

**Submission
No 71**

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

Organisation: Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People ACYP

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Submission to the Inquiry on Options to Improve Access to Existing and Alternative Accommodation to Address the Social Housing Shortage

Advocate for Children and Young People

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About the Advocate for Children and Young People

The Advocate for Children and Young People (ACYP) is an independent statutory appointment overseen by the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Children and Young People. ACYP advocates for and promotes the safety, welfare, wellbeing and voice of all children and young people aged 0-24 years, with a focus on the needs of those who are vulnerable or disadvantaged.

Under the *Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014*, the functions of ACYP include:

- Making recommendations to Parliament, and government and non-government agencies on legislation, policies, practices and services that affect children and young people;
- Promoting children and young peoples' participation in activities and decision-making about issues that affect their lives;
- Conducting research into children's issues relating to children and young people;
- Providing information to help children and young people; and
- Preparing, in consultation with the Minister responsible for youth, a three-year, whole-of-government Strategic Plan for Children and Young People (the Plan).

Further information about ACYP's work can be found at: www.acyp.nsw.gov.au.

Introduction

The Advocate for Children and Young People (ACYP) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Committee on Community Services' Inquiry into options to support and improve access to existing and alternative accommodation in order to help address the social housing shortage.

The number of children and young people experiencing homelessness, as well as availability and access to affordable housing, is a significant issue in NSW. In 2016, the Australian census recorded more than 37,000 people being without a home in NSW, with almost 4,000 of those being children (aged 0-12 years) and 9,000 being young people (aged 12-24 years).¹ And according to the 2019-2020 Specialist Homelessness Services report, 43.5% of all people accessing Specialist Homeless Services in NSW were aged between 0-24 years.² The actual number of children and young people experiencing homelessness is likely to be even higher. The broader housing context for young people in NSW is also increasingly characterised by declining homeownership rates, decreasing housing and rental affordability and a decline in the availability of social housing. Whilst anecdotal reports suggest that social housing providers are often more reluctant to accept younger tenants as they are viewed as having unstable incomes and being a higher-risk.³

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). (2016). Census of Population and Housing: Estimating homelessness, DataCube 2 State and territory of usual residence. Canberra: ABS.

² Australian Institute for Health and Welfare (AIHW). (2020). Specialist homelessness services annual report, 2019-2020. Canberra: AIHW.

³ Hand, T. and MacKenzie, D. (2020). Young People and Housing Supports in Australia: Income Support, Social Housing and Post-Homelessness Housing Outcomes, UniSA AHURI Research Centre, Adelaide, p.14.

Access to safe, stable and adequate housing is a fundamental human right⁴, and is critical to ensuring that children and young people have the opportunity to thrive. We know that when children and young people experience issues with housing - including over-crowding, housing stress and homelessness – they can often experience food insecurity, school disruption and other challenges, as well as being at risk of adverse outcomes in the future.⁵ Children who experience homelessness are a particularly vulnerable group, and are at a heightened risk of experiencing mental health problems, as well as having an increased likelihood of subsequently experiencing homelessness as adolescents or adults.⁶ Young people who experience homelessness are also more likely to experience ill health, however they face particular challenges relating to disruption of their progression from childhood to adulthood – including potential issues relating to transitions from education to employment, and the formation of stable social networks.⁷ Ultimately, the experience of homeless or housing instability has a substantial impact on a child or young person’s health and wellbeing, regardless of whether they remain part of a family unit or are living alone.⁸

This submission focuses on outlining the key issues that children and young people have raised with ACYP in relation to this topic, as well as unpacking a number of innovative opportunities to improve children and young people’s access to existing and alternative accommodation - to ensure that all children and young people in NSW have a safe, stable and affordable place to call home.

Whilst outside the scope of this Inquiry, ACYP notes that alongside exploring options to improve access to existing and alternative accommodation, there is a need for a large-scale and long-term investment in a variety of housing options to better support children and young people across NSW.

⁴ Article 25(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Articles 2, 4, 26, 27 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 11(1) of the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

⁵ AIHW. (2020). *Australia’s Children: Homelessness*. Canberra: AIHW.

