Unsafe & Unseen:

Spotlighting the needs and experiences of unaccompanied young people seeking shelter
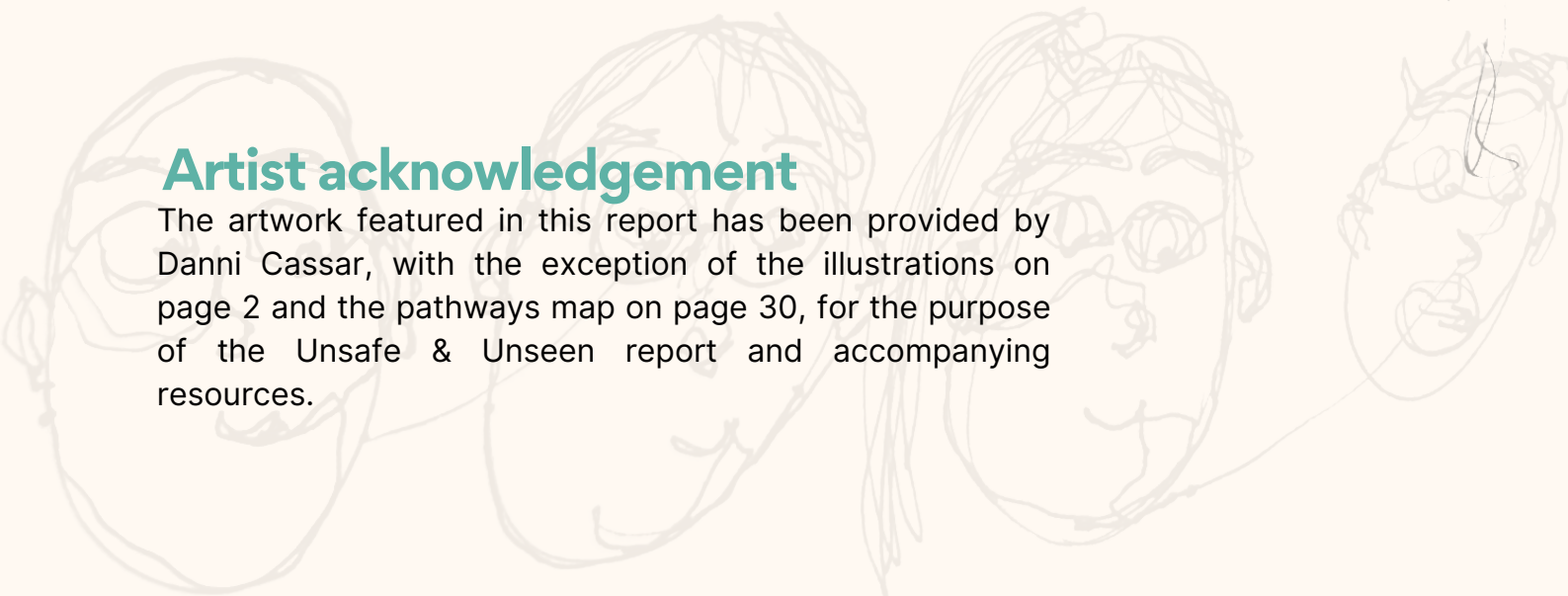
Summary Report

October 2025

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Centre for Innovative Justice

Artist acknowledgement

Acknowledgements

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Key definitions and concepts

Young Person

This research considered the experiences of, and engaged with, young people who were between 14 and 24 years of age at the time of interview or where information about their experiences was captured indirectly in cases studies. That said, young people frequently described experiences which dated back to younger childhood, often having lifelong histories of family violence that had gone largely unaddressed.

The focus on young people aged 14 to 24 is in no way intended to diminish the experiences of young people who fall outside of this age range, or to suggest that they would not benefit from improved services responses in relation to their experiences of family violence and homelessness.

Unaccompanied

An 'unaccompanied' young person refers to any young person who presents to the service system without a protective parent or other guardian. The term can encompass a breadth of circumstances, including young people who have left the family home; those who remain at home but do not have a parent who is willing or able to act protectively towards them; those who may be living between a parent who acts protectively and another (parent or other family member) who does not; and young people in the out-of-home care system experiencing placement breakdown or otherwise presenting to the service system alone. It also includes young people who have children of their own (whether or not they have custody of the child), where the young person is not supported by a protective parent.

Family violence

In line with Victoria's legislated definition, 'family violence' encompasses behaviours that are physically or sexually abusive, emotionally or psychologically abusive, economically abusive, threatening, coercive or other behaviours that control, dominate and cause fear.

Family violence may occur within a young person's family of origin, family of choice and/or an intimate partner relationship, and may occur across multiple relationships, either simultaneously or at different points in the young person's life.

Homelessness

Homelessness means being without a secure, safe, stable and private space to live. It can include circumstances such as sleeping rough, couch surfing, and living in temporary or unsafe housing situations such as rooming houses, cars or crisis accommodation

Lived experience

Refers to personal knowledge about the world gained through direct, first-hand involvement in everyday events, rather than through representations constructed by other people.

Lived Experience Advisers' foreword

As members of the Lived (and Living) Experience Advisory Group, we joined this project because we have all endured family violence and homelessness.

While our lived experiences play a significant role in our advocacy, our expertise is greater than the sum of the violence we have survived. As part of our contribution to this project, we spoke about our experiences of harm - including moments when the system meant to protect us let us down. Sharing our experiences with each other, we reflected on the common themes in our stories but also paid attention to where our experiences diverged because of our wholly unique identities, upbringings and ways of seeing the world. We also found threads of resilience, optimism and empathy.

Every time we lend our lived experience to a cause or project, we give parts of ourselves, hoping to change how the system treats young people. We speak out to shift the response from condescension and disempowerment toward respect and recognition of young people as victim survivors in their own right. This advocacy is deeply personal, born of frustration with the status quo and a belief that we can create change.

Too often, including lived experience in research and reform is a one-sided affair. Young people like us are asked to relive trauma and offer solutions yet receive little in return. We have all felt the sting of tokenism, which can replicate the very harm it seeks to address. Lived experience isn't a buzzword; truly embedding it takes time, effort and a willingness to be challenged.

Together the CIJ and MCM worked with us as equals, creating an environment where we felt safe, supported and respected when sharing our stories and insights from our experiences. Unsafe and Unseen is a product of this genuine collaboration, and it amplifies the voices, perspectives and solutions of young people as a result.

Like us, the young people interviewed in this report also shared their stories to help others. Their testimonies are more than words on paper; they are genuine offerings given in hope that no other young person will have to endure what we did. Each story is an invitation to work with us to build a better system response for unaccompanied young people.

As young people, we have a vision for a better system. We don't need others to "fix" it for us, we need to be at the table as partners in the decisions that shape our lives. We entrust this report to you and look forward to working with you to build a system that truly protects and empowers young people, so that no young person is left unsafe or unseen.

Project partners

Centre for Innovative Justice

The Centre for Innovative Justice (CIJ) at RMIT University is a research and reform body with the aim of improving our legal, family violence and related systems in ways that reflect and respond to the diverse needs of those who access them.

To achieve this, the CIJ conducts person-centred research – this means speaking directly to people with lived experience - to understand how these systems actually work; where and what the gaps are; and what solutions would make the most impactful difference. Within this work, the CIJ have a dedicated program of research focused on the needs and experiences of children and young people.

The CIJ believes that research can be a powerful avenue for raising awareness about the issues impacting our society. The CIJ is skilled in translating its research into practice and uses this expertise to advocate for meaningful change through the development and implementation of improved policies, procedures and programs.

With a large and multidisciplinary team of professionals, the CIJ's staff have a breadth of experience in legal and social work practice, research, policy development and law reform.

Melbourne City Mission

Melbourne City Mission (MCM) is a community service organisation that provides a range of supports to people who are experiencing different forms of disadvantage across Victoria.

MCM's vision is to contribute to a fair and just community where people have equal access to opportunities and resources and works alongside people and communities to provide long-term, sustainable pathways away from disadvantage.

MCM has more than 80 programs which span multiple service systems, including homelessness, disability, early childhood intervention, education and care, health (homebased palliative care), mental health, and education and training. MCM also run the Hester Hornbrook Academy, an independent specialist school providing education and wrap-around supports to some of the most challenging and disengaged young people in Victoria.

Family violence is a common thread that underpins much of MCM's work. There are very limited specialist family violence supports for young people who are victim survivors of family violence – the default response to young people disclosing family violence in Victoria is to pathway them into the homelessness system.
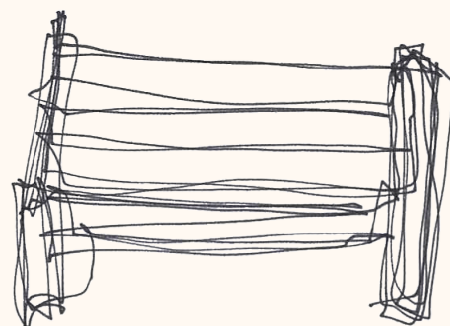
Background

This research was sparked by growing recognition that young people's unique experiences of family violence need to be more accurately understood and accounted for in the design and implementation of family violence responses. Young people as defined in this research are those aged 14 to 24, noting that the experiences described here are not limited to this age range.

Existing research highlights both the prevalence of family violence against young people, and the extent to which experiences of family violence are a leading cause of homelessness for this cohort – including where young people present to the system without protective parent. Despite this prevalence, evidence points to a lack of dedicated responses which consider the safety and wellbeing of young people with interrelated experiences of homelessness and family violence.

Previous research conducted by Melbourne City Mission (MCM) identified key gaps in family violence responses for young people – indicating that young people who disclosed family violence are generally referred into either family violence responses designed for adults, or into youth homelessness services.[1] This choice fails to recognise young people who leave violence on their own terms and who seek shelter through a range of sometimes unseen, often unsafe, means, such as sleeping rough, couch-surfing, living with people using violence, being subjected to exploitative rental arrangements, and engaging in survival sex.

The Centre for Innovative Justice (CIJ), in partnership with MCM, felt it important to make this cohort visible to the system, including by situating young people as the experts in their own experiences. In doing so, this research aims to explore and interrogate how the system is being experienced by young people in practice – as opposed to the responses outlined in policy – and then use this knowledge to inform service responses that can prevent young people's experiences of violence from propelling them towards further harm. The research questions that guided this work were as follows:

- What are the needs, goals and experiences of unaccompanied children and young people seeking support and/or accommodation, including from an intersectional perspective?
- What is the current system response for unaccompanied children and young people and to what extent does this response reflect the needs of unaccompanied children and young people?
- What assumptions (if any) does the service system make about young people's needs, capacity, goals and service preferences, and what impact can these assumptions have on young people's access to meaningful support?
- In what ways and to what extent is the service system itself compounding, replicating or otherwise causing harm to young people?
- How can we strengthen the service system response, including by better supporting young people to navigate the system and ensuring that their voices are heard and uplifted at every point?
- How can we uplift and embed young people's voices in policy, service and system design, including by better supporting young advocates?

