisis support for more extended periods or present multiple times to a service, colloquially known as refuge hopping. This was identified as a key issue by Yfoundations' Youth Homelessness Representative Council.<sup>v</sup> At the same time, the rate of young people entering out-of-home-care (OOHC) is decreasing, with SHS picking up the slack to support young people. This is because many mandatory reports are either not assessed due to staff shortages or fail to meet the threshold to be considered a risk of significant harm.

Specific cohorts of young people are particularly vulnerable to experiencing homelessness. Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander young people are more likely to experience homelessness than the general population. Of those accessing SHS in 2016-17, 25% identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, despite forming less than 5% of the general population.<sup>vi</sup> There is currently just one Aboriginal-led SHS. Young people transitioning from OOHC are also particularly vulnerable to homelessness. Australian research has found that 64% of OOHC leavers did not have a leaving care plan, and 35% were homeless within their first year.<sup>viii</sup>

We must support initiatives that both prevent homelessness and create a safe and supportive pathway out of homelessness for our children and young people.

The last five decades have seen massive changes to the NSW housing market and employment sector. No age group has been more affected by these changes than young people as they transition to adulthood and independence.<sup>ix</sup> The most recent Rental Affordability Snapshot highlights the unaffordability of the private housing market. Of the 2,835 private rental properties advertised in a given area, none were affordable for young people on JobSeeker or Youth Allowance, even if they opted to live in a share house.<sup>x</sup>

Youth homelessness is a complex and unique experience for every young person.

Policy and programs have to work to provide sustainable pathways out of homelessness for young people. The NSW Government must prioritise investment in areas and programs that:

- > Work with young people and families to intervene early and prevent homelessness
- > Provide a stable and safe living environment for young people who are unable to return home
- > Provide education and employment opportunities so that young people can transition to and sustain independent living.

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## The impact of COVID 19 on young people

Already experiencing high levels of unemployment and under-employment before the spread of COVID-19, young people are likely to be disproportionately impacted by pandemic-induced job losses because of the industries they often work in, like hospitality and retail. The Grattan Institute estimates that 15 to 19-year-olds are the most likely to lose their job due to shutdowns of non-essential services and physical distancing measures. The youth unemployment rate is almost twice the general national rate at 16%, and well above rates before the Global Financial Crisis (7.6%).<sup>xi</sup>

Young workers are vastly over-represented in the sectors hardest hit by current measures. Research using ABS data shows that three of the six industries that have reduced staff hours most due to COVID-19 are hospitality, retail and arts, and recreation. These areas employ 45% of young people, compared to 27% of other age groups.

More than one-quarter of young workers are employed on a casual basis and have been with their current employer for less than 12 months. That makes them ineligible for the Federal Government's JobKeeper payment.

This negatively impacts their financial situation and curtails their ability to swiftly return to the jobs they had before. As the labour market attempts to recover from the economic impact of COVID-19, unemployment will continue to be a significant problem. Connecting young jobseekers to employers as well as tailoring education and training to ensure young peoples' skills meet industry demand is critical to the recovery of the youth labour market.<sup>xii</sup>

## Trauma-informed care

We have also seen increasing rates of domestic and family violence, relationship breakdown and mental illness hit our young people particularly hard. Services for young homeless people must be funded to provide trauma-informed care to ensure young people are adequately supported and nurtured. Trauma can come from many different life experiences. Children experiencing homelessness often encounter multiple traumas over many years; as a result, many lack trust or live in fear. Trauma-informed services build trust and help people overcome their fear.<sup>xiii</sup> They are attuned to the possibility of trauma in the lives of their clients and are committed to and act on the core principles of safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, and empowerment.<sup>xiv</sup>

## 1. Medium-term supported accommodation (24/7 staffing) model

Medium-term accommodation provides supported housing for children and young people with staff onsite 24/7. Much like crisis accommodation, medium-term accommodation provides children and young people with safe and stable accommodation in a home-like environment, with holistic wraparound support and trauma-informed care. Unlike crisis accommodation, medium-term accommodation permits children and young people to reside in the service for 2 – 3 years, as they complete their education or training, and develop critical living skills. These medium-term services take into consideration that trauma and development significantly impact on a young person's capacity to live independently.