⁶ AIHW. (2021). *Australia’s Youth: Homelessness and overcrowding*. Canberra: AIHW.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Increase investment in early intervention, including Community of Schools and Services (COSS) models, that identify young people at risk of homelessness before they reach crisis point.

Recommendation 2: Increase investment in long term supported accommodation for children and young people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness.

Recommendation 3: Convene an expert, multi-agency panel for children and young people who 'over-stay' in Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) beyond the short-term to seek their input and develop accommodation plans in their best interests, including the option to remain in the SHS for longer than three months to allow them to achieve stability.

Recommendation 4: Increase the availability of services to children and young people after hours and on weekends (i.e. a 24/7 drop-in centre in Sydney).

Recommendation 5: Increase awareness of housing and other support services available to children and young people using social media, print advertisements and through schools.

Recommendation 6: Greater support for young people to navigate the rental market, and ensure they are prepared to enter the private rental housing market and independent living.

Recommendation 7: Greater investment in family support programs, to allow children and young people to reconcile with their families, while maintaining their safety.

Recommendation 8: Develop an implementation plan for the 'No Exits from Government Services into Homelessness Framework' – to ensure young people exiting Out of Home Care and the justice system are set up for success.

Recommendation 9: Expand funding for medium-term transitional services, such as youth foyers, that include wrap-around support based on models designed and proven to work with young people.

Recommendation 10: Seek to enhance partnerships between community, government and business sectors, with a focus on reducing the barriers to exploring and utilising vacant or available properties (often referred to as meanwhile use) and other innovative approaches.

Recommendation 11: Explore opportunities to support the development of purpose-built alternative accommodation for young people.

Recommendation 12: Engage with not-for-profit real estate agencies to determine opportunities to support the development of the sector, including a focus on increasing pathways for young people.

Recommendation 13: Work in partnership with the Real Estate Institute to develop greater awareness and knowledge about Rent Choice products which are available for young people.

Recommendation 14: Continue to support the development and evaluation of Homeshare models in NSW, with a focus on increasing young people's access to affordable housing.

What children and young people had to say

Since 2015, ACYP has undertaken consultations on a broad range of issues with over 40,000 children and young people - including face-to-face consultations with 12,300 children and young people, and engagement with more than 27,700 through surveys, polling and other activities.

Across a number of these consultations children and young people have raised the issue of housing instability and homelessness; including those conducted to inform the development of 2016-2019 and 2022-2024 Strategic Plans for Children and Young People⁹; consultations with children and young people in regional areas¹⁰; as well as interviews with children and young people in youth justice¹¹ and with socially excluded children and young people¹². In addition, in October and November 2016, ACYP held targeted face-to-face consultations with 60 children and young people aged 13-24 years who were experiencing or at risk of homelessness.¹³ The homelessness consultations took place in the Central Coast, Illawarra-Shoalhaven, North Coast and Greater Sydney regions.

Issues relating to housing affordability and the need for greater support navigating the rental market are also raised by children and young people in ACYP's regular polling work. For instance, in a poll conducted by ACYP in April 2021, price of rent and housing was in the top five issues that young people (12-24) said was impacting their lives, with 40% of all young people saying it was an issue and this increasing to 54% for those aged 18 years and over.

Early intervention and wraparound supports

In ACYP's targeted homelessness consultations, young people reported needing support much earlier than they received it. They spoke about often remaining in unsafe situations as a consequence of not knowing where to go for help or what services were available in their area.

One young man reported that "when I stayed I would fight with my parents which never ended well", whilst another young man said he "spent weeks on the street because I didn't know where to go or what was available."¹⁴ This was a common theme in the homelessness consultations, across all regions.

We know that when services and supports are provided early, before a child or young person disengages from school, and before family breakdown occurs, there is enormous opportunity to positively change the trajectory of a young person's life.

⁹ Note: The 2022-2024 Strategic Plan for Children and Young People is currently in development. The 2016-2019 Strategic Plan review and accompanying documents, including consultation reports, can be accessed via:

<https://www.acyp.nsw.gov.au/plan>

¹⁰ ACYP, 2015. *Regional Consultation Report*. Sydney: ACYP.