How we approached the research

Embedding lived (and living) experience

Embedding lived (and living) experience across all phases of the research design and delivery was considered crucial by both the CIJ and MCM. At the project's outset, a governance group of young people with diverse and intersecting lived and living experiences was convened to provide direction and oversight of the research. This included through a series of structured workshops and reflection sessions focused on research design; testing of key research findings and opportunities for system improvement; and the development of a practice resource.

The impact of the Lived Experience Advisers on this project cannot be overstated. As both individuals and a collective, they shaped the project's aims and associated research questions and influenced the approach to engagement with interview participants to ensure that their participation was a safe and supported experience. The Lived Experience Advisers have also provided invaluable input into the recommendations for system reform stemming from the research findings.

Capturing young people's stories

The research team conducted interviews with 17 young people with intersecting experiences of family violence and homelessness. Interview participants varied in their current living situations and safety. Some remained in crisis or in unstable, uncertain accommodation, while others had moved into transitional or longer-term housing options. All were at different stages in their healing and recovery. To ensure that participation in the research was safe and supported, the approach to engagement included the following:

- Recruiting through practitioners from MCM refuges and programs, maximising existing relationships to maintain visibility on a young person's holistic needs and potential risks.
- Tailoring engagement strategies to each individual young person, ensuring flexibility and responsiveness to their changing needs and circumstances.
- Conducting interviews in convenient, private and developmentally appropriate environments, usually MCM premises, and ensuring that the young person chose the timing and venue.
- Offering continuous support throughout the recruitment and interview process, including proactive opportunities for debriefing. Where appropriate, the CIJ research team also spent time with the young person following the interview to share a coffee or food as a point of connection that did not centre solely around the young person's experiences of harm.

Interviews were complemented by data from eight in-depth, de-identified cases, developed by MCM practitioners, to understand the presenting needs and service interactions of those young people who faced significant barriers to participating in an interview, but whose stories and experiences highlighted vital opportunities for system improvement and reform.
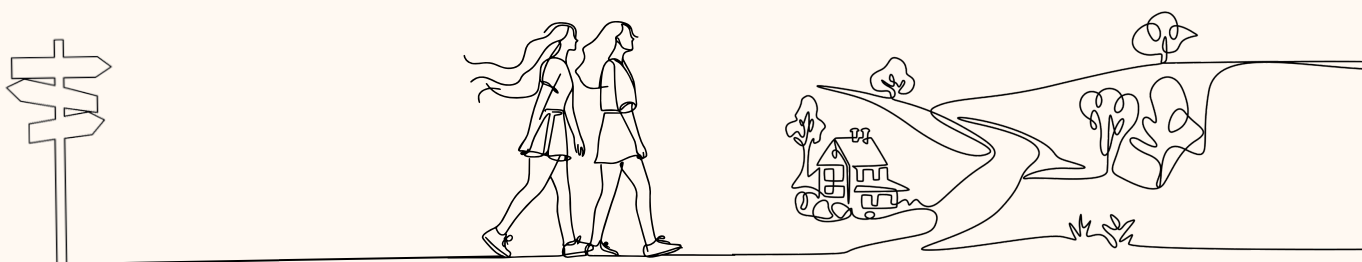
Hearing from support services

The research team conducted 25 online focus groups with a range of practitioners (n = 130) who encounter unaccompanied young people through their work. This included some services who work specifically with this cohort, although it more often involved services who were encountering this cohort incidentally or as one part of a broader client group.

Participants were employed across a diversity of service sectors, such as housing and homelessness services, including homelessness access points; youth-specific services, including youth refuges; specialist family violence organisations; Community Legal Centres; flexible learning schools; Child Protection; and The Orange Door network.

Alongside in-depth focus groups, the CIJ engaged with a Practice Advisory Group at key points in the research, who supported the team to contextualise and interrogate research findings.

Challenges and limitations

Involving extensive, whole-of-system data collection, the research nonetheless features some key data gaps and limitations. These are as follows:

- Young people were recruited through youth homelessness services, based on existing evidence that this is where unaccompanied young people often feel most comfortable presenting or where they are directed when they present to specialist family violence services. The CIJ acknowledges that this recruitment method means that we were less likely to engage with any young people who were supported through specialist family violence settings, and that negative or ineffective service interactions with specialist family violence services were more likely across the study's cohort.

- The 17 interviews conducted with young people fell just short of the target sample size of 20. The sample did, however, enable engagement with young people from diverse circumstances and backgrounds. It also accorded with empirical evidence which establishes that thematic saturation in the context of research is usually achieved somewhere between nine to 12 interviews. That said, it should be noted that the requirement of the research methodology that interview participants must be supported by at least one service meant that the experiences of young people who were not supported by any service at all were not captured.

- Despite active and extended recruitment, focus groups had low representation from some key sectors, most notably Child Protection, multicultural and multifaith services, youth mental health services and, as discussed further below, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs). In addition, engagement with specialist family violence services was primarily limited to The Orange Door network, family violence refuges, and family violence services working in youth-specific contexts.

- The research ultimately had limited engagement with Aboriginal young people and community-based organisations or other culturally specific services. The original aim of the research was to connect with a Victorian-based, community-controlled youth service to support the recruitment of Aboriginal young people for interviews. As a result of the high demand and under resourcing that is characteristic of the sector, however, this service was unable to engage and participate within the project timeframes. This meant that all young people were recruited through MCM, with very few eligible Aboriginal young people identified through this recruitment pathway. Similarly, Aboriginal-led family violence, youth-specific and homelessness services had limited capacity to participate in focus groups – again reflecting the impacts of chronic underfunding this sector, as well as the over-consultation of Aboriginal communities.

Findings

How unaccompanied young people present to the system

The research found that unaccompanied young people present with unique and layered risks. Their safety needs often sit at the intersection between family violence risk, sometimes perpetrated by multiple people; mental health risk, often linked to their experiences of trauma and harm; and risks associated with homelessness.
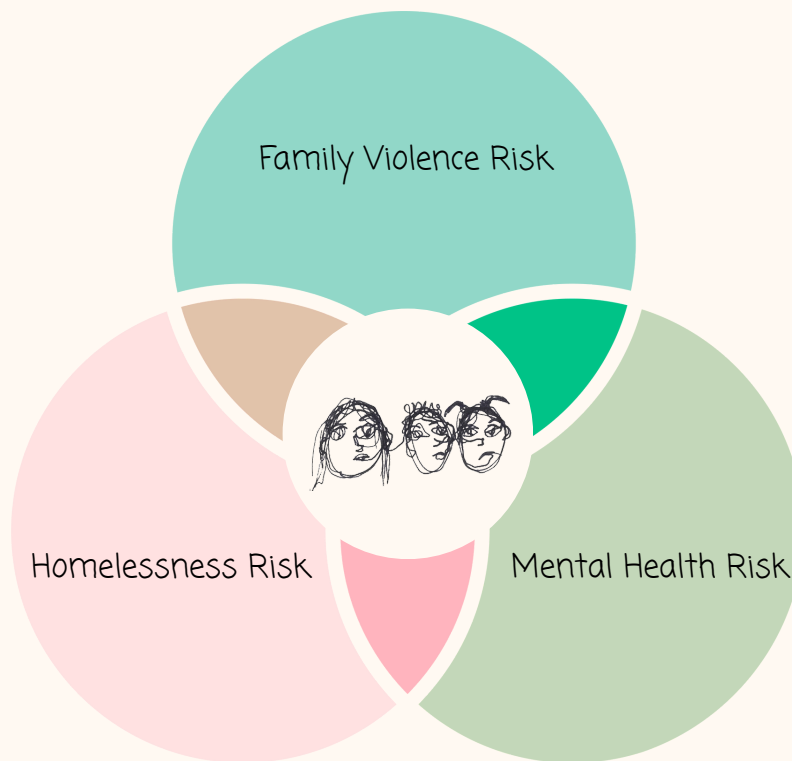
"I didn't feel safe to even go into the house. It got to the point where I would almost throw up just by being near the house."

(Young Person 9)

Despite interviews revealing that young people are experiencing significant risk and fear, including immediate and imminent threats to their lives, the research found that services still struggled to recognise and believe them as victim survivors 'in their own right' when they presented for support.

Often, this occurred as a result of the confluence of risk factors, which meant that young people sat at the intersections of multiple systems and were 'handballed' from one to the other. Accordingly, many remained at significant risk of harm without the necessary supports or interventions.

"… all the workers I've seen and everyone that's written about me and the amount of times I've told my story… I got juggled around and palmed off a lot."

(Young Person 12)

Consistent with the layered risk profiles which are a feature of young people's lives, the research found that unaccompanied young people present to a broad array of services – often driven by needs that are separate from, but related to, their experiences of family violence.

Many young people presented to youth homelessness services (or were directed there by other services), with the need for safe, secure and stable housing as their primary presenting need. Health services, Community Legal Centres (CLCs) and schools were also identified as important entry points and pathways to wider service engagement.

The extent to which justice and statutory agencies, including Child Protection, functioned as an effective entry point to the service system was variable, with multiple young people reporting repeat contact, often from a very young age, that did not result in meaningful support. Likewise, while many young people who participated in the research had come into contact with specialist family violence intake points or services at some stage in their journey, this often did not lead to system intervention to improve young people's safety and reduce risk.

Support needs and goals of unaccompanied young people

Unaccompanied young people present to the service system with diverse, interconnected support needs and goals that relate to and predate their experiences of family violence and homelessness. These include material and safety needs, such as needs in relation to housing, financial assistance, mental health, trauma recovery, substance use, legal issues, parenting support, independent living skills, access to identification documents, health and medical issues and support to navigate complex, often siloed systems. Despite this breadth of needs, the research identified a set of common support needs with which almost all young people presented.

Being believed and validated

The most consistent theme raised by interview participants was the importance of being listened to, believed and having their experiences validated. Almost all reflected that at some point they had felt silenced or had their experiences minimised, with this often occurring within their personal relationships, service interactions and from the system more broadly.

"... no one listens to the kid. Everyone listens to the adult ... I picked that up at like seven. If you're a kid trying to talk to an adult, no one's going to listen to you, no one will try and even look at you, no one will do anything to try and talk to you."

(Young Person 2)

Young people described how these experiences eroded their trust in practitioners and the service system and made it less likely that they would disclose harm or seek support.

"I stopped accessing that service because they told me it was all in my head, the paranoia I was feeling. It definitely wasn't in my head. ... So, I decided to stop accessing them because of that. And that kind of just made things get worse."

(Young Person 9)

For many, this resulted in their safety and wellbeing continuing to deteriorate out of sight from the service system. In some cases, young people described waiting until they hit "rock bottom" before seeking help again, while others described engaging in risk-taking behaviours or moving into other unsafe environments – such as rough sleeping – to compel the service system to provide them with much-needed support.

"… if me voluntarily going to someone to ask for help isn't working, I'll make people help me, where I'm in the position where I do need help."

(Young Person 9)

Practitioners in focus groups similarly reflected on how the system's propensity to minimise young people's experiences of violence and harm in turn undermined trust in services, as well as making it difficult to elicit risk information and engage with young people during future service interactions. By contrast, young people emphasised the therapeutic value of being listened to without judgement.

"… just having someone who would listen to what's going on with me and who would actually care and help me felt really good."