The GHSR reforms resulted in a critical loss of medium-term youth homelessness services.<sup>xv</sup> At present, there are only four medium-term services – three in metropolitan Sydney and one in the Illawarra (which operates across three campuses).

Due to the lack of medium-term supported housing options, children and young people must rely on short-term crisis accommodation, which requires they move every three months, leading to disrupted education and loss of community connections. Homelessness can be disruptive to education as it is associated with frequent school moves and disengagement in the classroom. Two-thirds of homeless young people will leave school before Year 12.<sup>xvi</sup> Stability of housing and continuity of schooling can lead to better educational outcomes, contribute to wellbeing later in life, and entry into the labour market.<sup>xvii</sup>

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At the same time, the deficit in the funding of the current medium-term services leads to them not being able to have enough staff to cover nights and weekends adequately. Consultations with the existing services indicate that the size of this funding deficit varies between 30% to 70%.

The total cost of a best practice medium-term supported accommodation with staffing 24/7 is on average \$800,000 per annum. In developing the costing, research was undertaken on good practice both nationally and internationally, and comparisons were made with other similar services which support a similar client group, such as crisis accommodation and OOHC residential services.

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## 2. Youth Foyers

Youth Foyers are a model of service developed in the United Kingdom. They have been in operation for over 20 years and provide quality transitional housing, alongside onsite support to assist young people with access to training, education, employment, and transitioning to independent living. Youth Foyers offer a package of support, including accommodation to homeless or at-risk young people, based on participation in education, training and/or employment as a supported transition to independent living and a sustainable livelihood. While there are other programs providing education and homelessness support to young people in NSW, there are very few that provide the fully integrated service model of a Youth Foyer.

In a 2017 study by Adam Steen and David MacKenzie, they found that 81% of ex-residents of Australian Foyers had moved into stable and secure housing, which compared favourably with overseas models in similar housing markets. Fifty-two per cent of ex-residents were in some form of education and training, and while this was lower than overseas figures, the researchers suggest that 'A plausible explanation for this is that ex-residents may have entered the workforce, but this could not be verified'. The study also concluded that in all of the Australian Foyers, the shortfall between annual client rent received (25% of the resident's income - standard for community housing rents in Australia) and the total cost is significant. It indicates that without substantial additional recurrent funding, the various Youth Foyers are not financially sustainable.<sup>xviii</sup>

Steen and MacKenzie undertook a financial comparison between an ideal 40 bed Foyer in the UK and Australia per young person. Their findings are in Table 1.

Table 1:

UK Foyer (40 beds in urban location)			Australian Foyer (40 beds in urban location)		
Income	£ Average			A\$ Average (£ equivalent)	
Rents and service charges	£8,377	57%	Client Rent	\$10,183	£5,091
Grants received (Supporting People Block Grant)	£6,282	43%			
Income total	£14,659	100%	Income total	\$10,183	£5,091
<b>Expenditure</b>					
Staff related costs	£8,261	77%	Staff related costs	\$16,326	58% £8,163
Operating/program costs	£806	7%	Operating/program costs	\$7,204	25% £3,602
Administration costs	£1,716	16%	Administration costs	\$7,747	17% £2,373
<b>Total cost</b>	<b>£10,784</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>Total cost</b>	<b>\$28,278</b>	<b>100% £14,139</b>
Surplus	£3,875		Deficit	\$18,095	£9,047

In Australia, there are currently 14 Foyers or Foyer-type services across all States and Territories except Tasmania and the Northern Territory. Unlike the UK, most are relatively small, accommodating between 10 and 35 young people. There are approximately 300 beds in Youth Foyers across Australia.

