



F

FRONT
YARD

YOUTH SERVICES

WE'RE NOT SO DIFFERENT

Youth Homelessness in Melbourne

RESOURCE & EDUCATION BOOKLET



Australian Government



mcm.
melbourne city mission
your future, your way



Contents

This is my life	7
Sally's Story	8
We all deserve a safe home	10
What is homelessness?	11
How many people are homeless in Australia?	11
Youth Homelessness – A Hidden Problem?	12
What are the main causes of youth homelessness?	13
Family Breakdown	14
Pathway to Youth Homelessness	15
What is Out of Home Care?	16
As soon as I turned 18, I became homeless. - A Personal Journey	17
Couch Surfing	18
Lack of safe housing options	19
I felt alone and vulnerable. - A Personal Story.....	20
What accommodation options are available for people who are homeless?.....	22
What might it be like to be experiencing homelessness?	23
What help exists for a young person experiencing homelessness	25
What should a young person expect on their first visit to Frontyard?.....	25
Who is MCM?.....	26
How does MCM support young people experiencing homelessness?	27
All services at Frontyard Youth Services are FREE.....	28
Frontyard – a one-stop-shop	30
Healthy body, healthy mind.....	31
The importance of education	33
My journey of growth.....	35
The role of trauma.....	38
Health.....	40
Ling's Story.....	43
Can't they just get a job?	46
Youth Engagement	47
Homelessness isn't a choice - A Personal Story.....	49
How do young people get out of homelessness? Are there many success stories?	50
Fundraising ideas for your class	51
We can all make a difference.....	52
Yes, my school will help young people experiencing homelessness	53
What would help reduce youth homelessness?.....	54
Take home messages about youth homelessness.....	55
How is Shane doing now?.....	56
Did Sally's situation improve?.....	57
Commonly asked questions.....	58
What can I read to find out more?.....	60
Acknowledgements.....	61

Introduction

As Victoria's leading youth homelessness service, MCM's Frontyard Youth Services is pleased to provide this resource to give teachers and students a better understanding of homelessness and a greater appreciation of the many challenges faced by young people.

Through real life examples, this document provides useful information on the causes, impacts and solutions to youth homelessness. It also aims to improve the level of social awareness amongst students and encourage a greater sense of community engagement.

The document is designed to complement education sessions run by MCM for thousands of students each year, allowing for a type of learning that encourages reflection upon how they can make a difference to the lives of others.

Any queries about Frontyard's School Engagement Program can be directed to:

Frontyard Youth Services

03 9977 0077

frontyard@mcm.org.au

“OVER TIME HE BECAME MORE ABUSIVE TOWARDS ME. I'D OFTEN HAVE CUTS OR BRUISES ON MY BODY THAT I WOULD TRY TO COVER UP BY WEARING LONG SLEEVES OR PRETENDING I'D HURT MYSELF WHILE PLAYING FOOTBALL WITH MATES.”

Shane*, 17. Homeless due to family breakdown.

*names have been changed to protect identities.



THIS IS MY LIFE...

Dad left home when I was really little so I never really knew him. I didn't have any contact with him after I was four and I lived with my mum instead. When I was 9 years old Mum moved in with her new boyfriend. He wasn't a very nice man, always angry and mean to me and he would always come home from work and take out his anger on me. He was nice enough to my mother but seemed to hate me.

Over time he became more abusive towards me. I'd often have cuts or bruises on my body that I would try to cover up by wearing long sleeves or pretending I'd hurt myself while playing football with mates. It was noticed one day at school that I had bruises over my body and not too long after that, Mum's boyfriend stopped living in our home and it was just the two of us again.

Over the next couple of years mum became really unwell and would stay in bed all day long. She seemed to stop caring about everything. After a while doctors said she had depression and anxiety.

During this time I pretty much looked after myself. I would eat whatever was in the fridge and get myself to school

each day. I did my best to take care of myself but my school work started to suffer. I found it hard to focus on what the teachers were saying and eventually I dropped out thinking I would be better off getting a job.

Mum was not happy I had dropped out of school, in fact she was really angry. We started having really intense arguments. She would scream at me and blame me for how bad she was feeling. I felt like I was contributing to her problems so I started staying at a friend's house to avoid having to deal with her. I would just crash on my mates couch and during the day I would try to find work. After a while, I had to move on from his place as his parents didn't want me there any longer.

I thought I would find a job and a place to live really easily but it turned out to be much harder than I thought. I didn't feel I could return to mum's place so I started staying with a different person every night until I eventually ran out of places to stay. Some of my belongings got stolen while couch surfing and I had no money to live on so someone recommended I go into Frontyard Youth Services to get help.

Shane, 17.
Homeless due to
family breakdown.

“I NEVER CONFIDED IN MY DAD ABOUT WHAT WAS REALLY GOING ON IN MY LIFE AS I DIDN'T FEEL LIKE HE WOULD UNDERSTAND.”

Sally, 16.
Homeless due to
family breakdown.

SALLY'S STORY

My Dad and I were always close. Mum passed away when I was 7 years old and I didn't have any brothers or sisters' therefore it was the two of us for a really long time.

I quite liked going to school in primary school and had a good group of friends that I always hung around with but midway through secondary school things started to change. Friends started to spread rumours about me that were really nasty and untrue. I couldn't understand why they did this but soon enough nobody at school wanted to be seen hanging around with me anymore.

As each day went by things got worse and despite trying to reason with my old friends nothing changed. I tried to pretend that it didn't bother me but going to school every day became a horrible experience that I dreaded. I started missing days at school by pretending to be sick and when that didn't work I would just not turn up and instead go down to the beach and waste some time.

It was during this time that I started to self-harm by cutting myself. I would do this at times when I felt really stressed and anxious. I knew it wasn't a good thing to do and I was really embarrassed that people might find out but I just felt completely overwhelmed. I became really withdrawn and angry and eventually I simply refused to go to school.

My relationship with Dad started to change around this time. He was always unhappy with me and it became so bad at home that every time we had contact it would turn into a screaming match.

I never confided in my Dad about what was really going on in my life as I didn't feel like he would understand. The only person I had to talk to was my boyfriend who was very supportive of me however my Dad really disliked him because he thought he was a bad influence. At the end of Year 10 I decided to leave school and look for a course that I could study instead. My Dad hit the roof when he heard about my plans and we had a huge fight, he told me if I didn't want to follow the rules under his own roof then I could find somewhere else to live. I said some really awful, hurtful things to him before walking out of the house.

My boyfriend's mum let me stay at her house on the condition that I try to work out my problems with Dad. She gave me the phone number of Frontyard Youth Services and recommended I contact them to find out what help might be available.





“Having all your worldly possessions fitting into a backpack, fearing for your safety, not knowing when your next meal, or opportunity to sleep or shower will be... all of these can be really overwhelming. Can you imagine how that would feel?”

Quote from 21 year old male

We all deserve a safe home...

Youth homelessness in Australia has continued to grow in recent years and yet it remains a problem largely invisible to the wider community. While some young people are sleeping rough, many others are ‘couch surfing’ or having to rely on crisis accommodation or rooming houses and their plight is often hidden from view.

The young people seeking support from Frontyard Youth Services face enormous challenges with a wide range of issues from family conflict, violence, mental health, substance abuse and financial stress. Each of these issues can exacerbate the difficulties in obtaining affordable housing and living independently without the support of family.

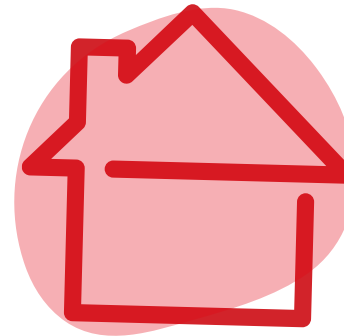
It is important to remember that young people experiencing homelessness have just as many hopes, dreams and aspirations as any other young person

but may not be fortunate enough to have as many opportunities. The work Frontyard undertakes on a daily basis seeks to rectify this by providing pathways that lead away from homelessness.

Recent findings from the Cost of Youth Homelessness in Australia project has shown that preventing young people from becoming homeless by strengthening and integrating school and youth services at a community level could save an estimated \$626 million per year¹ across the youth justice and health services systems alone. The cost to the general community, just from increased interactions with the health and criminal justice systems for young people experiencing homelessness, exceeds the total annual cost of all homelessness services across Australia for people of all ages.

1. Thielking, M., Flatau, P., La Sala, and Sutton, D., (2015)

WHAT IS HOMELESSNESS?



Homelessness in Australia is often referred to as a ‘three layered situation’² but what does this mean?

Homelessness is defined as “a state of non-permanent accommodation or accommodation that falls far below minimum community expectations.”

1. **Primary homelessness** is the definition applied to those without conventional accommodation – this could mean ‘sleeping rough’ (under a bridge or on a park bench) or living in a car.
2. **Secondary homelessness** is defined as when people move frequently from one place to another, such as ‘couch-surfing’ at friends’ houses or staying in a refuge.
3. **Tertiary homelessness** is defined as when people have accommodation but it is considered unstable, such as living in a caravan park or rooming house.

How many people are homeless in Australia?

Accurately estimating how many individuals may be experiencing homelessness is difficult. In the 2016 national Census:

- 116,427 people were estimated to be experiencing homelessness.
- 20% of Australia’s homeless population live in Victoria
- On Census night 58% experiencing homelessness were male and 42% were female.
- Despite Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders only accounting for 2.8% of the Australian population in 2016, they accounted for 22% of all persons that were homeless
- 39% of those captured as homeless on census night were under 25 years old.

The national rate of homelessness has gone up by about 14 per cent since 2006.