(Young Person 14)

This accords with the wider evidence base, including wider research conducted by the CIJ, which suggests that compassionate and validating responses to disclosures of harm and violence are integral to a victim survivor's journey towards healing.

Support to understand family violence

Young people's experiences of family violence are often quite distinct from those of adult victim survivors. As such, many of the interview participants reflected that it took time, support and a process of unlearning to recognise their experiences as ones of family violence and to seek support on this basis.

"I didn't see that as like 'oh we shouldn't be doing that', that was just normal for me."

(Young Person 1)

The factors contributing to this varied across the sample and included the normalisation of violence within family structures; not seeing themselves represented in mainstream, heteronormative and gendered family violence messaging; working through pervasive feelings of guilt and shame; and fear of service involvement, particularly for young people who used resistive violence or had previous negative system contact.

"It's kind of … a big eye opener that it's not all, like, physical, you know it is emotional, it is mental but also [the] financial aspect … the main thing is that lack of knowledge that it's not out there as much as it probably should be."

(Young Person 3)

This normalisation of violence was further compounded where young people had made disclosures, or where services were otherwise made aware of the violence that the young person was experiencing, but this did not result in them receiving any meaningful intervention.

"They talk about 'perspecticide', and I can't think of a better word for how this person's corroded … sense of truth has meant … not being able to even rely on their own memory or their own cognition to interpret interactions and experiences."

(Family violence practitioner)

Young people whose experiences of violence were compounded by or filtered through aspects of their identity, including gender, culture and sexuality, often faced additional barriers to recognising themselves as victim survivors of family violence, or to being recognised as such by the wider service system.

Although young people recognised that increasing their family violence literacy was important both to their safety and healing, some interview participants felt that this new knowledge came with its own costs. While many knew that something was 'not right' about their experiences, stopping short of labelling these as family violence served as a self-protection mechanism.

Removing this protective layer should therefore be accompanied by new layers of support so that young people are not left holding the burden of this information on their own. This includes trauma recovery and support to build up and maintain protective factors in their lives, as well as support to form and maintain positive, healthy relationships in the future.

"When you find out too much or you see the world a bit too much more than you probably want to, you can't go back … You can't naively go through the world when you've seen how bad it is … I don't know how to find a balance with it but, realistically, I'll never perceive relationships and people and the world and society the same as if I hadn't gone through family violence. It challenges you and it changes you."

(Young Person 1)

Across interviews and focus groups alike, psychoeducational support for young victim survivors emerged as a key support.

Support to navigate complex systems

The research found that young people were having to engage with multiple service systems but had very limited visibility of the types of services available and were only able to build this awareness through ongoing trial and error and self-advocacy.

"I didn't even know MCM was a thing. I didn't know [youth services and state-wide homelessness access point] was a thing … The only thing I knew of was like homeless for like, I guess like older people …"

(Young Person 2)

While this can be a challenge for many victim survivors, the research suggested that it is particularly acute for unaccompanied young people, who have less experience navigating systems generally. This included less experience accessing 'basic' services such as health services and Centrelink, let alone more complex service systems.

"... half the services that I've had to reach out to I didn't know existed. I didn't know Frontyard existed, I didn't know The Orange Door existed, I didn't know [supported housing provider] was a thing ... didn't know any of that."

(Young Person 7)

Where young people were able to identify appropriate services, stringent eligibility criteria – including where young people's risk profile cut across multiple system responses – and parental consent requirements acted as significant barriers to receiving support.

Similarly, the research revealed that convoluted and complex processes within services could further marginalise young people, who typically have limited experience navigating administrative processes and service requirements. These barriers were particularly severe for young people with intersecting support needs.

"... there's always a challenge trying to find ... a service that is appropriate and the young person is eligible for ... people are like, 'Oh no, they can't access this mental health support because they're using substances' or vice versa ... that is very like normal thing that happens, and case managers need to kind of navigate that service system."

(Youth housing practitioner)

Young people shared stories of frustration around not being able to access support because of the complex and often siloed nature of the service system. This meant that having to repeat this process time and again to different services – including by recounting experiences of harm – was an exhausting and isolating experience.

"... all the workers I've seen and everyone that's written about me and the amount of times I've told my story... I got juggled around and palmed off a lot."

(Young Person 12)

Young people who were able to connect with a dedicated worker who provided ongoing support and advocacy within these complex systems generally described this as a positive experience, highlighting the importance of system navigation as a function of youth-specific support.

Stop making things over complicated. Make it easy to access services. Actually be able to provide services."

(Young Person 9)

Consistently, young people indicated a need for a service or practitioner who could walk alongside them as they interacted with different parts of the system. This included in circumstances where they had benefitted from this form of intensive system navigation support, as well as where they had been required to navigate the service system alone.

Support that recognises the impacts of trauma

The research clearly indicated the trauma-related impacts of a young person's experiences of family violence and homelessness and that young people, by the nature of their age and developmental stage, will often experience additional, compounding impacts.

"When I talk about this, like I'm talking now, it's very calm, very collected and I'm very open about it. Whereas, when I'm actually alone, I'm processing it, it is a complete breakdown. It isn't pretty, it isn't calm, it isn't collected, it's very destructive and it's understanding that loss, that big change that maybe could have been avoided."

(Young Person 3)

Young people described significant trajectories of mental ill-health, including self-harm and suicidal ideation; ongoing hypervigilance, self-destructive and risk-taking behaviours; and self-soothing tactics through alcohol and drug use. Young people also described varying degrees of readiness to acknowledge, name or address these impacts.

"There's a lot of things that I've sexualised in my life I think as a trauma response. I remember I couldn't work professionally with male workers in the services because I'd always sexualise it because I just assumed 'Oh, they're going to perpetrate me anyway'... I'm at a point [now] where I don't even, like, think of that."

(Young Person 1)

More broadly, the research revealed a lack of capacity across the system to respond in a trauma-informed way to young people's experiences of harm or to engage with them on their own terms. Behaviours stemming from a lifetime of family violence were often classified as symptomatic of mental ill-health, resulting in young people being pathologised, criminalised or otherwise penalised by or excluded from the system. This led to responses which compounded, instead of addressing, young people's experiences of harm.

"... when we talk about it, re-living everything ... It brings up a lot of stuff we've had to push to the back of our mind to be able to continue on in ... day-to-day life."

(Young Person 7)

"I've had a lot of clients whose AOD issues were so significant and complex that ... they haven't been able to stay in refuge or stay anywhere because of safety issues and whatnot. So, they're just on the street... So, yeah, it's pretty crazy that the highest risk [young people] are the ones that a lot of the time can't access a basic need like housing."

(Community legal practitioner)

Importantly, the impacts of trauma, while pervasive, are not the entire picture for unaccompanied young people, including those who participated in this research. Unaccompanied young people demonstrated incredible capacity to see the best in others, including their peers or workers, and to hold onto hope even when it might appear lost.

"... there's always that little glimmer for me; I kept holding on to that one little ounce of me ..."

(Young Person 17)

It is therefore crucial that the service system reflects these strengths back and actively empowers young people to move through and beyond their experiences of harm.

Support to foster trusting and safe relationships

Findings point to the significant, ongoing impacts of family violence on a young person's sense of belonging and connection. Interview participants almost universally described the breakdown of family units, romantic relationships and friendship groups, as well as dislocation from their geographical community. Many interview participants reported that it was very difficult for them to feel safe in relationships.

Conversely, where young people had been able to build safe, supportive relationships – including through positive peer relationships, intimate relationships and going on to start their own families – these were often identified by the young person as a source of strength and hope, signalling the importance of this focus in broader therapeutic support.

"... the best part is finding that support system ... [so] you don't ... fall back into old toxic ways ..."

(Young Person 7)

Safe and supportive peer groups also emerged as particularly important for young people whose experiences of violence included identity-based abuse, such as young people who identify as LGBTQIA+. The communal environment of youth refuges allowed some interview participants to connect with other young people with similar backgrounds and histories, which helped them to feel less alone in their experiences of family violence, including from their family of origin.

More broadly, young people expressed complex feelings about the kinds of relationships that they wanted or were able to maintain with different family members. Many of the young people who experienced family violence in their home of origin, often from one or more parents or guardians, expressed a sense of grief at the loss of these relationships. In some cases, interview participants felt that they needed to sever ties, not only from the adult perpetrator, but also from their non-violent parent if they had not acted protectively. Others were actively cut off from their non-violent parent for disclosing or reporting their experiences of harm.

"I don't think a lot of people realise that big disconnection and the grief that one goes through because I had lived with my [primary parent] all my life you know. Still saw my [parent], [stepparent] and siblings but my [primary parent] was there for almost 18 years, and it wasn't even an adjustment period it was just straight, you know, cut off... having to get away from them for my own safety. So, they've made the choice that they don't want to talk to me anymore whilst the intervention order is still there. It is very heartbreaking."

(Young Person 3)

In this context, young people emphasised the need for choice and agency in any reconciliation attempts, with some young people describing harmful service interactions which pushed them towards family reunification, even where these relationships were unsafe.

"The way that they had it set up was it was based around … trying to get to a point where you can get the family together and I didn't want that."

(Young Person 1)

Finally, an important theme of the research was the reparative capacity of therapeutic and service relationships in which young people felt seen, heard and treated with dignity. Crucially, these relationships were not confined to formal therapeutic settings, but could occur across a range of service environments, including refuges.

"I guess there was just some workers that really stuck out against others … They just speak to you like you're just a friend or just a normal person. But in a lot of other refuges, they speak down to you and, you know, they speak to you like you're a child"

(Young Person 15)

Support to have the experiences that other young people have

A recurring theme was the loss of 'normal' childhood and adolescent milestones. Many young people described having to protect themselves, their siblings and others in the household. This acceleration of responsibility, compounded by homelessness, often meant that young people had to navigate complex adult systems, such as finding shelter, employment, and managing safety – further disconnecting them from normal adolescent experiences like school and socialising.

"A lot of us kind of kept ourselves alive, like we were sort of our parents growing up."

(Young Person 1)

Young people often expressed a desire to have the experiences of others their age. Education was repeatedly raised in this context, with young people describing how their experiences of family violence and homelessness, including ongoing transience, made it difficult to maintain a connection with their schools.

"I just dropped out. Like, at this point I just left home. I was like, 'I'm not going to school if I'm not living at home'."

(Young Person 2)

A lack of educational continuity not only affected young people's learning but also limited their ability to form key peer relationships and experience important social milestones. Practitioners noted that alternative education options played a crucial role in helping young people to re-engage with learning in a trauma-responsive environment.

Young people's constant need to ensure their own safety also left little room for the recreational activities that are critical to emotional and social development. Youth services, including youth-specific refuge environments, often provided the first opportunities for young people to experience moments of respite and connection with peers – helping them to cope with trauma, build self-worth, as well as develop a sense of normality and connection.

"… we've got to go to the zoo, like we got to do ice skating. Like there's so many cool things I've gotten to do with Front Yard …"

(Young Person 15)

The importance of positive recreational experiences cannot be understated, with evidence suggesting that it can support a young person's capacity to cope with, resist and recover from experiences of family violence.[3] Echoing this evidence, interview participants described how engaging in playful, relational activities offered respite from the hyper-vigilance that had become normalised for them and allowed them to connect with other young people in a meaningful way.

