



HOMELESSNESS

among young people in Australia

Early intervention & prevention

a report to the
National Youth Affairs Research Scheme

by Phil Crane, Jillian Brannock (Project Directors)

*Linda Ray (Project Coordinator), Jenny Campbell,
Georgia Smeal & Bill Atweh (Research Team Members)*

*And the special assistance of:
Megan Williams and Shane Warren (Research Assistants)
Nikki McLarty, Cherie Sloan, Mark Hoyle,
Jenny Clough and Samorn Sanixay (Peer Researchers)*

Copyright © 1996, **National Youth Affairs Research Scheme**

ISBN 1 875236 35 X

This paper has been prepared for the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme and is intended to provide background research and other information as a basis for discussion.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the National Youth Affairs Scheme Coordinating Committee, Youth Ministers Council or individual Commonwealth or State/Territory Ministers or Departments responsible for Youth Affairs.

Cover photo courtesy *The Mercury*

Published by the
National Clearinghouse for Youth Studies
Hobart, Tasmania

Acknowledgments

THIS REPORT WAS commissioned and funded by the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme (NYARS), which operates through voluntary funding and participation of the Commonwealth, States and Territories. We gratefully acknowledge the ongoing assistance of NYARS, and in particular Peter Jones, the Chair, and the NYARS Steering Committee's liaison officers for the project, Magdi El Hag and Judith Rowell (Youth Bureau, Queensland Department of Family, Youth and Community Care).

Additional funding from The Body Shop allowed for payment of the young people participating in the research and is gratefully acknowledged.

It is important to acknowledge and thank those young people and parents who participated in the interviews. The telling of personal stories about family, home leaving and homelessness, though freely given, was sometimes painful and deeply personal.

The authors express their thanks to those non-government and government service providers who assisted with locating young people and parents to interview, participated in advisory processes and focus groups, provided reports and documentation, or otherwise gave of their time. In particular, we wish to thank the services involved in the case studies and national survey for giving their time and for their insights regarding their programs and their vision. We wish to acknowledge the support and assistance of the Centre for Research in Policy and Leadership Studies, Queensland University of Technology, where the project was based and the School of Social Science, Queensland University of Technology, for providing study leave necessary for the research to be undertaken.

Thanks are also due to Fr. Wally Dethlefs and Dr Rodney Fopp, for their valuable input, Martin Lambert, School of Maths, Science and Technology, QUT, for his assistance in survey analysis, Jocyn Lee, for her secretarial support, and Anna Spencer, Grant Brannock and Stephen Villiers for their input and support throughout the project.



Contents

	Page
Executive summary	vii
Chapter 1 : Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Homelessness and early home leaving: Prevention and early intervention	5
Chapter 3: How the research was conducted	23
Chapter 4: Description and review of policies and programs	29
Chapter 5: Perspectives of young people	39
Chapter 6: Perspectives of parents	53
Chapter 7: Perspectives of service providers: National survey	69
Chapter 8: Case studies of services	81
Chapter 9: Implications for best practice and policymaking	97
References	109
Appendices	115

List of Tables

	Page	
2.1	Definitions of prevention and early intervention	15
2.2	Family status of persons aged 15 to 24, June 1995	18
2.3	Percentage of 15- to 24-year-olds living with parent(s)	18
2.4	Homelessness related calls according to severity – Kids Help Line	20
2.5	Age of SAAP youth service users, census night 1994	20
4.1	Orientation of prevention and early intervention programs	32
5.1	Interviewees’ age distribution	39
5.2	Interviewees’ educational/work status	39
5.3	Age of first home leaving	40
5.4	Family structure at time of first home leaving	40
5.5	Stated reason(s) for first home leaving	40
5.6	Helpful or unhelpful in the period immediately prior to or after home leaving	48
5.7	Number of young people reporting responses from different sources as being either helpful or unhelpful	48
6.1	Employment status of parents	53
6.2	Family structure at time of first home leaving	54
6.3	Parents’ perceptions of reasons for children’s home leaving	54
6.4	Number of parents reporting particular types of response	60
6.5	Sources of responses given at different times in the process of home leaving	61
6.6	Number of parents reporting particular types of response as helpful or unhelpful	61
6.7	Number of parents reporting responses from different sources as being helpful or unhelpful	61
6.8	Number of parents indicating particular types of intervention as needed in their case or needed in general	63
7.1	Number of respondents categorised by funding source	70
7.2	Number of referral to services by source	70
7.3	Average percentage of those 18 and under who access the service providers	71
7.4	Most critical current intervention strategies	76
7.5	“Best practices” identified by service providers in models of early intervention	77
8.1	Service providers where case studies were undertaken	82

Executive Summary

THIS STUDY provides further support for the findings of previous studies regarding the factors which lead to homelessness among young people. Homelessness most clearly arises from a lack of access to affordable safe accommodation. This said, the experiences of young people where early home leaving occurs are typified either by a long-term process where the young person feels a lack of emotional support, often associated with abuse, domestic violence, negative school experience, rejection accompanying repartnering of a parent, or as a result of one or more specific events which involve grief or loss, or a combination of any or all of the above. The view that the provision of income support for homeless young people provides an inducement for early home leaving is not borne out in this research.

While a number of current Commonwealth and State/Territory policies acknowledge the importance of prevention and/or early intervention, few programs and services are specifically directed to these purposes. Outside of the Attorney-General's adolescent mediation and family therapy programs, some Supported Accommodation Assistance Program services, a small number of alternative care services, and a small number of school focused services, there are few recurrently funded services to young people and their families exist.

The study found that young people see their relations with parents, or other parent figures as central to their capacity to remain at home. Young people indicated they principally left home because of conflict with parents, various forms of abuse, because they were kicked out, and/or because of drug and alcohol related issues. Themes of a lack of felt emotional support, a culture of blame, and unresolved grief and loss pervade the accounts of these young people. Young people suggested that well in advance of home leaving occurring, there needs to be improved parental and adult attitudes and behaviours to them, greater understanding of the impact of new parental partners on them, a halt to abuse, and early access to third party facilitation of communication. Young people indicated that when home leaving first occurs they needed a clear idea of where to get help, recognition that it was a very stress-

ful time for them, short and long-term accommodation options, culturally sensitive services and immediate response to their calls for assistance.

The dominant view of young people was that they should be respected and listened to more, and specifically that parental attitudes and behaviour should alter. Overall they see communication based strategies as the ones most frequently needed, though they indicate such services can be unhelpful and even destructive if they do not recognise the young person as a person in his or her own right, with views, feelings, and important information. Counselling and many other helping strategies, often appear to young people as biased or unempathetic. When young people find others acting and speaking in a way which presumes they are themselves the problem, they quickly dismiss such assistance as useless.

Parents' accounts of their experience of early home-leaving which results in homelessness leave in no doubt the distress, anger, defensiveness and embarrassment that they often feel. Parents generally identify their children as the "problem", while at the same time indicating significant levels of difficulty, instability, stress, and problematic behaviour within the family, and specifically, in relation to one or more parent/s or adults.

Parents report great difficulty in gaining adequate responses from service providers at critical times, prior to and after home leaving. Parents report the same range of issues as causing early home leaving as do young people with the exception that parents do not include the feelings and perspectives of their children as issues. It is significant that although there is a degree of similarity in parents' and young people's definitions of home (where people feel loved, safe, supported) parents do not, as young people do, include in their definitions specific behaviours which indicate how such feelings are developed and maintained (through listening, getting problems sorted out, talking to each other). This, together with a tendency to blame, and exclude from discussion their own role in the process of early home leaving, supports the view that parents have a substantial "blind spot" about the antecedents of early home leaving.

The implications for parent support and education strategies include the need to examine the notion of home from a child's perspective, for parents to develop the capacity to self-reflect on the behaviours that are consistent with their own notions of home, and to develop skills in discussing these matters with children. Parents indicated that in order to prevent homelessness among young people, most needed were whole of family counselling or family mediation, time out accommodation, and changed school practices.

The national survey of service providers indicated the most detailed and clearly thought out early intervention services were being provided by young people–family mediation programs, whole of school approaches (as opposed to add on, targeted at risk strategies) and SAAP services which have a significant focus on young people 12 to 15 years of age. Seventy-five per cent of services indicated there was a need for greater collaboration between community based service providers and schools. Constraints to the undertaking of early intervention or prevention work were cited as the limitations of program funding parameters, inadequate resources, and institutional practices which mitigate against undertaking this work.

Best practice principles to emerge from the study are:

- immediacy of response from services when help is sought by young people or parents;
- understanding the social, economic and cultural contexts of family difficulty, and seeing young people and parents as operating in stressful circumstances rather than being “dysfunctional” or inherently problematic;
- developing practice models which combine both relational and rights-based approaches, that is, models which simultaneously recognise the importance of family relations yet recognise the fundamental rights of young people, such as the right to a safe and supportive home;
- recognition that within family relations work, the perspectives of both young people and parents need to be appreciated;

- recognition that the prevention of homelessness among young people has structural and institutional dimensions which require reform at those levels;
- provision to parents, young people, and other family members, of a range of universally accessible, non-stigmatising support services. Such services should provide a “soft entry” point of first contact, where parents or young people, separately or together, can access support to more specialised services;
- organisational practices which use explicit action/reflection processes, together with substantial staff support and development processes;
- substantial cooperation, collaboration and networking between different service providers at the local and regional levels, e.g. youth services, police, protective services, community services and schools, so that the broad range of needs demonstrated by young people and families may be responded to. This is particularly critical between “first to know” services (those most likely to be the first point of contact for young people or parents experiencing difficulties related to early homeleaving) and other services;
- the involvement of services in individual and systems advocacy. While case management can assist in high need circumstances, it is not an appropriate model on which to base the development of protective factors nor for the development of self referral services; and
- recognition of the need for culturally appropriate services for indigenous people, and people from non-English speaking backgrounds.

There are numerous models in the case study series which can be considered to incorporate best practice in their own contexts. Particularly worthy of examination are: The Drum Information Café (a basic community based model of information provision and “soft entry” service access to young people); KITS (comprehensive approach to school and community services), St James Prac (whole of school pastoral care approach), Kids

Help Line and Parentline (universally accessible telephone counselling services); Family and Individual Support Worker in SAAP model (building into transitional accommodation a clear family relations capacity); Youth and Parent Services (a dedicated early intervention service combining short-term SAAP accommodation and family mediation/counselling functions); RAPS (young person–family mediation services to the broadest cross-section of families); BABI and MUYIM (community boarding programs which support reunification and reconciliation); Burnside’s Intensive Family Based Support Service; Marsden Families Program (a multi-component alternative care model specifically for young people and their families); EPPIC (a mental health service for young people and their families); and, finally, the insights of the rural youth services (who identified the need for local young people–family support strategies in rural areas). What is striking in this context of best practice, is the lack of an explicit early intervention referral role for the police, given that they are often one of the “first to know” agencies.

The capacity of early intervention and situational strategies to prevent homelessness among young people is limited given the existence of substantial structural and institutional factors. The prevention of homelessness among young people will require far more than an increased focus on early intervention. One structural factor of particular relevance to this study is the way young people are understood and stereotyped. These usually negative constructions affect the capacity of governments, services, the media, parents and young people to respond fully and constructively to issues such as homelessness among young people. In the pursuit of best practice, this research suggests that a recognition and re-evaluation of the beliefs about, and portrayals of, young people is needed.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

THE PURPOSE of the study was to determine models of best practice in the prevention of, and early intervention into, youth homelessness by identifying and describing:

- 1 the indicators that may lead to young people (defined as 25 years and under with a specific focus on the under-18 age-group) leaving the family home and becoming homeless;
- 2 the factors which contribute to young people becoming homeless;
- 3 the range of preventive and early intervention policies and programs that assist young people at risk of leaving the family home to remain at home, or assist those that have left, to return home within a relatively short period of time, where appropriate, (to be conducted in all States and Territories and include postal questionnaires to some services); and
- 4 models of best practice in the area of prevention and early intervention, and to discuss the reasons for success.

The collapsing full-time youth labour market during the early to mid 1970s underpinned the progressive development in Australia and other western nations of specific policies and programs, not only to

respond to youth unemployment, but to address a range of associated social issues – such as homelessness – which were named and deemed worthy of government action. The emergence of prevention as a policy objective, and of early intervention as a strategy, can be tracked through an examination of significant reports published in the 1980s and 1990s.

In 1982, the Senate Standing Committee on Social Welfare reported on youth homelessness in Australia and recommended the continuation of funding for youth crisis accommodation and income support for homeless young people. The rationale for this included an acknowledgment that in the context of unemployment and recession, family breakdown and the subsequent leaving home by young people were realities which required response.

The focus at this time was on developing crisis accommodation options for young people once they had become homeless. In 1985 all Commonwealth crisis accommodation programs were consolidated under the *Supported Accommodation Assistance (SAAP) Act 1985*. Within the Youth Supported Accommodation Program (YSAP) component of SAAP, services were oriented to young people “who are homeless as a result of crisis and who need to move towards more appropriate accommodation, including independent living where

possible and appropriate" (Chesterman 1988, p.11).

The first evaluation report of SAAP *Homes Away from Home* (Chesterman 1988, p.46) asserted that SAAP should not have "a primary focus on those at risk of becoming homeless", but should leave this to other programs. It was suggested SAAP would have some preventive functions such as community education on SAAP issues (Chesterman 1988, p.44). Early intervention into, and/or prevention of, young people leaving home and becoming homeless, were not raised as matters for attention for SAAP. This typified the responses of governments to youth homelessness at this time.

The importance of pursuing a preventive approach in relation to youth homelessness was a recurring theme within the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) report *Our Homeless Children* released in 1989. This watershed report outlined in detail the major elements of a comprehensive prevention and early intervention agenda. The report located prevention within the children's rights framework of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, a framework which asserted the holding of fundamental human rights by children and young people, while at the same time affirming the role of families.

Homelessness among young people was seen to be a result of a wide range of interrelated factors, including poverty, unemployment, the practices of state welfare departments, inadequacies in accommodation options, and family stress. In recommending how governments should respond, the report specifically acknowledged the importance of efforts to reunite young people with families where possible. Family reconciliation was identified as a major means of preventing long-term homelessness and "should be a primary aim of youth accommodation services where it is both possible and appropriate" (HREOC 1989, p.211), through the resourcing of youth services to engage in negotiation, conciliation, counselling, provision of information and assistance with access to services the family requires (ibid. p.183).

The report also called for the building up of protective factors, such as a network of support services to strengthen families, so that substitute care arrangements would be used less frequently.

The primary thrust of our recommendations concerning preventive services is towards strengthening the family so that it can retain its children and rear them successfully. Preventive services that have the effect of supporting parents in their function as caregivers and nurturers are vital at whatever developmental stage of the child they occur. Support programs for new parents, parents with toddlers and school-aged children, all play a part in reducing the results of family disintegration which can include detached and homeless adolescents (ibid. p.251).

In the mid 1980s, Australian youth policy had shifted to have a dominant focus on increased retention in education and vocational training, and within this logic an increasing attention to "disadvantaged", "marginalised" (Irving, Maunders & Sherrington 1995), or "at risk" young people became evident. The 1991 Report of the Australian Education Council Review Committee (AECRC), *Young People's Participation in Post-compulsory Education and Training* (The Finn Report), endorsed a greater articulation and integration of services which targeted at risk young people, and specifically homeless young people, within the goal of increasing education and vocational training retention, and recommended the Students at Risk Program be extended. Within this logic, prevention of unemployment, homelessness and a range of other social problems, was oriented towards the retention of at risk young people in education or vocational training.

In the area of family policy, the articulation of prevention and early intervention goals clearly underpinned the final report of The National Council for the International Year of the Family, *Creating The Links: Families and Social Responsibility* (1994). The report calls for preventive programs to address family violence and child abuse, citing in particular, systemic family support services, relationship education and counselling, child care, community education initiatives, adequate family income support, secure and affordable housing and a comprehensive response to family violence and child abuse (Cass 1994). The report also suggests that the National Child Protection Strategy make provision for the development of early intervention programs and increased investment in parenting programs.

In 1995 the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs (HRSCCA) released *A Report on Aspects of Youth Homelessness* (The Morris Report). The Inquiry was established as a response to concerns expressed about income security payments to young people. The report strongly asserted that early intervention into, and prevention of, youth homelessness would require changes to both policy structures and service delivery approaches (HRSCCA 1995, p.271).

The range of services identified as necessary for early intervention included family mediation and counselling, family services, school based strategies, and consideration as to how a range of groups with special needs could be adequately responded to. Key recommendations were that:

- income security be reformed with the Department of Social Security having overall responsibility;
- a new SAAP category be established for young people under 17 as it is inappropriate for them to be placed in SAAP agencies under the current requirements of the SAAP Agreement;
- legislative reform occur to require certain stan-

dards for child and family welfare across Australia, including a national family policy into which youth policy is integrated; and

- a National Child and Youth Bureau be established within the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department to coordinate youth policy in a manner consistent with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Burdekin, Cass and Morris reports all acknowledged the importance of supplementing crisis support services with broad preventive strategies to build up protective factors, and early intervention services to assist young people and their families, when difficulties emerge.

The importance of a wide range of policies and ser-

vices in the development of comprehensive preventive and early intervention responses has been highlighted repeatedly in these reports. Youth homelessness emerges as a multi-faceted phenomenon requiring a range of responses across a number of policy and service delivery sites.

The initial framework adopted in this research reflects the above complexity. As the research progressed and the authors clarified how prevention and early intervention could be understood, it became clear that the dominant focus in this study was on understanding and responding to early home leaving which results in homelessness. Any examination of social policy and practice must define key terms, and this examination provides the starting point for Chapter 2.

Chapter 2

HOMELESSNESS & EARLY HOME LEAVING Prevention & early intervention

THE DEFINITION of the term “homelessness” has been the subject of ongoing debate, and of course, how a social issue is defined determines to a large degree how it will be responded to. A further complication arises when responses are to be directed not at amelioration of the phenomenon itself but to its “prevention”. On the face of it this involves not only definitional clarity, but clarity about what causes the phenomenon in the first place and what can be done to reduce the existence of these causal factors. The notion of “early intervention” implies that it is possible to observe in the lives of people the early manifestations of the phenomenon in the making, and respond in such a way that progression to experiencing the phenomenon is halted or impeded.

While there has been considerable debate about how homelessness should be defined there has been less about what prevention of homelessness means and very little concerning early intervention. Indeed, when examining the policy literature about youth homelessness, the researchers found that the terms are often used interchangeably, and often without clear or coherent definition.

The need to critique definitions occurs in the context of the debate about the extent of youth homelessness in large part triggered by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Inquiry (1989) estimation that

between 20,000 and 25,000 young people were homeless in Australia at that time. The definitional debate has to a large degree been conducted in this context, of establishing extent, with different definitions providing the basis for including a larger or smaller number of young people (Fopp 1988; MacKenzie & Chamberlain 1992). These estimations have been considered important in providing an empirical basis for the allocation of government funding to various programmatic responses, and have been the focus of considerable media interest.

The most recent manifestation of interest in determining the extent of youth homelessness has been the national census of homeless school students conducted in 1994 (MacKenzie & Chamberlain 1995). This census, which comprised a survey of 1,921 schools and field-work visits to 100 schools, estimated that 11,000 school students were homeless in the census week. The authors estimated that annually 25,000 to 30,000 school students experience homelessness, and they further extrapolate that 70% to 80% of schools encounter homeless students at some point in the school year. The conclusion that most teenagers first experience homelessness while at school is consistent with the O'Connor study (1989) where 75% of teenagers sampled were 15 or younger when they first experienced homelessness.

Defining homelessness

The way in which homelessness is defined has important implications for the research carried out and the subsequent policies devised and pursued (Neil & Fopp 1992). Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1992) delineate three broad approaches to defining homelessness, referred to as conventional, radical and literal. The term “person-centered” is preferred in this report to the term “radical”.

The conventional approach is to define homelessness in terms of the character of a person’s housing situation. A person’s housing situation renders them homeless, not merely on the basis of whether there is “shelter”, but when it fails to meet the “minimal housing conditions that a particular community believes people have a right to expect” (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 1992, p.277, citing Marcuse 1990). These are the culturally relative and socially constructed conditions of a “home”.

In a person-centered approach, criteria which emphasise the perception of people as to the adequacy of their housing situation, are central in determining who is homeless. A person would be homeless if *they felt* that where they were living was not in the affective sense a “home”, such as feeling emotionally unsupported or physically unsafe (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 1992, p.280). The National Youth Coalition for Housing (NYCH 1985, p.1) definition is located within this approach when it cites as the central criterion “the absence of secure, adequate and satisfactory shelter as perceived by the young person”.

The third approach identifies someone as homeless when they are without shelter in the literal sense. In the United Kingdom this approach has been used by local authorities where “rooflessness” has been employed as the criterion for determining who are homeless young people (Centrepoint 1995, p.7). This is the most narrow approach as it does not include those people whose “homelessness is characterised by continual insecurity and frequent moves” (Chamberlain & MacKenzie 1992, p.286).

The conventional approach appears to be gaining increasing acceptance in Australia. In a relatively unspecified form it was used in the HREOC Inquiry where homelessness was described as being more than a total lack of shelter, where “for many children and young people it signifies a detachment from family and vulnerability to dangers” (HREOC 1989, p.7). The second SAAP evaluation spoke of the importance of “a network of community and family supports normally associated with home” (Lindsay 1993, p.39). *The Report on Aspects of Youth Homelessness*, referred to as the Morris Report (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs [HRSCCA] 1995 p.26) indicated that this definitional approach

reflected “an emerging community consensus” and endorsed a slightly abbreviated version of the definition proposed by Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1992) where accommodation in a single room of a boarding house was omitted.

Young people are homeless if they are living without any family assistance in the following circumstances:

- (a) no accommodation (e.g. street, squat, car, tent etc.);*
- (b) temporary accommodation (with friends, relatives or moving around between various forms of temporary shelter);*
- (c) emergency accommodation (refuge or crisis accommodation etc.); and*
- (d) other longer term supported accommodation for homeless people (e.g. hostels, youth housing programs, transitional accommodation) (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs 1995, p.26).*

Generally consistent with the “conventional” approach, Neil and Fopp state that a definition of homelessness should be:

... one which gives weight to the most basic requirements of a home, that is, that state in which people have no access to safe and secure shelter of a standard that does not damage their health, threaten their personal safety, or further marginalise them through failing to provide either cooking facilities, or facilities that permit adequate personal hygiene (1992, p.8).

This study proceeded on the premise that literal approaches are of little benefit in examining prevention and early intervention. The inclusion of normative notions of home, vulnerability and safety, in some conventional definitions begs continued debate as to what constitutes a minimum community standard in relation to these, and who determines this. In turn such questions lead to various perceptions about the minimum community standards regarding the housing, income support and social resources which should be made available to young people of various ages. While definitions such as those proposed in The Morris Report are convenient and clear as a way of defining who are and who are not homeless people, such approaches are useful in the exploration of early intervention and prevention of homelessness only to the extent that they identify an undesirable outcome.

Neil and Fopp propose two other important dimensions to homelessness:

First, there is a time dimension. Homelessness may be chronic, it may consist of a single acute crisis in a person’s life, or it may be an enforced state entered and exited intermittently. Second, for homeless people, homelessness is not an event, but a process – one that involves constant adaptation. The way people react once

homelessness has occurred, and the mechanisms they adopt to cope with the stresses it generates, in turn add to, or detract from, their subsequent chances of exiting permanently from homelessness (1992, p.3).

This notion of homelessness as a process has been affirmed by other researchers (O'Connor 1989, p.2; Mackenzie & Chamberlain, 1995). Mackenzie and Chamberlain (1995) maintain young people go through various stages before developing an *identity* as a homeless person, and assert that the first key transition is the permanent break from family and home (ibid., p.22). The second break is the shift to *chronicity*, which refers to the young person accepting homelessness as a way of life (ibid.). This stage of chronicity may be accompanied by crime, prostitution, drug abuse, and young people who have entered this stage are often reluctant to change their lifestyle.

Further, MacKenzie and Chamberlain (1995) maintain that the first stage can occur as quickly as two to three weeks after leaving home, if the young person leaves school and home at the same time. They suggest that this permanent break can be delayed if school attendance is maintained, thus maintaining relationships with teachers, friends and significant others (p.23).

Such an approach acknowledges what Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1994, p.1) elsewhere referred to as a "temporal dimension" of young people's homelessness. The temporal concepts they describe apply from the point of a young person leaving home, that is, in relation to young people "being" homeless. Defining and investigating prevention and early intervention requires in addition to this, the application of a temporal dimension to the experience of young people in the period before they experience homelessness as defined in the conventional sense. It is from this perspective that it is critical to accommodate and respond to the felt homelessness of young people, which is characterised by feelings of insecurity, a lack of safety or of not belonging, and is central to a person-centered definition of homelessness.

The causes of homelessness among young people

It is important to recognise in social research and its interpretation that correlation does not equal cause (Fopp 1995, p.13). Frequently in the research literature, factors associated with becoming homeless are confused with outcomes of homelessness. Common examples of this concern mental illness and crime, both of which are at times "linked" to homelessness without any clear understanding of whether this occurs prior to first becoming homeless, whether it accompanies the situation of homelessness or

whether it is an outcome of homelessness (Hutson & Liddiard 1994; Brandon et al. 1988).

There is also the tendency to view personal characteristics as causes of homelessness. From this perspective homelessness is viewed as a personal behaviour rather than as a feature of a particular society. Fopp summarises the "popular view" of the causes of homelessness as where:

- *personal characteristics of homeless people are regarded as deficiencies;*
- *personal characteristics are confused with and become causes or explanations for homelessness;*
- *the direction of causation, from personal characteristic/deficiency to homelessness, is presumed; and*
- *symptoms are confused with and become causes (1995, p.12).*

Numerous studies have investigated the factors which may lead a young person to becoming homeless and their subsequent experiences of homelessness (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1989; O'Connor 1989; Maas & Hartley 1988; Neil & Fopp 1992; Tasker 1995). In most instances in the literature a number of often interrelated factors are listed. Several authors (Fopp 1993; Sheridan et al. 1983; Morgan & Vincent 1987), however, have suggested that it is useful to consider factors as situational, external or structural. It is within this framework that thinking about prevention and early intervention was approached in this research.

Morgan and Vincent (1987) describe a broad set of structural factors including: the creation of adolescence as a period of dependence on families, a changing social structure which offers little support to families, a general breakdown in notions of community, an economic system which seriously disadvantages many people and contributes to rising unemployment, and a society which creates expectations for a standard of living which is unachievable for many young people and families. According to Symons and Smith (1995):

... particular social, institutional and economic structures create conditions for the emergence of the category "homeless youth"... such social structures, rather than individual characteristics, create barriers that prevent homeless youth from effectively making transitions into adulthood, especially through the education system (p.30).

External factors are those which deny a viable self-determination and include policies and practices of government, corporate and non-profit agencies which create barriers to young people establishing an independent household. Inadequate levels of income support to avoid poverty, the lack of access to public housing, discrimination by landlords and other con-

straints experienced by young people because of their juvenile status can be seen as external factors (Sheridan et al. 1983). Additional external factors which particularly impact on young people can include the actions, inaction, and orientations of statutory welfare authorities, juvenile justice authorities, the police, schools and non-profit human services. In short, the institutional context of young people's lives cannot be viewed as outside and somehow separate from the process of young people becoming homeless.

Situational factors are those which arise from an individual's immediate relations and in the case of young people, most significantly their family relations. These factors include high levels of family conflict or stress, sexual, physical or emotional abuse, domestic violence, alcohol or substance abuse. Different types of factors can overlap in such a way as to make it impossible to determine priority of causation; for example, poverty and other income related issues can underlie factors such as family stress and conflict in many cases.

In the following section the factors causing homelessness among young people are reviewed with particular reference to factors contributing to early home leaving.

Constructions of adolescence and youth

A number of writers have indicated that with the emergence of adolescence as a recognised stage of life, came the view that this period was one of "storm and stress", of crisis and upheaval for young people (Springhall 1983; Bessant 1994). These theories, which continue to have popular appeal, were essentially theories of abnormality. Though there is virtually no empirical support for this approach to young people (Dunlop 1991, p.126) the images of young people as problematic, as dangerous threats to social order (Tait 1995), as deviant and troublesome (Carrington 1993) or as naive victims, have heavily influenced relations between social institutions and young people. The Australian media have been found to portray young people in a highly stereotypical, generally negative way, with a substantial focus on crime (Australian Centre for Independent Journalism 1992; Crane 1995a).

Bessant theorises that the public fascination with the youth "problem" reflects the tendency to use young people as "repositories for our collective fears and anxieties" (1994, p.38) and argues that the treatment of youth as some "exotic species" helps create typologies of deviance which justify intervention by the expert into the lives of young people and their families, in an endless quest to "normalise" young people to the satisfaction of the older community.

The concepts of adultcentrism (Petr 1992) and ageism (Bytheway 1995; Crane 1995b) are useful for

naming some of these age-related social dynamics. Adultcentrism has emerged in the family therapy literature to describe the tendency by adults to view the world from an adult perspective and in so doing not understand or appreciate how children and young people are viewing things. At the same time age relations as a determinant of young people's experience can be overstated and infer that young people constitute a homogenous group (Drury & Jamrozik 1985). While age relations are significant considerations' socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity and race are more significant contextual factors. These interact with age relations producing quite different dynamics for differently located young people.

Studies investigating young people's attitudes and perceptions do not support the notion that they constitute a group at odds with the values of mainstream society. Rather, studies show that young people value their relationships with parents and family members, and have respect for parents (Hartley & Wolcott 1994). Even where young people have been forced to leave home because of difficult circumstances (including high levels of conflict, physical and emotional abuse) they usually want to re-establish or maintain contact and have some level of relationship with their parents or other family members (Tasker 1995).

The model of social management

The particular model of societal management used is cited by Burke (1994) as an often overlooked factor in analysing why some countries have greater or lesser levels of homelessness. Australia is described as a mixture of "corporatist" and "economic rationalist" models where economic decision making is largely market driven, with rationalist assumptions underpinning taxation policy and government spending, and where instead of universally directed services there is an emphasis on targeted welfare delivery (Burke 1994, p.13). Burke makes the point that homelessness is much more a problem in dominantly economic rationalist societies such as the United States and Britain, and contends there is evidence that Australia is moving more towards the economic rationalist model.

Unemployment and poverty

Unemployment plays a key role in becoming homeless (Hirst 1989; Boyce 1991), and employment is an important avenue for escaping homelessness (Smith 1995, p.17). In the past two decades full-time employment opportunities for young people have been substantially eroded with every recessionary period seeing an over-representation in jobs lost to young people which are never recovered in following periods of relative employment growth (Sweet 1991). In 1966,

59% of 15- to 19-year-olds in Australia were in full-time employment; in 1992 this was 20% (Keating 1992). Similar downward trends have occurred in the United Kingdom, USA and Europe (Hartley & Wolcott 1994). So serious is the issue that the National Council for the International Year of the Family notes: "Youth unemployment was described as a 'black hole', a direct and insidious form of abuse against the young person by economic and labour market circumstances" (Cass 1994, p.237). Even when young people do find full-time employment, the question remains whether this guarantees an income which allows them to live independently above the poverty line. Bessant cites data which indicates that with the exception of clerks, all award rates for 15- to 17-year-olds are below the poverty line (1995, pp.260-61). The viability of independence is largely predicated on young people having access to a viable income, and this is not within reach for most independent young people.

Related to this is the factor of family income and employment. Recent data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics reveals that 17% of Australian families had no parent in paid employment, while among sole parent families, 43% were not in the labour force (cited in Cass 1994, p.12). Any analysis of homelessness must consider the financial stresses on families and young people within families resulting from low income and unemployment. Young cites Australian statistics indicating that the occupation of the father has an influence on the children's homeleaving, with blue collar workers' children leaving home at an earlier age than those from white collar jobs (1987, p.109). Where the father was unemployed or not working, a high proportion of their children left home to live with a partner or because of conflict, especially so with daughters (p.110). In the United Kingdom patterns of home leaving in terms of reasons, the timing, reversability of the process, and type of accommodation moved to, have been found to vary between classes, and are closely related to differences in access to educational opportunity (Jones 1987).

Since its inception in 1986, the Youth Homeless Allowance (YHA) has been the source of some speculation as to its role in inducing young people to leave home prematurely (Mass 1995, p.6). A review of the literature does not support this notion (see especially the Morris Report). The National Youth Coalition for Housing point out that if the allowance was an incentive to leave home, more young people leaving home would have sought SAAP assistance because of the long waiting time for YHA (Ellis & Fopp 1995). In a recent survey of agencies conducted across the United Kingdom, *withdrawal* of benefits to 16- and 17-year-olds was seen as a major factor in increasing youth homelessness (Centrepoin 1995, p.9).

The combination of low incomes and high housing costs

The combination of low incomes and high housing costs mean that young people seeking to form independent households face great difficulties. As the Maas report for the National Youth Housing Strategy (1995) points out, 80% of young people on low incomes are in private rental accommodation (p.50). A range of factors is well canvassed in the literature, factors which result in a lack of access to affordable housing for young people on home leaving (see HREOC 1989; Maas 1995). These include access to and adequacy of wages or income support for young people, discrimination against young people in gaining rental accommodation, and continuing low levels of access to generally unsuitable public housing stock.

Statutory welfare intervention

Being removed from home because of protective concerns may reduce the risk of physical or sexual abuse but it may have the unintended consequence of propelling a child or young person into homelessness. The pattern of transience and multiple care givers that many young children experience as a result of state welfare authority intervention meets the definitional requirements of homelessness in some important respects. That the intervention by the state authority is warranted in cases of abuse or neglect is not at issue; what is highlighted is the phenomenon whereby statutory intervention which removes a child from the family home, rather than removing the abusive or neglectful perpetrator, may well render the child vulnerable to the conditions that constitute homelessness. The experience of young people leaving care has been characterised as one of particular vulnerability given that little support is available from the State to assist these young people to establish a stable independent living situation (HREOC 1989).

Schools

Evidence cited previously indicated that young people who leave school at an early age also leave home earlier. The connection between early school leaving and young people becoming vulnerable to homelessness is also strongly demonstrated in the literature. Smith (1995) found that the earlier young people left school, the longer they were likely to remain homeless. Few homeless young people continue their schooling even if they have not reached the minimum age for leaving and there is evidence that between two-thirds and three-quarters of homeless students do not complete the school year in which

they become homeless (MacKenzie & Chamberlain 1995).

Attention in the research literature has been directed to: inflexible structures in schools (especially secondary schools); the notion that curricula areas are largely irrelevant for students not aiming for tertiary study; the poor quality of teacher-student relationships (Beresford 1993); the practice of rejecting or neglecting underachievers; and the policies of suspension or expulsion of difficult students (O'Connor 1989). Interviews with young people reveal that developing rapport with an understanding teacher was a crucial element in making their school experience positive (Tasker 1995, p.74). Patterns of truancy and school failure recur throughout the narratives of young people who become homeless (Wolcott & Weston 1994). Despite this, there is little evidence that schools are assuming systematic measures to address the needs of the broadest cross-section of students.

Child abuse and family violence

The definitions provided by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the State and Territory government welfare departments are used within this research (Zabar & Angus 1994, p.70). Abuse often takes a multi-dimensional form, illustrated by a recent Australian study which found that when the primary abuse was physical, emotional abuse also occurred in 45% of cases, with neglect occurring in 44% (Levesley 1984). Most difficult to define is emotional abuse, where definitions range from emotional deprivation from a carer (Zabar & Angus 1994) to a broader ecological definition of

the child inhabiting a situation or ecology characterised by patterns of interpersonal and intersystem relationships which have an influential and detrimental effect on the child's emotional development (Preston 1986, p.43).

Factors which may contribute to an abusive ecology in families include marital conflict (including inter-spouse violence), family separations, stress resulting from life crisis such as unemployment or the death of a parent, restructured or blended families, the presence or absence of a family network for support, gender stereotypes maintained within the society, and learned patterns of aggression and dominance (Berger 1980; Garbarino & Gilliam 1980; Justice & Justice 1982; Martin & Walters 1982; Giles-Sims & Finkelhor 1984; Preston 1984; Smith 1984).

A substantial number of Australian studies indicate escape from physical, emotional and sexual abuse as common reasons for early homeleaving (Powers & Jaklitsch 1989; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1989; Robson 1992; O'Connor 1989;

Wolcott & Weston 1994; Smith 1995). The Howard and Zibert study (1990, cited in Brown 1993) of 92 homeless young people in Australia found 75% had experienced some form of violence in their families. In a recent American study of "runaways", 37% left home at least once from physical abuse, and 11% from sexual abuse (Robertson 1990). Among 16- to 17-year-olds in the United Kingdom study by Centrepoint, 33% revealed prior experience of physical and/or sexual abuse (Centrepoint 1993). Data on the relationship of the "maltreater" to the child are incomplete. Where persons responsible for abuse are identified (61% of cases), it was found that 72% of cases were the natural parent, 12% of cases involved step-parents, de facto parents or foster parents/guardians, 7% siblings and other relatives, 6% friends or neighbours, leaving 4% in the other category (Angus & Woodward 1995, p.15).

According to Hendessi (1992), four in ten young women who become homeless have experienced prior sexual abuse. The high incidence of sexual abuse revealed among homeless young women is further supported by researchers such as Maas and Hartley (1988), Darwin (1991) and Healy and Walsh (1994). O'Connor's study also revealed a significantly high percentage (12%) of the young people who had become homeless reported sexual abuse, and that typically the sexual abuse had lasted for years (1989, p.25).

The statistics on sexual abuse as an antecedent to early home leaving are quite variable (Brown 1993). The difficulty in building a clear picture of the level of incidence is due in part to the pattern of "late" disclosure among homeless young women, who generally refrain from revealing details of sexual abuse until such time as considerable trust has been established between themselves and human service workers (Brown 1993, pp.62-63), and the reluctance by young men generally to disclose experiences of sexual violence (Daws et al. 1995).

There is also some evidence that young people who leave an abusive home and become homeless experience an increase in their self-esteem and sense of control in their lives (Pears & Notter 1995).

Family conflict

Family conflict is the most commonly cited reason by young people as to why home leaving resulting in homelessness occurred (Hutson & Liddiard, 1989; Newman 1989; O'Connor 1989; Centrepoint 1995). Indeed, O'Connor's interviews with 100 young homeless people in Australia revealed that "family conflict is a unifying theme in all of the accounts" (p.30). There is also a substantial body of literature indicating that marital conflict is correlated with a significant number of emotional problems in children (Emery 1988; Amato & Keith 1991; see Grych & Fincham 1990 for a review).

One effect of high levels of marital conflict is to increase levels of children's anger and aggression, particularly in male children (Cummings et al. 1989).

As children get older it is inevitable that some shift in roles and expectations within families occurs. The need for parents and adolescents to change roles and assumptions as the young people move towards independence was one finding of the study of 92 families by Wolcott and Weston (1994).

A family's communication patterns, problem-solving abilities, belief systems, and structure of relationships will influence whether adolescence is a time of normal challenge and adjustment or becomes a crisis of conflict (p.208; see also Robin & Foster 1989).

In one Australian study (Young 1987) the most common "sources" of conflict prior to leaving home, identified by young people listed in descending order were: both parents (41% of those who mentioned conflict), father (26%), mother (21%), need for independence (26%), personality clash (20%), view of life (20%) conflict between the parents (11%), social life/peers (10%), alcohol misuse (9%), conflict over young person's partner (7%) and clash with stepfather (7%) (p.126). It appears conflict triggered home leaving, together with those attributes which render a family and young person more vulnerable to stress (such as unemployment, low income, high mobility) correlate with a higher incidence of homelessness.

Young's study also examined correlations between restrictions placed on children by parents, and their homeleaving. This had distinct gender dimensions:

... restrictions on the independence and freedom of sons will force them to leave home sooner and more likely for the reason, independence. Restrictions on daughters are relatively more likely to result in their leaving home because of conflict. Among daughters, also, there is some indication that marriage may be used as a means of achieving independence from a restrictive family situation (Young 1987, p.136).

Tasker's study for the Brotherhood of St Laurence (1995) asked a sample of 35 young people who undertook their final year of secondary school in 1994 while living without parental support, about the reasons behind their home leaving. In descending order of frequency, the most common reasons were: problems with communication (28), physical abuse (16), emotional abuse (16), problems with step-parents (9), drug/alcohol abuse (8), rules or discipline (7), lack of support for studying (5), and lack of money (5). Problems with communication were cited by the young people as arising from a lack of understanding of them, and an inability by parents to acknowledge or adapt to the young person's growing independence. Seventeen young people, or almost 50%, indicated inflexible atti-

tudes by at least one parent as the reason why family conflicts could not be resolved (Tasker 1995).

There is evidence that parents and children have different perspectives of their relationship. A longitudinal study by Thornton et al. (1995) finds that not only do parents and children see the relationship differently, they are unaware of the other's perspective. Based on interviews with 867 families in the United States, the study also found that children report less positive relationships with their fathers than their mothers. The authors indicate that "it is critical that future research collect data directly from both generations" (p.560). In the methodology chosen for this study, the views of both young people and parents have been sought.

The research of Rueter and Conger (1995) is useful in that it studied 335 families over a four-year period, analysing how family context related to conflict between adolescents and their parents in the early adolescent years. Their research supported the well-established view that the interactional styles established in a family may be used to accurately predict whether adolescent-parent conflict will be high or low (Anderson & Sabatelli 1990; Steinberg 1990; Paikoff & Brooks-Gunn 1991; Galatzer-Levy & Cohler 1993; Hill 1993). The Rueter and Conger (1995) study further confirmed the view that families with high levels of hostility, blaming, disruption and impatience were strong predictors of increasing levels of child-parent conflict during adolescence (pp.445-46). The authors went on to recommend that intervention should be "directed at improving problem-solving behaviour ... paired with efforts to teach positive communication and supportiveness" (p.446).

Rueter and Conger's conclusions are supported by the work of Barber (1989), who studied 1,828 American families from a range of ethnic backgrounds. Barber analysed data on sources and frequency of parent-adolescent conflict for correlations with parenting style, defining positive parenting style in terms of how often the parent hugged the child, praised the child, and allowed the child to help set rules; negative parenting was defined in terms of how often the parent slaps, spansks or yells at the child.

The sex of both the adolescent and the custodial parent may also be factors in the contexts for conflict within families. Paterson, Field and Pryor (1994) published findings based on a New Zealand sample of 493 young people aged between 13 and 19 years. The study concludes that as female adolescents get older, they develop closer affective relationships with their mothers, while male adolescents do the reverse; both male and female adolescents revealed a pattern of using their fathers less for support as they age. This research builds on work suggesting mothers are the preferred parent to turn to in times of distress (Hunter & Youniss

1982; Youniss & Smollar 1985; Papini et al. 1990) and in particular, that female adolescents differentiate between parents and refer significantly more to mothers than fathers (Wright & Keple 1981; Youniss & Keterlinus 1987; Papini et al. 1990).

Changes in family structure

Ochiltree (1990) reported findings associating stepfamilies with higher levels of family conflict and lower levels of self-esteem in children. Meanwhile, Young (1987) maintained stepfamilies are correlated with decreases in school performance and earlier home-leaving. In a Canadian study of early home leaving Mitchell (1994) indicates the factors associated with early home-leaving include the sex of the young person, racial/ethnic background, education level, employment and income. The results, based on the views of 2,033 young people aged 15 to 24 were that:

- young people from stepfamilies were two and a half times more likely to leave home due to “conflict” than young people from biological families;
- young women were significantly more prone to early home leaving than young men;
- young people with greater access to material wealth were less likely to leave home early (Mitchell 1994, p.666).

Some authors suggest that in cases of family breakdown or separation, the structure of the family after the event is more critical to the long-term adjustment of the child than the event of separation itself (Wallerstein & Kelly 1980; Wallerstein 1982). Edgar, in commenting on all the findings on divorce produced by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, indicated that the research confirms: “that it is the degree of conflict, not divorce per se, that traumatises children” (foreword, in Dunlop & Burns 1988, p.v).

High levels of conflict within a family regardless of the family structure is seen to be associated with poor adolescent adjustment (Dunlop & Burns 1988). There is a temptation, encouraged in the popular media, to overstate the significance of the single parent or blended family as social “problems” in themselves. This is particularly so of single parent families, given historical data which indicates single parent families are not a new phenomenon. In 1891 the percentage of families comprising single parents with children was 17%, a figure which matches contemporary statistics (McDonald 1993, p.29). In the 19th century it was mortality rather than divorce, that accounted for this figure, yet as McDonald points out: “despite the currently high divorce rates, marriages today are more likely to be still intact after 30 years than were marriages 100 years ago” (p.29).

Peer group influence

Shulman et al. (1995) undertook a study of links between family dynamics and peer group interactions among 131 adolescents. They found that high levels of family acceptance and support correlated with peer groups being seen as sources of support, while:

... antisocial conformity was found to relate to a family atmosphere that was high in conflict and which emphasised achievement and independence combined with a lack of support for intellectual development (p.585).