## CASE STUDY 1: Illawarra Youth Foyer Project

In Wollongong, Southern Youth and Family Services (SYFS) operates the Illawarra Youth Foyer Project. Two Foyers were established in 2001 (Wollongong – 30 units) and 2015 (Warilla – 20 units). They form an integral part of SYFS's impressive network of services that includes family, OOHC, early intervention, crisis refuge, health and a range of holistic support and training provision, working with young people from 12 to 24.

The services operate a personalised Foyer model in which young people are not assigned a set 1-1 worker but can choose between available staff for weekly support meetings, in addition to monthly access to more specialised education and training staff to review their education and training plan, with the total ratio of 1-1 staff to young people around 1 - 7. The Foyer has relationships with the local TAFE and connects young people to a range of local partners to deliver a holistic response.

The Foyer has an admirable record of success. In 2017 the Foyer was able to report that than 68% of young people in the program were engaged in employment on exit: 38% in full-time employment, 21% in part-time employment, and 41% employed as casual staff. This compares with 35.5% on entry classified as casual or insecure. Numbers accessing work placements increased from 11% on entry to 16% on exit, and the numbers unemployed went down by almost 16%.

## CASE STUDY 2: Education First Youth Foyers

The Victorian Education First Youth Foyers (EYF) is run by the Brotherhood of St Laurence in partnership with Launch Housing. It is based on having supported accommodation for at-risk young people aged 16-24 located in close proximity to TAFE and University. The EYF Model is designed to break down structural barriers that prevent young people from engaging in educational opportunities and provides a structure for them to transition to independence.<sup>xxix</sup>

In 2019, KPMG released a financial evaluation of Victoria's EYF model, assessing the costs and benefits attributed to young people exiting these Foyers over a three-year period. When compared to alternatives, the report found Foyers delivered significant long-term savings of \$10 million in net benefits over a 20-year timeframe through increased earnings, avoided incomes support payments (i.e. Centrelink), avoided housing support, and reduced emergency department admissions.<sup>xx</sup> With student accommodation for 40 young people, the EYF model has sufficient scale to ensure the financial viability of the model and the ability to attract philanthropic and corporate funding.<sup>xxi</sup>

SHS across NSW are seeking to replicate the success of the Youth Foyer model. In July 2019, Platform Youth Services commenced an Education First Program at Lemongrove House in Penrith. Although the NSW Government is yet to support this Youth Foyer project, an interim report highlighted a number of positive outcomes for young people in the program including successful exits to independent living, two-thirds of young people engaged in education with the remaining third seeking opportunities, 50% in employment, as well as health improvements.<sup>xxii</sup>

**Ask: NSW Government must invest in capital grants and ongoing operational costs for four Youth Foyers across NSW.**





### 3. Programs that support young people to transition to independence from SHS

For many young people, turning 18 years of age does not mean that they are ready and capable to live independently. This transition period is a critical time to ensure that a young person has the stability, support and employment or education opportunities to maintain independence. The cost to society – and to young people – if we fail to do so is high: \$355 million across all young people aged 15-24 accessing SHS.<sup>xxiii</sup>

The Premier's Youth Initiative (PYI) is a NSW pilot program funded by DCJ across five sites. The initiative provides services to young people leaving OOHHC who are identified as being vulnerable to experiencing homeless or at risk of homelessness on exit from care. Services provided include casework support, subsidised community housing support, and education and employment mentoring. The PYI program aims to build the long-term capacity and resilience of young people in order to permanently divert them from the homelessness service system.<sup>xxiv</sup> The PYI is a valuable program working to support young people transitioning from OOHHC into independence and would be equally beneficial for young people leaving SHS, many of whom have had limited stability prior to turning 18 and may struggle to live independently as soon as they turn 18 without ongoing aftercare support.

Ask: The NSW Government to invest in ongoing funding for the PYI and to expand and roll out similar programs that support young people to transition to independence from SHS across NSW.

failure to support young people could cost society in excess of **\$355m** to access SHS

### 4. Investment in innovative, affordable housing

Investment in social and affordable housing is critical to avoid severe job losses, a severe decline in housing wealth, and reduced economic activity as a result of reduced housing demand.