Support that responds to specific needs and identities

While the research found strong evidence that unaccompanied young people broadly struggle to have their support needs met within current service system responses, this was particularly true for certain groups of young people. Often, these young people were found to face unique forms of service exclusion, including on the basis of their identity, or otherwise struggled to have the level of risk that they were experiencing understood during service interactions. Where services were involved, gaps in specialist responses and structural barriers to engagement often meant that, even where individual practitioners and services made genuine efforts to support and advocate for young people, they remained unsafe.

The specific communities and groups of young people considered in the full report include LGBTQIA+ young people; young people from multicultural or multifaith communities; Aboriginal young people; young men and boys; young people with disabilities; young people from regional and rural areas; and young parents and those with caring responsibilities.

Young people identifying as LGBTQIA+

Broader research indicates that people identifying as LGBTQIA+ experience distinct forms of violence – often referred to as identity-based abuse 4 – and this holds true for the young people participating in this research. Interviews revealed examples of young people being pressured to conform to gender norms; being excluded from the home, including the family home and private rentals, as a result of their sexuality or gender; and extreme instances of conversion therapy.

"[My roommate said] 'If I would have known that you were transgender, chances are you wouldn't have been living with me'".

(Young Person 1)

Practitioners working with LGBTQIA+ young people reflected that the social marginalisation and systemic exclusion of queer and transgender young people manifests in a range of harms that produce barriers to recognising and disclosing family violence; engaging with services; and receiving meaningful care that affirms their identity. Practitioners highlighted the societal and structural hurdles that LGBTQIA+ young people face in even being able to identify family violence behaviours and have these experiences recognised by the service system. They also observed that rigid cultural conceptions of family violence led to harmful behaviours being normalised within queer relationships, as well as young LGBTQIA+ victim survivors being misidentified as the perpetrator of family violence by police. Practitioners reflected how, cumulatively, these factors could result in queer and transgender young people living with significant unaddressed family violence risk.

"It's very difficult for young people to access refuge, especially trans and gender diverse young people, because a lot of people feel that they have to shape themselves into the criteria of the service to access [it]. And once you've done that once, you don't ever want to do that again, so that stops people from wanting to access any services in case they find out, 'yes, we can meet your needs, but you're going to have to look like this to be able to do that.'"

(Family violence practitioner)

In circumstances where LGBTQIA+ young people were able to engage with support that affirmed their gender and sexuality, this was found to have significant therapeutic benefits. One young person spoke about the relief – and even the joy – of finding a refuge placement where they could freely express their identity through their clothing and appearance.

"… it's the fact that I can express myself without worry of judgement. I can wear what I really want to wear…"

(Young Person 9)

Young people from multicultural and multifaith backgrounds (including recently arrived migrants and refugees)

The CIJ spoke with several young people who had recently arrived in Australia, in some cases fleeing family violence in their country of origin. Although these young people were from different backgrounds, spoke different languages and had a diversity of experiences, particular themes were repeatedly raised during their interviews. Many of these themes were echoed by practitioners working with multicultural and multifaith communities, either through specialist services or as part of a broader client group.

One such theme was the unique ways that a young person's immigration or visa status can be used to control and enact harm by the person using violence. In one example, a young person described feeling that they were unable to leave a violent relationship for fear of being deported from Australia. This young person had been repeatedly told by their perpetrator and other people that, because they did not have Australian citizenship, they did not have any rights and could not access any support or entitlements.

"My [ex-partner] was also threatening me to have my visa cancelled. And that's also why I couldn't get any support … because I don't have citizenship, a lot of people told me that I wouldn't have a right to anything."

(Young Person 6)

The research suggested that visa-based abuse can be particularly harmful for young people, who already experience various forms of service exclusion and are even less likely than adult victim survivors to have the resources required to access key supports, including legal support for their migration matters.

Where interview participants had escaped violence in their family of origin, this often meant removing themselves or being excluded from their broader community and, with it, their language and cultural practices which would otherwise act as protective factors. For other young people, family members with whom they had a safe relationship resided in their country of origin and so were not able to provide shelter or material support. Across this cohort, young people described feelings of isolation and disconnection – a common migrant experience which is compounded by experiences of family violence and the lack of appropriate support from services.

"I don't have anyone anymore."

(Young Person 10)

Conversely, practitioners described the complexity of supporting young people who live in inter-generational, crowded homes where family violence is occurring, particularly where this is compounded by the significant economic and social exclusion, including from the private rental market, that can be experienced by migrant and refugee communities. These practitioners observed how young people's entire support system resides in the one place, limiting opportunities for the young person to leave, either short-term or permanently, without losing access to non-violent family members and other supports.

"His mum, his grandparents, his uncle, they all live together in quite a small sort of unit. So, his whole sort of family base are all under the same roof. And when he does have some family conflict issues with his [violent parent], he doesn't really have any family options for respite…"

(Family violence practitioner)

Practitioners working specifically with young people from multicultural and multifaith communities reflected that these young people often faced complex barriers to recognising and disclosing family violence. The research found that factors including differing cultural understandings of family violence and cultural and religious stigma around seeking support, were often further compounded by service limitations, such as lack of funding for translators. Practitioners observed that these factors often culminated in young people struggling to access culturally responsive and appropriate support.

Practitioners also reflected on the complexity of supporting young people from close-knit multicultural and multifaith families and communities. While being part of a deeply connected family and cultural network provided these young people with a sense of belonging and safety in many respects, practitioners observed that it was sometimes harder for these young people to access family violence support without their community becoming aware.

"So, if we meet them outside in the community, they might feel a little bit safer, where they're not feeling like they're getting judged by walking into a building or if they see two people with lanyards walking to their home…"

(Youth practitioner)

Aboriginal young people

As described at the outset of this report, the research had limited engagement with Aboriginal young people and practitioners working within Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, despite the aims in the initial design. Acknowledging this limitation, interviews and case studies involving Aboriginal young people, alongside focus groups with a small number Aboriginal-led organisations, point to some specific considerations for this cohort.

The importance of community and cultural connection emerged as one of the most vital support needs of Aboriginal young people. This finding echoes clear and consistent messages from Aboriginal Elders, community leaders and organisations.[5] In this respect connection to community and culture was recognised as central to healing and recovery, particularly in the context of intergenerational experiences of trauma and harm.

Focus groups with community organisations emphasised the ongoing impact of colonisation on Aboriginal communities, families and peoples, as well as the importance of all services understanding the ongoing consequences of colonisation for Aboriginal young people today. In particular, practitioners stressed that the delivery of service support to Aboriginal young people and families cannot be disentangled from the disproportionate levels of child removal and the overincarceration experienced by Aboriginal communities. Instead of culturally safe, therapeutic care, however, practitioners from community-led organisations explained that Aboriginal young people too often encounter services responses that further entrench disadvantage and harm. This in turn creates significant distrust in services that requires time and concerted effort to repair.

Reflecting on best practice approaches, focus groups emphasised the importance of place-based responses that draw on local cultural practices and the needs of the community to provide appropriate, safe and holistic support.

"Place-based responses for anything, that's going to be when you see the difference, it's where you make the change. But that's not necessarily always the stuff that meets the needs of the funders I guess…"

(Family violence practitioner)

Young men and boys

A consistent finding across the research was the harm caused by the exclusion of boys and young men within mainstream family violence discourses. The research consistently identified examples of boys and young men having their experiences as victim survivors disbelieved and their need for support minimised based on rigid, gendered assumptions about who experiences – and conversely, who creates – family violence risk. As a result, male interview participants, as well as practitioners, reflected that young men often lived with significant family violence risk for a long time before they were connected with meaningful support.

Several young men interviewed described how outdated definitions of masculinity, as well as the associated stigma and shame that they experienced when displaying emotional vulnerability, discouraged them from seeking support. These young men went on to describe the mental health impacts of internalising and repressing experiences of family violence trauma, including where support to understand and unpack these experiences was not forthcoming.

"I feel like I shouldn't talk as a male, young males. And that doesn't coincide with the statistics of young males killing themselves increasing over the last 10 years. Go figure. Shocking. So, we don't talk and we're killing ourselves more."

(Young Person 13)

This insight was echoed in focus groups, where a range of practitioners spoke specifically about the exclusion that young men face when engaging with the service system generally, particularly around experiences of family violence. Practitioners described boys and young men being actively excluded from specialist family violence services and refuges that were primarily designed to respond to women and younger children. They also described examples of boys and young men made to feel like; being assumed to be; or even formally misidentified as a perpetrator of family violence rather than a victim survivor when they sought support from specialist family violence services – contributing to their disengagement from services and discouraging future help-seeking.

Concerningly, even where services are able to work with male victim survivors, gendered narratives around family violence victimisation meant that young men and boys saw these as settings in which they would not be welcomed or receive support.

"I think it's Orange Door and all that sort of stuff for the girls. But me personally, I don't have any other services."

(Young Person 2)

"I just lay on the floor when I first got there crying because I didn't feel like I deserved it. … And then when I got the [a different refuge] I still didn't feel like I deserved to be in a refuge."

(Young Person 9)

Similarly, young men who participated in interviews reflected that, while they did not want to ignore or deny the gendered aspect of family violence, being a male victim survivor came with its own unique difficulties.

"…don't get me wrong… Nowadays everyone is a lot more open and honest talking about their situations. But there is still that big … lack of support for men being the victim just because of, like, how – I don't want to say rare but how like – less common it is compared to the women. And that's not to put down women in any way shape or form at all."

(Young Person 3)

While many interview participants spoke about experiencing violence during periods of homelessness – including while sleeping rough, living in hotels, or during short-term refuge placements – the research found that multiple male interview participants had experienced life-threatening physical violence while homeless.

Each of these young men spoke about experiencing symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a result of being attacked, reflecting that these incidents contributed to a decline in mental health, and increased feelings of unsafety.

"I got assaulted with a [weapon] ... That was like two days, three days in hospital. So, that was pretty fucking full-on and I kind of lost the plot a bit after that and I kind of went on a bit of a rampage. But after I got all that out of my system I kind of realised, like, 'fuck man, I'm just getting so close to either, like, dying in an overdose or a car crash or spending all this time in jail or fucking, you know, getting stabbed or shot or fucking bashed'."

(Young Person 12)

Several practitioners shared experiences where young men who presented to the service system with experiences of homelessness, mental ill-health and substance addiction stemming from experiences of family violence were mischaracterised as aggressive or unsafe – and were in some instances criminalised. One practitioner described the disproportionate impact of this mischaracterisation on young men from First Nations and multicultural backgrounds, who were dual victims of gendered and racist assumptions.

"... this group of young men are culturally diverse, they are tall and they're solid and my thing is, like, they're already a target, right? Like, from the community because [they're] big, brown scary boys."

(School support practitioner)

Some practitioners described working with young men who were expressing aggression or using violence following their own experiences of harm. In these instances, practitioners emphasised the importance of connecting young men with therapeutic support and working in a way that is rooted in acknowledgement and validation of their past experiences of violence, harm and grief.