State/Territory	Estimated Homeless
Victoria	24,817
Australian Capital Territory	1,596
New South Wales	37,715
Northern Territory	13,717
Queensland	21,671
South Australia	6,224
Tasmania	1,622
Western Australia	9,005

2. Chamberlain, C and Mackenzie, D (2003)

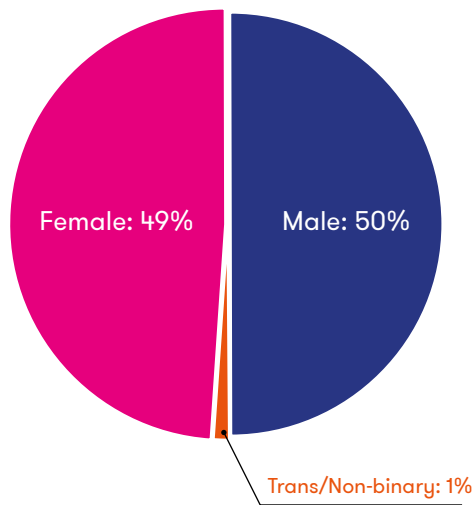
3. Homeless Australia, the national peak body advocating for people experiencing homelessness in Australia homelessnessaustralia.org.au/site/about.php

YOUTH HOMELESSNESS – A HIDDEN PROBLEM

The image of the ‘rough sleeper’ is so prevalent in the portrayal of homelessness that many people who are couch surfing often don’t reach out to get the support they deserve. Young people often think because they aren’t on the street, they aren’t homeless.

Only 7% of those experiencing homelessness sleep rough. Rough sleepers are merely the tip of the iceberg. The remaining 93% are less visible to the wider community because individuals may be temporarily staying in emergency accommodation, dwellings that fall well below minimum community standards or couch surfing.

A whopping 39% of the Victorians counted as homeless on Census night were under 25 years of age. It is this section of the community Frontyard Youth Services is designed to support.



“When you’re homeless it’s like you’re invisible, it’s like you don’t even exist, I reckon I could vanish and no-one would notice, no one would even care.”
 - Quote from 21 year old male having to sleep rough

WHAT ARE THE MAIN CAUSES OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS?


There are many reasons why young people experience homelessness, or become at risk of homelessness.⁶

These reasons can include:

- Family breakdown
- Violence
- Family forced into homelessness following a crisis

Other Contributing Factors Include:

- Unemployment and poverty
- Lack of affordable housing
- Lack of sufficient income
- Lack of support in leaving state care
- Transitioning to adult employment and education services
- Mental health issues
- Alcohol or other drug issues



65% of young women presenting to Frontyard have experienced family or domestic violence



45% of young men presenting to Frontyard have experienced family or domestic violence

4. City of Melbourne (2016) StreetCount
 5. Census 2011, Published by Australian Bureau of Statistics visit <http://www.abs.gov.au/>

6. Council to Homeless Persons 2010 www.chp.org.au

FAMILY BREAKDOWN

Young people are forced into homelessness for a range of reasons however the common factor is family breakdown. Family breakdown covers not simply abuse or violence but also conflict in the home.

This conflict can be due to alcohol or drug problems within the family, rejection when a parent re-partners, pregnancy and sexual preference or the declining health or mental health in the young person or their parents.

For some people in Australia, the family home is not a safe place. There can be physical, verbal, emotional, and sexual violence happening in their house.

For many young people, their natural survival instincts kick in and they look for somewhere safer. Other young people are forced to leave after being kicked out or threatened by a family member.

One young person said:

“



“My mother had been physically and psychologically abusive towards me on a regular basis from the age of 4 till 16 and would often kick me out for hours at a time. I never took this seriously and would just wait outside until one day I had enough and did not return”.

- Quote from 19 year old female.

”

For young people couch surfing or sleeping on the streets, their family home is often so unbearable that a random couch or city laneway may appear safer to them.

Homelessness can affect everyone, not just people from a lower socio-economic background, which is often assumed. Violence can occur in any household and force any young person to seek safer accommodation. The difference, it seems, is simply that people from lower socio-economic backgrounds may run out of resources and options faster than those from better financially resourced families.

Did you know: you don't need to wait for things to become unbearable at home before asking for help? If you are feeling overwhelmed and thinking about leaving home there is help available. Early intervention programs such as the Gateway Reconnect program can help you by working with you to strengthen family relationships.

PATHWAYS TO YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

REASON	Conflict with family rules (youth dissenters)	Traumatic childhood experiences (youth escapers)
PROCESS OF BECOMING HOMELESS	<p>Leave home due to perceived excessive parental control and escalated relationship tensions</p> <p>Young person's emerging identity comes into conflict with, or leads to, rejection of family rules and values</p> <p>Often characterised by 'in and out' behaviour - staying nights with friends after a fight etc., eventually given an ultimatum</p>	<p>Experience abuse or neglect in childhood home</p> <p>Pre-homelessness life is chaotic and violent; transition to homelessness is relatively seamless and often experienced as an improvement in safety</p> <p>Parents with mental illness or problematic drug use; housing instability; episodes of foster care; family home a place of danger and drama</p> <p>Disruptions to schooling - contrast between traumatic homelife and normal school too much to bear; isolation and stigmatisation</p> <p>Identity is formed in violent, abusive, neglectful situations - unable to reconcile with mainstream pathways and identities</p>
CHALLENGES	<p>Family rules and parental control</p> <p>Cross-cultural differences</p> <p>Stigma of homelessness</p>	<p>Trauma of physical and/or psychological abuse</p> <p>Stigma of dysfunctional family background</p> <p>Disrupted education and poor labour market position</p> <p>Experiences of child protection system including foster care - mistrust of mainstream services systems</p>
RESOURCES	<p>Family and social relationships</p> <p>Connectedness to mainstream social and cultural institutions especially school</p> <p>Family responsibilities provide strong motivation/incentive to resist homelessness</p>	<p>Strong personal resilience and street survival skills</p>

7. Johnson, G., Cronda, H., & Coutts, S. (2008) On the outside: pathways in and out of homelessness. Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing.

WHAT IS OUT OF HOME CARE?



Out of Home Care or State Care refers to the care of children and young people up to the age of 18 years who are unable to live with their families (often due to child abuse and neglect). It involves the placement of a child or young person with alternative caregivers on a short or long term basis.

State Care currently ends at 'adulthood' age 18. For those living in care the expectation is for them not only to move out of their State Care home but for them to have the necessary skills to live independently.

Young people leaving State Care are at great risk of homelessness. Many, who are required to leave their Care setting at 18 years, become homeless, involved with the criminal justice system, unemployed or a new parent within the first 12 months of being exited from Care. The termination of Care by State Governments at 18 years is not consistent with parenting that is seeing most young people remain home well into their 20's.

MCM believes that extending the leaving Care age to 21 years will give young people a much greater chance of successfully transitioning to independence. Over 100 organisations across Australia are currently working to make this a reality through the Home Stretch campaign.

We want to see young people exiting state Care and thriving, not just surviving. We don't want any more 18 year olds on our doorstep, homeless, because their time in State Care is up.



AS SOON AS I TURNED 18, I BECAME HOMELESS. A PERSONAL JOURNEY

- [A member of Frontyard's Youth Advisory Committee]

My lived experience of homelessness began when I went into DHHS (Department of Health and Human Services) care at the age of one. Both my parents were drug addicted and violent, and therefore, I was in and out of foster care for a number of years until age six, never really having a place to call 'home'.

My foster care experience was extremely traumatic. I was placed with several different foster families throughout the years and didn't manage to build relationships anywhere. At the age of six, I was placed back into the care of my Dad. However, at the age of 8, my Mother suicided and I was put back into the foster care system. I tried to make it work this time around, but I just couldn't handle the system anymore, so at the age of 14, I ran away from my foster family due to countless instances of abuse. I began to couch surf between friends' houses for 6-12 months. At age 15, I was put back into foster care for another 12 months until age 16, where I was placed into residential care with my sister, until the age of 18. Unfortunately, young people are only eligible to access the care system up until the age of 18.

The 'Home Stretch' campaign is a current national campaign advocating for change to the current leaving arrangements for young people, which will extend leaving care from the age of 18 until 21 years. As soon as I turned 18, I basically became homeless overnight. When I finally went into transitional housing, I moved in with a young girl where I felt extremely unsafe. She was going through a lot of mental health issues of her own and there were several occasions where she put me in really uncomfortable situations.

During the time of living in transitional housing, I met a guy and we got into a pretty serious relationship. He was from Turkey and together we moved overseas to Istanbul for six months. This was a really cool experience for me because it gave me the opportunity to travel, but I was also in a relationship with someone who had money and gave me the chance to get out of the homelessness cycle. I was really excited about this opportunity because I ended up being able to travel for the first time in my life but unfortunately, the relationship broke down and I had to fly back to Australia.

When I arrived back in Australia, I ended up being homeless once again. I was in and out of refuges, such as Stopover, Hanover and WAYSS for two years and it felt like it would be impossible to get out of the cycle. At the age of 21, I obtained my own apartment through Office of Housing and have sustained this tenancy today. Homelessness isn't a choice. If I didn't have the support from case workers, teachers, and friends, I wouldn't be where I am today. The most significant change in my narrative happened when a TAFE teacher told me that she noticed potential in me that I didn't see in myself. She told me that she saw my struggles, but she also identified my strengths and told me that I would make a difference one day. From that day, I have worked to change my life around. Her words are always at the back of my mind. This teacher saw me and changed my whole life. Deep down, I knew I wanted to be different than my parents were and she made me realise that I could do so much more for myself.