5,000 additional social and affordable housing units would cost \$1.88 billion in 2020-21 but would support 18,000 construction jobs across NSW.

Building more social and affordable housing stock offers both short-term stimulus to the residential construction sector, as well as long-term benefits due to improved housing security, health and economic participation.<sup>xxv</sup>

Traditional supportive housing models alone cannot end youth homelessness; we must look to new, creative, flexible, affordable housing models that match individuals and local community needs. To adequately address the emerging needs of those experiencing homelessness NSW must have a wide selection of affordable housing models. To do so, the NSW Government must invest in innovative ways to improve the selection and availability of housing stock, offering both a social and economic return, whilst achieving the best outcomes for tenants. In a 2016 study entitled 'Cost Offsets of Supportive Housing: Evidence for Social Work', over a period of twelve months, a person experiencing homelessness accessed an average of \$48,217 of government services, such as police, prison, emergency department, hospital-admitted patients, ambulance, mental health, and homelessness services. By comparison, when a person was a tenant of supported housing, their annual need for frontline services was reduced by \$13,100.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Currently, the NSW Government is preparing a NSW Housing Strategy to adapt to changing trends and ensure the state has the right housing to benefit communities for the next 20 years. The recently release NSW Housing Strategy Discussion Paper recognises the value of innovative approaches, stating: "The NSW Housing Strategy offers the opportunity for councils to further develop affordable housing projects on council-owned land. This could include innovative housing models such as co-living, community land trusts and housing cooperatives. The NSW Housing Strategy could consider capacity building, partnership brokerage or planning assistance to drive this process".<sup>xxvii</sup>

Two recent examples of innovative construction models which provide significant social and economic returns are Tiny Homes Foundation and Kids Under Cover Studio Program.

## Tiny Homes

Tiny Homes Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to providing socially, environmentally, and economically sustainable affordable housing solutions. The pilot project in Gosford NSW is based on a "Housing-First" principle that prioritises housing for people experiencing or at-risk of homelessness and then wrap around additional supports and services as needed.

Completed in May 2018, the pilot project built four Tiny Homes (Tiny Homes Village) on land leased by Central Coast Council. The four self-contained single occupancy homes were 14.4sqm each and included a bathroom, kitchenette, and sleeping/lounge area. The four Tiny Homes share a common lounge room and laundry in the Tiny Home Village. The Tiny Home Village (including four homes and common space) costs approximately \$250,000.

Since then, Tiny Homes has expanded to deliver a 'Tiny Home on Wheels' in Armidale to engage with the BackTrack Youth Works programs. Tiny Homes Foundations would like to collaborate further with BackTrack to build additional tiny homes as part of their work with young people in the Armidale region.<sup>xxvii</sup>

The pilot program has proved successful, as tenants have maintained their tenancies, improved their mental health, and engaged in education and employment.<sup>xxix</sup>



## Kids Under Cover

Kids Under Cover is a not-for-profit organisation supporting vulnerable young people between 12 and 25 years who are at risk of homelessness. At the heart of their work is the 'Studio Program'. One- or two-bedroom studios with bathroom are built in the backyards of family or carers homes. This provides secure and stable accommodation for young people on the verge of family breakdown.

Studios are prefabricated, with its entire kit flat-packed and pre-assembled. Studios can be transported by truck and erected within 10 days, at a cost of \$50,000 to \$60,000 per studio.

In 2017, EY conducted a Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis. The findings from the report showed that the Kids Under Cover Studio Program is effective in achieving its aims, with EY calculating that the social return equates to over \$30 million over six years. The evidence provided within the analysis has shown that for every dollar invested over six years returns \$4.17 in social value, with the model generating \$63 million of social value.<sup>xxx</sup>



**Ask:** The NSW Government to fund innovative affordable housing options for young people to reduce youth homelessness and stimulate the residential construction sector.