Joining particular peer groups may then compensate for the young person feeling less accepted by parents (Collins 1990). There is a body of research indicating the importance of peer group friendships for adolescents as a source of support (Ryan & Lynch 1989; Paterson, Field & Pryor 1994), but at the same time, a strong theme emerged that peers do not replace family and parental bonds during adolescence (Paterson, Field & Pryor 1994). Arguments that peers play a critical role in “subverting” young people away from the home environment lack support in the research literature.

Mental illness

The HREOC (1993) report into human rights and mental illness, estimated that 15% of Australian adolescents suffer from a recognisable psychiatric disorder with more recent research citing a figure of 20% (Garton et al. 1994). There is evidence that serious depressive illness has increased dramatically among adolescents and young adults (Cross-National Collaborative Group 1992) and the dramatic increase in suicide particularly among young males is well documented.

The correlation between homelessness and mental health problems is well supported (Hearn 1993; Reilly et al. 1994) though it is also recognised that this correlation does not distinguish mental health issues as antecedents or products of homelessness. Further there is the caution that young people are at times pathologised as “ill”, when in reality there may be social and contextual reasons underpinning the “symptoms”.

O'Connor (1989) concluded that “homeless young people have a high risk of depression and suicide” (p.103) and there is a clear pattern of suicidal attempts and/or ideation appearing as warning signals: for example, these are reported by 25% of young people who are at risk of becoming homeless (Wolcott & Weston 1994, p.214). In the Western Australian Child Health Survey (1995) 16% of adolescents reported having had suicidal thoughts. In the same study, the adult caregivers/teachers reported that only 3% of the adolescents had spoken of suicide. This discrepancy supports the conclusion that the caregivers’ perception of children/young people often differs from the self-perception of children/young people.

Long-term process and event based antecedents

While myriad reasons are offered by young people indicating why they became homeless there is a recognition that these can in simple terms be categorised into processes that have occurred for many years on one hand, and events which dramatically alter the young person's living context on the other.

What each of these stories have in common is that they are records of gradual or sudden dislocation (Smith 1995 p.20).

There is often a mixture of these reflected in the accounts of young people (see Tasker 1995). Long-term processes, such as abuse, may culminate in events which have the effect of removing important protective factors, or which (by way of how they are responded to) may lead to processes becoming entrenched and so result in home leaving. In the study by Smith (1995), about 20% of respondents gave drug and alcohol mismanagement as a reason for their homelessness, but connected this with physical and/or sexual abuse experienced within the family, and 25% of this same group had come from families where one or both parents had died (p.19). These life experience factors, such as separation from or death of a parent, are significantly over-represented among samples of young people who become homeless.

The same broad pattern was found in a study for Hanover Welfare Services of 33 families (including teenage parents) where there were two major patterns in becoming homeless. One pattern involved family hardship and disruption from early childhood. For these young people the underlying causes were seen as:

... poverty, violent and often drunken fathers, sexual abuse, the difficulties of single mothers, the loss of a parent, parents separating and repartnering, conflicts in relationships, and the trauma of children being made Wards of State or put in foster care (McCaughey 1992, p.6).

The second pattern arose from a sudden event such as job loss or the death of a parent.

Plass and Hotaling (1994) extend the notion of a "lifelong" process to the point of concluding that there is evidence for intergenerational transmission of "running away" from home. In a study focusing on 108 parent-child cases involving running away, and a control group of 224 cases of children aged over 10 years, it was concluded that:

... parents of runaways were significantly ... more likely to have run away themselves than were parents of non-runaways: 24% of the parents of runaways said they were runaways themselves, compared to 11% of the parents of non-runaways (p.343).

Factors for particular groups of young people

There are a number of additional issues relating to the cultural and personal contexts of young people which also need to be understood in any discussion of home leaving leading to homelessness. A range of factors has been mentioned already having particular impact on young women. Issues for other groups of young people include:

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people:

- a general lack of adequate accommodation (O'Neil 1988);
- high mobility among families (Loveday & Lea 1985);
- an education system which is poorly oriented to their needs, and a tendency to leave school at an early age (O'Neil 1988); and
- over-representation in the juvenile justice system (Cuneen & White 1995).

For young people from non-English-speaking backgrounds:

- the particular impact of family structure (Maas 1995);
- conflict between parents and offspring over morality and personal freedom, especially for young women in some cultural groups (Seeto 1991);
- conflict arising from parents' struggle to maintain cultural identity (Prince 1995);
- more severe restrictions on the freedom of young people, and stricter discipline, than that imposed on their peers (Cox 1995); and
- a reliance on community elders or clergy to resolve family conflict (O'Connor et al. 1994).

For young people with an intellectual disability:

- a greater risk of chronic homelessness than other young people (Price-Kelly & Hill 1995);
- high levels of pressure on families and frustration by parents (Coleman 1994);
- negative school experiences and lack of ongoing educational opportunities (ibid.); and
- a pattern of highly unstable or inappropriate accommodation (ibid.).

For gay and lesbian young people:

- conflict with the parent/guardian arising from parental attitudes regarding the sexual orientation of the young person (Irwin et al. 1995).

Defining prevention and early intervention

In the literature the terms prevention and early intervention in relation to youth homelessness are often used interchangeably, inconsistently, and with little specificity. For example, the second evaluation of SAAP: “supports a greater focus on preventive activity through a modest expansion of SAAP’s early intervention activities” (Lindsay 1993, p.3) and identifies four levels of intervention:

- *activities which assist an individual on the point of homelessness;*
- *activities which focus upon the development of living skills in those people whose lack of such skills threatens them with homelessness or a return to homelessness;*
- *community development activities which focus on overcoming barriers at a local level to a SAAP user’s reintegration into the community;*
- *advocacy at a broader policy level to overcome structural barriers to secure housing (p.53).*

This approach to early intervention illustrates a mixture of structural, external and situational strategies, implying that almost all action can be understood within the parameters of early intervention.

At the literal level prevention is stopping something from happening. Implicit is the element of prediction where an event will occur unless some action is taken to hinder or stop it (Hargreaves & Hadlow 1995, p.362). Prevention frameworks have increasingly been applied in social policy contexts such as health, crime and labour market contexts.

It has also been argued that something cannot be prevented unless “unambiguous causal links can be demonstrated between the intervention strategies and the problem which they are intended to eradicate” (Billis 1984, cited in Hargreaves & Hadlow 1995, p.349). Commonly, a layering approach has been adopted with a number of types of prevention being defined:

... a primary focus aimed at strategies which would prevent the emergence of a problem, a secondary focus which would address problems identified in their early stages, and a tertiary focus which would address mitigation of their most damaging effects (Hargreaves & Hadlow 1995, p.350).

In Australian literature this layered approach has been adopted by Carter (1993) who proposed four levels of prevention of youth homelessness as outlined in Table 2.1. Early intervention in this framework exists as one level of prevention. Another term synonymous with early intervention is that of “preventive

intervention”, used by Hargreaves and Hadlow (1995).

The approach taken by MacKenzie and Chamberlain (1995) uses the point of leaving home as a demarcation between early intervention, which occurs as soon as the young person becomes homeless, and generally in the first few weeks following leaving home, prior to becoming chronically homeless, and prevention which occurs when a young person is at risk but is not actually homeless.

Table 2.1 includes in the first two columns contemporary definitions of prevention and early intervention by Carter (1993), and MacKenzie and Chamberlain (1995). The definitions of early intervention and prevention proposed by MacKenzie and Chamberlain match to some extent the secondary and tertiary prevention levels proposed by Carter. In column three we outline our definitions of prevention and early intervention of youth homelessness.

In the definition used in the present research, prevention incorporates Carter’s primary prevention level and that aspect of secondary prevention which builds up the protective factors around young people. Indeed prevention can be enhanced by building up protective factors not only around young people but around their families and communities. This definition is influenced by understandings of the causal factors of homelessness as being to some extent situational, though predominantly external and/or structural. Prevention can address each of these levels. For example, prevention that is both situational and protective may take the form of a parenting skills program incorporated in the school curriculum. Prevention aimed at external factors may be targeted at programs or policies that improve the pool of suitable public housing stock for young people. Prevention aimed at structural factors may include change to age based systems of youth wages and income support.

Early intervention in our definition incorporates the tertiary prevention level referred to by Carter, together with intervention in relation to specific young people and their families seen as vulnerable to homelessness. Early intervention is distinct from prevention in that it is aimed at addressing situational factors that may contribute to a particular young person becoming chronically homeless. Early intervention can occur prior to homelessness in response to a difficulty or crisis perceived by a young person, family member or carer to be a possible antecedent to early home leaving or homelessness.

The definitions which have arisen from the present research are based on the view that:

- homelessness is a social phenomenon rather than an individual phenomenon. Its prevention, or the substantial reduction in its incidence requires changes at the social and institutional levels;
- action which targets individual young people

Table 2.1 Definitions of prevention and early intervention

Carter (1993)	Mackenzie & Chamberlain (1995)	Definitions used in the present research
<i>Primary prevention</i> involves addressing the underlying political, economic and social causes (local, state and national) which place young people at risk of homelessness.		<i>Prevention</i> involves the development and implementation of policies, practices and strategies which address structural or external factors contributing to youth homelessness, or which focus on factors which are both protective and situational. These responses are not targeted to specific individuals or families on the basis that they are considered vulnerable to homelessness.
<i>Secondary prevention</i> involves identifying the young people in a school who are at most risk of homelessness. It involves strengthening their attachments by building up their protective factors, and decreasing their risk factors to ensure they do not become homeless.	<i>Preventive</i> strategies focus on young people who may be "at risk", but who are not actually homeless (p.23).	<i>Early intervention</i> involves the development and implementation of policies, practices and strategies which address situational factors affecting specific young people. These a) respond to a perceived difficulty or crisis which may be a precursor to a specific instance of homelessness, or b) respond after homelessness has occurred, but before such time as the shift to chronic homelessness has taken place.
<i>Tertiary prevention</i> involves ensuring that young people who experience short periods of homelessness do not become chronically homeless.	<i>Early intervention</i> refers to measures to help young people as soon as possible after they become homeless ... [and] before young people have made the transition to chronic homelessness (p.23).	
It is at the level of <i>quaternary prevention</i> that most services for young homeless people are concentrated (for example, youth refuges). The aim is to prevent life long homelessness.		

and/or families is more appropriately thought about within the logic of intervention which, though it is hoped would have a preventive impact at the individual level, is not of itself addressing the underlying causes of homelessness, and will not of itself substantially reduce the incidence of homelessness in the longer term;

- there is a need to primarily approach the prevention of homelessness from the perspective of building up protective factors for communities, families and young people rather than from the perspective of identifying and responding to at risk individuals or families; and
- there are sometimes opportunities for constructive early intervention prior to a young person becoming homeless.

This question of a protective versus at risk orientation requires some explanation. Carter (1993) suggests that a focus on protective factors is required.

Social scientists have become more adept at defining the risk factors (unemployment, lack of income, housing, family breakdown, etc.) than the factors which protect

against youth homelessness. We can conceive of protective factors as the other side of the coin to the risk factors. Resources (adequate income, housing, education, employment) and relationships (stable family life and involvement in the local community) are the elements which provide protection against youth homelessness. Prevention needs to aim at maintaining or rebuilding young people's attachments by increasing the level of protective factors, thereby decreasing the risk factors (pp.130–40).

The point Carter makes has merit. Bell's (1986) model of risk/protective factors, is based on the view that not only do certain factors increase the risk of something happening but that protective factors decrease risk. The Western Australian Child Health Survey (1995) provides an example of a protective factors approach in relation to healthy child development. These have some relevance to homelessness prevention and early intervention. The report highlights the three areas of family, school and the social environment (p.53) and goes on to list particular avenues for prevention. These include improved preparation for parenting, high quality day care and

preschool education, building parental competence, improved support for families with adolescents (optimising the protective functions of families); life skills education, healthier school environments, in particular, addressing the problematic transition from primary to secondary school, using schools as a venue for parent education (optimising the protective functions of schools); and supporting locally initiated action, and countering harmful socio-cultural influences particularly in the mass media (thus optimising the protective capacities of communities) (pp.53–55). A range of other protective factors, particularly structural and external factors can be extracted from the literature on the antecedents to homelessness among young people.

There is a lack of consensus, and large variability in the use of “at risk” terminology as it applies to young people. The term is generally used “to denote a set of presumed cause and effect dynamics that place the child or adolescent in danger of negative future events” (McWhirter et al. 1993, p.6). Commonly cited in discussions about particular future problematic events are references to signals of being at risk such as school exclusion, drug and alcohol use, low self-esteem and various forms of abuse (Wassef et al. 1995, p.526).

At risk terminology is almost always explored at the level of the individual, family or population sub-group implying that the antecedents of the particular negative event are located in people themselves or in their interaction with their immediate environment. The assumption is that the young people themselves are in some way lacking rather than seeing the economic, social and institutional contexts of their lives as lacking. For example, in a review of the Australian literature between 1980 and 1994 on students at risk, Batten and Russell indicate the term at risk:

... is used to describe or identify young people who, beset by particular difficulties and disadvantages, are thought likely to fail to achieve the development in their adolescent years that would provide a sound basis for a satisfying and fulfilling adult life (1995, p.1).

Of critical importance is the nature of the “risk” phenomenon. Homelessness, drug misuse, suicide, and early school leaving are quite different phenomena. Yet the language of at risk is used relatively indiscriminately to refer to all of these with little if any clarification regarding meaning and the underlying assumptions that accompany a particular pairing.

In recent Commonwealth and State Government social policy, the use of at risk terminology has at times been located within a social justice framework, or used as a synonym for disadvantage (Batten & Russell 1995, p.2). From this perspective the identification of at risk young people and groups of young people is seen to allow specific targeting of limited government resources to tackle social problems such as crime, AIDS,

and homelessness, and thus enhance access and equity for disadvantaged groups. Such an application has merit although it is likely that in accomplishing such strategies the individuation of social problems often occurs.

Increasingly the term has been a focus for critique (see Westhorpe 1991; Brough 1994; Tait 1995). Most common in these analyses is the view that “at risk” can be or is a vehicle for managing young people in a way which locates the source of social difficulty within young people themselves, thereby diminishing the significance of structural and institutional factors which underlie social problems, such as homelessness. Second, depending on the focus of attention, there is generally very poor predictive power in the application of at risk factors to individuals. The term at risk can also have the effect of labelling and further marginalising those it is applied to.

Finally, it seems that the problems people face at any one time could result in a wide range of preventive goals depending on the institutional location of the service, the naming of the “problem”, the practice framework of the worker or service, and the views of the people themselves. For multiple reasons the terminology of at risk is not promoted in this research, though it is used descriptively when programs or agencies self-identify in this way.

Young people and homeleaving

The connotations of “leaving home” are of a young person making a conscious decision to head off and embark on a relatively autonomous adult lifestyle. As this and other research shows it is often the case with young people under 16 that home leaves them rather than the other way around. The term “home leaving” is preferred on the basis that it places more emphasis on the phenomenon than on an individual’s agency.

Most people leave their family of origin and establish another household at some point in their lives. There are financial dimensions to this process, most significantly a secure income sufficient to afford private rental housing, the main form of tenure accessed, often with significant difficulty, by young people.

In light of substantial barriers to accessing other housing, it is not this act of leaving home which of itself causes homelessness (Neil & Fopp 1992). There is however a tendency for this to be inferred. For example, the Morris Report states:

Early intervention, in the context of youth homelessness, is a process which is based on the principle that if appropriate action and support is provided at an early stage of a young person leaving home, the spiral towards chronic homelessness can be avoided (HRSCCA 1995, p.271).

Implicit is the view that a young person is of an age

where formation of an independent household is not appropriate. If this is in fact so, then the view that home leaving causes homelessness is still problematic, given that the overwhelming majority of young people for whom independent living is not appropriate, do not commonly leave home without substantial issues existing in the home, and are unlikely to remain at home on returning unless these circumstances change in some positive way. This is not to say that providing support to young people and families prior to or shortly after home leaving occurs is not well placed. It is simply to be clear that home leaving itself does not cause homelessness even when the young person is of an age where they do not have access to sufficient resources to avoid homelessness.

For many young people it is the time gap between home leaving and the availability of adequate material, social and protective resources to form another household which causes homelessness. The availability of these resources is the subject of social policy and is largely outside of the capacity of families and youth services to provide.

There is an age under which living independently is not socially or politically sanctioned, generally agreed to be 15 or 16. This is linked to the age at which schooling is no longer compulsory (15 in most States/Territories), the benchmark where young people symbolically begin to be seen as economically productive members of the community (Maas 1995). This is also the age below which the state has child protection concerns as evidenced by the Commonwealth/State Protocol arrangements for the payment of income security benefits to under 16s. The National Youth Housing Strategy report (Maas 1995) cites 15 years as the age when young people, because of lost family connections, having been a ward of the state, or because of moving out of home due to violence or abuse, may need the means and the opportunity to make independent choices.

There is beyond this an age range where home leaving is partially sanctioned, but littered with disincentives. The discrimination young people experience in accessing private rental and public housing, even though they are technically eligible, are examples. The age grading of income support arrangements for unemployed young people and students also typify this partial acceptance. Finally, there is the age where home leaving is acknowledged implicitly in social policy as appropriate and legitimated as such, that is, where individuals gain a full adult rate of material support and access to social resources.

Home leaving needs to be discussed with a view to which of these three populations it is applying. There is clearly a reasonable basis for seeing home leaving of young people under 15 or 16 as an issue for exploration, where the goal of remaining at home in the

context of safety and well-being is pursued. This is a matter of considerable public consensus and is reflected in Commonwealth/State divisions of responsibility regarding income support, and the continuing concern within SAAP for under 16s. It is to this age range which the present research has been most directed and to this age range that the term “early home leaving” can be applied with confidence.

The issue of home leaving for those between 16 and the age where employment and genuine adult incomes becomes accessible cannot be addressed without examining and debating the economic, social and political place of young people in Australian society, and the implications this has for responses to home leaving. The debates here are various. Presumably there is no debate about early home leaving in relation to the third group, that is those who leave home after adulthood is conferred to the general population. This said, there are numbers of groups in society for whom home leaving has been considerably more difficult or conditional, such as those with disabilities or those suffering from mental illness.

When the age of availability of full-time work (or marriage to/cohabitation with an employed partner) was articulated to the age of sanctioned home leaving, there was little need for social policy to attend to the nexus between home leaving and homelessness, other than that which attended to child protection. As the employment opportunities for young people have been delayed and not replaced by income subsidy arrangements sufficient to sustain an independent household a difficulty has emerged. At what age should it be sanctioned, in a social policy sense, for young people in Australia to leave home? It is not within the scope of this report to canvass this question in detail. However, it is important to recognise the structural and social policy dimensions of home leaving and their relationship to homelessness. To not do so is to assume that home leaving by young people of itself causes homelessness.

Where are young people living?

Data produced in Table 2.2 summarises the family status for young people aged 15 to 24. Of 15- to 19-year-olds, the group of most interest to this research, only 11% live independently from their family of origin and of these 63% live with other unrelated people in group households, 29% have already formed their own families, and about 7% live alone. This compares with 51% of 20- to 24-year-olds who live independently of their family of origin.

The statistics in Table 2.3 indicate increased percentages of young people of both sexes living with parent(s) for both age ranges with a total of 89% of all young people between the ages of 15 and 19 being of

particular relevance to this research. Other ABS data indicate that within these age ranges the percentage of young people living at home decreases gradually as age increases (Hartley & Wolcott 1994, pp.32–33).

The mix of family types in Australian society has also changed in significant ways (Hartley & Wolcott 1994). In 1992, 35% of families were couples without children living with them, 52% were couples with children, and 13% were sole parent families with children. Of sole parent families, 57% resulted from separation or divorce, 23% by death and 20% were formed by parents who were not married. Eight per cent of couple families contained stepchildren, and of these families, four out of ten were “blended” families (Cass 1994, pp.10–11).

Patterns of home leaving

Prior to the 1970s it was the pattern for young people to leave home for marriage once they had become financially independent (McDonald 1995). Leaving home in many ways signified independence. The trend for young people to leave home later has been acknowledged and reflected in ABS data since the late 1980s (Kilmartin 1987). Females tend to leave home at a slightly earlier age than males (Young 1987). There is evidence, however, that while the average age of homeleaving is increasing, there may be an increased diversity of ages at which young women leave, with some leaving earlier and some later (Bracher & Santow 1988). Whereas young people, especially females, routinely left home for marriage prior to the 1970s the average age of marriage more recently has increased to the point where it is usual for there to be a period of “independent living” following home leaving (Hartley 1989).

Table 2.2 Family status of persons aged 15 to 24, June 1995

<i>Family Type</i>	<i>Age 15–19 (‘000)</i>	<i>Age 20–24 (‘000)</i>	<i>Total (‘000)</i>
Living with parents	1,053.6	664.2	1,717.8
Students	725.7	121.4	847.1
Non-dependent child	298.3	485.4	783.7
Other family person	29.6	57.4	87.0
Living in own households	47.8	418.4	466.2
Couple, no children	16.3	183.8	200.1
Couple, with children	10.2	118.7	128.9
Sole parent, with children	11.7	43.7	55.4
Living alone	9.6	72.2	81.8
Living in other shared household	82.0	259.5	341.5
Total living independently	129.8	677.9	807.7
Overall totals	1,183.4	1,342.1	2,525.5

Source: ABS, Labour Force Status and Other Characteristics of Families, June 1995 (Cat No 6224.0.40.001)

Table 2.3 Percentage of 15- to 24-year-olds living with parent(s)

Year	<i>Males</i>		<i>Females</i>		<i>Persons</i>	
	15-19	20-24	15-19	20-24	15-19	20-24
1982	87.5	47.9	80.8	28.1	84.2	41.0
1992	91.3	54.9	86.5	39.7	88.9	47.4

Note: Excludes a small number of persons with a partner or child of their own who lived with their parent(s). Source: ABS Cat No. 4420.0)

The underlying reasons for later home leaving can be summarised as the collapse of the full-time youth labour market and increased levels of participation in education and vocational training. Other factors such as the interaction of housing costs and availability with levels of income support for young people unemployed or studying, have contributed to the situation where increased numbers of young people are remaining at home (Ellis 1996). These structural issues have been cited as giving rise to increasing levels of conflict between young people and their parents (Edgar in Hartley 1989).

The research suggests that where young adults had once been seen as individuals who had achieved independence, autonomy and responsibility, the evidence shows an amplification of dependence and irresponsibility which goes along with the absence of freedom for an increasing number of young people (Bessant 1995, p.249).

Ellis (1996) outlines ABS data which supports the view that young people are not only leaving home later but that parents are playing a significant role in supporting them financially both while they are at home and subsequently when they leave. The implication is that home leaving is not a clear move to independent living but usually requires, in the current Australian context, a level of continued economic relationship between parents and young people. Where such connection does not exist, or where families have limited income, the implication is that young people are at additional risk of becoming homeless. It is unfair, Ellis argues, that young people should remain at home when otherwise they would have to leave for education/employment or when parents cannot provide support at the levels required (p.36). Hartley (1989) summarises the positions of families in this way:

Some parents were very supportive of their teenage children; others contributed little or nothing to their upkeep. In the latter cases, this was sometimes due to the breakdown of relationships between parents and their children. Many, however, particularly widowed parents or those on supporting Parents Benefit with a number of children in their care, simply did not have the financial resources to provide for their older teenage children (p.111).

At one level this financial dependency can be seen to create tension against moves to social independence by young people. Hartley and Wolcott (1994) point out that harmonious family life for young people in late adolescence now requires *interdependence*, within a mutually supportive relationship of "equals", yet this equality is highly problematic in a context where young people's financial dependence is so prolonged.

Young (1987) identified the main reasons cited by

young people for leaving home as marriage, independence, work, study, conflict in the family, and travel. She points out that there is a significant difference between home leaving for a clear goal (such as study or taking up a job offer), and home leaving due to conflict. Further, young people frequently leave home and return a number of times. Fifty per cent of young men and 40% of young women who left returned later to the parental home (Young 1987). It is significant that: "a high proportion of second departures of those who first left because of conflict are also because of conflict" (p.60).

It would appear that there are "positive" connotations attached to the first kind of home leaving, but not attached to the second kind. The sources of conflict, the unresolved nature of that conflict (evident in the fact that the young person leaves yet again) and the availability of sufficient resources to avoid homelessness if staying at home is not possible, are the issues at stake, rather than the home leaving itself. Under ideal circumstances, leaving home is viewed positively by both the young person and the parent/s. In the case of young people who leave home at a very early age, who are 'kicked out' by parents, and/or who leave in situations of emotional distress, the pattern of leaving is often very complex.

Wolcott and Weston's (1994) Australian study of 92 families reported that one-third of the young people in their sample stayed away from home for fewer than six days, one-third for a period of one to four weeks, and one-third for a period that ranged from five weeks to more than a year (p.215). Young people in these situations may leave one family home to go to another, or where there has been separation or divorce they may move from the mother's home to the father's. It is difficult to establish which home leaving is the critical precursor to homelessness. In the Wolcott and Weston (1994) study, 42% of the young people stayed with a family member or noncustodial parent after leaving home, and 40% with a friend (p.215). This difficulty is compounded by a general failure in the literature to acknowledge that for many young people, there is not a single identifiable "home" but rather multiple homes (see Goldscheider & Goldscheider 1993).

In a study of 104 young people, Smith (1995) found that on their first night away from home, the largest percentage (36%) went to a friend's place, and this arrangement could extend for weeks or even longer; 18% spent the first night with a relative or other member of the extended family; 14% spent one or more nights on the street after leaving home; and 22% went directly into a government or non-government service (pp.38-41).

Plass and Hotaling (1994) in a comparable American study found that 60% of the young people who ran away from home went to a friend's house

(p.339). This latter study also found that in 40% of the cases, police were a first point of referral by parents of runaways (p.339). Tasker (1995) found that most young people who had left home a number of times initially sought shelter with friends or another family member.

It is very difficult to estimate the number of young people in Australia who fall into the early intervention parameters used in this research. Any available statistics are inevitably going to include only a small proportion of young people and families experiencing distress that could lead to early home leaving and subsequent homelessness.

Kids Help Line data

Kids Help Line, a national free call telephone help service for children, maintains a comprehensive data base and supplied the following data (Kids Help Line 1996). During 1995 Kids Help Line received 4,000 calls relating to homelessness and/or home leaving, accounting for 6% of all problem-related calls. The number of callers in this category was greatest for females aged 15 and males aged 16, gradually decreasing either side of this peak age of inquiry. The number of calls from males and females is similar. Such findings are consistent with data which indicates the

average age of home leaving for females is slightly younger than for males.

Calls made to Kids Help Line in the calendar year 1995 relating to homelessness and home leaving were rated according to severity (Table 2.4).

Of relevance to the area of early intervention is that 38% of callers, (more than 1,500), were making inquiries about or contemplating leaving home. Kids Help Line indicated that many of those classified as "left home – distressed" and most of those "left home – severely distressed" are experiencing stress within the first month of home leaving and fall within the parameters of early intervention defined in this study. A number of other categories are of factors acknowledged as contributing to early home leaving leading to homelessness and include those of family relationship, child abuse, and violence.

In the period 1991 to October 1995, 798 adults (almost all of whom were parents) phoned Kids Help Line about children "running away" from home. Parents Help Line which at the time of writing is only available for the Brisbane area (07 code) received 1,526 calls during the first three months of operation, of which 1.3% were categorised as related to homelessness. Thirty per cent of all calls were to do with family relationships and it was estimated approximately half of these (15% of total calls) concerned parent/adolescent conflict.

Table 2.4 Homelessness related calls according to severity – Kids Help Line

Severity	%
Left home – severely distressed	7.52
Left home – distressed	21.65
Left home – okay	32.93
Contemplating leaving	14.94
Inquiry	22.97

Table 2.5 Age of SAAP youth service users, census night 1994

Age range	Male	Female	Total
Under 16	14.3% (130)	15.9% (164)	15.2% (294)
16–17	40.5% (368)	38.7% (399)	36.9% (767)
18–19	22.8% (207)	24.5% (253)	23.7% (460)
20–24	18.5% (253)	15.9% (164)	17.1% (332)
Other	3.8%	4.9%	4.7%
Total	908	1031	1939

(Note: other includes those over 25 and those not stated)

[Source: Summarised from Table 8 National SAAP Client Census Data for 3 November 1994.]

SAAP data

Some young people move directly from home to a SAAP service. While most of these young people will be accommodated in a SAAP youth service young people 18 and under are also users of SAAP services for single women, single men, families and services for multiple target groups. The national client census data for 1994 indicates the following level of youth services usage by young people of various ages.

On census night a number of young people under 16 (n=26) and 16 to 17 (n=79) stayed in other types of SAAP services (services targeted at young women, families, young men and multiple target groups), compared with 1,061 in youth services. The percentage of young people staying in youth services whose previous accommodation was a parent(s) home was 16% (n=312). The overall percentage of people in SAAP whose previous accommodation was a parent(s) home was 8.6% (n=588).

SAAP data is of limited use for estimating the extent of home leaving resulting in homelessness for young people given the exclusion from this data of those young people who stay with friends, other family members, are mobile or who cannot be accommodated (Hartley & Wolcott 1994).

Best practice

A term included in the research brief which requires clarification is that of “best practice”. The nature of this research requires that the term be interpreted more generally than specifically.

The term best practice originated in the commercial sector in the United States and is generally used to refer to an operational model for the achievement of efficiency and effectiveness objectives. It is a management concept and has been used in recent years in conjunction with others such as “benchmarking”, in the context of industry reform in Australia. It has a technical meaning of “the best way for an organisation to achieve an output or outcome” (Industry Commission 1995, p.321). It is this context of increased organisational accountability and instrumentalism regarding social services (Nyland 1994) that the term “best practice” has developed.

Best practice is generally taken to mean best current practice rather than best future practice:

Best practice is the term used to describe the “state of the art” in a field of activity. It is a way of referring to services which are performing in the best possible way at the present moment but which still strive for constant improvement ... In a constantly changing environment, the elements of best practice change over time (Community Services Development 1995, p.1).

There has been some concern that “best practice” may not necessarily be synonymous with good practice. For example if that practice is moderated by policies, legislation or other constraints which themselves are problematic, then the best practice may well not be good practice from a number of evaluative perspectives.

In a mediocre policy, program and service environment, it is likely the “best” current practice may be inadequate which, in turn, necessitates a description of “better” practice (Fopp 1994, p.35).

The Queensland Department of Family and Community Services identifies five elements shared by best practice community service organisations, and which informed the way best practice was understood in this study.

- *being consumer focused, flexible and responsive to consumer needs;*
- *an organisational environment characterised by co-operation, commitment, trust and loyalty;*
- *a commitment to continuous improvement through monitoring of the internal and external environments;*
- *a commitment to responding to and, where possible, driving change in the community services industry and the environment within which it operates;*
- *sharing experiences and building links (Community Services Development 1995, p.viii).*

A further area for clarification is the inference that some practices are “best”, and therefore transportable across diverse contexts. Clearly the context of a social service can have dramatic implications for the nature of the service and methods of service delivery. There are therefore good reasons for viewing a generic “best practice” with caution, and for using, in preference, the notions of “successful” or “good” practice, identifying, where possible, principles of practice which have widespread application. In this research, the authors oriented those involved in the study to understand that best practice was understood as “successful” practice.

This chapter has reviewed the literature on youth homelessness and home leaving, and a framework for conceptualising prevention, and early intervention in relation to homelessness among young people has been outlined. In the next chapter, the design of the overall project, and the data collection approaches employed, are described in detail.

Chapter 3

HOW THE RESEARCH WAS CONDUCTED

THIS CHAPTER describes the research design and methodological approaches used. Given the various objectives of the research and the complexity of issues associated with young people and homelessness, a multifaceted approach to data collection offered the best opportunity for deep analysis and investigation. The approach permitted the researchers to collect and collate data from a range of perspectives, that is, parents, young people, service providers and the policy and programmatic context within which responses to the phenomenon of homelessness are located.

The research team's conceptualisation of homelessness as a process rather than an event had important implications for the research design in addressing the various tasks. In the first stage of the research process an advisory group was formed, drawn from experienced service providers and key personnel working in the area of prevention of and early intervention into youth homelessness. The advisory group met to critique the methodology and commence the process of refining key terminology and issues. As a result of this meeting, some aspects of the proposed methodology changed: for example, on the group's recommendation, the number of case studies was increased, and case studies in remote rural areas were included. The advisory group also assisted with referrals of agencies,

young people and parents for the purposes of case studies and interviews, and in piloting the national survey instrument.

Review of policies and programs

Relevant departments of State/Territory and Federal Governments were contacted to ascertain current and proposed policies and programs relevant to the research. Departments were asked to provide the following information:

- relevant policies and strategic planning statements;
- the most recently available annual report of relevant departments, for example, those who have responsibility for the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, family support, education and youth affairs; and
- documents/reports/evaluations that describe or discuss government policies or government funded programs relevant to prevention of or early intervention into youth homelessness.

Focus groups

Three focus groups were conducted in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne, involving a total of 60 key informants

working in positions relevant to youth homelessness. The major purpose of the focus groups was to:

- identify potential case studies;
- investigate definitional issues; and
- develop an understanding of the important elements that need to be incorporated in models of “best practice”.

The research process was dialectical in that key issues related to the research process underwent cyclical investigation through the focus groups. Drawing on the insights and experience of service providers across three States, the researchers continually sharpened and redefined definitional terms, assumptions and principles underlying the research.

Definitions of homelessness which were shelter oriented were reported by participants in focus groups as problematic, in that critical issues such as a young person’s sense of belonging were not included. Many service providers indicated that a child experiences a “lack of home” well before she or he leaves a home and suggested that interventions needed to occur well before that time. The theme of the importance of sense of belonging, lack of identity and connectedness in understanding the phenomenon of homelessness was repeatedly expressed in focus groups. The notion that homelessness was a process was also strongly supported.

Service providers expressed a level of discomfort with the notion of models of “best practice”. They suggested that naming a model as “best practice” implied there was one “best” model when in their view there may be several. Further, because current funding levels are perceived to be inadequate there are few examples of “best practice”. For these reasons participants felt it more realistic to talk in terms of “successful” practice. It was also suggested that models of practice are often context dependent, and that in any case study approach, context be considered.

Participants were able to describe a number of factors which were considered significant in contributing to young people becoming homeless. These were consistent with the range appearing in the literature. There was some dissatisfaction expressed with the presentation of factors as a “shopping list”. This highlighted a need to consider different ways of conceptualising the factors which contribute to young people becoming homeless.

The working definitions of prevention and early intervention presented by the research team were discussed and supported by participants at focus groups as useful both in the context of policy and service delivery development, and in terms of advancing analytically current understandings. Participants maintained that the definitions provided a common language for both discussion and the categorisation of

current interventions. Carter’s (1993) notion of building up the protective factors rather than focusing all interventions on “at risk” factors was strongly supported at the three focus groups.

National survey

A survey of government and non-government service providers from all States and Territories currently working in the areas of prevention and/or early intervention into youth homelessness was undertaken (see Appendix 4).

The aims of the survey were to elicit data concerning:

- the nature, scope, and orientation of the prevention/early intervention strategies used by that agency/organisation;
- the agency/organisation’s understanding of what constitutes a successful outcome in prevention/early intervention programs;
- the factors considered important in determining effective practice in prevention and early intervention; and
- the factors which constrain effective practice.

In light of research objectives 3 and 4 (see Chapter 1) it was important to gain an understanding of prevention, early intervention and successful practice from the perspective of the service provider. This perspective was then compared and contrasted with consumer perspectives (see Chapters 5 and 6).

The survey was piloted with ten Brisbane based services, redrafted and distributed to 658 services throughout Australia. Using the network established from the three focus groups, the advisory group and data bases accessed from government and non-government services, the research team identified a comprehensive range of services considered relevant for the purpose of the survey. These organisations primarily included:

- Family focused services
- Youth services
- Schools and school focused services

One hundred and fifteen service providers completed the survey, which represents an 18% response rate. Three factors were thought to influence this response rate. First, the survey was lengthy and in parts complex; second, the size of the distribution sample necessitated mailing the survey; and third, budget constraints prohibited follow-up phone calls or letters to encourage return.

The survey collected both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data was analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences), while open-ended questions were analysed manually. Chapter 7 provides details of the survey data and analysis.

Semi-structured interviews with young people and parents

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with young people and parents to collect data which relate to objectives 3 and 4. Family groups were not interviewed, rather young people and parents (who may or may not have a familial relationship with the young person interviewed) were individually interviewed.

In addition to the semi-structured interview schedule, interviewers used a narrative approach to exploring issues relevant to the family and the experiences of the young person. This technique has wide acceptance (Adams-Webber 1979; White & Epston 1989) and is defined by Moloney as a theoretical approach which: “takes as its starting point that each individual’s and each family’s unique interpretation of events is the reality to be worked with” (Moloney 1994, p.55). In accessing parents’ perspectives through in-depth interviews this research makes a significant contribution to what up until now has been an under-researched area. While it is common to represent the views of young people in research on homelessness, it is uncommon to represent parents. This research not only articulates parents’ views but it compares and contrasts their perceptions with those of young people and service providers. These multiple perspectives thus provide a unique picture of the dimensions of early home leaving leading to homelessness, and provide insights about important elements of best practice in prevention and early intervention.

Peer researchers

An important feature of the research design was the process of involvement and participation by young people. Peer researchers were involved primarily in the conduct and analysis of interviews with young people. The methodology of involving people who are best placed to penetrate the world of individuals studied is gaining increasing recognition in social science research (Denzin 1989; Alder & Sandor 1990; Victorian Youth Advocacy Network 1990; Ferguson 1993; Wilkens et al. 1993; Daws et al. 1995). It was recognised that young people themselves, who had some experience of homelessness were those best placed to penetrate that world. Research involving young people as researchers yields perspectives and data that may not have been possible using other techniques. Strong support for this view came from the post-interview analysis workshop conducted with the peer researchers.

Advisory group members were asked to contact and nominate young people who might be suitable for the position of peer researcher and had some personal experience of homelessness. The peer researchers

employed were aged 20 to 25. Four were female and one was male. One peer researcher was from a non-English-speaking background and three were parents.

The peer researchers attended a two-day training workshop which focused on central issues in the research project and interviewing skills. During this workshop the peer researchers undertook role-playing exercises, shared insights with respect to their own experience of homelessness, provided input to the interview schedule for young people, and considered the protocol of accessing young people for interviews and the conduct of interviews. Following completion of the interviews, a debriefing workshop was conducted with the peer researchers to explore their insights about the interview data, share with them the preliminary interview data analysis, and note their comments.

Development of the interview schedule

The same interview schedule was used for young people and parents (see Appendix 3), with slightly altered wording for each. The initial draft of the interview schedule was trialed and refined during the training of the peer researchers. The redrafted schedule was then piloted with a further six young people and two parents. Feedback from the pilot process was incorporated into a further redraft of the schedule. Interviews were structured to determine:

- the process of early home leaving leading to homelessness;
- definitions of home and homelessness;
- the nature and helpfulness of responses that occurred in the periods before and shortly after the young person became homeless; and
- what would help in preventing homelessness generally.

Accessing parents and young people

Young people to interview were accessed through schools, youth services and family support services in south-east Queensland. The majority of these interviews took place at the service with a small number occurring in the young person’s home. In the case of parents, agencies approached the parents in the first instance to seek their willingness to participate, and then if agreeable gave the parent a contact number for the research team. A researcher then phoned the parent and arranged an interview at the home of the parent or a place of their choosing. A small number of parents actively sought out the research team in response to media publicity about the project, and volunteered to participate in the interview.

Interview sample

Interviews with the young people were conducted by the peer researchers, while interviews with parents/guardians were conducted by the university based research team members who were experienced in interviewing. The interviewees involved either one or both parents/guardians.

Interviews were restricted numerically and geographically due to budget constraints and conducted in urban and rural areas of southern Queensland. Subject selection for interview was purposive in that the selection was made on the basis that the young people and parents had been involved in working through an issue of homelessness within the past two years.

The interviews of 40 young people aged between 12 and 22 are reported (see Chapter 5 for description of the total interviewee sample). Forty parents in total were interviewed, with a total of 30 parent interviews conducted. Four interviews were matched family sets, where the young person and parents were interviewed separately.

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and subsequently coded. Data was analysed using Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorising package (NUD.IST), a qualitative data analysis program. After the initial data analysis the peer researchers were asked to make comments about the analysis based on their insights arising out of their involvement in the interview process. The same analysis process was undertaken with the parent interviews with the university based team members sharing their insights from their involvement in the interview process. Chapters 5 and 6 detail the perspectives of young people and parents respectively.

Case studies

Yin (1994) defines case studies as empirical inquiries that investigate contemporary phenomena within a real life context using multiple sources of evidence. Typically, these sources include documentation, interviews, and often visits to sites. Twenty-five case studies of service providers were conducted in Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. Case study participants were selected on the basis that they:

- represented a range of agencies/service providers or programs across a number of sites of prevention or early intervention, including youth services, family focused services and schools;
- were (in nearly every case) recommended to the research team by practitioners in the field as examples of successful practice; and
- represented a range of service types: for example, direct casework, service coordination and multi-service models.

In some cases, agencies were selected because it was felt necessary to supplement the range and representativeness of the sample. As the services recommended to the team were based in large cities, the research team attempted to extend the range by including two small, rural agencies as case studies.

In each case, the service provider was contacted by a member of the research team and their permission gained to incorporate their service as a case study in the research. Case study data was gathered via a number of strategies dependent upon the location of the service provider, its organisational complexity, and the need in some cases to interview a number of personnel involved with specific programs. The strategies employed one or more of the following: face to face interviews, telephone interviews, discussions with clients of the service, discussions with other service providers in the local service network, and document collection from the service. An individual case study summary was sent to each participating service, to check accuracy.

Most case studies involved two formal, semi-structured interviews conducted in person or by phone (see Appendix 5) which aimed to identify the respondents' understanding of:

- successful practice within the context of their program/s;
- critical components of their model of service;
- how their model perceived the needs of young people; and
- how their model responded to homelessness, prevention, and early intervention, within the definitional terms established by the research team.

The case studies were complementary to the national survey, in that they combined to produce an understanding of contemporary practices in prevention and early intervention practices. The case studies provide a unique insight into the way in which prevention and early intervention are understood, how principles of successful practice are articulated, and a view of what practice components are critical to successful practice. Chapter 8 presents the case study data and analysis.

Ethical considerations

The nature of the research necessitated careful attention to ethical issues arising during the data gathering phases. Ethical clearance was gained from the Queensland University of Technology Research Ethics Committee, and particular attention was paid to the conduct of interviews with young people and parents. Appendixes 1 and 2 provide copies of the consent form issued to parents and young people before interviews

commenced. Donations to the research project made it possible to pay the young people who took part in the interviews a small amount for their time and travel costs, but as the consent form clearly indicated, this did not obligate the interviewee to finish or extend the interview.

The sensitive nature of the subject matter being explored meant that each interviewee, whether parent or young person, was informed about support available in the form of counselling, should this be required after the close of the interview. Before the commencement of each interview the interviewee was advised that the subject matter of the interview could possibly resurrect painful emotions and memories and therefore were reminded of their right to end the interview at any time. Rigorous measures were taken to protect the confidentiality of the respondents, with first names only used on tapes and transcripts. In the case of matched pairs (those instances where the parent and young person from the same family were interviewed), strict confidentiality was maintained.

Limitations

The breadth of the brief for this project, and the lack of clarity in the central terminology of prevention, early intervention and best practice, imposed limitations on the research outcomes. To a certain degree, this has meant a sacrifice of specificity in order that the scope of the data not be narrowed without sufficient justification for doing so; for example, this study has chosen not to focus narrowly on strategies for returning young people to the family home, but to take a broader conceptual approach to the issues of home leaving leading to homelessness. Given the nature of this research the research team openly acknowledges the improbability

of accessing a representative sample of young people or parents. The sample of young people and parents was purposive, and within the constraints of budget and personnel has included a range of subjects, in terms of socioeconomic background, family type, ethnicity and gender. Arguably however, the experience of homelessness and the antecedents of homelessness revealed by this purposive sample reflect to a large extent the experiences of young people and parents who have worked through these issues.

Two common issues in any research drawing upon volunteers are first, access to the volunteers, and second the motivation of volunteers. The question may be asked whether agencies, as gatekeepers, referred only those young people and parents who would reflect favourably on the agency themselves. The perceptions of young people and parents revealed in Chapters 5 and 6, however, do not support this possibility. Another dimension to the question of access is the reluctance by subjects to volunteer. The research team found a greater level of reluctance among parents than young people. Issues of motivation are always open to conjecture. It should be pointed out that there was no compulsion to attend or complete any interview. Given the nature of the interviews, which employed a narrative approach as well as pre-determined questions, the research team has confidence in the strength and honesty of the data.

The study does not address models of best practice in relation to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities. While a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are included in the study (15% of the sample), no Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander parents are in the parent sample. While efforts were made to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and parents this was not achieved.

Chapter 4

DESCRIPTION AND REVIEW OF POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

THIS CHAPTER briefly describes and reviews policies and programs which at the time of writing, address most directly early home leaving and subsequent homelessness. Of necessity, a range of other policies and programs relevant to the broader issue of prevention of homelessness among young people are not canvassed.

