



THE LEARNING JOURNEY

A practical guide for schools supporting young people living independently

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose of this resource is to provide schools within Banyule with practical and local information on supports and services available to address the needs of young people who are at risk of homelessness.

This resource will:

- » provide an overview of the prevalence of youth homelessness,
- » outline how young people experience homelessness,
- » make suggestions about how schools can support young people who are living out of home,
- » provide an overview of how to access supports through the homelessness and wider support system.

This resource is best read in conjunction with the DEECD publication ***Supporting children, young people and their families affected by homelessness.***



ABOUT YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Youth homelessness and its impacts:

Young people are disproportionately represented in homelessness statistics. The latest homelessness sector data shows that of all people seeking support from homelessness services across Australia, 42% were under 25 years of age.

There can be many reasons why young people choose to leave home, however, the main contributing factors are:

- » Family violence
- » Family or relationship breakdown
- » Abuse and/or neglect
- » Parental health issues, including parents experiencing mental ill-health or AOD use
- » Family homelessness
- » Unemployment and poverty
- » Lack of support in leaving care

Young people experiencing homelessness are vulnerable to a range of potentially life-long disadvantages. In particular they can be vulnerable to disengaging from education. In fact, young people often disengage from education/training soon after becoming homeless. Homelessness combined with interrupted education/training, places young people at a significant disadvantage in an ever increasingly competitive job market and can face the possibility of long term disadvantage and ongoing housing instability.

How young people experience homelessness:

Young people are often referred to as the 'hidden homeless' as their experience of homelessness is generally characterised by 'couch surfing' – stay at friends places informally for periods of time, rather than 'sleeping rough'. Some 'couch surfers'

may stay with one family for a long period of time, while others may alternate between a number of houses.

While couch surfing may not sound as drastic as sleeping rough, it is a very unsettling experience for young people. 'Couch surfers' often describe their experience as being unsettled, unsure of how long they can stay where they are and where they will spend their next night, and they often feel a sense of disconnection to family and community.

Young people may 'couch surf', without having any support, for a prolonged period of time. There can be a number of reasons for this:

Young people often don't know that support is available. Many of the supports that are available to help young people who are experiencing family conflict are accessed through the homelessness service system. Young people who are couch surfing generally don't view themselves as homeless and so don't seek support through the homelessness service system.

Some young people may be fearful of what will happen if a 'worker' steps in to help with their situation. Most young people who have left home have not had any previous experience accessing support and can be fearful of what it means to have a 'worker'.

Youth homelessness in Banyule:

In 2009 the Banyule/Nillumbik Youth Services Network undertook an investigation to identify the extent to which young secondary school students were at risk of homelessness. **The study identified that one in ten young people were potentially at risk of homelessness, with young people in years 10 and 11 at the greatest risk.**

IDENTIFYING YOUNG PEOPLE AT RISK OF HOMELESSNESS WITHIN THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Young people who are experiencing homelessness often want to remain connected to school as the school community provides a stable and grounding connection to friends and routine. Maintaining positive connections with friends, positive adults and community based activities is a strong protective influence for young people who are experiencing homelessness.

Signs that a young person might be experiencing homelessness:

Identifying young people who are experiencing homelessness within the school community can be a difficult task as many young people will not openly tell teachers/support staff that they are not living at home. It is therefore important for the whole school community to be aware of the signs that a young person might be experiencing homelessness. Some common signs can be:

- » Changes in study habits: a usually conscientious student may find it difficult to complete work tasks while living out of home.
- » Changes in personal appearance: young people who are living informally at friends' homes can find it difficult to maintain their normal personal care routine. Be mindful uncharacteristic changes in appearance that may indicate that the young person does not have access to their normal toiletries.
- » Changes in peer relationships: young people who are living out of home can very quickly feel isolated from friends. They often have an acute a sense that their friends don't know what they are going through and don't understand them. This can put a strain on previously strong friendships.
- » Changes in eating patterns: young people who are couch surfing often find it difficult to meet their basic needs and may worry about asking the family they are staying with to provide them with food. Typically young people end up skipping meals – particularly lunch at school.
- » Recurring illnesses: the uncertainty and stress of couch surfing can make young people susceptible to stress related illnesses, particularly colds and upper-respiratory infections.
- » Changes in school engagement patterns: young people who are living out of home can struggle to continue attending school, particularly if they have to access public transport. Excursions or extra-curricular activities such as school productions or school formals can be very difficult for young people to access if they do not have access to financial support – young people who had previously been well engaged in school may start to miss days or stop attending extra-curricular activities.

