

Youth Information and Referral Service



“A Place to Call My Own”

MACKAY YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

REPORT 2009

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Preface.

“A Place to Call My Own” has been produced to inform and promote an ongoing dialogue on the level and nature of social exclusion and homelessness in young people of Mackay.

The report has been produced as the second part of a funding initiative through the Local Answers Program by the Department of Families and Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). The first component of the initiative was the provision of outreach service delivery to young people who have been socially excluded through:

- Disengagement from school and learning.
- Substance abuse.
- Sleeping rough / homelessness.

The report recognises the need to a “whole of government” approach to address social exclusion and homelessness in young people of Mackay, and as such, the report project was developed, implemented and monitored by a Steering Committee comprised of the following government and non-government organisations:

- Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.
- Department of Communities (Queensland Government).
- Mackay Aboriginal and Islander Justice Alternative Group
- Skills Training Mackay.
- Youth Information and Referral Service (Mackay).

Acknowledgement is also given to the following contributors to this report:

- Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (Australian Government).
- Department of Housing (Queensland Government).
- ITEC Employment Services.
- Mackay Youth Support Service
- St Paul’s Uniting Church
- Mackay Child Safety Service Centre.
- Mackay and District Education Centre
- Mackay and District Youth Crime Prevention Service
- Ozcare
- Kalyan Youth Services Inc.

Particular acknowledgement must also be given to the young people who use the youth and other community services of Mackay, that shall remain anonymous, but whose stories provide invaluable insight into issues facing marginalised young people in the area.

Executive Summary.

This report is a result of a project which set out to investigate and quantify the level of youth homelessness in Mackay, to identify issues pertaining to the target group that result in social exclusion and homelessness, and provide localised, relevant practical strategies, and solutions. The report is provided as a catalyst, to further activity to continue to analyse and develop responses to youth homelessness and social exclusion within the Mackay region.

The research confirmed that:

- Suitable affordable accommodation is at a premium in Mackay due to external economic factors and despite the economic downturn there is likely to continue to be a chronic shortage of housing availability in the area.
- Current youth service providers have difficulty in fully meeting the range of needs of young people in Mackay.
- The relationship between unstable / poor education history, social disengagement and the potential link between these and homelessness and lack of economic participation.

In line with the nature of the report a number of concepts are provided to promote further dialogue around the nature and potential approaches to social exclusion and homelessness amongst young people in Mackay.

It is important that the report be circulated, read and discussed by all those involved in the provision of support services to young people and be used to continue and build an informed, evidenced based and meaningful dialogue that will result in appropriate solutions to the challenges experienced by many vulnerable young people in Mackay.

Introduction.

The purpose of this report is to investigate and quantify the level of youth homelessness in Mackay, to identify issues pertaining to the target group that result in social exclusion and homelessness, provide localised, relevant practical strategies, reality based solutions and innovative approaches in line with policy being developed through the Australian Government Homelessness White Paper process.

This report is one component of multifaceted activity funded through the Australian Government that consists of a number of youth focused initiatives including:

- The provision of a Youth Inclusion Support Officer located at Youth Information and Referral Service (YIRS), working with young people that have been socially excluded through disengagement from school and learning, substance misuse and other underlying issues relating to homelessness.
- The provision of a Youth Justice Diversionary Officer located at Mackay Aboriginal and Islander Justice Alternative Group (MAIJAG) (auspiced by Skills Training Mackay - STM), working on the development of programs and activities to divert young people that are currently involved with, or who are at risk of entering, the youth justice system.
- The establishment and maintenance of a volunteer program that supports the capacity of volunteers to respond to youth needs and crises in Mackay.

As stated in the preface, this report seeks to inform dialogue on the issues of social exclusion and homelessness relating to young people in Mackay. This informed dialogue will underpin decisions and actions that will be taken by government agencies and other key players in the Mackay community, to support young people at risk of social / educational disengagement, substance abuse and other underlying issues relating to homelessness.

The report introduces a working definition of homelessness and then seeks to provide a short policy and research overview to contextualise the nature of youth homelessness.

The nature of homelessness specifically relating to Mackay is then described using both quantitative and qualitative information. A service map of those organisations delivering significant services to young people is also provided, to further describe the environment in which socially excluded and homeless young people in Mackay exist.

This contextual information raises a number of issues associated with youth homelessness in Mackay including:

- The lack of accommodation in Mackay overall – associated with the economic pressure related to mining.
- The significant rise in homelessness in the Mackay area overall since 2006.
- The relationship between disconnection from education and economic opportunity and homelessness.
- The need for an integrated system of support, backed by adequate human and physical infrastructure to support young people at risk in Mackay.

The report also identifies areas for potential supplementary research / exploration, to further support future activity by key players, to ameliorate the level and impact of social and economic exclusion and homelessness in Mackay.

A series of recommendations complete the report; one set dealing with three specific “Concepts” worked up across service providers in response to the needs of homeless young people in Mackay. These concepts address a number of crucial issues and need further discussion and development to be implemented. The second set of recommendations includes a number of what could be best termed “works in progress”; areas of activity that have already started, but needing to be progressed, to significantly change the circumstance of young, homeless people in the area.

1. Definitions – homelessness and youth.

This report utilises a cultural definition of homelessness used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, contending that ‘homelessness’ and ‘inadequate housing’ are cultural concepts that only make sense in a particular community at a given historical period.¹

The most widely accepted definition of homelessness within the Australian context describes three kinds of homelessness:

- Primary homelessness, such as sleeping rough or living in an improvised dwelling.
- Secondary homelessness, including staying with friends or relatives and with no other usual address, and people in specialist homelessness services.
- Tertiary homelessness, including people living in boarding houses or caravan parks with no secure lease and no private facilities, both short and long term.²

Importantly, for this report, “homelessness does not simply mean that people are without shelter. A stable home provides safety and security as well as connections to friends, family and a community. Homelessness makes it very difficult to hold down a job or lead a healthy and stable life. The minimum community standards embedded in the present-day housing practices of Australia, it has been argued, encompass having ‘a room to sleep in, a room to live in, kitchen and bathroom facilities of your own, and an element of security of tenure’.³

“Homelessness is best understood as a “process”, rather than an “event”. Because homelessness is a process, it is often difficult to know when homelessness “begins” and “ends”... young people are usually “at risk” prior to becoming homeless”.⁴

¹ Chamberlain, C and MacKenzie, D (1992) ‘Understanding Contemporary Homelessness: Issues of Definition and Meaning’, *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 27(4), 274–297.

² Cited in Chamberlain C, MacKenzie D (2009). ‘Counting the Homeless 2006: Queensland’. Cat. no. HOU 205.Canberra: AIHW. 17-19.

³ Chamberlain C and Johnson G. Early Intervention: a research paper prepared for the Victorian Homelessness Strategy, Department of Human Services, 2000.

⁴ The Second National Consensus of Homelessness, *Youth Studies Australia* v.21, n.4, 2002, - 24).

These simple requirements of what constitutes a “home” and homelessness have particular relevance for young people. For the purposes of this report “young people” refers to individuals who:

- Are aged between 15-25 years of age.
- Are eligible to access organisations/agencies that provide services to marginalised young people.

2. Homelessness – Current policy and research – Nationally, Queensland & Mackay.

In December 2008, the Federal Government released *The Road Home – The White Paper on Homelessness*. This policy position paper outlines the framework of the Federal Government's response to homelessness in Australia. The White Paper sets out the following principles to guide governments' actions in relation to homelessness:

- A national commitment, strong leadership, and cooperation from all levels of government and from non-government and business sectors is needed;
- Preventing homelessness is important;
- Social inclusion drives our efforts;
- Clients need to be placed at the centre of service delivery and design;
- The safety and wellbeing of all clients is essential;
- The rights and responsibilities of individuals and families needs to be protected;
- Joined-up service delivery needs joined-up policy;
- Transition points are a priority;
- Evidence-based policy helps to shape our priorities for action; and,
- Targets are set to reduce homelessness and hold ourselves accountable.

Importantly the White Paper identifies the need for a national system to support those at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness where there are 'no wrong doors', addressing coordination issues between the Federal, State and Territory Governments and homelessness services and between homeless and mainstream services.

This policy framework sits against a background of significant research into the level and nature of homelessness in Australia. The White paper recognises that there have been two major sources of static information on homelessness, Census data and that information collected by Special Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP).

Whilst both have been a rich source of data, the white paper recognised that:

- Using Census data to presents a number of difficulties. These include the challenge of counting populations such as rough sleepers, the inability to capture longitudinal data on individual pathways in and out of homelessness, and the frequency of the data collection. A further difficulty is the time lag between data collection and availability of the data analysis – that is, data from the 2006 Census was not publicly available until 2008.
- In relation to SAAP data, the National Data Collection Agency at the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) collects data on all specialist homelessness services funded by the Australian Government and states and territories. While the data captured under this collection is richer and more complex than the Census data, these services come into contact with only 19 % of people who are homeless on any given day. It misses the many thousands who did not approach a SAAP service, those who use mainstream services, or people who receive a service from a homelessness service not funded under SAAP. Also, the data collected does not provide detailed information about the medium and long-term outcomes for those who receive assistance through specialist homelessness services.⁶

The statistical information available from these and other sources does however paint a picture of the extent and nature of homelessness broadly.