In response to the 1989 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission report, *Our Homeless Children*, the Commonwealth Government announced the Youth Social Justice Strategy, which included an explicit focus on the prevention of homelessness. Over four years, \$5.5 million was dedicated for adolescent/parent mediation services “directed at preventing young people leaving home through intervening at an early stage of in the cycle of family conflict”, and an extension of existing marriage counselling services to family counselling with adolescents “to create avenues for young people to return to their family, or at least ensure that lines of communication are sufficiently open to maintain support between the family and the young person” (Commonwealth of Australia 1989, p.8).

Other strategies announced in the package included innovative health care services for disadvantaged and, particularly, homeless young people, additional funding to allow the development of innovative sup-

ported accommodation models, particularly those which provided medium to long-term accommodation to young people, and increased numbers of Youth Access Centres supplemented by grants to rural community groups to establish information services for young people. Themes of increased coordination, co-location of services, the use of outreach strategies, and the targeting of services to “at risk” young people underpinned the package.

The Working Nation policy framework announced in 1994 further consolidated the place of education retention and vocational training as the central strategies for the Commonwealth Government response to disadvantage among young people. The most significant feature of this policy was the elevation of case management as the principal mechanism for improving the access of disadvantaged young people to the labour market. The Youth Training Initiative component of Working Nation provided for:

... intensive case management, so that unemployed people under the age of 18 years will have the assistance of a specific case manager in their search for a suitable work, training or education placement. Case management will begin 13 weeks after registering as unemployed (with earlier case management assistance for the high risk group).

The second shift of relevance signalled by Working Nation was the absence of homeless young people as a group experiencing specific disadvantage and therefore warranting specific targeting. While it is acknowledged that young people who do not finish secondary schooling face longer periods of unemployment, have much higher rates of unemployment, and are more likely to be homeless as a result of early school leaving, homeless young people are not identified as one of the groups who may face additional barriers to obtaining employment.

There is also evidence of this shift in the place of young people in social justice policy. The *Social Justice Statement 1995–1996* (Commonwealth of Australia 1995a) does not specify young people as a target group as did the Youth Social Justice Strategy 1989. Young people are now subsumed in the context of other social indicators.

The centrality of a case management approach in framing prevention and early intervention of youth homelessness can be seen in the Commonwealth Government's response to the Morris Report tabled in the House of Representatives. Case management is presented as an adequate framework for early intervention and prevention (Commonwealth Government 1995).

SAAP policy, articulated in the document *Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) Strategic Directions 1993* (Department of Housing and Regional Development 1993) reveals a shift in the objective of SAAP to include early intervention as a strategy to prevent homelessness. Early intervention is understood in two ways: intervention in relation to people at "imminent risk of becoming homeless, for example those facing eviction or family breakdown" and intervention "to reduce the dislocation associated with homelessness" (p.7). Client outcomes to be achieved include "restoring or maintaining family relationships and other informal networks" (p.5). In relation to under 16s, the policy outlines the importance of an integrated care and support approach through case management to facilitate access to family mediation, income support, State substitute care and other community support services. The *Supported Accommodation Assistance Act 1994* reflects this stronger focus on early intervention. Among the groups for whom services may be developed are independent young people above the school leaving age for the State concerned.

The 1995 Commonwealth Government policy statement, *An Agenda for Families*, stated:

The Government's first priority is to reunite the young person with their family and through family mediation seek to resolve the issues which have led to the young person leaving home. If this is not possible, income support, accommodation and help to stay at school or to find employment or training are available for young people (Commonwealth of Australia 1995a, p.39).

This represents a shift to a position of clearly prioritising what is variously described as family reunification or family restoration. Prevention of homelessness is conceptualised at the level of family intervention which fosters better relationships and better coping skills.

Income support policies provide for a homeless rate of payment to under 18-year-olds through the Department of Social Security (DSS) administered Youth Training Allowance, Job Search Allowance, Sickness Allowance and Special Benefit. The Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA) administers a student homeless rate of Austudy and Abstudy. In June 1993, agreement was reached on the adoption of a protocol between the Commonwealth and State/Territory government welfare departments for the improved coordination and integration of services to unsupported, homeless under 18-year-olds through case management of protective care support services, and income support to young people who claim the homeless rate of a Commonwealth payment (DSS 1995a).

The protocol arrangements are directed at two target client groups, those under 15 who are homeless, and those 15 to 17 years inclusive (with some variation in the upper limit in some States/Territories) who are homeless and who are considered at risk of or are subject to a Care Order (DSS 1995b). The protocol outlines statements of responsibilities and referral and assessment procedures for both target groups in each State and Territory.

Common features of the protocol across States/Territories include: any young person under the age of 15 who is homeless is considered to be at risk of significant harm; protective assessments are to be undertaken by departments who have responsibility for child protection to ensure the health and well-being of the young person; and any young person less than 15 years who presents to the respective Departments for income support must be interviewed by a Departmental social worker who will refer the young person, subject to certain conditions, for a protective assessment; in assessing and verifying the young person's circumstances, social workers are to encourage moves towards reconciliation between the young person and their family where this is considered appropriate (DSS 1994; DSS 1995b).

There is a wide range of government and non-government delivered programs and services which could be included in this discussion. As a tool for description and analysis the following framework has been devised:

- 1 **Family relations services** : Those programs/services which include an explicit goal of family retention, restoration or reconciliation.

- 2 **Services targeting particular young people** : These programs/services are targeted at specific young people who are seen as vulnerable to homelessness or who have recently become homeless;
- 3 **Universal protective services at the situational level**: Those programs/services which are oriented to building up situational protective factors around young people and their families through the provision of universally available services.
- 4 **Service delivery infrastructure strategies** : Strategies which act to reduce barriers to accessing resources which are protective factors against early home leaving and/or homelessness.
- 5 **Social policy positions and development processes** which constitute a fifth level of action, though not strictly within the logic of programmatic service provision.

There are also programs which do not mention homelessness or early home leaving specifically but which are aimed at the prevention of circumstances which are contributing factors to some young people leaving home and becoming homeless, for example, child abuse prevention strategies. These programs are often explained as being directed at the prevention of, and/or early intervention into, other social phenomena, and can occur at the five levels identified above. Table 4.1 outlines the main features of the framework in terms of the theme of intervention, the aim of the program/service, and to whom the program/service is available.

Programs with a family relations focus

The term family relations services is used to define a cluster of programs and services which are explicitly oriented to assisting with the development of improved relationships between family members. A variety of particular intervention methods are employed ranging from those based on specialised therapeutic models, to mediation, to various counselling approaches, to those which involve more informal styles of family liaison.

The notion of “family” requires some definition. While the term family has legal parameters in various contexts, in the context of early home leaving and homelessness, family connection can appropriately be self-defined. Given the changes in family structure experienced by many young people who become homeless, it is important to consider “family” in the broad rather than the narrow sense.

The goals of programs included as having a family relations focus can include one or more of the following:

- family retention where a young person remains living with particular family members;
- family restoration or reunification where the young person returns to live with particular family members; and
- family reconciliation where there is the re-establishment of positive family relations between a young person and particular members of the family network, often but not necessarily one or both parents.

Regardless of the particular language used, these programs routinely recognise that positive family outcomes, such as those listed above, are not always desirable or possible, and include therefore out-of-family options, such as independent living by the young person, as possible positive outcomes of intervention.

Parent-adolescent mediation and family therapy program (Attorney-General’s)

The parent/adolescent mediation and family therapy program “provide a means for adolescents and their parents to resolve conflicts that could prevent young people from leaving home or from leaving home without some support” (Wolcott & Weston 1992, p.60). There are 12 services funded at 14 locations, primarily in urban areas. In 1995–96 the program provided funding of \$1.8 million per annum. The majority of young people who are clients are between 13 and 16 years, and are still living at home. An evaluation of the program found that the joint use of family therapy and mediation strategies is an effective intervention approach with families where there is an adolescent at risk of homelessness (Wolcott & Weston 1994).

The Morris Report (HRSCCA 1995) indicates that considerable evidence was received by the inquiry regarding the effectiveness and accessibility of family mediation. However, it was noted that certain groups were not accessing these services, in particular, those young people who were already homeless, from low-income families, from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, from non-English-speaking backgrounds, and from rural communities. Recommendations were made in the report that additional resources be provided to develop adolescent/family mediation models of practice which would increase access to these groups.

State funded adolescent/parent mediation/counselling programs

In some States, for example Victoria and ACT, adolescent/parent mediation programs have been funded by

4.1 Orientation of prevention and early intervention programs

<p><i>Orientation of intervention</i></p>	<p><i>Prevention and early intervention of homelessness/early home leaving</i></p>	<p><i>Prevention and early intervention of other related social difficulties that may co-exist or lead to homelessness/early home leaving</i></p>
<p>Family relations services</p>	<p>Theme of intervention: Young person-family relations, e.g. through counselling, mediation, liason. Aim: Family retention/ reconciliation Available to: Those young people and their families identified as most in need.</p>	<p>Theme of intervention: Information provision, skill development and community awareness. Aim: to build up protective factors which prevent homelessness/early home leaving. Available to: These are universally available to large categories of people, e.g. young people, and are not generally perceived as targeted or "welfare".</p>
<p>Services targeting particular young people</p>	<p>Theme of intervention: Family relations, e.g. sexual abuse services to adolescents and their families. Aim: Increasing safety, well-being of children in high need families, e.g. where there are protective concerns. Available to: Those young people and their families identified as most in need, e.g. child protection programs, young parent programs.</p>	<p>Theme of intervention: Information provision, skill development, and community awareness. Aim: To build up protective factors which help prevent that social problem or create well-being. Available to: These are universally available to large categories of people and are not generally perceived as targeted or "welfare".</p>
<p>Universal protective services at the situational level</p>	<p>Theme of intervention: Responding to individual needs in areas such as accommodation, income support, employment, education, health. Aim: Assisting young person seen as being homeless or vulnerable to homelessness or early home leaving, to establish a stable living situation. Available to: Those who are seen as vulnerable or "at risk", and those in targeted groups.</p>	<p>Theme of intervention: Development of social policy and resources to prevent early home leaving/homelessness. Addresses interrelationships between levels of policymaking and service delivery. Aim: To address structural and external factors which contribute to early home leaving/homelessness. Available to: Aspect of governance/coordination.</p>
<p>Social policy and service delivery infra-structure</p>	<p>Theme of intervention: Responding to individual needs in areas such as income support, employment, education, health Aim: Assisting young people in relation to other, associated issues, e.g. employment support. Available to: Those who are seen as vulnerable or "at risk" in relation to these issues, and those in targeted groups specific to that issue.</p>	<p>Theme of intervention: Development of social policy and resources to prevent a related social problem and create social well-being. Addresses interrelationships between levels of policymaking and service delivery. Aim: To address structural and other external factors which are related to other social difficulties that may co-exist with early home leaving/homelessness. Available to: Aspect of governance/coordination.</p>

the respective Office of Youth Affairs. In Victoria during 1994–95 a total of \$540,000 across nine agencies was provided for family reconciliation services (Health and Community Services 1995, p.12).

The NSW Department of Community Services, through its Adolescent Support Program, funds 41 projects, 35 of which are for adolescent/family counsellor positions. The target group is young people 12 to 18, who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Adolescent/family counsellors work with young people and their families towards reconciliation. The program is funded at 2.7 million annually.

Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)

Some States have made funding available for specific positions within SAAP youth services to undertake early intervention and family reconciliation work. In Victoria 13.5 equivalent full-time (EFT) family Reconciliation (FR) pilot positions were funded across 16 agencies for 1994–95 (Health & Community Services 1995, p.1). The target group of the funded positions are homeless or imminently homeless people who are aged 15 years and over. Interventions are time limited and a range of models have been developed which include:

- *Family mediation services operating separately to SAAP youth services.*
- *FR positions attached to SAAP funded youth services.*
- *Family conflict resolution positions attached to youth crisis accommodation services.*
- *Youth outreach positions which include a reconciliation component.*
- *Family crisis positions which include a reconciliation component* (Health and Community Services 1995, p.5).

In South Australia as a result of a review of metropolitan SAAP services for young people, a new service delivery system was introduced in 1992. A number of specialist services were established, one of which was a specialist early intervention service (see Youth and Parent Services outline in Chapter 8). This service and other specialist services are articulated to a central SAAP assessment and referral agency for young people. This is the only example of a sector level approach to early intervention in Australia located by this research.

In most States/Territories other than Victoria, South Australia and New South Wales, the view stated was that early intervention/family reconciliation are already undertaken as part of a SAAP worker's normal duties. In Queensland the Department of Family and Community Services indicated that 23 SAAP services for young people operated, where appropriate, from

family intervention/preservation models where such work was conducted by staff within the course of their work with young people. In the Northern Territory it was indicated that with only four SAAP youth services, specialisation was not appropriate.

Other models of relevance within SAAP include community placement programs and services for young parents. Community placement programs often include a goal of family restoration or reconciliation. They provide accommodation and a negotiated level of support for a homeless young person within an established household (Lindsay 1993, p.305), usually within their local area. This program model received support in evidence to the Burdekin Inquiry (HREOC 1989, p.170) and has been argued to be a model of local community-based support which has the capacity to adjust and evolve to the changing needs of young people and their families (Ferguson 1995). Young parent support services within SAAP often work with young women who have become homeless because of family conflict or stress related to a pregnancy. They can be seen as preventive services in relation to intergenerational homelessness, and as early intervention services when they support the maintenance or re-establishment of connection with the family of origin, and linkage to other community supports.

The following family relations services have as a central concern the prevention and/or early intervention of other related social difficulties that may co-exist or relate to homelessness/early home leaving.

Child protection and alternative care

Child protection and alternative care arrangements differ in each State and Territory. While family restoration and/or reconciliation are often cited as program goals the most common primary focus across State and Territory programs is on preventing and responding to child abuse. Within this framework there has been significant development in efforts to minimise the breakup of families with adolescent children, and where protective concerns exist and an adolescent is removed from the home, to work towards reunification.

Despite this shift, criticisms of State and Territory child protection programs were cited in the Morris Report, and included:

- the insufficiency of responses to adolescent young people in need of protection. The report specifically noted evidence that;
... young adolescents, not regarded as being at high risk of abuse were largely forgotten in the child welfare system (HRSCCA 1995, p.208);
- that deinstitutionalisation has been embraced without developing and resourcing sufficient

alternative community support or care options. This was argued as contributing to homelessness among young people, particularly those aged 12–16 years of age.

A generally less interventionist approach by State governments has generally seen far fewer children and young people taken into care, with the accompanying consequence that support through substitute care services has been more difficult to access (Lindsay 1993).

Family support programs

The funding of family support programs has been the responsibility of State and Territory Governments since 1988 when Commonwealth tied grants for Family Support Services funds were eliminated. Family support programs are generally concerned with promoting positive relationships within families and the development of safer, more caring family environments. They are mostly delivered by non-government funded services through community and neighbourhood centres, and commonly involve the employment of family support workers.

In some States there is evidence in program documentation of a shift from a crisis reactive focus to a preventive focus. For example the Western Australian Family and Community Support Program provides services which aim to:

... assist individuals and families in crisis or to assist them and their communities to develop the skills and abilities needed to prevent crisis. An increasing focus of the program is the development of preventive rather than reactive services (Department for Community Development 1994, p.17).

There have been concerns raised by a number of non-government organisations about the apparent decline in funding to family support services since tied grants were eliminated (Cass 1994; Bullen & Robinson 1994). The reality of a shift in focus to more preventive services has also been questioned (Cass 1994), with evidence being presented that the clients of services are restricted to the most disadvantaged and “difficult” families (HRSCCA 1995). The focus generally of family support services appears to be targeted towards families with younger children, supported in an examination of departmental documentation which revealed no mention of services to adolescent/family support services in the family support programs of a number of States. This was summarised as:

... lack of funding and the focus on at risk families with young children has meant that low priority has been given to families with adolescents (HRSCCA 1995, p.188).

The family support programs documentation provided by States and Territories specified a wide range of family care and counselling services, many of which could be seen to have a preventive orientation in relation to youth homelessness. However a general feature of the programmatic documentation in this area is the absence of specified services or resources for adolescent/family work.

Services targeting particular young people

A second category of programs and services is conceptualised as responding to homeless or vulnerable young people in order to prevent homelessness or related social difficulties.

Innovative Health Services for Homeless Youth Program

This program was initiated as part of the Youth Social Justice package in the 1989–90 Commonwealth Budget. The objective of the program is to develop and implement for homeless young people, primary health care services which are non-judgemental and recognise the complex needs young people present with, either by offering an integrated service, training, or by providing access to a network of compatible services (McLean 1993). The program targets both young people who are homeless and those who may still live at home but are at risk of becoming homeless. The most common service designs are youth specific health centres, and mobile/outreach services. Forty-five services or projects are funded throughout Australia, through matched Commonwealth/State contributions. The total budget for 1995–96 was \$5m. These services undertake varying degrees of family relations work.

HARYAP

The Homeless and “At Risk” Youth Action Package (HARYAP) began in the 1995–96 financial year. Total funds available under HARYAP in 1995–96 are approximately \$0.8m (DEET). The program is described as including the following elements:

- development of a long-term strategy, which focuses on prevention and early intervention, to reduce the incidence of homelessness among young people;
- coordination of streamlined Commonwealth assistance and services to be delivered in schools and in the community to pre-empt the drop-out of students who become homeless;

- funding of effective non-government agencies to assist disadvantaged young people to stay at school through the provision of family counselling and support services;
- development, trialing and evaluation of best practice models in the provision of advice and assistance to the young homeless or those at risk of becoming homeless;
- innovative provision of information on employment, education and training, advice and service delivery to disadvantaged young people in rural or remote communities which have limited government services; and
- seed funding for relevant projects assisting the young homeless.

Nine Young Homeless Pilot Projects have been established as part of HARYAP, targeting young people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The most common foci of these pilots are skill development by at risk young people, and the development of increased linkages between services. The projects are funded for 12 months with an evaluation on completion. The total expenditure in 1994–95 was \$0.625 m.

The Students At Risk Program (STAR)

This program is a component of the National Priorities Element of the National Equity Program for Schools, introduced in 1990 as part of the Youth Social Justice Strategy. It is currently funded to 1996.

The objective of the program is to identify those students 'most at risk' of not completing secondary school and to encourage their continued participation by supporting a range of school-based projects at or in association with government and non-government secondary schools. The principal aim of Students at Risk funding is to make significant, observable differences to the lives and prospects of identified young people. The Component is not intended to fund whole-school change (DEET 1995b, p.69).

Students most “at risk” are defined as being those who may leave school before completing Year 12, and “those whose level of achievement or behaviour at school is adversely affected by circumstances such as family dislocation, itinerancy, violence or abuse, homelessness, truancy or substance abuse” (DEET 1995b, p.69). In 1995 the amount allocated nationally to STAR was \$7.1m, slightly below the \$7.25 allocated in 1994. Among the types of projects eligible for funding in 1995 were those which involve:

- the development of a range of in-service strategies which support the continued involvement of young people at risk in mainstream education;
- strengthening of home/school relations through

greater involvement of and feedback to parents of students at risk;

- development of screening strategies so that counsellors, year co-ordinators and teachers are better able to identify students at risk;
- development of innovative organisational arrangements and flexible structures of schooling, such as easier exit and re-entry policies, combinations of school and TAFE courses, part-time work and part-time study, for at risk young people;
- educational support services for students through the employment of support staff, e.g. counsellors, youth workers, community liaison officers and transition co-ordinators.

In the first evaluation of the program undertaken in 1992 the authors concluded that STAR had been successful in responding to the target group (Coopers & Lybrand Consultants and Ashenden Milligan 1992).

School based programs (States and Territories)

In Victoria, the Student and Youth Services Project (An Extra Edge) is a pilot program examining ways in which education and welfare services may be coordinated to better support young people who are at risk of not completing their secondary schooling. Generally these students are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Each school receives a grant and a project support teacher in addition to the school's staffing entitlement. Eighteen participating secondary colleges established pilot Student and Youth Services Centres to coordinate government and non-government youth support services in the local area. An additional ten schools, which had significant numbers of homeless or at risk students, were funded under the Homeless Student Support Project without the extra support teacher to pursue the same aims as An Extra Edge. A third program, the Student and Family Support Project, funds a further 18 schools to undertake similar work.

The participating colleges focus on the development of screening strategies so that school staff are better able to identify students at risk, working with local agencies to identify homeless and at risk students, implementing together with local agencies specific welfare and curriculum measures, strengthening home/school relations, and the provision of a range of professional development activities that support the continued involvement of homeless or at risk young people in mainstream education.

The Tasmanian Department of Education and the Arts provides social work services to students, families and teachers. The services provided include:

- support and advocacy for students, parents, school staff;
- personal counselling and group work concentrating on building self-esteem and confidence in students and dealing with educational, social and emotional concerns;
- mediation service between home and school and other agencies;
- professional development of teachers;
- procurement of financial assistance to students.

During 1996 the Queensland Department of Education is undertaking three one-year pilot programs in schools to examine models of early intervention into homelessness. The pilots are coordinated by one additional guidance officer in each of two high schools and one cluster of three primary schools.

The New South Wales Department of School Education has recently conducted a Homeless Young People in Schools Project, involving the employment of a project officer to produce a trial package for schools. The package will include sections on understanding the effects of homelessness on young people, and strategies for helping students who are homeless or at risk of homelessness stay at school.

Youth Access Centres (YACs)

There are 92 Youth Access Centres across Australia. These centres have the role of information provision, referral and provision of assistance under the Youth Training Initiative. A review of YACs was undertaken in 1994. The recommendations included that YACs be retained, with a focus in particular on the Youth Training Initiative (YTI) client group, that where appropriate YACs be co-located with other agencies providing services to disadvantaged young people, that YACs should register all under-18-year-old clients and undertake early identification of at-high-risk clients, that specialist case managers be identified within Employment Assistance Australia (EAA) and, to the maximum extent possible, work on YAC premises, and that in the longer term, consideration be given to developing YACs as a national system representing all Commonwealth services for young people (Community and Public Sector Union 1995).

In July 1995 the Minister for DEET endorsed *A Statement of Youth Access Centre Functions and Priorities* and instructions that young homeless unemployed clients were to receive more comprehensive assistance than that received under the Jobs Placement Employment and Training Program (JPET). The shifts in DEET servicing of young homeless people during the 1990s can be summarised as:

- the adoption of a case management approach;
- the shift to EAA of staffing resources to service

that group and other young people from the Youth Access Centres located within DEET and created to provide case management. This approach involves the integration of servicing to young people and moves away from the provision of services through youth specific agencies.

The Jobs Placement Employment and Training Program (JPET)

JPET, administered by the Commonwealth Department of Housing and Regional Development, was established as a pilot program in 1992 to provide, through addressing the barriers to employment, support and assistance to young people aged 15 to 19 who were at risk of entering long-term homelessness, unemployment and poverty (Butlin, Phyland & Lloyd 1995). Forty-four projects were established nationally, 37 in urban areas with high rates of youth unemployment and youth homelessness, and seven in regional areas.

In a 1995 evaluation of JPET, the program was found to be effective with its outcomes comparing well with other labour market programs.

The successful outcomes are largely attributed to JPET's unique holistic case management approach, coupled with a high level of flexibility. This allows JPET workers to fill gaps in services to homeless young people at the local level (Butlin, Phyland & Lloyd 1995, pp.ii-iii).

Despite this analysis the evaluation report recommended that in view of increasing overlaps with the YTI and higher JPET case management costs, JPET services be progressively subsumed within the YTI subject to retention of certain key features which included the provision of prevention and early intervention services (Butlin, Phyland & Lloyd 1995, p.111). JPET has been re-established by the Coalition Commonwealth Government with \$11.3m for two years commencing in July 1996. The target group will be young people 15 to 19 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Department of Social Security

The Department of Social Security has established special units which target homeless clients. Ten Youth Service Units have been established to provide more intensive support to young people under the age of 18 years, especially those who are homeless.

Youth Service Units provide on-going personal contact with homeless customers, an option for intensive case management and capacity for more contact with families, aimed at encouraging reconciliation (DSS 1995c, p.174).

Community Service Units were established in 1995 to provide outservicing to homeless people, and an

outreach function to community agencies. There are currently 20 DSS regional offices with CSUs.

Other programs/strategies

A third category of programs and services relevant to early home leaving is concerned with building up protective factors around young people and families and in the community generally. Such programs and services are preventive in the sense that they deal with factors that are structural and external, or are situational and protective. Strategies responding to situational factors are therefore not targeted to specific individuals or high risk groups but are generally available. A range of services fall into this category. Many local youth and community services, neighbourhood centres and community centres offer young people and/or their parents open access to information, or universal access to a variety of supports.

The fourth category of strategies includes the substance of policy itself, and the way policies translate into service delivery. Issues associated with the articulation of policies and services and coordination of multi-faceted service responses have been frequently raised as critical in responding to social phenomena such as youth homelessness (HREOC 1989; HRSCCA 1995). A wide range of strategies could be examined. The relationship between Commonwealth and State government responsibilities has been partially acknowledged through the development of the Youth Protocol. At the service level the funding of Family Resource Centres is relevant. There are 11 of these centres across Australia funded by the Department of Health and Family Services with \$4.7m per annum. These centres do not engage in direct service delivery but work to enhance and coordinate existing family related services.

In May 1996 the Coalition government announced the formation of a Prime Ministerial Taskforce on Youth Homelessness. The Taskforce is to develop a framework for a two-year \$8m Youth Homelessness Pilot Programme focusing on early intervention and wherever possible, family reconciliation; ensuring that income support at the independent homeless rate is

made available to people who are properly entitled to it; and enhancing the coordination of service provision and policy within and between governments, between governments and community services, and between community services.

While government programs have been discussed in terms of four categories, the reality is that particular agencies often include services in a number of these areas. It is not unusual for an agency to combine work with young people, with a particular approach to engagement with families of origin, and at the same time participate in local or regional interagency coordination strategies.

Conclusion

Policies which focus on homelessness among young people have begun to specifically incorporate early intervention as an orientation, though the meaning of this has varied. The late 1980s and early 1990s saw the development of a number of important program initiatives, particularly in the period following the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission National Inquiry into Homeless Children. Despite this, and the presence in numerous policy statements of family reconciliation and restoration objectives in relation to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, the development of services is uneven and inadequate, both in geographic coverage and the diversity of young people and families who access services. The programmatic responses that are directed at early home leaving, come predominantly through the Attorney General's AMFT program and to some extent SAAP. Programs funded by DEET are typified by an at risk approach and are often pilot/short-term programs.

While some States/Territories have developed modest programs addressing early intervention into homelessness or early home leaving, most have not, and the overall impression is that the shift in policy direction is ahead of the development and resourcing of programs and services. Finally, there is a general lack of sufficient protective and family support services for young people and their families, both prior to and after early home leaving.

Chapter 5

PERSPECTIVES OF YOUNG PEOPLE

THE PRIMARY purpose of this chapter is to examine the views of young people who have had some experience of homelessness. This experience ranges from running away from home several times for periods not greater than one night, to young people who have had many years of abuse and mobility.

The sample of young people

The data in this chapter are derived from 40 interviews with young people. Of those in the reported sample, 15 were males and 25 were females. Table 5.1 shows the distribution of ages at the time of interview.

Of these young people, three were parents, one was a self-identified gay young man, two had an intellectual/learning disability, six were Aboriginal young people (five female), and two came from a non-English-speaking background. Nine of the sample at the time of the interview were living with one or both parents, while 31 were not. Table 5.2 indicates that at the time of interview most of the young women were either students or unemployed and three were parents. Two-thirds of the young men were unemployed.

At the time of interview, 23 of the young people lived in capital cities, six lived in rural areas and 11 lived in coastal cities. Interviews were conducted in

Brisbane, the Gold Coast, Sydney, the Sunshine Coast and two rural towns in south-western Queensland. A number of the young people in the sample had moved from interstate or rural areas since home leaving occurred.

Table 5.1 Interviewees' age distribution (N=40)

	12-13	14-15	16-17	18-19	20-21	22-23
Female	1	9	9	3	2	1
Male	0	1	6	3	5	0

Table 5.2 Interviewees' educational/work status (N=40)

	Student	F/T work	P/T work	Unemployed	Home-maker
Female	11	0	1	10	3
Male	2	3	0	10	0

Age when first left home

In some cases it is very difficult to clearly identify when home leaving first occurred. Some young people indicated they had run away at as early an age as six. Others left and returned home before leaving “properly” and becoming, in their view, homeless. For some others fostering had occurred from an early age and they had “run away” to re-establish contact with biological parents and/or family members. As to when these young people “left home” one must depend on a normative meaning ascribed to home or to a perceived judgement by the young person as to when they became homeless. For other young people the split in parental relationship meant they had multiple “homes” and spent some time moving between different members of their family. Periods of running away at age six or seven, where the return home occurred immediately, were not taken as the age of home leaving, if followed by a sustained period at home. Similarly, where a long-term foster family was the place of normal residence, running away from foster care has

Table 5.3 Age of first home leaving (N=40)

Age	10–11	12–13	14–15	16–17	18
Female	1	9	15	0	0
Male	3	3	6	2	1

been categorised as home leaving.

The average age of home leaving for females in the sample was approximately 13 years, and for males 14 years. For all but three young people home leaving first occurred when they were aged 15 years or less.

Family structure at time of first home leaving

As shown in Table 5.4, nine young people (22.5%) were in a family where both natural parents were

Table 5.4: Family structure at time of first home leaving

Family structure	Male	Female	All
Both parent	5	4	9
Single parent (mother)	4	9	13
Single parent (father)	0	2	2
Blended family	6	9	15
Foster family	0	1	1

living together at the time of first home leaving. Fifteen (37.5%) were in a blended family with one step parent and 15 (37.5%) were in a single parent family. One was living with a foster family at the time of leaving home.

Multiple home leaving and returning

The notion of leaving home carries with it the image of a single departure. This is overwhelmingly not the case in this sample. Over two-thirds of the young people (n=28) returned home one or more times. In nine of these cases the young people were still living with one or both parents when interviewed.

Stated reasons for home leaving

More than one reason was often offered by young people for home leaving. Table 5.5 indicates the number of times a particular reason for home leaving was given. It is also important to acknowledge, as young people sometimes do, deeper reasons for the difficulties they experience. One young person indicated that it was work stress which was behind the

Table 5.5 Stated reason(s) for first home leaving (N=40)

Stated reason	Male	Female	All
Conflict with parent	7	15	22
Kicked out	5	10	15
Drugs/alcohol	2	7	9
Physical abuse	3	5	8
Statutory intervention	2	3	5
Sexual abuse	0	4	4
School trouble	1	2	3
Emotional abuse	1	1	2
Didn't belong	2	0	2
Neglect	1	0	1
Financial hardship	1	0	1
Wanted freedom	1	0	1
Ran away to look for natural parent	0	1	1
Personality change	0	1	1

stepfather's violent behaviour, and work commitments which meant his mother did not have the time to undertake counselling. These structural dimensions are largely missing from the analysis of young people themselves as they report their immediate and usually problematic personal experiences. There were no sig-

nificant differences in the reasons cited for home leaving between males and females with the exception that drug/alcohol related issues and sexual abuse were more commonly cited by female young people.

Arguing/family conflict

Arguing or family conflict was the single most commonly cited reason for home leaving by young people in the sample. It was most often cited in conjunction with a more specific reason such as abuse, or as an outcome of differences between parental and young person's expectations.

In three cases arguing and verbal conflict between family members, but with no violence, or other abuse, was cited as the only reason for leaving home. The situation was reported as simply becoming intolerable. In a number of other instances, rather than specifying verbal conflict, young people identified pressure or blaming from parents as something that they just "had to" get away from:

Just pressure from Mum, mainly from Dad really, because he was on my back all the time and I just had to get out. (Young person 27)

Well, for example when my sister did something wrong, I was the one getting the blame for it, ... so I could not handle the pressure, so I left home. (Young person 15)

Everything that always happened was always my fault. (Young person 6)

Sometimes leaving home is expressed as the end result of "getting nowhere" over a long period of time:

Why else did I go and leave home? Because everything I did and said or tried to do didn't get anywhere. (Young person 10)

Conflict and disengagement was reported as sometimes triggered by a parent accusing a young person of doing something they did not do. One example was the presumption that a young woman had slept with a boyfriend while staying away overnight. The making of assumptions on the part of parents and the tendency to not provide clarifying information to parents was evident in a number of interviews.

But I haven't told him. I wouldn't tell him. I didn't want to tell him because I couldn't talk to him either. (Young person 3)

Some young people explained the reasons for leaving home in terms of a mismatch between parental expectations and their own. These can be categorised as where:

- Parental expectations were felt to change unrealistically, creating confusion and resentment for the young person. This was reported from young

people in both blended and two biological parent families. One young person assumed greater responsibility after the death of the father, only to be required to adhere to a far more restrictive regime when the mother repartnered.

(Young person 30)

- Too little freedom was allowed by parents. This is often accompanied by other significant contextual circumstances (e.g. a lack of emotional warmth, a parent's alcohol or drug problem) which supports the view that this is not simply willful rebellion without rationale.

These young people talk of parent rigidity, rules which are overly restrictive for their age, and double standards by parents. The young people also talk about a failure by parents to genuinely listen to them, and for parents to need to get in the last word before they, the child, has been understood. Hitting of the child, if it occurs, is not considered by the parent within an abuse framework.

The repartnering of a parent was often cited as causing a change in the climate at home which led directly to the young person leaving or being told to leave.

It was good until she got married to my brother's Dad, and he was sort of taking over and I wasn't used to it, and then Mum started getting really hard, because she used to be soft on us, and then she just come down really hard on us. (Young person 19)

Two young people reported a feeling of not belonging prior to leaving home. In other cases the links between a number of factors such as violence, family structure, supportive communication and a sense of belonging were made:

There was a couple of times when I was having problems with my maths and I asked my stepfather because his job deals with that as well. I asked him but because I didn't get it straight away he got really upset and then hit me in the face and then Mum just told him, basically, watch yourself. And then he just said, "Well why don't you teach your son discipline?" And then they had a big family fight and I just didn't feel like, I shouldn't be there. This is not where I want to be. (Young person 1)

Violence and abuse of young person

Fourteen young people cited one or more forms of abuse/assault as a reason for home leaving. The number of cases where abuse/assault was experienced by a young person in a family exceeded this number. This figure refers only to the young people who said the abuse was a reason for home leaving. The most

commonly cited form of abuse was physical violence against themselves (8) followed by sexual abuse (4), emotional abuse (2) and neglect (1). These young people were very clear about both the presence of the abuse and the link between this abuse and home leaving. In one other case the young person indicated the reason for leaving was domestic violence, though not directly against themselves.

Kicked out/told to go by parents

Fifteen in the sample indicated they were told to go, usually in terms of being “kicked out”. In ten cases it is indicated that it was the mother who told them to leave, though in two of these cases it is indicated that this was the result of stepfathers/boyfriends indicating the mother must choose between them or the child/young person. In one of these two cases the stepfather was reported to have sexually abused the young person. In only two cases it was reported that a father or stepfather alone was the one to tell the young person to leave. In three cases the young person indicated they were told to go by both parents. In 11 out of the 15 cases the young person indicated that either physical abuse or domestic violence had occurred in the family.

The reasons provided for being “kicked out” included rejection by a step-parent, a behaviour issue, parent alcoholism, mental illness, and forced choice by stepfather between mother and child. In 2 cases the young person indicated the relationship with boyfriend/stepfather was prioritised.

My stepfather sexually assaulted me, and he gave mother the choice: either I go or he goes. She said “Bye” [to me].
(Young person 8)

My mother asked me to leave because I was not getting along with her boyfriend ... it was like either he goes or I go sort of thing.
(Young person 22)

One young person reported being told to get out many times and had refused to go. It was a case of the child trying to “hang in there”. The meaning of being kicked out varied. In some cases it was reported as a clear unambiguous ejection by the parent/s:

She threw all my shit out and said like “Out!” Pushed me down the stairs, like, “.... off out of here”.
(Young person 8)

Some others explained it as resulting from a clear understanding that they were not wanted at home. This often coincided with a feeling that they could not put up with it any longer. In such cases the intent of the parent was not for the young person to leave and never come back, but rather that there was a family problem.

Me and Mum were fighting too much, and she kept threatening me. She was going to kick me out, so I just moved out. She kicked me out to my aunty’s first, and then I went home, and then she told me to get out so I did.
(Young person 19)

Removal by authorities

In five cases the young people indicate home leaving was the result of being taken from the home by authorities, in four cases by state child protection authorities, and in one case by the police. To many of the young people this was very confusing and destructive.

In some cases the reason for removal was direct abuse of the young person. Removal by authorities was seen as part of the problem of creating homelessness. One young person had been put into foster care as an 8-year-old and spent the next 11 years going between foster placements, an alternative care institution and shelters, with occasional stays with the mother. Fostering, even from a very early age, was seen as leading to later attempts by young people to re-establish contact with biological parents.

Alcohol and other drug misuse

Drugs and alcohol were identified by at least nine interviewees as factors contributing to home leaving. In five cases it was indicated that one or both parents drank to excess leading to substantial family conflict. In other cases it was the young people drinking and drug taking that led to them being “kicked out of home”. One young person indicated heavy drinking by both her mother and herself led to her being kicked out at the age of 12.

Event triggered

In a number of instances a specific event was cited as precipitating the home leaving. In these cases if the event had not occurred, home leaving would most probably not have occurred for a considerable time. The events cited were: the death of a father; taking a car intended as a birthday present from parents and “writing it off”; being expelled from school for fighting and “too scared to go home” so “ran away to a refuge”; and a big family fight. While there were often long-standing issues in the families concerned, the young people cited these events as being a reason for home leaving.

As soon as my dad died, I changed ... I needed something to calm me down and help me out with my relating my father’s death, but my mother couldn’t cope. I was only there for about six weeks after my dad died ... My main thing in life was to die before my dad died because you know I loved him more than anything.
(Young person 30)

Other reasons

One young person indicated that the reason for leaving was associated with a lack of money:

I was with my mum and we didn't have much money and it got a bit stressful so [I said] I'll leave.

(Young person 33)

No young person cited the availability of income support benefits such as Young Homeless Allowance as a contributing reason for leaving home. None indicated that the reason was peer pressure, although a small number of young people indicated that peer associations had been an influence. One young person in the sample identified "the streets" as somewhere he wanted to live, where he loved helping others.

I just wanted to experience things you know, get to know, you know, the world.

(Young person 32)

Experiences prior to home leaving

The young people were asked what was occurring for them before home leaving occurred. This information goes beyond the reasons stated for leaving home. As most questions asked were general and not targeted at specific themes such as sexual abuse, it is quite likely that there is an under-reporting of specific phenomena. What is reported is what young people saw as significant enough and were comfortable enough to mention. Specific questions were asked regarding what was happening at home prior to leaving, about changes to family structure and about their school experience.

Changes in family structure

Young people reported a wide range of changes to family structure. In 25 cases the parents were separated or divorced and in two cases a parent had died. Significant changes in family structure were also caused by the departure or arrival of siblings or step-siblings. One young woman reported that when a brother was "kicked out" of home by parents she was left feeling as though she was without any family:

... but when my brother left that totally cracked me up. I couldn't handle living with my mum and my dad on my own ... That was probably when I was 11. Then I felt as though I didn't belong there because my brother and my sister were my family cause they brought me up more than my parents.

(Young person 9)

Abuse and violence

In total, seven young women cited experiences of sexual abuse, four of whom cited this as the reason for

leaving. A total of 21 young people (52.5%) reported being physically hit, with eight citing this as the reason for leaving home. In six (15%) cases young people indicated extensive domestic violence. Young people themselves reported being violent in a number of cases, usually within a culture of violence in the family.

Events which dramatically altered the home situation

As well as events which directly led to leaving home, a number of young people reported events in addition to parent separation or repartnering which had a substantial impact on their experience of home. These events sparked family conflict or were experienced by the young person and/or their family as extreme loss. Events cited were falling pregnant (2), aunty suiciding (stepfather blamed himself), younger brother dying, both mother and best friend dying in the year before, "coming out" to parents as homosexual, and moving to a small country town from a coastal city.

When this group is added to those young people who cite an event as the reason for home leaving, it can be seen that in about one-fifth of cases a significant unexpected event occurred prior to leaving home which elicited strong feelings or opinions within the family. These ranged from accidents, to illnesses or death, to disclosures. Such events can either result in conflict, rejection or simply a deep sense of loss. A common theme is that young people view the reaction of their parent/s to the event as indicating a lack of support or understanding, or in some cases it would seem that the issues resulting for the young person were simply not adequately responded to.

Attempted suicide or suicidal ideation

Five young women indicated they had attempted suicide, one that they had felt suicidal, and one that their sister had attempted suicide.

Financial difficulty

Financial difficulty was related by three of the young people interviewed as impacting on the family:

We used always to be taken to the office and stuff. "Oh we never see you kids with lunch" and stuff like this. See my father never used to pay child endowment or anything like, and my Mum was full on broke could hardly afford anything.

(Young person 5)

Experience of schooling

The interview attempted to obtain a general picture about significant factors in the schooling experience of these young people. At the time of interviewing 12 of the young people were at school, some having left before or during homelessness and returned. Of the 12 at school, ten were female. The general view of school was that it had been a negative and sometimes dehumanising experience.

Like if you get to be perfect, you get treated like a human being. (Young person 12)

Some teachers were regarded highly. These were teachers who were friendly and who they felt they could talk to.

The average reported school level when these young people have left school was Year 9, with a range from Year 6 to 12. Perhaps the most common theme in the school experience of these young people was the number of schools that they attended. For both females and males, the average number of schools (primary and secondary together) attended by each was six. Difficulties arising from changing schools included the loss of friends:

... [in every new school] I'd be on my own and I'd fight for my respect ... and I finally get some respect and then just move on. (Young person 33)

Leaving home was often given as a reason for dropping out of school. School work often added to the existing pressures at home. One young person related the following reflections on how school work added to the sibling rivalry and resulting alienation of the young person from the parents:

[my parents] did not help me choose where I wanted to go. They didn't talk to me about my life. They used to try and bribe my brother to get better [marks] at school. [They used to tell him] if you get a B, I will buy you a stereo". And then I would complain as I used to [get] A's and like: "What about me, what do I get for achieving well." (Young person 34)

Themes of experience prior to home leaving

A number of themes emerged which cut across the various experiences young people had prior to home leaving.

Theme of lack of felt emotional support

A lack of felt emotional support pervades the responses from young people in the sample. This may be seen in

statements from the young people where they indicate not feeling they were shown affection, of not being spoken to in a warm and friendly voice, that they lacked attention, that parents did not understand their problems and worries or what they needed, or that parents did not make them feel wanted or give them praise. These indicators are derived from those developed by Parker, Tupling and Brown (1979) (cited in Kennedy 1995) for determining attachment between parents/careproviders and children. Phrases used by young people to refer to their family life included:

"No one listened to me", "being humiliated", "everything was my fault", "put down", "never around for me", "we never talked. My dad was always putting me down constantly, like always putting me down. And I was really uncomfortable there". (Young person 3)

From another interview:

I just couldn't be bothered doing anything, know what I mean? I just got put down, you know, useless ... sort of thing, you know, stupid idiot and that sort of thing, and you start believing it and everything starts happening, going downhill ... Yeah I just got put down psychologically, really and every other way. (Young person 21)

One young woman summed up what young people who were homeless on the streets thought:

I've been on the Brisbane streets meeting a lot of people, people didn't want 'em, nobody cared about them that's what they thought. Nobody cared, nobody wanted them, or they did but didn't show it. (Young person 28)

Lack of consistency from parents, and the lack of acknowledgment of the impact of domestic violence on the young person, were often factors leading to young people feeling unsupported. One young person said of her parents "making up" after one of their many domestic fights:

They are saying sorry to each other, I'm sitting there watching TV and no-one said sorry to me about what has happened over the last months ... they used to be lovey dovey and poor little old me just used to be ignored. (Young person 10)

This felt lack of emotional support included open disregard involving blame of the young person for circumstances, highly conditional approval, movement back and forth between biological parents, and physical isolation, e.g. locked in a room. Caution must be exercised not to necessarily attribute blame for this to parents or caregivers. Young people often indicated that parents or caregivers were themselves very isolated, suffered from a mental illness, had a drug or alcohol problem, were in financial hardship, or had themselves been abused as a child.

Theme of blame

The theme of blame consistently recurred in the interviews though in a number of forms. In some cases blame was deriving from the parent, who saw the young person as the source of the problem. Sometimes the blame laid by a parent was for something the young person asserted they had not done. One young woman who was kicked out at 15 said things had been very bad since her mother had left her father when she was 10. When asked what would have helped she said:

Nothing. Nothing at all. Believe me. I tried working with her, tried everything. Nothing at all. Everything – nothing is her fault. Everything has got to be someone else's fault, and it was mine.