Case Study: Jenny

Jenny is 17 and is in year 11 this year. She is a passionate and engaged member of her school community, she is on the Student Council and is an active participant in the school netball program. Jenny has a strong core group of friends – most of whom are also part of the school netball program.

Jenny's teachers and friends don't know that Jenny is not living at home at the moment. Jenny's mum is struggling to manage her mental illness and as a result, life has become too stressful at home for Jenny. Jenny has been living with a neighbour for the past 2 months. Jenny doesn't want her friends to know she isn't living at home, she just doesn't want to have to talk about her complicated family life, no-one would understand what it is like when her mum is unwell.

Jenny's Human Biology teacher has noticed that Jenny's appearance has changed lately. Jenny used to always wear her straightened hair down, however lately her hair has been left curly and tied up. Jenny's general appearance is also 'different'. Jenny has not attended her weekend netball games for the last three weekends, has missed two of her training sessions and has missed a number of days of school due to a recurring cold.

Talking to a young person about homelessness

It can be challenging to open up a conversation with a young person who you think may be experiencing homelessness. The following suggestions may help you begin the conversation:

- » Think about who has the best relationship with the young person – does the young person have a school mentor or a teacher they connect with and trust. This person might be the best to start a conversation with the young person about any concerns.
- » Ensure you choose an appropriate space to talk, ensure that the young person's friends, other staff etc. are not able to over-hear the conversation.
- » Listen to the young person's experience, try to avoid value judgments.
- » Try to ascertain where the young person is staying, try to ensure that the young person feels safe, is able to travel to and from school and is able to meet their basic needs.

RESPONDING TO WELFARE CONCERNS

Young people who are living away from home can be vulnerable to a range of welfare risks. If you have any concerns about a young person's safety, you may need to consider contacting Child Protection, Child FIRST (via Orange Door), the police or a family violence service. The following information outlines who these services respond to and when to contact them:

Child Protection:

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Child Protection Units respond to welfare concerns for young people and children 17 years of age and under. In considering whether to make a report to Child Protection, refer to the guidelines in the DEECD, DHHS Child Protection joint protocol: Protecting the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

The Child Protection Office covering the Banyule area is the Preston Office:

679 – 685 High Street Preston

Tel: 1300 664 977

Victoria Police:

Victoria Police work alongside Child Protection in the investigation and prosecution of alleged physical abuse, sexual abuse or serious neglect. Where abuse has occurred and the child's family is able to protect the child from further harm, Victoria Police should be contacted to initiate a criminal investigation of the abuse. A report to Child Protection under these circumstances is not required unless the family is not able to protect the child from harm.

Child FIRST:

Child FIRST (Child and Family Information Referral and Support Team) is the community-based referral point to access family services for families and children aged 0 -17 years. Child FIRST referrals occur through the Orange Door in North East Melbourne. A Child FIRST referral is appropriate when the concerns for the young person are of a low to moderate level, the immediate safety of the young person is not compromised by making a referral to Child FIRST and the young person and family are willing to engage with support from a family service organisation. Concerns that can be addressed by Child FIRST include:

- » Significant parenting problems that are affecting the young person's wellbeing and development.
- » Significant social or economic disadvantage that is impacting on the young person's care or development.
- » Significant family conflict including family breakdown.
- » Families experiencing significant issues such as mental ill-health, substance misuse, bereavement etc.
- » Young people who are young parents and are isolated/unsupported.