Data from the 2006 census shows that there are 104,676 homeless people in Australia and of this number 43% are under the age of 25 years, with the highest percentage of homeless people in Australia being teenagers aged between 12-18 years of age at 21%. Young people aged 12 to 18 are the largest group of people experiencing homelessness and the highest users of specialist homelessness services.⁷

The most recent commentary on census data included the following observations for Queensland:

- The estimated, typical point-in-time figure for homelessness is about 26,750, up from about 24,500 in 2001.
- In Queensland, half (49%) of the homeless were staying temporarily with other households on census night and 20% were in boarding houses. 19% were in the primary population, up from 16 per cent in 2001 (3869 to 5165 people). Only 12% were in SAAP.

⁶ *The Road Home*, A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness (White Paper) Commonwealth of Australia 2008. 58-59.

⁷ Cited in Chamberlain C, MacKenzie D (2009). 'Counting the Homeless 2006: Queensland'. Cat. no. HOU 205. Canberra: AIHW. 4-5.

- Nationally, 56% of homeless people were male and 44% were female. In Queensland, men outnumbered women 58% to 42%.
- The homeless population in Queensland was older than the homeless population in other states, with 49% of the homeless aged 35 or older. Nonetheless, a majority (51%) of homeless people in Queensland were in the younger age groups. 16% of the homeless were teenagers aged 12 to 18 (mainly on their own). 11% of the homeless were children under 12 who were with one or both parents. Another 10% were young adults aged 19 to 24, and 14% were adults aged 25 to 34.
- In Queensland, Indigenous people were overrepresented in all sectors of the homeless population, but particularly in improvised dwellings and SAAP.⁸

It is important to note that census data was collected in 2006 and much has happened in Queensland since then. As QCOSS President Karyn Walsh recently stated:

"The figures in this report are from the 2006 census, so despite new investment, the problem has been growing. Our members are telling us there is an even more urgent and dire need now – there are, without doubt more homeless people looking for help than these figures show."⁹

⁸ Chamberlain C, MacKenzie D (2009). 'Counting the Homeless 2006: Queensland'. Cat. no. HOU 205. Canberra: AIHW. 32 - 35.

⁹ Youth Affairs Network Queensland - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People overrepresented among Qld's homeless - <http://www.yanq.org.au/content/view/1936/> - accessed 21/07/2009.

3. Homelessness – Mackay – quantitative and non quantitative descriptions of the issue.

The Mackay context.

The Mackay Whitsunday Region covers the local government areas of Mackay, Whitsunday and Isaacs Regional Councils. The region has a population of 163,000 with a current growth rate of 3.1% and a projected growth rate to 2011 of 3.2 to 3.8% over the next five years. The Population Information and Forecasting Unit of the Department of Infrastructure and Planning has projected that the regional population in 2026 will be between 245,000 and 268,000. ¹⁰

The most up to date comparable data as at 30 June 2007 is that the estimated resident population of Mackay Regional Council was 109,575 persons, representing 2.6 per cent of the State's population and of this number 14,891 or 13.6% was comprised of young people aged between 15-24 years of age. ¹¹

The estimated resident population of the Mackay urban area at June 2007 was 79,172, of whom 11,650 were aged 10 to 19 years. In the August 2006 Census of Population and Housing, 764 young people aged 10 to 19 years in the Mackay urban area identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. This represented 25% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the area, and 7.1% of young people in the area. ¹²

ABS figures from 2008 utilise a different definition of young people (10 – 24) and in this case the statistics are that young people represent a 21% of the Mackay population. Of these young people 6% are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people which represents 33% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. ¹³

Both the number of homeless people and the rate of homelessness have increased sharply in Mackay. On Census night 2001, 348 people were identified as homeless in Mackay (56/10 000), while on Census night 2006 this has increased to 692 people (95/10 000), an increase of 99%. ¹⁴

In recent years there has been a rapid expansion of the mining industry in the Bowen Basin and the accompanying population growth has had significant environmental, social and economic impacts on local communities in the region, including Mackay. ¹⁵

¹⁰ ABS 2008 Population by Age and Sex, Regions of Australia, cat 3235.0

¹¹ Office of Economic and Statistical Research. Queensland Regional Profile, (2008).

Accessed 28 April 2009. URL: www.oesr.qld.gov.au

¹² ABS 2007 Indigenous Community Profile, Mackay SLA A, cat. 2002.0

¹³ ABS 2008 ERP

¹⁴ Counting the Homeless State/Territory Reports, Queensland summary, Homelessness Australia, at www.homelessnessaustralia.org.au

¹⁵ Sustainable Resource Communities Policy: Social impact assessment in the mining and petroleum industries

It is reported that this economic expansion has “ impacted on the availability of affordable housing and placements for young people, placing them in an even more marginalised and disadvantaged position from which to transition through adolescence and into adulthood.”¹⁶

This observation is further reinforced in the Whitsunday Hinterland and Mackay Regional Plan, 2006 which states that (in response to economic expansion) “specifically, there is a lack of affordable housing in some localities and a lack of access to housing for particular groups, such as young people”.¹⁷

Early in 2008 Mackay recorded the highest five year rental increase for a two bedroom unit in Australia with the median rental price rising 112.5% from \$120 per week in March 2002 to \$255 in December of 2007. Three bedroom rentals increased 105.9% over the same period, during which time, demand has far surpassed supply. According to the Tenancy Advice and Advocacy Service, rental costs expressed as a percentage of income mean that a young person on Youth Allowance spends an average of 78 percent of their weekly income on a one bedroom unit. Similarly, a single person on Newstart allowance would expect to pay 67 percent of their weekly income for a one bedroom unit.¹⁸

Anecdotal comment recorded in the local media indicates that the impact of growth in the region has not dissipated despite the recent economic downturn. In fact it has been reported that the current economic circumstances have only exacerbated the situation in relation to homelessness. One recently reported example states that "If another Census was taken tonight, the situation would be far worse,"¹⁹ Headlines such as the following give some idea of recent local media perceptions of homelessness in Mackay.

- “Coal blamed for homelessness boom”. – Daily Mercury 9 July 2009.
- “Homelessness on the rise”. – WIN Television Thursday 9, Jul 2009.
- “Young homeless slip through the cracks”. – Courier Mail – 13 July 2009

Other factors that assist in describing the context of young people in Mackay include:

¹⁶ Adapted from Mackay Regional Council for Social Development and the Youth Information and Referral Service. Pro-Youth Action Group Report, 2007 unpublished.

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Reported in Queensland Shelter, February 2008. - <http://www.qshelter.asn.au/branchstory/february-2008-5>. Accessed 21/07/2009

¹⁹ Queensland director of welfare group Mission Australia, Tony Stevenson, reported by the ABC (On line) “Minister urges public support to help Qld's homeless.” 9 July 2009 - 2:02pm

- The number of young people appearing before the Mackay Children’s Court increased by 14% between 2005 and 2007. Youth Justice Orders issued over the same period in the Mackay Whitsunday region more than doubled, with the majority being issued in Mackay.²⁰
- The Mackay/Fitzroy region had a suicide mortality rate amongst the 15 - 24 year old group which is 40% above the Queensland level.²¹ The data does not specifically target a rate for Mackay, but the widespread perception within Mackay supports a higher rate of youth suicide in comparison to the rest of the state.
- Proportionally, Mackay has a significantly higher number of families with no parents working, as well as, a high number of young people who have not finished school and are not in learning/employment.²²

One of the major problems that have continuously confronted the Mackay community sector is that of the collection of “real” localised data and information on issues that influence the quality of life of young people, their families and the community. This is often related to the perception of the “wealth” in the region due to growth of the mining and associated industries.

An additional factor is that of the responsibility for the collection of data, and the type of reportable data, that funded organisations are required to report on. For example; most organisations are not required to report on “turn away” data; however, during discussions with service providers, some organisations are collecting this information for their own purposes.

During the research conducted to support this report, the awareness of the need for ongoing statistical research and the issue of who is responsible for this became apparent. Despite the fact that all organisations included in this report are funded either through Federal or State government entities, there is no centrally available portal for consistently reported localised statistical information that reflects the needs of the Mackay community.

In addition to this, the definitions of homelessness or “youth” cited above, are not built into reporting requirements for government funded organisations and while the perception in the community of the number of young people who experience homelessness in Mackay is high, this is not always supported by statistical data. This can be attributed both to the acknowledgement of homelessness by young people themselves (if they are couch surfing they do not consider themselves homeless) and to the understanding of the definitions of homelessness by workers in the community sector.

²⁰ Dept of Communities, unpublished data, Regional report focussing on Youth Funding Realignment: Mackay-Whitsunday Region June-July 2008.

²¹ De Leo, D., Klieve, H. & Milner, A. 2006 *Suicide in Queensland 2002-2004: Mortality Rates and Related Data*. Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention, Griffith University, Brisbane.

²² Regional report focussing on Youth Funding Realignment: Mackay-Whitsunday Region June-July 2008

Another issue impacting on the collection and compilation of usable data is the lack of funded administrative positions as “many ‘direct service staff’ undertake a number of administrative support functions”. Many funded organisations do not have funding for specific administrative support positions and “the overall administrative tasks of an organisation are becoming increasingly complex and considering the nature of the work that is undertaken by administrative staff there is a requirement, of at least, one full time position within each organisation”.²³

Given the difficulty in extracting reliable and comparable data the authors of this report decided (with the agreement of the project Steering Committee) that the method for collection and compilation of primary statistical data would focus on the following funded youth programs and services in Mackay:

- Job Placement, Employment and Training (JPET) - ITEC Employment Services.²⁴
- Youth Pathways Program – Mackay and District Education Centre.
- Youth Support Coordinator and U-Nite Program - Mackay Youth Support Service.
- Youth SAAP Service - Kalyan Youth Service Inc

In addition to statistical data, anecdotal information and non-identifiable stories from young people are included from the above organisations and also from the following contributors:

- Mackay Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice Alternative Group.
- Mackay and District Youth Crime Prevention Service.
- Ozcare.
- St Paul’s Uniting Church.
- Mackay Child Safety Service Centre.
- Queensland Department of Housing.
- Youth Information and Referral Service

²³ Queensland Youth Housing Coalition Inc. Queensland Addressing Youth Homelessness Business Case, October 2008.