“

“Cause I couldn’t be at home with my mum I crashed on my friends couch, that lasted a little while and wasn’t too bad but then I got asked to move on and I didn’t want to be a burden to my mate cause he’d been good to me and helped me out so I left and ended up with nowhere to go. I slept in a park for a few nights until someone told me about Frontyard”

- Quote from 19 year old male

”

COUCH SURFING

Did you know: Couch surfing is a form of homelessness.

Although in recent times homelessness has become more visible on the streets of Melbourne, to the wider community youth homelessness remains largely invisible. In part, this can be attributed to people not realising that couch surfing is not only a form of homelessness but also the most common form experienced by young people.

What is couch surfing? Couch surfing is typified as a person staying temporarily in a series of other people’s homes and making use of improvised sleeping arrangements.

Young people often couch surf when they no longer feel safe at home. While sleeping on someone’s couch may provide a roof over their head, their resting place does not necessarily provide a safe, secure and stable environment.

At first these sleeping arrangements may not seem too awful but as time goes by the novelty begins to wear off, friendships

can become strained and suddenly couch surfing can be the start of a slippery slope that leads to further disengagement and more serious circumstances.

Many young people will first experience couch surfing while still at school, often without realising there is support available. It’s important to remember that it’s not necessary to be living on the streets before you reach out for help. You don’t need to wait for your problems to become unbearable before seeking support. The earlier you reach out for help the better chance you have of avoiding more serious, longer term problems.

If you or a friend is experiencing difficulties at home, help can be sought by calling Frontyard Youth Services Freecall number 1800 800 531.

Young people don’t ‘choose’ to remain homeless and risk their safety, wellbeing, or livelihood, they simply don’t have access to adequate resources and supports that enable progression into independence.



LACK OF SAFE HOUSING OPTIONS...

72% of young people presenting at Frontyard **require assistance with housing.**

40% of young people presenting at Frontyard **had nowhere to stay that night.**

For young people entering the homelessness system, the key referral pathway is into the youth refuge system that is designed to provide temporary emergency accommodation.

Frontyard has more than 200 requests per fortnight from young people with nowhere to sleep. There are 17 youth refuges across metropolitan Melbourne. Four of these are run by MCM and two are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific. Demand for these beds vastly exceeds supply – the current turn-away rate is around 66%.

- Only 144 beds exist in youth refuges, with 15 dedicated to those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent.
- But 6,408 young people in Victoria are homeless.

Without the option of a youth refuge bed, if a young person is not able to safely return home or draw on their personal networks to find emergency shelter, the alternative accommodation options are cheap motels and backpacker accommodation. These are neither a sustainable [long-term] option nor a safe option for young people (although they are marginally safer than sleeping rough).



I FELT ALONE AND VULNERABLE - A PERSONAL STORY

- (A member of Frontyard's Youth Advisory Committee)

I am 22 years old and a trans woman. I first became homeless when I was 18 years old because I got exited from the State Care system and I have been homeless on and off since then for the past 4 years. My experience within the care system wasn't the best and I didn't get set up with the life skills I needed or informed about services that I could go to. For me, I haven't been able to go home since I was 15 so it's not as easy as 'just going home'. My only option was to sleep rough.

Sleeping rough as a transwoman:

Sleeping rough as a trans woman affected me severely because I felt alone and very vulnerable. A lot of the time I couldn't trust people because to me people didn't have a good record of treating trans people with respect and dignity. I almost always got mis-gendered even if I told the person I was talking to that I am a trans woman because they didn't believe me. I didn't shave most of the time not only because shaving irritates my skin, but also for my safety. There isn't really a specific space for homeless LGBTQIA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex and Asexual or Allied) people. Frontyard Youth Services tries their best to help us feel safe and included but not all people see us as humans. Not being acknowledged and treated like we don't exist is extremely hurtful and harmful to our mental health.

How homelessness effects mental health:

Homelessness messed up my mental health pretty badly. I wanted to kill myself every other day because I couldn't see the light at the end of the tunnel. My anger really came out when I didn't receive somewhere safe to

sleep for a night or two, I knew I shouldn't have gotten angry at the staff as it wasn't their fault. The lack of funding doesn't just affect LGBTQIA+ people but for other people too. The amount of homelessness is ridiculous.

The need for more funds towards crisis accommodation:

Did you know that there are thousands of young people who are currently homeless and that there is roughly around 144 beds in refuges, but not all of those beds are available every day. The more funding MCM gets, the more homeless young people they can get off the streets and out of hotels and off peoples couches. Not only will they renovate existing refuges with the money they get at Sleep At The 'G, they will also build new purpose built refuges.

My personal suggestions are:

- Longer term supported accommodation
- Refuges for young families
- Refuges for young women
- More refuges in general
- Renovate current refuges

Changing people's attitudes to homeless people will help encourage us to actually seek the help we need instead of just trying to hide ourselves from non-homeless people such as yourselves. Try not to lift your noses in a disrespectful way, but get to know us and understand us. We are not evil people nor are we animals.

WHAT ACCOMMODATION OPTIONS ARE AVAILABLE FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS?



For those unable to safely live in the family home there are very limited safe, affordable housing options available.



Youth Refuge

A referral may be made by Frontyard to a Youth Refuge which provides emergency housing where young people are assisted with a place to stay for a short period. During the stay, young people are allocated a support worker who works with them to return home if it is safe to do so or find more stable, long term accommodation such as shared housing. Support staff are on site 24/7.

Limitations:

- Only a short-term solution with stays limited to 6 weeks
- There are only a total of 17 youth refuges with 2 dedicated to those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island descent
- 144 (15 Aboriginal/TSI-dedicated) beds in Victoria in contrast with over 6,000 young people homeless in Victoria



Rooming House

These places have a communal kitchen, laundry and shared toilet and shower facilities. The rooms (often shared with other people) as a rule have a small fridge, bedding, a few bits of furniture and if you're lucky a TV.

Limitations:

- Often substandard dwellings with poor living conditions
- Young people can be very vulnerable living alongside older residents with drug/alcohol issues or mental health issues
- Possessions often get stolen, can be places where drugs are dealt
- It can be expensive and may eat up most of a person's income.



Private Rental

Getting into the private rental market can provide young people with longer term, stable accommodation however there is a lot of competition for properties within the community.

Limitations:

- Difficult to obtain when you have no rental history to prove you would be a reliable tenant
- Affordable options can be hard to find and are often in more isolated locations that offer fewer supports
- Landlords looking for tenants who are stable, trustworthy and employed.

“



“In today's rental market finding a place that's cheap doesn't happen very often. Then there is the first month's rent, gas and electricity connection and the added expenses of obtaining furniture, plates and cutlery. If someone can get all of this together then a lack of references will usually stop approval going through”.

- Quote from 19 year old female

”



WHAT MIGHT IT FEEL LIKE TO BE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS?

Homelessness can severely impact a person's perceptions of themselves, especially their self-confidence and self-worth. Simply needing to visit a support service such as Frontyard can raise all sorts of strong emotions in a young person, especially considering the negative stigma homelessness has attached to it. For young people presenting at Frontyard, staff often witness young people:

- Turning up very upset/in tears, feeling overwhelmed with despair
- Feeling angry and frustrated
- Blaming themselves for things out of their control
- Feeling intimidated and fearful of the unknown
- Experiencing all of the above

For those experiencing homelessness, it can be isolating and you may feel misunderstood.

Feelings of failure

“I had a traineeship that I got all by myself and held on to for a few months, all while I was homeless. But in the end, I just couldn't maintain the job and deal with my problems at the same time. I felt like a total failure that I couldn't keep that job, I tried really hard but I couldn't make it work. It seemed to confirm what so many people thought of me – I was a loser.”

Ostracised by society

“All my old friends, the ones who still lived with their family and were at school, just stopped having anything to do with me. It was like they thought maybe my problems were contagious or something so they just stopped hanging out with me – it made me feel like I was dirt.”

Stigmatised

“People make certain assumptions about you when they find out you're homeless. They just presume you're a junkie or you're somehow dangerous to be around – that doesn't describe me but I get lumped in with that group.”

Feeling invisible

“People just sort of look right through you, I don't know if it's because they don't care or if they honestly don't notice you, but it does make it pretty clear you really don't matter at all – you've got nothing worthwhile to contribute.”

- When asked to describe how they felt **while experiencing homelessness** young people provided the below descriptive words

INSIGNIFICANT DEGRADED
 HUMILIATED INDEPENDENT
 WORRIED ISOLATED
 EMBARRASSED DEHUMANISED
 DEPRESSED STARVING
 REJECTED DESPAIR SAD ANXIOUS SORROW
 SCARED LONELY ANGRY
 ALONE STRESSED
 GUILTY UNLOVED UNVISIBLE DIRTY JUDGED
 DEHUMANISED UNLOVED LOST ASHAMED
 AWFUL INSECURE
 NERVOUS DISCONNECTED
 AFRAID DESPERATE
 DISAPPOINTED UNSAFE
 WORTHLESS

WHAT HELP EXISTS FOR A YOUNG PERSON EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS?



For more than 30 years, Frontyard Youth Services has been at the forefront of innovative responses to youth homelessness. It is a specialist youth service, located in Melbourne's CBD, providing a range of programs that meet the physical, emotional and social needs of young people at risk or experiencing homelessness.

Frontyard is unique in the support it's able to offer to young people because of its co-located, collaborative approach. Often when a person becomes homeless they need to seek help from several services and those services may be located in disparate places making it hard to access. Frontyard has the benefit of being a 'one-stop-shop' with multiple services all located in the one building and working together to develop pathways out of homelessness.