Child FIRST (Child and Family Information, Referral and Support Teams) for North East Melbourne now occurs through The Orange Door:

Tel: 1800 319 355

nema@orangedoor.vic.gov.au

56 Burgundy Street

Heidelberg, 3084

**9:00am to 5:00pm Monday to Friday
(closed public holidays)**

Family Violence:

Consider a referral to a family violence service for young people aged 16 year or over who are experiencing family violence. Family violence also includes intimate partner violence, regardless of whether the young person is living with their partner. Family violence services can also provide support to young people experiencing intimate partner violence.

For more information on identifying family violence and supporting someone experiencing family violence, go to: www.nifvs.org.au

When working with young people experiencing family violence, it is important to be aware of how technology and social media use can impact on their experience. Social media and web based resources can be an important avenue for support and information for young people experiencing family violence. However, technology can also be used by perpetrators of violence as a way of maintaining control. Refer to the above website for technology safety tips and information on how to support people who are experiencing family violence.

Family Violence Services:

Safe Steps

Safe Steps is a state wide telephone based service for women experiencing family and domestic violence. It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and can provide support and information about safety planning, legal rights, referrals to refuges and how to access appropriate local services.

Tel: 1800 015 188

Berry Street Northern Family and Domestic Violence Services

Berry Street can provide ongoing support for women aged 16 years and over who are experiencing family violence. Supports available include; risk assessment and safety planning, case work support, counselling, court support, housing brokerage and more.

**This service is available Mondays – Fridays
9:00am – 5:00pm, Tel: 9450 4700**

Immigrant Women’s Domestic Violence Service (IWDVS)

IWDVS provides culturally sensitive information for women and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who are experiencing family violence. Services provided include; information, support, advocacy and risk assessment. IWDVS can also provide secondary consult to support services as well as co-case management.

**This service is available Mondays – Fridays
9:00am – 5:00pm, Tel: 9413 6500, 1800 755 988
(crisis service)**



Case Study: Aaron

Aaron is 15 years old and has been living with a friend from school for the past few nights after he had an argument with his mum around his increasing marijuana use. During the argument Aaron damaged furniture, punched holes in the wall and threatened his mum with violence. This has happened before and Aaron's mum is worried about the impact of Aaron's violence on her other younger children. Aaron's mum has made the difficult decision to apply for an Intervention Order preventing Aaron from living at the family home.

Aaron really wants to go home but knows he can't until he can demonstrate he is not a risk to his family's safety. Aaron is regretful about his behaviour and would like to access support to address his drug use and his anger, but firstly Aaron needs a safe place to stay. Aaron feels safe at his friend's home, however Aaron is not sure how long he can stay there. Aaron's mum

has met the family Aaron is staying with and they are communicating regularly. Aaron's mum is confident it is a safe and supportive environment and the family is happy for Aaron to stay with them for a while but things are tight financially.

Aaron's mum has contacted Aaron's school counsellor to seek some support for Aaron. Aaron's school counsellor has been able to access some support from Melbourne City Mission's Family Reconciliation and Mediation Program (FRMP). This includes funding for Mediation support for Aaron and his mum as well as some brokerage support for the family Aaron is staying with. Aaron's school counsellor also contacted Child FIRST and made a referral for ongoing family support for Aaron and his mum as well as providing Aaron's mum with information about Berry Street's TARA (Teenage Aggression Responding Assertively) workshops for parents of children who are exhibiting family violence.

LEGAL RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES TOWARDS YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING AWAY FROM HOME

Unless a Children's Court or Family Court Order is in place which limits parental responsibilities and access, parents remain responsible for decisions relating to the care and wellbeing of their child.