¹¹ ACYP, 2019. *What Children and Young People in Juvenile Justice Centres Have to Say*. Sydney: ACYP.

¹² ACYP, 2018). *Report on Consultations with Socially Excluded Children and Young People*. Sydney: ACYP.

¹³ ACYP (2016). *ACYP Homelessness Consultation Report*. Sydney: ACYP.

¹⁴ ACYP (2016). *ACYP Homelessness Consultation Report*. p.16 & p.3.

Young people experiencing homelessness also reported that the support system is complicated, and that they were experiencing significant challenges in trying to navigate it. In nine of the homelessness consultations, young people reported not feeling confident about what services were available in their local area. They highlighted the need for greater wraparound and concurrent supports across various domains (i.e. health, education, housing, employment, and financial), and spoke about difficulties in obtaining the right support at the right time.

Young people experiencing homelessness also raised the issue of having to re-tell their story each time they approached a new service or refuge. Young people discussed the trauma involved with this and were of the view that their records should be shared among services to avoid them having to relive their experiences regularly.

Recommendation 1: Increase investment in early intervention, including Community of Schools and Services (COSS) models, that identify young people at risk of homelessness before they reach crisis point.

Stability and suitability of housing

Across ACYP's consultations with socially excluded children and young people, many spoke about not having a safe home to live in, not enough beds in medium to long-term accommodation and not having access to crisis accommodation suited to their needs. In ACYP's consultations with young people experiencing homelessness they also raised that due to bed shortages, they are often offered accommodation that is too far away for them to travel to. Further issues raised by young people were not being allowed to have their family or friends visit them at the supported accommodation and that the three-month tenure in crisis refuges is too short, leaving young people with nowhere to live at the end of the period.

In ACYP's consultations with children and young people experiencing homelessness, participants reported feeling worried and anxious about where they were going to go after their initial three months had expired in a youth refuge. Young people who were working towards their goals, had secured employment, and were making concerted efforts to get their lives back on track, spoke of feeling very concerned about facing another perilous and uncertain housing situation.

Across several consultations with children and young people experiencing homelessness, concerns were raised about being offered accommodation that is too far away for them to travel to. One young woman spoke of her experience of being placed a long distance from her community and school as this was the closest available placement at the time. She reported commuting two hours every morning to school and three to four hours home as the availability of public transport in the afternoon was much less frequent.

The availability and accessibility of food is a major issue for children and young people experiencing homelessness.¹⁵ Many reported that healthy food is very expensive and out of their reach. Others spoke about feeling unwell after being given food that was well past the expiration date by services

¹⁵ ACYP (2018). Report on Consultations with Socially Excluded Children and Young People. p. 37.

they were accessing. When asked about what was not working well for them, young people experiencing homelessness spoke about not having enough to eat, skipping meals.

Recommendation 2: Increase investment in long term supported accommodation for children and young people experiencing, or at-risk, of homelessness.

Recommendation 3: Convene an expert, multi-agency panel for children and young people who 'over-stay' in Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) beyond the short-term to seek their input and develop accommodation plans in their best interests, including the option to remain in the SHS for longer than three months to allow them to achieve stability.

Safe crisis and emergency support

Young people experiencing homelessness also discussed their experiences with trying to get emergency accommodation. In most of these consultations young people reported long wait times and felt the initial assessment process was onerous. Some young people understood that services can be limited in their capacity to provide support, given the shortage of physical accommodation available across the State. However, they expressed a desire to be provided with some form of support. One young man said, "A hot meal, just something, I don't want to be told there isn't anything they can do for me."¹⁶

Young people experiencing homelessness reported couch surfing, sleeping in parks, sand dunes and on the streets. Others spoke about the hierarchy of sleeping rough and which areas were more or less safe to sleep: "Sleeping on trains isn't safe...but it's safer than on the streets"; "Buses aren't safe either, drivers are powerless, but they're more safe than trains."¹⁷

In many of ACYP's homelessness consultations, young people reported the need to be able to access a safe space after hours where it wasn't necessary to book a bed in advance. For example, in three of the Sydney-based homelessness consultations, young people reported that a 24 hour/7 day a week drop-in centre was needed with crisis beds, social workers, food, counsellors and internet facilities.