²⁴ Note: From 1 July 2009, the Australian Government introduced a new approach to employment services - Job Services Australia. Job Services Australia replaces previous employment services including the Job Placement Employment and Training (JPET) program

Due to the privacy issue of government funding guidelines, no raw data is able to be released in the report for publication. However, permission was obtained for the author of this report to analyse data provided and compile comparable information for the purpose of this report.

A summary of an analysis of comparable data for the JPET, Youth Pathways, Youth Support Coordinator and U-nite programs is included below. As Kalyan Youth Service is the only Youth SAAP Service in the region, this data is included separately.

A caveat to the statistical information presented in this report is that, where possible, comparative data has been requested from services for the timeline period 2007 and 2008. Many funded organisations have not been required to collect data on homeless young people. Specifically, staff employed by youth and other community organisations have not been required to report on the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of homelessness and most organisations approached were not even aware of these levels. During the compilation of this report, it has become apparent that the reportable data required of government funded organisations does not include enough information to fully analyse the needs and disadvantages faced by the young people of Mackay.

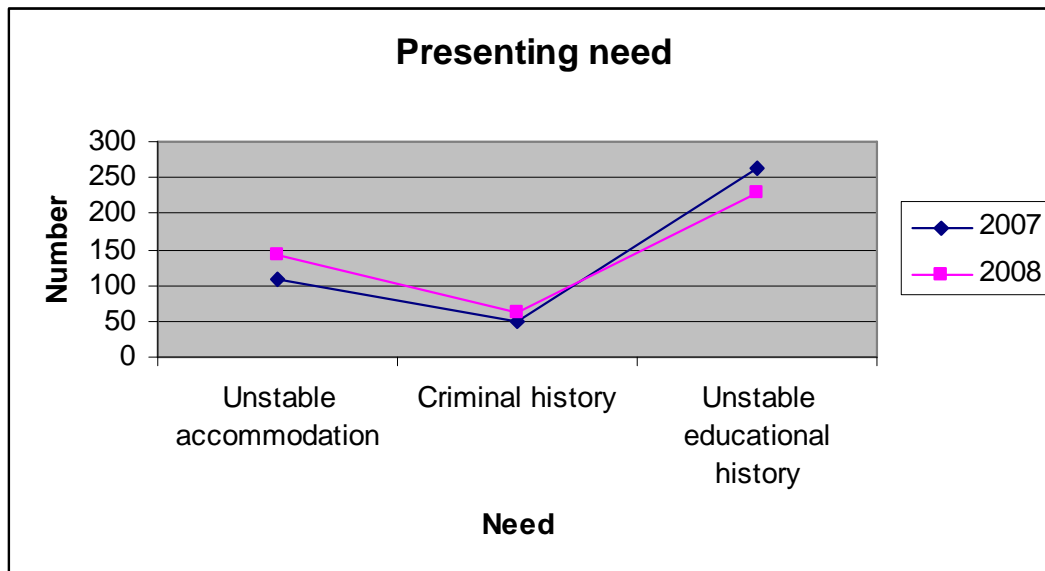
All attempts have been made to adhere to realistic counting rules but it is acknowledged that there still exists the possibility of “double counting” of young people who access more than one service during the timeline periods reported on.

JPET, Youth Pathways and the Youth Support Coordinator and U-nite programs.

Combined services for young people aged 13 – 21 year of age

	<u>2007</u>	<u>2008</u>
TOTAL NUMBERS:	519	591
Females:	313	367
Males:	206	224
Indigenous:	76	148

The graph below identifies the proportionate reason that young people presented at the services.



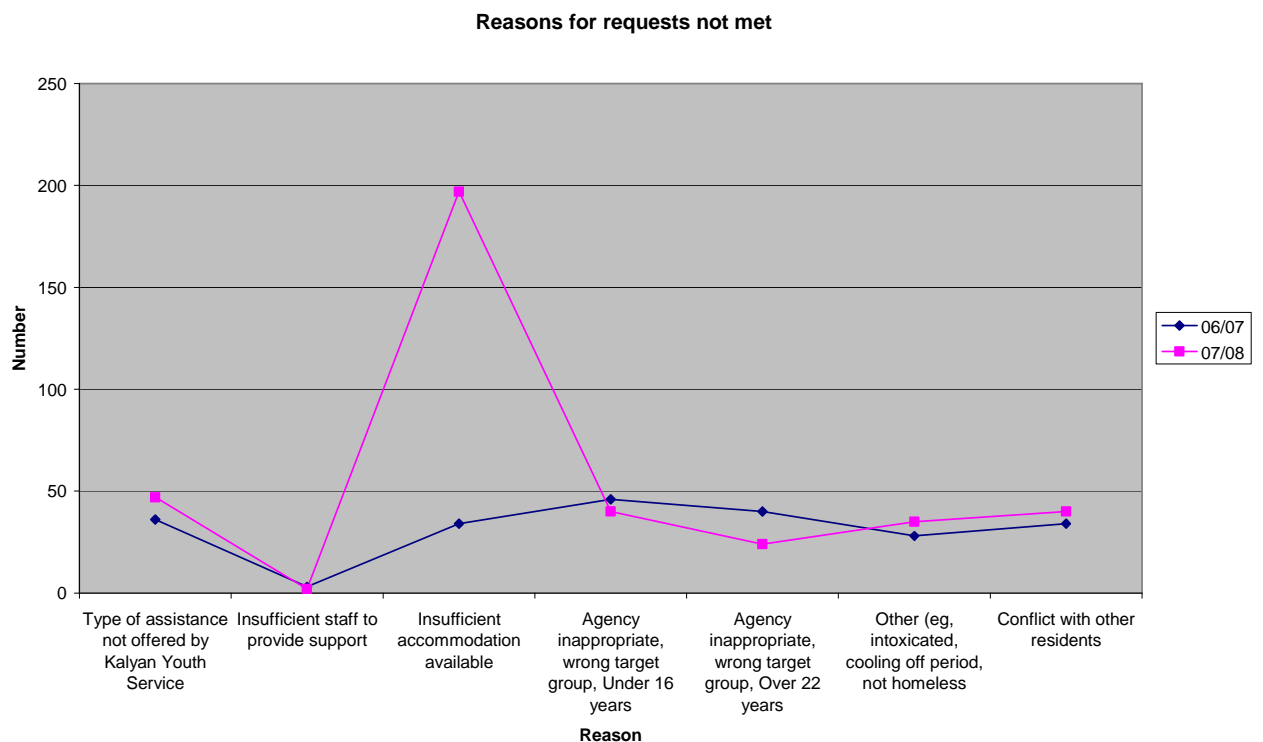
These figures clearly indicate that the level of homelessness has increased in Mackay and that disengagement from education is a strongly associated factor. It is also noted that in line with the findings of the White Paper, young women are more likely to access these support services. Access to these services by Indigenous young people increased by 10.4% from the Year 2007 to the Year 2008.

Kalyan Youth SAAP Service

Services provided for young people aged 16-21 years. Figures from Kalyan Youth Services are provided per financial year and not calendar year.

	<u>2006/2007</u>	<u>2007/2008</u>
TOTAL NUMBERS:	97	70
Females:	41	32
Males:	56	38
Indigenous:	8	4
PRESENTING ACCOMODATION ISSUES:		
Eviction:	28	30
Emergency accommodation ended:	19	12
Previous accommodation ended:	30	22

Kalyan does track unmet demand from potential clients. As the graph below indicates the reasons for unmet demand are reasonably stable apart from "Insufficient accommodation available" which was at a disproportionately high level in the 2007/2008 year.



With regards to youth homelessness, it is very difficult to obtain information from young people themselves unless they are accessing services that are funded to collect data specifically around this issue. The Pro Youth Action Group project, (2007), actively canvassed the collection of information from young people aged between 13-25 years of age through a collaborative partnership between the Mackay Regional Council for Social Development and the Youth Information and Referral Service (YIRS).

The young people who participated in the project were clients that accessed the services of YIRS and participated in interviews guided by a developed questionnaire. Of the interviews conducted, 23 completed responses were received with the following key findings reported:

- 78% of respondents do not live at home with family.
- 57% of respondents are homeless.
- 61% of respondents have not had a regular place to stay for months.
- 74% of respondents do not work or study.
- 74% of respondents have been a victim of domestic violence or other abuse.
- 26% of respondents have no connection with the Department of Child Safety.
- 22% of respondents are young people 13 to 16 years of age

This information while valuable and insightful, also confirms the difficulty of gaining usable statistical information from young people, as YIRS records on average, around 700 contacts with young people per month. The Pro Youth Action Group Final Report 2007 also acknowledges that “research undertaken during this project failed to uncover existing data addressing housing and accommodation situations of Mackay youth”. This again reflects on the responsibility for the collection of statistical information and the need for standardised reporting mechanisms across both Federal and State funded services.