Many professionals from different disciplines work onsite to provide holistic assistance to young people.

Some of the services we provide include:

- Housing support
- Case management
- Food and cooking programs
- Showers and laundry
- Family mediation
- Centrelink access
- Healthcare
- Links to training and education
- Legal Support
- And many others

Frontyard often acts as a safety net for young people who have exhausted all other options.

What should a young person expect on their first visit to Frontyard?

They should expect to feel welcomed and safe in the space, we work really hard to put people at ease and ensure they are familiar with how Frontyard can help them.

A worker will ask about what sort of help they are looking for and will chat about how they can access support at Frontyard. They will ask some questions to get a

better idea about their current situation and depending on their needs, a referral will be made to services in the building.

While they are waiting to be seen by those services young people are encouraged to get involved and take advantage of any of our engagement programs that are running ie: cooking, music therapy etc.

WHO IS MELBOURNE CITY MISSION?



Established in 1854, MCM has been around for almost as long as Melbourne itself. Now with over 800 staff and more than 300 volunteers we deliver over 90 community programs each week and work with Victoria's most vulnerable individuals, families and communities. These are the areas we deliver services in:

Homelessness Services: we find that there is no single face to the story of homelessness. Our role is to meet the needs of each individual and provide a service that helps them break out of homelessness.

Family and Community Services: we provide support to children, families and members of the community, working closely to tailor services to each individual's circumstance.

Disability Services: we have led the way within the disability sector in the development of new and innovative programs as a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) provider offering support to people living with disability, mental illness or developmental delay.

Early Childhood Intervention Services: as an NDIS provider, we offer specialist support for families with children with developmental difficulties.

Early Years: MCM runs two early years centres, offering childcare, kindergarten and additional services for young families.

Education: The Hester Hornbrook Academy is an independent school operated by MCM to deliver evidence-based, flexible learning options for students who have become disengaged from traditional schooling.

Justice Programs: we support people exiting prison, to assist them with getting back into work and rejoining the community, to work towards a positive and fulfilling future.

Palliative Care: a specialised area of health care that gives practical and emotional support to people who have a terminal illness. We ensure dignity, comfort and quality of life in the final stages of life.

MCM's vision is to create a fair and just community where people have equal access to opportunities and resources.

One of MCM's programs is Frontyard Youth Services (Frontyard), working with those between 12 & 25 experiencing or at risk of homelessness to address their physical, social and emotional needs.



HOW DOES MCM SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS?

There are many services at Frontyard, including:

Melbourne Youth Support Services (MYSS) is a state-wide Youth Access Point providing drop-in and telephone information and referral services for young people at risk of homelessness, providing information regarding crisis accommodation, drug and alcohol programs, mental health services and living skills.

Intensive Support Work (ISW) provides short-term intensive case management for young people who require holistic outreach support to achieve their goals.

The Youth Action Group (YAG) is a group of emerging young leaders who are passionate about raising the profile of young people in Melbourne. Over the course of the year they create and deliver campaigns that champion the voice of Melbourne youth, and the issues that they care about.

Youthlaw provides free legal information, advice and support to young people. Youthlaw workers are available in person, over the phone or even via Skype.

Family Reconciliation Mediation Program (FRMP) supports young people to improve their relationship with their family/significant others (if appropriate) through interventions such as family mediation and individual counselling and brokerage.

Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA) is an allowance from the Australian Government that helps young people make a successful transition from out-of-home care (formal care) to independent living and assists to achieve stability through enhanced engagement in education, employment, training and community life.

Young People's Health Service (YPHS) is the only primary healthcare service that specifically works with young people who are experiencing homelessness and/or marginalisation. A free service including all areas of health-nurses, counsellors, doctors and other health staff provide assessment, treatment, information and referral as needed.

Young Women's Crisis Service provides intensive crisis support for young women aged 16 to 24 and their children. Outreach team also supports young women in a number of transitional properties.

Music Therapy helps young people express their emotions, feel engaged and improve their mental health and wellbeing.

ALL SERVICES AT FRONTYARD YOUTH SERVICES ARE FREE

-  HOUSING
-  HEALTH & WELLBEING
-  INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT
-  FAMILY
-  MENTAL HEALTH
-  EMPLOYMENT
-  PROGRAMS & EDUCATION
-  LEGAL
-  FINANCIAL

The Young and Pregnant Parenting Program (YAPP) is a support program for young people who are pregnant and/or parenting who are at risk of or are experiencing homelessness.

The Reconnect Program works with young people and their families to provide mediation so that the young person can stay connected to their families and communities or return home.

The Department of Human Services - Centrelink provides specially trained community engagement officers who are trained to work with young people at risk and understand the issues facing them.

Check-In provides support to young people who display psychological distress and may present with challenging, at-risk, and suicidal behaviours.

Frontyard Youth Advisory Committee (FYAC) creates partnerships with young people and provides them the opportunity to voice their opinions, to influence the decisions that affect them and have their knowledge valued equally to adults and adult professionals.

Community Corporate Education provides education sessions to corporate organisations about the work of Frontyard to stir philanthropic individuals and organisations to take action to address youth homelessness.

School Engagement Program a social justice program run for Victorian Secondary Schools to raise awareness amongst students of the prevalence of youth homelessness and how to seek support.

Psychosocial Support Program is a non-therapeutic intervention for people with mental health concerns. It can assist to participate and relink with community programs, manage daily tasks, secure employment & housing and connect with family and friends.

Living Skills aims to strengthen independence by providing living skills to those who require additional support.

Life Hacks covers topics young people have identified as problematic, difficult to navigate and something they wished they had someone tell them about.

MCM and Frontyard have a number of professionals who visit regularly and offer free services including:

- Physiotherapist
- Optometrists
- Dentists
- Podiatrists
- Dieticians
- Drug & alcohol counsellors



“



“Frontyard workers try to remind us that we’re not just homeless people, but that we’re people, just like anyone else. My crappy circumstances don’t define me”.

- Quote from 20 year old female experiencing homelessness

”

Frontyard staff are able to assist via phone - the service receives over 65,000 calls for help each year.

Frontyard is based at 19 King Street, Melbourne and is open every day of the week.

If you, or anyone you know is at risk of homelessness and needs assistance, please contact:

Frontyard on
(03) 9977 0077 or
Freecall 1800 800 531
(Landlines Only)

frontyard.org.au
mcm.org.au



FRONTYARD - A ONE STOP SHOP

Young people experiencing homelessness are likely to be dealing with a range of difficulties, not just a lack of accommodation. For that reason Frontyard is holistically focused and runs programs aimed at giving each person the necessary life skills needed to move beyond homelessness.

We run many engagement programs at Frontyard, to not only equip young people with useful skills but also provide a chance for them to build rapport and trust with workers. Below is just a small sample of some of these programs.

Jobs Skills Program - Youth Workers help young people develop the necessary skills needed to source employment. Participants learn how to develop a resume and cover letter to help them secure work.

Animal Assisted Therapy - Gives young people a chance to heal some of their trauma through positive engagement with animals and reduces feelings of stress in a safe, relaxing environment.

Cooking Program - Our Youth Workers help to develop young people's cooking skills and teach them how to create healthy meals from every day ingredients.

Art Therapy - Expressing one's self artistically can help people to improve their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing as well as develop and manage their behaviour and feelings, reduce stress and improve self-esteem and awareness.

Yoga - Learn techniques to help manage stress or strong emotions, as well as increasing relaxation and physical and mental wellbeing.

HEALTHY BODY HEALTHY MIND



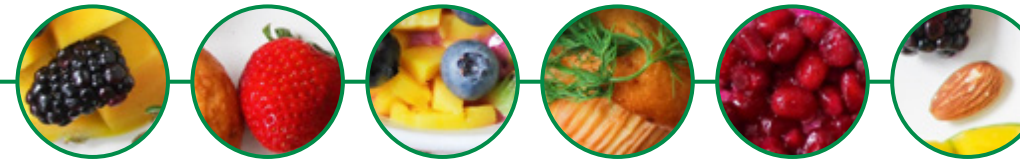
Those experiencing homelessness generally have poor diet and nutrition, and in many cases poor mental and physical health.

Significant research has shown the positive impact of physical exercise in relieving the symptoms of depression and anxiety.

The benefits of regular physical activity on the mental, physical and social health of young people can contribute towards developing better coping skills.

To assist young people to improve their knowledge and understanding of their own bodies and the positive

impact physical activity can have on their overall wellbeing, Frontyard has introduced an on-site gym area and kitchen space where life skills programs focusing on healthy, nutritional meals that are affordable and easy to prepare can be regularly run.



Wellbeing and Relaxation - Mindfulness techniques are used to deal with stress, resilience, anxiety, depression and other physical and mental illnesses.

Private Rental Workshop - Provides participants with a comprehensive knowledge base for when they are ready to explore private rental and share housing.

The Outdoor Experience (TOE) - Engages young people with alcohol and drug problems in meaningful, safe and appropriate therapeutic adventures and activities

Chillout Zone - to increase social inclusion and connection staff take young people out for activities, events and happenings as a way to introduce them to new places, engage positively with venues and services and to feel safe in these places.

Certificates have been acquired by young people in a range of areas to make them more job ready including:

- Food Handling
- Responsible Service of Alcohol
- Responsible Service of Gaming
- First Aid
- Barista
- White card
- Forklift



The Hester Hornbrook Academy offers VCAL programs in three sites around Melbourne:

- North Fitzroy
- Sunshine
- Prahan

Any enquires can be directed to:
1800 517 218 or enrolments@hhacademy.vic.gov.au
Visit our website hhacademy@vic.edu.au



THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION

THE HESTER HORN BROOK ACADEMY

Education can be a passport to employment, better health, stable housing and community connection. Young people disengage from learning for a variety of reasons including negative educational experiences, homelessness, substance abuse, physical or mental illness, family violence or a combination of these factors.