However, in cases where a young person is living away from home and does not have regular contact with their parents/guardian, it may be necessary for schools to liaise with informal carers when making day-to-day decisions about the education, care and wellbeing of the young person. Below are some guidelines on how and when to engage with host families in regards to the care and wellbeing of a young person living away from home in an informal care arrangement and without regular contact with their parents/guardian. These suggestions are based on the **Child Protection Practice Manual** advice on voluntary out of home care placements and the **Legal issues for grandparents and other relative carers** publication by the Commission for children and young people:

- » Day-to-day decisions such as permission to attend excursions, engage in school productions, accessing material support for learning materials, are decisions that school staff can make in consultation with young people and their host family. School staff should seek to engage the student in a conversation which explores any potential risks involved in the activity or education decision.

Young people who are able to demonstrate a level of maturity that indicates that they understand the potential consequences of their decisions, can be deemed mature enough to provide consent in their own right.

- » For more significant decisions including significant changes to enrolment or seeking permission to attend camp, it is best to make every attempt to make contact with the young person's parent/guardian. In the event that this is not possible, it is recommended that permission is sought from a carer who is providing ongoing consistent care and support of the young person. Consider also seeking advice through a secondary consultation through Orange Door.

For carers who are providing long-term informal kinship care, schools can recommend the carers access and complete the **Informal Relative Carers Statutory Declaration**. This form outlines the broad circumstances of the young person's care arrangement and can assist in clarifying the boundaries of the care and decision making in relation to the young person.

The Informal Relative Carers Statutory Declaration, while outlining the parameters of the informal care arrangement of a child, does not in any way alter the legal guardianship of a child or young person.

A fifteen year old student was referred to me for support the other day because she has left home. The young lady says she doesn't have anywhere to stay and says she cannot go home. I know a family from the school who would be willing to let her stay for a short while, can I approach them to see if they will take her in?

Housing options for young people who are homeless are limited. There are not enough refuge places to accommodate the number of young people who are needing accommodation and for the young people who are able to access a refuge bed, the refuge may be a long way away from school, friends and their local community. Consequently it is often best for young people to stay in a safe and trusted environment such as at a friend's house if they are unable to return home.

However, legal parameters around informal out of home care arrangements can be complex. We recommend that services take into account the following when deciding how to support young people who are presenting as homeless.

- » Unless there are clear and significant concerns that a young person's parents present a risk to their safety, parents have the right to information about the whereabouts and care arrangements of their children. The Children Youth and Families Act 2005 (CYFA) outlines penalties for individuals who harbour children. This section of the act relates to encouraging children who are placed in out of home care by Child Protection services to be living away from their placement. However, we recommend that services use the principles of the CYFA as a decision making guide in considering how to meet the best interests of the child.

- » If there is the possibility of arranging an informal out of home placement for a young person with another family that is not known to the young person's parents, we recommend that you consult with the young person's parents/guardian and seek to assist the young person's parents/guardian to engage with the host family to plan for the care arrangements of the young person. Establishing accommodation for young people in out of home care arrangements is a specialist and detailed area of work and there are a range of safety issues that need to be considered. If you are unable to liaise between the young person's parent/guardian and the host family, we recommend you seek a secondary consultation with Child Protection.
- » Young people can be very vulnerable when living in informal out of home arrangements and may not be able to effectively assess whether the home they are staying in is safe. It is important for support workers to be conscious of the potential risks to young people's safety and wellbeing when living in informal out of home care. We recommend that you regularly engage the young person in a conversation about their experiences of living in a different home setting and ensuring that the young person is feeling safe.

NB: Melbourne City Mission's Family Reconciliation and Mediation Program (FRMP) can provide some financial assistance to help host families meet the basic financial costs of having a young person live with them. See Section 6 for more information

PRACTICAL SCHOOL SUPPORTS

There are a range of practical initiatives schools can implement that can make a real difference in supporting young people who are living away from home. We have included a few practical suggestions for supports you may wish to consider implementing in your school. We recommend you also refer to the DEECD publications:

- » [Supporting children, young people and their families affected by homelessness](#)
- » [Out-of-Home Care Education Commitment](#)
- » [Calmer Classrooms: a guide to working with traumatised children.](#)

Canteen meals and breakfast clubs

Young people living away from home often struggle to eat a regular and balanced diet. School support via the provision of Canteen lunches and Breakfast Clubs can make a big difference and can increase young people's engagement with school.