There is no data available on the numbers of young people who are sleeping rough, and this can only be included in the report as anecdotal information. Sleeping rough in Mackay constitutes many situational reasons including:

- Forming of camaraderie between disengaged young people as there tends to be a common bond that unites these young people into staying together in certain situations. This was highly evident during the 2008 youth suicide tragedies where a number of young people had homes to go to but because of the situation felt a level of responsibility in staying with their peers.
- Episodes of prolonged substance misuse leading to young people “sleeping where they drop” including local parks, abandoned buildings and churches. This results in young people losing most of their possessions, which impacts adversely on their ability to engage with mainstream society.
- Sleeping on the riverbank with homeless adults.

With situations like this there is the snowball effect of police involvement, which leads to many of the young people returning to, or entering, the youth justice system, or accumulating large debts through fines which can not be paid. This also places these vulnerable young people at high risk of harm or abuse.

Whilst statistical data is limited, that presented above, does paint a picture of the nature of youth homelessness in Mackay. An extra dimension is added to this picture through the case studies presented below. They were compiled as part of this review and accurately record the circumstances of individual young people in Mackay.

Case study 1

A 17 year old female presented to the service needing accommodation. It was established that the client has a difficult family situation with a history of domestic violence in the household. The client also suffers from arthritis and is required to take medication for her condition.

The client stays at different friends houses because when she is at home her 15 year old brother physically abuses her. Her mother is an alcoholic and when home the client usually cares for her.

The client can't live with her father because when she was 14 she went to the police because he was physically, mentally and emotionally abusing the whole family and a Domestic Violence Order was issued.

It was suggested that the client apply for public housing and after months of organising birth certificate and all the correct identification she applied for public housing. Her application was denied as she was not considered very high risk because she could live with her mother and “stays at friends” by choice.

The public housing assessment established that as the mother's house is a three bedroom dwelling there is not an overcrowding problem.

The Domestic Violence Order on her father was considered in the assessment and was identified as a "significant issue" but as the father resided in another state the young woman still doesn't fit the "very high need" criteria. As such her choices are limited to staying with friends or be abused by brother and care for alcoholic mother.

The client has applied for share accommodation but gets turned away because she is unemployed. She is on a Disability Employment Network Program, but because she has arthritis is very limited to what kind of work she can do.

Case Study 2

A 16 year old female presented with a range of issues including lack of suitable accommodation, family breakdown, sexual abuse and a learning disability which client's mother also has. The client describes her current situation as sometimes staying with mum but mainly on the streets.

The client's mother has a diagnosed mental health issue but is not receiving support.

The client displays highly sexualized behaviour which results in disagreements with her mother and often the client is told to leave the mother's home.

The client's mental health has been assessed and she is currently displaying signs of depression, anxiety and suppressed emotions about sexual abuse.

She has stayed at the youth shelter in Mackay but because of her highly sexualized behaviour she is asked to leave. The client would benefit from semi supported accommodation where she can live independently with support. The youth service cannot support a client with this many mental health issues, which leads to the client sleeping rough at nights. This can occur weekly and last for months.

Case Study 3

A 17 year old Indigenous male presents with accommodation, previous substance abuse, ex offender and current legal issues. He is doing his best to change his life. He has a fulltime job at a restaurant in town and can sometimes work up to 45 hours per week, and he works split shifts.

The client is on probation and signs in weekly and things have been progressing well. He has been trying to get himself accommodation because he is currently couch surfing and in the middle of his split shifts goes to friends or the men's homeless shelter for a shower.

He cannot stay at the Men's homeless shelter because it is full. He could apply for public housing but because he is not receiving Centrelink payments and as he earns an independent income, he is not considered "high risk". As such it is unlikely that he will be entitled to public housing for years. He has applied for private tenancy and has had no success. He has applied for share accommodation and again has had no success. This causes the client to live transiently and may cause issues with his employment, which may lead to a return to his previous substance abuse. This then could lead to breach of probation and back to prison.

Case Study 4

An 18 year old pregnant Indigenous female has been forced to relocate to Gladstone as she has no accommodation options in Mackay. She was living with her mother in a housing commission home that was very over crowded. Housing Queensland requested that the people who were staying were to leave or her mother was going to be evicted.

The client was forced to leave. She then applied for public housing herself and was considered "very high risk". The client put her name at every caravan park in Mackay, at the women's shelter and youth shelter, but they were all full. The client couch surfed for a few weeks and stayed on at hotel at a cost of \$300 for the week. This left her with \$40 for the fortnight leaving her very vulnerable. She then was back to couch surfing, and then made the decision to relocate leaving her family and cultural connections.

There are many examples for pregnant young women who have their names on the Housing Queensland data base but have not been provided with any housing. This leads to many issues including removal of children by Child Safety because the client doesn't have stable accommodation.

Perhaps one of the greatest insights into the nature of youth homelessness is the fact that young, homeless, ex offenders who have experienced periods of incarceration consistently report that:

"The best time of my life has been when I have been locked up; where I am secure, safe, can go to school, and where I can engage with people."

Other considerations

While on the surface, Mackay appears to have a number of service providers available for young people, there are still significant impediments to young homeless people in securing a suitable future in Mackay. These include:

- A lack of affordable accommodation – limited options that are usually short term, even when they find accommodation with friends, etc. it is usually only time limited because there are no supports, either financial or emotional, for families taking on a teenager.
- Lack of accessible transport – public transport is limited in Mackay and young people report they cannot get to employment or work experience opportunities because of transport. This ultimately impacts on their ability to secure suitable accommodation.
- Assistance to get a drivers licence (impacts further on employment and schooling). If a young person has their learners licence and they have left home they no longer have anyone they can drive around with and this is a factor that will prevent them from getting their driver's licence or even going for their learner's because they think "...what's the point, I won't be able to get my 100hrs up and I can't afford to pay for lessons."
- Relative lack of family mediation/support services.
- Lack of education related resources:
 - Computers – if a young person does not have access to one outside of school they cannot complete assignments.
 - Covering the costs of subject related activities including equipment, excursions, camps, etc.
 - Being able to afford to participate in social activities such as formals, graduations, etc.²⁵
- Lack of safe and affordable social activities for homeless young people to participate in – leading to increased risk of engaging in risky behaviour including crime, hanging around in public spaces, hanging out at parties and "scabbing" alcohol and drugs, etc.

²⁵ While some of these may seem like luxuries, young people who feel disadvantaged at school either financially or socially report feeling self conscious and have less motivation to remain in education. Once they disengage from education they fall into unemployment because they don't have the resources (e.g. transport and relevant level of education) to gain employment and then they are at further risk of falling into primary homelessness. Often placements within families also fall down when the young person is no longer able to remain engaged in education.

- Lack of school support or school staff that have an understanding of the struggles these young people face.
- Lack of crisis accommodation for young people, especially when they don't fall into the criteria for particular service providers.
- Lack of parenting programs / workshops for parents of teenagers who exhibit challenging behaviour.
- Changes to service provision as a result of the implementation of Job Services Australia from 1 July 2009 has resulted in a gap in service provision. Previously there was a close and effective relationship with the JPET service provider that supported more intensive support for some young people, when needed. The new arrangements, at this stage, do not seem to have picked up from where JPET left off and as such this is putting pressure on non employment specific focused service providers.

4. Stakeholders / key players in youth homelessness in Mackay. ²⁶

As indicated previously in this report there are a number of organisations that seek to provide services to young and homeless people in Mackay. Their operation and their ability to offer services required by homeless young people is an integral part of the landscape that describes youth homelessness in Mackay. This section summarises the support offered and also notes some of the difficulties experienced in providing these services.

Youth Information and Referral Service (YIRS)

The Youth Information and Referral Service (YIRS) has taken the lead role in the development of this report, including the recruitment and management of both the consultant for the report and the Youth Inclusion Support Officer position.

YIRS provides services to at-risk young people with a range of early intervention, targeted and intensive services that support personal and social development; promote positive engagement with peers, family and community networks; and participation in education, training and employment. The organisation is funded by the Queensland Department of Communities, and services include:

- Development and implementation of targeted programs including suicide prevention and postvention.
- Coordination and delivery of integrated youth support services which include wrap around responses for young people with complex needs.
- Provision of information and referral responding to the complex needs of young people.
- Participation in working groups and committees to address issues relating to young people's safety and well being.
- Supporting the establishment of programs to develop life skills, self esteem, and other skills for economic and social participation.

²⁶ Note: This section focuses primarily on serviced provides. The report recognises other key players including: Department of Families, Housing Community Services and indigenous Affairs, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Department of Health and Ageing, Department of Communities (Housing), Department of Justice and the Attorney General, Department of Community Safety (Child Safety Unit), Department of Education and Training, Mackay Regional Council, and Construction Skills QLD.

- Development of referral pathways and Memoranda of Understanding to assist the coordination and integration of youth support services in the community.
- Conducting activities which support cultural identity development, enhance young people's sense of cultural identity, and assist them to connect and/or maintain connection to their cultural community.

The priority target group includes young people aged 10-19 years, particularly Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander; Australian South Sea Islander and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse young people, who are at risk of involvement with the youth justice, police and child protection systems. Young people aged 10-24 years who experience the following risk factors are also within the target group:

- Living in an area of socio-economic disadvantage.
- At risk of disengagement from education, training and employment.
- Living with both parents/carers who are unemployed.
- At risk of teenage pregnancy and/or who are teenage parents.
- Lack of positive friends, family and community support networks
- Homelessness.
- Engaged in anti-social behaviour and using alcohol, drugs in harmful ways.

Young people with low support needs are also eligible for service provision but are not considered a priority target group.