Many young people who disengage from education are keen to return but lack the confidence or are uncomfortable with the traditional learning environments. We have seen first-hand the benefits of education in helping to break the cycle of disadvantage and particularly homelessness.

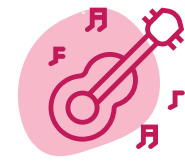
MCM has a vision to educate every young person who is disadvantaged in Melbourne. In order to move towards this vision, we have created 'The Hester Hornbrook Academy', an independent school which delivers educational programs to young people who have disengaged from traditional schooling. It brings together a network of teachers, social workers and students to form a learning community.

The Hester Hornbrook Academy offers foundation, intermediate and senior levels of VCAL and various VET at Certificate Levels 1, 2 and 3 all run in a flexible, supportive environment.



Halie, 20.
Homeless due
to eviction.

MY JOURNEY OF GROWTH



The first time I was ever at Frontyard, I was an angry teenager who had just been given an eviction notice and blamed others for the position I was in. The fact I had to go to Frontyard in the first place angered me more than anything.

As I sat waiting to be seen by the Centrelink officer, I answered the questions the staff had. As I was explaining my situation, they asked if I would like to speak to the housing team to see if they could help – being the type who hated asking for help I took a few moments to answer before I said yes. Unfortunately, because I did have a last resort, they couldn't find me a place to stay but I was given a list of places I could stay if I found myself homeless. This wasn't exactly ideal, especially during that time.

In between speaking to the housing team and waiting to see the Centrelink officer, I was approached by Asami and asked if I would like to attend the Music Therapy program they had on. I had convinced myself that I had to do whatever these strangers were asking me, so I said yes.

I had a brief meeting with the Centrelink officer, which made me more frustrated as I had waited so long; it was no fault of theirs though. I only had one question to ask, I was just at the point in the day where everything was adding to my anger.

By the time Asami came back over to tell me we were heading downstairs I was ready to cry, fighting all the emotions that I had all day long was exhausting and I couldn't think of anything worse than participating in music with more strangers. I believed I had definitely met my quota of new people for the day and just wanted to go home, but I didn't.

I remember messaging a friend mentioning I had to go to some music thing and that I couldn't think of anything worse, these thoughts continued as I stomped my way down the stairs and followed the group into the music room. We sat around a table and ended up writing up a song.

How this worked was each of us wrote one line on some paper, we all put them into a basket and then they were pulled out one by one and made into a song. I just sat back and watched as everyone sung and one guy even rapped during one part because it sounded better.

By the time the hour long session was finished I was feeling much better and glad that I decided to stay. In fact, I felt so good that I returned the following week, and pretty much every week after that. Even now almost a year later I still continue to attend every week. I missed a few weeks as I was away and I definitely noticed myself missing it.

Every week, I would be singing songs and escaping with people who were feeling similar emotions to me. For that hour and a bit, I didn't have to think about what was going on – I could stop thinking about everything else.

I don't exactly remember when but around a month after my first time there I mentioned I wanted to learn guitar. This then became one-on-one sessions with Asami who taught me to play and was always extremely patient and put up with my constant complaining about not being able to reach the C chord. Now I can safely say I'm very good at playing it. I still continue these one-on-one sessions with Asami but it has become less about learning guitar and more about sharing poems and song ideas with her in order to get help in making them into proper songs.

During the past year I have met many amazing people who attended the Music Therapy program, some of who have been there almost as long as me and others who I've only seen once or twice but will remember them and the fun we had.

A small group of us got the chance to perform at the MCM Annual Wrap staff event, where all staff from the organisation could attend.



We practiced for about two months, the same song over and over. Still to this day I have mixed feelings about that song. Performing with the same group of people, you make a bond. I remember every week we would get asked how we were feeling about the upcoming performance and my answer was always that I was feeling fine. Others were nervous and excited but I don't think it had really hit me that we were about to do this.

We got to the event and a lot of the staff from Frontyard had come to support us which helped with the overall nerves everyone had. Being able to see familiar faces. We were given a room to just hang out in during the rest of the event since we were on last; the vibes were just awesome as we had a jam session and played different songs together.

Probably about ten minutes before we were set to go on my anxiety peaked and I had to step out. While I was focusing on not bursting out in tears while having a panic attack, I had a member of the Frontyard team come up to me. It was refreshing to know that even then they were there to support me. I calmed myself enough to go back inside but was still shaking. I turned

to communicate my fears to someone who would be performing with me and whom I knew would be much better at this kind of thing than me.

I still remember he told me that he thought I was great and that he knew I could do it. He suggested finding someone in the audience that I knew and just looking at them whenever I got nervous. I chose him even though he was on the stage. Every time I looked over he would be smiling and I would immediately calm down.

Afterwards I asked if anyone could tell that I kept looking at him but I was assured that it just seemed like I was checking the sheet music. The buzz I felt afterwards was unexplainable; I never wanted the night to end.

Frontyard has given me so many amazing opportunities that I am always sure to take and every time I do, I always learn something about myself. I don't think I could speak highly of a place as much as I could of Frontyard.

I find myself confiding in the staff about things I don't even tell my friends and they're always ready to listen and to help. I am now a part of Aardvark, which is a song-writing program separate to Frontyard, where I can further my song-writing skills and meet new people.

At the start of this year I was asked what my New Year's resolution was and my response was to have the best year I can. So far so good and I have them to thank for a lot of that. If I had never said yes to that first Music Therapy session I wouldn't have the supports I have and I wouldn't have the friends I have. Frontyard is the place where I feel safest to share my feelings and each day I feel myself grow in ways I never have and I am forever grateful to each person, staff member and client that I have met so far during my time there.



THE ROLE OF TRAUMA

It is very common at Frontyard for support staff to be assisting young people who are not only struggling with homelessness but also dealing with the impact of trauma.

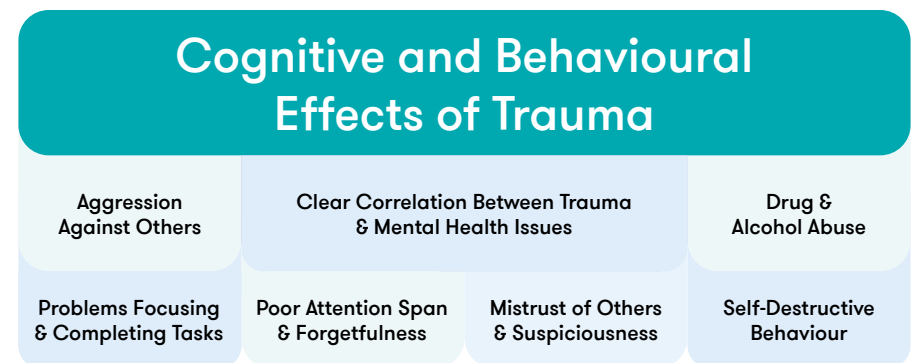
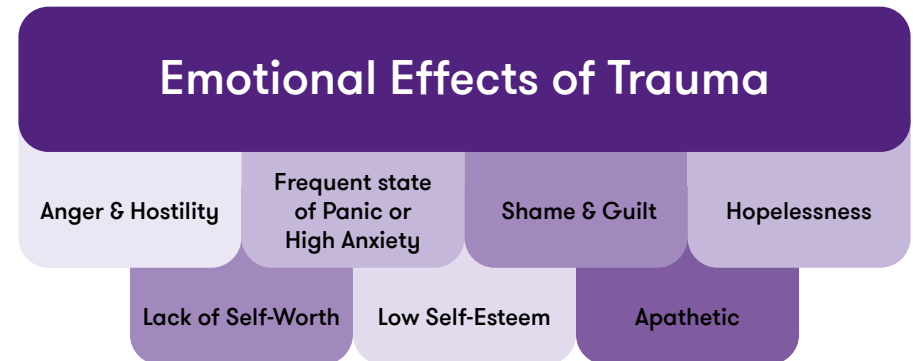
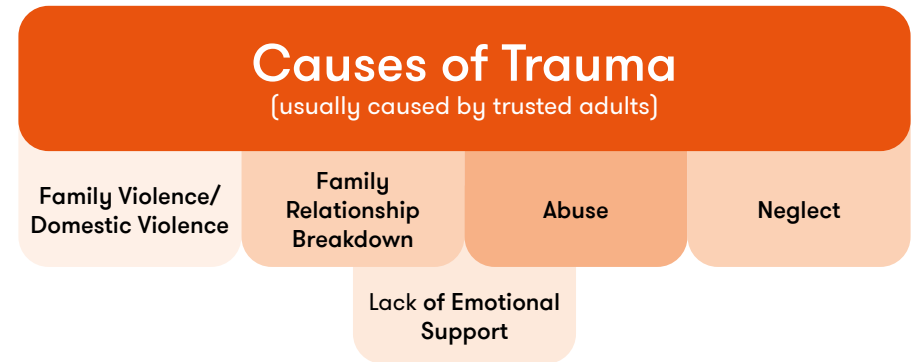
Trauma has a very powerful impact on our brains, especially when we are young and our brains are still developing. Trauma occurs when the nervous system is so overwhelmed by an experience that it kind of shuts down or freezes. In a way, it interrupts the normal “circuitry” in the brain and keeps us in a constant state of alertness. This goes well beyond being a little bit stressed.