Recommendation 4: Increase the availability of services to children and young people after hours and on weekends (i.e. a 24/7 drop-in centre in Sydney)

Improved communication about how to access services

Another issue raised in consultations with children and young people was not knowing that housing and other support services exist. Children and young people engaged with Specialist Homelessness Services reported that the type of information they most needed when they first became homeless included access to information about their rights; the numbers they could call for help; details about any eligibility criteria for services; and information to help them confirm that services are safe and

¹⁶ ACYP (2016). What children and young people experiencing homelessness have to say. p.28.

¹⁷ ACYP (2018). Report on Consultations with Socially Excluded Children and Young People. p.39.

welcoming for children and young people. They also sought information about services or places where they could get a meal, talk to a support worker and charge their mobile phones or top up credit.

Some young people were looking for information about particular forms of support, such as services for families, young people with disability, LGBTQIA+ young people or Aboriginal young people. Many talked about wanting information about the process of accessing homelessness support, from the initial stages of experiencing homelessness to eventually finding long-term accommodation.

“More information about the actual process of accessing homelessness support - from the initial stages of experiencing homelessness, young people want to know how to navigate the system, step by step”¹⁸

When asked how and where this type of information should be provided, young people suggested a website that children, young people, schools and services can use and share. They also recommended posters at bus stops, train stations and tunnels, radio and television advertisements from the perspective of a young person, and social media campaigns across Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

Children and young people experiencing homelessness also reported additional issues around a lack of available support after normal business hours and over the weekend. They recalled experiences of being kicked out of home in the middle of the night and not having or knowing a service to help with accommodation.

Recommendation 5: Increased awareness of housing and other support services available to children and young people using social media, print advertisements and through schools.

Support to transition to independence and reconnect with family

Across ACYP’s consultations with socially excluded children and young people, an issue that was raised was the need for greater assistance with housing. Many young people that ACYP consulted with had spent time living on the streets, usually after being kicked out of home. They suggested that young people doing it tough should receive assistance to secure housing and live independently. Likewise, children and young people in Specialist Homelessness Services called for greater support for young people to transition, including to enter and navigate the rental market.

For those young people living independently or within a supported living arrangement, there were many concerns about the cost of the private rental market. Young people reported difficulties in covering their basic needs after paying housing costs: “After rent is taken out, which is highly subsidised, I have no money left for the week.”¹⁹

In ACYP’s consultations with young people experiencing homelessness, a number of young people

¹⁸ ACYP (2018). Report on Consultations with Socially Excluded Children and Young People. p.39.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 39

also reported wanting more family support programs, to allow children and young people to remain connected to their family, while ensuring their safety.

Recommendation 6: Greater support for young people to navigate the rental market, and ensure they are prepared to enter the private rental housing market and independent living.

Recommendation 7: Greater investment in family support programs, to allow children and young people to reconcile with their families, while maintaining their safety.

Support for children and young people exiting OOHC and the justice system

Having safe, secure, and stable housing was identified by young people involved in the youth justice system as crucial to quality of life. They spoke about needing more housing options along the full continuum from crisis refuges and supported accommodation through to affordable, independent housing.

Young people, especially young women, also described having to stay in custody because they were unable to meet the accommodation requirement of their bail conditions due to limited spaces within Youth Refuges and other alternative housing services. Young people said where possible applications to housing providers should happen whilst they are in custody. Waiting lists for social housing are long so they thought applying early would assist in reducing the time they have to wait after they are released.

Young people exiting the out-of-home-care system also report needing more support and assistance with securing housing.

Recommendation 8: Develop an implementation plan for the 'No Exits from Government Services into Homeless Framework'²⁰ – to ensure young people exiting OOHC and the justice system are set up for success.

²⁰ NSW Government (2020). No Exits from Government Services into Homelessness: A framework for multi-agency action 2020.