In addition to the above funded services, YIRS offers a holistic model of service that includes a free Youth Health Clinic, free support and advisory service around everyday issues including employment, training, housing, legal, relationships, mental health, and drug and alcohol.

Job Placement, Employment and Training (JPET) Program - ITEC Employment Services

JPET is a pre-employment programme bridging the gap between crisis and employment assistance services for disadvantaged young people. This program is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR)

To be eligible to participate in JPET a young person must:

- Be aged 15-21 years of age (inclusive), and
- Homeless or at risk of homelessness; and/or
- Facing barriers which prevent them from participating in the workforce or in their community; and
- Not be in sustainable employment; and
- Be an Australian citizen, have permanent residency or hold a Temporary Protection Visa.

The barriers to social and economic participation experienced by these young people may include:

- Drug and alcohol abuse.
- Sexual and physical abuse.
- Mental health problems.
- Family troubles.

A key objective of the JPET program is to stabilise the young person's situation in order to re-engage them with education or training, help them access employment assistance or to enter employment. JPET providers draw on and work collaboratively with existing community support services and networks in their local community to give young people the most appropriate support for their needs.

The provision of JPET services is now located under the Job Services Australia network arrangements. As noted earlier, the previous close and effective relationship that existed between the JPET and other service providers does not, at this stage, seem to have continued on under the new arrangements.

Youth Pathways Program – Mackay and District Education Centre (MADEC)

Youth Pathways aims to assist the most at risk young people to make a successful transition through to completion of year 12 (or its equivalent) and ultimately, to further education, training or employment and active participation in the community. This program is funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and is aimed at young people aged 13 to 19 that are thinking about leaving school or have recently left Year 12. Participants are not eligible for Youth Pathways services if they have left school for over 12 months.

Eligible young people participating in Youth Pathways will receive services which include:

- Personal one-on-one assistance to help identify strengths, goals and barriers;
- Individual support to achieve their goals;
- Individual support and guidance to help overcome barriers, and;
- Other services aimed at better equipping young people to successfully make the transition through school and from school to further education, training or employment.

Youth Support Coordinator (YSC) and U-Nite Programs - Mackay Youth Support Service (MYSS)

MYSS is funded by the Queensland Department of Communities and runs two programs; the Youth Support Coordinator program and the U-Nite program. Both programs require that all clients are voluntary and take an early intervention approach.

The Youth Support Coordinator program provides support to young people at risk of disengaging from education prior to completing their senior phase of learning aged between 12-18 years and is a joint collaboration between Department of Communities, Department of Education and Training, and is an integral component of the Queensland Government's Education and Training Reforms for the Future. The Youth Support Coordinators work in partnership with schools, TAFE and other community support agencies to ensure that the holistic welfare and social support needs of individual young people and their families, are addressed.

Youth Support Coordinators target young people who are most at risk of disengaging from education due to the serious social and personal difficulties. Mackay Youth Support Coordinators were initially responsive to the 2004 District Youth Achievement Plan and continue to monitor these priority areas of support along with adapting to current trends.

Current priority areas include Aboriginal, Torres Strait, Australian South Sea Islander young people, young people living in rural areas, pregnant and parenting young people and young people at risk of/ or no longer living at home. Their role within schools, Technical and Further Education Institutes (TAFE), and communities can include:

- Individual casework.
- Needs assessments and management of case plans.
- Information advice and referral to support personal or social functioning and to facilitate access to community services and resources.
- Individual advocacy.
- Counselling and support services.
- Group work.
- Community development activities.
- Community Education Activities

The U-Nite program works with young people, aged between 12 and 18, and their families experiencing difficulties with communication and relationships. It is intended to prevent youth homelessness and rebuild relationships between families where the young person has left the home environment due to family conflict. The U-Nite worker has the capacity to support the young person, or the family, or both where this is suitable. The supports delivered by the U-Nite Service include:

- General service information, advice and referral.
- Advocacy.
- Needs assessment and management of support plans.
- Mutual support and self help groups.
- Personal/individual support.
- Personal and social development.
- Living skills development.

- Family mediation.
- Family capacity building.
- Referral

MYSS works predominantly with young people who fall into the category of secondary homelessness. Often young people will be referred to the MYSS because they are no longer living at home. The young person usually resources their own accommodation by arranging to stay with family or friends, however, these arrangements are usually temporary, even when they are intended to be long term. This is usually due to the complexity of the experiences of young people who find that it is no longer suitable to live at home. The resulting collapse of these arrangements, results in the young person again facing homelessness. Once a young person faces primary homelessness they will usually disengage from education and/or training, therefore falling outside of the YSC target group.

Youth SAAP Service - Kalyan Youth Service Inc

Kalyan Youth Services is a SAAP funded facility that provides emergency and medium term accommodation for young people between the ages of 16 and 21 years. The aim of the organisation is to provide a safe environment where young homeless people can have the opportunity to advance themselves and improve their lives. Kalyan is the only service of its kind that services an area between Rockhampton and Townsville and out west of Mackay. Kalyan Youth Services include all aspects of youth affairs such as training, education, life skills teaching, safe emotional and psychological support, confidential assistance, empowerment, self determination and autonomy.

Young people that are accommodated at Kalyan Youth Service crisis/emergency accommodation develop a client support agreement (case management/support plan) which is negotiated between a youth worker and the young resident at the time of intake, based on the needs of the individual young person.

A client support agreement can contain a number of different activities including:

- Specialist counselling.
- General living skills.
- Budgeting.
- Health and hygiene.
- Employment and/or education and training.

- Financial independence.
- Family reunification.
- Transition into independent living

Kalyan Youth Service also provides medium term and transition accommodation in the form of 4 x 2 bedroom flats. These flats can be occupied by a minimum of 1 individual young person and a maximum of 2 young people with a maximum of 2 dependent children, based on the needs of each individual young person.

As noted above²⁷, Kalyan Youth Services has had an increase in turn away numbers for insufficient accommodation and other reasons in 2008, and a summary of the reasons for this are included below:

- Kalyan Youth Services receives a number of requests from young parents for accommodation with their children and the service is not appropriate or funded for this target group.
- Young people who demonstrate that they are active drug users and/or chroming are not able to access services at Kalyan. The organisation does not have staffing ratios to support these young people.
- If the majority of young people accessing the service at any given time are around the age of 16 years, this precludes “older” young people aged over 20 years to access the service at the same time.
- Group dynamics and conflicts can impact on current residents and new referrals, particularly when some of these are under court orders that may restrict who they can have contact with.
- Insufficient beds available, for example; when the male room is full and the only available room for a young male requesting accommodation is in the female room and vice versa.
- Young people who request assistance from Kalyan must be assessed by the service as to whether or not they should be involved with the Department of Child Safety and this can determine the suitability of acceptance into the service, as this age group lies outside of the target group.

²⁷ See Pg 17-18 of this report.

- Kalyan will accept referrals for young people aged less than 16 years after negotiation with the Department of Child Safety (but not less than 13 years of age). Again, this presents a safety issue that current staffing cannot support.
- Families will present for accommodation but are unwilling to separate from their eligible children and are refused accommodation.
- Depending on the dynamics and mix of young people already in the shelter, some young people with complex needs are not able to be accepted due to staffing ratios.
- Conflicts of interest between ages, complexity of needs, drug use and other factors need to be considered on a case-by-case basis to ensure the safety of other residents and staff.

Service provider observations

As a result of the research undertaken in preparing this report providers offered a number of observations on what needs to happen to address issues of youth homelessness in Mackay. They include:

- The need for a youth based “hub” centre that is comfortable and safe for young people but provides ownership and responsibility by young people. The “hub” would:
 - Be used as a vehicle for young people to access other services through co-servicing e.g.; other workers operate out of the “hub” or there are immediate referrals to other services.
 - Provide supervised and, where appropriate, educational and/or training facilities.
 - Have minimal rules to promote engagement, but to include “work in kind” provided by young people.
 - Not have counselling or other “shameful” areas attached.
 - But would have arrangements in place for speedy referral.
 - Would include “youth friendly” PLOs or police.
- Reduce the “silo” operation of youth services and ensure more collaborative approaches to delivery of youth services in Mackay.

- Better utilisation of existing resources such as funded youth programs, Youth Crime Prevention funds and PCYC facility.
- Secure funding for organisations to alleviate major changes and sector competition.
- Implement “round table” type of support for young people in programs to facilitate transition through programs and support services with ultimate aim of independence for young people. This can follow an integrated case management model with an independent facilitator/coordinator.
- Develop and implement more early intervention strategies pre-high school to reduce the numbers of issues for young people that result in homelessness.
- Establish “soft” accommodation for young people that are experiencing problems at home either in a community based family home or something similar that can involve family mediation processes to prevent the cycle of homelessness and associated issues in young people.
- Encourage young people to either return to their family home, or if this is not an option to find a caring family environment whereby they can continue to go to school and/or participate in structured social and economic activities.
- Address the need for appropriate drug and alcohol services for young people. The current Alcohol and Drug Rehabilitation Service is funded for people aged 16+ years; however, the service is unable to take young people due to group dynamics of mixing a young drug user with “hard core” users.
- Establish a position of a sexual abuse counsellor for young people.
- Develop and implement a domestic violence perpetrator program.
- Focus on providing alternate education programs/facilities to support the particular needs of young homeless people.
- Develop and implement parenting programs for adult parents who have drug and alcohol, mental health and domestic violence histories to be able to cope with their own children.
- Explore ways for ensuring placement stability and longitudinal support for young people in care.