Because of this interruption in normal brain activity, a young person who has experienced trauma is constantly on the lookout for danger, or what is commonly known as “fight or flight” response. They are always in survival mode, looking at how to avoid getting hurt again or feeling the amount of pain that originally overwhelmed their nervous system.

Coping with trauma

For some, dealing with this trauma manifests itself as anxiety, panic, stress, pain in the body, and negative thoughts. When you don’t have the tools or social relationships to navigate these difficult experiences, people often turn to drugs and alcohol to manage the symptoms or “self-medicate”. This self-medication is sometimes the only resource a young person feels they have to experience immediate relief from the uncomfortable experience of being in their body. This can then turn into dependence, or addiction, which adds another layer of complexity to a young person’s journey.

Staff at Frontyard work with a trauma-informed approach by providing a physically and emotionally safe environment and maximising young people’s choices and control. We help young people to identify their own strengths, and develop and enhance their own coping skills.



8. Mental Health Professional and Online Development, 2017
 9. http://www.mhpod.gov.au/assets/sample_topics/combined/Trauma_and_Mental_Health/objective1/index.html

THE ROLE OF TRAUMA



Health

Young people experiencing homelessness often face a constant struggle with poor health. The lack of stability, the constant presence of fear, stress, anxiety and uncertainty associated with being homeless, all multiply the impacts on a young person's health.

People experiencing homelessness are more prone to suffer a number of common and easily treatable conditions, which may include:

- Upper respiratory and chest infections;
- Skin problems such as scabies, head lice, sunburn, abscesses and dermatitis;
- Foot problems including fungal infections, blisters, ulcerations, overgrown nails;
- Accidents and injuries such as burns, cuts and abrasions which can become infected;
- Sexual and reproductive health issues;
- Dental problems as a result of poor oral hygiene and diet;
- Poor nutrition; and
- Chronic diseases such as diabetes, bronchitis, and hepatitis.



Mental Health

The relationship between homelessness and mental health is reciprocal. Many young people with mental health concerns have problems accessing housing and maintaining tenancies. Likewise, homelessness is considered to be a contributor to some mental illnesses and can exacerbate existing conditions which may include:

- Psychological distress
- Psychiatric disorders
- Alcohol and drug misuse
- Self-harm and suicidal behaviour
- Inadequate nutrition
- Limited access to medical care
- Unsafe sexual encounters
- Violence



26% of young people at Frontyard have concerns around their physical health.

49% of young people presenting at Frontyard have a mental health diagnosis.

Ling, 22,
Homeless due to
family breakdown
and mental illness.



LING'S STORY

I first found out about Frontyard in early 2015 through my psychologist. For years I had been asking, no begging, for help with my accommodation from my psychologists at Orygen.

My relationship with my mother has always been belligerent to the point that sometimes it would escalate from verbal abuse to physical abuse and she was constantly kicking me out. And it was taking a heavy toll on my mental health.

I had been going to Orygen for almost 2 years and they had only just figured out that I was Schizophrenic. I don't know why it took them so long to get me help with my accommodation for I had been asking them the entire time I was there but it is the way it is. So, my psychologist referred me to Frontyard and accompanied me for the interview and I was assigned a case worker.

My case worker helped me with everything from getting my L plate to referring me to a short art course to paying for an appointment with the ASD clinic to figure out whether I was autistic. I was eventually referred to Rocket, an accommodation program for young people suffering from mental illness, where I could stay for 12 months to get my life together and ready for private rental.

The move was great for me. I started eating well, I was able to concentrate on studying and they had wake up calls so I got up pretty early in the morning.

It was a good jumping off point before I stood on my own because I had support from social workers when I wasn't feeling well mentally. Then the 12 months passed and I thought I should go up to Sydney to see family and confront a delusion I had been experiencing over 2015 and 2016. So, I put most of my stuff in storage and packed my bags to go to Sydney for a couple of months.

I decided I would either stay in a boarding house or stay at my mother's when I got back. My mother's being the very last option. Things went well in Sydney and it was nice being around the beaches and family. It was quite a beautiful time though not without some bitterness.

I came back to Melbourne and stayed at a boarding house for a while but then came to the conclusion that I would deal with my mother and stay with her so I could save up some money for a laptop. Things had gotten better with my mother, though I know I would never trust her, so I thought things would remain peaceful. However, my mental health disintegrated while I was there and I started getting very mentally ill. My mother seeing this got into more and more fights with me before it exploded on one final day. I walked out of there determined never to go back unless it was to see my sisters.



I travelled straight to Frontyard and asked to be put in a refuge and they put me somewhere for the weekend. However, how traumatic the fight was sent me spinning so far down that I was hospitalised over the weekend. I stayed in hospital for 3 weeks before the hospital paid for accommodation at Mayfair Lodge for 2 weeks so I would have somewhere to stay while I waited for a refuge. And within 2 weeks I was transferred to a refuge where I am staying now.

Frontyard has been so helpful to me. The people at Frontyard understood my need for a home. Because in truth for years I didn't have one. For a long time, my mother wanted me out of the house in the morning and back late.

Home is your sanctuary, it's where you go to restore yourself from the day's events. And if you don't have that you are feeling constant threat. It takes a toll on your mental health and your perception of safety so that even when you find a home you are always worrying about losing it whilst being more appreciative of it than you were before.

I thank Frontyard and I am grateful that I am at the place I am now: both mentally and physically.



CAN'T THEY JUST GET A JOB?

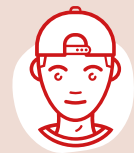


Many young people have the drive and desire to find work, yet come up against significant barriers. Not having a fixed address, access to identification, access to showers or mentoring on how to approach employers, make it more difficult. Some of the common barriers are:

- **Unstable accommodation** - not knowing where they may be living in 6 weeks' time is a huge barrier. Trying to obtain accommodation takes priority over almost everything else in their life. It makes it extremely hard to plan ahead.
- **Low paid traineeships** - even when a young person obtains a job, it can be a struggle to make ends meet. Living independently is not cheap, rent is expensive and a minimum wage can make it difficult to cover expenses.
- **Limited level of education** - many young people have to drop out of school because of homelessness. When applying for a job the reality is they will be competing with other applicants who have completed Year 12, who have the benefit of stability at home and may appear to be a more attractive option to an employer.
- **Complex trauma** - for those still working through issues of trauma, an extra level of support may be necessary from employers to provide a work environment that is supportive and encourages a young person.
- **Presentation and hygiene** - would you hire someone who hadn't showered in a few days/week and doesn't have stable accommodation? Employers want to hire individuals who can be relied upon to turn up to work looking neat, tidy and well rested.

There are a number of programs that Frontyard has set up to provide young people experiencing homelessness with education and training opportunities. These programs understand that participants may have missed out on opportunities the rest of us have received to attend a school that supports our learning and social needs.

“



“While you may not tell an employer you are homeless, there are other contributing factors. In my experience, I was unable to find employment due to appearing as a “lout”. I have often been told this is my fault, however it is not as simple as just putting on nice clothes and brushing your hair. You have to not only find the money to buy nice clothes, but re-construct your social and living behaviours to be fit for employment, a lengthy process not so simple for some”.

Quote from 21 year old male

”

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT



So first, what does youth engagement actually mean?

According to Act for Youth, youth engagement is the result when young people are involved in responsible, challenging actions to create positive social change. This means involving youth in planning and in making decisions that affect themselves and others.

Why is youth engagement important?

Youth participation actively involves young people in decision-making processes on issues that affect them. Young people make invaluable contributions to communities and are empowered themselves when they participate. Through youth engagement, communities can do a better job of creating the services, opportunities and supports that young people need.

What Youth Participation Programs does Frontyard provide?

- **Frontyard Youth Advisory Committee (FYAC)**

FYAC is a program that seeks to foster the development of disadvantaged and socially isolated young people, while purposely involving them in the decisions that affect them. The FYAC is made up of past and present service users who are involved in the decision-making processes and assist staff in providing direction for Frontyard Youth Services. So far FYAC have consulted not only with MCM and Frontyard about how we can improve the work we do, they have also been active in sharing their experiences and expertise with Council to Homeless Persons, Youth Affairs Council VIC, Orygen Youth Mental Health Services, Berry Street, Melbourne Water and City of Melbourne.

- **Youth Action Group (YAG)**

The Youth Action Group is comprised of a group of young leaders aged 18-25 who are passionate about raising the profile of young people in Melbourne. Members of the YAG champion two yearly projects that will affect positive change in the community. The YAG are given complete freedom in deciding what the projects will be, how they're delivered, and the impact the project would aim to have on the community. They receive professional training in leadership, public speaking, advocacy, campaign management, etc.

And lastly, what are the benefits of youth engagement?

Well, there are HEAPS of benefits. The benefits to the young people include the ability to share their ideas, opinions and have their voice heard and acted upon. Through this process, they gain skills, knowledge, self-esteem, connectedness, and grow their confidence. There are also myriad benefits to the organisation, such as improving our programs, gaining community recognition, being more youth-friendly, more effective programs, and creating a foundation of trust between clients and workers.

HEAR FROM TAMEIKA!

One of our very active members of both FYAC and YAG is Tameika.

Let's hear her views on the benefits of Youth Engagement.

What changes have you seen within yourself since being part of both groups?

I'm more confident within myself. I know how to position myself in the best way to help others who need it. I have learnt so many things about homelessness (youth) than I would ever think possible and feel I'm in the position to educate others. Being part of FYAC has given me another side of things I've never seen before and let me develop into a more rounded person. Through this group I got to learn what I like doing and what I am good at, helping me to decide on a career I wouldn't think of myself.