Blame on parent or stepparent

In my situation I blame my parents for my leaving home cause it was them being bad to me more than anything ... It was just the fact that they were sexually abusing me and violently abusing me and stuff like that I had to get out, cause I couldn't handle it anymore. (Young person 9)

Blame of self for the situation

A young woman who had been physically abused by her father until he left when she was aged nine, and who had witnessed domestic violence against her mother, summed up why she had no positive relationships in her family by saying:

I just turned them all against me. (Young person 2)

A young woman who was told by her mother to leave after the stepfather had sexually assaulted her said of her experience staying with relatives and friends:

I just felt like I was bludging off everyone, you know, and I thought, well, my family doesn't even want me. (Young person 8)

Theme of grief and loss

There is a recurring theme of grief and loss in the responses of young people. The grief, loss and self blame associated with separation from a parent or siblings is clear in many accounts. There are other areas where loss impacts on these young people, such as the loss of friends, and indeed the loss of parents themselves when home leaving occurs. The interviews were littered with indications that there was a great sadness about the lack of relationship with one or both parents, other family members or friends. It was commonly reported that prior to leaving home they had

ceased to feel that they belonged in the family. For one young person the death of his grandparents meant he felt he had no-one else in the family with whom he could get on.

Theme of freedom

There seem to be two quite different meanings given by young people to the word freedom, these being “freedom from” and “freedom to”. One young woman who indicated she had been physically abused said:

... freedom has got a lot to do with people that run away as well, and I think there needs to be abuse stopped. You know as soon as it is let out there should be something done about it instead of people ignoring it, telling you its not happening. (Young person 34)

For another young person, the “freedom to” was cited:

One reason was I wanted my freedom and I was too into going out all the time with my friends and ... I just wanted to party and everything ... Mum didn't want me to. (Young person 35)

Significantly in this family the father and mother had been separated since the child was one year old but repeatedly re-established the relationship when the father's drinking periodically ceased. In two interviews young people indicated that they were allowed far too much freedom by parents.

Where the young people went when they left home

By far the most common place to go on home leaving was to friends. Nineteen young people (47.5%) indicated they went to friends on leaving or being told to leave home. The meaning of “friends” seems quite variable ranging from long-standing close friends to acquaintances.

In a number of cases (15%) young people went to other family members (brothers, grandmother, cousin). It was, however, more common for young people to indicate they wished they could have stayed within their extended family, but that there were barriers to doing so, for example, the extended family had taken the parents' “side”.

Like if I had one of me uncles there, or even if Pop had of stuck up for me, but because I was fighting with Dad, Pop went on the edge, like hated me too ... like he had to stick on Dad's side, I just felt like everyone was ganging up on me except Mum. (Young person 27)

In 15% of cases the young person went directly to a youth refuge or service, and in another 12.5% of cases

they stayed on the streets. The other young people in the sample were removed by welfare authorities (5%) or did not provide this information (5%).

The importance of friends as a source of support is further emphasised by the tendency for friends to provide accommodation support following an initial stay at a refuge, or for young people to move on to a youth accommodation service after an initial stay at a friend's place. It was common in this sample for young people to stay at the home of a relative or friend, for a period of weeks or months, and when this broke down, to then become "homeless" from their perspective.

Was returning home explored as an option?

The young people interviewed were asked if, when they left home, anyone explored with them the option of returning home. Responses to this question were very varied and highly contextualised. The responses clustered into the following categories, though in some cases more than one of these themes was reflected in the responses.

When exploration or action regarding returning home did occur

- The young person talked to (or was talked to by) a number of friends or relatives (brothers, grandparents, other parent) and/or services, but they could not see going home as a possibility.

Yeah, a few people, but my mother kicked me out of the family house. I don't talk to my mother. I can't stand my father. (Young person 2)

They [a youth service] knew what was happening at home, and once I said that I wasn't going back, they knew that I had my aim settled, and that I wasn't going back ... no-one could change my mind ... I'd had enough. (Young person 6)

- The parent(s) contacted the young person and invited closer contact.

We never talked for the first couple of weeks, or the first month, and then Mum started – she rang me up and said I had to go to my grandparents for a BBQ, and then we started talking. So my grandparents got us talking. (Young person 19)

- The parent(s) contacted the police:

Mum wanted me back home, so they called the police. The police found me and brought me back home. (Young person 1)

- The young person was forced to go home by a youth service, the police or a neighbour.

A Oh, it [the youth service] was like trying to throw me back home.

Q Back with your parents?

A Yeah.

Q And what was that like for you?

A Oh, I didn't really want to go back so, but I did, but, I don't know, everything happened again.

(Young person 13)

- The young person or service explores the possibilities by contacting the parent/s.

In one case the parents were contacted in relation to determining the young person's eligibility for income security. The response from the parents was that the young person could not return to either parents' home. In another case a service actively explored the option of returning home, with the outcome of the young person returning. (Young person 13)

When exploration or action regarding returning home did not occur

Many young people, when asked if anyone explored with them the option of returning home, responded with "no" or a qualified "no". Again the explanations and circumstances were varied.

- The young person was away for a period of a few days or less before returning home and they had not told anyone about their circumstances.
- The young person did not divulge the problem even when supports were technically available.

Well like my brother and sister said "Never move back", once I'd left, and youth refuges would try to talk to you, but I'd never want to talk about any of the stuff that happened ... I never got a child care officer, because the thing is what I did, which I realise I did the right thing now, but I didn't know what I was doing at the time – I would never tell anyone what happened. You see, you tell people what happens, and then people start sticking their noses into your business. It was just like, "Oh, no, I left because I couldn't handle it". (Young person 5)

For one young woman who was encouraged to go to the school counsellor this was not an option because she had been abused and she didn't feel comfortable discussing issues with a male counsellor. (Young person 18)

- Numbers of young people said they stayed with friends without query or moved from one place to another.

Often these stays were with separated parents, relatives or friends, sometimes interspersed with refuges. The result was that they slowly became homeless without attracting a great deal of

attention or intervention.

- In some cases the option of going home was not canvassed because the young person and the service provider considered this would be inappropriate, usually because of abusive home circumstances or circumstances considered irretrievable.
- In other cases the process of service delivery was itself a factor in determining whether returning home was explored. A young person staying at a youth accommodation service indicated:
I wanted to go home ... and they wouldn't let me ... they thought I had a bad attitude and they didn't want me going home ... I'm thinking you can't keep me here. And they go, "Well if you leave, we'll call the cops". And I thought this is for homeless kids that have nowhere to go. It's not for kids that have bad attitudes and their parents don't want them living at home. Now, Mum chucked me in there for a break for her. You know, they didn't care about me, it was just Mum. (Young person 35)
- In a number of cases young people indicated that the services they accessed were for food, accommodation and emergency money. The implication was that the issue of exploring a return home was not relevant either to their situation or to that service.

The varied circumstances of these cases make drawing conclusions difficult. It does seem though that by the time home leaving occurred many young people and the services consulted considered the situation to be inconsistent with returning home. There does, however, seem to be little evidence in these cases of services clearly exploring the possibilities of family restoration or reconciliation. Police, schools and youth services adopted various practices in relation to young person/parent recontact, with little appearance of this leading to the addressing of underlying issues. A major issue is the trust and comfort young people have in engaging with others about these issues.

Returning home

Most young people in the sample returned home one or more times, though for some returning home was not considered an option. Even when they could not return home the loss of home by young people was often very deeply felt. For many there were indications that they would prefer to be home, provided home was a safe and supportive place.

I'm just glad I found somewhere to stay and I wasn't out on the street ... I've lived a hard life, like sometimes I stayed awake all night just thinking – don't know

really about what, but I just felt real low, like, down, and I sat there thinking. I couldn't sleep just thinking whether I would go home.

(Young person 12 to 13 years old)

But, for some, there was no desire to go home. It was a finished and very unhappy chapter in their lives that could never be redeemed. Despite this, the young people interviewed indicated they were often encouraged to return home and some were taken home by authorities such as police or a youth service, with little other intervention. One young person described the temporary nature of this return:

Q *What happened when you went back home again?*

A *Dad was there ... take me inside, get the belt and hit me, and I would run.* (Young person 16)

When a young person was taken home or persuaded to go home without the situation improving from their perspective, the result was almost always another home leaving shortly afterwards. One young woman, whose brother located her in a shelter and brought her home, said of her return home:

Then my parents tried to bribe me back. They bought me all this stuff and that, but when Mum got back it was just totally different. I just couldn't cope any longer. I had to move out ... They were blaming me for stuff that I had never done. (Young person 18)

The reaction of parents to the young person returning home was a strong determinant of whether the young person remained at home. The key seems to be whether, in the view of the young person, anything changed. These changes related particularly to parent(s) valuing and communicating with them, or a reduction in perceived negative parental behaviour such as yelling, blaming, "putting down", hitting or disregarding.

When I got home, well, see we're not arguing anymore. We're getting along a lot better. That's why I haven't any intentions of moving out again soon. I suppose she just needed a break. (Young person 12)

A young person from a high income background who had just moved back home commented:

My parents got back from America and my stepfather seemed to have changed and he apologised and said, now because he spent a month over there, he realises and recognises what kids need and want. So he understands what I did. So, you know he said he'd change. So I moved back home to see how it goes. (Young person 1)

Some young people felt they were driven home because a stable safe place to live was not found away from home, and/or because they didn't have sufficient money to live adequately. If there was not some

change in relation to those things which led to home leaving then it was usual for leaving to recur within a short space of time. For example, a young woman returned home following a number of moves between youth services and alternative care placements in the first few weeks. When told the next placement would be for only four to six weeks she decided she might as well be at home, only to leave shortly afterwards.

Responses considered helpful or unhelpful

Tables 5.6 and 5.7 indicate the types and sources of response young people said were helpful or unhelpful to them in the period shortly before leaving home or shortly afterwards.

The most common types of response related to accommodation or shelter, and communication-based support. Interestingly, communication-based support was just as likely to be found unhelpful as helpful. Accommodation was found to be helpful in about two-thirds of cases. In most cases statutory intervention was seen as having been unhelpful.

In five cases (12.5%) there was no service response or engagement before, or in the period following, home leaving. In numerous other cases the responses were in relation to issues other than the home leaving, for example, a drug problem, crime or accommodation. In this sample the services that young people most frequently had contact with (not always voluntarily) just prior to or just after home leaving were: youth accommodation services, general youth services (not specifically an accommodation provider), police, state welfare authorities, and schools, in that order. Drug and alcohol rehabilitation services, psychiatric services and non-government counselling services were used to some degree.

Those services always reported as helpful by the young person were generalist youth services and drug and alcohol rehabilitation centres. Youth accommodation services and schools were found to be helpful and unhelpful by similar numbers of young people, while state welfare authorities, the police and psychiatric services were generally found to be unhelpful. In most cases where youth accommodation services were indicated to have been unhelpful, this was due to what they did not do rather than what they did. In the case of other types of services it was what was done that was generally seen as unhelpful.

Only one young person interviewed mentioned a service response that was helpful prior to leaving home. In this case it was a youth worker who visited the school. The other responses almost always found helpful were provided by family and friends.

A significant number of young people indicated that counselling had been distinctly unhelpful, or had a negative impact on family relations prior to leaving home.

Table 5.6 Helpful or unhelpful responses in the period immediately prior to or after home leaving

Type of response	Number of responses	
	Helpful	Unhelpful
Communication based support	16	15
Shelter/accommodation	15	8
Material assistance	9	1
Statutory intervention	2	5
Employment/vocational training	2	0
Medical assistance	1	1

Table 5.7 Number of young people reporting responses from different sources as being either helpful or unhelpful

Response from	Helpful	Unhelpful
Police	2	5
Youth accommodation service	7	5
Schools	4	4
Friends	7	1
Family	5	1
General youth service	10	0
Psychiatric services	0	2
Drug & alcohol rehabilitation service	3	0
Detention centres	0	1
State welfare authorities	0	6
Other non-government service	0	2

At 13 I lost faith in the counsellors, psychs and anything like that. I'd been there and I had lived it with Mum and Dad and I was sick of the blackboards and people showing me what to do and how to say it. I must feel this and I feel this, when you do this I feel this and all that crap. It never worked for me because my family wasn't consistent. (Young person 10)

A number of young people also indicated that communications they expected to be confidential were not. The result was a loss of trust by young people in talking to others about their concerns.

And then one time I went to counselling and the stuff I told the lady, she went back and told my Mum and my Mum fired up about me about it and we were arguing and stuff. (Young person 34)

In relation to a school counsellor one young woman said:

The one I had, she lost my trust straight away ... They'd say its confidentiality. You tell them and they go and make a hundred and one calls before you can get another word out, go and blab it to someone else. Yeah, real confidentiality. (Young person 18)

Another young woman indicated her mother changed counsellors when it was suggested she (the mother) needed counselling.

Well, one lady said Mum should get counselling for her own problems because it was going round in a cycle. Mum said "bull...." so we went back to the other counsellor, and she agreed with Mum. (Young person 20)

This "other counsellor", according to the young woman, felt she was "mixed up in the head" and should be put into a psychiatric ward. The young woman indicated that the difficulty stemmed from the family not acknowledging sexual abuse by the young woman's uncle of both her mother and herself. The young woman indicated the response within the family and from the services sought by the mother was to pathologise the young woman as mentally ill. Psychiatric services when mentioned were described as unhelpful. One young male taken to a psychiatrist after his father's death, and shortly before leaving home said:

... she took me to a psychiatrist, and the psychiatrist turned around and said that I was a selfish bastard, so I told him to get stuffed. Mum tried to have like family counselling with other counsellors and stuff like that, but you know it just didn't work ... like they just couldn't understand where I was coming from. (Young person 30)

Another young woman indicated:

What I hate most, right, is how psychologists and counsellors and workers and everything turn around and say they know what you are going through and they don't. (Young person 38)

Youth refuges were valued if they provided accommodation, food and safety, but they were not cited as places which assisted young people to deal with issues related to the young person's leaving home.

Some of them were really good, and others I wouldn't go back to ... like, as a youth shelter, they were supposed to be support ones, and all they done was sit in the office and let the kids do whatever they want. There was girls there that ended up getting raped and stuff. (Young person 18)

One refuge closed down a week after a young person moved in and in another the short-term time

limit was cited as leading to mobility between friends, with homelessness on the streets resulting.

State welfare intervention and youth detention centres were seen by respondents as unhelpful, and as causing or exacerbating homelessness.

What young people say is needed

While each young person's view of what is needed is different, the pervasive theme throughout the interviews was that young people say they should be respected more, listened to more, and that specific efforts at getting parents to alter their attitudes and behaviour to their children should occur.

Responses needed well in advance of leaving home

Most young people indicated that if early home leaving was to be prevented, different attitudes and behaviours of parents and caregivers towards them were needed. While many of these points may be clustered under a heading of communication, this would not capture the quality of personal recognition which children are saying they need from their parents.

Improved parental/adult attitudes and behaviours towards children and young people

Overwhelmingly, young people, both male and female, indicated that what was most needed were improved parental/adult attitudes and behaviours towards children. Among desired attitudes, the most commonly cited were respect, acceptance and understanding, while the most commonly expressed behaviours were: listening rather than blaming or putting down, problem solving and compromise, and talking with rather than at. Attitudes and behaviours were usually mentioned together, indicating that a general caring attitude from parents was not sufficient. Caring is seen as requiring parents to do certain specific things and not to do other things.

Compassion, trust, a lot of respect ... parents have to stop putting kids down ... I got an LA in maths and a HA in english ... like I didn't get praised for them. I just got put down for my LA in maths. (Young person 3)

Parents to understand me, to listen to me. (Young person 16)

Listen to what I say not blaming. (Young person 18)

If I did something wrong, they didn't have to go on ... putting me down that far. (Young person 21)

My father did not really want to talk about [my sexuality] ... With my mother ... I ended telling her everything and she didn't want to hear what I had to say. (Young person 23)

A lot more love. Compassion, trust, a lot of respect.
(Young person 3)

Young people talk about parents being more supportive, listening more, not putting kids down, and adjusting their expectations and management as the young person gets older. A number of young people commented specifically on the need for parents and older people not to use the age difference to legitimise ignoring what young people are saying:

Parents think because they have lived longer, hey, that they know about everything when they don't. And I think that after parents have been through a bit of a bad time, they take it out on the kids, because there's like no-one else.
(Young person 5)

Parents to understand the impact on children of a new partner

In some cases the new partner is seen as completely incompatible, and in these situations the young people simply want the new partner to leave.

Stopping the abuse

Young people often indicated that abuse, where occurring, needed to stop.

Early access to a third party for counselling and communication facilitation

One young person indicated that the habits in families of not listening to parents meant that third party involvement would be very useful as long as it was done in a non-threatening and friendly way.

The best thing they could do is confront a counsellor, or if I am going to school, speak to my school counsellor and, just speak to him and my Mum go down to see him one day and just say, "listen I think John is not doing so well at home. I think he might want to run away" ... I guess the best thing is to get someone else to talk to you about a problem that the family is having rather than them coming to you because you are not going to listen.
(Young person 1)

Confidentiality for young people when they seek help

While support services are often acknowledged as well intentioned, there is a consistent theme of services needing to deal with issues of confidentiality. Issues include belief of the young person's story, disclosure to parents and work colleagues, breaches of trust and the subsequent escalation of conflict and difficulty. In order to deal with the reluctance of young people to discuss their issues, services will need to be clear and consistent about what rights to confidentiality young people have.

That services are seen by young people to be impartial

The young people interviewed were quite clear about services and organisations they considered were friendly and supportive to them, and which would be accessed by them. This raises the "credibility" difficulty some institutions and agencies may encounter if they do not appreciate the subtleties of delivering services perceived by vulnerable young people to be impartial.

The school and the church and that, they have their services and I'm sure they are well run, it's just the fact that kids aren't going to want to talk to them or anything because of who they are or what body they're with. I mean they could be really good and they could work out great but it's like there's this attitude in there stuck in the back of your mind, you're younger, and this person could be working with your parents or working with your teachers or whatever.
(Young person 29)

Other responses suggested as needed well in advance of leaving home were:

- the provision of accurate information to young people at schools about homelessness (and a range of associated issues);
- better advertising of youth and counselling services;
- the availability of, and involvement by young people in youth and community groups which offer activities that these young people consider interesting;
- better community education regarding homelessness; and
- access to drug rehabilitation centres.

Responses needed when they first leave home

Themes from the interviews included:

- the importance of young people knowing where they can get help;
- the importance of service providers acknowledging the high level of stress a young person experiences upon leaving home.
- the critical need for immediacy of response from service providers;
- the importance of recognising the young person does not want to be somewhere that is "culturally" very different; and
- the availability of sufficient affordable accommodation.

Nothing helps

Often young people who felt that going home was not an option, identified that nothing would have helped

in relation to family matters, but that a range of financial and accommodation supports were needed to assist in establishing a stable and positive future. For some young people the abuse, neglect or disconnection with family – experienced before home leaving – was of such duration or impact that reconnection with the family of origin was considered futile.

Other barriers to receiving assistance

There were several factors identified by the young people as preventing them from getting assistance before and after they left home.

Lack of knowledge of available services

The most common reason given by nine of the young people for not seeking help for the available agencies is their lack of knowledge about them.

I did not know anything about them. (Young person 14)

When I was six, there was no – well, I didn't know of any agency that could help, so I just basically relied on the goodness of a person's heart, I mean for food, for shop-lifting, or whatever I could do, even if it was a chocolate bar. (Young person 15)

So the local community could probably communicate more, like advertise services because there are some out there but the local community doesn't know that they are there. (Young person 23)

A reluctance to disclose difficulties or seek help

Seeking help depends on more than simply knowing about the availability of the services. A number of young people indicated that, even though they may have known about the existence of sources of support they did not seek help. Some did not think of seeking help, while others were fearful about disclosure, experienced lack of trust, or saw seeking help as a sign of weakness. Young men more often expressed a reluctance to discuss difficulties than young women.

No I never come to a place like this. I'd rather just keep it to myself and try to work it by myself. (Young person 27)

I think back then when I was going to school, I knew the counsellor was there, but it did not really mean anything to me ... someone could have told me to go to the counsellor there, but I wouldn't have thought of it for help or anything. Like I said, when I was a kid I just shut my mouth and didn't say boo to anyone about what was going on. Because what was said and done at home stayed in the home. You didn't involve anyone. (Young person 10)

[My teachers] asked me about it, but I just denied anything was wrong because ... that was one thing I was ashamed of. (Young person 21)

A number of respondents indicated that agencies intervening into their lives were “sticking their nose in” when it was not wanted or useful.

Insufficient services available

A large number who ended up on the streets reported that inadequate facilities for homeless young people was a major problem.

At that time, I was trying to get into [this accommodation] because there's like a waiting list, and so I wasn't going to school at that time. (Young person 12)

I stayed with them a couple of weeks. And then I moved out of there, because that's only a short-time accommodation, and started living from friends to friends and just anywhere I could really. (Young person 1)

One young person explained the problem as a lack of available staff at youth accommodation services to meet the various needs of the young people.

... you can have all the literature in the world in a hostel like this place, you can have every bit of literature in whatever you want or need when you are in the street, or whatever, but what kids really need when they get into a hostel is a cuddle and some[one] to rely on and talk to and there is not enough of that. For example, when I was in [a previous house] there was only one worker on for the day, and there are different workers all the time, and you have 13 or 14 kids in a house, like that, how the hell are they going to have the time to talk to you? (Young person 10)

Discussion

Young people see their relations with parents and step-parents as central to their capacity to remain at home. It is not surprising therefore that they see communication-based strategies as the ones most frequently needed. There is clearly a rider though. Such services can be unhelpful and even counter-productive if they do not recognise the young person as a person in his or her own right, and exercise sensitivity in dealing with information given by the young person. Counselling and other communication-based strategies often appear to young people as reinforcing the very problems they hope they will address. When young people find others acting and speaking in a way which presumes the young people are themselves the problem, they quickly dismiss such assistance as useless.

The experiences prior to home leaving of the young people sampled may be either a very long period of difficulty in the family, or a particular event immediately prior to leaving home which altered in some critical way the home context. These “events” did not cause the leaving home of themselves. It could be suggested, however, that there were insufficient

protective factors in the family for the repercussions of the event or changed circumstance to be dealt with without leaving home becoming a consequence. In simple terms then, both event-triggered home leaving and long-term process-generated home leaving can be identified, with the caution that in most cases there is a mix of the two to varying degrees.

It must also be emphasised that it is not leaving home that caused homelessness. Homelessness may result from leaving home when there are insufficient

protective factors supporting a young person – whether these be provided by the state, the extended family, the network of friends or other sources such as schools. There may, however, be insufficient protective factors around a young person while they are still at home, and the interviews with young people clearly identify this as the reason for exiting from the place identified as home. Once they have left home, there are certainly insufficient protective factors around many young people.

Chapter 6

PERSPECTIVES OF PARENTS

THIS chapter examines, from the perspective of parents, the experiences of young people and their families that may lead to early home leaving and/or young people becoming homeless, their perspective on the home leaving, the responses made at particular times, the helpfulness or otherwise of these, and what they think was needed in their case and needed generally.

The parent sample

Thirty parent interviews were conducted all from different family groups, 18 with a mother, or recognised female carer, two with a father, and ten with both parents/care givers. This provides a total sample of 40 parents/care givers: 28 women and 12 men. For simplicity, the terms parent/mother/ father will be used henceforth to denote a recognised care giver for the young person.

Twenty-five of the interviews were conducted with parents living in an urban area, primarily Brisbane, two with parents living in a coastal city, and three in a rural area. For each family, the current employment status of both parents is shown in Table 6.1. A majority of fathers were employed full-time, a majority of mothers were employed either part-time or

were full-time home-makers.

Each parent interview focused on one young person. The data reported here relate to that young person, even though additional relevant information concerning siblings might also have been collected. All of the young people came from a family background where English was the first language, although two young people had mothers who were Malaysian and West Indian respectively. Five of the young people had been diagnosed as having intellectual disabilities. One had been diagnosed with attention deficit disorder, and also had epilepsy symptoms, and for another his mother reported the likelihood of attention deficit disorder with hyperactivity. These latter seven young people were all boys. In the total sample, 16 young people were girls and 14 were boys.

Table 6.1: Employment status of parents (N=30 family groups)

	No. full-time employed	No. part-time employed	No. unemployed	No. home-makers	Other
Mother	5	13	0	11	1
Father	20	1	4	1	4

Exactly half the sample (15) of young people are now living at home, the greater proportion of whom are 15 years or under. Of the 13 young people who are still at school, all but one is living at home. For those who are 15 or under, there is a strong correlation between living at home and attending school. All of those 15 or under who are at home are also attending school, while all who are not living at home are also not at school. For those who have left school, all except one left at the end of Year 9 or 10.

Family structure at time of first home leaving

With respect to family structure, reported in table 6.2, the sample was quite diverse, including conventional nuclear families, single parents, foster parents and blended family arrangements.

Table 6.2: Family structure at time of first home leaving (N=30)

Sex of young person	Biological family	Single parent (mother)	Single parent (father)	Blended family	Foster family
Male	3	4	1	5	1
Female	8	2	0	5	1

Twenty-nine of the 30 young people actually left home for some period. The other young person is a 13-year-old boy, reported as having attention deficit syndrome, who has been packing his bags and threatening to leave since the age of five.

Multiple home leaving and returning

Nineteen of the young people returned and left home again several times. Sixteen (53%) were reported to have had one or more episodes when they were either literally shelterless, or the parents interviewed did not know where they were, and in a number of cases reported them missing to the police.

Parent perceptions of reasons for home leaving

The reasons parents gave for home leaving by their children are reported in Table 6.3. Twenty-four of the young people are reported to have left home through their own initiative. Two young people were reported as being kicked out of home, one by a stepfather's ultimatum that either he or the young person must leave.

The mother chose to support the stepfather because of their young daughter. Two young people were removed from home by statutory authorities, and two spent some weeks at a non-government welfare respite service but otherwise did not leave home.

Rules and regulations

Nearly half the parents identified disagreements over young people not keeping to the rules of the house, and challenges to parental authority, as reasons for leaving.

Table 6.3: Parents' perceptions of reasons for their children's home leaving (N=30) (more than one reason may be given)

Reason	Male	Female
Rules	5	8
Abuse	0	3
Statutory intervention	1	1
Financial hardship	1	1
Kicked out	1	1
Alienation	0	2
Drugs/alcohol	3	4
Youth Homelessness Allowance	3	3
Personality change	3	4
Other	9	10

Mother: Like he wanted a girl friend to sleep over. Now I am dead set against that. (Parent 30)

Mother: She wanted to leave home so she could be independent. You know, we're too fussy here. Even though we weren't ... she wanted to be able to do what she likes. (Parent 19)

Mother: The reason she ran away was from discipline, from discipline from misdemeanours. (Parent 20)

Personality change

Seven parents reported quite marked personality changes in their teenagers:

Mother: C's mood just totally changed. From being quite a happy adjusted kid to, like he had a huge chip on his shoulders. (Parent 22)

Mother: She changed from a girl who always used to like dressing in the latest fashion even at the beginning of grade 9 – being a real yuppie ...

then she met these street kids. And she started dressing in filthy old ... only in black, she just changed.
(Parent 19)

The income support allowance to homeless young people

Six parents indicated that “the Youth Homeless Allowance” had provided an inducement for the young person to leave home.

Father: We've sort of had to borrow from here to there ... we've never been able to give them pocket money. When he turned 16, the government said, "Right it's his money now. You've got no control over it." Well, what would you do if you've never had anything and then all of a sudden – bang, you've got \$106 a fortnight?
(Parent 21)

Father: And she came home one day and she said to her mother, "Well, you know Mum, if I wasn't living here, I could get the homeless allowance." ... Mainly it is the money because if they have got the money, they're not going to come home.
(Parent 28)

Given the interest in the possible linkage between income support at the homeless rate and early home leaving, the family circumstances of these interviewees were examined. Without discounting the possibility that there could have been some influence as cited by the parents, it appears clear from the data that the family circumstances all contained other plausible antecedents to the homelessness, thematically similar to those related in the stories of other parents. Examples of family circumstances where the availability of income support was cited as the sole, or most important cause of home leaving include:

- a history of alcohol misuse by a father, and associated domestic violence;
- a change in family structure (repartnering of the mother) and subsequent high levels of conflict between the stepfather and the young person and low levels of felt emotional support;
- relocation of family from small rural town to large metropolitan city as a result of ongoing financial difficulties; and
- physical violence to and/or by the young person.

In addition, there is a pattern of subsequent returning home evidenced by the young people of these parents. Regardless of whether income support is cited as a reason for home leaving, the key indicator for reconciliation appears to be whether critical aspects of the family environment altered when subsequent returning

home occurred. One possible explanation for income support payments being singled out as the dominant reason for home leaving is that the existence of the payments provides a non-stigmatising explanation for the genuine and deeply felt concern these parents expressed about what had occurred. While a range of factors, including attitudes to income support availability, could affect how individual family members act and interact, the data is not consistent with such payments acting as a cause of early home leaving or homelessness.

A variety of other reasons for homelessness were given by parents, in addition to those listed in Table 6.3, such as the young person's intellectual disability, low self-esteem of the young person, specific family arguments, and in one case, crowded housing in which a mother, her defacto and their new baby were living with her 72-year-old mother (who was reported as causing problems) as well as the 15-year-old young person (who had an intellectual disability). In two-thirds of interviews parents cited the negative influence peers had on their young people's attitudes, values and behaviour in general. This was mentioned equally in relation to male and female children.

Experiences prior to home leaving Changes in family structure

The classification of a single parent family which is used here indicates the separation or divorce of the young person's parents, but no outside additions to the family. In a blended family, however, the parent with whom the young person lives has had more than one partner and this has resulted in the young person living with either step-siblings or half-siblings, with whom they share only one biological parent. Some of the blended family arrangements are quite complex. The following provides some examples:

C's mother married when she was 18 years old and C was the son of that marriage. Within two years the marriage had broken up and mother and son were living with the man who was to become the mother's second husband, and by whom she had three more sons. All contact with her first husband was severed and he grew up believing the second husband to be his biological father. This marriage also foundered and during a bitter custody battle when C was 11 years old he found out that his "father" was not his biological father. In the ensuing argument C broke off all contact with his step-father and has since felt a great deal of bitterness towards him. He was reported to have undergone a "personality change" from that point on.

A recurrent theme running through the parent interviews is of grief, loss and rejection experienced by the children of the sampled parents. The break-up of

parental partnerships was experienced in two-thirds (20) of the families in the sample. Other examples of grief, loss and rejection associated with the breakdown of family relationships include:

Mother: She has found out some information about her (biological) father and she was very angry with him because he has another family. (Parent 12)

Mother: K still knows her (biological) mother who is very rejecting of her. K wants to find father but biological mother won't tell her who her father is. (Parent 17)

Mother: B remembers the violence, he knows what (his father) done to (his sister), but I still think there's a part of B that wants to know his Dad. (Parent 19)

Mother: (Her adopted daughter said) "You're not my mother, you'll never be my mother because you have none of my blood in your bones" – and that was the beginning. (Parent 13)

In a majority of these cases the young person and family received no counselling or outside support at the time of family breakdown to help them come to terms with the grief or feelings of rejection. This has important implications for service delivery to families in which family structures change.

Abuse and violence

At the extreme end of family relationships which cause distress are those involving sexual and physical abuse. In five interviews (17%) sexual abuse had been an issue within the family. In three of the cases the young person (female) alleged abuse by either her mother's partner or a foster father. In the other two cases the (male) young person's sister was involved. In all cases there was no biological relationship between the adult male and the young woman, and in all cases the allegations (whether substantiated or not) caused major disruptions to the whole family. For instance, in one case the young person's half-sister was molested by his father, her stepfather. This resulted in the mother ending what was an abusive marital relationship:

Mother: Then he (father) made another pass at (her daughter) and that's when I said "you can get out". Unfortunately, it had to be on P's (son's) birthday that I kicked him out, which didn't go down real well. (Parent 24)

In another case the young person (female) was removed by a statutory authority from the family home because of sexual abuse by the stepfather. The mother, who also has three sons, talks about her own feelings:

Mother: I mean at the time you call your daughter a bitch – she's the other woman – your husband's the biggest bastard that ever walked on two legs. You want a rope to hang yourself, then you've got to think about the other kids. (Parent 2)

A distinction is made by parents between the physical violence which seems to be an on-going part of some families' mode of operation and that which occurs in the context of physical punishment and attempts by parents to control their children. While in some cases these two co-exist and are interrelated, in many parents' minds they are quite separate. Consequently, physical punishment will be considered in the section on discipline and control. In ten (33%) of the interviews there was evidence of physical violence within the family which went beyond physical punishment. The following are some examples:

Mother: He (young person) learned very quickly not to have a go at me cause I wouldn't tolerate it and I'd fight back anyway. He copped quite a few good smacks across the face when he tried to stand up to me ... They had a fight and B (stepfather) sort of smacked him (young person) in the mouth like you would a male. Not that hard, but since that day he never went over again. (Parent 22)

Mother: I was suffering for about 12 years domestic violence. I mean I've had broken ribs and damaged arm and a damaged leg, and spine. T (father) would, like, flick P (son aged 4 years) on the head, you know, use a knuckle on his head like that, or T, his father, would choke him at the back of the neck, grab him at the back of the neck. (Parent 24)

Mother: With S (daughter) she would never listen unless I hit her and made her cry. Now that's wrong, but for her that gets through to her and that's what I had to do to make her listen to what I had to say. (Parent 11)

Conflict and verbal fighting

All of the interviews provided evidence of some family conflict. In some cases this appeared to be a recent phenomenon associated with adolescent behaviours (for instance to do with truancy, drug and alcohol use and peer group activities). However, in most cases there was evidence of long-term problematic relationships, and in some cases, some very deep feelings by young people towards their parents, or vice versa. For example, when the young person was told, by her stepsister, of her stepmother's new pregnancy she allegedly replied: "If I

see her I'll kick her in the guts so she'll have a miscarriage." (P25)

Further examples are:

Mother: I was so angry at her. She'd walk in a room and I'd feel my back of my neck just – all the hairs on it go up – I couldn't look at her.
(Parent 29)

Mother: He (son) was abusive. He was going to kill me. He was going to wreck the house. He was going to do everything. He said "I hate you", and this and that. I said, "M, my only wish is that I could hate, because if I hated you, maybe I wouldn't care any more".
(Parent 9)

Mother: Sometimes she would say to him (father) "Oh, when are you going to die? When are you going to retire, because people normally die two years after they retire."
(Parent 19)

Mother: The (school) counsellor said to me he had never known a kid to hate his mother as much as I hated me.
(Parent 30)

Another potential area of conflict in the family is between siblings, and parents mentioned problematic sibling relationships in two-thirds of the interviews. The potential for jealousy and disagreement is exacerbated in blended families where siblings may not have in common one or both biological parents, and where there may be differences in maintenance payments, visits to and attention from separated parents and so forth. Any disruptive behaviour by one sibling was seen as having serious consequences for the other children in the family.

Discipline and control

It is instructive to look at the methods by which parents in the sample report try to manage their young person's behaviour, and the way in which the young people react. There is considerable evidence in a number, but by no means all, of the sampled families of unilateral, authoritarian methods of command and control which often depend on physical punishment.

Mother: You've just got to ... not very sternly, like punch her. You've got to say like "that's it" ... "you don't ..." There's got to be punishment because, if you don't, then it's "I've got away with it, I can do it again and I can do something worse" and like you've got to pull her in.
(Parent 15)

Mother: If she comes home, we would have her here, however it would be on our terms, not hers ... The first thing, she would have no more contact with this little dead.... She then has

got to go and have a medical – blood tests, the lot ... If she was pregnant, the child would – it just goes – and I don't believe in abortion, but the child goes ...
(Parent 28)

Mother: I mean she wasn't mistreated, was never hit, I mean she got a whack across the ears like every other kid gets. She was certainly treated very well.

Father: Nobody ever got whacked on the ears in our family.

Mother: Well she got a smack in the face by me.
(Parent 12)

Mother: I ended up giving her a whack across the top of her head with the language she was carrying on with ... Anyway she told me to get and I can't hack that and I walked back and gave her a thump on the arm ... So in the end I just laid her one thump to the head and she went flat on her bum and it's the first time I ever hit her like that ...
(Parent 6)

It appears that the consequence of these authoritarian modes of control is that young people must either acquiesce, retaliate or run away. It is these last two responses which are most frequently reported in these families' experiences. The parents believe that young people tend to adopt unilateral modes of response:

Mother: He had such a row with her, you say things you don't mean, and she said "I'm going, you can't stop me". And he said "If you go, you're not coming back". And she said "That's okay". And she went.
(Parent 19)

The parents interviewed indicate these responses leave them with no further options but to escalate the attempts to control or to acquiesce to what is happening, and many parents expressed their feelings of helplessness and powerlessness to prevent the destructive course of action they saw their young person adopting.

Mother: You're always frightened if you say something, they'll go. They'll walk out the door again. And there's nothing you can do. There's nothing X (Government Department) can do. There's nothing the police can do. (Parent 29)

The parents interviewed generally lamented society's current condemnation of physical punishment. They did not agree that it constituted abuse, and saw it as a necessary means of control. They blamed society for taking away their right to use it, and schools for teaching their children about their own "rights".

Mother: Like some kids, you raise your hand and they turn around and say, go on hit me and I'll do you in to Welfare – that's child abuse. And that's not right. It takes all the parents' rights away. (Parent 2)

Mother: They pretty much told him all his rights. I feel sorry for the teachers too, the whole system is terrible because the kids have got so many rights, the teachers cannot do anything about it, they can't discipline. (Parent 30)

Mother: She started coming home (from school) saying, "I don't have to do that if I don't want to" and "You can't smack me, you can't touch me". But we didn't used to smack her anyway. (Parent 1)

Attempted suicide or suicidal ideation

Parents reported suicide attempts by three young people (two girls and a boy).

Mother: Once he jumped in front of a train at the station but the train was, you know, a good way down the track, but he jumped in front of the train saying, "I'm going to kill myself". (Parent 26)

Three cases of self-mutilation attempts were also reported, all by girls, and one other of suicide threats.

Mother: She was doing some really crazy stuff – putting her school tie around her neck and trying to choke herself. She was carving things into her arms. She was running around with Coke cans – broken Coke cans in her socks and playing football and hoping to cut her ankles and slitting her wrists. (Parent 29)

Financial difficulty

Unemployment and financial hardship are important contextual factors in a number of the families' lives.

Mother: A lot of our problems – a lot of people's problems are financial, I think, because both Mum and Dad have got to work for starters ... and the families are going to suffer. (Parent 10)

Father: When we had the farm out at [a small country town], we was borrowing up to \$1,000 for food and fuel and just things to keep going. So we've never been able to give him pocket money. (Parent 21)

Mother: I mean the bottom line is you cannot feed a growing 15-year-old, a two-year-old baby and

yourself, and have any sort of social atmosphere, and rent a house. You get unemployed, so you've got financial hardship, so that makes everybody tense. (Parent 24)

Experience of schooling

In many instances in this sample, schools have been a source of stress and difficulties for families. Over one-third of the family groups interviewed clearly identified the transition to high school as heralding a change for the worse.

Mother: He'd started high school and he was truanting high school and he was hanging around with kids that were into drugs and breaking into houses and things like that – much older kids. (Parent 5)

Mother: Ever since she started high school, she was a bit, you know, well, she'd sort of answer you back and be a pain, you know, fighting with her brother all the time. (Parent 8)

Mother: From grade 1 to grade 7 ... she had academic qualities ... she was getting 100 out of 100 for maths and she got 294 out of 295 for spelling ... she was athletic ... she was overall champion of the school in grade 7 ... and then she hit grade 8 [beginning of high school in Queensland] and she went down to below average ... she was wagging school ... constantly. (Parent 15)

Concerns expressed repeatedly throughout the interviews regarding school experience relate to poor academic performance, often associated with truancy; a change in the young person's attitude, manners and a challenging of parental authority; and association with peer groups who are seen as having a bad influence.

In one third of interviews, parents reported problems with truancy, and their own inability, or that of the school, to do anything about it. Just over one-half of those reported truancy were girls.

Mother: She was coming to school about two or three times a week. And the school ... well of course, there's nothing they can do. (Parent 19)

Father: She'd been dropped off and had been picked up, but she had not attended. So we didn't know.

Interviewer: Do you have any idea of how big a problem that truancy had been?

Mother: I think it became excessive, and I am quite horrified about the school. We'd always told them if there was a problem, to contact us. They knew she was dropped off and picked up, and they never notified us until we got her

phone call – and by that time she'd be going into the city and meeting street kids, and oh, you find all this out much later on.

(Parent 1)

A third of parents reported that their child had been suspended or expelled from school. There was some overlap with the truancy sample, but half involved different individuals, and a majority of those excluded were boys. Parents' overwhelming reaction to exclusion from school was that it was not helping the young person solve their problems:

Mother: Even when L was excluded for continual truanting, I said to (the Principal), "Look, I don't believe that exclusion is solving this problem", and he said to me, "It isn't. Excluding him isn't solving the problem with what's happening, but frankly, I don't know what can".

(Parent 5)

Mother: (High school 1) decided he should be expelled, not leave. He said, "That's not fair. I said I was leaving before you said I was expelled". And when he went to (High school 2), (High school 1) apparently phoned (High school 2) to say to hold off because we might be expelling this kid – which I think was wrong.

(Parent 9)

Half of the parents (15) identified problems to do with academic school performance, and girls and boys were equally represented here. Over half the parents also identified other problems at school such as behavioural problems, bullying, and one case of a boy with an intellectual disability being sexually abused by a peer over a period of time.

Mother: I mean, when you are getting detention upon detention slapped upon you for the stupidest things, it becomes so overwhelming that, well, what are you going to automatically say to the school system?

(Parent 22)

The primary impression from the parents' interviews is that schools in general are not providing a supportive environment for these "troubled" young people. This impression is further reinforced when parents' accounts of their experiences of individual school staff are examined, although there were many examples of the positive impact care and concern from school personnel can have on parents and young people.

One third of parents gave examples of how sympathetic teachers, principals and guidance officers made a difference to their young person's life. This may be contrasted with almost half of the sample who reported their interactions with school staff as unhelpful.

Mother: High school X was really good. They were fabulous. They seemed to really care about M and they wanted to help. They would talk to me.

(Parent 29)

Mother: If he really hated the teacher or if the teacher gave him a hard time, he didn't have a hope in hell.

(Parent 22)

Father: School counsellors – they were the most helpful, supportive people we had come across to that point. They were just marvellous.

(Parent 3)

Of particular concern are the young people with an intellectual disability who, in this sample, frequently did not receive the support they needed from school, though when they did, it made a large difference to them.

Mother: (Whose son, with a mild intellectual disability left school three months before he turned 15). Actually I have to say, X High seemed to be really glad to get rid of him. They have no time for you if you're a slow learner at that school.

(Parent 24)

Mother: There was one teacher that was really, really good but she had philosophical differences with the principal and she had a nervous breakdown and left ... The teacher that they put in charge of his class when she left was a very dictatorial, authoritarian man. So it just went chung! downhill at a fast rate ... in violence and a couple of attempted suicides.

(Parent 26: Mother of young person with an intellectual disability)

Father: We looked at a few schools (for primary schooling) we were told X was good. So we went there, and the teachers were very caring, the aides were caring, everybody was caring. Even the kids were caring. And they really pulled him up a long way. (The parents then catalogued the lengthy process involved in trying to find a secondary school that would admit their son.) So we approached the high school first ... and the principal there said, "No we don't want him in our school. We're not a school for those".

(Parent 21: Father of young person with an intellectual disability)

Alcohol and other drug misuse

Half the parents reported drug or alcohol use by their children as contributing to their problems. In a few families it was the father's drinking that was problem-

atic, and for one young person was the reason why he left home. The severity of the problem with the young people varied enormously, and in six cases drug use was reported as leading to major personality and behavioural changes, and was identified by the parents as the reason for the young person leaving home. Several parents reported their complete inability to get any help for their child, and argued the need for drug rehabilitation centres for adolescents under the age of 16 years.

Contact with police and the criminal justice system

Contact with the police and the legal system occurred in almost two-thirds of the families in the sample. The young people could have been either the victims of abuse and subject to court orders; have been brought home by the police when missing; or have been involved in offending behaviour such as vandalism, shop lifting, breaking and entering. Eleven young people (37%) were in this last category, seven boys and four girls. Of the young men with intellectual disabilities, four out of five have had contact with police or courts in relation to offences.

Parent distress and sense of loss

This account has necessarily focused on the aspects of these family relationships which are causing distress, to emphasise how much family members are hurting and where intervention could be helpful. The concern and care which the parents in this sample have for their children is frequently expressed. The parents are distressed and troubled by what has happened in their families, and in a number of cases it is possible to see a cycle being repeated from their own unhappy childhoods. It was not uncommon for mothers to cry during the interview and their grief is expressed throughout the interviews.

Mother: At one stage I'm sure I must have been very close to a nervous breakdown, because I couldn't talk about him. I couldn't anything. I just cried and cried and cried and cried. It was like he died. (Parent 9)

As will be elaborated later in this chapter, many parents receive no support in coming to terms with what has happened and, indeed, are left with unresolved feelings of grief, guilt and blame.