5. Mackay Youth Inclusion Project Outcomes.

As mentioned previously, this report is only one component of the funding received by YIRS from FaHCSIA, and the other facets of this project will be comprehensively reported on as per service agreement requirements. However, as some of the outcomes from this project are relevant to this report, some of the challenges and outcomes have been included. ²⁸

Youth Inclusion Support Officer

This position included the employment of a contract Youth Inclusion Support Officer to work with young people that have been socially excluded through disengagement from school and learning, substance misuse and other underlying issues relating to homelessness.

Funding was received from FaHCSIA in late November and recruitment for the position was completed by 01 December 2008 to ensure that work could fully commence in January 2009. Due to the short timeframe for the project, it was important that the project officer recruited had extensive knowledge and previous experience working with the target group and within the Mackay community. It was fortunate that the successful applicant is an Aboriginal Leader who had successfully worked in the community sector for many years.

Some of challenges experienced with this position include:

- Due to the nature of the target group, at times it has been difficult to maintain regular contact and attendance at planned activities, and to obtain relevant information vital to the achievement of core objectives agreed outlined in the funding agreement.
- One of the outcomes expected from this position was that the Youth Inclusion Support Officer would work with young people to gauge the levels of homelessness and other underlying issues. This however, proved difficult as the definition and perception of homelessness differs within cultures and the “widely accepted definition of homelessness in Australia” ²⁹ is not accepted by all cultures. For example; if an indigenous young person is staying with friends or relatives and has no fixed abode, culturally this is not considered homeless as they have somewhere to stay.

²⁸ The report does not include any information on the MAIJAG Youth Justice Diversionary project.

²⁹ *The Road Home*, A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness (White Paper) Commonwealth of Australia 2008.

Some of the major achievements from this position are:

- There has been a notable increase in Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Australian South Sea Islander young people accessing YIRS and has provided the opportunity for these young people to be offered more culturally appropriate support in accessing other mainstream government and non-government services.
- In addition, YIRS has noticed an increase of participation by extended family members of these young people, which in turn has enabled recruitment into the volunteer program to help with the delivery of more culturally appropriate programs.
- Having a male Aboriginal Leader provided a positive role model helping link to cultural identity and positive participation in the community of Mackay.

The Youth Inclusion Support Officer played a pivotal role in the conduct of two cultural camps. A number of young people have identified that they had little knowledge of their culture and history. These camps have since been undertaken and with the use of other funding sources, further short term programs have been developed to help to continue to engage with these young people. The camps have provided the opportunity to work with young people who were identified as leaders of factions within the youth culture of Mackay and had the potential to become peer group role models. (See attachment 1 for summary of a description of what has been involved in the cultural camps).

The Youth Inclusion Support Officer has maintained a continual presence at the Canelands Shopping Centre which had been identified as a “hot spot” area during peak times of most days from 3.30pm and Thursday night late shopping and other out of hours outreach services. This has resulted in opportunities for YIRS to network and educate private businesses about young people and the issues that influence their social and behavioural patterns. In addition to this, the Youth Inclusion Support Officer has been able to actively advocate on behalf of young people accessing Canelands and other private/public spaces to help alleviate the perception of young people as “trouble makers”.

While working with an identified core group of young people, the Youth Inclusion Officer has also initiated sporting activities for young people who would not usually access this type of recreational venture. This program if continued has the potential to increase community connection, build individual resilience and social inclusion for marginalised young people.

Volunteer Program

Another component of the Mackay Youth Inclusion Project was to support the capacity of volunteers to respond to youth needs and crisis in Mackay.

This has resulted in the development of the following volunteer screening management tools including:

- Volunteer Checklist.
- YIRS Volunteer Policy and Procedures.
- YIRS Child Protection Policy and Procedures.
- Volunteer Position Descriptions.
- Blue Card Register.
- Training Register.
- Volunteer Database.

To date, 29 volunteers have been recruited and have undertaken the following training:

- 4 – First Aid Certificate.
- 9 – Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST).

A further 15 volunteers have indicated that they would like to complete their first aid certificate and 16 for the ASIST training.

In addition to the volunteers already recruited; there are 10 other people who have expressed an interest in this program. In short there has been an overwhelming positive response to this program.

Learner Driver Program

Another major achievement that has occurred to the program funding allocated to the Mackay Youth Inclusion Project is that of the learner driver program for disadvantaged young people. YIRS had previously been delivering a program to assist young people to obtain their Learner's Licence by educating them on the road rules and practice mock tests and payment of the learner's licence fees. This was funded through community donations but was unable to progress beyond obtaining their learner's licence. With the introduction of program funding through this project, this program has now developed into a more comprehensive program that includes driving lessons and accumulation of driving log hours.

This has long been identified as an issue for young people who do not live at home with their parents and who face other disadvantage in Mackay, and can assist young people in gaining employment and access to more affordable accommodation than that available in Mackay.

This program has been developed in partnership with Skills Training Mackay (STM) and has utilised funding from program allocation for this project and has secured at least one more program through donations.

The program was made available to marginalised young people who had already completed the Learner's Licence program at YIRS and who had been successful in gaining their Learner's Licence, paid for by YIRS.

Queensland has a Graduated Licensing System to obtain an open driver's licence. This involves:

- 100 hours supervised on-road driving experience during the learner stage.
- a two stage provisional licence (P1 and P2)
- a compulsory hazard perception test to graduate from a P1 licence.³⁰

The program includes 80 hours of driving lessons at reduced project cost through STM. Most of the young people accessing YIRS are disadvantaged and do not have access to driving lessons with an accredited driving instructor. If they undertake 1 hour of driving with an instructor it is equivalent to 3 hours driving in their log books with a maximum of 30 hours that can be allocated to the 100 hours of supervised training.

Once they have completed formal driving instructor lessons and understand the basic rules of driving, the young people can utilise the vehicle provided through the FaHCSIA funding to practice and achieve their log hours with the use of volunteers. For highly disadvantaged young people this is the only option for them to secure a driver's licence which can lead to independence. Insurance and other legalities have been addressed by YIRS and this program has the potential to impact substantially on the opportunities for economic and social participation for highly disadvantaged young people.

Life skills program

Another project that was developed in partnership with STM through the program funding was a "life skills" program that included:

- Basic Cooking.
- Budgeting and shopping

³⁰ Queensland Government. Safe Driving in Queensland, Edition One, July 2007

- Accredited construction industry Blue Card.
- Accredited First Aid Certificate.

This project was initially designed as a young males program for participants from the cultural camps. However, intense support and mentoring provided by the Youth Inclusion Support Officer secured these young people employment and the program was made open to both young males and young females

The Volunteer, Learner Driver and Life Skills programs have all been successful in that they provide support and opportunities for marginalised young people. All have had a positive impact on the lives of some young, socially excluded and homeless young people in Mackay and point to the type and nature of the support young people in the area need. Unfortunately the resource base needed to underpin these programs is insufficient for them to be sustained.

6. Issues arising from analysis of the available data.

The available statistical data and the research conducted to inform this report has established that of the young people who are accessing youth support programs in Mackay, over 20% of these are homeless and that the current youth SAAP service is not able to meet this demand.

The report also confirms:

- Suitable affordable accommodation is at a premium in Mackay due to external economic factors and despite the economic downturn there is likely to continue to be a chronic shortage of housing availability in the area.
- Current youth service providers have difficulty in fully meeting the range of needs of young people in Mackay.
- The relationship between unstable / poor education history, social disengagement and the potential link between these and homelessness and lack of economic participation.

Homelessness – the evidence base.

As indicated previously in this report, statistical analysis of youth homelessness in Mackay is problematic for a number of reasons including, definitional issues, funding criteria driving data collection and the siloed nature of service provision at both a funding agency and service delivery level.

Any future policy, program and funding decisions would benefit from the development and maintenance of a firm evidence base in relation to the needs of young people, particularly in relation to education and training, family circumstances, substance abuse and homelessness. Such a baseline would then support a strategic approach and inform key decisions to be made in relation to limited resources. It would also recognise the particular circumstances of young people on Mackay.

Specific support for Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and/or Australian South Sea Islander young people.

YIRS provides services to all young people. Work with cultural camps and their success indicates a need for additional Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and/or Australian South Sea Islander Leaders to work with young people in the Mackay community. Such a focus is appropriate given the disproportionate number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the homelessness population. How this can be best achieved needs to be the focus of future discussions and exploration.

Education and Training

To further address the issue of disengagement from education and training, discussions are currently underway between Education Queensland, the Mackay Whitsunday Youth Justice Service Centre, Child and Youth Mental Health Service and YIRS to explore the establishment of an Education Queensland approved alternate education program. This is in discussion stage only and will involve further organisations/agencies if this project progresses. YIRS staff are conducting a school survey over a one month period to “snap shot” the number of young people of compulsory school age to determine attendance and engagement with the education system. The findings from these initial surveys will be presented to Education Queensland with a view to conducting more robust research for the development of alternate educational strategies and options if results support this.

Future strategies could include:

- The enhancement of the Youth Support Coordinator program to focus on young people at risk of disengaging from education and who are homeless.
- The development of realistic options to ensure that young people are not disconnected from mainstream educational opportunities due to their homelessness status.³¹

Clearly the links between access to education and training, economic and social participation and homelessness within the context of Mackay need to be further explored, understood and responded to.

Employment

As outlined in the National Youth Coalition for Housing Green Paper Submission:

- Employment is central to a sustainable livelihood for homeless young people.
- A continuum of labour market support programs need to be developed which address education barriers to employment and prepare young people for training, provide vocational training and assist young homeless people to engage with the labour market.
- The absence of specialist and appropriate labour market options for disadvantaged young people have ensured that homeless young people have been largely excluded from participation in the ‘full-employment’ Australian economy.