Young people with disabilities

The specific support needs and experiences of young people with disabilities emerged as a consistent theme throughout practitioner focus groups. While none of the interview participants explicitly disclosed that they were living with disability, several described accessing NDIS entitlements and disability services, while many interview participants also described the ways in which their experiences of neurodiversity, acute mental ill-health and psychosis had impacted their ability to access support

Practitioners who support young people with cognitive disabilities described the difficulty that their clients often faced in recognising that family violence was occurring and disclosing these experiences. In some circumstances, practitioners reported that this difficulty arose from a lack of cognitive understanding and developmentally appropriate psychoeducational support about family violence behaviours. In other circumstances, practitioners explained that this difficulty was the product of active coercion, gaslighting and identity-based abuse. In circumstances where young people were able to disclose what they were experiencing, multiple practitioners provided examples of young people having their experiences of violence minimised and disbelieved by relevant services and agencies on the basis of their disability.

Practitioners also described an absence of disability-informed family violence responses across the system, allowing for young people's family violence risk to go unrecognised by practitioners or, in some cases, actively increased by the system. In some instances, this resulted from systemic failures to engage meaningfully with a young person with disability about their safety needs, or inadvertently colluding with the person using violence to seek consent or clarification. The research found that this resulted in high levels of financial abuse – often by accessing their Centrelink or NDIS entitlements – being enacted against young people with disabilities.

"Centrelink weren't willing to change over that money into Youth Allowance or full disability or even transfer the account because the young person was not able to access Centrelink because the young person's Mum was saying that they're fine to live at home …"

(Youth practitioner)

While the issue of systems abuse by parents and systemic collusion in this was identified in focus groups and interviews across the board, the research found that the potential for systems abuse could be particularly acute for young people with disabilities. This is because young people with disabilities face distinct barriers to having their experiences and agency recognised, as well as in accessing the financial and other resources required to leave unsafe environments.

This cohort's ability to leave unsafe environments is further complicated by the lack of appropriate, flexible and responsive accommodation options that meet the accessibility and support requirements of young people with disabilities.

Young people from regional and rural areas

A small number of interview participants were originally from, or had spent time in, regional areas – including at the time that they were experiencing family violence. These participants described how the small, close-knit nature of these areas could make it difficult to disclose their experiences of family violence or leave these situations of harm. Practitioners working in regional and remote areas similarly observed that young people residing in these areas could struggle to access support that is sufficiently confidential.

"I think just a rural area as well, escaping violence is a really hard thing to do because everyone knows everyone, you can't really hide too well down here."

(Youth practitioner)

These challenges were further compounded by the lack of services in regional and rural areas, with one young person describing how they returned to a violent intimate partner on several occasions because they could not find adequate support from the services in their region.

"I've been in and out of the relationship with my ex-partner because of not really good support around there to get out."

(Young Person 5)

The lack of services in regional and rural areas had various impacts, including significant wait times to access services and a lack of choice in services. For young people who were excluded from services or specific accommodation options, or who required more specialised responses because of specific needs or aspects of their identity, this lack of choice was particularly extreme.

As a result, young people described relocating to central areas to access support – even if this support involved long wait times or was not entirely appropriate and even if this meant leaving valuable informal support networks behind. This left them in the vulnerable situation of being severed from their community, while being caught in the limbo of waitlists and short-term refuge stays that cemented a cycle of crisis.

Young parents and those with caring responsibilities

Many of the young people whose stories were captured in this research, either through interviews, case studies, or focus groups, had caring responsibilities for other people or animals, in addition to being responsible for their own safety. Interview participants and practitioners reflected that parenthood, or other caregiver responsibilities, had the potential to function both as an added stress and as a crucial protective factor for unaccompanied young people with intersecting experiences of family violence and homelessness.

All the young parents who participated in interviews described parenthood as a motivating and affirming experience. In some cases, however, young people reflected that the stigma and judgement imposed on them through service system interactions affected their confidence in their capacity to parent.

"… every time something goes wrong or, you know, [my child is] upset I'm constantly being like, 'Oh I'm not doing something good enough', because I've just been told by someone who's meant to help me that I'm a bad parent, that I'm set to fail as a parent …"

(Young Person 7)

This was particularly true where young people had interactions with Child Protection which situated them as a 'risk' to their child, while simultaneously failing to acknowledge the risk being faced by the young person themselves or to deliver a protective or supportive response.

Some young people reflected that it was falling pregnant which allowed them to be moved 'up the list', out of crisis accommodation and into transitional housing. While young people were grateful to receive this support, they reflected that these experiences reinforce the message that young people are invisible to the system and that responses are designed either for adults or for children with a protective parent.

"… when we told them, like, 'look, we've got three months until my partner gives birth' … at that point they'll, like, 'hurry the fuck up and get in' … Like, 'we'll take you straight away'. And the moment we gave birth, like, within two months we had the house."

(Young Person 2)

Interviews and focus groups also highlighted the frequency with which unaccompanied young people presented to the service system with non-parental caring responsibilities, usually towards siblings or pets. While sibling relationships or care for pets were also often an important protective factor for young people, interview participants and practitioners reflected how their accompanying concern for the safety and wellbeing of their siblings or pets could exacerbate existing barriers to accessing accommodation and housing, with very few refuge environments resourced to accommodate sibling groups or pets.

Support to access developmentally appropriate housing

Across the research, housing emerged as unaccompanied young peoples' most pressing need, exacerbated by a national housing crisis as well as an absence of dedicated, supported housing options for young people. As a result, young people emphasised that they were frequently forced to make the impossible choice of being safe from family violence or having a roof over their head.

> "Just mainly a roof over me and my [child]'s head, yeah that was my big priority."
>
> (Young Person 7)

Critical gaps in crisis, medium and longer-term housing options for young people meant that many young people were placed in inappropriate situations such as adult refuges or unsupported accommodation like hotels and motels. While practitioners were sometimes able to find creative, informal solutions by leveraging young people's social networks, these were not always sustainable and, likewise, were not an option for many young people.

> "… I was at hotels, you know, kind of thing. And that was really, like, distressing … some of the hotels weren't that safe."
>
> (Young Person 11)

> "… we got a motel in the eastern suburbs … I stayed there for nine days, yeah and it was the worst time of my life, I would never, I don't want to go there."
>
> (Young Person 1)

The absence of suitable transitional and long-term accommodation options for unaccompanied young people also required young people to move constantly between short-term housing options, often across suburbs and regions, to secure a safe place to sleep. This included while in acute crisis, having just left a situation of violence. Some interview participants described relocating each day without knowing where they would end up. This not only left them in an ongoing state of crisis but also left them unable to access catchment-based services or stay connected to protective factors in their lives such as employment, education, or peer groups.

> "… a lot of [refuges] that I went to only had like two to four week stays, like it was pretty short … so you can't get a job because then you're moving across town and you don't know where you will be."
>
> (Young Person 15)

These prolonged cycles of crisis caused considerable harm to young people – materially limiting their capacity to engage supports and work towards recovery, as well as leaving them in a constant state of hypervigilance and uncertainty. This in turn caused or compounded experiences of significant mental ill-health for many young people.

"… it feels kind of demeaning, having to call and ask for help every single day."

(Young Person 4)

"My future is uncertain so that's why I'm … feeling not well, because it's really stressful to consider moving to a new place."

(Young Person 10)

Alongside stability, a sense of safety emerged as a critical feature of accommodation options for unaccompanied young people, with interviews revealing how many young people were left feeling unsafe within the living arrangements available to them. The types of environments in which young people felt safe or unsafe were unique to each individual and often intersected with their past experiences of violence and harm.

"It was more … the other people there, just making me personally feel unsafe and, you know, funny … I had to go to a lot of places that were all age and all adults and that was terrifying."

(Young Person 15)

Both young people and practitioners pointed to a need for a suite of dedicated accommodation options for young people, with capacity to respond to young people's varying support needs and risk profiles, including family violence risk, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

Key features of the current system response

Designed with adults in mind

The research found that the current family violence response is underpinned by a series of interrelated assumptions about who is accessing family violence services and what they need from the system. The most striking of these assumptions apparent across the research is the assumption that young people will always present to the service system alongside a protective parent. This is evident in dominant societal narratives about family violence, as well as in the resulting policies, processes and practices that view young people as extensions of their non-violent parent.

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"Frankly, I think there are services in our sector for whom the response when a young person rings is to say, 'call Kids Helpline' because they're just not confident on the kind of legislative basis for doing that work."

(Policy practitioner)

Beyond the key issue of parental consent, young people regularly encounter a service system that is designed for adults and fails to account for the age and developmental stage of young people and the resources that they have available to them. Practical realities such as not having access to a safe email or working phone, identification documents or modes of transport often undermined young people's engagement with services.

> "When I first got on Centrelink, they needed ID … [but] to get photo ID … you need a phone, you need a number, email address, like, you need passport, bank statements … They just, they take so much from you."

(Young Person 2)

The research also encountered multiple stories of young people being excluded from services, or having their files closed, on the basis that they were being 'unresponsive' or 'difficult to engage.' This included examples of young people being closed prematurely because of a lack of contact in circumstances where it was not safe for them to communicate with services.

> "Orange Door have opened. This young person was uncontactable when they tried twice. So, they called, had an initial appointment. The next two times that the worker called within a span of a week, this young person wasn't able to answer because their Dad was around. And Orange Door knew that, knew of this information. And they have actually notified us this morning that they're closing support."

(Housing practitioner)

Conversely, youth-specific services, including youth homelessness services and youth-specific family violence case management programs, demonstrated a range of positive strategies for promoting meaningful engagement with unaccompanied young people. This included extended or flexible service periods, outreach, practical support and robust case coordination and advocacy.

Invisible gaps in the system

Related to the assumption that young people will not present to family violence and wider services unaccompanied is the expectation that, where young people aged under 18 are experiencing family violence risk within the home environment, they fall within the remit of Child Protection.

In practice, the research found that chronic demand; a lack of appropriate accommodation pathways for unaccompanied young people; and variable capability to engage with and properly assess young people's risk meant that Child Protection rarely intervene when unaccompanied young people are at risk. This contributed to a dangerous fiction that, where unaccompanied young people are not supported by other services, they will be 'picked up' by Child Protection – leaving the majority of unaccompanied young people under the age of 18 to fall through an invisible gap in the current system response.

> "DHS was the biggest service I had in my life, and they did nothing … I was praying I would get taken away from my parents, put into a foster, just given a new family. Nothing, nothing. Just the same shit and the same stuff over and over … that's why I just left. I just couldn't do it … The whole system is so fucked. It's so bad."

(Young Person 2)

""We've got situations here where permanent care placements have broken down and the child is too old to go back into Child Protection services, so they're kind of just left trying to navigate the system on their own ..."

(The Orange Door practitioner)

Similarly, the research suggested a mismatch across the system between what The Orange Door network, as a key statewide family violence intake point, is resourced to do, and how it is understood by the wider system. This – alongside other factors such as variable capability across The Orange Door network to assess and respond to young people's risk – meant that young people being referred into The Orange Door, as well as practitioners working with unaccompanied young people, regularly described receiving an inadequate service response.

"I reached out to the Orange Door, and I've been told ample times that what I was experiencing isn't family violence, and that they closed my case, and that there's nothing they could do to support me ... It doesn't change the fact that I'm now homeless."