What has been the highlight for you in FYAC & YAG?

There has been so many highlights being part of the group since it began. Getting to be a part of Sleep At The 'G' the past two years has been something I would never have even thought of as part of my future. I've been given so many opportunities because of FYAC like getting my writing published (as an aspiring writer that's amazing!!!).

Why do you think youth engagement/participation is important?

Youth engagement, I think, is vital for a service who centres around youth services. While contracted by the system itself, if given the voice, the young people can go far and change so many things that can help not only the young people, but those who decided to advocate and work with young people. Young people are a well of knowledge and understanding that comes from our stories, and when understood properly, can inspire and empower everyone.



HOMELESSNESS ISN'T A CHOICE

A PERSONAL STORY

- (member of Frontyard's Youth Advisory Committee)

I am 24 years old and I was once homeless. Growing up, I lived in a house full of people. 9 people to be exact in a 3-bedroom house with 1 sun room. I was in the sunroom, where it was extremely cold. I was 19 when I moved out to go to Darwin. We drove up there and it was pretty good at the beginning until a few months later that my aunty kicked me out of the 'tent' that I was living in at 4am one morning and told me to go fend for myself. I ended up living on my boss's floor on one condition: that I fed his kids. I used to go hunting with him and I spent a lot of time outdoors with him, but I went back to Melbourne as soon as I heard my dad was sick.

I went back to Darwin and my boss had found me a place at the Sunrise Homeless Centre. Then I found out my uncle died and I turned to alcohol, drank the whole bottle and ended up in a paddy wagon. I got extradited back to Melbourne. It was alright for a bit until my cousin moved back in and he brought all his mates with him where they started to assault me until I couldn't live there more. After a bit of this, I had enough. That's how I became homeless on these concrete streets.

On the first night, I remember being at the opposite end of St Andrews Cathedral and I just remember people walking by acting like I didn't even exist. This made me feel empty, worthless and awkward. Just one thing that I want to mention is that just because someone looks nice, it doesn't mean that they're not homeless. I like to dress nice because it makes me feel good and

makes me feel presentable. There are a lot of stereotypes of what is a 'typical homeless person' but there are a lot of people flying under the radar who aren't noticed. Just because some people couch surf every night, doesn't mean they're not homeless. They still don't have a safe space to go every night.

I had a few friends who accessed Frontyard and who suggested that I should go there and have a shower. I have been involved with Frontyard for nearly 5 years now, and they have helped me with everything.

Homelessness isn't a choice. It's the last resort. For me, family violence was a key factor but for many other people, they have their own stories.

Being homeless, I have struggled with things such as obtaining a drivers licence, finding stable accommodation, gaining employment, and other standard things that would be made easier if I wasn't homeless.

As I am 24 turning 25, I will no longer be eligible for youth services and that's going to be a struggle. But I just don't want more young people to have to experience what I have experienced and hope that in the future, there are many beds and services available for young people.



How do young people get out of homelessness? Are there many success stories?

Yes! There are many young people that overcome the challenges of homelessness and go on to live healthy and successful lives. Whilst the journey out of homelessness can be difficult and complex, and there are often many setbacks, it is not impossible.

Each year we are inspired by stories of young people finishing school, gaining employment, reuniting with families, and securing stable accommodation. The reason why services like Frontyard exist is because we believe that young people can and will overcome homelessness given the right supports.

Each young person's journey is different, and each will need different supports at different times. There is really no "formula" for success other than a steadfast belief in each young person, a drive to advocate for them, and working collaboratively alongside them. It can take time to work through the many layers and complexities of their experience and many need ongoing support even when they do find housing.

As one young woman said:

"It's when you finally get a place and can relax that all the emotional baggage you've been carrying around comes rushing to the surface. When you are focussing on where you're going to sleep that night and where your next meal is coming from, you don't take time to think about all the stuff you've been through and how it affected you. Now you've got a house and food in the fridge and all this time to think. That's when it gets really hard and you need the support the most!"

Again, we see the importance of having strong communities and support to enable a young person to unpack their experience of being homeless and integrate what they have learnt. This is why Frontyard is committed to rolling out long-term support for young people, even after they have technically left our services. We want to make sure a young person has the confidence and skills they need to navigate the world before we slowly withdraw contact and are no longer needed!

We can all do something to help end youth homelessness. You can even make an impact right here in your classroom! Here are some fundraising suggestions for you and your classmates:



Fundraising Ideas for your Class!

- 1. Game day:** Plan an afternoon of board games and indoor activities that students and teachers can sign up for with a small fee, and participate in a number of games around the school. Offer small prizes for winners.
- 2. "Give It Up" challenge:** Encourage students and families to give small donations towards a goal set for a day. If the goal is met, teachers commit to giving up something that is part of their every day routines such as coffee, sweets, etc. This can be a weeklong event with goals increasing in difficulty.
- 3. Multicultural fair:** Showcase the many delicious foods and unique talents of your students by hosting an event where students are encouraged to share their cultural traditions with one another. Donate proceeds from food sales and door takings.
- 4. Cake Walk bake sale:** Parents, students and staff can contribute baked goods for a one-day sale. Children and/or parents can be invited in to buy these treats.
- 5. Art exhibition:** Create an event where student artwork is showcased – set it up as a "pop up art gallery". Attendees can "bid" on the artwork, and donate the proceeds.
- 6. School sleepover:** Host a school sleepover. Students can bring sleeping bags and pyjamas. You can plan fun activities, games or a movie, and provide snacks and breakfast in the morning. Charge a specific amount for students to get involved, or ask them to go to their networks to sponsor their efforts.
- 7. Quiz night:** Divide participants into teams (or ask them to sign up as teams). Prepare a list of questions based on a particular theme and have a "Quiz Master" who can ask the questions. Sell tickets to participate and offer a prize for the winning team.
- 8. Flea market:** Promote a school-wide flea market where families can bring in items they want to sell from home, such as old books or toys. Consider having specific tables for each type of item to keep it organised.
- 9. Read-a-Thon:** Read as a class or encourage individual reading during a specific period of time. Ask for donations based on how much you read!
- 10. Pyjama day:** Ask for a small donation from other students and teachers to participate in a Pyjama Day, where your class wears pyjamas to school.
- 11. Principal challenge:** Ask your principal or a favourite teacher to do something drastic – like shave his or her head – if you reach your fundraising goals.

We'd love to hear about your event!
Let us know your plans and contact our
School Engagement Program

Email: fundraising@mcm.org.au
Phone: 1300 364 507
Donate: mcm.org.au

WE CAN ALL MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Year 9 students from Geelong High School as part of their Community Service Program chose to focus on a more hidden form of homelessness “couch surfing”. With support, students arranged an activity for 2 consecutive nights of “couch surfing” (between friends and family) all the while forgoing luxury and comfort in exchange for sponsorship. The activity gave students a glimpse into the battles some young people face and generated much needed funds to Frontyard life skills programs.

At Frontyard we know that we do case management and crisis work well. We are funded for those programs. In addition, Frontyard has five commitments to young people, that we’re not funded for. We need help fulfilling these five commitments:

1. Safety: We want to make sure no young people sleep on the street tonight.
2. Innovation: We want to run innovative programs that support young people to deal with past experiences of abuse holistically.
3. Skills and Confidence: We want to support young people to regain confidence and self-worth, build capacity and develop skills.
4. Employment: We want to support young people to access employment opportunities.
5. Advocacy: We want to advocate for systemic change alongside young people.

Help Frontyard fulfil its commitment to young people by getting involved and raising funds.

What could your donation go towards?

Some of the most useful programs run at Frontyard such as our Life Skills Programs do not receive any Government funding therefore donations will often be directed towards ensuring these essential programs continue to provide assistance.

Life Skills Programs

Frontyard provides young people with a chance to learn important life skills in a safe, welcoming and supportive space.

Skills such as:

- Cooking
- Budgeting
- Job skills
- Searching for private rental

For many people these skills would be developed in the family home however not everyone gets to experience living in a safe, healthy environment. It therefore falls to support services to help young people develop useful skills they can take with them for the rest of their lives.

Proof of ID

One of the many obstacles faced by young people at Frontyard is the inability to prove their identity with documents. Helping our service to cover the \$10 cost of purchasing a Proof of Identity card can help young people gain access to:

- Housing
- Income
- Employment
- Education

Donations to cover this sort of item can turn out to be the most impactful as the ID card can continue to be used by the young person in the long term.



Yes, my school will help young people experiencing homelessness.

My gift:

\$100 \$500 \$1000 \$_____ Surprise us!

I would like to pay by:

Credit Card: Visa MasterCard Amex

Card No.:

Expiry date: /

Name on card: _____

Signature: _____

Cheque (made out to Melbourne City Mission)

Please send me information on leaving a gift to MCM in my Will.

Your details:

Title _____ First Name _____

Last name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Mobile _____

Email _____

Date of Birth: (Optional) _____ / _____ / _____

Donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible.

Donate online at mcm.org.au

WHAT WOULD HELP REDUCE YOUTH HOMELESSNESS?



MCM believes that to eliminate youth homelessness, further investment and focus should be given to the following areas:

Education & Training: Education is critical to improved life opportunities. The longer a young person is disengaged from education, the harder it is to return. Helping a person return and stay engaged requires a significant level of support and flexibility. Supporting innovative programs like The Hester Hornbrook Academy allows for those at-risk to continue with their learning.

Foyer Models: The foyer model of accommodation and support is designed for homeless young people who have a desire to pursue education, training and employment. Putting a roof over someone's head is not the simple cure to homelessness - it is only the first step. The foyer model provides a whole suite of support services that have been proven to move people out of crisis and into stability.