³¹ Adapted from the Queensland Youth Housing Coalition, Queensland Addressing Youth Homelessness Business Case, 2008.

- Existing options for drug and alcohol services or mental health services are too often unable to provide timely assistance and treatment or are unable to accommodate young people while they are dealing with drug and alcohol issues.³²

Therefore, options may need to include the provision of “coordination and increased brokerage resources for youth homeless services to either ‘purchase’ or integrate mainstream and wrap around support services - including employment services, youth health services and education.”³³ How this may apply to the circumstances in Mackay needs further exploration.

This report has identified a number of areas of improvement and these have been condensed into three major recommendations.

³² National Youth Coalition for Housing. Green Paper Submission, June 2008.

³³ Ibid

RECOMMENDATIONS – Part 1: Concepts

A fundamental issue that needs to be addressed prior to the discussion on specific programs or products that will assist young people's access to housing and homelessness services is that none of these can be delivered if there is no community infrastructure. ³⁴ (Queensland Youth Housing Coalition Inc, 2008).

While it is acknowledged that there may be models to improve current service delivery from both government and non-government services that can be achieved with current resourcing available, these can not be fully explored in this report due to the timelines of events.

Further reportable initiatives relating to this report will be available after July 2009, however, a number of ideas have been put forward during the research phase of this project with similar key themes which has been condensed in the following three (3) concept recommendations.

Each concept stands alone with regard to resourcing and addresses differing areas of need; however, there are significant links between Concepts 1 and 2 which will be outlined the model included after Concept 2.

Concept 1 – “Foyer” approach

In line with the “Breaking the Cycle” recommendations of the White Paper Report, this concept proposes the development of a Foyer style model of a supported transitional accommodation facility. ³⁵

A preliminary discussion between YIRS and Mackay -Whitsunday Area Office Department of Housing has ascertained that the State Government is currently in the planning stage for the development of 130 new government housing properties. This project is due for commencement in 2009 and completion in 2010 with 70% (91) of these properties being allocated as one bedroom units. It has been further advised that it is anticipated that these units will be built in 6, 8 or 10 unit complexes in suburban areas easily accessible to the CBD and also outer suburban areas of Mackay.

At the time of initial discussion, Department of Housing advice was that 62 applicants for the Mackay area are aged from 16-21, and made up 10% of their waiting list for housing in Mackay.

³⁴ Queensland Youth Housing Coalition Inc. Queensland Addressing Youth Homelessness Business Case, October 2008.

³⁵ Foyer models – Foyer models provide housing for young people who are homeless. The housing is conditional on their participating in education, training or employment. Several Foyer models currently operate in Australia.

Of these figures:

- 9 are very high need
- 42 are high need
- 11 are moderate need
- Nil are low need.

It is proposed in this concept, that one complex of 10 one bedroom units is requisitioned for a supported transitional accommodation facility, based on the Foyer Model. This model does not include crisis accommodation and is intended to provide support to young people who meet the following eligibility criteria adapted from the New South Wales Live`N`Learn Australian adaption of the UK Foyer:

- Aged between 16-21 years.
- Engaged in education or training (enrolled and participating in Secondary School, TAFE, Apprenticeship, Traineeship, Queensland Education/Queensland Studies Authority approved educational programs or other tertiary courses).
- With a housing need – currently in unstable accommodation or unable to stay in current living arrangements.
- Exiting existing services (such as crisis SAAP services).
- Receiving a sustainable income such as a Centrelink Benefit and have been in receipt of this income for at least six (6) weeks prior to application.
- Able to pay a bond (may be acquired through a housing bond loan).
- Meet the Queensland Government Department of Housing eligibility criteria.
- Have the capacity to achieve independence with support.
- Willingness to enter and commit to a formal Personal Action Plan which is a condition of continued residence in the Foyer. ³⁶

³⁶ <http://www.livenlearn.com.au/> - accesses 15 July 2009

Young people housed in the Foyer type accommodation will have access to assisted support services, aimed at transition to independent, living including a combination of internal and external support service as indicated below: ³⁷

- Nutrition and healthy eating
- Study/homework support
- Cooking and food preparation
- Grocery shopping
- Personal grooming
- Physical health and well being
- Family and relationships
- Relaxation techniques
- Environmental awareness
- Developing community contacts
- Career guidance and advice
- Finances and budgeting
- Applying for independent accommodation
- Further study and training / University courses and applications
- Preparing applications, resumes, letter writing and interview skills
- Enrolment and support for attendance at external programs
- Improving confidence and assertiveness
- Team skills, working together as a group
- Time management skills
- Learner's and Driver's licence programs

External programs and/or mandated requirements:

- Literacy/numeracy skills
- Access to alternate education programs
- Alcohol and Other Drugs support services
- Child Safety Services
- Accredited short and certificate courses
- Mental Health support services
- Youth Justice Services
- Other services as identified

Discussions are currently underway with Education Queensland for the provision of alternate education programs delivered by non-government organisations that meet Education Queensland and the Queensland Studies Authority requirements for the Senior Phase of Learning.

One of the roles of the day youth support worker and the part time coordinator, associated with this concept, would be to ensure that young people from the facility that are engaged in alternate education programs, meet attendance requirements and that homework support is available.

³⁷ Internal programs provided by day and night staff:

The estimated human resource requirement to support such a concept is detailed in Attachment 2.

The physical infrastructure required and potential tenancy arrangements are described in Attachment 3.

“Partnerships are central to the success of young people achieving their goals. Foyers provide safe and stable accommodation and support, but as the core goal is to promote independence, the aim is to support engagement of young people with mainstream opportunities”.³⁸

Concept 2 – A Youth Hub

Discussions have been initiated between YIRS and the St Paul’s Uniting Church in Mackay for a proposal to develop a two-storey purpose built facility with the capacity to include the following:

- Ground Level – a 24 hour hub centre for young people to access referral and initial assessment services with a shower block, kitchen, laundry facilities, networked computers and lockable storage areas for those young people who are not able to access other housing options. This facility would be able to provide information and referral services for young people with visiting services such as those mentioned in Concept 1.
- Upper Level – this level would include short term crisis accommodation with 24 hour youth support services available.

Estimated human resource needs for such a concept are detailed in Attachment 4. Attachment 5 provides some detail on physical infrastructure required as well as contractual and tenancy arrangements.

Such an approach will provide a focus for youth services in Mackay, and as such, there is potential to move away from the siloed approaches of the past. This, in turn, means that young people will always have access “to the right door” in times of need.

There is a clear articulation between the “Foyer” approach and the “Hub” concept that will potentially cater for the significant needs of young people in Mackay. Attachment 5 is a suggested way of managing access to and the journey through support offered by these linked concepts.

³⁸ <http://www.livenlearn.com.au/> - accessed 15 July 2009

Concept 3: Affordable Housing - Satellite Housing Project

This concept is aimed at an affordable housing option for young people involved with Youth Justice of the Department of Child Safety.³⁹

The Satellite Housing concept is a multi-faceted initiative to offer solutions for a range of barriers for disadvantaged community members, young people studying construction skills, and unemployed people wishing to enter the construction industry. The concept would offer:

- Low cost housing option for singles and/or couples without children.
- Opportunity for in-house life skills training.
- Group housing with youth worker support for young people involved with Child Safety and/or Youth Justice.
- Construction training opportunity for young people in schools.
- Construction opportunity for unemployed people.
- Construction opportunity for people studying Certificate I and/or II in Construction

The design of the housing could be obtained by a competition throughout schools linking architect and design companies and students studying in this field. This would offer an opportunity for young people to obtain skills in this career pathway which is identified as a skills shortage area. It would be encouraged that the design encompass positive environmental aspects as well as a manufacturing process that schools and Registered Training Organisations could manufacture the housing in specific parts. (E.g. each single unit to be designed to fit on the tray of a semi trailer and be transported to site to be installed.) This process could be managed by Construction Skills Queensland to encourage young people into this career.

The manufacturing process would allow schools and training organisations to develop a plan around building a component of the finished product. This can be factored over a nine or ten week term with the installation being conducted in the next term allowing participants to be a part of the completed project and celebrate the achievement. Although this project focuses on construction trades there is a component for students studying horticulture to participate in the establishment of gardens and lawns.

³⁹ This concept has been designed and developed by Colin McPherson, who has worked in the FaHCSIA funded Youth Justice Diversionary Officer position located at MAIJAG during the research and development period of this report.

On completion of the construction the property can then be handed over to the relevant Government Department or Non-Government agency to manage the use in a prescribed manner, with the main focus being targeted disadvantaged community members.

Below is a list of major stakeholders and their potential contribution to the project.

QLD Government Departments	
Department of Communities	Coordination of differing Government Departments and access to funds for a project worker to facilitate.
Department of Justices and Attorney General - Youth Justice	Opportunity for transition housing for young people exiting youth detention centres offering a chance for young people to continue training, education and activities commenced whilst in detention. Funding for youth workers to assist with supervision for young people on Community Supervision Orders as an alternative to sending a young person into detention.
Department of Community Safety - Child Safety	Opportunity for transition housing for young people exiting the Child Protection system. Opportunity to house young people not suitable to be placed with foster families. Funding for youth workers or group house supervisors to support the young people living in this location.
Department of Communities Housing	Opportunity to increase single and group accommodation options at a lower cost. Funding, and contractual arrangements to support management of properties. Funding to support land needs.
Department of Education and Training - Training QLD	Opportunity to increase training numbers in a range of construction certificates. Funding support to fulfil off-the-job training requirements.
Department of Education and Training - Education QLD	Opportunity to offer young people in schools another pathway of up to date training whilst still attending school. Offer young people a chance to directly link learning to a real-life project and be a part of the final outcome.
Local Government	
Mackay Regional Council	Opportunity to increase housing stock for the Housing Corporation. Opportunity to fund/supply land needs to assist disadvantaged community members. Funding to manage properties in collaboration with other Government and Non-Government agencies.