(Young Person 7)

This points to a broader issue identified by the Lived (and Living) Experience Advisory Group at the outset of the research – being the acute impacts of a service system that is comprehensive and integrated on paper, but which in practice is riddled with holes.

Fragmented with lots of closed doors

Beyond the key – but invisible – gaps described above, the research found that young people seeking shelter from family violence encounter a series of closed doors and poorly connected service responses. Young people described being connected with a proliferation of services and yet failing to receive a meaningful response. Paradoxically, the research suggested that this often occurred because of the layered risk profile of unaccompanied young people, which meant that, despite their high levels of need, no one service felt confident to manage their risk.

Young people described a lack of coordination and information sharing between services, which resulted in them having to re-tell and re-live their story repeatedly as they were handballed between different services and different parts of the system.

"And we don't want to relive any of that ... that's our biggest fear: we don't want to have to relive what we went through. And then, obviously they just refer us to other agencies, and we have to relive it all over again ... none of the services talk or link together ..."

(Young Person 7)

Young people were also often left managing multiple relationships, service requirements and referral pathways in a time of personal upheaval. This system fragmentation meant that system 'activity' rarely contributed to improved outcomes for young people's safety and often led to young people giving up until their risk and needs escalated further.

"I was, like, managing … talking to [community service] and [housing and homelessness service] … I was also doing … Orange Door and [women's family violence service]. And so it was … a lot of services to kind of be juggling … And get an outcome that's not great."

(Young Person 11)

The need for more effectively integrated service responses for young people was a common theme in focus groups, with practitioners reflecting on the unrealistic expectations from the system that young people in crisis should be able to manage and maintain multiple service relationships.

"I think that the challenge is when you've got a young person presenting and completely overwhelmed by their experience … Trying to connect them to multiple services and have any confidence that they'll then have the skills to be able to successfully engage and manage the interface with different organisations and different workers … We're almost setting them up to fail in many ways."

(The Orange Door practitioner)

The findings highlight that multidisciplinary and case management models are most appropriate for young people – indicating that young people's experiences of family violence and their wider support needs are all interconnected and should be supported as such.

Limited capacity to assess young people's family violence risk

A critical gap identified by the research was the capacity of the service system to identify and accurately assess young people's risk – and respond to that risk accordingly.

Interview participants had a strong sense that their disclosures of violence and harm did not carry the same weight as adult victim survivors – a reflection that was echoed by practitioners with experience supporting adult victim survivors and young people alike. The CIJ heard examples of young people with active service involvement, often from a young age, that did not result in their safety concerns being listened to or addressed. Young people also repeatedly described being told by services to 'just go home', despite explicit disclosures that it was not safe to do so.

"Most people [are] like, 'oh, just go back home you bloody idiot'. It's like, 'I can't just go back home. There's no home for me at home'. You know what I mean? … They're like, 'go back home you fucking idiot'. Like, you know, 'what are you doing out at this time?'"

(Young Person 9)

"… they look at the younger person as trouble, typically. You are the problem. You are the delinquent child who does not have a mind to conceive what is going on around you appropriately. So, your statement cannot be accurately taken."

(Young Person 13)

Interviews also revealed repeated examples of schools, police and Child Protection failing to ask about, identify or address family violence risk. Often, this was accompanied by a tendency to discredit the disclosures made by the young person or actively minimising the level of harm and risk being described.

"… there were heaps of times police got involved, but they didn't do anything … So, I just left it … I was like, 'they're obviously not doing anything.' I called them out to my house, and the most they told me was 'stay in different rooms of the house', even though I've told them everything … I said 'that's not really doing much to help' …"

(Young Person 7)

Interview participants and focus groups emphasised that young people will not always feel comfortable making explicit disclosures of family violence or have the language to describe or name their experiences. Services which had experience working with young people also pointed to the need to adopt a broader view of risk. This broader view needs to account for the layered risk profiles with which young people can present and apply a lens which understands how young people's limited resources and capacity to navigate service systems can itself compound risk.

"We often find … with our young people who have experienced quite significant family violence, that it's much harder to build that rapport because there is … that system distrust. Because they have gone through so many systems or tried to go through those systems and … they've been shut down because of, say, their age or 'you're just, you know, a bratty teenager' or those sort of stereotypes."

(Youth homelessness practitioner)

Significant histories of negative service engagement, including repeatedly having their experiences ignored or minimised, also meant that risk assessments often needed to be iterative and founded on a trusting and safe relationship with a practitioner or service.

"… they treated me like kind of like a nuisance because it's like 'oh here's another teenage girl, oh she's probably just going [through] a phase' …"

(Young Person 17)

"We need to really build capacity in how to have those compassionately curious conversations with young people and move us away from that checkbox style of assessing risk. You know, where we create safety enough that a child or a young person can disclose on their own terms and in language that makes sense to them. And without a practitioner sitting down and asking potentially traumatising questions of a young person because that approach just isn't safe."

(Policy practitioner)

In circumstances where young people's risk was not identified by the system, or ignored completely, the research found countless missed opportunities for earlier intervention. Many young people described these as "sliding door" moments and wondered how their life might be different had they been believed and received the support that they needed during these earlier points of system contact.

"[I needed] to be listened to and to not be told I'm being dramatic or something's normal when I know it wasn't … the situation could have been dealt with a lot quicker if they just listened to me."

(Young Person 17)

Unable to meet the level and nature of need

Findings point towards an overwhelmed and under-resourced system that is unable to respond to the level and need of its users. Cutting across multiple components of the service system with which unaccompanied young people interact – including youth homelessness, family violence and mental health services – this results in young people being handballed from one part of the system to another or in practitioners being left to hold risk outside the scope and resourcing of their service.

"I was so hopeless by that time because I went to so many people, but they didn't help…"

(Young Person 8)

Every young person who participated in an interview had experienced lengthy waits to receive support, with some even being turned away from services completely as demand outstripped capacity.

"… it seems like they're kind of, like, at full capacity."

(Young Person 11)

"I was told that there was a waitlist, but I wasn't expecting it to be a six-month long waitlist, especially because it was court-ordered … by [Child Protection]."

(Young Person 7)

As described previously, under-investment in appropriate accommodation and housing options for young people has particularly wide-ranging impacts on their safety and longer-term recovery, with housing identified as a foundational need that must be in place before other needs can be addressed, or even properly identified.

"I'm literally doing it all on my own. And then they've closed my case now, but they weren't supposed to close until I had a house, a safe house for me and my [child] to live. And I'm offered nothing. They're forcing me to go back to a house that I'm not safe in."

(Young Person 7)

Almost uniformly, practitioners expressed feeling some level of distress at not being able to house the young people with whom they worked in a meaningful or effective way.

"Being a housing case manager in a housing crisis is one of the most miserable jobs in the world."

(Housing practitioner)

In the context of the family violence system, chronic demand across family violence intake points and services was found to contribute to the practice of young people being 'assessed out' – including because their risk was not deemed high enough or because it was determined that their needs could be met by another part of the system.

Acknowledging the prevalence of experiences of family violence for homeless young people, practitioners called for greater investment in the youth homelessness system, as well as greater coordination between family violence and youth homelessness services to ensure that young people are supported in the right place and that specific forms of risk (and associated experiences of harm) are not left unaddressed.

Crisis-oriented

Consistent with reports of widespread strain within the service system, young people and practitioners uniformly characterised current service responses as being geared towards crisis, rather than stability and recovery. This was true across multiple components of the service system, including homelessness and housing, family violence and mental health.

"… it was a refuge and then another refuge. And then a hotel again, and then a refuge and then another refuge. So, [I've] moved around quite a bit …"

(Young Person 11)

"And it is exhausting especially for myself going through eight years of on and off therapy and seeing over 40 different people where you've essentially got to, you know, start the whole story again."

(Young Person 3)

Practitioners reflected on the importance of longer-term engagement with young people to build trust and conduct proper risk assessments and safety planning, including the capacity to offer extended refuge stays. Where this could not be offered, practitioners reflected that the system response was simply perpetuating, rather than disrupting, cycles of harm.

"So, you actually can't recover from family violence, particularly, I believe, as a young person in six weeks. You can't recover in crisis. So, it's around being really honest with yourselves and services about that."

(Family violence practitioner)

While all service systems with which young people interact are arguably oriented towards crisis, practitioners pointed to a critical under-investment in youth homelessness services. This undermined the potential for healing and recovery in these service settings, relative to what is available to adult victim survivors through specialist family violence services.

"There is a real focus on therapeutic intervention and recovery [in specialist family violence refuges]. And I think … [young people] do really get lost in the youth homelessness system."

(Family violence practitioner)

The research clearly identified that unaccompanied young people usually prefer to be supported by youth homelessness services given these services' deep specialisation in working with young people. As such, this meant that they did not have the same opportunities as adult victim survivors to engage with formal therapeutic supports, unless specialist family violence support was also embedded in the youth homelessness response.

The crisis-oriented nature of the mental health system, which often missed opportunities for early intervention, was also identified as a barrier to young people beginning to unpack and recover from their experiences of harm when they were ready. Paradoxically, in the absence of earlier mental health support and intervention, some young people reported experiencing such a significant decline in mental health that they were then not eligible to engage with mainstream mental health services because of self-harm and suicide risk.

"Rates of suicidality, rates of self-harm, rates of needing to access other sort of crisis services and acute mental health services would lessen if we were able to intervene at the point in which people need the support."

(Family violence practitioner)

Reflecting on the orientation of the broader service system towards crisis responses, rather than early intervention and trauma-informed care, practitioners noted that young people's experiences of family violence trauma and harm often get lost. In this sense, practitioners observed that the service system's over-investment in managing the symptoms of trauma can mean that opportunities to unpack and heal from experiences of trauma are missed.

"The whole system can wash over the fact that this person is reacting normally to experiencing abuse and violence. And it's not a problem inside them … they're responding to experiences that they've been subjected to … even … when I've worked with young people who've had, like, inpatient stays and things like that and hospitalisation … you know, there's sometimes an unwillingness to go like deeper down beyond that kind of surface level."

(Family violence practitioner)

This focus on front-end intervention also meant that service involvement often perpetuated the cycles of crisis which can characterise young people's interrelated experiences of family violence and homelessness, rather than empowering young people to transition to safety and stability.

Catchment-based

Young people who participated in the research frequently described cobbling together a tapestry of short-term refuge stays, couch surfing and emergency hotel stays, sometimes interspersed with periods sleeping rough. Despite this transience being a universal feature of youth homelessness, the research found that young people were then expected to a navigate a service environment that is catchment-based – resulting in them being constantly moved between services or denied support altogether because they were unlikely to be able to remain engaged.

"I rang one of them, and they were kind of like 'why did you call? Like, that's not really your, like, catchment' … and then after an hour of being put on hold and then just for them to refer me to services that weren't suitable for … my situation … it was really disappointing."

(Young Person 1)

Young people and practitioners alike described feeling overwhelmed by the administrative burden involved in trying to understand the geographical area covered by relevant services and whether they qualified for support. Young people also described receiving referrals for which they were ineligible or having to re-establish relationships repeatedly with services and re-tell their story, further compounding the impacts of a fragmented system.

"… as well as … having the house struggles, I just wanted like mental health support, like a therapist or someone to see during that but … with the moving areas, I couldn't stick with one person or find one person to stay with."