Homework support

It can be difficult for young people living away from home to find quiet spaces to study. IT resources can also be limited when living away from home. Homework support through study clubs and extended hours access to library and IT resources can help young people feel more in control of their schooling.

Education mentor

Education mentors can have a very significant influence on young people's engagement with school. Young people can find it very powerful having a supportive and understanding teacher who knows the challenges they are facing, can

make practical suggestions on how to meet school obligations and can advocate to other teachers on the young person's behalf.

Access to quiet space

Young people who are living away from home often experience changes in friendship dynamics within their friendship groups. Couch surfing young people often feel that their friends don't understand what they are going through. Young people will often recall that their friends think that the couch surfing experience sounds exciting and enjoyable. Young people who are living the experience of being away from home struggle to convey to their friends the considerable isolation and loss they experience as a result of living out of home.

As a result, young people who are couch surfing can quickly become isolated from peer groups. The provision of a quiet space in which young people can escape from tension with friendship groups can help young people feel safe at school.

ACCESSING SPECIALIST HOMELESSNESS SUPPORT SERVICES



This Section provides information about the homelessness service system and how to access local youth homelessness services.

About Access Points:

The majority of the homelessness sector's service delivery is coordinated by designated Access Points. Access Points are the central intake and coordination of support/crisis vacancies across the homelessness sector. Referrals for support to specialist youth housing services generally have to go through the Access Point for Intake and Assessment Planning (IAP).

The local Access Point for the Banyule, Darebin, Nillumbik and Whittlesea area is Haven; Home, Safe, Ph: 9479 0700.

Melbourne City Mission operate Victoria's Youth Specific Access Point, Melbourne Youth Support Service - co-located at Frontyard, 19 King Street Melbourne, Ph: 9977 0078 (MYSS) Ph: 9611 2411 (Frontyard)

Family therapy/Family re-engagement Programs across the northern region:

Program	Scope	Target Age	How to Access	Link
Reconnect – Nillumbik Health	Assists young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to stabilise and improve their housing situation and improve engagement with family and the local community. Reconnect can provide small amounts of Brokerage support for essential items	12 – 18 year olds	Contact healthAbility: 9430 9100	For more information, see: http://healthability.org.au/about-us/
Berry Street HIP (Homeless Intervention & Prevention) program	Provide support to young people who are at risk of homelessness due to family breakdown. HIP workers can undertake an assessment of the issues impacting on the young person's accommodation and provide advice and access supports	16 – 25 year olds	Referrals can be made by school SWC's, support workers/agencies or by the young person themselves. Referrals taken directly by Berry Street: Contact the Berry Street Transitional Youth Support Service, Ph: 9450 4700. This service can also be accessed via Haven; Home, Safe	
FRMP – Family Reconciliation and Mediation Program	Brokerage funding for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Brokerage can be used for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Individual/family therapy » Family mediation » Respite of up to \$700.00 per year paid to a carer » Discretionary funding 	16 – 25 year olds	Any support worker who is providing ongoing support can apply for FRMP funds on behalf of the young person – this includes SWC's providing ongoing support	See FRMP guidelines and application forms at: www.frmp.org.au

Program	Scope	Target Age	How to Access	Link
Hope Street Youth Reconciliation	Counselling and support for young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness and their families. Can include family mediation and living skills workshops.	16 – 25 year olds	Referrals to this program are via an access point – contact either Haven; Home, Safe: 9479 0700 or MYSS: 9614 3688	For more information, see: www.hopest.org/programs/youth-reconciliation
Kids Under Cover	Provide self-contained one and two bed studios that are locatable on the grounds of the family/ care-giver's home for young people who are at risk of homelessness due to over-crowding or family conflict. The aim of the program is to maintain positive family connections. Program also provides mentoring support and financial support to assist young people to stay connected to education/training.	12 – 25 year olds	Referrals to this program are via a Community Service Organisation who is providing ongoing support to the young person.	For more information, see: www.kuc.org.au
Kildonan Kinship Care program	Provides support to extended family networks who are caring for a family member who is unable to live with their parents.	12 – 17 year olds	Referrals can be made directly to Uniting, Ph: 8401 0100 hello@vt.uniting.org	For more information, see: www.uniting.org