Opportunities to improve access to existing and alternative accommodation for children and young people in NSW

*“Given the difficulties that disadvantaged and homeless young people have in accessing any form of social housing, there is a case for reimagining social housing for young people, not necessarily or mostly as a permanent housing option but as a housing option during their extended transition period to sustainable independent living”.*²¹

Meanwhile use

‘Meanwhile use’ is a concept that first emerged in the United Kingdom, and in recent years has been gaining popularity in Australia and in other contexts. Meanwhile use refers to the temporary use of vacant land or properties for alternative uses until they are required for their final purpose.²² In NSW, a significant opportunity exists to utilise meanwhile use as a short-term solution to social housing needs, through increasing supply of crisis and transitional accommodation.

It is important to note that for meanwhile use to be an effective and viable model, several challenges need to be addressed. For example, some of the existing barriers for meanwhile use include contractual arrangements, issues with planning and development applications if the space needs to be adapted for purpose and the general short-term nature of the spaces rather than a long-term option. Overcoming these challenges will require a concerted effort to determine what a mutually beneficial partnership looks like for community, government and the property industry.

As highlighted earlier, ACYP has heard from young people experiencing homelessness about the challenges and uncertainty they face when provided with short-term stays in youth refuges, as well as the need for early intervention, wrap-around services and supported transition pathways. As a result, when looking at meanwhile use as an option for young people or children and their families, it is particularly important to ensure that the space is fit for purpose and that a wraparound service model is provided which allows for stability and supports transition. In order to be effective, “meanwhile use initiatives must be designed and delivered in a way that creates real value for local communities, and that ensures that these benefits are long-lasting, even when the initial activity is time-bound.”²³

Below are a number of existing youth-specific and family-focused housing models in NSW which could and may utilise the meanwhile use concept, and should be further explored.

²¹ Hand, T., and MacKenzie, D. (2020). Young People and Housing Supports in Australia: Income Support, Social Housing and Post Homelessness Outcomes, UniSA AHURI Research Centre Adelaide, p.3.

²² DPIE - NSW Government (2021). *Discussion Paper: A Housing Strategy for NSW*. p. 67.

²³ Arup. (2020). *Meanwhile Use London: A Research Report for the Greater London Authority*, London: UK, p.3.

The Youth Foyer Model

One model that emerged within Australia in the late 2000s is the Youth Foyer Model.²⁴ Youth Foyers are a great example of where the meanwhile use concept can be utilised and is a model that allows for government buildings, such as old hospitals, TAFE and land, to be repurposed to provide temporary housing for young people.

Youth Foyers are an integrated accommodation and learning model for young people, generally aged 16-24 years, who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness.²⁵ The focus is on providing young people with point in time wrap-around supports. Upon entering a youth foyer, young people are required to commit to participating in education, training and employment, as well as looking after their accommodation and participating in a range of other activities and services that the Foyer offers.²⁶ In exchange, young people are provided with stable accommodation for up to two years in a supported living environment. The model also teaches young people how to manage a property and helps them to transition to independent living.²⁷

Recommendation 9: Expand funding for medium-term transitional services, such as youth foyers, that include wrap-around support based on models designed and proven to work with young people.

My Foundations – The Addison Project

My Foundations Youth Housing (MFYH) is a community housing provider (CHP) that provides a Transitional Housing Plus (Youth) Model.²⁸ They utilise a tapered rent model that gradually scales up overtime, to help prepare young people for the private market. The program offers young people accommodation for up to five years in the form of renewable six-month fixed-term leases, which provide young people the opportunity to exit prior to the five-year period if they wish.²⁹ Similar to Foyer Models, participation in the Transitional Housing Plus program requires young people to sign a contract agreeing to participate in education, training or employment. Whilst Foyer models focus on having services available on site, MYFH instead partners with a range of external specialist support services aiming at meeting the needs of young people.³⁰ This provides some flexibility in the properties that are used for housing.