(Young Person 15)

The catchment-based nature of housing services and wider supports placed significant stress on those practitioners who could provide continuity of care. These practitioners were often left to generate new referral pathways and establish new working relationships with other practitioners every time that a young person changed catchment. Practitioners also described being left to hold risk when critical supports fell away as a result of young people changing locations.

Overall, the catchment-based nature of the current service system compounded feelings of frustration and hopelessness among young people and practitioners alike. Practitioners expressed particular exasperation at the arbitrariness of catchment-based eligibility criteria and its incompatibility with the need to support young people experiencing homelessness.

Positive outcomes often based on 'luck of the draw'

Noting that the participants in this research were engaged with a service and were therefore a reflection of those who had received support, all repeatedly used the word "lucky" to describe the types of service interactions that resulted in meaningful, positive outcomes for their safety. Indeed, there was a general sense that the positive outcomes that they experienced were not a feature of the current service response but were something that occurred despite it.

For some participants, this luck came in the form of a single, dedicated worker – often the first to listen in a genuine way to the young person – who was able to advocate on their behalf. For others, it was not until a significant event, such as pregnancy or declining health, pushed them into higher-risk categories or otherwise made them eligible for additional supports.

"I went to the hospital and coincidentally they asked me 'do you need a worker because you are just by yourself', and I didn't know that they do have these kind of supports … maybe if I was not pregnant, if I was just like a single person … would I have ended up here? I don't think so. I wouldn't have gone to the midwife, wouldn't have met [social worker] and wouldn't have ended up here."

(Young Person 8)

Practitioners and interview participants consistently reflected that positive outcomes were based on the efforts or generosity of individuals, whether that be informal supports in the young person's life or a practitioner going above and beyond. The research therefore highlighted the contrast between this reality and the existence of any service system that could respond to young people's experiences of violence and homelessness in a reliable and coordinated way.

Actively causes and escalates harm

In fact, the research encountered a service system that often caused, contributed to or compounded young people's experiences of harm.

The research's most consistent theme was young people's experiences of not being listened to or believed, and the ways in which these experiences left them feeling invisible to the system. Interviews and focus groups described how not being believed was a traumatic experience – one that could discourage future help-seeking and further normalise young people's experiences of violence, leading to longer-term trajectories of harm.

"You're interrogated at such a young age and they're trying to pick apart every story."

(Young Person 17)

"It's got to the point I've just stopped telling anybody that I'm unsafe. Or I'm scared because it feels like I just don't get listened to by anybody."

(Young Person 7)

Similarly, the research found that the current system response perpetuated cycles of crisis, with the precarity of crisis and short-term accommodation options – and the transience that often accompanied this – having significant impacts on young people's mental health, sense of self and hope for the future.

"When you'd ask some of our kids ... 'So, when you're 18, what do you want to be?' They'll be like, 'I'll probably be dead.' Or, like, they think they'll be locked up ... they just can't think like that because there's no hope."

(Flexible school practitioner)

The research also found strong and alarming evidence of system responses actively escalating young people's family violence risk. The clearest manifestation was in the myriad stories shared by young people and practitioners about services – particularly Child Protection, Centrelink and Victoria Police – inadvertently colluding with adult perpetrators in questioning and delegitimising young people's experiences of family violence.

"... Lifeline redirected me to the police ... before I realised it, they were already taking down a ... report. So, after that ... I figured it's probably best to be honest and upfront with my mother ... then we ended up having another family violence incident ..."

(Young Person 3)

In some circumstances, this was enabled by parental consent requirements. These can encourage practitioners to engage with the alleged perpetrator to validate the young person's story and enabled adult perpetrators to gate-keep young people's receipt of support and financial entitlements. In some instances, services' contact with adult perpetrators – including to seek their consent to engage with a young person – resulted in an escalation of violence.

"We've had ... an instance of refuge workers speaking to a young person's violent parent who was saying 'I'm not violent to them, it's fine, they can just come home'. And then the refuge worker being like, 'well, why don't they just go home? It's not violent'. And me really having to ... advocate for the young person to be believed and for the person who's using violence to not be able to consistently use the system against young people."

(Family violence practitioner)

The CIJ also heard examples of young people being exposed to new forms of harm as a result of inappropriate responses from the service system. For example, one young person who was unable to access Youth Allowance when their parents would not corroborate information that they had provided, had an older landlord use their vulnerable financial position to pressure the young person to provide sex as payment for rent.

"And so, I remember sex being offered to me because Centrelink wasn't working out."

(Young Person 1)

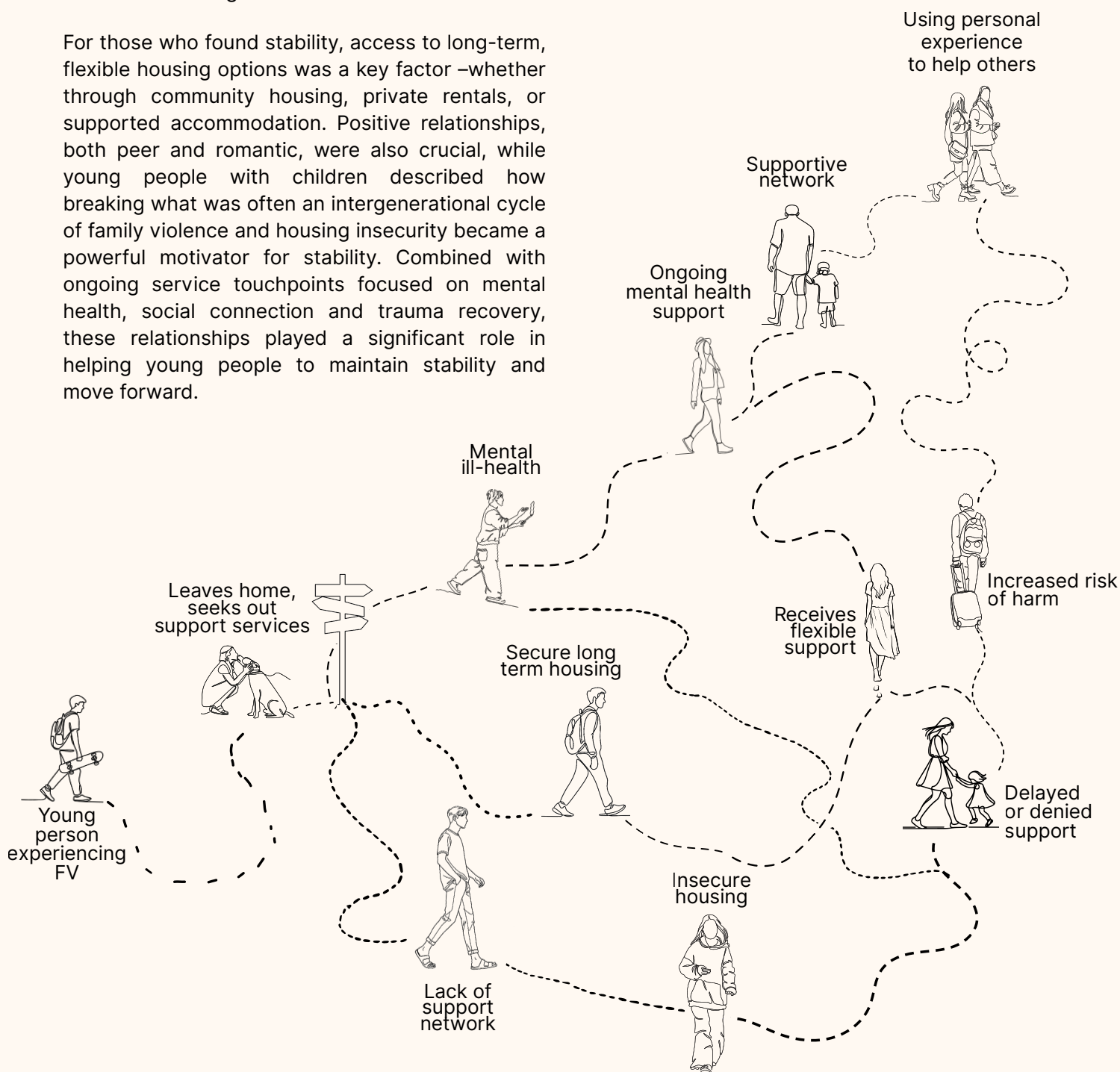Young people and practitioners alike reflected that the continuous failure by the system to recognise and intervene in young people's experiences of family violence and wider harm can compound feelings of stigma and shame. Just as concerningly, it normalises young people's experiences of violence and discourages young people from seeking support – ultimately prolonging unsafe situations and exposing young people to further harm.

Unaccompanied young peoples' longer-term trajectories

Moving towards safety and stability

While a small number of interview participants had been able to transition out of crisis, many continued to experience ongoing instability because of systemic and structural challenges.

For those who found stability, access to long-term, flexible housing options was a key factor –whether through community housing, private rentals, or supported accommodation. Positive relationships, both peer and romantic, were also crucial, while young people with children described how breaking what was often an intergenerational cycle of family violence and housing insecurity became a powerful motivator for stability. Combined with ongoing service touchpoints focused on mental health, social connection and trauma recovery, these relationships played a significant role in helping young people to maintain stability and move forward.

Using personal experience to help others

Supportive network

Ongoing mental health support

Mental ill-health

Leaves home, seeks out support services

Secure long term housing

Receives flexible support

Increased risk of harm

Young person experiencing FV

Lack of support network

Insecure housing

Delayed or denied support

"And if I hadn't met my friends … I wouldn't be here. That's the best way to describe it. Mentally. Maybe physically … I don't know how that would end. And that's not a story I wanted to start."

(Young Person 9)

For many, however, the shift to secure housing was destabilising when they were left to navigate trauma recovery without sufficient support – including struggling with hypervigilance and worrying about the precariousness of this stability in a cost of living and housing affordability crisis.

"… no one really explains that bit either, like getting out of homelessness. Explaining like how that feels and how, when you're out of it … you don't feel safe straight away, you just still kind of feel like you're in that survival mode still. It takes a while to turn off."

(Young Person 15)

Practitioners also emphasised the strengths and incredible resilience of young people as they worked towards safety and stability, reflecting on the need to take young people's lead and recognise what they are already doing to keep themselves safe.

Here, it should be acknowledged that all of the interview participants remained in precarious situations, even where they had made significant progress towards stability and recovery. This precarity was not the responsibility of the young people but of ongoing structural influences – including increasing costs of living, an out-of-reach property market and a lack of appropriate and timely support services, including trauma recovery. Cumulatively, these factors mean that young people were keenly aware that their circumstance could change very quickly.

Remaining unsafe and unseen

Concerningly, the most common trajectory for interview participants was one of recurrent crisis and instability, often perpetuated by a lack of appropriate housing options and wider service responses.

Young people described a history of being bounced between services, preventing them from accessing necessary safety planning and support at a critical time. Without clear pathways into alternative housing, a significant proportion had also slept rough at some point. This was described as confronting and unsafe and, as a result, many young people explained that they returned to the situation of violence, even temporarily.

Seeking shelter with friends, extended family and non-violent partners was also a common pathway. Interview participants described couch-surfing for long periods, sometimes years on end, until they "literally ran out of people" who could accommodate them.

