

**Submission
No 30**

**OPTIONS TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO EXISTING AND ALTERNATE
ACCOMMODATION TO ADDRESS THE SOCIAL HOUSING SHORTAGE**

Organisation: Ted Noffs Foundation Ltd

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Submission to –

The New South Wales Parliament Committee on Community Services, 'Inquiry into options to improve access to existing and alternate accommodation to address the social housing shortage.'

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Ted Noffs Foundation's Role in Youth Housing

The Ted Noffs Foundation currently operates a Youth Homelessness Service (YHS) which has two constituent entities -

- the Inner City Sydney Homelessness Prevention and Support Service for Young People
- the Eastern Suburbs Multipurpose Youth Homelessness Support Service

Both components provide a crisis intervention, counselling and case management service for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. They also provide post-crisis support to help young people find suitable housing and offer additional assistance to help these young people remain in safe, stable accommodation.

YHS has a strong focus on responses for Aboriginal young people, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, in the out-of-home care system, and/or with complex needs.

All services are delivered as a member of consortia with other local agencies with the respective organisational roles and obligations detailed in Joint Working Agreements. These Agreements are effectively contracts that specify funding amounts in return for stipulated levels of service delivery.

YHS is committed to intervening early to prevent young people falling into homelessness, providing crisis and transitional housing and to keeping young people housed by providing post-crisis support. In making this commitment YHS acknowledges shared values of cooperative working, a "no wrong door" policy for all clients, the need for strengths-based and holistic wrap-around services, a client centred approach, flexibility and fairness and respect.

Where family re-integration is not possible and clients are stable and have been assessed as suitable, they will be referred to transitional housing programs as a means of securing safe accommodation. Clients moved to transitional housing will be aware that it is not a legitimate process for moving out of home unless there are significant and irreconcilable problems within the family environment. This housing will be used to give clients time to further stabilise and develop skills and attributes required for progression to independent living.

Support to clients in transitional housing will include regular and on-going casework and case planning with our staff and other relevant agencies such as Juvenile Justice and the Department of Communities and Justice. A basic requirement of case plans will be that all clients are engaged in meaningful employment or education, that they actively address any outstanding mental health or drug and alcohol issues, that they take part in living skills and budgeting programs and that they agree to participate fully in exit planning.

Where clients are re-housed in transitional housing or the private rental market they will remain clients of the service and will be provided with support to maintain the tenancy. This support will include skills development programs, mentoring, access to a tenancy advisory

service, assistance with connections to education or employment options and referral to other specialist services as required.

In all components of this service specific emphasis is placed on building individual and family capacity and the involvement of families in developing an effective response to a client's needs and in achieving better outcomes.

Barriers to young people accessing any form of social housing

There is intense competition for access to social housing programs by various, worthy target groups. In this environment, young people are often shuffled to the end of the list due to either institutional bias or an often erroneous assumption that they have the option of returning to their parental home.

In many cases, family reintegration is not desirable and may be acutely risky due to such factors as domestic violence, sexual abuse and criminality. For a lot of young people in our care, this barrier to safe, secure housing is further exacerbated by a range of complex needs and issues such as drug and/or alcohol use, cognitive disability and mental ill-health.

There is an urgent need to make available realistic, affordable housing options for young people under the age of 18 years who, for their own safety and welfare, cannot stay at home.

Supported accommodation

A large proportion of young people who find themselves homeless or in crisis accommodation have experienced major levels of trauma, grief and loss. For many of them, long-term, intensive support and stability is required to develop the necessary life skills to move to transitional accommodation or the private rental market.

In the past, these particularly vulnerable young people were able to access an interim step between crisis and transitional accommodation that was known as supported accommodation. This residential model provided care 24 hours a day, seven days a week in a home-like environment to small groups of children aged between 13 and 18 years of age. It is quite distinct from the NSW out-of-home care system in that it occurs not in a family milieu but a setting staffed by qualified personnel and usually operated by a recognised non-government organisation.

Over the past decade, investment in this model has been wound back and there are currently very few agencies in NSW providing this level of care. It is a labour intensive service modality and thus requires substantial levels of funding. This, however, should be measured against the lifetime institutional costs incurred by vulnerable young people who would otherwise fall through the gaps. There is clear evidence that the lack of services at an early age is associated with costly health, welfare, housing and criminal justice interventions later in life.

Consideration should be given to restarting a number of supported accommodation services in NSW to meet the current need and mitigate against future decades of costly interventions.

Transitional Housing

Transitional housing provides a platform for people to actively engage with support services and to find long-term accommodation suited to their particular needs. This form of housing is though time-limited with most services setting an upper limit of eighteen months. After this time, clients, with the support of their caseworkers, are expected to make other arrangements to meet their accommodation requirements.

Within the transitional housing sector there are a significant number of priority target groups including women with children, those escaping domestic or family violence Indigenous people and those with disabilities including mental illness. While young people are considered a priority group, in such a congested service sector, the availability of housing places for those age 16 to 18 years is limited.

Similarly, there is a dramatic shortage of the onwards supply of secure, affordable accommodation for young people once their time in transitional housing (up to eighteen months) has expired. There is an urgent need for an increased supply of housing stock for both transitional and permanent purposes.

Rent Choice Youth

The Rent Choice Youth initiative of the Department of Communities and Justice provides rental assistance to young people aged 16 to 24 years who have leased premises in the private rental market and are prepared to work closely with support services to achieve goals in work, study and financial independence.

The Noffs Youth Homelessness Services have made extensive use of this program and have found it to be of major benefit in the stabilisation of young people in secure accommodation once they have left transitional or crisis housing.

The public/private alliance embodied in Rent Choice Youth delivers substantial economic benefit to the government in both the short and long terms through the savings on capital expenditure to construct or purchase housing stock.

The continuation of Rent Choice Youth is strongly endorsed and the Ted Noffs Foundation advocates for significant future investment by the Department of Communities and Justice to expand the program beyond its current scope.

'Meanwhile Use' Housing

The 'meanwhile use' concept to boost the level of available housing stock through the activation of otherwise unused properties is an innovative response to the issues of unaffordable rents and underutilised resources.

It is though, crucial that acknowledgement be given to the fact that tenures in such accommodation can be limited in duration and may well not meet the needs of a significant number of people at risk of homelessness.

The instigation of a number of pilot projects to test the potential of the concept in assisting vulnerable young people is strongly supported by the Ted Noffs Foundation.

It is noted that there may be advantages in having such pilots managed by community-based agencies rather than commercial estate agencies and that there will be a need for adequate provision of alternative housing options should properties be required to be returned untenanted to the owners at short notice.

Further, given the limitations on tenure of 'meanwhile use' housing, any expansion of this concept should not be at the expense of long-term planning for and provision of traditional social housing schemes.

Matt Noffs
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