In 2017, My Foundations Youth Housing (MFYH) partnered with TOGA to deliver Australia's First Housing Pop-Up, The Addison Project; which saw a 42-room serviced apartment building in Kensington transformed into affordable and emergency accommodation for young people.³¹

²⁴ Foyer Foundation (2021). How Foyers Work. Accessed online via: <https://foyer.org.au/foyers-in-australia/>

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Mullins, R. (2016). Social housing for young people: why my foundations youth housing was formed. *Parity*, vol. 29, no. 3, pp.30-31.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Cockburn, P. (2017). Sydney's Addison Hotel opens its doors to homeless youth in Australian first. ABC News. Accessed online via: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-04-03/opening-an-empty-sydney-building-to-the-homeless/8405196>

Working in partnership with a number of key social enterprises, the Addison project was able to not only provide shelter, but also food through an Oz Harvest Supermarket, a laundry service through Orange Sky and access to new clothes via Thread Together.³² This project highlights the type of critical accommodation and wrap around supports that can be provided for young people when the right partnerships are put in place.

Pathways Home

In 2016, the PAYCE foundation approached Women's Community Shelters (WCS) with an opportunity to utilise vacant properties earmarked for future development, at no cost to WCS. The partnership enabled WCS to provide crisis and transitional housing for women and their children escaping family violence.³³ For example, in 2017 the PAYCE foundation provided WCS with access to five houses to use as a temporary accommodation for women and children in North-West Sydney.³⁴

Since that time, PAYCE and WCS have further partnered with Bridge Housing to form 'Pathways Home'.³⁵ Pathways Home is a meanwhile use housing program focused on increasing available housing stock for women and children, who need transitional housing after leaving WCS crisis shelters. The intention is for Pathways Home to act as a partnership platform to bring together property owners, not-for-profit organisations and philanthropic partners to deliver innovative housing solutions for women and children escaping domestic and family violence and experiencing homelessness. The focus is on utilising properties ear-marked for future development, to provide short term transitional housing. In addition, the project is also exploring opportunities to leverage the use of secondary dwellings that are not currently available on the private market. In order to ensure stability for the women and children accessing these transitional housing supports, the minimum timeframe for any project is 18 months.

Additional opportunities for partnership

Within NSW there exists numerous additional opportunities to create partnerships to develop innovative housing models for young people, including supported accommodation for specific cohorts which is connected to education and other wrap-around support services.

For example, Warrakirri college is currently working to establish accommodation for young mothers. Warrakirri is an independent high school for students aged 15-22 years who have disconnected from mainstream education or don't feel comfortable in a traditional school.³⁶ The young people who attend the school often experience challenges with housing instability. As a result, Warrakirri is seeking to establish housing that would sit alongside a parenting program and school for young

³² Cockburn, P. (2017). Sydney's Addison Hotel opens its doors to homeless youth in Australian first. ABC News. Accessed online via: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-04-03/opening-an-empty-sydney-building-to-the-homeless/8405196>

³³ Caneva, L. (2017). Partnership provides transitional housing for women experiencing homelessness. Pro Bono News. Accessed online via: <https://probonoaustralia.com.au/news/2017/11/partnership-provides-transitional-housing-women-experiencing-homelessness/>

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Warrakirri College (2021). Warrakirri College: A Different Kind of School. Accessed online via: <https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/prod-mtc/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/09/Warakirri-College-V03032020.pdf>

mothers in Campbelltown area.

A similar existing model is Catholic Care's HOPE (Housing and Outreach to Promote Empowerment) program which works to provide young mothers with transitional housing and wrap-around supports for a 15-18 month period.³⁷ The program is focused on supporting young mothers aged 16-25 years old who are experiencing or at-risk of homelessness and have complex needs, by providing a holistic model of support focused on early intervention and family preservation. The model involves qualified case workers supporting the young women with parenting and life skills, education and transition to employment, as well as linking them to broader support services. CatholicCare utilises old parishes and other properties owned by CatholicCare or the Sydney Catholic Archdiocese as a one mechanism to provide young mother and their children with transitional accommodation over the course of the program .

There is a significant opportunity for government to play a role in supporting community and business groups to connect to establish meaningful partnerships.

Recommendation 10: Seek to enhance partnerships between community, government and business sectors, with a focus on reducing the barriers to exploring and utilising vacant or available properties (often referred to as meanwhile use) and other innovative approaches.

Purpose-built alternative accommodation for young people

There are several new models that are currently being explored in Australia that focus on providing low-cost and purpose-built alternative accommodation for young people, often connected with wrap-around supports.