Event-triggered or long-term process homelessness

The interviews were categorised as either indicating whether a long-term process of abuse, conflict, or other substantial difficulties was apparent in the family experience, or whether there was no such history discernable. In these latter cases, there was often a specific event which seemed to trigger home leaving. In some cases it was not possible to identify either a long-term process or a specific event, and in some cases both are apparent. In families where the two biological parents are present, homelessness tends to be more often event-triggered. Few other differences are suggested in this data.

Parent perceptions of the responses received and needed

Parents' description of the responses they received from community or government support services were coded according to the following time scale. Responses occurred:

- 1 well in advance of the young person leaving home;
- 2 just prior to the young person leaving home;
- 3 within one month of the young person leaving home; or
- 4 over one month after the young person left home.

Table 6.4: Number of parents reporting particular types of response (N=30; multiple responses given)

Time relative to young person leaving home	Type of response						
	Shelter	Communication based support	Medical assistance	Material/ financial assistance	Work/ training	Statutory intervention	Other
Well before	2	16	5	1	1	1	12
Just before	3	16	4	1	2	3	9
Within one month after	16	12	3	4	0	3	14
Well after	9	12	4	7	3	4	12

Table 6.5: Sources of responses given at different times in the process of home-leaving

Response from	Time relative to young person leaving home			
	Well before	Just before	Within one month	Well after one month
Friends	1	2	10	6
Family	2	2	2	2
Police	4	6	14	7
School	8	6	3	0
Church	1	0	3	0
Health professional	7	6	3	3
Government social service	10	7	14	16
Non-government welfare Service	7	11	14	9
Community	2	0	0	2
Other	3	1	1	4

The number of parents who reported particular types of response at different times relative to their young person leaving home are reported in Table 6.4.

The figures do not mean that parents did not receive particular forms of response, but merely that they did not report it in the interviews. As described earlier in this chapter, many families have been in distress for a number of years, and the figures show that parents are often receiving communication-based support before, or after the homeless episodes. Table 6.5 summarises the different sources of the above responses. The most common respondents were government social services, non-government welfare agencies and police.

The sampled parents, in the period just before or within one month of home leaving, most commonly

accessed or gained service response from non-government welfare organisations, government social services, the police and friends in that order. Schools and health professionals responded to a lesser degree.

Table 6.6 indicates the number of parents who considered particular types of responses received in the categories well before, just before and within one month were either helpful, or unhelpful. Unhelpful means that the outcome was either not considered helpful or it was considered detrimental. In a small number of cases the respondents view of the response was not given.

While 24 communication-based support responses were cited as helpful an almost equal number were cited as unhelpful. In most cases accommodation services for young people were cited as helpful. Disatisfaction was almost always cited with medical and statutory-based assistance, and the provision of material support to young people.

Table 6.7 summarises the number of parents who indicated that particular responses from different agencies or individuals were helpful or unhelpful either well before, just before or within one month of home leaving. The latter category includes responses that were detrimental as well as those that were merely ineffective.

Sources of support proportionally most helpful from the perspective of parents were various non-welfare community support, including churches, together with other family members. Here support most commonly takes the form of people to talk with who they feel do not judge them negatively. Non-government welfare services were both accessed relatively often and found helpful by most parents.

Table 6.6: Number of parents reporting particular types of response as helpful or unhelpful (N=30)

Response type	Helpful	Unhelpful
Communication based support	24	21
Medical assistance	3	9
Shelter/ accommodation	6	3
Material assistance (e.g. income support)	2	6
Statutory	0	6
Work/ employment training	1	1

Table 6.7: Number of parents reporting responses from different sources as being either helpful or unhelpful (N=30)

Response from	Helpful	Unhelpful
Friends	5	4
Family	4	1
Police	9	6
School	6	10
Church	5	2
Health professional	2	8
Community	6	1
Non-government welfare services	19	8
Government social services	9	16

It is the non-judgemental manner of intervention that parents imply marks the helpfulness of non-government welfare services.

Mother: I rang Y Agency ... and I said, "Look I'm just desperate, I'm at the end of my tether". And they were excellent. They just said, "Look we've got a camp on tomorrow, we'll at least take him off you for the weekend" ... and they've really been the only group that have hung in there. (Parent 26)

Mother: They ... have an office there where they are working with parents of homeless youth and also kids that just – parents that need time out – if they have got a crisis at home – they own a home where the children can go and stay ... basically it's time out for the parents. They were very much, we felt, supportive of the whole family. (Parent 5)

In relation to those responses by non-government service providers regarded as helpful by parents, the characteristics most commonly referred to are the capacity to work non-judgementally with the whole family, the utilisation of mediation and education programs through which parents and young people develop new ways to relate and negotiate, and the availability of time-out accommodation which can provide temporary relief from family pressures.

Friends are cited equally as helpful and unhelpful. They can disapprove and lack understanding.

Mother: Then I have actually had friends who I have had for 15 years actually turn their back on me. Yes, because they said I should wipe him, forget about him altogether ... I just said, well, he's my son and he'll always be my son no matter what he does. (Parent 9)

Parents also report having variable experiences with the police:

Mother: They were wonderful. The police were on every occasion fantastic. (Parent 1)

Father: We called the police and they didn't want to know about us. (Parent 12)

While a particular family doctor might be noted as supportive, all parents who consulted psychiatrists found the response they received to be either ineffective or detrimental.

Father: The psychiatrist wasn't much chop either. I mean she used to compare E (young person) to her grand children. (Parent 12)

Mother: When I went to see the psychiatrist in the hospital because we were afraid she was going to

do something again (make another suicide attempt), she just spoke to D and didn't want to know what I had to say, more or less treated me like a moron. I actually felt quite humiliated and shut-out. (Parent 6)

Such feelings of exclusion and humiliation are also reported frequently by parents interacting with government social services.

Father: They (statutory welfare authority) actually worked very strenuously to prevent any contact. They even told her that we didn't want her. It was a real conspiracy ... You never saw the same person twice ... Social workers treat us like we are some kind of mass murderers. (Parent 12)

Mother: Or they won't say anything. Their only comment is, "I'm sorry, I can't tell you anything because of the Privacy Act".

Father: Won't tell you where she is, won't tell you if she's getting a benefit, won't tell you if she's been reviewed. (Parent 28)

Many parents feel that they are being blamed by service providers. They feel put on the defensive and their focus becomes one of justifying their own actions and placing the blame back on the young person, rather than working to rectify damaged family relations. Parents also feel excluded by service providers who often work only with the young person and do not include parents in the process.

A number of parents indicated that the young person fabricated or deliberately distorted events for their own purposes (for instance to obtain the youth homeless allowance). Further, these parents believe that the young person's version of reality is automatically believed by service providers without sufficient investigation. Parents generally indicate feeling a high level of defensiveness, and point to the need for sophisticated intervention strategies on the part of service providers that avoid blaming, that enable them to listen to and affirm all parties in a family conflict and work towards a reconciliation that is satisfactory to all. Inherent in this expressed view, is the perspective that young people should not have rights which seem to exclude parents.

Assistance unobtainable

In addition to the responses which parents and their families actually received, and often found helpful, 21 parents (70%) told stories of trying extremely hard to get help but failing. This was particularly so when the presenting issues concerned drug and alcohol misuse, mental health, or support for young people with an intellectual disability.

Mother: I used to sit on the phone and cry to them and say, "My daughter will be dead and I will be burying her before you decide what you are going to do" ... I rang so many numbers. I've got – my address book is still full of numbers.

(Parent 29)

Mother: There was no counselling. There was no rehabilitation ... There was nothing. We rang everywhere ... But there was absolutely nothing. All of them said, oh, but he's too young. If he was 16 and getting the dole they could take him in ... They said, oh, it's a shame but he's too young. I said, "Yes, but he's still got a problem" ...

(Parent 9)

Mother: We went back to the police station and the policeman said, "Look I'm going to see if I can get her put somewhere, dried out and assessed and see if we can do something to save this 14-year-old". And we sat and waited and he came back in 15 minutes and he shook his head and said, "There is nowhere I can put her, the only place I can put her is a half-way house and she can walk out, and it's best you take her home.

Father: And she was gone the next day. (Parent 13)

Overall there was an extremely high amount of unmet need for parents, many of whom indicated they had been quite desperate. It is also clear that parents believed the problem overwhelmingly resided in the young person. It is possible that some available assistance may not have been accessed, if it was not premised on this.

Prevention and early intervention

Parents were asked about the sort of support that would have made a difference to them, and also about how youth homelessness in general could be prevented. The number of parents indicating particular types of response is summarised in Table 6.8.

Eleven parents spoke of the importance of family counselling or mediation. As discussed before, there is a need for sensitivity in those who work with families to ensure that they listen to and affirm all parties.

Mother: I'd like to say to the professional people that when parents do come and cry out for help, listen to them ... when they are crying out, don't think they don't have any idea of what they're feeling or what their child is feeling, or what they are crying out for. (Parent 18)

Eleven parents identified issues to do with safe, supervised accommodation for their young person as being of importance to them personally, and also in

Table 6.8: Number of parents indicating particular types of intervention as needed in their case or needed in general (N=30)

	Needed in this case	Needed in general
Counselling/family mediation	11	11
Accommodation/time out	11	11
Schools to operate differently	2	10
Greater discipline	4	8
Changes of laws/family services	0	9
Financial help	3	2
Community awareness	0	7
Parent education	0	4

general. Of particular concern was the need for respite or "time out". Six parents identified this as something they personally had needed, and ten parents identified it as a general strategy.

Father: If I'd have known about the services of (X agency) ... they may have been able ... to have taken her away from home to look after her for a period of time, to settle things down may have been more effective. (Parent 20)

Young people with intellectual disabilities and their families often had particular respite accommodation needs:

Mother: I honestly believe that respite may have stopped all of this happening, because his proper place is at home where we can look after him. (Parent 21)

Once their sons with intellectual disabilities reached maturity, parents identified the urgent need for supervised accommodation where they could live in semi-independence.

Mother: I'd like to see a little complex where he can have his own room or unit, but where there's someone overseeing ... he can't cook ... he has no idea of caring for himself. (Parent 27)

The other urgent accommodation need expressed by a set of parents (where young people had become addicted to drugs and/or alcohol) was for rehabilitation programs for those under 16 years.

Schools

In spite of quite a catalogue of complaints about school operation, during the course of their interviews only

two parents specifically nominated changes to school as needed in their cases. These were in the form of more individualised programs. When considering prevention or early intervention in general, one third of parents identified changes to schools as being potentially helpful. Changes included:

- a modification of school curriculum to cater for special needs, particularly those of young people with intellectual disabilities;
- the development of parent education or interpersonal skills type programs, and the involvement of parents in those;
- abolition of suspensions and expulsions; and
- greater control over truancy.

Not surprisingly, given the views of some parents quoted earlier in this chapter, a number of parents wanted an increased emphasis in schools and the family on discipline and the enforcement of rules, and they wanted schools to stop teaching children about their “rights”.

Changes to laws/family services

Related to the issue of discipline is some parents’ concern about the way in which state child welfare services operate. These parents want there to be less focus on the child and a greater involvement of parents.

Discussion: Parents’ and young people’s perceptions compared

The interviews with both parents and young people asked for their definitions of home and homelessness. This last section compares and contrasts the two sets of data.

Parents’ definitions of homelessness and home

Most, but not all parents were asked for their descriptions of homelessness and home. Responses were categorised as to whether they focused primarily on issues to do with shelter and the provision of material needs, on the absence or presence of family, or whether they included affective criteria such as the absence or presence of caring relationships or feelings of belonging.

Homelessness

When defining homelessness, one-third of parents (9) gave shelter definitions.

Mother: To me it brings up the image of somebody who hasn’t got a place to sleep basically, and needs

to go somewhere like St Vincents de Paul if they can get in. (Parent 16)

Father: To me, it’s someone that has got no place to live or stay, no income, no nothing, you know, just out in the street – like a derelict or something. (Parent 13)

Mother: Kids living on the street. (Parent 8)

In contrast, two-thirds of parents (18) gave definitions involving having no family, or not being able to be with your family, and while people were mentioned, the accompanying positive affect to do with love and belonging was not mentioned explicitly.

Mother: If you are homeless you have no-one. Not just no home. (Parent 14)

Mother: Well I think homelessness is when you can’t be with your Mum and Dad. I mean, he might be in safe hands where he is now, but to me he is still homeless because he’s not with his mother or his dad. (Parent 24)

Two parents provided definitions which included affective qualities such as love and belonging.

Mother: You can be homeless and still have a home. Parents are so wrapped up in themselves. It’s about when you don’t belong – when no-one wants them – even if there is somewhere to put their head for the night. (Parent 17)

Mother: I was orphaned and I was put in foster care homes. Even though I was put in those I still felt homeless.

Interviewer: Why was that?

Mother: Because I didn’t feel the love. (Parent 18)

Almost a third of respondents (8) explicitly mentioned that they did not consider their young person to have been homeless. According to these parents, they had a home, but they chose not to live there.

Father: So I don’t class (K) as homeless. The department does, I don’t. (K’s) got a home. He can come back here if he wants to live by the rules. (Parent 21)

Home

When defining home almost all parents (22) who answered described home in terms of affective qualities.

Mother: Well to me a house is not a home to paraphrase a famous book. A home has a supportive atmosphere to me, somewhere where you feel welcome and comfortable. (Parent 16)

Mother: A home to me is a loving and safe and caring and nurturing environment for everyone within that family unit. (Parent 5)

Only four parents described home in shelter-based terms. Of the parents who said that their young person was not homeless because he/she had a home, all but one clearly defined a home in terms of loving, caring relationships.

Young people's definitions of homelessness and home

Responses by young people were classified using the same categories of shelter-based, family-based and affective criteria. It was a feature of the responses by young people that they cited criteria from more than one of these categories.

Homelessness

Homelessness was defined solely in terms of having no shelter, or shelter of an inadequate or tenuous quality, by 12 young people and included by a further six together with affective criteria.

When people live on the streets, just walk around, loitering, you know, have a few and sit down. (Young person 24)

If you need support from somewhere, like accommodation support, that kind of stuff, well then you are homeless, really, because if you don't get that support, you'll be out on the streets. (Young person 21)

Five young people defined homelessness solely in family-based terms:

Being out of your real home. Not actually living in the streets but being out of your natural parents' or people that have been there for you, like if you have been adopted out they're adoptive parents. (Young person 1)

[Homelessness is] when you are not living with a guardian when you are really young. (Young person 22)

Definitions in this category often juxtaposed being on the streets with not being at the family home. Eight young people defined homelessness solely in affective terms with a further ten combining affective with shelter or family-based criteria.

Just not having anywhere to go, and sort of like having no support, you know no-one there ... Yes, no-one there for you, that's what I think. (Young person 8)

This example cites the absence of particular affective qualities. Other qualities which, when absent, define homelessness, included the lack of love or a sense of belonging, safety or support.

I'd say homeless would be like not having anywhere to go, and sort of not having anyone you know around you. (Young person 17)

... no-one generally cares what you ... with what happens to you. (Young person 33)

Other definitions cited the presence of some negative feeling such as fear or loneliness. Speaking of a boyfriend a young woman said:

... but then, when he started hitting me around and stuff, I started feeling really lonely and feeling I had no-one around to talk to and ... I knew that at the end of that, that I was homeless. (Young person 34)

In summary, most young people in the sample talked about homelessness not only in terms of an absence of adequate shelter but also as absence of qualities such as caring, love or belonging and/or the presence of negative feelings or circumstances.

Home

The overwhelming view of the 36 young people was that home is not defined by a place, even that of the family of origin. It is defined by their experience of it, through qualities that are largely felt, such as feeling safe, and through the way others treat them, such as being listened to. Only two young people defined home only in terms of being in the family of origin. The main themes of response are the following.

- Home is where people talk to you, listen and sort out problems in a supportive way:

Communication, probably [is] the most important thing. Everyone has to talk to each other and try to sort their problems out. (Young person 21)

You are at home when you can communicate, like having your say and people listen to you without getting abused. (Young person 18)

Feeling of security, support, umm like everybody supporting one another, communication and openness. (Young person 23)

- Home is where there is a sense of belonging and being wanted:

... somewhere where you belong, you're wanted. (Young person 12)

Having a home is somewhere where you can live, invite friends over to stay or to have dinner, or somewhere that you are comfortable with living. (Young person 15)

- Home is where there is familiarity

I think I will have a place where I'll be living there by myself but its still not going to feel like home, unless I've got other people there that I've known for a while. (Young person 34)

- Home is safe and free from abuse

A home is a place where you have people who will support you and not put you down or abuse you in any way. (Young person 9)

There is a degree of similarity between the responses given by parents and young people to the question of defining what home means. Both describe an environment where people feel loved, safe, and supported. What is different is that parents do not describe, as many young people do, specific behaviours or attributes which indicate how such feelings are maintained. The young people interviewed identified home as a place where they were talked to, listened to and where problems get sorted out. Parents identify the same feelings but did not specify particular behaviours necessary for these to be created or sustained.

The definitions of homelessness by young people and parents reflect quite a distinctly different orientation. Parents far more frequently mentioned family-based definitions and far less frequently mentioned definitions which reflected feelings. While young people mentioned shelter-based criteria, they also mentioned affective criteria to the same extent.

The view supported by this data is that parents have a limited appreciation of what being homeless means to young people, and of the contradictions young people see in what happens at home compared with the maintenance of the conditions of a home. This fits with what Petr (1992) calls “adultcentrism”. In general, adultcentrism describes how adults often view the world from an adult perspective which does not appreciate and value the often different perspective that children and young people have of the world. The defensiveness of parents, reflected in responses such as “but they have a home here”, supports this analysis.

This said, there is more common ground between parents and young people regarding the notion of what home is, than regarding the notion of homelessness. The exploration with young people and parents as to what they understand a home to be, and what characteristics they feel a home should have, presents as a positive direction for building mutual understanding. This has implications for how response strategies in prevention and early intervention are conceptualised and promoted.

Matched parent/young person interviews

In four cases both the parent(s) and a child were interviewed. This arose through the agencies referring these parents and young people separately for interview. These matched interviews provide in some small way a useful opportunity to consider similarities and differ-

ences in the perceptions of young people and parents. The following observations of this data can be made.

- In none of the cases did information provided by young people about the circumstances at home contradict information provided by their parents. This was true even when negative behaviour such as violence by the young person was reported. The view expressed by some parents that young people would fabricate stories is not reflected in the data.
- While parents almost always gave longer accounts in relation to the reasons for leaving home, they often did not reveal some of the contextual information provided by the young person. A close reading of the interviews supports the view these were omissions by the parent(s) rather than distorted or invented material by the young people. In one case where the young person indicated long-term alcohol problems of the father as having substantial impact on the family and home leaving, this was not mentioned by the parent. There are issues of social embarrassment which could well contribute to this, as well as the view that parents do not admit or perceive some significant parent-related factors behind home leaving.
- Where young people and parents did clearly differ in some instances was in their respective views as to what was needed to prevent homelessness. For example in one case there were opposite views as to the importance of income support for young people who are homeless.

Conclusion

Parents’ accounts of their experience of home leaving which resulted in homelessness leave in no doubt the distress, hurt, anger and, implicitly, the defensiveness and embarrassment they can feel about what has happened. Parents generally identify their children as the “problem”, while at the same time indicating significant levels of difficulty, instability, stress and problematic behaviour within the family – specifically, in relation to one or more parent/s or adults. Services, peers, and government income support arrangements are also targeted as sites for blame.

Parents report great difficulty in gaining adequate responses from service providers at critical times, prior to and after home leaving. Parents report the same range of issues as causing early home leaving as do young people, with the exception that parents generally do not include the feelings and perspectives of their children as issues. It is significant that although there is a degree of similarity in parents’ and young people’s definitions of home (where people feel loved,

safe, supported) parents, unlike young people do not include in their definitions specific behaviours which indicate how such feelings are developed and maintained (through listening, getting problems sorted out, talking to each other). This, together with a tendency to blame the child and exclude their own role in the process of early home leaving from discussion, supports the view that parents have a substantial blind spot in respect of the antecedents of early home leaving. On the question of "what part did I or we as parents play in the process leading to home leaving and homelessness, and how could we have done things differently?" there is a general silence.

The implications for parent support and education strategies include: the need to examine the notion of home from a child's perspective; to develop the capacity to self-reflect on the behaviours that are consistent with their own notions of home; and to develop skills in discussing these matters with their children.

Parents most frequently gain responses from non-Government welfare services, government social services, police and friends in the periods just prior to home leaving and within one month of home leaving, that is in the period relevant for early intervention. Responses seen as having been helpful were largely communication-based strategies with the availability of some form of time out, with temporary accommodation next most frequently mentioned. Responses from non-Government welfare services, other members of the family, the general community, and churches were seen as having been helpful during this time, with gov-

ernment social services, health professionals, and schools cited more often as unhelpful. Friends and the police were cited as helpful and unhelpful to a similar extent. Parents indicated that in order to prevent homelessness among young people, whole of family counselling, family mediation, time out accommodation and changed school practices were most needed. A small number of parents prioritised strategies to increase discipline on young people and remove all income support to them.

There is clearly a great need for parents to have opportunities to talk about and express their concerns, whether these be about the situation regarding a child, or about other issues and stresses in the family. Parents indicate a general lack of such supports. There is a level of parent anger regarding what they perceive to be a lack of acknowledgment by service providers. A number of factors may contribute to this. First, parent support services are not available generally, and while services individually may try to respond they are not primarily intended to undertake this role. Second, the view of what is needed by parents and what young people believe is needed is at times quite different. Parents can perceive as threatening, attempts by the young person to express their views and seek service support.

Of critical relevance to models of best practice, therefore, is how parent and young person relations are understood and how parents' needs are understood and responded to.

Chapter 7

PERSPECTIVES OF SERVICE PROVIDERS

National Survey

THIS CHAPTER describes the results of the national survey of government and non-government service providers in each Australian State and Territory. The survey was conducted to gain an understanding of practice in the prevention of and early intervention into youth homelessness from the perspective of service providers.

The sample

This chapter is based on 115 returned and completed surveys. A total of 658 surveys were distributed, 25 were returned to sender “address unknown”, possibly due to the high turnover among many services. Respondents to the survey included 31 government services (8 Commonwealth, 18 State, 5 Local) and 84 non-government services. Survey returns by State and Territory were: New South Wales (28), Victoria (28), Queensland (23), Western Australia (11), Tasmania (10), South Australia (7), Northern Territory (5) and Australian Capital Territory (3). Sixty-nine of these were youth services, 26 were family-focused services and 20 were school-based services. Table 7.1 provides further information on the sample.

For the purpose of analysis, survey responses have been categorised by broad service focus: youth services;

family-focused services and school-based services. The sample was derived from lists of services receiving funding from relevant programs, services known or recommended as undertaking prevention and/or early intervention work, and other service providers working in the area of homelessness listed on the Kids’ Help Line national database.

Given the relevance of referral patterns to early intervention and prevention, especially with regard to which agencies are the first to know a problem exists, respondents were asked to rank in order (1, 2, 3, 4) their top four referral sources. Notable comparisons are drawn between government and non-government service providers. Table 7.2 reports on referral sources within the context of service type i.e. youth services, family-focused services and school.

The highest source of referral to government service providers was schools, with parents and young people themselves also being frequently cited. The greatest source of referral to non-government providers was young people themselves, with other non-government welfare services being frequently identified as a referral source. Non-government service providers also identified schools and parents as significant referral sources.

Table 7.2 shows the police to be a negligible referral source to service providers (government and non-gov-

Table 7.1: Number of respondents categorised by funding source (N=115)

<i>Youth services</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Family-focused services</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Schools</i>	<i>No.</i>
SAAP	38	Family counselling/therapy	12	Student 'at risk' programs	11
Mental health service	5	Alternative care services	5	Whole of school pastoral care programs	8
Community placement program (SAAP funded)	4	Family reconciliation/mediation services	4	Aboriginal Education Grant funded	1
Local government funded services	3	Parent/adolescent mediation (Attorney-General's)	2		
Adolescent health services	3	Family Court Counselling Service (Attorney-General's)	1		
Church self-funded services	3	Community Justice Centre	1		
Drug and alcohol services	2	Parent support group	1		
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services	2				
Community Services Grants Program (NSW)	2				
Disability service	1				
Prevention of Youth Homelessness Program Office of Youth Affairs (VIC)	1				
Crime prevention program	1				
Gay and lesbian service	1				
Employment support service	1				
Telephone counselling service	1				
Non-English-speaking services	1				
Total services	69		26		20

ernment) with 93% of the total respondents not locating police anywhere in their one to four ranking of most frequent sources of referral. This contrasts with the high numbers of parents and young people interviewed who indicated contact with police at an early stage in the process of early home leaving.

As identified in Table 7.2 young people themselves were the most significant source of referral to youth services with non-government welfare services and state welfare departments also being frequently cited as sources of referral. Schools and parents were mentioned less frequently, but as Table 7.2 shows, these groups did represent significant sources of referral to youth services.

The table indicates that

parents constitute the major source of referral to the family-focused service providers, with state welfare departments and schools also ranking highly. The most

Table 7.2: Number of referrals to services, by source

<i>Referral source</i>	<i>Youth services</i>	<i>Family-focused services</i>	<i>Schools</i>	<i>Totals</i>
Young people themselves	52	8	15	75
Non-government welfare services	45	11	4	60
State Welfare Department	39	16	4	59
Schools	30	14	13	57
Parents	26	18	11	55
Health service/general practitioner	9	7	0	16
Department of Social Security	12	1	0	13
Employment Support Service	9	0	1	10
Police	4	1	1	6
Psychiatrist	3	1	0	4
Other	11	7	3	21

significant sources of referral to the schools in the sample were young people themselves and schools (school personnel and other schools). Parents also ranked highly as a referral source to schools.

Respondents were asked to identify as percentages, the age range of the client group(s) which accessed their service. Of most interest to this study is the 12 to 18 age-group. Both family-focused and youth services indicate one third (34%) of their clients are 12 to 15 years of age. Youth services indicate 48% of the clients are 16 to 18 years of age, whereas family-focused services indicate only 18% of their clients are in this age range. The response from schools reflected the age range of secondary students.

Table 7.3 indicates the average percentage of the 18 years and under client group who were from non-English-speaking backgrounds; were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders; or had an intellectual disability or mental illness.

Table 7.3: Average percentage of those aged 18 and under who accessed the service providers

Service providers	NESB %	ATSI %	Intellectual disability %	Mental illness %
Youth service	14	7	7.5	18
Family-focused services	4	5.5	5	3
Schools	13	14	2.5	2

Across the three service types, males and females represented the same average percentage of clients under 18 years of age. The higher average percentages of non-English-speaking background young people in the case of youth services reflects the 14 youth service providers who indicated that 20% or more of their client group in the 18 and under age range were young people from non-English-speaking backgrounds; two youth services indicated that these young people comprised 90% or more of their client group in that age range. Similarly two schools indicated that 90% or more of their 18 and under client group were young people from non-English-speaking backgrounds. Even so it is interesting to note no family-focused services indicated 20% or more of their work was with young people from non-English-speaking backgrounds. In a similar vein, few youth services (7) in the sample indicated that 20% or more of their client group were young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. In contrast, one school indicated 90% of their 18 and under client group were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Twenty youth services indicated 20% or more of their client group consisted of young people with mental illness; three youth services in this group stated

that more than 90% of their young person client group suffered from mental illness.

The additional client groups most frequently mentioned (in terms of the number of times cited by service providers) were young parents or pregnant young women (15), parents and/or families (10), young women (5), students (4). Other client groups mentioned (by two or fewer services) included refugees, witnesses of domestic violence, young people engaging in alcohol and other drug misuse, young people involved in or at risk of becoming involved in prostitution, young offenders, victims of child abuse, gay and lesbian young people and young men.

Services were asked to indicate how often their work with clients under 18 years of age involved work with the parents or guardians. Thirty-six (52%) of the youth services indicated that their work with the 18 and under client group virtually always, or often, involved work with parents or guardians. A further 24 (35%) reported that parents or guardians were occasionally involved. Similar results were found with school respondents, 11 (55%) of whom maintained that their work with this age-group virtually always, or often, involved work with their parents or guardians. A further nine (45%) reported occasional work with parents or guardians. Twenty (77%) of the family-focused service respondents revealed that parents/guardians were involved virtually always, or often, in their work with the 18 and under client group, and four (15%) reported that parents or guardians were occasionally involved. The figure for youth services is perhaps higher than expected, however, with most youth services being involved with parents of young people in the course of service delivery.

Across school, youth and family-focused services, the extent to which work with the parents involved the male and/or female parent or guardian was extremely consistent. In all services two-thirds of the work involved the female parent or guardian and one-third the male parent or guardian.

Current early intervention strategies

Service providers were asked to indicate if their service undertook any work which could be described as early intervention into youth homelessness, that is, interventions that target young people and/or their families before the young person has left home or within one month of the young person leaving home. Overall 80% of service providers recorded that their service engaged in early intervention work, with 95% of schools, 85% of family-focused services and 74% of youth services

indicating engagement in early intervention.

Service providers were requested to estimate when their service was most likely to *first* become involved with a young person:

- well in advance of the young person leaving home;
- just prior to potentially leaving;
- within one week; or
- within one month of leaving.

Interventions from the family-focused services and schools in the sample typically first occurred well in advance of the young person leaving home, and were less likely to first occur just prior to the young person leaving home or within one week of the young person having left home. In the crisis periods within one week and one month of the young person leaving home, youth services indicated high levels of first becoming involved.

The survey also sought to gather information on the *types* of intervention strategies provided by service providers in relation to the same time frame. The following section presents information on their responses. (Seventeen per cent of those services which specified they did early intervention work did not specify any strategies.)

Family-focused services and early intervention

For the purpose of this discussion, family-focused services have been divided into three categories: those who identify as family support, family mediation/reconciliation, or alternative care services respectively.

In the family support services, the average age of clients was younger than the family mediation/reconciliation services where most clients were in the 12 to 15 age range. In family support services, clients were in equal numbers for the 0 to 11 and 12 to 18 age ranges. Work with children and young people, however, comprises only a small percentage of their work, with 70% directed at servicing parents and caregivers. A significant number of the family support and alternative care services make no distinction between the strategies they use at different times in the process of home leaving leading to homelessness. Family mediation services, however, did tend to indicate distinctive and detailed intervention strategies used for the different time periods. Family support services cite a far greater number of strategies directed at parents compared with those directed at young people. The most common strategies identified were family or individual counselling with some references to parent education and referral to other agencies.

In the period well before early home leaving, coun-

selling is the most common strategy cited by family support services. Outcomes for this time period include improved communication and understanding between young person and parents. Alternative care services also identified counselling as a common strategy along with respite care. Outcomes for this period are focused on the safety of the young person. The strategies identified by family mediation or reconciliation services included family therapy, mediation, family conferencing to identify needs, roles, expectations and responsibilities, individual counselling and referral. Outcomes most often cited included improved communication and reduced conflict between young people and parents, and the young person continuing to live at home.

In the period just prior to the young person leaving home, family support services and alternative care services again focused on counselling and the use of time out or other accommodation options which relieved pressure in the family. Retention of the young person at home continued to be the preferred outcome.

Family mediation or reconciliation services saw this period as particularly critical. Strategies for this time period are those already mentioned above, together with a focus on crisis intervention to reduce conflict. Successful outcomes focused on the young person remaining at home, with all parties having improved commitment to and skills in dealing with issues and any resultant conflict. Creative solutions to the need for temporary alternative accommodation, such as caravan accommodation, in the backyard or staying with another family member, were also cited as positive strategies.

Strategies cited as used within one week of a young person leaving home indicate diminished activity by family support services. One service suggested that their strategy was one where they “encouraged a settling-in time for the young person by limiting contact [by parent/s] initially”. While reconciliation was identified as a successful outcome by a small number of family support services, returning home ceased being cited as a goal of intervention. Parents and young people are dealt with separately and with the view that independent living, or reconciliation, are the indicators of successful outcomes. Strategies and outcomes cited by alternative care services remain the same as for the preceding periods.

Strategies cited by family mediation and reconciliation services in this time period were focused on returning home, time out or reconciliation (when the young person is living in alternative accommodation). Family therapy and mediation were again cited as strategies to assist in relationship building and improved communication. Accommodation of the young person in a supportive environment outside of their family was cited as an indicator of success, provided reconciliation options remain open.

In the period of one month of the young person leaving, home strategies identified by family support services and alternative care services were the same as the preceding time periods, with the addition of a focus on life skills training directed at young people. Very few strategies are focused on assisting the young person to return home. The successful outcomes cited were seen in the light of accommodation outside of the home, with some emphasis on reconciliation.

Strategies identified by family mediation services continue to focus on reunification where possible. Return home by the young person, reconciliation and improved relationships are cited as indicators of successful outcomes.

Family mediation services are focused much more clearly on retention, restoration and reconciliation than the family support and alternative care services – where the focus after the young person has left home is more on exploring alternative accommodation arrangements.

Youth services and early intervention

SAAP youth services indicate they tend not to see young people well before home leaving occurs. Most report a small proportion of young people are first seen just prior to leaving home with the majority being seen after home leaving has occurred, but with significant numbers in the first month. SAAP youth services can be broadly divided for the purpose of this discussion into those with a major focus on young people 16 years and older, and those with a significant percentage of young people aged 12 to 15 years.

In those SAAP services with a principal target group of 16 years and over, it is common to provide support within the context of a movement to independent living, where contact with parents is cited as being around issues of letting parents know the young person is okay, and supporting contact between the young person and the parents when this is seen as appropriate. In these services, when young people make contact after leaving home, no consideration of exploring a return home is cited. The implicit view presented is that the circumstances which lead young people to the SAAP service are such that movement to independent accommodation is the only viable option. This is reflected in the comment of one respondent that “opening of communication [is] not possible due to family dysfunction”. This appears somewhat at odds with the earlier reported data that 52% of youth services indicated they “virtually always” or “often” work with parents or guardians. There are grounds for suggesting that SAAP services may be quite polarised in relation to the extent they work with parents. Also, although some services may have contact with parents, the contact is not substantial enough or systematic

enough to have warranted identifying a family of origin strategy in their description of early interventions employed in the service.

Most of these services also see a proportion of 12- to 15-year-olds, often 5% to 25% of the total client group. Some indicate that a significant proportion of these young people have been out of home for longer than one month or have been, in reality, homeless through state wardship for considerable periods of time. The responses to the survey indicate little orientation towards making family links, beyond broad statements saying such links are appropriate. The notion of “appropriate” seems often to be predicated on judgements regarding the safety of the young person at home. The degree to which such perspectives underestimate the potential for links between a young person and their family, or are a reaction to the paucity of supports and resources available to deal with family crisis, is a matter worthy of consideration. It could be argued that SAAP services with clients as young as 12 to 15 years should have access to a specified early intervention strategy which includes exploration of family based issues.

Some SAAP services with a small percentage of users in the 12 to 15 age-group do have clearly identified early intervention, family-oriented practices which go beyond the requirement to notify the state welfare authority that a young person under 16 is there. In the period before home leaving occurs these services typically cited a strategy of facilitating discussions with the young person and the family, discussions or negotiations which suggested sources of additional support for young person and/or family. SAAP agencies indicate they do not see many clients at this stage. The goal is for the home to be a safe and supportive one, or if leaving is to occur, then this occurs with options in place so homelessness is not a consequence. Unless referred to a family mediation service these discussions are indicated as generally informal, rather than involving contracted counselling sessions.

More formalised strategies such as family mediation and time-out/respite options are cited as relevant to the period just before leaving home. A number of services indicate an action plan is developed at this stage where both parents and the young person are satisfied.

In the period following leaving home these services continue to cite individual counselling and family mediation as strategies used alongside the exploration of housing options. Family mediation is indicated as becoming more difficult as the period out of home increases. Both returning home and re-establishing positive family contact and support are cited as indicators of successful outcomes.

The young person is seen as having rights, such as the right to be safe, to leave home and the right to have an independent life. This is accompanied by a

view that resolving difficulties may result in a young person returning home and that this can be the best outcome in some circumstances. This possibility is actively explored without diminishing the commitment to the young person's basic rights to safety and recognition of their right to self-determination.

Other SAAP services indicate more than a third of their users are aged 12 to 15 years. These services can be divided into those with an early intervention strategy which prioritises an examination of family issues, and those which prioritise the establishment of independent living or simply notify the relevant state welfare authority that a young person under the age of 16 is at the service.

For those with a family issues focus, the strategies used are similar to those cited for services with an older target group, but with the following differences. They indicate that they virtually never see young people before home leaving occurs or before a crisis that occurs immediately before home leaving. Strategies used at this point include making contact with the parents by phone, family counselling and mediation, offering support to the family, explaining to the young person what it is like out of home (a "reality check"), and making links to the school counsellor. This family-focused approach is used in the month after home leaving occurs with the view that return home or reconciliation are possible. These services clearly adopt a focus of exploring family issues from the perspective of identifying problems that are preventing the young person returning home. Family restoration or reconciliation is viewed as desirable though not necessarily possible.

Community placement program (SAAP funded) respondents clearly locate themselves within an early intervention framework where the goal is family retention, reunification or reconciliation. These programs provide outreach support to families prior to home leaving which includes family conferencing, referral to mediation, counselling, access to parent skills training, and when time out or respite is needed, use families in the local community to provide accommodation to the young person while reunification or reconciliation oriented work occurs. The respondents indicated this approach is used in respect of young people both where conflict occurs before home leaving and when home leaving has already occurred.

A variety of non-accommodation-based youth services indicated they could not cite particular strategies on the basis that their approach is client driven, empowerment oriented, and that every situation and every young person's needs are different. In contrast, a number of other general youth services indicated they use a client driven, problem solving approach involving a detailed set of strategies which are made available as options to young people. These include actively dis-

cussing with the young person the possibility of returning home, processes to contact parents with the young person's permission, a level of immediately available mediation and counselling, supplemented by referral to more specialist family counselling services. These agencies argue that it is possible to have a client-centred and rights based practice with young people, together with a range of clear processes to respond to issues such as early home leaving.

It is clear from the responses of adolescent health services that when family conflicts cannot be resolved or the situation is abusive, the services undertake early intervention work, particularly in terms of therapeutic interventions such as family counselling and therapy, and referral to other services such as accommodation. Types of health services indicating they undertook relevant work include child and adolescent mental health services (which tend to work with under-16s), and drug and alcohol support services.

Streetwork services which respond to young people once they have become homeless play an early intervention role to the extent that some of the young people who access these services have been away from home for less than a few weeks. One respondent indicated their focus was in providing individualised case management to young people (who were seen as having unique needs) through a streetworker, who was seen as a stable and caring adult. The categorisation of youth issues into program structures was indicated as particularly problematic by one respondent.

For a significant number of youth services little difference in strategies between the four time periods is very common. Often a strategy such as family therapy is offered as the strategy used at all levels, or the service is driven by a very strong belief structure such as a religious rather than welfare orientation. It would seem that such services are largely methodologically driven with a one size fits all approach.

Schools and early intervention

Similarly, a significant number of school respondents make no distinction between the strategies they use at different times in the process of home leaving leading to homelessness: the strategies they cite as using well in advance to home leaving are the same as those they cite as using after home leaving has occurred. Those with the most detailed and clearest strategies are those schools which take more of a "whole of school approach" than a tightly targeted "at risk" student approach. This whole of school approach is reflected in statements of philosophy and school mission in terms of social justice and the valuing of students as individuals.

Respondents from targeted at risk student strategies (such as STAR funded strategies) in the main had fewer articulated and detailed early intervention strategies

than whole of school respondents. They cited goals specific to the at risk population of students rather than focusing on processes that may place a student at risk. Strategies from at risk targeted programs reflected a lower level of interaction with parents.

Schools typically used clearly defined strategies to target students who were at risk of leaving home. However, strategies targeting those students who had left home were less defined or used. In the period well in advance of home leaving, school respondents referred to discussions, usually with a school counsellor, occurring with students and sometimes with parents regarding student issues. Referral to family counselling or mediation services outside the school was the most frequently cited strategy used in relation to parents and home issues. The most common strategy cited by targeted at risk services was information provision and skill development to students through life skills oriented curriculum. Schools with a whole of school focus generally talk about a package of support measures which include educational, material, counselling and family supports. There was significant variability in the criteria cited for successful outcomes in this work.

In approximately 10% of school responses, interventions that solely targeted parents well in advance of the young person leaving home were cited. These included: home visits, parenting courses, referral to conflict resolution or other relevant support agency, marital therapy and community education evenings.

The strategies cited in the period just prior to the young person potentially leaving home were essentially the same in respect of both parents and young people, with the exception that numbers of respondents indicated that they discussed or explored with students at this stage the options of staying at home or finding safe accommodation out of home.

In the period within one week of the young person leaving home, strategies cited most often in relation to parents involved assisting parents to cope with the changed circumstances and assisting in liaison between the young person and their parents. In relation to young people, the most mentioned strategy was about supporting the young person to move towards independent living. There is a large decrease in the citing of strategies to assist the young person and parents in reconciliation. Successful outcomes are most generally stated in terms of school retention and the maintenance of communication between the young person and their parents. Few strategies are cited in the period within one month of the young person leaving home which go beyond general strategies applying also to other times.

Analysis of indicators of successful practice reveal a distinct difference between the responses from targeted at risk programs and whole of school responses. The

targeted programs criteria were generally quite functional, such as school retention, staying at home, better conflict resolution, and an increased awareness of problems by the student. Concern was within the context of school attendance, and it was generally accepted that attendance may be with the student either living at home or independently. By contrast respondents involved in whole of school strategies routinely included as indicators affective and relationship-based criteria: for example, students feeling supported and encouraged, living cooperatively at home, increased appreciation of viewpoints. There is a clear view from these respondents that success is integrally connected with the quality of the young person's relationships and support structures both at school and home.

Intervention strategies identified as most critical

Respondents were asked to identify in order of importance the three most critical strategies implemented by the service to respond to the needs of young people who are at risk of leaving home or who have just left home. Seventy-eight services responded to this question; Table 7.5 details these results.

These strategies were categorised as being directed at young people only, parents only or both parents and young person. One hundred and ten responses were classified as being directed at both young people and parents, 75 towards young people only and 14 towards parents only. Half of the indications of the need for talking to parents come from the family-focused services which comprise 23% of the sample.

Table 7.5 indicates the most commonly cited early intervention strategies involve counselling or talking with, information provision and referral, family therapy, mediation, accommodation, educative courses and various forms of school support. The low use of time out and respite strategies supports interview statements by young people and parents that access to these options is limited.

Suggested "best practices" in early intervention

Service providers were asked to indicate practices they perceived as vital in models of "best practice" in early intervention into youth homelessness. These responses are categorised in Table 7.6 according to the focus of practice cited, that is, whether the response is focused on a service delivery system or characteristic, on whole families, on young people or parents, on schools or on communities.

The greatest number of references are made with

regard to the service focus. Case management/coordination was the subgroup within this practice focus which was most frequently cited with comments ranging from “effective case management to address all the needs/issues involved” and “an intersectorial case management response is required”. It is interesting to note that immediacy of response from the service was mentioned by only a small number of services. A practice focused on families rated highly in terms of service providers’ perceptions of practices vital in models of early intervention. Ensuring the safety and support of young people was also frequently cited as best practice in a model of early intervention. Few services cited practices in relation to parents which again reflects the lower priority of practices directed at parents than at young people or whole of family.

Schools were identified by service providers as a site for early identification of problems. Some respondents additionally cited community education as a vital component of early intervention, or perhaps prevention.

Respondents were asked to nominate the principles/philosophy that should underpin models of best practice in the area of early intervention into youth homelessness. Philosophies focusing on the family were most frequently cited by service providers. These ranged from a belief that family is the best place for the

young person to an acknowledgement that “return home is not always the ‘best’ result”. Philosophies pertaining to the right of young people to feel safe and the need to respect young people also featured prominently in service providers’ comments. A small number of respondents tied the philosophies that they believed should underpin early intervention to the broader structural influences of society and community. Fourteen respondents identified ethical dimensions of principles that they felt should underpin models of early intervention best practice, such as equity, non-discriminatory practice, confidentiality, client participation and social justice.

Prevention

Two-thirds of service providers reported that their service undertook work that was relevant to the prevention of youth homelessness. Respondents were asked to identify the prevention activities of their service (i.e. work aimed at building up “protective” factors in communities, families or individuals so that young people are less likely to experience homelessness). Respondents commonly identified activities which, in the framework of this research, fall into the category of early intervention, again reflecting the lack

of clarity associated with the terms prevention and early intervention. The activities identified by service respondents that could be considered as prevention activities included: information provision and education through schools and the broader community (including health promotion); strategies to develop or challenge the current policy and regulatory context; universally available supports to young people and parents, for example, telephone counselling, drop-in-centres, general school support available to students; and the provision of material support to the young person, for example, through the availability of adequate housing and income support.