## 5. Youth Specific Referral Line

As a result of the GSH reforms, there were many changes to the youth homelessness sector across NSW. One major change was to YConnect, the phone and online referral service for young people seeking accommodation, which ceased operation in 2014. The service was replaced by an integrated state-wide information and referral service called Link2Home.

Link2Home is a telephone service for enquiries about homelessness in NSW. It brought together several homelessness telephone services including the Homeless Persons Information Centre, the After-Hours Temporary Accommodation line and YConnect.

Survey analysis conducted by the Industry Partnership during the COVID-19 pandemic found that the referral process from Link2Home is problematic and inconsistent, with many services reporting that they either do not receive referrals from Link2Home until the last minute or that clients are self-referring.<sup>xxxii</sup> Qualitative data indicates that services are seeing a decrease in referrals from Link2Home but an increase in referrals from community housing providers or housing offices instead. Other issues that have emerged include poor assessments and inappropriate referrals by Link2Home, such as those out of area or unsuitable age referrals.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

Anecdotal reports made by children and young people experiencing homelessness suggest that Link2Home staff are not specialised and do not understand the specific needs of young people. Further, staff do not have a thorough knowledge of issues or the services available and are unable to effectively guide young people through the referral process, highlighting a gap in the process. In order to improve outcomes for children and young people experiencing homelessness, the NSW

Government should invest in a youth-specific referral line for children and young people aged 12 to 25 years old. The telephone line would be supported by an online platform offering daily updates and information of vacancies across youth homelessness services in NSW.

A youth-specific referral telephone line would be operated by trauma-informed youth workers, social workers, and counsellors, who have the time and capacity to triage the client, to understand their needs, and make an appropriate referral to a suitable homelessness service within NSW, whether it be crisis accommodation, transitional accommodation, temporary accommodation, or other support needs.

To protect the youngest and most vulnerable children, a report will be made to the child protection helpline when a child aged under 16 phones the referral line.

Data would be reported quarterly on the referral lines service delivery to complement CIMS reporting and enable tracking of service support.

**Ask:** The NSW Government to invest \$260,000 to reinstate a youth-specific referral line for children and young people aged 12 to 25 years, operated by trauma-informed staff.

## 6. Aboriginal Youth Resource Unit

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are more likely to experience homelessness than the general population. Of those accessing SHS in 2016-17, 25% identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Young people transitioning from OOHC are also particularly vulnerable to homelessness. Australian research has found that 64% of OOHC leavers did not have a leaving care plan, and 35% were homeless within their first year.<sup>xxxiii</sup> With the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and young people experiencing homelessness in NSW, we must have a strong and culturally competent youth sector.

In order to respond to the high rates of Aboriginal children and young people who are homeless, the NSW Government needs to invest in an Aboriginal Youth Resource Unit. The initiative will support the youth SHS sector to develop cultural competency training, influence policy and provide expertise in supportive practices when working with homeless Aboriginal children and young people. The Aboriginal Youth Resource Unit will provide sector education and training, and focus on service excellence and guidance in cultural competency and interventions. The unit will inform government policy and improve service delivery by working alongside young people with lived experience. The Aboriginal Youth Resource Unit will provide services with guidance on cultural practice and competency training, design and develop policy and procedure to create a sustainable sector, and adhere to ASES requirements. Staff will work in close partnership with communities, services and children and young people to design supported pathways for Aboriginal young people out of homelessness.

**Ask:** The NSW Government to invest \$332,200 to establish a Yfoundations Aboriginal Youth Resource Unit to support the SHS sector to provide sustainable and culturally safe practices.

## 7. Concluding comment

This pre-budget submission has detailed the critical challenges facing young homeless people. The worst is yet to come if we fail to provide integrated systems that support young people to heal, connect to community, complete education and find employment. With an already underfunded and under-resourced youth homelessness sector, the economic burden of supporting additional young people will place additional stress on services providing support for homeless children and young people in NSW.

## End Notes

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