A recent innovative model that has been explored in the Victorian context is 'Kids Under Cover' (KUC).³⁸ This model focuses on building relocatable studio accommodation in the backyard of a family or carer's home – to relieve overcrowding, reduce tension and provide a secure and stable accommodation. The studio apartments can later be relocated and re-used up to four times to support other young people and families in need. In order to provide a more holistic service model, KUC provides the studio accommodation in connection with scholarships for education or job training. These scholarships are also provided to other younger siblings who might be residing in the main family home.

We know that many children and young people that experience housing issues or homelessness cite family and relationship issues as a major contributor. The KUC housing model provides an early intervention tool to reduce these pressures. A recent evaluation of the KUC program found that not only did the studios give the young people a new physical space, they also provided them with a

³⁷ CatholicCare Sydney (2021). Youth pregnancy and parenting support. Accessed online via: <https://www.catholiccare.org/children-and-youth-services/youth-pregnancy-and-parenting-support/>

³⁸ Kids Under Cover (2021). What we do: Prevention is better than cure. Accessed online via: <https://www.kuc.org.au/what-we-do/>

renewed sense of family, belonging, attachment and privacy.³⁹ In addition, the evaluation also found that young people with significant mental health issues, particularly depression and anxiety, reported experiencing a dramatic improvement from living in one of the backyard studios.⁴⁰ The evaluation report does note that the installation of a studio is a relatively expensive undertaking, however literature has shown that benefits accrued over a lifetime for a young person from the studio program can substantially outweigh the installation costs.⁴¹

More recently in NSW, BackTrack Youth Services has partnered with the Tiny Homes Foundation to build four 14-square-metre tiny homes to assist in the provision of additional beds for at-risk young people in the Armidale area.⁴² The homes, which include a full kitchen, bathroom and veranda are designed to create a pathway to independence, with the young residents taking full responsibility of paying rent, on-going maintenance and cleanliness of the homes.⁴³

The four tiny homes will complement a larger existing BackTrack housing facility, and are designed to work in tandem with the BackTrack's education, training and support programs. As part of the project BackTrack has also been able to employ number of young people to assist in the construction of the tiny homes, providing over 100 hours of on the job training.⁴⁴ In addition, the housing project will help young participants gain an important tenancy history – which will support their later transition into the private rental and housing market.⁴⁵

Recommendation 11: Explore opportunities to support the development of purpose-built alternative accommodation for young people.

Support to enter the private rental market

Across ACYP's consultations, young people have told us that they want more support to transition into independent housing, including the private rental market. Young people have said they regularly face challenges in navigating the private rental market, including issues accessing appropriate information, high prices and competition with other tenants (e.g. those with more secure rental histories).

Outlined below are a number of models that could be further explored to better support young people to enter the private rental market.

³⁹ Stolz, D. and Spinney, A. (2020). [A New Place to Call Home: Kids Under Cover Long-Term Studio Impact Report](#), Swinburne University, Melbourne, p.29.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p.30.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* p.31.

⁴² Tiny Homes Foundation (2020). BackTrack Tiny Homes, accessed online via: <https://www.tinyhomesfoundation.org.au/backtrackbuild>

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Sheil, D. (2020). "Tiny Homes Foundation and BackTrack think big to help at-risk youth build a future", ABC New England, accessed online via: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-11-18/tiny-homes-grand-designs-for-social-housing-youth-unemployment/12891340>

Not for profit real estate models

Within Australia there are a number of emerging philanthropic and not for profit real estate models, which focus on connecting property owners with tenants - including by offering accommodation to vulnerable people either on a philanthropic basis, through affordable housing schemes or by offering below market rentals.⁴⁶ At present less than 1% of private rentals are affordable for people on low incomes in the greater Sydney region,⁴⁷ and this issue is often exacerbated for young people who may have experienced homelessness and are being priced out of the market. Not-for-profit and philanthropic real estate models seek to provide opportunities for people who are at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness. In addition, these models also seek to address the issue of major cities increasingly having a number of investment properties sitting vacant, by connecting landlords with prospective tenants.

Recommendation 12: Engage with not-for-profit real estate agencies to determine opportunities to support the development of the sector, including a focus on increasing pathways for young people.