Program	Scope	Target Age	How to Access	Link
Relationships Australia	Provides counselling and family therapy services – note this is a fee for service on a sliding scale based on income.	Families and young people – not age limit.	Referrals can be made directly to Relations Australia – Ph: 9404 7800; enquiries@greensboroughFRC.org.au	For more information, see: www.relationships.org.au/locations/vic/greensborough
The Bouverie Centre	Provides counselling and family therapy for families experiencing stress around the impact of; serious mental illness, trauma, complex AOD issues or Acquired Brain Injury on the family unit and functioning. NB: The Bouverie Centre is located in 8 Gardner Street Brunswick and all counselling appointments are from this Centre	Families with complex presenting needs	Referrals can be made either via a support agency or the family themselves – contact Client Intake to make a phone intake appointment: Ph: 9385 5100	For more information, visit: Bouverie.centre@latrobe.edu.au

Banyule Youth Services remain available for secondary consult support to assist any school or welfare organisation to determine the best avenues of support for young people at risk of homelessness, Ph: 9457 9855

Financial Support and Brokerage Programs:

Program	Scope	Target Age	How to Access	Link
FRMP – Family Reconciliation and Mediation Program	<p>Brokerage funding for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Brokerage can be used for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Individual/family therapy » Family mediation » Respite of up to \$700.00 per year paid to a carer » Discretionary funding 	16 – 25 year olds	Any support worker who is providing ongoing support can apply for FRMP funds on behalf of the young person – this includes SWC’s providing ongoing support	See FRMP guidelines and application forms at: www.frmp.org.au
CEEP – Creating Connections Education Employment Pathways	<p>Supports young people who are homeless with brokerage funds to sustain their education, employment and training pathways. Support workers can apply for brokerage of up to \$1,200 per calendar year. Submitting agencies purchase items including school fees, uniforms, myki’s and other education related expenses and are then invoice CEEP for reimbursement.</p>	15 – 25 year olds	Any support worker who is providing ongoing support can apply for FRMP funds on behalf of the young person – this includes SWC’s providing ongoing support	See Melbourne City Mission’s website for guidelines and application forms: https://www.unitingharrison.org.au/index.php/ceep
Centrelink Youth Allowance – Independent Rate	<p>Youth Allowance Independent Rate is paid to young people who have undergone an assessment by Centrelink’s Social Work Assessment Team and it has been identified that it is unreasonable for the young person to live at home due to significant family breakdown or significant safety concerns.</p>	<p>16 – 24 year olds</p> <p>Available to 15 year olds in very special circumstances.</p>	<p>Young people must first have a Customer Reference Number (CRN) and have activated online services with Centrelink.</p> <p>Once this is done, young people can apply for the payment online.</p>	For information and links to how to claim: www.humanservices.gov.au and search for Youth Allowance.

Program	Scope	Target Age	How to Access	Link
healthAbility	Assists young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to stabilise and improve their housing situation and improve engagement with family and the local community.	12 – 18 year olds	Contact healthAbility Intake Services: 9430 9100	For more information, see: https://healthability.org.au/services-support/youth-support/
Department of Health and Human Services Student Scholarship Program (Kids Under Cover)	Scholarships for young people in years 11 and 12 who are living in public or community housing or who are at risk of homelessness. 150 scholarships of up to \$1,100.00 are available for young people continuing their education the following year.	Under 21 years	Kids Under Cover Scholarship Coordinator. E: scholarship@kuc.org.au T: (03) 9429 7444	Contact https://www.kuc.org.au/what-we-do/how-we-help/scholarship-programs/dhhs-student-scholarships-program/