Holistic, Integrated, Wrap Around Services: Working more collaboratively with other organisations, government and the corporate sector to address the growing, complex needs of young people at risk. Bringing together a range of different services and organisations to offer

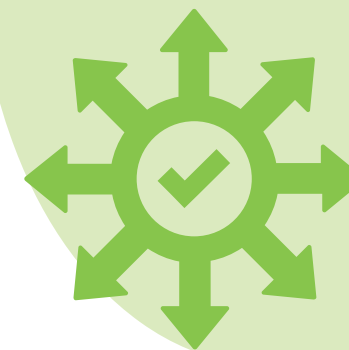
a 'one stop shop' approach to permanently diverting young people away from disadvantage. Youth homelessness cannot be reduced without 'joined-up' service approaches like Frontyard Youth Services.

Increase in Youth Allowance: The level of Youth Allowance available to those experiencing homelessness is insufficient for those with little choice but to live independently. This demands review in light of the continually rising rental market. Young people often do not have the capacity to overcome the financial burden imposed by the high cost of rent.

Early Intervention: Effective early intervention responses such as the Reconnect program are critical in identifying early those in need of assistance and taking preventative measures to ensure young people do not continue further down the pathway of homelessness.

More Affordable Housing Options: Presently, there is a gross shortage of safe accommodation for young people unable to live with family. A dramatic increase in emergency accommodation, transitional housing and a greater investment in social housing is much needed.

TAKE HOME MESSAGES ABOUT YOUTH HOMELESSNESS



Homelessness does not simply apply to those who sleep on the streets

Many young people experiencing homelessness may not be sleeping rough: they may instead be 'couch surfing'. Temporarily sleeping on the couches of friends, relatives or in some cases, total strangers, until eventually overstaying their welcome, is a common experience.

This form of homelessness is less likely to be visible to the general public as well as less likely to be captured in research, such as the census. Young people can often move from one couch to another, never knowing from one night to the next where they will be sleeping.

Addressing homelessness requires a holistic approach

Adequately dealing with youth homelessness is not simply about addressing a housing need, it requires a detailed response to a complex set of needs.

Being able to focus on the whole person, identifying what resources may be lacking in their life and what support can be put in place is essential to assisting a young person to move beyond homelessness.

Homelessness does not discriminate

At Frontyard, young people from all walks of life approach the service needing support. Becoming homeless does not only happen to families in lower socio economic households, it can happen to anyone.

Family breakdown is the main cause of youth homelessness

Young people are forced into homelessness for a range of reasons, however the common factor is family breakdown. Family breakdown covers not simply abuse or violence but also conflict in the home.

This conflict can be due to alcohol or drug problems within the family, rejection when a parent re-partners, pregnancy and sexual preference or the declining health or mental health in the young person or their parents.

Remaining connected is important

Young people who can be assisted to remain connected to family, education and with their community are far more likely, in the long term, to move beyond homelessness to lead healthy and productive lives.



DID SALLY'S SITUATION IMPROVE?

After calling Frontyard, Sally came into the service and met with a support worker. After discussing her situation a referral was made to the Reconnect Program. Sally continued staying with her boyfriend's family for a week while Reconnect implemented some family mediation for herself and her dad. Sally eventually moved back home with dad and continued to receive support to work on improving her relationship with her father. Sally has since enrolled at TAFE to complete her VCAL studies and feels much more comfortable and supported in this learning environment.

HOW IS SHANE DOING NOW?

After turning up at Frontyard Youth Services and speaking with support staff he was referred to a youth refuge where he lived for 8 weeks before moving into transitional housing. With the help of the Family Reconciliation and Mediation Program (FRMP) he also began working on his relationship with his mum and has supported her to seek the mental health support she needs. He has now re-engaged with education at The Hester Hornbrook Academy to finish his Year 11 & 12 and is also undertaking work experience in the automotive industry as he hopes to pursue an apprenticeship as a mechanic.



COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How long has Frontyard Youth Services been running?

Frontyard Youth Services commenced in 1984 as the Info Deli and was initially based at Flinders St Station. In the following years, under the auspice of Melbourne City Mission, the range and number of services has continued to expand, and Frontyard is now widely acknowledged as a leader in the youth work field.

How is Frontyard funded?

About 85% of our funding comes via Government. That includes all levels of Government: Local, State and Federal. The other 15% is made up of philanthropic donations, and support from corporate and community groups. Students and schools also get involved in raising funds for our service by holding fundraising activities. These additional funds make it possible for Frontyard to offer the best possible levels of support.

How do people hear about the service?

Often it is through positive word of mouth. The service is regularly recommended from one young person to another. Frontyard is also very well-known and highly regarded by other organisations in the field who regularly make referrals for young people they are trying to assist. Furthermore, we also work hard to spread the word amongst schools about the availability of our support services in the hope that people will reach out for help before circumstances reach crisis point.

Why should the average person in the community care about homelessness in their city?

Homelessness is everyone's problem. It reflects on the values and beliefs that we as a community hold. Melbourne is continually voted the 'Most Liveable City' however not everyone gets to equally enjoy the many wonderful aspects of the city. Wouldn't it be nice to see some of the ample resources we have within the community put towards those who would truly benefit from it?

What happens if someone needs help but they are over 25 years old?

If someone does not fall within the age eligibility of Frontyard, staff will always ensure to link that individual into the most appropriate adult support service depending on the issues they need help with.

Is the problem getting worse?

Yes, results from the 2016 Census showed that Youth Homelessness rose 26% from 2006-2016. Nationwide, over 16,000 high school and University students are experiencing homelessness.

Is Frontyard run by volunteers?

No, each person working at Frontyard is highly trained and qualified. As a minimum all staff hired are expected to have a University degree in Youth Work, Social Work or a relevant field. Due to the complex nature of the work we do and how vulnerable our young people may be, it is imperative that staff are well trained to cope with challenging situations.

Should we give money to beggars on the street?

We advise it is not best for individuals to give money to those begging on the street and instead it is more useful to direct that support towards services that run programs to assist those in need. Often giving money directly to individuals can, in fact, result in delaying efforts to seek help to address their underlying problems.

What happens if someone has nowhere to stay tonight?

Once workers have done a detailed assessment with a young person and determined that staying with family is not an option, a referral may be made to a youth refuge in the hope of obtaining a safe bed in which to stay. If no beds are available, other options such as backpackers, motels or rooming houses may need to be utilised in the short term.



11. Census 2011, Published by Australian Bureau of Statistics visit <http://www.abs.gov.au/>

What can I read to find out more?

Australian Bureau of Statistics Census of population and housing: estimating homelessness, 2016, cat. no. 2049.0, ABS, Canberra

Campo, M., & Commerford, J. (2016). Supporting young people leaving out-of-home care (CFCA Paper No. 41). Melbourne: Child Family Community Australia information exchange, Australian Institute of Family Studies.

City of Melbourne (2018,) StreetCount 2018

Coddou, M, Borlagdan, J & Mallett, S 2019, Starting a future that means something to you: outcomes from a longitudinal study of Education First Youth Foyers, Brotherhood of St Laurence & Launch Housing, Melbourne.

Flatau, P., Thielking, M., MacKenzie, D., & Steen, A. (2015). The Cost Of Youth Homelessness In Australia Study: The Australian Youth Homelessness Experience, Snapshot Report 1. <http://apo.org.au/node/53029>: Salvation Army. <https://doi.org/10.4225/50/55AC3D19B3DAE>

Heerde, J.A. (2019). "I can be me again": Animal Assisted Interventions with young people experiencing homelessness. Report of program implementation and outcomes. Department of Paediatrics, Melbourne Medical School, The University of Melbourne. Parkville, Australia.

MacKenzie, D. (2018). The Geelong Project: interim report 2016-2017. Melbourne: Barwon Child, Youth and Family

Moore, S. (2017) Couch Surfing Limbo: Legal, Policy and Service Gaps Affecting young couch surfers and couch providers in Melbourne's West WestJustice.

The Road Home: A National approach to reducing Homelessness 2008 The Federal Government's White Paper on Homelessness, The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness - executive summary.

Thielking, M., Flatau, P., La Sala., and Sutton, D., (2015), 'Couch Surfing Secondary Students: The Yarra Ranges Youth Homelessness Participation Project', Swinburne University and the University of Western Australia Centre for Social Impact.

Youth Development Australia., National Youth Commission. (2019) The National Report Card on Youth Homelessness. Youth Development Australia.

For more information about the work
MCM does with young people experiencing
homelessness, please visit



MelbourneCitymission



melbcitymission



melbcitymission

Or contact our School Engagement Program:

frontyard@mcm.org.au
03 9977 0000

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

MCM would like to acknowledge the following people, who have contributed to the creation of this booklet.

Teaching staff & students who have participated in the School Engagement Program over the last few years and provided valuable feedback.

MCM and Frontyard Youth Services workers who contributed their experience and knowledge throughout the development of this document.

Young People who contributed artwork and shared their stories.

Notes

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing notes, spanning the width of the page below the title.

Notes

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing notes, spanning the width of the page below the title.

Each night in Australia,
there are **116,427** homeless people:
enough to fill the MCG to capacity.
Of those, **44,000** are
under the age of 25.



Frontyard Youth Services

PHONE 03 9977 0077
FREECALL 1800 800 531
FAX 03 9102 5333
EMAIL frontyard@mcm.org.au
WEBSITE frontyard.org.au
ADDRESS 19 King St, Melbourne VIC 3000

Frontyard Youth Services is open 7 days a week.

mcm.
melbourne city mission
your future, your way