Service providers were also asked to identify what is considered a successful outcome of their prevention work. More than one-third of service providers (42) did not respond to the question that related to successful outcomes from prevention activities. Many indicators cited are more accurately described as indicators of successful early intervention activities. A small number of respondents indicated change at a societal and policy level to address the issue of homelessness as a successful outcome. A small number (8) also made ref-

Table 7.4: Most critical current intervention strategies*

<i>Strategy type</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>
Counselling/talking with young people	52.5	41
Information provision and subsequent referral of young person and/or parents	44.8	35
Mediation/negotiation between young person and parents	38.5	30
Family-focused counselling	28.2	22
Facilitate access to safe and secure accommodation	19.2	15
Counselling/talking with parents	17.9	14
Involvement of young person in educative courses	11.5	9
Family reconciliation strategies	9	7
Family therapy	9	7
Maintain young people in their local community	7.7	6
Maintaining service linkages with schools, family service and youth services	7.7	6
School-based pastoral care	6.4	5
Provision of material support	5.1	4
Support to attend or remain at school	5.1	4
Time out/respite	3.8	3
Support staff at school	1.3	1

*Note: 78 service providers identified three strategies each.

Table 7.5: “Best practices” identified by service providers in models of early intervention (N=?)

<i>Practice focus</i>	<i>No.</i>
Service focus	
Case management/coordination	12
Employment of experienced workers together with ongoing training	10
Accessible service	7
Assessment of need undertaken	7
Immediacy of service response	6
Appropriate referral mechanisms	6
Positive relationships developed with clients	6
Adequate resources	4
Family focus	
Family centred focus	17
Family mediation	13
Communication based strategies	5
Family therapy	4
Family reconciliation	3
Young person focus	
Ensure safety and support for young person	15
Early identification of problems	7
Counselling strategies	4
Generate options with young person	2
Educational or employment training	2
Parent focus	
Counselling and support strategies	5
Parenting skills education	2
School focus	
Resourcing of schools to carry out pastoral care role	6
Problem identification leading to early intervention	6
Community focus	
Community education about homelessness and associated social problems	8

erence to community indicators, such as an increased awareness of the needs of young people and particularly an awareness of homelessness, in terms of indicators of a successful prevention outcome.

One possible interpretation (referred to earlier) is the lack of specificity regarding the meanings of prevention and early intervention among service providers. It may, however, also indicate that despite homelessness having clear social dimensions, the prevention of homelessness is most strongly understood as being addressed by change at the individual and family levels, whether this be attitudinal or behavioural. It is clear that service providers focus predominantly on situational factors, and further, that they have a largely individualised picture of what constitutes successful practice in relation to the prevention of homelessness. To some extent this derives from the limited scope and

mandate that their services may have for addressing prevention activities. It should be noted, however, that almost one-quarter of respondents took the opportunity to record additional comments, many of which were extensive and clearly articulated their understanding of the social and structural dimensions underpinning homelessness.

Service providers were asked to indicate what practices they perceived as vital in the prevention of youth homelessness. Again given the preceding discussion it is not surprising that few practices cited are “prevention” practices. Forty-eight respondents (41%) did not offer any information on their perceptions of practices vital to models of prevention “best practice”.

Reference to accessible and adequate services is more frequently cited as an important practice than it was in early intervention, as was the provision of education and skill development for parents. The need for supportive school environments is also cited as an important practice. A small number of services cited the capacity for young people to be equal participants in decision making as an important practice in models of prevention.

Service providers were asked to nominate the principles/philosophy that should underpin models of best practice for the prevention of youth homelessness. Of the 65 who answered this question, 13 stated the “same as for early intervention” and four, the same as the service’s principles, philosophies and/or critical strategies of early intervention. Again there were few principles or philosophies cited that could be viewed as building up protective factors. Respondents generally cited philosophies that acknowledged the importance of family to the young person being framed within philosophies of support, “links with extended family networks and supports for families that are struggling”. Philosophies cited in relation to young people were focused primarily on safety, “right to feel protected and be safe”, “the right to appropriate long-term housing options with supports”.

A small number of respondents cited philosophies that related to society and the community, most frequently within the context of increased community awareness. A few respondents cited philosophies that specifically addressed schools, such as the need for schools to have philosophies underpinned by notions of supportive school environments.

Work with schools

The family-focused and youth services were asked to indicate if the early intervention/prevention work of their service in any way involves interactions with schools, and if so, to describe their links or interactions with schools. Seventy per cent of respondents indicated that their early intervention and/or prevention work

involved interactions with schools. These interactions ranged from receipt of referrals, formal and informal meetings with school personnel to advocacy on behalf of the young person, “visiting schools to talk about services available”, “agency links with school counsellors”, “setting up peer support program”, “links with welfare coordinators, administration, teachers” and “professional development workshops for teachers”.

School respondents were also asked to indicate if the early intervention/prevention work of their school in any way involved interactions with young people and/or family support services and if so to describe these links. Twelve of the 19 school respondents indicated that their early intervention and prevention work in the area of homelessness involved interactions with youth and or family services ranging from “actual visits from youth personnel”, and “network meetings, referral to agencies, and in some cases, involvement in case management”. One school mentioned that trained youth counsellors were actually available at the school to offer support. Seventy-six per cent of all survey respondents believed that there is a need for more collaborative work between community-based service providers and schools in order to effectively address the issues associated with homelessness and young people. The family-focused services were the least likely to indicate a need for more collaborative work.

Respondents who indicated a need for more collaborative work were asked to identify strategies that could link schools and youth and family-focused services. School respondents suggested a wide range of strategies to develop more effective links between schools and community-based service providers. Those most commonly cited in descending order of frequency were: increasing awareness about homelessness; better and more stable resourcing for agencies and counselling services; professional development for teachers and agency workers; more funding for school counselling services; a change in government funding guidelines to encourage schools and community agencies to apply for integrated/holistic programs; visits by agency personnel to schools; need to build trust between services; school charters to outline community links; establishment of steering committees to represent both school and community; less bureaucratisation; and an increase in school budgets to include community welfare.

Youth, and family-focused services also cited a wide range of strategies to link schools with their services. They included in descending order of frequency: raising awareness in schools of available services; regular visits by agency personnel to schools and opportunities to provide counselling at schools; professional development and training for school personnel; a change in school curriculum to be more flexible and pay more attention to social education; alternative pro-

grams for at risk young people; early assessment and/or referral of young people to support or specialist services; involve parents more; develop whole of school approaches to manage the issue of youth homelessness; expand funding to STAR programs and increase school budgets to include provision for a pastoral care role. Both schools and youth- and family-focused services commonly suggest a wide range of school based strategies which range from targeted at risk approaches to whole of school pastoral care approaches.

Constraints

Respondents were asked to identify the three most significant constraints faced by their service in terms of undertaking prevention of and/or early intervention into youth homelessness. Lack of funds and resources were the most frequently cited constraints. The focus in service agreements on performance indicators which are determined by service usage or “bums in beds” was identified as a constraint in preventing “out of home” placements from occurring and, to a large degree, the capacity of the service to undertake early intervention work. One service provider suggested that their “funding only allows us to support a young person when they have already left the family home”. Inadequate resources were also identified as inhibiting the capacity of the services to undertake follow-up work with clients or respond at a level beyond that of crisis intervention.

School policies and practices, such as informal exclusion of young people and no clear links with welfare support services, were also cited as a constraint in undertaking early intervention work. A small number of service providers also cited the reticence of parents to engage with welfare services as a constraint.

Additional support needed

Respondents were asked to indicate what is most needed in addition to existing support mechanisms and programs in the area of prevention of and early intervention into youth homelessness. Responses that related to parents ranged from increased access to programs and courses, to increased levels of support for parents when required. Many service providers maintained that accommodation was the support mechanism most needed to address prevention of or early intervention into youth homelessness. Examples of accommodation support included more respite care facilities, support for young people in entering the private rental market, residential facilities and affordable accommodation.

Additional support mechanisms and programs cited in relation to schools included increased numbers of schools counsellors and liaison workers in schools and

the development of programs which are offered as an alternative to mainstream education. A smaller number of respondents cited support mechanisms, including access for young people to develop social and relationship skills, improved recreational facilities and increased availability of life skills and conflict resolution programs.

Conclusion

Results of the survey indicate that family-focused services and schools in the sample typically see young people well in advance of the young person leaving home while youth services indicate they typically first become involved during the periods of within one week and one month of the young person leaving home.

The most detailed early intervention strategies are those cited by youth/family mediation programs, whole of school approaches and SAAP services which respond specifically to the family issues of 12- to 15-year-old clients. The majority of current early intervention strategies identified and suggested as important in a model of best practice involve young people and whole of family rather than parents by

themselves. This is understandable to some extent. However, it supports the view expressed by parents interviewed that they have great difficulty accessing support.

Schools are seen as important sites of early intervention and most family-focused and youth services indicate some level of work or links with schools, however almost 75% of respondents indicated there is a need for greater collaboration between community based service providers and schools.

Few activities or practices cited with regard to prevention were focused on the building up of protective factors or were universally targeted strategies. Some respondents cited prevention activities that were targeted at the individual or family who were perceived to be at risk. While a number of respondents indicated prevention strategies at the situational level, few strategies were identified to respond to the issue of homelessness at the external or structural levels.

Constraints faced by respondents in undertaking prevention of and/or early intervention into youth homelessness are nominated as the limitations of program funding parameters, inadequate resources and other institutional practices which militate against early intervention.

Chapter 8

CASE STUDIES OF SERVICES

IN THIS CHAPTER the findings from case studies conducted across four States are reported and discussed. It is important to reiterate that the focus on programs and services which facilitate family reunification or reconciliation has resulted in an emphasis in this study on early intervention. Where prevention strategies are addressed it is principally in relation to strategies which build up protective factors at the situational level and which attempt to reduce the extent to which institutional and administrative systems produce homelessness as an outcome. Structural factors underpinning youth homelessness receive little acknowledgment from this perspective, though they are clearly relevant.

For the purpose of reporting and analysis the case studies are clustered into three broad categories:

- family-focused services;
- services located in educational settings; and
- youth services.

Table 8.1 details the services where case studies were undertaken. Due to the limitations of space not all case study services are described, though the data from them have informed the discussions about best practice. The services examined are seen as sources of insight into best practice rather than necessarily encapsulating a best practice model.

Family-focused services

The contexts of the family-focused services examined differ in important respects. Some are located in statutory protective and alternative care contexts, some are part of the more recent funding of adolescent-family mediation services, and in some the geographic context (Kings Cross, Sydney) provides a distinctive rationale for the service's existence.

There is a belief across these services that it is best for children and young people to remain within or return to their family of origin, when it is safe for them to do so. This is clearly applied to young people under 16 who represent the major client group for these services. It is also considered important, where possible, to work with the whole family, generally from a family systems approach. Within this overall orientation, individual work with parents, caregivers and young people is seen as an important precursor or supplement to work undertaken with the family group.

While there was a strong belief in the importance of a continued family connection of young people to families, best practice involves contextualising the difficulties families experience. For example, it was routinely acknowledged by services that families are often socially isolated, in economic hardship, may have little knowledge of supports available within their local com-

Table 8.1 Service providers where case studies were undertaken

<i>Case study</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Major funding base</i>
Youth and Parent Services (YPS)	Adelaide	Attorney-Generals and SAAP
Resources for Adolescents and Parents (RAPS)	Sydney	Attorney-Generals
Family and Individual Support Worker (YFS)	Logan City Qld	SAAP
Adolescent Unit (DOCS)	Kings Cross Sydney	State Government
Intensive Family Based Support Service (Burnside)	Sydney	Alternative Care
Marsden Families Program	Brisbane	Alternative Care
Muyim (Gold Coast Youth Service)	Gold Coast	Alternative Care
ParentLine (Boystown)	Brisbane	Self-funded
Keeping In Touch With Schools (KITS)	Melbourne	Commonwealth and State (STAR)
The HOME Project	Melbourne	Self-funded
The Ardoch Youth Foundation	Melbourne	Self-funded
Samoan Family Liaison Officer	Ipswich	State Government
St James Prac	Brisbane	Commonwealth and Church
Centre Education	Logan City	Commonwealth/State and Church
The Drum Information Cafe (Burnside)	Campbelltown	Self-funded and SAAP
Kids Help Line	Australia wide	Commonwealth and self-funded
Bayside Adolescent Boarding Program (BABI)	Brisbane	SAAP
Inner City Homeless Youth Project	Sydney	DEET
St George Youth Service	St George	DEET
Care Goondiwindi	Goondiwindi	State Government
Early Psychosis Prevention and Intervention Centre (EPPIC)	Melbourne	State Government
Adolescent Mental Health Outreach Project (AMHOP)	Brisbane	State Government
Breaking The Cycle	Melbourne	DEET and self-funded
Albert Park Flexi School	Brisbane	Local and State Government
Options (YFS)	Brisbane	Attorney General's

munities, and that young people, particularly those who have been under statutory care for a long period of time, may experience substantial systems abuse and subsequent disadvantage in the welfare, education, justice and health systems. Services acknowledge that homelessness cannot be understood entirely in terms of situational factors, ignoring the external and structural factors that affect families and individual life choices. Virtually all services talked about the importance of the social context of families, the importance of a social justice perspective to practice, and the importance of participation by the services in advocacy processes concerning policy and service delivery development. These factors are accompanied by a regard for and reliance on psycho-social and therapeutic interventions.

The notion of “dysfunctional family” was largely absent in the responses of services. Practitioners in the field speak consistently of the need to support and validate parents, rather than blame. The difficulties facing

parents are normalised, and their needs for reassurance and support are strongly indicated as elements essential for successful practice.

A confusion in some case studies was created by the tendency for the terminology of “family” to be used as a synonym for “parents”. The most common client-focused principles and strategies cited were those oriented to make services genuinely accessible to families (both parents or caregivers and young people). Most services cite the importance of presenting a non-welfare face because of perceived social stigma. Among the strategies cited which attempted to ease these difficulties of access were universality of access (except for alternative care agencies), an informal friendly approach, the answering of phone inquiries by counsellors, a preparedness to work in the family home, and continuity of personnel dealing with a family.

The importance of responding immediately to requests for support or help is highlighted repeatedly throughout the case studies. Having the resources, and

a service structure and approach which responds immediately to the family or young person requesting support is critical to success. The reason for this lies in the reality that young people, and particularly parents, usually do not seek support until the home situation has become critical. The mediation services, for example, which operate over large geographic areas, have specific intake strategies which reflect the different levels and types of response different families require. These intake processes allow for a level of initial universal telephone assistance to any caller immediately they ring, coupled with a range of other more substantial face-to-face responses which this initial call gains access to. Such strategies require intake systems within the organisation which are highly specified and where a level of resources remains available to all callers, coupled with access to more intensive or specialist services.

Other best practice principles cited as critical were:

- Discretionary funds to assist people with material support on a case by case basis or to purchase specialist workers, services or material support.
- Availability to clients beyond business hours and up to 24 hours per day (in alternative care models).
- Maintaining anonymity and confidentiality.
- Coercive strategies with young people were only cited as appropriate in one extreme circumstance, this being when a young person entered the highly dangerous and exploitative environment of Kings Cross, Sydney.
- Workers' conceptualisation of problems at both the macro and micro levels, accompanied by a strong appreciation for the individual stories, and the historical and social context of particular families. A model of practice does not translate into recipes but a high level of eclecticism and flexibility unified within a family systems framework.
- High commitment to professional support, supervision and ongoing training for workers, a heavy emphasis on team reflection and action planning in relation to particular family interventions, specialist awareness, knowledge and theoretical orientations.
- Explicit strategies to explore and monitor service delivery were cited as integral to operating in the complex area of young people-family relations. Action research processes, such as those used by Muyim, and rigorous data collection methods (Parent Help Line), provided mechanisms for pursuing an agenda of continuous improvement.
- A relationship of mutual regard with their state government welfare authority fostering a collaborative approach to service delivery.
- The maintenance of extensive links and establishment of liaison processes with other support

services located in the community.

- Schools are seen as critical.
- Strategies which invite parents and young people to remain maximally engaged while support services are accessed are worth closer examination. One example where this approach is reflected is YPS where parents remain involved in the everyday decision making, limit setting and negotiation with the young person.

Youth and Parent Services (YPS)

Situated in Adelaide, South Australia, YPS operates a counselling service for adolescents and families, and an accommodation facility for use by young people while the family undertakes a contracted program of family restoration or reconciliation. YPS is the designated early intervention SAAP service for young people in metropolitan Adelaide, where SAAP youth services have been restructured. The target group is young people 12 to 18 and their families or caregivers, with most young people using the service being 14 to 15 years. The preference is to see families before violence or other difficulties are deeply entrenched.

The Counselling Service consists of seven counsellors, two funded from the Attorney-General's Department and five through SAAP. Initial access is via the phone and involves assessment, referral and/or intervention and may take up to one hour. About half the initial inquiries result in face-to-face interviews, with the bulk of other callers responded to within the parameters of the initial phone call or referred to a more appropriate service. There is a strategy of "half referrals" where callers gain ideas to be trialled at home and can ring again if they want further support. Ongoing work involves a series of weekly sessions at the rooms of the service or by the mobile team at local agencies. Initial inquiries are mostly from parents, sometimes from young people, with 25% to 40% being clients of the State welfare department.

The accommodation component is designed for young people who have just left home, have been out of home for some time but wish to return, or are still at home but where family conflict makes home leaving imminent. The Accommodation Service has a capacity of eight, uses a semi-detached residence, with young women residing on one side and young men on the other. Staffing consists of 5.5 SAAP funded full-time equivalent residential care workers. In circumstances where it is unsafe for a young person to go back home the preferred approach is to refer to another service until sufficient progress is made to commence restoration work. Critical components of the model include:

- The role of the central referral or "hub" agency for SAAP youth services in metropolitan Adelaide (Trace-A-Place) in streamlining referrals and as a

referral site for clients who fall outside the target group.

- Access processes to the counselling and accommodation services are designed to be client-sensitive, efficient and coordinated. There is access to the counselling service duty counsellor via telephone, and a systemised intake process which allows speedy allocation of appointments and counsellors by the duty counsellor at the time of the initial telephone call. The service tries to minimise the need for callers to have to repeat their story before they get initial assistance.

The emphasis of the intake process to the accommodation component of the service is for the families to decide if they want the service. Families can decide immediately at an intake meeting, or take up to 24 hours to make a decision. If families do not accept or a decision is made jointly that the referral is not appropriate, the family will be either referred to the hub agency or the YPS counselling service. The principle is to provide as much information and time as possible so that families can make informed decisions.

- YPS uses a range of practices which have the objective of empowering the whole family to participate and for the parents' role in decision-making regarding their child to be respected. In the accommodation service, for example, the goal is not to create a situation that would make it difficult for the young person to return home. Parents are encouraged to feel comfortable in visiting the accommodation facility as they please. Parents in consultation with staff set the rules for their child while they reside in the accommodation unit. If there are issues between the young person and their parents around rules, they will be discussed and negotiated in counselling and then implemented into the accommodation unit. The service considers it is critical to respect that parents are the legal guardians of their children.
- The impartiality of workers is critical. Care is taken that communication strategies enhance young people's understanding and capacity to participate in the process.
- Strategies are used to minimise the chance that either parents or young people will adjust to the young person's absence in such a way that they become reluctant to have them at home again. These include increased periods spent at home by the young person so both young people and parents can engage in what the service refers to as "practice", trying out what has been discussed in counselling. This often concerns other ways of dealing with conflict where they might have previously resorted to verbally or physically abusive behaviour. Information about each party's "prac-

tice" is communicated to the other party.

- It is made clear to families that it is important not to blame individuals but for people to work together to solve any difficulties they are experiencing. It is also explained that workers are not "super parents", but rather listen to information and feed it back with, at times, a different construction.
- The family is prioritised as the site for intervention, support and change. While counselling occurs with individual members of families when needed, there is a preference for working with the family group rather than using group or peer strategies.
- The two service components are co-located within one organisation, in a close working relationship with each other. This is seen to reduce the impact of the service system on families. All processes are devised jointly by services.
- There are a large number of workers from NESB backgrounds on staff. At the time of writing 11 languages were spoken among a team of 16 people. Such a staff mix has the effect of creating cross-cultural awareness and increasing access to people from NESB backgrounds.
- A case conference is immediately held where a client has involvement with the Department of Family and Community Services. Roles are clarified, or one agency agrees to withdraw, so confusion is not created for the client.
- Joint funding by the Attorney-General's Department and SAAP improves flexibility, allows a stronger auspice to work with schools, and allows engagement in preventive work.

Data supplied by the service indicated that in the last financial year, of 19 families using the accommodation service, 18 achieved their stated goal of restoration or reconciliation. An indirect impact of the service cited is increased orientation within other youth services towards interacting with families.

Resources for Adolescents and Parents (RAPS)

RAPS is a mobile family therapy service targeted at young people 12 to 18 and their care givers in the greater Sydney metropolitan area. The service is part of Relationships Australia, with the major source of funding being the Commonwealth Attorney-Generals Department. Specifically targeted are young people and carers experiencing severe problems such as: a history of chronic truancy, a long history of aggression, extreme conflict which may lead to violence to or by the young person, suicide attempts, being thrown out of home, where young people are "inappropriately" threatened, or where significant issues exist in relation to fostering, adoption, adjustment to separation, divorce, or death.

Approximately 40% of RAPS referrals come from the NESB communities and 87% of clients come from lower socioeconomic strata. Appointments are offered at 14 centres across Sydney.

Immediacy of response is primarily achieved through the intake process design and the mobile nature of the sessional work. After the initial phone interview the service is mobile, working with people in their own homes, or at a place which is accessible and comfortable for the people involved. Young people and carers are often transient and may not at any single time be co-located.

RAPS cites a high incidence of success in young people and their carers in resolving family conflict and a high level (90%) of case completion. RAPS cites associated decreases in problematic behaviour of carers and young people such as violence and drug use, and significant incidence of young people returning to education or moving on to vocational education and training.

Limitations of the model include the amount of travel required, which impacts on staff fatigue and stress. A maximum of 15% of service time is allocated to travel. Networking limitations result from the difficulty in maintaining familiarity with services in an area as large as metropolitan Sydney. Only NESB clients with functional English can be responded to as RAPS is not funded to provide interpreter services.

A family and individual support worker within SAAP

The Youth Accommodation Service (YAS), part of Youth and Family Services (Logan City) Inc, (referred to as YFS) has had a Family and Individual Support Worker (FISW) position specifically directed at family reunification and reconciliation since early 1995. This SAAP funded position primarily focuses on issues of family conflict where there is a risk of homelessness occurring. This worker interviews young people under 16 years who have contact with the SAAP service, and responds to cases on the waiting list for medium to long-term accommodation where early intervention and family issues are indicated (20% of referrals to the FISW come from the waiting list). A small amount of work concerns the facilitation of young people returning home from the SAAP accommodation. The FISW position locates on a day-to-day basis with the Adolescent-Family Mediation Service, Options, also operated by YFS.

The position promotes an unobtrusive yet deliberate incorporation of an early intervention focus into the work of other key personnel, such as the SAAP housing workers and school counsellors, who are encouraged to make regular reference to the FISW role and services in their work with young people and parents.

Linkages with local secondary schools are seen as

critical. Twenty-five per cent of all referrals to FISW come from schools. The nature of the linkages to schools takes a number of forms. Contact is made by the FISW with school guidance officers regarding young people who are seeking accommodation, or as a result of parents ringing. Direct work occurs with young people and their families referred by local secondary school guidance officers. Guidance officers are informed the FISW is available for any students who have left home or where there is family conflict, and invited to call on the FISW for support when needed. The FISW also conducts seminars for senior secondary students on "getting the conflict out of home rather than getting out of home", the difficulties facing young people who live on the streets, and understanding the role and availability of counselling services, as part of the Human Relationships Curriculum. Currently a program for Years 8 and 9 students is being developed which will have a more anticipatory focus. The FISW on invitation operates within school by way of sessional use of office space, open access to students, with strong linkage to school provided through the guidance officer. An outside counsellor is reported as not being interrupted in the same way as a guidance officer.

Safeguards have been established to make sure the SAAP orientation is not lost, including attendance at accommodation service staff meetings, continued referral of cases from accommodation service, participation in accommodation service review processes, and continued work with young people in externally supported accommodation and in their families.

An intensive family-based support service

The Intensive Family Based Service of Burnside is a two-year pilot child protection program. The target group is families whose children are at imminent risk of removal due to protective concerns. The program aims to help children and young people remain at home with their families and prevent entry into the substitute care system, while assisting parents to create a safe environment for their children.

Practice at Burnside Intensive Family Based Service (IFBS) is client centred, and parents make decisions about the level of support they require. Interventions occur in a family's own environment and are intensive (20 to 50 hours per week with workers on call 24 hours per day), structured and time-limited (4-6 weeks).

A family support program for young people in alternative care or at risk of being taken into alternative care

Marsden Families Program is auspiced by the Uniting Church in Brisbane and receives referrals by the State Welfare Authority of families with young people between the ages of 12 and 16 years who have been in the care of

the State or are at imminent risk. Interventions aim at family restoration and/or reconciliation.

Components of the Marsden Families Program are residential short-term respite care for children and young people with a carer they know (an extended family care model); a youth services component which involves individual and group self-esteem and living skills enhancement; counselling to the young person and/or their family; family therapy when interventions need to be of a more intensive and therapeutic nature than those offered by the counselling component; and an education support component which provides tutorial assistance and study space at the program. Clients can be referred for one or a combination of the above components.

No changes are made to case plans without a case review meeting. The young person has the right to be at the case review, as do parents who are part of the young person's case plan. Young people are viewed as having equal status to parents in decision making. Interventions occur in a client's own home, or if they prefer, in a space provided by a community agency in their locality. Networking families into their local community, especially schools, is viewed as critical.

The flexibility of the model is enhanced by the use of discretionary funds which allow the service to "purchase" additional appropriate services, for example, sessional workers or specialist services.

An alternative care program with an emphasis on family restoration

Muyim is a family-based placement program for young people aged 13 to 17 years, auspiced by the Gold Coast Youth Service. All referrals come from the Queensland Department of Family, Youth and Community Care. The aim of the service is to provide an early intervention service for young people at risk of homelessness or of being taken into State Care. The focus of interventions is on working towards family reunification, where appropriate, or to facilitate and support the move to independent living where family reunification is not appropriate.

A telephone counselling service for parents

ParentLine is a trial telephone counselling service for parents which currently operates in the Brisbane Metropolitan, Logan and Ipswich areas of south-east Queensland. A significant number of calls concern parent/young person conflict and homelessness. The medium of telephone counselling provides an immediate response to parents who often ring at a point of crisis. Calls are not screened or diverted to a switch, but are answered directly by counsellors. Other critical components of the model are listed in the outline of Kids Help Line.

Service models to families from non-English cultural backgrounds

No family-focused services were identified which were specifically oriented to provide early intervention services to young people and families from non-English cultural backgrounds. For this reason research undertaken in 1995 by Youth and Family Services (Logan City) Inc., and funded through the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, is reported. The research (Prince 1995) investigated culturally appropriate adolescent mediation and family therapy and family skills training service delivery for those from non-English cultural backgrounds.

Key elements of a model of service delivery proposed from the research are:

- a recognition of the studies' overwhelming finding that non-English cultural background families prefer to work with a counsellor or with a counsellor who is culturally sensitive and has an understanding of the immigration and settlement experience specific to non-English cultural background families; and
- a recognition that many non-English cultural background families prefer to use their own community language in the counselling setting (Prince 1995, p.40).

While a range of service delivery options are canvassed, the report offers a preferred model for how a generic service can best respond. This model involves the employment of a coordinator responsible for recruiting, training, and supervising a pool of bi-cultural workers, building relationships with key people and marketing the programs to non-English cultural background communities, and providing cross-cultural training for generic workers in the organisation (and area, where appropriate). It is suggested a pool of bilingual, bi-cultural workers would allow a pool worker with appropriate cultural and language skills to co-work with another counsellor in providing a service to particular families (Prince 1995, p.41).

Insights into early home returning

The three adolescent-family mediation services involved in this study were asked for their insight regarding signals for home leaving and returning. All indicated difficulty with the predictive utility of such indicators, the reality being that while there was a degree of generality in the observations, there were many variations. The family situation was highly contextualised, and the application of indicators in any predictive or judgmental way was said to be inappropriate and even dangerous.

The experiences of families and young people are deeply contextualised and do not conform to a simple set of indicators. Indicators can be very broad but are likely to be misinterpreted. They need to be very broad and not be used as a replacement for looking at the individual circumstances of a young person and family. There is a culture of "blame" in our society which is quick to attribute behaviours by young people and difficult circumstances experienced by them as being of their own making – in other words that they are to blame.

With this caution in mind, the services were able to produce a list of possible signals for early homeleaving leading to homelessness.

- physical or sexual violence by a parent to the young person or physical violence by the young person against a parent or sibling;
- the young person saying they are going to leave or giving some verbal warning such as "I've had enough";
- the young person or parents maintaining an attitude that nothing is going to change, and that they are unwilling to mediate;
- the young person expressing concerns and the parents not acknowledging that these are valid points of concern;
- the young person thinking things are hopeless, possibly triggered by something that they feel cannot be undone;
- young people escaping by leaving their bedrooms or going through the windows;
- the young person not wanting to come home, or saying "I don't want to be home";
- perceived escalation in the verbal or the emotional abuse by either parent or young person; and
- behaviours which prompt parents to kick out the young person (such as stealing the family car).

Services were clear that the presence of any of these is not in itself an indication that a young person will leave home, but they could be a reason for engaging with those parents and or young person on a voluntary basis.

Regarding returning home, the feedback from services is summarised as:

Young people have a complex interplay of factors occurring affecting whether they return. They are often wanting to be back, but there are issues of acting for self protection from abuse, being put down, and there is a requirement for a level of change. There are also dynamics of their own increasing need as young people to have a natural increase in their level of "adulthood". All these make the process complex and unpredictable.

The following were cited as facilitating a return home:

- the parents being willing to prioritise the young person's safety above their rules and morals;
- the willingness of parents to work on problem issues while the young person is away to prepare for the young person coming back, and to communicate to the young person that this is happening;
- the young person is talking to someone about the viability of returning home if there is some change;
- when there has been a change of some sort to the attitudes/ behaviours that underpinned the leaving;
- the parents and/or young people are prepared to alter their thinking or behaviour and accept some of the others' ideas and values as valid for them;
- young people re-contacting parents. It may not appear as a clear attempt to move home but may be to see a brother or sister, or to collect clothes. Often they are cueing for a different response from the parent(s) because if things changed in some way they would like to return;
- the young person does something which gains the parents' attention, which focuses the parents on them rather than something else (such as the parent/partner relationship). This may be by getting into trouble of some kind;
- when there has been abuse the young person receives individual attention and the abuser is counselled or treated to ensure the abuse ceases. There is discussion between the young person and the non-abusing parents followed by, and where appropriate, discussion between all parties. Where violence is involved it is important for the abuser to take responsibility, apologise, and for a safety plan to be created.

The reality that early home leaving usually occurs not once but on multiple occasions, referred to by one service as "boomeranging", was seen as having important implications for practice by these family mediation services. Young people often "run" to invite a possible solution, or as a way of escaping. It is their way of intervening, a way of trying to effect change.

When a young person returns it is an indication that they want to be at home, but unless something changes, home leaving will occur again. Returning, even for a quick visit, can be a young person's way of reminding others that if there is some level of change, they would return. Leaving again is often triggered by parents blaming the young person on their return.

One ideal time for intervention, when the motivation levels of both parents and young people is high, is often in the period just prior to a move back home. Preparation for returning home in the week before is important, together with maintaining support in the weeks after the return. For both parents and young

people it is important to canvas how they can live together including a renegotiation of ground rules, and what time they will all spend together.

Services located in educational settings

These case studies included three school/community link services aimed at developing responsive school environments for homeless students or those at risk of becoming homeless, an ethno-specific family/school support service, a mainstream inner-city independent school which has developed a whole of school approach to pastoral care, and two alternative schools attended by a high proportion of students who have been excluded from mainstream schools or have experienced homelessness.

It is clear that homelessness rather than home leaving is the dominant construction of the problem employed by these services. A correlation is clearly seen between school retention and homelessness. Accordingly, strategies have been developed to encourage retention within a supportive school environment, to respond to the needs of students who become homeless, and in some cases to identify and target for particular intervention, students who are at risk of early school leaving because of family issues or other difficulties.

A number of common themes emerged from the case studies. Schools are clearly conceptualised as part of the problem of young people becoming homeless. By what schools usually do (alienate many students by the content and processes commonly employed in secondary schooling), and by what they usually do not do (provide opportunities for the sharing or identification of significant problems and a platform for response), the institution of secondary schooling is consistently cited by school personnel and community service providers alike as a significant part of the problem of young people becoming homeless.

School, it is argued, can provide a stabilising and protective influence for students who are experiencing difficulties at home. Retention in school can itself be a protective factor against early home leaving leading to homelessness. The movement from primary to secondary school is a source of trauma for many young people because of the shift from a generally one-teacher, supportive classroom environment in primary school, to a more rigid and impersonal environment in secondary school. School curriculum is seen by the services studied to be too narrowly academic in orientation, and too focused on tertiary entrance, which in turn does not adequately meet the diverse needs of many students.

Principles of social justice are commonly cited as a necessary part of the response framework if students

who are homeless or at risk of homelessness are to be adequately responded to by schools, a view expressed in virtually all case studies and associated discussions with other education providers.

Young people are cited as needing a positive and engaging relationship with at least one and preferably more school personnel. The structures of secondary schools are seen to militate against good quality student/teacher and student/school administration relationships. There is a consistent view among service providers that students' personal concerns should be able to be raised and responded to within the school context. Schools are seen to be better able to respond when specific support strategies and programs are put in place as integral and legitimised components of the school environment, and where extensive and coordinated links are established with community-based supports for young people outside the school. In a number of case studies, comment was made regarding the professional distance and antagonism existing between education and welfare professionals, and the possible barrier this posed to coordination. Where strategies to respond to at risk students are incorporated, these generally co-exist with a range of whole of school pastoral care strategies.

Other points of commonality to emerge included:

- strong school priority on the development of pastoral relationships with students;
- creating opportunities and a climate for early disclosure and early recognition of student distress; this may be via a number of strategies including the availability of youth workers or family workers within the school, the availability of student welfare officers who do not have substantial teaching loads, a staff/student mentoring program, through a diary sharing system, and/or staff development to sensitise teachers;
- an emphasis on developing a sense in the young person of being valued within the school, for example, by the practice of teachers in the first instance, and subsequently students, using respectful language to one another;
- strong links with parents by the pastoral care personnel. Clear and direct links between school and home are developed, with a recognition that home circumstances and school performance consistently influence one another. In one service model (Samoan Family Officer), the increased parent involvement in school is in itself viewed as a protective factor;
- recognition of the importance of responding immediately to young people's needs;
- a policy and practice of prioritising communication with "difficult" students to arrive at the fullest picture of the student's circumstances, rather than a narrow reliance on punitive behav-

our management strategies, suspension or exclusion;

- provision of educational curriculum structures that meet the needs of students who have disrupted schooling is viewed as critical;
- validating the feelings and difficulties that teachers experience, together with provision of professional development for teachers aimed at improving their knowledge and understanding of homeless and disadvantaged students; and
- strong cooperative links between the schools and local welfare agencies. In some models youth and community workers are invited into schools to work alongside teachers and school guidance or pastoral care staff in the playground.

Schools have models which differ in some important respects. Aspects where difference can be seen include whether special roles internal to the school, such as special welfare coordinators, are integral to the strategy, the extent to which teachers or specialist staff are the primary vehicle for implementation of the strategy, the extent to which whole of school approaches or “add on” targeted at risk strategies are used, the extent to which strategies actively engage in family liaison, mediation and referral to family support services, and whether a rights- or needs-based framework is used to conceptualise the provision of support to students within school. It is clear some school responses are focusing on the identification of particular students who are seen to require early intervention. This contrasts with approaches where, through professional development of teachers and staff, the approach is more focused on creating the conditions for self-disclosure and “whole of school” support for all students.

In the most developed models, sources of support for students within the community generally, and from youth and family services in particular, are established and maintained through a clear, organisationally legitimised mechanism for ongoing liaison. This can involve liaison between the school and community welfare services regarding the location of case management when a significant welfare response involving multiple agencies is required. Such case management is seen as most appropriately located outside the school.

Schools generally have a stronger focus on students than on recognising family, and there is a clearer school response either after homelessness has occurred or well in advance as part of a broader strategy of student support and pastoral care. There is very little mention by agencies of the dynamics of home leaving and the school’s role in responding to opportunities for support at this particular time, or which are designed to promote the young person staying at home or returning home. This does not mean that school-focused strategies do not engage with parents or undertake forms of liaison at the time of home leaving.

There was, however, very little profile given to these matters in the information and insights provided to this study by school-based services.

KITS: Keeping in Touch with School

This service draws funding from the STAR project (Directorate of School Education), the Victorian Office of Youth Affairs, and the Eltham Community Health Centre. The program operates currently within ten schools in the Melbourne region. The target group consists of students attending secondary school who are disadvantaged, homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless. Partnerships are built between schools, families and local community services with the goal of providing immediate response to student needs. Components include: peer support networks (including a transition program for Year 7 students entering secondary school), outreach work by youth workers in the school grounds, material and accommodation support for students, referral to agencies, coordinated case management for students contacting agencies, family mediation, and the use of community specialists within the classroom. Critical components of the model include:

- Provision of redefined job descriptions for youth/family services workers to affirm this collaborative work with schools. Agency resources are allocated to the project so the work and links between youth services and schools are legitimated.
- A Student Welfare Coordinator is situated at each school with a half-teaching and half-student welfare load. The Coordinator responds to student issues and, when this goes beyond their expertise or resources, seeks assistance from agencies outside the school.
- A case management approach is used for coordinating welfare responses to students identified as homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The case manager is drawn from one of the agencies outside the school.
- A Steering Group guides the project, and consists of 22 representatives from shires where the project takes place. It includes student welfare coordinators, school administrators, parents, workers from housing groups, health centres, the Youth Access Centre, community and adolescent workers, a parent/adolescent mediation centre representative, and representatives from various relevant government departments. Coordination of services is seen as the key.
- A peer support system is employed where students are trained to identify and support other students needing help. A transition program involves Year ten students helping Year 7 students in a mentoring role. Anti-bullying programs are considered integral.

- Community specialists are brought into classrooms to teach about health, family issues, and relationships, while the teacher remains in the classroom. This means an interchange of information and teaching styles as well as relationship building can occur between teachers and community practitioners, and students become familiar with available services.
- The strategy is inclusive and universal, rather than targeted at particular at risk students.
- Links with the ethnic community are fostered by involving the Migrant Resource Centre in the program, for example by using MRC guest speakers.

The HOME project

Operating at Box Forest Secondary College in Victoria, the service focuses primarily on students in Years 7 to 10 who are at risk of not completing their schooling or becoming homeless. Of particular note in this model is the emphasis on teachers acquiring the skills to identify and support students using the Community Services Victoria inventory of signs of neglect or abuse. The Student Welfare Coordinators play a key role in communicating with teachers about student welfare, contacting students, and accessing families. Some family mediation is offered to families in crisis through the school, particularly around school issues such as truancy. When issues require more specialist responses the SWC's refer students to these agencies.

Ardoch Youth Foundation

This model is now implemented in five Melbourne secondary schools, with parts of the model operating in a further 50 schools. The Foundation is funded by private donation and currently receives no government funding. The model of service is based on developing strong networks to link welfare and community services with a school. Student support programs involve accommodation and rental supports, breakfast and lunch programs run by volunteers, personal goods such as clothing and toiletries, access to shower and laundry facilities, academic assistance via the use of tutors and mentoring, family support on a case-by-case basis, and input into the curriculum addressing communication and life skills.

There is a strong recognition that a supportive, responsive school environment is the key to early intervention and prevention. Critical components of the model as it has been developed for secondary schools include:

- Support (material and non-material) is universally available, and students self-identify as needing assistance. Support strategies are presented in a non-stigmatising manner, and underpinned by a school ethos which declares that support is every

student's right. This is enhanced by the inclusion of the goal of universal student support in school charters and mission statements.

- The role of the Student Welfare Coordinator (SWC) is separate from any Guidance Officer position, though a current concern is the lack of prerequisite training or adequate time release from teaching duties for SWCs in the school system.
- Strategies to link schools and students with local agencies include welfare and community services coming into the school to assist students in need, and the development of training manuals for schools and teaching staff on how to access local agencies. Emergency housing is organised for homeless students.

Samoan Family Liaison Officer

This is a support service for Samoan students and families at a secondary school and its main feeder primary school and pre-school. The program, which commenced in 1995, is funded as a Cultural Equity and Enhancement Project from Metropolitan West Region of the Queensland Department of Education. Funding is on a yearly basis and not necessarily ongoing. One worker is employed half-time at the level of teacher aide.

Samoan students comprise 22% of the primary school population and 5% of the high school population. The schools are located in Ipswich city west of Brisbane, and the catchment area has high levels of public housing, families with low incomes, and a high proportion of families from non-English-speaking backgrounds. The program aims to establish links between schools and the Samoan community, particularly parents of Samoan students, to acquaint staff with the needs of Samoan students and their families, and to promote education as a shared responsibility by increasing the participation of Samoan parents. The work is principally understood as being oriented to parent/student support and cultural valuing rather than behaviour management. Critical components of the model include the proactive establishment and maintenance of contact with Samoan parents and students. The Liaison Officer visits homes regularly, and uses Samoan language routinely as a way of developing close relationships with parents. The Liaison Officer spends time in the playground establishing contact with students, and senior students assist in mentoring younger students.

The Liaison Officer is informed of a possible suspension or exclusion of a Samoan student, and is able to have discussions with the student so a more complete understanding of the issues can be gained. This process has resulted in fewer suspensions and exclusions of Samoan students.

The Liaison Officer works across the pre-school, primary and secondary schools. This permits the build-

ing of strong, continuous relationships with families and students with the expected result that the move from primary to secondary school will be more supported, and the work of family liaison more efficient given the high percentage of families with children in both primary and secondary schools.

While this model is not specifically oriented to prevention or early intervention in relation to homelessness, it has value as a generic model linking schools to particular communities. Such a model can be seen to contribute to both prevention and early intervention outcomes. School liaison positions could be administratively located in schools such as this example, or in community based organisations as is occurring in some States.

St James Prac

St James is a co-educational secondary school which operates under the auspices of the Christian Brothers. It is situated in an inner suburb of Brisbane, and caters to a wide range of cultural groups (43 nationalities in 1995), and a significant number of ATSI students. While the Pastoral Care program is the focus of this case study, it cannot be isolated from the school, since the involvement of staff, and the high level of integration across school functions and structures, means that the school is as much the focus as the program itself.

Critical components of the model are an inclusive enrolment policy, equal pay and leadership status for the Assistant Director (Pastoral Care) and the Assistant Director of Academic Studies. The Assistant Director (Pastoral Care), the Home Liaison officer and five Year Coordinators form a collaborative team, providing regular proactive work with parents, a strong professional development program for teachers, and strong linkages with and referrals to welfare services.

Regular pastoral contact occurs for all students. This is a universal rather than targeted approach. All students maintain a diary in which they and their teachers record observations, on the explicit understanding that this diary is shared with parents and teachers. This provides an additional avenue for students to indicate they have a need for assistance.

A strong ethos of social justice underpins the school policies and practices. This is reflected in culturally responsive programs such as the social functions and dance groups for ATSI students and families, and a Spanish-speaking support group. The small size of the school (under 550) is cited as allowing for a personal approach to students and their support needs. As with the alternative school programs there is a strong emphasis on participation, respect and relationships that are not built on authoritarian structures.

Youth services

Nine case studies were undertaken of services which self-identify as youth services and where young people are identified as the primary client.

The reasons for early home leaving by young people are seen by youth services as almost always genuine, most often being the result of abusive relationships or conflict associated with difficulties parents experience in adjusting parenting styles as their children get older. At the same time services overwhelmingly recognised the value of the young person remaining in the family or maintaining positive relationships with family members as appropriate. The assessment of "appropriate" was strongly linked to notions of safety of the young person and a belief that leaving home to independent living is sometimes necessary and the most positive outcome available. It was also widely recognised that young people under the age of 16 or thereabouts require responses which inquire about their family circumstances, and for young people over this age, responses which assist in the process of returning to the family home, if this is the wish of the young person. Services saw referral to state welfare authorities of young people under the age of 16 years as appropriate, but were critical of the lack of quality and long delays these young people often faced in being responded to by these authorities. Services gave examples of welfare authorities indicating a young person's circumstances were not extreme enough to gain a response given that staff resources were needed for the most extreme cases. This level of response was cited by a number of case study services as a form of systems abuse, commonly experienced by older adolescents.

Services identified children and young people not being adequately listened to by parents and adults generally as a critical issue, and reinforced the need to ensure that young people have access to high quality information and service support. With accurate information and identification of options most young people are seen as able to make appropriate decisions.

Services saw that work with young people should include the willingness to engage with and listen to parents and caregivers, and most had in place specific strategies to be parent-friendly while maintaining their primary client as the young person. Youth services indicate that parents often conceptualise the problem they experience in relations with their children as residing in the child, rather than acknowledge factors beyond the child, including their own behaviour and attitudes. There was a strong view that many family issues are complex and most often require long-term support and intervention, rather than short-time quick interventions.