Other Organisations	
Construction Skills QLD	Opportunity to increase training numbers in a range of construction certificates. Funding to support pre-vocational training in schools and targeting the unemployed.
Commonwealth Government	
Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations	Linkage with Career Advice Australia to facilitate linkages with local employers and schools.

All three concepts need to be further discussed and explored, as the development of an ongoing, informed dialogue around issues of youth homelessness within the Mackay region is the primary purpose of this paper.

The report provides an opportunity for the community to respond to, and build on the concepts presented to the extent that issues surrounding youth homelessness in the region are clearly identified, understood and appropriately acted on by the key stakeholders.

RECOMMENDATIONS – Part 2: Specific Actions

This report has concluded that there are a number of specific actions that need to be taken, involving all players working with young people and homelessness in Mackay, to positively impact the lives of socially, educationally and housing excluded young people.

- Identify and implement ways and means of confirming an evidence base on which policy, program and funding decisions can be managed in a way that will respond directly to the needs of young and homeless people in Mackay.
- Further research and identify ways of addressing the specific needs of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and / or South Sea Islander young people in the Mackay community.
- Work to identify and action ways to develop education and training, economic and social participation opportunities for young people at risk in Mackay, building on the work undertaken by service providers.
- Further develop, and then implement a model to maximise ready access for homeless young people to mainstream support services in the key areas of employment, health and education.
- Further develop the business cases for the recommended “Concepts’ (above), including sustainable funding provision.

Conclusion

Thanks is given to the individuals, organisations and agencies (including the community sector and the Queensland and Australian Governments) who have contributed to this report. Researching this report has confirmed that there is significant good will within organisations and the community to tackle what is a significant challenge now and will remain so in the future unless significant, well thought out and deployed action is taken in the short, medium and long term future.

Attachment 1: Cultural Camps.

The cultural camp that occurred during this project included:

- Welcome to Country
- Smoking Ceremony
- Yarning Circle
- Cultural Song and Dance
- Palm Weaving
- Stay Strong, Healing Our Way workshop
- Action Challenge Activities
- Ropes
- High Ropes
- Tower of Terror

The above activities are based around building individual strengths, trust and teambuilding.

Six young people attended this camp and initially demonstrated negative perceptions about their future, however, as the camp evolved more positive behaviours resulted, including interest in engaging in employment, sports, arts and education. Follow up of these young people through the Youth Inclusion Support Officer has achieved the following outcomes:

- At the time of publication of this report, 2 young people have remained in full time employment for over 8 weeks.
- One young person is continuing an art based certificate course through TAFE and is also attending regular boxing classes.
- Two young people have remained engaged at high school and have been attending regularly.

Attachment 2: Foyer Concept - Human Resource Infrastructure

- 1 x 0.5 FTE coordinator @ SACS Award Level 6
- 1 x 1 FTE day youth support worker @ SACS Award Level 4
- 2 x 2 FTE night youth support workers @ SACS Award Level 4
- 4 x volunteers
- 1 x security service/system
- Other volunteers as required from Volunteer Register

Additional human resources can be provided by utilising existing services such as Child Youth and Mental Health Service, YIRS, MAIJAG, Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drug Services, Sexual Assault Service, U -Nite family counsellor/mediation service (Mackay Youth Support Service) and Child Health Nurses.

Attachment 3: Foyer Concept – Physical Infrastructure and Proposed Tenancy Arrangements.

Physical Infrastructure

- 1 x 10 unit public housing complex of furnished units to include: a bed, lounge kitchen table and chairs and inclusive of normal kitchen equipment such as fridge, toaster, electric kettle, electric frypan, pots, pans, plates, cutlery and one television.
- 1 unit to be equipped with one bedroom for sleep over staff, one kitchen facility and the living area to be equipped with 10 broadband networked ADSL accessible computers with monitored Internet usage.
- 1 x computer area to be allocated to the youth support workers of the facility

Rental agreements need to be negotiated with Queensland Housing to ensure sustainability of security services and also to include payment for Internet and other utilities. This is an ideal opportunity which has arisen with Queensland Housing; however, operational costs and the appropriate direct debiting from young people's income will need further consideration.

Length of Stay

It is proposed that residential contract agreements of 12 months are entered into with participants of this model as findings from the New South Wales Live`N`Learn program has shown that “residents staying at LNL over 6 months have a 3 times greater chance of moving into independent accommodation...”. Figures in this report show that stays under 6 months showed 22% of young people moving into independent accommodation with 64% of young people achieving this after a stay of 6 months or longer. ⁴⁰

Contract agreements entered into with young people could contain an exit clause at 6 months if sustainable independence is achieved at this time. It is not recommended that contract agreements are negotiated for a stay of less than 6 months. This is further supported by anecdotal information provided by the Manager of the Mackay Child Safety Service Centre (Queensland Government) in that ‘longitudinal support and placement stability’ are the major factors for achieving success for young people transitioning from care.

⁴⁰ <http://www.livenlearn.com.au/> - accesses 15 July 2009.

Attachment 4: Youth Hubb, Human Resource Infrastructure

These requirements are similar to those for Concept 1; however, this proposal has the capacity for a youth service such as YIRS, to relocate to the Ground Level of these premises. The youth service would then be able to provide already funded day time staff and pay a contribution towards the rent of the premises from St Paul's Uniting Church.

There would still be the requirements for the following additional positions:

- 1 x Team Leader/Volunteer Coordinator @ SACS Award Level 6
- 2 x Indigenous youth support workers @ SACS Award Level 4
- 2 x 2 FTE night youth support workers @ SACS Award Level 4
- 4 x volunteers
- 1 x security service
- Other volunteers as required from Volunteer Register

Attachment 5: Youth Hubb Physical Infrastructure, Contractual and Tenancy Arrangements.

Physical Infrastructure

- 1 x 2 storey purpose built facility of approximately 250 square metres per storey.
- Upper Level - 6 x crisis bedrooms with male and female bathrooms and toilets and communal kitchen facility.
- Ground Level - 1 x kitchen area and 1 x laundry facility
- Ground Level - 1 x shower block to accommodate 4 showers and toilets – 2 female and 2 male.
- Ground Level - 1 x networked computer area to be allocated to young people.
- 6 x computer networked work stations for day and night staff with lockable office area.
- Ground Level - 1 x counselling room
- Ground Level - 1 x staff room
- Ground Level - 1 x doctor's clinic facility

Contractual Arrangements

The premises would be owned by St Paul's Uniting Church who would provide a minimum 5 year lease at commercial costs to recoup initial outlay of building the facility. It is proposed that a further 5 – 10 year lease be made available at contract signing reduced cost once the Uniting Church has recovered building costs.

The youth service located on the Ground Level would pay rent on the property to St Paul's Uniting Church and young people accessing the crisis accommodation beds would pay a weekly rent for use of the facility.

It is also proposed that other services maintaining a continuous presence at the centre would pay a contribution towards rent and utilities.

Length of Stay

Access to the Ground Level facility will be open 24 hours to all young people that can genuinely demonstrate a need for use of this facility.

The Upper Level short term crisis accommodation facility would need to have a time length attached such as 3 months or less, and young people using this facility will have access to their rooms and the Ground Level facilities during the day.

Eligibility for stay in the Upper Level short term crisis accommodation facility needs to be age appropriate but without many of the restrictions that currently effect eligibility to other crisis accommodation.

Initial contracts will be for a 6 week period and if the young person has progressed with positive change at the end of this, another 6 week contract will be negotiated. At completion of 12 weeks if the young person has demonstrated stable engagement with education, training or employment, this young person would be eligible for entry into the Foyer model program as outlined in Concept 1.

One of the benefits of this proposal is that by having this facility located within the grounds of St Paul's Uniting Church is that young people will have easy access to additional pastoral and other services offered by the Uniting Church that they might not otherwise consider.

Attachment 6: Model for Concepts 1 and 2

Application	Assessment	Contract 1	Contract 2	Transition Housing	Independence
Young person accesses 24 hour hub centre and assessed as meeting criteria for crisis accommodation interview	Young person assessed as willing to undertake Contract requirements for crisis accommodation.	6 week contract to include: Establish life goals Establish support needs (mental health, drug and alcohol, health, youth justice etc.). Develop support plan for positive change in behaviour and life choices Engage with internal and external providers to provide support.	6 week contract Young person has demonstrated positive behaviour and life choices. Establish ongoing support needs. Support Plan to be reviewed to include participation in education, training and/or employment. Engage with internal and external providers to provide support.	Has completed 12 week program at Hub Centre. 6 month contract for transition to independence (to be reviewed at end of 6 month with a maximum of 3 months additional accommodation). Young person has engaged with education, training and/or employment. Develop support plan and housing contract requirements. Provide internal support including bus timetabling, budgeting, and transport where required, cooking and basic life skills. Maintain links and referrals to external agencies.	Young person has gained employment. Is engaged in further/higher education. Has secured stable accommodation.