Rent Choice Products

Another opportunity to better support young people to enter the private rental market, is to work with the Real Estate Institute around creating greater knowledge and awareness of Rent Choice and other products aiming at supporting youth people. Rent Choice is a private rental subsidy that helps pay part of a tenant's rent for up to three years.⁴⁸ The focus is on helping the tenant to set up and maintain a tenancy, as well as connecting them to training and employment opportunity.

Rent Choice Youth⁴⁹ is a product currently available to young people aged 16-24 years who don't have their own place to live and are at risk of homelessness. For the first 12 months of the program, young people are required to pay 25% of their weekly income plus 100% of any Commonwealth Rent Assistance they might be entitled to. Once this payment has been paid, the NSW Government provides the rest of the payment to the landlord or real estate agent. After the first 12 months, the amount paid by the young person gradually increases, with the tapered rent model helping to support the young person to become independent.

Across ACYP's consultations with children and young people, they have told us that the service system is often hard to navigate, and they can often find it hard to find information about support services, such as Rent Choice products. In addition, young people have previously reported issues with Rent Choice not being available in a number of geographical areas across NSW. As a result, expansion of Rent Choice to additional locations for eligible 16-24 year olds was a key initiative under the *2016-2019 NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People* and Rent Choice is now

⁴⁶ For example, the HomeGround network is an innovative model of delivering affordable housing that was created by Launch Housing in Melbourne in 2014, and has since expanded to Sydney. For more information see:

<https://www.bridgehousing.org.au/properties/homeground-real-estate-sydney>

⁴⁷ Anglicare Australia (2019). Rental Affordability Snapshot. Access online via: <https://www.anglicare.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Rental-Affordability-Snapshot-2019.pdf>

⁴⁸ Service NSW (2021). Rent Choice. Accessed online via: <https://www.service.nsw.gov.au/transaction/rent-choice>

⁴⁹ Department of Communities and Justice (2021). Rent Choice Youth. Accessed online via: <https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au/housing/factsheets/rent-choice-youth>

available in all Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) districts, including in the Far West district.⁵⁰

Recommendation 13: Work in partnership with the Real Estate Institute to develop greater awareness and knowledge about Rent Choice products which are available for young people.

Homeshare models

Another alternative housing model for young people is 'Homeshare'. Homeshare is a model that has been successfully adopted in many international and domestic jurisdictions, which is primarily focused on matching older people or people with disability, who might require some assistance to remain living independently in their homes, with people seeking affordable housing.⁵¹ The idea is that the tenant agrees to assist with a pre-arranged lists of tasks and responsibilities, and in return they are provided with either low-rent or no-cost accommodation.⁵²

In 2015, Youth Action NSW launched a paper outlining how Homeshare could provide an affordable housing alternative for young people in NSW, and recommended that the NSW Government pilot a Homeshare model focused on meeting the needs of young people.⁵³ A Homeshare pilot was subsequently launched in NSW in 2018 by Holdsworth Community, providing a community-led response focused on supporting isolated seniors and young people seeking safe and affordable housing in the Northern, Central and South Eastern Sydney Regions.⁵⁴ They have recently received grant funding from the Department of Communities and Justice to support the program in 2022, which will enable the program to be expanded in the Inner, Eastern and Northern Sydney regions.⁵⁵

Recommendation 14: Continue to support the development and evaluation of Homeshare models in NSW, with a focus on increasing young people's access to affordable housing.

Conclusion

ACYP thanks the Committee for considering these important issues and welcomes any follow up questions from its members. In addition, ACYP notes that we would be happy to work with the Committee to seek further feedback from children and young people with lived experience of these issues, in order to assist with supporting the implementation of these recommendations. Should you wish to discuss these matters further, please do not hesitate to contact [REDACTED]

⁵⁰ ACYP (2021). Review of the NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People 2016-2019, p.86.

⁵¹ Youth Action (2015). Homeshare: An Affordable Housing Alternative. Accessed online via: <https://www.youthaction.org.au/homeshare2015>

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Holdsworth Community (2021). Media Release: NSW Government Partners with Holdsworth by Investing \$200K to Combat Social Isolation and Housing Affordability.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*