Youth services consistently cite the lack of affordable accommodation for young people as a significant contributing factor to home leaving resulting in home-

lessness. Other points of commonality to emerge include:

- The importance of universally available and easily accessible “soft entry” services to young people in their local area. Such resources are essential for many young people to experience social support outside of family or school, and play a vital role together with other agencies in undertaking early intervention.
- Presenting a non-welfare and non-stigmatising face to the community is essential to maximise accessibility.
- The availability of different workers who are able to relate to parents and young people, followed by joint work with both young person and parents. Alongside this is the need for close links to specialists providing mediation, counselling, mental health, and legal services.
- Providing high quality information to young people about their options and their rights, often painted as problematic, is in fact helpful in assisting young people to remain at or return home.
- It is critical that there be immediacy of response to calls for assistance by young people.
- Safe short-time out-of-home accommodation is necessary as a locally available resource while initial assessment, conflict resolution, and negotiation work is undertaken with young people and parents.
- Confidentiality for the young person is a critical issue and one which requires explicit protection by clear agency processes which see the young person as a primary client.
- Stability in funding to allow for stable and sustainable local youth services is required if models of best practice are to develop over time.

Youth services commonly cited the role and practices of schools, statutory welfare authorities and to a lesser degree police, as central to any early intervention strategy. The view was that strong links between community youth agencies were essential, but that they found the willingness of schools, police and welfare authorities to support close liaison highly variable.

An information café which provides access to a range of on-site youth and family services

The Drum Information Café is part of the Burnside Youth Resource Centre. It is located in Campbelltown, south-west of Sydney and is one service within a purpose built youth services centre which also includes accommodation, legal and health services to young people aged 12 to 24 years. The Drum Information Café offers a non-targeted and non-threatening mechanism for young people to gain information, access to youth workers and counselling, basic support services

such as showers, laundry and material assistance, and referral to specialist services within and outside the complex. The Drum undertakes advocacy, negotiation and mediation roles with young people and their families.

Early intervention elements include the availability of mediation at the family home, telephone counselling, and negotiation/advocacy between young person and parents, friends, DSS, and other youth services. Preventive elements include agency inputs into social policy, information provision about options to help young people to successfully leave one dwelling where they are unsupported for another where they are supported, and the development of a range of protective factors such as strengthened social networks, having a safe place to go to, and the availability to young people of service information and networks prior to a crisis.

The Drum Information Café offers a safe place where any young person can relax, access information or a range of basic services, and/or talk through problems with trained staff in a non-threatening and non-judgemental environment. Hours of opening are tailored to suit high demand periods from young people. Specific thought is given to the type of environment that young women and other user groups feel comfortable in. It is considered important to respond to the immediate expressed need of the young person even though there may be larger or deeper issues facing them. To achieve this, workers need to be skilled and able to operate with decisiveness.

The purpose built nature of the facility is designed to reflect the service principles. People can enter the café directly or enter by another door to a general inquiries counter to gain access to other services or for appointments. The building is designed with a central paved quadrangle which gives access to co-located services. There is a heavy use of signs and symbols in the complex to facilitate access by the widest range of young people. Co-location with other key services (youth housing, health and legal) enhances responsiveness. The service is located close to public transport yet off the main street and close to the town centre, which is also central in the region.

The service sees as central the provision of quality information to young people about their options, the implications of these, and their rights, together with their responsibilities. This includes young people having information about what behaviours and circumstances in the home are unacceptable, including violence or abuse, and what young people’s rights are when these “bottom lines” are transgressed. At the same time it is vital that the service is seen as family- and parent-friendly. The goal is to be open, accessible and responsive to parents without making the parent the primary client. This means contacting parents with

the permission of the young person, staff spending time with parents who approach the Centre for information or with concerns, and a willingness to be in communication with parents of young people who have left home and who the Centre has some level of involvement with. While safety issues for a young person in the home are of immediate concern, it is felt important not to dismiss a return home in the longer term simply because of this.

A telephone counselling service for children and young people

Kids Help Line is a free national telephone counselling service for children and young people. A significant proportion of calls from young people relate to family conflict and issues related to leaving home or homelessness. A national data base of service providers allows counsellors to refer children and young people to services in their local area. Critical components of the model include children and young people being seen as having the right to discuss their difficulties and concerns (referral of young people to other services is dependent upon a child or young person's willingness for this to happen, counsellors have a code name and callers can request to speak to them on subsequent occasions); the service is free, not targeted, and can be accessed from anywhere in Australia for little cost. Confidentiality is respected and no information that could identify a caller is recorded or released outside of the organisation without the client's permission; staff undergo intensive and ongoing training, regular supervision and performance appraisal as mechanisms for quality control (there is a policy of not using volunteers); and a rigorous data collection system allows the organisation to undertake ongoing investigation of caller issues and referral patterns.

A community boarding program within a SAAP service

The Bayside Adolescent Boarding Program Inc (BABI) is a youth service, principally funded through SAAP, located in Wynnum, a coastal suburb of Brisbane. One element of the service is a community boarding program where the aim is to assist young people to return to their family, if possible, and where this is not possible and the young person cannot be accommodated with extended family or close friends, for longer term supported accommodation to be provided as a step towards independent living. The target group is young people 13 to 18 from the local area. Three to four boarding families are involved at any one time. Critical components of the model include:

- The decision to enter the boarding program and go to a particular boarding family is made by the young person. In addition, when a young person is under 16, permission to stay in the program is

gained from their parent(s) or legal guardian. When the young person is over 16 the service asks their permission to contact the parent(s) and discuss the situation. Where there are issues of abuse this contact may be with another family member.

- Provision of a range of services for the family of origin, including family counselling and mediation, parenting of adolescents courses. A plan is negotiated with parents and all parents are offered a place in the "parenting adolescents assertively" program. It is common for increasing time to be spent at home by the young person while in the boarding family. Parents meet the boarding family where the young person is staying and have the telephone number of the boarding family. Discussion between the parents and families around placement issues is discouraged with parents directed to have discussions with the service. Parents have access to individual support from the service, in the form of access for discussion with a worker and referral to other services.

A coordination of youth services strategy

The Inner City Homeless Youth Project is a pilot project funded by the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA). The project (ICHYP) is one of four pilot projects managed by local task forces to address existing service provision to homeless young people. The project works with youth services in the inner-city area of Sydney to help build stronger links between the services, government and non-government. A key focus of the project is to develop strategies for intersectoral collaboration and cooperation to develop a "seamless" service delivery system of income and social support for homeless young people. Local working arrangements between services have been developed to improve coordination of services to young people who are homeless.

The approach is problem-based, where barriers to accessing services are identified and relevant service providers brought together to develop solutions. The focus is often on simple pragmatic issues that can make significant changes. ICHYP facilitates the development of clear referral information and processes for use by young people and agencies. The agencies involved, such as schools, are often the first point of contact for young people who are vulnerable to becoming homeless. The project has produced a pocket-sized information card to refer young people to local services, and a guide to local support services for service providers.

Services in rural towns

Two rural human service agencies were approached to consider what early intervention, best practice principles and practices would be appropriate for rural towns

which did not have the range or size of services available in larger urban areas.

The St George Youth Service is partially funded for one year at a time by DEETYA, through the Rural Youth Information Service (RYIS) component of the Homeless and At Risk Youth Action Package (HARYAP). The priority target group is disadvantaged young people under 21 years of age. The service provides information, social space through a drop-in-centre, crisis support and access to a range of other services. Staffing consists of one and a half youth workers.

Care Goondiwindi is a generic human services agency located in Goondiwindi, a rural town in south-west Queensland with a population of 5,000, servicing a population district of 10,000. Services include a Youth Support Service staffed with a half-time youth worker. Care Goondiwindi responds to a wide range of issues including concerns by young people and parents about family conflict and homelessness. The youth service is staffed by one half-time youth worker. The views offered by the two services regarding the critical components of an early intervention service delivery model seen as relevant to rural towns are synthesised here. Not all elements referred to are currently operational in either or both towns.

- There is a need for affordable, safe, short-term accommodation in the towns. Currently this does not exist. Services indicate that hotels and the local hospital have been used for short-term crisis accommodation. A particular need is for a time-out accommodation facility for use across target groups and where a young person could stay for a few days to allow time for some clarification and negotiation between the parents and the young person, and the organisation of longer term support or intervention from other agencies (e.g. counselling) to deal with issues behind the home leaving or potential home leaving.
- It is imperative for rural towns to have a sustainable youth service offering access to young people, able to offer support and connect young people into support services. There is a need for stability in youth services funding to allow for the development of local models of response which are not destabilised by short-term funding horizons.
- An effective early intervention strategy requires key youth and other human services personnel in the town to work cooperatively to provide a consciously developed young people/family support strategy. In these towns, this comprised a counsellor employed within community health services, youth worker/s, other community workers where present, the school and the police.
- Youth centres which operate on particular afternoons or evenings in these towns are seen as

important mechanisms for enhancing the accessibility by young people to support. The youth centres provide social and recreational activities which are seen as largely missing from rural towns. These centres operate on extremely limited resources.

- The availability of local specialist counsellors is vital and usually involves developing strong collegial networks beyond the agency, and often beyond the town. This local network approach fulfils the dual role of responding to the needs of specific young people and parents, and in providing professional support to youth workers as they inevitably become involved in family work.
- Schools are a vital component of such a strategy. Links to the guidance officer and support from the principal are key elements in developing a cooperative strategy. Participation by youth services staff in school planning processes which consider how the local youth support workers could fit into the school pastoral care program were suggested as important.
- Police are often where parents go first. For example, when parents believe the young person has “gone missing”, or when a young person is apprehended formally or informally. Young people sometimes ask the police whether they must go home. A model of best practice needs to look at the role and practices of the police when they become aware of these circumstances, or are asked for assistance by a young person or parent, particularly the role they play in information provision and referral.
- It was suggested that local young people/family support strategies be developed which identify sites of support, resources and coordination to ensure services and professionals interrelate in a way that maximises the response to issues, particularly given the spread of human service resources across different agencies in the town and region. Co-location of workers involved in the direct support of young people and regular contact between human services workers to help with each other’s ideas and pool resources were suggested as important.
- It is important, particularly in small communities, not to be seen as “government welfare”. It is important the centre is user friendly, and for service staff to be willing to visit people in their homes. To this end it is an important issue of access that such a strategy identify itself as a community strategy rather than as a welfare strategy.

An adolescent mental health service

The Early Psychosis Prevention and Intervention Centre (EPPIC) is an integrated and comprehensive

psychiatric program which seeks to address the needs of young people with early psychosis in western metropolitan Melbourne. EPPIC has an accommodation and family work program. The accommodation program is a collaborative program which is run in partnership with key community agencies to provide transitional accommodation for young people and adults recovering from an episode of psychosis. The majority of clients are aged 16 to 30 years. Family counselling is offered to residents of the accommodation program and the aim of this work is negotiated with the young person and his or her family. Where a return home is not appropriate due to the age of the client or family situation, family reconciliation is an important goal of intervention.

The transitional accommodation provided by the centre may act as a period of time-out for the young person and their family while the young person recovers, or as a safe and secure alternative to institutional or hostel settings while longer term housing options are explored. The accommodation consists of three houses located in the community.

Critical components of the model include:

- The collaborative partnership with community based agencies enhances opportunities for support and reduces stigma. For each residence support hours are provided by both EPPIC and the community agency.
- Role clarity of workers is seen as essential. Each client is assigned a primary therapist as well as a

support worker who may focus on skill development while exploring future options. A client driven approach is taken.

- The conceptualisation of the accommodation as transitional provides an opportunity for the young person to be accommodated outside of institutional settings while recovering, and to develop future plans regarding either a return to live with their family or independent living.

Conclusion

The case studies serve to illustrate the diversity of services and service models that have some direct relevance to early intervention into and the prevention of homelessness among young people. While some strategies are directly focused on early home leaving, others have a more indirect effect on creating protective factors which reduce the likelihood of homelessness occurring or are targeted at difficulties closely associated with early home leaving, such as the environment, support and response capacities of schools. The implication of this data is that a range of approaches are required in a range of service system contexts. Common elements are evident, such as non-blaming responses, and valuing practice in relation to both young people and parents.

In the next chapter issues and implications regarding best practice in the prevention of and early intervention into youth homelessness are discussed.

Chapter 9

IMPLICATIONS FOR BEST PRACTICE AND POLICYMAKING

THE CONTEXT in which home leaving takes place in Australia has changed dramatically over the past 30 years, largely due to changes in the labour market. In a number of other respects there is a sense that interdependence is a more useful concept to characterise ongoing parent-child relations, rather than the traditional notion of dependence being replaced by independence. This reflects the view that as the patterns of home leaving alter, so the social relations between parents and children will need to alter accordingly.

There have been at least two identifiable policy responses to homelessness among young people. One has been a concern to respond to homelessness itself, through the provision of crisis and transitional accommodation together with some attempts to improve access to longer term housing tenures. The second, with a preventive focus, has involved a range of policies and strategies outlined in Chapter 4. The most tightly focused of these aim to minimise the number of young people who leave home before they have the resources to sustain an independent or shared household. An examination of the policy literature of the past ten years leaves the impression that there is an emerging policy agenda of “home retention” and that this agenda is in some respects an extension of the

central youth policy objective of the 1980s, school retention.

This chapter examines the implications of the data for best practice, particularly as this pertains to early intervention and prevention. The approach taken does not allow all aspects of best practice to be examined, such as the efficiency implications of various strategies, nor does it allow the development of benchmarks for particular types of service models. Given the relative recency of inquiry in this area and the multiple factors which can underlie early home leaving leading to homelessness, a broad rather than narrow approach has been taken.

Early home leaving and homelessness

This study provides further support for the findings of previous studies regarding the factors which lead to homelessness among young people, and confirms that these factors are often interrelated. The problem is not early home leaving itself, but a range of situational, external and structural factors which can result in early home leaving. Early home leaving can lead to homelessness if insufficient protective factors exist for a young person. The implication is that both prevention and early intervention strategies are important.

This study found further support for the view that early home leaving is not caused by income support acting as an incentive, by negative peer influence, or willfulness. Rather the data supports the view that early home leaving occurs in a climate of family conflict, a felt lack of emotional support, grief and loss, or environmental characteristics which remove the protective factors around young people (or young people and their families) to the point where the young person is kicked out, or is effectively compelled or feels compelled to leave.

This is not to suggest that young people were not at times active contributors to the difficulties experienced in families. However, in almost all cases there were other significant and preceding issues in the family. Early home leaving also occurs because of state intervention, where the safety of the child or young person and their continued residence in the family are seen as mutually exclusive. Protective factors to emerge in the study included:

- access to a parent who they felt can understand and listen to them;
- relatives or friends who provided alternative sources of support to parents;
- access to community youth services where a young person can gain information and personal support;
- a supportive teacher or school counsellor who could provide information or support; and
- a supportive and responsive rather than punitive school environment.

The study found that while most young people will return to the family home on one or more occasions, they will leave again if they believe nothing has changed. The implications of this for early intervention are numerous. They include helping parents think through their response to find the one which is most helpful, when their young person returns home or subsequently makes contact. Given that in many cases support external to the family is not sought until a crisis within the family or home leaving has occurred, the immediacy of service response is a critical indicator of the effectiveness of early intervention services.

In highlighting both the cultural and the temporal dimensions of homelessness and home leaving, this report endorses the view that prevention and early intervention relating to homelessness must incorporate more than purely shelter-based notions, to incorporate an affective dimension. The concept of home endorsed by this research, incorporates notions of safety, emotional support, and a sense of belonging. By addressing the affective and temporal dimensions of home, home leaving and homelessness, a clearer understanding of effective prevention and early intervention measures is gained.

Policies and programs

While an interest in the prevention of youth homelessness dates back to the 1970s, the language and concepts of early intervention are far more recent, with the HREOC setting out the overall agenda in a way that has remained substantially unchanged since 1989. An examination of the policies and programs reveals government responses since this time have been mixed, with outstanding features being the failure of the States to deliver adequate welfare services to young people, and the emergence – through tied Commonwealth-State programs such as the Adolescent/Family Mediation and Therapy Program and SAAP – of specific models of service which have an early intervention capacity. Other Commonwealth programs such as STAR have included as possible targets young people who are homeless and at risk of homelessness. This has allowed some localised, sporadic and generally time-limited developments relevant to early intervention to occur. Some States such as Victoria, have introduced specific programs relevant to early intervention, while most have done little beyond that required under joint contribution to Commonwealth programs.

In summary, the current dominant programmatic strategies by Australian governments involve:

- an increased commitment to adolescent/family mediation and support services;
- school-based at risk strategies that are largely focused on school retention and which largely develop responses within an individualised construction of at risk;
- a range of other programs aimed at prevention of homelessness which involve pilot, short-term initiatives at the local level, generally conceptualised within a vocational training, education or employment framework; and
- coordination and articulation of services strategies primarily focused on introducing individualised case management, and clear case management location.

Young people's perspectives

Young people see their relationship with parents, or step-parents (where there are changed family structures) as central to their capacity to stay at home. Many would remain living longer at the family home if there was a level of change in critical areas. Where previous studies have indicated that the theme of family conflict is pervasive (O'Connor 1989), this study suggests that the impact on young people of this is a lack of felt emotional support, that is, a deep conviction that home and their parents or larger family have rejected them or do not understand them. This study found that the perception of being rejected by parents or

family members may be related to the presence of behaviours by parents and family members which are inconsistent with the young person's notion of a "home".

When young people seek assistance they have mixed experience, with communication-based support being described as helpful or unhelpful to a similar extent. It is clear that young people often find that a counsellor, teacher or other service provider breaches what they consider to be the trust and implicit confidentiality of their conversations. There are also reports of service providers dismissing the young person principally on the basis of parental deference. There is a clear implication for a wide range of services and practitioners to explicitly examine from an ethical perspective the nature of their service relationship with young people and to develop practices which are respectful of them.

Parents' perspectives

The parents interviewed indicated a high level of concern, distress, embarrassment and sometimes anger for what had happened, and yet consistently indicated they had a high level of concern for their children. From the perspective of the parent, it is the young person who is most often seen as "the problem", or as having problems which need addressing. This was further confirmed in the case studies, where service providers frequently indicated that the most common parental request for response from service providers often amounted to a request to "control" or "fix up" the young person. The reasons for home leaving also cited by parents include negative peer influence and the availability of income support arrangements. This stands in some degree of contrast to the significant levels of difficulty, instability, mobility and problematic behaviour such as alcohol misuse, aggressiveness, or abuse reported by parents as usually occurring in the home in the period preceding the home leaving.

The parents interviewed did not include the feelings and perspectives of their children as issues contributing to home leaving. Although there was a degree of similarity in parents' and young people's definitions of home at one level (where people feel loved, safe, supported) parents did not, as young people did, include in their definitions specific behaviours which indicate how such feelings are developed and maintained (through listening, getting problems sorted out, talking to each other). This, together with a tendency to blame, and exclude their own role in the process of early home leaving from discussion, supports the view that parents have a substantial blind spot in respect of the antecedents of early home leaving. The implications for parent support and education strategies include the need to examine the notion of home from

a child's perspective, for parents to develop the capacity to self-reflect on the behaviours that are consistent with their own notions of home, and to develop skills in discussing these matters with children.

The survey findings reveal that 58% of the sample of agencies reported working with parents or guardians "virtually always" or "often"; and only 6% "virtually never". These results stand in sharp contrast with parents who repeatedly stated during interviews that they were unable to access support, and were frequently not consulted about their young person's situation. In many interviews parents maintained that they felt perpetually "judged" by service providers as inadequate parents or guardians. Seventy per cent of the parents related extreme difficulties in accessing support for their son or daughter. Interview and survey data suggest that many parents cannot find services to respond to their needs despite significant attempts, or that they are not aware of how to access those services which are available. There is a serious need for an increase in parent support services and an increase in community awareness about the kinds of support and services available to parents and guardians confronting an issue associated with youth homelessness or early home leaving.

Comparing the perspectives of young people and parents

Across the stories told by young people and parents, there is a high level of consistency at several levels. Both groups speak of the need for communication-based support, and of gaps or breakdown in communication within their families. Both groups speak about significant levels of conflict, physical violence (whether presented as discipline or not), and grief and loss. In the experiences of both groups, changes in family structure (the loss of a parent or caregiver, or the arrival of a de facto or step-parent) appear to be significant factors in the process leading to early home leaving and homelessness. There are striking similarities in terms of unmet need, cited in terms of lack of access to or support from service providers; inadequate provision of suitable short-term respite accommodation for the young person, especially where there is alcohol or substance abuse or an issue of intellectual disability; and inadequate counselling to deal with the grief and loss experienced by parents and young people. For both groups, schooling and contact with school staff tends to be more negative than positive, and there are disturbing similarities in the stories of parents and young people who speak of schools providing inadequate support when the young person demonstrated disruptive behaviour, a decline in academic performance, learning difficulties, or truancy. The

experiences of young people and parents with regard to schools strongly suggests that school systems need to engage in critical self-reflection about the impact of school policies and practices on young people who are vulnerable.

In both groups, physical violence: hitting, striking, slapping, occur as a part of family life. In more than half of the young people's interviews, episodes of physical violence are related. In the parents' group, serious physical violence is related in one-third of cases and one in six parents indicated sexual abuse of a female child in the family. Physical violence was often mentioned in these and other cases in the context of being necessary discipline. This calls into question not only the issue of young people's right to be protected from physical violence, but what constitutes appropriate discipline for children and young people. In many cases, the resort to physical means of discipline appears to be used as a means of authoritarian control or a lashing out rather than reasonable "discipline". A number of parents in the sample spoke with alarm about young people's "rights", as if information to young people about their right not to be the subject of physically violent discipline presents a threat to family life. The data in this study from a variety of sources does not support this view.

It is not only important to value parents and their role but to do so in a way which does not reduce young people to objects for coercion and manipulation. The issue of children's rights is important and should include the child's "right to relationships" with people they need to provide the safety and security necessary to emotional and physical well-being. This incorporates, but goes beyond, a purely legalistic notion of rights to one which requires a set of behaviours and attitudes to children and young people which reflect a view of them as people with views and feelings which cannot be routinely ignored. Parent and institutional behaviours consistent with this right to relationship include listening to young people, developing two-way communication, demonstrating commitment to children and young people over time, and ensuring that a young person's perspective is gained when matters concerning them are determined.

Service provider perspectives

The research proceeded on the basis that early intervention into and prevention of homelessness among young people required a variety of intervention sites and goals, and would be substantially affected by various contextual matters. This proved to be the case. Given this, it becomes difficult to suggest specific models of practice that are likely to be transportable unless this occurs in institutional environments where there is a degree of consistency across services. While

state secondary schools and child protection and alternative care systems, along with Commonwealth-funded welfare, education and employment programs, have the capacity to endorse and resource particular service models across states and sometimes across Australia, a significant degree of variability in the specific models developed can be assumed as necessary to account for these contextual factors. The following analysis draws from the research principles for successful or best practice.

Practice approaches across the field

In order to analyse models of early intervention practice it is necessary to consider whether the diverse practices and goals of different models can be classified into broad practice approaches. A number of these approaches are usually in combination in a specific service model. Taking into account all data in the study, six broad approaches to young people and service responses to them are discernable. It is of interest that these same approaches can be discerned in relation to parent strategies. We have called these approaches:

- a treatment and control approach;
- an individual therapy approach;
- a developmental approach;
- a rights-based approach;
- a relational approach; and
- a transitional/independent living approach.

The treatment and control approach involves a view of young people in a period of adolescence where they are essentially unstable, in a period of "storm and stress", or in effect, a period of abnormality. From such a perspective, young people need controlling or treatment by either parents, or if not parents, then services and other agencies such as school and police. Issues of home leaving are seen essentially as the fault of willful young people who are "bad" or "mad", who are led astray by peers, government inducements, youth workers or their own pathology. Parent-child relations are painted as static and as threatened by calls by the young person for greater autonomy. This approach when applied to parents, is one where parents are universally blamed and viewed as inherently uncaring and/or unstable. In research literature the "storm and stress" analysis has been rejected as an empirically supportable basis for understanding adolescence (Adelson 1986; Springhall 1983). This approach provides legitimacy for excluding young people who experience difficulty from sources of social and family support.

The individualised therapeutic approach is aimed at bringing about change in, or treating, the individual from a position of empathy, often stated as a client-centered perspective. It is essentially a deficit approach

and includes a range of mental health, drug rehabilitation and individual counselling strategies.

A third approach operates from a developmental perspective, where young people are seen as being in need of personal development, socialisation, guidance and stability of lifestyle in order to successfully make various necessary transitions, including from living at home to independent living. Where these conditions do not exist, a young person risks not making the transition successfully. Such an approach generates strategies focused on individual young people, often seen as being at risk. Two variations of this approach seem reflected in the data. In the first an active process of diagnosis occurs, where young people are identified as at risk through the application of particular risk factors. The second approach involves creating an environment where young people will self-identify as requiring support. This is an important distinction as young people themselves do not use the notion of at risk as a way of understanding themselves (Brough 1994). Both approaches often involve strategies for the development of skills or competencies by the individual, sometimes through specifically developed programs. When all young people are considered "at risk" these strategies are applied universally, for example, through the inclusion of conflict resolution or parenting curriculum in school. When applied to parents, a developmental approach focuses on education regarding parenting styles and skills.

A fourth perspective sees young people essentially as individuals with legitimate perspectives, feelings, and rights in the same way as other people. From this perspective, embodied in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CROC), young people have a right to protection, to education, to relationship with their families, and a right to be heard in decisions made which affect them. Implicit in this perspective is the view that parents and other social institutions such as schools only partially acknowledge the personhood of children and young people. Strategies with this orientation reflect an acknowledgement that young people do have rights and that they have a right to know what these are. In CROC, these rights include the acknowledgement of parents as the primary caregivers for children and so should not be assumed to be anti-parent. Practices which seek to include rather than exclude parents, to improve relationships, can be pursued, though this can be in tension when at the expense of other rights of the young person, such as the right to safety.

The relational approach sees young people as being in interdependent relationships with parents, other family members, and even communities, where ongoing implicit or explicit negotiation of the nature of the relationship and associated norms is required. Responses which heighten communication and mutual

understanding between young people and their parent/s are prioritised. Such an approach views the notion that young people are in transition to independence as simplistic and failing to understand the importance of family relationships to the social and emotional well-being of people throughout the lifespan. This relational orientation is reflected in young person-family counselling, strategies to link young people and parent/s, and mediation and systemic family therapy approaches. The highest priority of such strategies is improved relationships and support within the family. While individual work may occur with different family members, these are seen as necessary accompaniments to the whole of family work.

A final approach is oriented to the provision of and/or support of young people in accommodation or housing that is independent or transitional. This approach could be termed a transitional/independent living approach. It is most often cited as relevant when the family situation has been broken down for a considerable period of time, usually as a result of abuse or when a young person is needing or wishing to live independently and is of an age where there are no requirements for the involvement of the state welfare authorities. Such intervention usually falls outside the arena of early intervention with young people under 16, given the long-term process homelessness that young people of this age usually have as antecedents. It is a common approach used with young people 16 and older.

These approaches are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, in respect of best practice it is usual to see a number of approaches combined in a particular service model. This typology of approaches will be used to discuss early intervention later in this chapter.

Family-focused services

Family-focused services were broadly divided into general family support services, family mediation and therapy services and alternative care services. General family support services are more oriented towards work with parents and together with alternative care services seem to have comparatively less involvement with young people and families once home leaving has occurred, than family mediation/therapy, and young people-family mediation.

Family-focused services generally receive a significant proportion of referrals from statutory welfare authorities with referrals from young people and parents themselves often limited because of a lack of sufficient resources or a restricted mandate.

The overall impression from the data is that family-focused strategies regarding early home leaving and homelessness among young people are best coordinated by those services which have clear and articulate

pro parent **and** pro young person frameworks and practices. The adolescent-parent mediation and therapy services are outstanding examples of this, demonstrating a deep appreciation both of the experiences and perspectives of young people and the value which young people themselves place on family relationships, a respect and empathy for parents, and a commitment to continue to seek family restoration or at least a level of reconciliation well after home leaving has occurred. In this study there is little to support the view that generic family support services are sufficiently focused on or understanding of the issues and interests of young people within families to coordinate this work effectively, though this could well be the case in particular services.

This new type of young person-family service has emerged only recently, largely through the Commonwealth funding of adolescent-family mediation services. It provides an obvious site for the coordination of specialist adolescent-family-focused work which arises from the involvement of schools, general youth services and other service providers. Such services have an important role to play in providing specialist support to a range of agencies in professional development and training and in community education.

Vital to best practice is a framework for practice which contextualises the difficulties families experience, rather than simply viewing difficulties as signals of a dysfunctional family. It is notable that best practice agencies do not pathologise families (parents or young people), but see them as operating in stressful circumstances from a social justice perspective. The emphasis is on validating parents while at the same time being clear about the basic rights of young people to a safe and supportive home. This combination of relational, rights, developmental and therapeutic approaches requires substantial insight regarding macro and micro perspectives on practice with families and with young people, and can only be undertaken with a strong commitment by the service to professional support, training and ongoing reflective practice.

These young people-family services are clearly focused on early intervention in direct practice, yet can play an important role in developing greater protective factors particularly at the situational level, through involvement in community awareness raising activities, policy development, and preventive education in schools.

Protective and alternative care services have a clear role to play where there are long-standing or serious family issues, given the link between these issues and subsequent homelessness. State intervention is reported by a wide range of respondents as a substantial source of systems abuse and an active ingredient in the creation of homelessness. A variety of respondents

indicated the need for greater emphasis on providing support to families where there are protective concerns, and the need for specific services for adolescents and their families. The level of notifications of abuse of young people is not seen to be matched by services to those adolescents and their families. While in part this may be attributable to the difficulty in gaining sufficient alternative care placements in the community; the insufficiency of services and tendency to target services to younger children were cited as ongoing barriers to effective intervention. The case studies indicate that best practice involves using practices which deal with protective concerns while maximising the extent to which unproblematic family processes can continue. Best practice also involves service providers regarding the young person as a person with basic rights, which includes the right to be actively involved and heard in all aspects of the case planning process.

There is clear evidence that SAAP-funded services are engaging in family-focused work, and in particular with parents of young clients. Best practice in a SAAP service involves having a readiness and a capacity to engage with the families of young people, as well as to support young people in other areas of need. Services which are accessed by a significant number of young people under 16 are clearly moving in this direction. Linkage with a specialist young person-family worker or service appears vital if SAAP services are to effectively explore the family options young people have. The dilemma remains as to how in policy and practice SAAP will deal with young people under 15 years given the resilience of this group as users of SAAP, and the lack in many cases of alternative options for these young people.

The extent to which Youth and Parent Services in Adelaide involve parents in the alternative accommodation aspect of their work deeply challenges the long-held assumption that location in another family is a relatively benign strategy. Indeed it could well be that such placements, which may have some parent involvement aspects, actually contribute to the process of young people becoming detached from families more than is necessary. If family reunification is genuinely sought the YPS model of practice and some of the principles it is based on are well worth further application. This said, a view was raised a number of times in the research that the removal of, or location of the young people away from their home was in many cases detrimental. At a time when it is becoming increasingly recognised that the perpetrator rather than a victim of domestic violence should leave the family home while the matter is dealt with, (in many cases of course this does not occur), it is of concern that young people should be the ones to leave when there are protective concerns or when substantial family issues exist. Given that such relocation often actively contributes to

early home leaving and homelessness, it is time these practices are examined more fully with a view to young people remaining in the home when, for example, physical or sexual abuse indicates another family member or resident should be held accountable, and change their behaviour.

The needs of families from non-English cultural backgrounds receive some level of response by a number of services. However, as the research of Prince (1995) indicates, models are required which can respond to the needs of families where English is not the preferred family language. Models of practice for Aboriginal and Islander families have not been found in this study and this area requires further investigation.

Schools and school-focused services

The results from the survey and the parent interviews indicate that schools represent a significant source of referrals, and that they are an important site for both prevention and early intervention. Interview data arising from young people and parents revealed that schools were the institution most frequently identified as the first to be aware that the young person was having difficulties, though these factors did not present as related to early home leaving or homelessness. This potential for schools to be “first to know” cannot be overlooked when framing responses aimed at early intervention into youth homelessness.

The interviews with young people (and parents) revealed a pattern of declining school performance as a consequence of pressures at home. In a significant number of cases, leaving home was given as a reason for dropping out of school, and at times school expulsion or difficulty was a contributing reason for early home leaving. At the same time, interviews with more than one-third of parents identified the transition from primary to high school as a significant and detrimental turning point in the lives of their sons and daughters, with the same number of parents citing truancy and suspension/exclusion as a part of their young person’s school experience. Half of the parents identified problems with their young person’s school academic performance.

In any discussion of best practices as they exist in school settings, it is essential to consider what dilemmas or constraints exist for schools trying to implement best practice.

Given the credentialing demands generally placed on Australian secondary schooling systems, there are limitations on their capacity to adopt early intervention and prevention strategies. While secondary schools do respond to the social, emotional and welfare needs of students in a variety of ways in, general they do so in ways which often fall short of responding to the needs of those students who are homeless or most

vulnerable to homelessness (Tasker 1995). Such students are often seen as difficult and in need of significant additional support or attention within a disciplinary or behaviour management framework.

While our case studies and research show that schools are well placed locations for providing early intervention or prevention responses to youth homelessness in a number of respects, the larger issue arises of what the role of schools should be beyond the traditional development of a young person’s educational and vocational competencies. This is a contested area. The challenge for schooling systems and individual schools is to address academic and vocational goals and yet be responsive to the social and emotional well-being of young people from the widest range of circumstances. Clearly schools cannot do this alone.

By networking more efficiently, by breaking down barriers between teachers, welfare workers, youth workers and other professionals, schools can better achieve the multiple goals demanded of them by an increasingly complex society. This ability to network in the community, to draw upon the resources of specialised personnel in meeting all the life needs of young people, seems an essential ingredient of schools which strive for successful practice. Three strategies seem to typify current best practice. These are the involvement of youth and community services inside the school, in roles of contributors to the curriculum, sources of information in the playground, providers of specific support services in rooms located at the school, in active support of guidance officers and teachers regarding particular students, and in teacher in-service training. Second, it involves the schools’ use of these agencies in the community through referral (particularly in the areas of family work and supports for the student), participation in interagency networks, and school support of systems for external case management where significant welfare or family issues exist for the student. Finally, best practice in schools involves schools recognising that the institutional structures and processes of the school must be consistent with prevention and early intervention agendas. Best practice does not involve simply adding on early intervention and prevention features to the school without considering in very explicit ways the level of supportiveness experienced by students in the school generally, and the impact of policies related to exclusion, suspension, behaviour management and truancy.

At the same time, barriers between home and school need to be consistently tackled, with parents and young people encouraged to build partnerships of learning with teachers and school personnel. School authorities need to develop more flexible timetabling, including evening and weekend classes, so that young people and parents can better access school services. The unmet need by parents for support and educative

input can clearly be partially met at schools due to the image they have as community rather than welfare services.

There are issues here for teaching as a profession, and for teacher-training authorities. The past decade has witnessed increasing levels of criticism directed at teachers, and teachers have learnt to move quickly into “siege” positions when attacked. There is some parallel here with parents, who need first to be validated rather than attacked for their perceived failings. It is essential therefore to “sell” any changes in schooling to the teaching profession, to validate the enormous difficulties inherent in their work, and to help them see the benefits in changing. Throughout this report, there is continual reference to the crucial role played by teachers in the lives of young people. There is ample evidence that poor quality teacher-pupil relationships, and a reluctance on the part of teachers to see their pastoral role as important, are contributing factors to early school leaving. While schools are hypothetically ideal sites for early intervention given the almost universal attendance of children, in practice there are a number of cautions.

There are some things it appears schools can do well, for example, brief intervention that provides perspectives and information to parents and young people at critical times; curriculum which develops life skills and information about the existence of social supports, and ways to deal with difficulties. Schools can also respond well to young people once they have become homeless particularly in respect of ensuring (in concert with youth and community services) that there are additional supports to allow students to continue schooling while they live out of home, as evidenced by the Ardoch Foundation approach. In this respect schools can become a site for the delivery of welfare services integrated into the school and delivered in a non-stigmatising way.

Schools can be an excellent site for some aspects of prevention work (particularly protective situational issues such as young people and parents having knowledge and life skills), and can play an important role in early intervention, though this latter capacity is heavily dependent on their frameworks for viewing and responding to young people issues and their capacity to operate in the genuinely collegial and open manner with other community and specifically youth services.

Schools do not often engage in young person-family work that is substantial. This is the arena of specialist young people-family mediation and counselling services who are best placed to do this work. The critical issue with schools is how to liaise and connect into such services.

The critical issue of family relations involves having a practice framework that regards young people as people with views and feelings that must be heard, and

strategies which enable an increase in positive regard towards the young person within the family. In general there is little evidence of empathetic institutionally-supported practice frameworks in schools, as perceived by the young people who are homeless or likely to become homeless. While some schools exhibit strong values in this regard there is wide variation in school philosophy and management approach.

It appears that identifying students who are at risk and targeting specific strategies at these students is problematic. A narrow “at risk” approach will run the danger of labelling and stereotyping students. It reflects too closely an approach to students at the institutional level of the school that is essentially “doing to” rather than listening to and engaging with students. Further, there is evidence that the current general trend in Australia is to promote supportive school environment policies while the actual practices of secondary schooling are operating from a more behaviour management perspective (Slee 1995), and at risk strategies involving active identification could very easily be subsumed subtly and despite the best intentions into this pervasive orientation.

Young people are particularly concerned about confidentiality, and this raises the thorny question for schools of who is the primary client? Schools, it could be argued, do not perceive or reflect in their processes the view that students are their primary client but rather operate on the basis that the primary client is the community, parents, and society generally. The question of the practice frameworks used for best practice in schools is vitally important. Young people who are homeless or who are close to homeless will generally not respond or access a “treatment and control approach” or a response that does not include important protections for them, which are in turn embodied in a rights approach. While there can never be total confidentiality, there is a need for response frameworks that encourage access by students and build trusting relationships. At risk strategies, if employed, should focus on self-identification strategies rather than enter the ethical and dubious quagmire of diagnostic techniques to identify the at risk young people.

Schools can certainly use skills in the community and youth sectors, and work in partnership with agencies who do essential coordination. In this way, schools can incorporate a mixture of preventive and early intervention strategies, in the manner of KITS, which stands out as being based on many of the principles suggested by this study as best practice.

Youth services

There has been a certain public perception that youth services are in some way antagonistic to or do not engage with parents. This is not substantially borne out

by the data in this study in respect of youth services which undertake early intervention work. While young people most commonly self-refer to youth services, the youth services in the survey indicated that parents were the referral source at 50% of that level. More than half of the youth service respondents indicated that they worked with parents virtually always or often. It is also relevant that youth services did not cite the provision of accommodation as a critical early intervention strategy, although little work was directed specifically at the support of parents. A number of early intervention and prevention service models are located in youth services. In addition, some of those discussed under the family-focused services, such as the SAAP youth accommodation service with a specialist individual and family worker, identify as youth services.

The approaches used by youth services vary considerably, however it is reasonable to suggest that there is a strong recognition that a relational approach is important in respect of young people and early home leaving. This is accompanied by a view that young people have the right to be safe, to be heard, for the privacy of discussions to be respected unless permission for disclosure is given, and to seek and be given information and support as a person. A developmental approach is also present in most youth service approaches with parenting, life skills, conflict resolution, or some educative component for young people and parents (separately) viewed as important components of most models. Services in the mental health area indicate an emphasis on an individual therapy approach. The transitional/independent living approach is most clearly evident in youth accommodation services which cater primarily for young people 16 and over, and in those services where few resources are available to undertake the time consuming work associated with parent and family liaison.

Both generalist and specialist youth services can play a vital role in early intervention. A number of service models are worthy of specific mention. The Drum Youth Resource Centre is a model clearly replicable to other urban areas. It has a preventive orientation in building up protective factors regarding young people's access to information and easy access to support, where young women in particular are catered for, as well as a capacity to undertake basic early intervention work which links into schools as a matter of routine and family counselling as needed. Such a basic yet integrated youth service facility with health, legal, family relations and accommodation components co-located could be seen as an essential community resource in all suburban and satellite areas with a significant population of young people, and as a fundamental ingredient in the town plans of growing regional and satellite communities.

In small rural towns youth services of any descrip-

tion struggle to exist on short-term and low levels of funding. They respond to a very broad range of needs and the only way they can effectively undertake early intervention or prevention work is by developing strong links with other key people, particularly specialist workers in the area, such as in community health services, in schools, and in the police. Given the diversity of issues these agencies work on and the fact that early home leaving issues do not constitute a great deal of this, such a strategy would need to be developed in the context of responding to a variety of needs of young people and families in rural areas.

The importance of a national telephone counselling service for young people and parents cannot be underestimated. Universal access to immediate and confidential support is likely to have significant application particularly in regard to early intervention.

It is clear SAAP youth services are orientating to include relations between young people and parents/caregivers. There is however a distinct difference between the degree of insight, and the practices developed in those SAAP agencies with a concentration of clients in the 12 to 15 age range. These services have obviously developed an orientation to include family relations work to some degree in their role. This study supports the view that best practice involves either dedicated SAAP services to this particular age-group, or the close involvement of specialist young people-family workers who can undertake more systemic work with the families when this is needed.

The study highlights in a number of respects the role that specialist services to young people in the areas of mental health and drug and alcohol rehabilitation have in early intervention and prevention work. The data from the survey indicated the high percentage of young people with mental health issues accessing youth services, and the case study and interview data supports the generally accepted position that mental health issues and homelessness interact strongly.

Implications for other service providers

As in other studies the link between child protection intervention and homelessness is evident. While the rationale for intervention (abuse to a child) is not questioned, the removal from abuse appears to come in some instances at the cost of systems-induced homelessness. The continued lack of sufficient service supports to adolescent young people with protective concerns is clearly problematic given the emergence of effective practice models for these young people and their families. These models, some of which were the subject of case studies in this research, involve a range of services being made available, not only to those families in greatest crisis who are likely to be the subject of Care orders, but to a broader range of young people

and their families where there are protective issues. The removal of abused young people is seen as unfair by some young people and service providers. While it is important not to generalise to all family contexts, these respondents indicated that, in their experience, adolescents were often inappropriately seen as the ones who should be relocated when they were the subject of abuse.

Although some parents made very positive comments about their experience with police, the data from surveys and interviews supports the view that intervention from police, although in many instances positive, often does not involve effective referral of the young person or parent to an appropriate service provider. This conclusion is particularly significant given that in two-thirds of the parent/young person interview sample, contact with the police and/or the legal system had occurred before or during the young person's progression into homelessness.

These results strongly suggest the need for better communication channels to be developed between police and service providers working in the area of young people. This might entail educational and professional development programs which inform police of the factors associated with youth homelessness, and of appropriate avenues for referral and support for those young people and parents who present with difficulties associated with early home leaving. Infrastructures which build links between "first to know" agencies and other support services have the potential to result in better mechanisms for early intervention. Equally there is a need for health professionals, including psychiatrists, to reconsider their response frameworks when dealing with issues surrounding early home leaving. This may mean careful consideration of "pathology" models which focus on the young person as the source of problems in families.

Best practice in the area of early intervention requires services to incorporate as a minimum, aspects of relational and rights-based approaches. These models recognise that early intervention responding to early home leaving must recognise and respect the personal perspectives of both young people and parents where each has a right to be safe and heard. They are relational in that they work with both parents and young people specifically around home leaving and returning issues. Individual therapy and developmental approaches are used to supplement these core approaches as needed.

The need for protective supports

Successful prevention and early intervention means recognising the need for protective factors, and providing support networks which assist in this regard.

Throughout the course of the case studies, and during interviews with parents and young people, reference is made to the families lacking support networks. These networks might be other family members, friends, or community-based (such as church or parent support organisations). There is also a recognition in the field that some localities, by virtue of their isolation, lack of social infrastructure, low socioeconomic profile, and high levels of unemployment, represent localities where there is likely to be a lack of community resources to sustain and encourage such support networks. Cass highlights this factor: "supportive personal networks and well-resourced communities can play a key role in changing the conditions under which adults carry out the responsibilities of care, nurturance and parenthood" (1994, p.213). Directing policy, programming and resources to assist families in these areas appears to be well justified.

Implications for policy and program development: Early intervention and prevention

There is a need to acknowledge that many families are undergoing stress, particularly in the current climate where structural and external factors such as unemployment interact with factors such as family conflict. Massive changes to the labour market involvement of young people in Australia and many other nations have resulted in changes to home leaving patterns. These changes require a fundamental reconsideration of what protective factors families, and specifically young people and parents require if the level of inter-dependency emerging between them is to be sustainable. This is particularly true in families where financial resources are already minimal.

There is a need to recognise and publicly acknowledge that some young people in families where there are substantial long-term relationship issues, cannot or may not wish to live at the parent/s home. In this case, policies and programs have to address the needs of young people living independently.