"I … stayed with a friend and slept on a laundry floor for three months."

(Young Person 7)

Not all young people had access to a social support network who could accommodate them and, in lieu of these informal arrangements, some young people stayed in unsafe or exploitative share house environments. To this point, practitioners described the harmful trajectories experienced by many of their clients when the system was not able to respond appropriately to their experiences of violence or homelessness. This included residing in dangerous share house environments, often with older adults, where young people were subjected to financial abuse or exposed to substance use and criminalised behaviours. It also included young people going on to experience intimate partner violence, sex trafficking and other forms of interpersonal harm.

"One of the [young people] we've got in service at the moment has [experienced] family of origin, [violence], intimate partner [violence] and sex trafficking … [But] sometimes it's not picked up straight away… because the conditioning around violence is so prevalent anyway, because they've grown up around it or in out-of-home care and so have been exposed to violence throughout their whole … young adult life."

(Family violence practitioner)

Young people reported that their experiences of transience significantly impacted their capacity to move forward with their lives, as they felt physically and emotionally stuck in the state of crisis which brought them to the service system in the first place. All the young people who participated in this research had long-term goals which they wanted to work towards, whether this was owning their own house; reuniting with their pet; reengaging with education or employment; or becoming a peer support worker. Unfortunately, many felt that their current living situation of cycling through geographically disparate refuges and informal accommodation options prevented them from working towards these goals in any meaningful way.

"… so those moments [of instability] kind of overtook, like, the bigger picture and so it was really hard to kind of focus on … setting goals and … more long-term plans when those things were happening."

(Young Person 11)

These protracted experiences of harm often contributed to feelings of shame; further normalised young people's experiences of violence; and undermined the extent to which they felt worthy of safety or support.

Significant mental ill-health and associated experiences of harm

Like many victim survivors, every interview participant reported significant experiences of mental ill-health, with cumulative experiences of family violence, homelessness and systems harm resulting in symptoms of anxiety, depression and hypervigilance. Many young people further described intrusive flashbacks to their experiences of harm, dissociative episodes, difficulty in regulating their emotions and sensory overload. Self-harm and suicidal ideation also emerged as significant, often resulting after repeated but unanswered calls for support.

"… back when I was 14, I tried to commit suicide … I just wish I had the help back then …"

(Young Person 2)

"I had so much dissociation like I'd be having conversations with people and be like 'I'm not here right now'. I had an acid reflux disorder because my nervous system was fucked ... I would throw up all the time..."

(Young Person 1)

Although some young people found appropriate care through dedicated mental health services or ongoing support from trusted practitioners, many faced systemic barriers that delayed or denied support. These experiences reduced young people's willingness to seek assistance in the future, with some explicitly stating that they had avoided mental health care following a negative experience.

"[There is] so much stuff that you have to, like, tick boxes to be eligible for and either I'm not unwell enough or I'm too unwell ... it's been like that forever."

(Young Person 12)

One young person described this as a "million paper cuts" – meaning that each time that they were turned away from, let down by, or had their experiences minimised by a service, practitioner, or other adult, this left a mark which grew more painful with each successive cut.

"... if you got one paper cut ... it's going to hurt a little bit, but if you got a million paper cuts all over your body, it's going to hurt, you're going to notice ... so a lot of things ended up just adding up and piling on, and it definitely made me lose a lot of hope."

(Young Person 17)

The financial burden of accessing private mental health care, combined with long waitlists and complex administrative processes, further marginalised many young people.

"... it's like that financial kind of obligation was very difficult for a while. So, I didn't access any mental health services, or I didn't really see a GP until something got really bad."

(Young Person 17)

"I want to kind of look into seeing a psychologist. But I know for that ... I have to go to the doctors, get a mental health plan, and then I just don't know with psychologists, like, researching them and then calling them and, like, getting on the wait list. So, I wish that was, like, a bit more easily accessible somehow."

(Young Person 11)

Despite these challenges, the research also pointed to positive experiences, with some interview participants benefitting from consistent, empathetic support from practitioners who had built strong relationships with them over time and who took a flexible approach to maintaining engagement.

"... my psychologist checked in with me nearly every day if he could; if he had any gap, he'd call me, check on how I was doing. It was just amazing, especially at that point where I was very paranoid, and I was hearing voices and seeing things because of all the stress and all the cortisol levels in my brain ..."

(Young Person 17)

Ultimately, young people emphasised the therapeutic value of having their experiences of harm, and subsequent mental health concerns, listened to and heard.

Using their experiences to help others

A feature of this research is the empathy and hope for positive change exemplified by the participating young people. A significant number were, and continue to be, actively engaged in advocacy, sharing their stories on local and national platforms to push for better responses. Many young people are also drawing on their own experiences to directly support other young people as Peer Support Workers.

"One day when I have all my shit together and I'm older and I've sorted my life out I'd love to come back and try and do this sort of work, what these people here [are] doing for me ..."

(Young Person 12)

Young people who participated in the research described protecting children, siblings and other family members experiencing violence; referring other young people to services where they had experienced positive outcomes; and letting more 'in-need' young people take crisis accommodation placements.

"... I was going to the station ... [and saw] someone homeless there and I was just like, 'just go get help... I've been in this situation' ..."

(Young Person 2)

Their concern and empathy for others also shone through many of the system reflections that they shared through this research – with multiple young people acknowledging the ways in which their capacity to self-advocate, or the limited formal and informal supports available to them, meant that they navigated the system with a degree of privilege that not all young people had. To this point, young people consistently turned their minds to the barriers which other young people might face, putting forward solutions that would not only have benefitted them, but would result in a more accessible and inclusive system for all unaccompanied young people.

"... because I have been, like, so proactive I do feel like I have had that agency. But I feel like for other people maybe who are in the same position as me, I don't feel like they would have been listened to enough ..."

(Young Person 11)

The knowledge and lived experience of young people who have moved through these systems is a critical element of any future efforts at system reform.

Building a better service response

Although the research identified promising practice across a range of service settings, it ultimately pointed to a system response that regularly excludes, whether actively or inadvertently, unaccompanied young people seeking safety and shelter and fails to meet their needs.

It also found, however, that young people and the practitioners working purposefully alongside them have a clear vision of what an improved system response might involve.

The recommendations set out below outline an ambitious but necessary program of work that aims to improve capacity across the system to identify, assess and respond to unaccompanied young people's unique and layered risk profiles; address critical system gaps; and actively scaffold and streamline young people's interactions with the service system.

Consistent with the fourth domain of the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022 – 2032, the recommendations also seek to re-orient the current system from a crisis-focused model to one that supports young people to establish the foundations of genuine healing and recovery.

Finally, the recommendations seek to embed opportunities for young people with lived (and living) experience to inform system design, policy development and research in a meaningful way, with further context and direction on how the recommendations can shape an improved system response are included at section 6 of the full report. Demonstrated through the rich, insightful and generous contributions of young people throughout this research, improving the system response must always be guided by the principle of working with young people and not for them. As one of the Lived Experience Advisers commented, "the only way to create positive change is for brave people to continue to share their stories and for organisations to value lived experience". This research demonstrates the negative consequences that arise when young people are excluded from the decisions that impact them, at both the personal and systems level. It also demonstrates that the visions for an improved system from the research participants and Lived Experience Advisers – visions which are both deeply personal and represent a generous offering – should be heard, developed and ultimately realised.
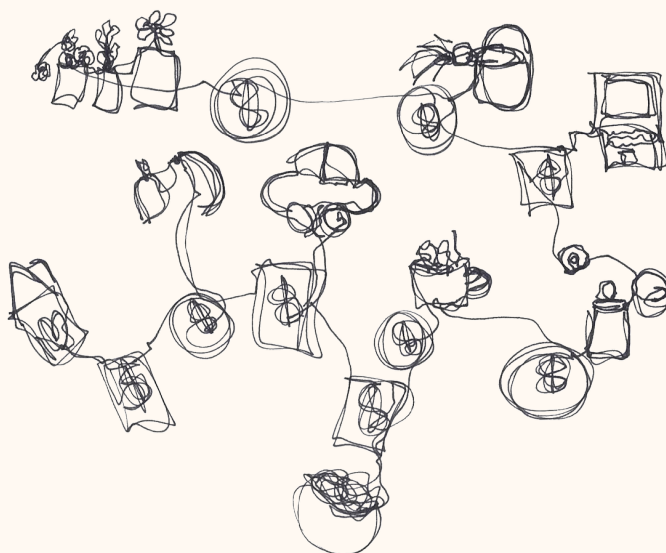
Recommendations

1. Build system capability to identify, assess and respond appropriately to young people's experiences of family violence, including where they are not accompanied by a protective parent.

2. Undertake work to improve understanding and address key gaps and barriers across non-family violence sectors where unaccompanied young people are likely to present.

3. Collaborate with Commonwealth agencies to **improve access to financial assistance measures** and entitlements for unaccompanied young people.

4. Acknowledging possible funding constraints, prioritise investment in and expansion of **access to youth-specific housing options**, including by developing a strategy to remove young people's financial barriers to accessing social housing.

5. Address the critical gap in formal trauma recovery and mental health and wellbeing support for unaccompanied young people.

6. Roll-out a state-wide, **youth-specific family violence case management** program that can respond to young people in developmentally appropriate and family violence risk-informed informed ways, including those who present unaccompanied.

7. Develop state-wide guidelines on parental consent for all services working with unaccompanied young people, including The Orange Door network.

8. Where funding limitations allow, reduce the reliance on inappropriate 'crisis' accommodation and **invest in medium-term accommodation options** that provide young people with a more stable, safe and supported base.

9. Reduce legal barriers to accessing housing, including through the development and funding of integrated legal practice service models which can support young people with intersecting experiences of family violence and homelessness to access and maintain housing.

10. Develop and maintain a resource to support young people with intersecting experiences of family violence and homelessness to understand their experiences and connect with relevant services.

11. Embed a genuine focus on working with young people, not for them, across all relevant family violence reforms.

12. Invite the Commission for Children and Young People to **monitor and report on efforts to improve service responses** to unaccompanied young people.
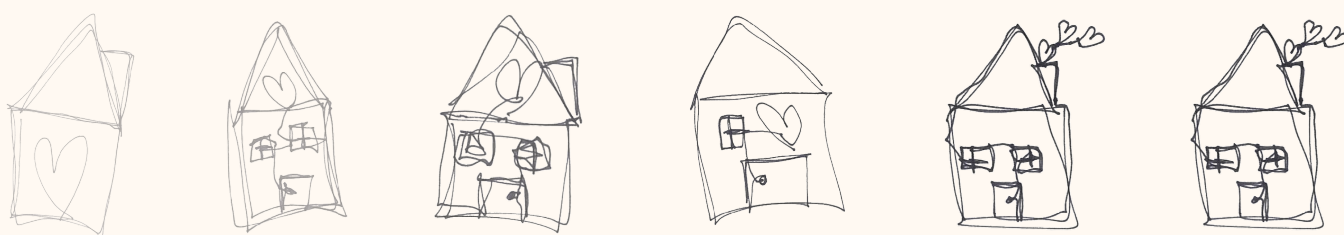
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