The models of service which met the requirements of best practice most clearly identified by parents, young people and service providers are those which offer non-stigmatised openly available services to all, and from this point were able to link people to other tiers of more specialist or specific support. In short, there is a need for sensitive systems of service delivery which encourage self-identification of support needs. Prevention approaches are best conceptualised as universal, and as building protective supports. Such supports can occur at a number of service system levels, and include the provision of community education

and life skills education. Services conceptualised as responding to young people at risk of homelessness should emphasise placing support service close to and accessible to young people and parents. These should be articulated to more specific service supports to deal with various levels and types of need. It is possible that an approach which emphasises identification of at risk young people could not only have a stigmatising effect but could also have a netwidening effect.

Early intervention strategies cannot deal with or ameliorate the social and structural dynamics which produce and sustain homelessness. Early intervention strategies can have preventive impact at the level of the individual and the level of the family and so reduce the numbers of young people who become homeless as a result of early home leaving. This said, there is the broad issue of young people's place in contemporary Australia, where even if many or most young people remain at home, significant numbers will need to live in independent households for one or a number of reasons. Study, employment, unsatisfactory circumstances at home or simply the desire to live independently mean that the prevention of homelessness ultimately returns to the core issues of poverty and housing affordability. Conversely the long-term processes that lead to early home leaving in many circumstances cannot be addressed by early intervention strategies. Indeed the comment was made several times

during the study that issues of abuse prevention and domestic violence, a re-examination of the place children and young people have when parents separate or repartner, whole family homelessness, the poverty and general lack of adequate housing for many Aboriginal people, and the broader socioeconomic stresses facing families are of vital importance in the prevention of homelessness among young people.

It is critical that there develops a positive and supportive view of young people generally, rather than there be a continuing view that young people, particularly those from low income circumstances and indigenous young people, are inherently problems and threats to social order. Images of the troublesome adolescent as a stereotype, reinforced through negative media portrayal, can themselves create additional distance between young people, their parents and the rest of the community. Such images provide legitimacy for a "doing to" approach to young people instead of an approach of engaging and listening. As young people gain information from a wider range of sources and remain for longer periods at home, the imperative is that our picture of who young people are and the nature of our relationship with them needs to alter. There is a need for substantial community and parent education, in order that these dominant perspectives are challenged.

References

- Adams-Webber, J. 1979, *Personal Construct Theory: Concepts and Applications*, Wiley, New York.
- Adelson, J. 1986, *Inventing Adolescence: The Political Psychology of Everyday Schooling*, Transaction Books, New Brunswick.
- Alder, C. & Sandor, D. 1990, 'Youth researching youth', *Youth Studies*, vol.9, no.4, pp.38–42.
- Amato, P.R. & Keith, B. 1991, 'Parental divorce and the well-being of children: A meta-analysis', *Psychological Bulletin*, vol.110, pp.26–46.
- Anderson, S.A. & Sabatelli, R.M. 1990, 'Differentiating differentiation and individuation: Conceptual and operational challenges', *American Journal of Family Therapy*, vol.18, pp.32–50.
- Angus, G. & Woodward, S. 1995, *Child Abuse and Neglect: Australia 1993–94*, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare: Child Welfare Series No.13, AGPS, Canberra.
- Aquilino, W. 1991, 'Family structure and home-leaving: A further specification of the relationship', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol.53, pp.999–1010.
- Attorney-General's Department 1994, *Family and Community Services Program: Directory 1994*, AGPS, Canberra.
- Australian Centre for Independent Journalism 1992, *Youth and the Media*, University of Technology Sydney, Sydney.
- Australian Education Council 1991, *National Report on Schooling in Australia: Statistical Annex*, AEC and Curriculum Corp., Melbourne.
- Australian Education Council Review Committee 1991, *Young People's Participation in Post-Compulsory Education and Training*, AGPS, Canberra.
- Australian Youth Policy and Action Coalition 1995, *Families: A Youth Perspective*, Commonwealth Department of Human Services and Health, Canberra.
- Barber, B.K. 1989, 'Cultural, family and personal contexts of parent-adolescent conflict', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol.51, pp.375–86.
- Batten, M. & Russell 1995, *Students At Risk: A Review of Australian Literature 1980–1994*, ACER Research Monograph, No.46, Melbourne.
- Bell, R.Q. 1986, 'Age-specific manifestations in changing psychosocial risk', in D.C. Farren & J.D. McKinney (eds), *Risk in Intellectual and Psychosocial Development*, Academic Press, New York, pp.169–83.
- Beresford, Q. 1993, 'The really hard cases: A social profile and policy review of early school leaving', *Youth Studies Australia*, vol.12, no.4, pp.15–25.
- Berger, A.M. 1980, 'The child abusing family: Methodological issues and parent-related characteristics', *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, vol.8, no.3, pp.53–65.
- Bessant, J. 1994, 'Questioning popular representations of "youth"', *Family Matters*, no.38, August, pp.38–39.
- Bessant, J. 1995, 'Consolidating an industry and prolonging dependency: Professionals, policies and young people', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, vol.30, no.3, August, pp.249–74.
- Boyce, J. 1991, *Out of Work, Out of Home: Report of the Action Research Project 'Unemployment and Youth Homelessness'*, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.
- Brachter, M. & Santow, G. 1988, 'Changing family composition from Australian life-history data', Working Paper No.6, Australian Family Project, Canberra Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University.
- Brandon, D. et al. 1988, *The Survivors: A Study of Homeless Young Newcomers to London and the Responses Made to Them*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.
- Briggs, F. (ed.) 1994, *Children and Families: Australian Perspectives*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney.
- Brough, M. 1994, 'At Risk' Youth: AIDS, Masculinity and the Politics of Prevention, PhD thesis, University of Queensland.
- Brown, H. 1993, *Shadows and Whispers: The Sexual Abuse of Children and its Relationship to the Later Experience of Drug-related Difficulties, Homelessness and Other Social Problems, Among Young People*, Fitzroy, The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria.
- Bullen, P. & Robinson, C. 1994, *Family Support Services in New South Wales*, Family Support Services Association of NSW, Concord West.

- Burke, T. 1994, *Homelessness in Australia: Causal Factors*, AGPS, Canberra.
- Butlin, A., Phyland, P. & Lloyd, R. 1995, *Closing the Gaps: An Evaluation of the Job Placement Employment and Training (JPET) Pilot Program for Homeless Youth*, Palm Management.
- Bytheway, B. 1995, *Ageism*, Open University Press, Buckingham.
- Carrington, K. 1993, *Offending Girls: Sex, Youth and Justice*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards.
- Carter, J. 1993, 'Future directions', in H. Sykes (ed.), *Youth Homelessness: Courage and Hope*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne.
- Cass, B. 1994, *Creating the Links: Families and Social Responsibility*, The National Council for the International Year of the Family, AGPS, Canberra.
- Centrepoint 1993, *Housing Our Children*, Centrepoint, Soho.
- Centrepoint 1995, *Tackling Youth Homelessness in South East London*, Centrepoint, London.
- Chamberlain, C. & Mackenzie, D. 1992, 'Understanding contemporary homelessness: Issues of definition and meaning', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, vol.27, no.4, pp.274-97.
- Chamberlain, C. & MacKenzie, D. 1994, 'Temporal dimensions of youth homelessness', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, vol.29, no.1, pp.1-25.
- Chamberlain, C., MacKenzie, D. & Brown, H. 1991, *Homeless in the City*, Melbourne.
- Chesterman, C. 1988, *Homes Away From Home: Supported Accommodation Assistance Program Review*, AGPS, Canberra.
- Coleman, A. 1994, *It Doesn't Mean I Can't Do It! Expanding Options for Young People with a Mild Intellectual Disability*, YAR/Mid Project Report, Brisbane.
- Collins, W.A. 1990, 'Parent-child relationships in the transition to adolescence: Continuity and change in interaction, affect and cognition', in R. Montemayor et al. (eds) *Advances in Adolescent Development: vol.2: The Transition from Childhood to Adolescence*, Sage, Beverly Hills.
- Commonwealth of Australia 1995a, *Agenda for Families*, AGPS, Canberra.
- Commonwealth of Australia 1995b, *Social Justice Statement 1995-1996*, AGPS, Canberra.
- Commonwealth Government 1995, 'Aspects of Youth Homelessness: Response by the Commonwealth Government to the Report by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs', November.
- Community and Public Sector Union 1995, *Youth Access Centres CPSU Survey*, Melbourne.
- Community Services Development 1995, *Towards Best Practice in Community Services in Queensland*, Department of Family and Community Services, Brisbane.
- Connell, R.W. 1993, *Schools and Social Justice*, Our Schools/Ourselves Prod, Canada.
- Coopers & Lybrand Consultants & Ashenden Milligan Pty Ltd 1992, *An Evaluation of the Commonwealth Students at Risk Program, 1990 and 1991*, Department of Employment Education and Training.
- Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 1994, *Responding to Custody Levels: A Greater Community Response to Addressing the Underlying Causes*, AGPS, Canberra.
- Cox, M. 1995, *Our Young People Our Responsibility: Responding to the Needs of Non English Speaking Background Young People in the Logan City and Surrounding Areas*, Logan City Migrant Neighbourhood Centre.
- Crane, P. 1995a, 'The portrayal of young people in the media: A critical element in the context of crime prevention debates', paper presented at the 3rd Annual Crime Prevention Conference, Brisbane.
- Crane, P. 1995b, 'Young people, ageism and the promise of inclusive citizenship', in R. Hicks et al. (eds), *Unemployment: Developments and Transitions*, Australian Academic Press, Brisbane.
- Cross-National Collaborative Group 1992, 'The changing rate of major depression', *Journal of the American Psychological Association*, vol.268, pp.3098-4105.
- Cummings, J.S., Pelligrini, D., Notarius, C. & Cummings, E. 1989, 'Children's responses to angry adult behaviour as a function of marital distress and history of interparent hostility', *Child Development*, vol.60, pp.1035-43.
- Cummings, E.M., Davies, P. & Simpson, K. 1994, 'Marital conflict, gender, and children's appraisals and coping efficacy as mediators of child adjustment', *Journal of Family Psychology*, vol.8, no.2, pp.141-49.
- Cunneen, C. & White, R. 1995, *Juvenile Justice: An Australian Perspective*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne.
- Darwin, M. 1991, *Queensland's Homeless: Evaluation of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program*, Queensland Council of Social Services, Brisbane.
- Davies, F. 1995, Addressing the needs of disadvantaged young people - The government's key initiatives for youth in employment, education and training, paper presented at "Jobs for Young Australians" Conference, 30 August 1995.
- Daws, L., Brannock, J., Brooker, R., Patton, W., Smeal, G. & Warren, S. 1995, *Young Peoples's Perceptions of and Attitudes to Sexual Violence*, National Clearinghouse for Youth Studies, Hobart.
- Denzin, N. 1989, *The Research Act*, 3rd ed., Prentice-Hall, New Jersey.
- Department of Education 1995, *Annual Report 1994-1995*, DSE, Melbourne.
- Department of Education 1994, *Annual Report 1993-1994*, Department of Education Queensland, Brisbane.
- Department of Education 1995, *Annual Report 1994-1995*, Department of Education Queensland, Brisbane.
- Department of Employment Education and Training 1993, *Annual Report 1992-1993*, AGPS, Canberra.
- Department of Employment Education and Training 1995, *Annual Report 1994-1995*, AGPS, Canberra.
- Department of Employment Education and Training 1995, *Commonwealth Programs for Schools 1995: Administrative Guidelines*, AGPS, Canberra.
- Department of Family and Community Services 1995, *Towards Best Practice in Community Services in Queensland*, Department of Family and Community Services, Brisbane.
- Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs 1995, *SAAP 1995 to 1999 Future Directions: Supported Accommodation Assistance Program*, Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs, Brisbane.
- Department of Housing and Regional Development 1993, *Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) Strategic Directions*.
- Department of Social Security 1994, *Community Service Officers Handbook*, DSS, Canberra.
- Department of Social Security 1995a, *Annual Report 1994-1995*, AGPS, Canberra.
- Department of Social Security 1995b, *Commonwealth, State and Territory Youth Protocol Guidelines*, DSS, Canberra.
- Department of Social Security 1995c, *Youth Service Handbook*, DSS, Canberra.
- Department of Community Development 1994, *Annual*

- Report, DCD, Perth.
- Department for Education and Children's Services 1994, *Annual Report of the Chief Executive Officer for 1994*, DECS, Adelaide.
- Department for Family and Community Services 1994, *Helping Families through Tough Times, Annual Report 1993-1994*, FACS, Adelaide.
- Dunlop, R. & Burns, A. 1988, *'Don't Feel the World is Caving in': Adolescents in Divorcing Families*, Monograph No.6, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.
- Drury, S. & Jamrozik, A. 1995, 'Conceptual issues of relevance to social policy and services for young people', in A. Jamrozik (ed.). *Issues in Social Welfare Policy 1985: Perceptions, Concepts and Practice*, SWRC Reports and Proceedings No.54.
- Education Department of Western Australia 1994, *Annual Report 1993-1994*, Education Department of Western Australia, Perth.
- Ellis, B. 1996, 'Leaving the nest, not! How young people, with parental support, are living at home longer', *Youth Studies Australia*, vol.15, no.1, pp.34-36.
- Ellis, B. & Fopp, R. 1995, 'Inquiring into youth homelessness', *Youth Studies Australia*, vol.14, no.1, pp.36-40.
- Emery, R.E. 1988, *Marriage, Divorce, and Children's Adjustment*, Sage, Newbury Park.
- Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia 1994, *Families From a Non English Speaking Background*, Commonwealth Department of Human Services and Health, Canberra.
- Ferguson, H. 1995, 'An Inala initiative: A community responds to its homeless young people', in W. Weeks & J. Wilson, *Issues Facing Australian Families: Human Services Respond*, 2nd ed., Longman, Melbourne.
- Ferguson, H. & Associates 1994, *Mission Possible: An Overview of Literature on Issues for Young People from non-English Speaking Backgrounds in Queensland*, Youth Bureau, Brisbane.
- Ferguson, S. 1993, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Young People and Opportunistic Prostitution in Fortitude Valley and Brisbane City*, Brisbane Youth Service, Brisbane.
- Fopp R. 1988, *Homeless Young People in Australia: Estimating Numbers and Incidence*, Report to Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.
- Fopp, R. 1993a, 'Housing versus welfare' in A. Clark (ed.) *Coming in from the Cold: The Fifth State Youth Housing Conference*, Youth Accommodation Coalition, NSW.
- Fopp, R. 1993b, 'More heat than houses: Housing and young people, the debate to date', *Youth Studies Australia*, vol.12, no.2, pp.45-51.
- Fopp, R. 1994, *The Co-ordination and Integration of Services for Young People*, National Youth Housing Strategy.
- Fopp, R. 1995, 'The causes of homelessness: Clearing the path', *National Housing Action*, vol.11, no.1, pp.11-16.
- Funder, K. (ed.) 1991, *Images of Australian Families: Approaches and Perceptions*, Australian Institute of Family Studies and Longman, Melbourne.
- Galatzer-Levy, R.M. & Cohler, B.J. 1993, *The Essential Other: A Developmental Psychology of the Self*, Basic Books, New York.
- Garbarino, J. & Gilliam, G. 1980, *Understanding Abusive Families*, Lexington Books, Mass.
- Garton, A., Zubrick, S. & Silburn, S. 1994, 'Mental health indicators in young people', *Youth Studies Australia*, vol.13, no.2, pp.36-39.
- Gatter, B. 1994, *A Review of the Operation of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program in Western Australia*, Bandt Gatter & Associates, Perth.
- Giles-Sims, J. & Finkelhor, D. 1984, 'Child abuse in step families', *Family Relations*, vol.33, July, pp.407-13.
- Goldscheider, F. & Goldscheider, C. 1993, 'Whose nest? A two-generational view of leaving home during the 1980s', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol.55, pp.851-62.
- Green, S. *Our Voluntary Homeless: Strategies for Change*, Children's Welfare Association of Victoria, Collingwood.
- Grych J.H. & Fincham, F.D. 1990, 'Marital conflict and children's adjustment: A cognitive-contextual framework', *Psychological Bulletin*, vol.108, pp.267-90.
- Hargreaves, R. & Hadlow, J. 1995, 'Preventive intervention as a working concept in child-care practice', *British Journal of Social Work*, vol.25, pp.349-65.
- Hartley, R. 1989, *What Price Independence?* National Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, AIFS, Melbourne.
- Hartley, R. & Wolcott, I. 1994, *The Position of Young People in Relation to the Family*, Report to the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme, National Clearinghouse for Youth Studies, Hobart.
- Hartley, R. (ed.) 1995, *Families and Cultural Diversity in Australia*, Allen & Unwin in association with the Australian Institute of Family Studies, Sydney.
- Health and Community Services 1995, *SAAP Family Reconciliation Framework and Guidelines*, Victoria.
- Healy, K. & Walsh, K. 1994, *I'm Always Waiting for Something to Happen: A Study of the Links Between Gender and Violence in the Lives of Young Mothers*, Women's Health Policy Unit, Queensland Health Department.
- Hearn, R. 1993, *Locked Up Locked Out: The Denial and Criminalisation of Young People's Mental Health Crisis*, Victorian Community Managed Mental Health Services Inc.
- Hendessi, M. 1992, *4 in 10: Report on Young Women who become Homeless as a Result of Sexual Abuse*, CHAR, London.
- Hill, J.P. 1993, 'Recent advances in selected aspects of adolescent development', *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, vol.34, pp.69-99.
- Hirst, C. 1989, *Forced Exit: A Profile of the Young and Homeless in Inner Urban Melbourne*, Salvation Army, Melbourne.
- House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs 1995, *Inquiry into Aspects of Youth Homelessness*, A. Morris, Chairman, Canberra.
- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1989, *Our Homeless Children*, AGPS, Canberra.
- Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1993, *Human Rights and Mental Illness*, AGPS, Canberra.
- Hunter, F.T. & Youniss, J. 1982, 'Changes in functions of three relations during adolescence', *Developmental Psychology*, vol.18, pp.806-11.
- Hutson, S. & Liddiard, M. 1989, *Street Children in Wales? A Study of Runaways and Homeless Young People Under 18 in Four Welsh Counties*, Cardiff, Children's Society.
- Hutson, S. & Liddiard, M. 1994, *Youth Homelessness: The Construction of a Social Issue*, Macmillan, London.
- Industry Commission 1995, *Charitable Organisations in Australia*, Report No.45, AGPS, Melbourne.
- Irving, T., Maunders, D. & Sherrington, G. 1995, *Youth in Australia: Policy Administration and Politics*, Macmillan, Melbourne.
- Irwin, J. et al. 1995, *As Long as I've Got my Doona: Homelessness Among Lesbian and Gay Youth*, The Australian Centre for Lesbian and Gay Research, University of Sydney.
- Jones, G. 1987, 'Leaving the parental home: An analysis of

- early housing careers', *Journal of Social Policy*, vol.16, no.1, pp.75-96.
- Justice, B. & Justice, R. 1982, 'Etiology of physical abuse of children and the dynamics of coercive treatment', in L.R. Barnhill (ed.), *Clinical Approaches to Family Violence: The Family Therapy Collection*, Aspen Public, Rockville, pp.1-20.
- Keating, P. 1992, *A National Employment and Training Plan for Young Australians*, AGPS, Canberra.
- Kennedy, L. 1995, 'Juvenile delinquency: The role of supervision versus emotional support', paper presented at the TASA Conference, 6 December.
- Kids Help Line, January 1996, *Kids Help Line Info Sheet No 12: Homelessness*, Red Hill, Queensland.
- Kilmartin, C. 1987, 'Leaving home is coming later', *Family Matters*, no.19, pp.40-43.
- Krueger, R.A. 1988, *Focus Groups : A Practical Guide for Applied Research*, Sage, Newbury Park.
- Levesley, S. 1984, *The Police Role in Child Protection in Queensland*, Queensland Police Department.
- Lindsay, M. 1993, *Moving Forward: National Evaluation of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program*, AGPS, Canberra.
- Loveday, P. & Lea, J. 1985, *Aboriginal Housing Needs in Katherine*, Australian National University North Australia Research Unit, Darwin.
- Maas, F. 1995, *Finding a Place*, National Youth Housing Strategy Final Report, Commonwealth Department of Housing and Regional Development.
- Maas, F. & Hartley, R. 1988, *On the Outside: The Needs of Unsupported, Homeless Youth*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Policy Background Paper No.7, November.
- MacKenzie, D. & Chamberlain, C. 1992, 'How Many Homeless Youth?', *Youth Studies Australia*, vol.11, no.4, pp.14-22.
- MacKenzie, D. & Chamberlain, C. 1995, 'The National Census of Homeless School Students', *Youth Studies Australia*, vol.14, no.1, pp.22-28.
- Martin, M.J. & Walters, J. 1982, 'Familial correlates of selected types of child abuse and neglect', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol.44, no.2, pp.267-76.
- McCaughey, J. 1992, *Where Now? Homeless Families in the 1990s*, Hanover Welfare Services and the Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.
- McDonald, P. 1995, *Families in Australia: A Socio-demographic Perspective*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.
- McLean, K. 1993, *Evaluation Report: Innovative Health Services for Homeless Youth Program*, Youth Health Policy Unit, Brisbane.
- McWhirter, J. et al. 1993, *At Risk Youth: A Comprehensive Response*, Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, Pacific Grove, California.
- Merlo, R. et al. 1994, *From Services to Outcomes: The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program in Victoria 1990-1993*, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra.
- Mitchell, B. 1994, 'Family structure and leaving the nest: A social resource perspective', *Sociological Perspectives*, vol.37 no.4, pp.652-69.
- Moloney, L. 1994, 'Responding to family crisis', *Family Matters*, no.37, April, pp.52-56.
- Morgan, D.L. 1988, *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*, Sage, California.
- Morgan, E. & Vincent, C. 1987, 'Youth Housing Needs: Housing Questions?', *Youth Studies and Abstracts*, vol.6, no.4, pp 21-23.
- National Youth Coalition for Housing 1985, *Shelter or the Streets: National Policies*, Canberra.
- National Youth Coalition For Housing 1989, *National Youth Housing Policy*, National Youth Coalition For Housing, Canberra.
- National Youth Coalition For Housing 1994, *Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs Inquiry Into Aspects of Youth Homelessness*, National Youth Coalition For Housing, Canberra.
- Newman, C. 1989, *Young Runaways: Findings from Britain's First Safe House*, Children's Society, London.
- New South Wales Law Reform Commission 1994, *People with an Intellectual Disability and the Criminal Justice System: Courts and Sentencing issues*, Discussion Paper 35, New South Wales Law Reform Commission, Sydney.
- New South Wales Department of School Education 1994, *Annual Report*, Executive Services Directorate, Sydney.
- Neil, C. 1992, *Homelessness in Australia Volume 1: An Overview*. Report for the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Homelessness and Housing, Melbourne.
- Neil, C. & Fopp, R. 1992, *Homelessness in Australia*, CSIRO Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Melbourne.
- Northern Territory Department of Education 1994, *Annual Report 1994*, Darwin.
- Nyland, J. 1993 'Little fingers of the state: Aggressive instrumentalism in the Australian welfare state', in *Power, Politics and Performance: Community Management in the 90's*, Conference Papers, Book 2, The Centre for Australian Community Organisation and Management, University of Technology Sydney, Sydney.
- Ochiltree, G. & Amato, P. 1985, *The Child's Eye View of Family Life*, Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.
- Ochiltree, G. 1990, *Children in Step Families*, Prentice Hall, New York.
- O'Connor, I. 1989, *Our Homeless Children: Their Experiences*, Report to the National Inquiry into Homeless Children by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Sydney.
- O'Connor, I., Gowing, A. & Macdonald, C. 1994, *Accommodating Difference: The Accommodation and Support Needs of Young People from a Non-English Speaking Background in South East Queensland*, South East Queensland Youth Accommodation Coalition, Brisbane.
- O'Neil, M. 1988, *Big Problem - No Action: A Report on the Needs of Aboriginal Young People*, National Youth Coalition For Housing.
- Paikoff, R.L. & Brooks-Gunn, J. 1991, 'Do parent-child relationships change during puberty?' *Psychological Bulletin*, vol.110, pp.47-66.
- Papini, D. et al. 1990, 'Early adolescent age and gender differences in patterns of emotional disclosure to parents and friends', *Adolescence*, vol.15, pp.959-1001.
- Paterson, J., Field, J. & Pryor, J. 1994, 'Adolescents' perceptions of their attachment relationships with their mothers, fathers and friends', *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, vol.23, no.5, pp.579-600.
- Pears, J. & Noller, P. 1995, 'Youth homelessness: Abuse, gender, and the process of adjustment to life on the streets', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, vol.30, no.4, pp.405-22.
- Petr, C. 1992, 'Adultcentrism in practice with children', *Families in Society*, September, pp.408-16.
- Plass, P. & Hotaling, G. 1994, 'The intergenerational transmission of running away: Childhood experiences of the parents of runaways', *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*,

- vol.24, no.3, pp.335–48.
- Platt, J. 1981, 'On interviewing one's peers', *British Journal of Sociology*, vol.32, pp.75–91.
- Powers, J.L. & Jaklitsch, B.W. 1989, *Understanding Survivors of Abuse: Stories of Homeless and Runaway Adolescents*, Lexington Books, Lexington.
- Preston, G. 1984, 'Structural problems in the formation and function of blended families', *The Australian Journal of Family Therapy*, vol.5, no.1, pp.17–26.
- Preston, G. et al. 1984, *Family Breakdown and the Emotional Abuse of Children: Part 1, Conceptualising the Problem*, Family Court of Australia, unpublished paper.
- Preston, G. 1986, 'The post-separation family and the emotional abuse of children: An ecological approach', *Australian Journal of Sex, Marriage and the Family*, vol.7, no.1, pp.40–49.
- Price-Kelly, S. & Hill, J. 1995, *Homeless and Fifteen: Young People with Intellectual Disability in Crisis*, NSW Council for Intellectual Disability, Sydney.
- Prince, G. 1995, *How Can a Stranger Understand Me?* Youth and Family Services, Logan City.
- Purdon Associates & Ernst and Young 1994, *The Way Home: NSW Supported Accommodation Assistance Program Review*, Report to the NSW Department of Community Services and the Commonwealth Department of Housing and Regional Development.
- Queensland Young Homeless Fund 1992, *Without Safe Shelter: A study of Homelessness among Young People in S.E. Queensland*, Brisbane.
- Randall, G. 1988, *No Way Home: Homeless Young People in Central London*, Centrepoint Soho, London.
- Reilly, J. et al. 1994, 'Psychiatric disorders in and service use by young homeless people', *The Medical Journal of Australia*, vol.161, pp.429–32.
- Roberston, M.J. 1990, *Characteristics and Circumstances of Homeless Adolescents in Hollywood*, paper presented at Annual meeting of American Psychological Association, Boston, Mass.
- Robin, A. & Foster, J. 1989, *Negotiating Parent-Adolescent Conflict: A Behavioural Family Systems Approach*, Guilford, New York.
- Robinson, C. 1992, *No Visible Means of Support or ... A Living Income: Income Support for Young People*, Youth Action and Policy Association (NSW) Inc., Surrey Hills.
- Robson, B. 1992, *Rough Justice: A Report on Sexual Assault, Homelessness and the Law*, North East Centre Against Sexual Assault, Melbourne.
- Rossi, P. 1989, *Down and Out in America: The Origins of Homelessness*, University of Chicago press, Chicago.
- Rueter, M. & Conger, R. 1995, 'Antecedents of parent-adolescent disagreements', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol.57, May, pp.435–48.
- Ryan, R. & Lynch, J. 1989, Emotional autonomy versus detachment: Revisiting the vicissitudes of adolescence and young adulthood, *Child Development*, vol.60, pp.340–56.
- SAAP/CAP Ministerial Advisory Committee 1994, *SAAP Evaluation Community Consultations*, AGPS, Canberra.
- Schneiders, M. 1994, *Until One Day I Had Enough ... So I Ran Away*, Department of Employment, Education and Training, Tasmania.
- Seeto, F. 1991, *Not Seen, Not Heard: An Impression of the Needs of Non-English Speaking Background Young People in Brisbane*, Migrant Resource Centre, Brisbane.
- Senate Standing Committee on Social Welfare 1982, *Report on Homeless Youth*, Parliamentary Paper No. 231/1982.
- Sheridan, G. et al. 1983, *'One Step Forward': Youth Homelessness and Emergency Accommodation*, Report of the National Evaluation Committee of the Youth Services Scheme.
- Shulman, S. et al. 1995, 'Peer group and family relationships in early adolescence', *International Journal of Psychology*, vol.30, no.5, pp.573–90.
- Slee, R. 1995, *Changing Theories and Practices of Discipline*, Falmer Press, London.
- Smith, S.L. 1984, 'Significant research findings in the etiology of child abuse', *Social Casework*, vol.65, pp.337–46.
- Smith, J. 1995, *Being Young and Homeless: Analysis and Discussion of Young People's Experiences of Homelessness*, Salvation Army, Melbourne.
- Springhall, J. 1983, 'The origins of adolescence', *Youth and Policy*, vol.2.
- Steinberg, L. 1990, 'Interdependency in the family: Autonomy, conflict and harmony in the parent-adolescent relationship', in S.S. Feldman & G.R. Elliott (eds), *At the Threshold: The Developing Adolescent*, Harvard University Press.
- Stuart, G. 1994, 'Homeless youth, conflict resolution and accommodation units: Experiences of homeless youth, barriers to teaching conflict resolution, and implications for service delivery', unpublished Masters Thesis, University of New England.
- Sweet, R. 1991, 'The youth labour market: The current recession in the context of longer term trends and future options', *Youth Affairs in Australia*, Winter, pp.16–23.
- Symons, Y. & Smith, R. 1995, 'Noticed but not understood: Homeless youth at school', *Youth Studies Australia*, vol.14, no.1, pp.29–35.
- Tait, G. 1995, 'Shaping the 'at-risk youth': Risk, governmentality and the Finn Report', *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, vol.16, no.1, pp.123–34.
- Tasker, G. 1995, *Moving On: Austudy and the Lives of Unsupported Secondary Students*, Brotherhood of St Laurence, Melbourne.
- Taylor, J. 1993, *Urban Housing Needs Among Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders*, Ian Buchan Fell Research Centre, Sydney.
- Thomson Goodall Associates 1994, *Needs of Children in SAAP Services*, AGPS, Canberra.
- Thornton, A., Orbuch, T. & Axinn, W. 1995, 'Parent-child relationships during the transition to adulthood', *Journal of Family Issues*, vol.16, no.5, pp.538–64.
- Victorian Youth Advocacy Network 1990, *The Public Transport Needs of Young People*, Victorian Youth Advocacy Network, Melbourne.
- Wadelton, D. & Coffey, M. 1994, *Home Sweet Home: Youth Homelessness in NSW*, Youth Accommodation Association, Sydney.
- Wall, R. 1978, 'The age at leaving home', *Journal of Family History*, vol.3, no.2, pp.181–202.
- Wallerstein, J.S. & Kelly, J.B. 1980, *Surviving the Breakup*, McIntyre, London.
- Wallerstein, J.S. 1982, 'Children of divorce: Preliminary report of a ten year follow up', Paper presented to 10th International Congress of International Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Allied Professions, Dublin.
- Wassef, A. et al. 1995, 'In search of effective programs to address students' emotional distress and behavioural problems: Part 1: Defining the problem', *Adolescence*, vol.30, no.119, pp.523–38.
- Western Australian Child Health Survey: Developing Health and*

- Well Being in the Nineties* 1995, Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Institute for Child Health Research, Perth.
- Westthorp, G. 1991, 'Who is at risk? How useful is the concept?' *Youth in Australia*, Special Conference Edition, Youth Affairs Coalition of Australia, Melbourne.
- White, M. & Epston, D. 1989, *Literate Means to Therapeutic Ends*, Dulwich Centre Publications, Adelaide.
- Whittaker, J., Schinke, S. & Gilchrist, L. 1986, 'The ecological paradigm in child, youth, and family services: Implications for policy and practice', *Social Service Review*, December, pp.483-503.
- Wilkins, V. et al. 1993, 'Youth participation in youth-focused research', *Youth Studies Australia*, vol.12, no.3, pp.49-52.
- Withers, G. & Batten, M. 1995, *Programs for Students at Risk: A Review of American, Canadian and British Literature since 1984*, ACER Research Monograph No.47, Melbourne.
- Wolcott, I. & Weston, R. 1992, *Evaluation of Parent-Adolescent Mediation and Family Therapy Program, Final Report*, Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- Wolcott, I. & Weston, R. 1994, 'Keeping the peace: Resolving conflict between parents and adolescents', *Family and Conciliation Courts Review*, vol.32, no.2, pp.208-29.
- Wright, P. & Keple, T. 1981, 'Friends and parents of a sample of high school juniors', *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, vol.43, pp.559-70.
- Yin, R. 1994, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Young, C.M. 1987, *Young People Leaving Home in Australia: The Trend Towards Independence*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.
- Youniss, J. & Smollar, J. 1985, *Adolescents' Relations with their Mothers, Fathers and Peers*, University of Chicago Press.
- Youniss, J. & Keterlinus, R. 1987, 'Communication and connectedness in mother and father adolescent relationships', *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, vol.16, pp.265-80.
- Zabar, P. & Angus, G. 1994, *Child Abuse and Neglect: Reporting and Investigation Procedures in Australia*, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Studies: Child Welfare Series No.8, AGPS, Canberra.
- Zeldin, S. & Price, L. 1995, 'Creating supportive communities for adolescent development: Challenges to scholars', *Journal of Adolescent Research*, vol.10, no.1, pp.6-14.

Appendix 1

CONSENT FORM (YOUNG PERSON)

Title of Research: Prevention of Homelessness Among Young People

Chief Investigators: Dr Jillian Brannock, Lecturer QUT (Ph 864 3496)
Mr Phil Crane, Lecturer, QUT (Ph 864 4663)

Project Co-ordinator: Ms Linda Ray, QUT (Ph 864 5960)

The Purpose of the Project:

This research is funded by the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme. Its purpose is to find the best ways of preventing young people from becoming homeless. Interviews will be taped.

The interview questions ask about homelessness.

You will be paid \$20.00 for your interview.

Only members of the project team will be allowed to hear the tapes, and you will not be named on tapes or in the research report.

Your participation is voluntary and you may choose to end the interview at any time. If you do stop the interview you will still be paid for the interview.

If you have any concerns about the interview you may contact a member of the research team or the Chairperson of the Research Ethics Committee (Ph 864 2902).

I have read the information and I _____
(print name)

agree to be interviewed for this research.

I understand that I can stop the interview at any time and that this may be done by telling the interviewer of that decision.

Signed _____

Dated _____

Appendix 2

CONSENT FORM (PARENT)

Title of Research: Prevention of Homelessness Among Young People

Chief Investigators: Dr Jillian Brannock, Lecturer QUT (Ph 864 3496)
Mr Phil Crane, Lecturer, QUT (Ph 864 3433)

Project Co-ordinator: Ms Linda Ray, QUT (Ph 864 5960)

The Purpose of the Project:

This research is funded by the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme. Its purpose is to find the best ways of preventing young people from becoming homeless. The information will be used for youth policy and programs to help prevent homelessness. Young people and parents/guardians will be interviewed. Interviews will be taped.

There are no known risks associated with the project, and the interview questions have a broad focus on homelessness among young people.

Only members of the project team will be permitted to hear the tapes, and you will not be named on tapes nor will you be named in the research report.

Your participation is voluntary and you may choose to discontinue participation at any time.

You may contact the research team members about any matter of concern or the Chairperson of the University Research Ethics Committee (Ph 864 2902).

I have read the information and I _____
(print name)

consent to be interviewed for this research.

I understand that I am free to withdraw my permission at any time and that this may be done by telling the interviewer of that decision.

Signed _____

Dated _____

Appendix 3

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (YOUNG PEOPLE AND PARENTS)

Introduction:

- (i) Explain the purpose of the research and ensure interviewing area is quiet.
- (ii) Consent form is signed.
- (iii) Explain rules of confidentiality.
- (iv) Test recorder.

1. We would like to draw your family geneogram to help us understand the relationships in this family

PARENT:

Explanation of the family relationships.
Occupations of adult caregivers.
Cultural background.

YOUNG PERSON:

Explanation of the family relationships.
Final year at school.
Occupation now.
Occupations of your parents/ guardians.
Cultural background.

2. What is your definition of homelessness?

3. What is your definition of having a home?

4. YOUNG PERSON: We would like you to draw a timeline to show over time your experience of homelessness.

PARENT: We would like you to draw a timeline to show how your son/daughter came to be homeless.

- When did you/he/she leave home for the first time?
- What was happening in the time before that first homeleaving? In the family? At school?
- What did you need to happen?
- What did happen? What did you get?
- Who did you tell?
- Where did you get your support from?
- Who did you go to for help? What made you go there?
- Did anyone explore with you/them the option of returning home?
- What happened next? (after next homeleaving)
- When on this timeline did you really feel you became homeless?/When did you think your son/daughter first became homeless?

YOUNG PERSON: Do you consider yourself homeless now? Why/why not?

5. If you were wanting to prevent or stop other young people from becoming homeless, what do you think should happen in:

- families
- schools
- local community
- youth/welfare services
- have you any other ideas about what else should happen to prevent young people from becoming homeless?

6. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience/your son/daughter's experience of being homeless?

7. Close interview.

APPENDIX 4

PREVENTION OF HOMELESSNESS AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE PROJECT NATIONAL SURVEY

The project, a National Youth Affairs Research Scheme (NYARS) initiative, will be conducted over the period February to November 1995. This survey forms an important part of the project's data collection process which also embraces in-depth interviews with young people and parents, several case studies of organisations in both rural and urban areas and focus conferences in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane.

The survey is being distributed to 300 organisations/services throughout Australia engaged in work relevant to the area of young people and homelessness. It aims to identify the work being undertaken in terms of prevention of and/or early intervention into youth homelessness. Specifically the survey aims to locate programs and strategies that assist young people who:

- are at risk of leaving home to remain at home (where appropriate);
- have left home to return within a relatively short period (where appropriate); and/or
- have made the decision not to return home.

It is estimated the survey will take approximately 30 – 60 minutes to complete.

Your responses to this survey will form an important part of the final research report. The report, when approved for release, will be widely distributed by NYARS through the State and Territory departments responsible for youth affairs.

RETURN DATE: *October 28th, 1995*

Please return to: Ms Linda Ray
Cultural and Policy Studies
QUT Kelvin Grove
Locked Bag No 2
Red Hil Qld 4059
Ph: (07) 3864 5960

Background information

1. **Name of Organisation:**
2. **Type of organisation :**
 - Government
 - Non Government
- 2(a). **If Government indicate level :**
 - Commonwealth
 - State
 - Local
- 2(b). **If Non-Government indicate :**
 - Non profit
 - For profit

Some organisations contain within them a number of discrete services (e.g. family mediation service, youth accommodation service etc). This survey is targeting those services that are related in some way to early intervention into and/or prevention of youth homelessness.

NB Please fill out a separate form for each service within the organisation which does work relating to the prevention of and/or early intervention into youth homelessness.

3. What is the name of the service you are describing in this survey?

4. Location of service :

Address:

Postcode :

Telephone:

Facsimile:

5. What geographical area does the service cover?

6. Please tick the boxes which indicate a source of funding for the service. Next to each response record the approximate percentage of funding from that source.

Government	%
Corporate	%
Fundraising/donations	%
Other (please state)	%

7. If you ticked the "Government" box please identify the Government program most funding is received from: (please state the name of the funding program)

This funding is received from (tick one)

Commonwealth government

State government

Local government

8. Where does the service most frequently get referrals from? Rank in order of top four referral sources (1, 2, 3, 4).

schools

parents

young people themselves

non-government welfare services

police

state statutory welfare department

health service/general practitioner

psychiatrist

employment support services

Department of Social Security

other (please state)

9. Summarise the main principles/philosophy underpinning your service.

10. Briefly list the main objectives of your service.

In a number of the following questions we are interested in obtaining information about your client group in percentages. Please feel free to make general estimations of the percentages, or if feasible use the last available statistics.

11. Where your service works directly with individuals identify the age range (in percentages) of all persons who access the service. (If none please indicate with 0%).

0-6 years %

7-11 years %

12-15 years %

16–18 years %
 19–25 years %
 26+ years %

12. What percentage of the 18 and under client group are

 %
 male ___
 female ___

13. What percentage of the 18 and under client group are from a non English speaking background (NESB) or are Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander (ATSI). (If none please indicate with 0%).

 %
 NESB ___
 ATSI ___

14. What percentage of the 18 and under client group have either an intellectual disability or a mental illness. (If none please indicate with 0%).

 %
 Intellectual disability ___
 Mental illness ___

15. Please list any other client group the service is specifically directed at (for example, gay/lesbian young people, service providers, young parents).

16. Does your work with the 18 and under client group involve work with their parents/guardians? *Please circle one response.*

Virtually				Virtually
always	often	occasionally	never	
A	O	OC	N	

17. If the service works directly with the parents/guardians of young people what percentage of the parents/guardians are male or female. (If your service does not work with the parents/guardians of the young people write not applicable).

 %
 Male ___
 Female ___

18. If the service works directly with parents/guardians of young people what percentage of these parents/guardians are from NESB or ATSI background (if none please write not applicable).

 %
 NESB ___
 ATSI ___

EARLY INTERVENTION

The central focus of the research is concerned with the prevention of and/or early intervention into youth homelessness. The next two sections of the survey are targeted towards identifying what aspects of a service’s interventions are concerned with early intervention and prevention.

19. Does your service undertake any work which could be described as early intervention? (i.e. interventions that TARGET young people and/or their families BEFORE the young person has left home “prematurely” OR WITHIN ONE MONTH of the young person leaving home “prematurely”).

Yes
 No

If your initial answer is “No” please read questions 20–22 and answer if relevant to your service. Subsequent questions are relevant to all services.

20. When is your service most likely to **first** become involved with a young person? *Please indicate the % of your client group you work with:*

- Well in advance of the young person leaving home _____%
- Just prior to the young person potentially leaving home _____%
- Within one week of the young person leaving home _____%
- Within one month of the young person leaving home _____%

21. In the table below list in column 1 the interventions that are likely to be undertaken by your service at particular times (either with young people or their parents/guardians). In column 2 list what is perceived as a successful outcome of that intervention.

Column 1 – Intervention

Column 2 – Successful outcome seen as:

Time 1: Well in advance of the young person leaving home

Parents/Guardians	Young Person
-------------------	--------------

Time 2: Just prior to young person potentially leaving home

Parents/Guardians	Young Person
-------------------	--------------

Time 3: Within one week of the young person leaving home

Parents/Guardians	Young Person
-------------------	--------------

Time 4: Within one month of the young person leaving home

Parents/Guardians	Young person
-------------------	--------------

22. Describe in order of importance the three most critical strategies implemented by your service to respond to the needs of young people who are “at risk” of leaving home or who have just left home.

23. What practices do you perceive as vital in models of “best practice” in the area of early intervention into youth homelessness?

24. What principles/philosophy do you feel should underpin models of “best practice” in the area of early intervention into youth homelessness?

PREVENTION

25. Does your service undertake any work relevant to the prevention of youth homelessness? (i.e. work which is aimed at building up “protective” factors in communities, families or individuals so that young people are less likely to experience homelessness).

Yes	1	No	2
-----	---	----	---

(If “no”, go directly to Question 29)

26. Please identify the activities of the service which fit into this category.

27. What does your service consider a successful outcome in this work to be?
28. What practices do you perceive as vital in models of “best practice” for the prevention of youth homelessness?
29. What principles/philosophy do you feel should underpin models of “best practice” for the prevention of youth homelessness?

WORK WITH SCHOOLS

Please answer questions 30 and 31 if your service is NOT a school .

30. Does the early intervention/prevention work of your service in any way involve interactions with schools (for example, school visits, liaison with school guidance officers, referrals of young people from school personnel)?

Yes 1 No 2
(If “no” go directly to Question 34)

31. Please describe your links/interactions with schools.
Please answer questions 32 and 33 only if your service is a school.

32. Does the early intervention/prevention work of the school in any way involve interactions with youth and/or family support services?

Yes 1 No 2
(If “no” go directly to Question 34)

33. Please describe these links/interactions with youth and/or family support services.

34. Is there a need for more collaborative work between service providers and schools in order to more effectively address the issues associated with homelessness and young people?

Yes 1 No 2

What strategies should be developed to link schools and youth/family support services?

CONSTRAINTS

35. In order of importance, what are the three most significant constraints faced by your service in terms of undertaking prevention of and/or early intervention into youth homelessness?

36. What additional support mechanisms/programs are most needed to address the prevention of and/or early intervention into youth homelessness?

OPEN COMMENTS

37. In the space provided below please feel free to add any additional comments.

38. Is your agency willing to be listed on a national register of services/organisations working in the area of prevention of and/or early intervention into youth homelessness?

Yes 1 No 2

Thank you for completing this important survey.