

**Report into
the needs
of
Homeless Youth
in Holroyd**

A project of Western Sydney Housing Information and Resource Network Incorporated (WESTHIRN) funded by Holroyd City Council.

September 2001

Background

Western Sydney Housing Information and Resource Network (WESTHIRN) is a community based organisation situated in Harris Park. Westhirn is the primary organisation who lobby and research housing issues in Western Sydney.

It has been identified by Westhirn, Holroyd City Council and the Holroyd Housing Forum that there is a need to document the existing provision of housing services for young people in the Holroyd and surrounding local areas

In 2000/2001 Westhirn received funding from Holroyd City Council to complete research into the existing provision of youth housing in Holroyd and surrounding areas, including crisis, medium and long term accommodation. A consultant was engaged in 2001 to complete the project and the following objectives were set.

Project Objectives

1. To research, identify and document current accommodation and housing options for young people in the Holroyd Local Government Area
2. To list crisis, medium term and long-term services, and attached support services, target groups and costs.
3. To produce information in the form of a resource directory for young homeless people and the community providers.

In addition the project has aimed to provide an analysis of the current issues facing homeless young people in the area and to develop a series of strategies to address these issues.

Project approach

Through consultations with local service providers for young people, providers of accommodation and government departments the following has been produced:

- A report that documents needs and issues related to youth accommodation;
- A document that can be used as a resource directory.

Current Issues in Youth Homelessness for Holroyd

What is Youth Homelessness?

According to the Youth Accommodation Association youth homelessness is the absence of safe, secure, affordable and adequate shelter as perceived by the young person. At least one of the following conditions applies to be defined as homeless

- An absence of shelter;
- The threat of loss of shelter;
- High mobility between places of abode;
- Existing accommodation is considered inadequate because of overcrowding, its physical state, lack of security of occupancy, or lack of emotional support and stability in the place of residence;
- Unreasonable restrictions in terms of access to alternative forms of accommodation.

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission defines youth homelessness as, “lack of shelter that is permanent, adequate and secure, and a vulnerability, as a result of this lack of shelter , and the lifestyle it imposes, to exploitation and abuse.”

According to the National Youth Coalition for Housing youth homelessness is the result of a combination of political, economic and social factors including:

- Rising levels of unemployment and poverty;
- Reductions in income security options for young people;
- High costs of living;
- Inadequate public housing;
- High rental costs in the private rental market; and
- widespread discrimination on the basis of age, race, class and gender.

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program defines a person as homeless if, he or she has inadequate access to safe and secure housing, including current accommodation where the accommodation:

- Threatens their well being;
- Fails to provide personal access to amenities;
- Fails to provide the supports normally provided by a home;
- Lacks safety, security and affordability of accommodation; and
- Lacks security of tenure.

Homelessness is not just a lack of shelter it is also a lack of a safe and nurturing home environment.

What are the Issues in Holroyd?

Consultations with youth workers from Holroyd identified the following issues for young people who are homeless:

- Absence of locally based Crisis accommodation services;
- Issues with young people who have mental health or drug and alcohol problems;
- Issues with young people and State wards who have left their accommodation and are unable to access Centrelink or accommodation because they are State Wards;
- The age of youth homeless is decreasing. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there are children as young as nine who are homeless;
- DOCS are not responding to requests – young people are reported to them as being at risk or homeless but they are not picked up;
- DOCS are difficult to contact;
- Young people have no money to get to accommodation if it is available;
- Young people come from diverse cultural backgrounds;
- 14 – 18 years male are the hardest to place in a refuge;
- Homeless young people have a number of issues that do not make family restoration an option.

Consultations with other service providers in Holroyd identified the following issues:

- There are increasing numbers of young people and families with young people seeking accommodation;
- The age of young people is decreasing and services are seeing more State Wards;
- Numbers of requests for assistance are increasing. For example Holroyd HATCH had 14 requests in May for accommodation or food parcels and 27 requests in June of this year;
- Local High School Counsellors are having increasing number of students presenting with accommodation issues for either themselves or for their family;
- People are seen more than once – their immediate crisis may be met but they continue to have housing issues;
- People need to be referred out of the area, as there are few accommodation options. This presents problems as funds are required for transport costs;
- Homeless young people gravitate to Parramatta;
- Young people need to leave the area in the absence of accommodation and this impacts on their education and social supports;
- The homeless problem is not unique to Holroyd.

Previous reporting of the issue in Holroyd

Holroyd Council has been concerned for some time over the increasing numbers of homeless youth and the decreasing number of services. In April 2000 Council met with the Holroyd Ministers Fraternal to discuss social issues impacting in the Holroyd area. The main social issue that emerged was that of homelessness, in particular the number of young children and young people who it is now affecting.

Council followed this meeting up with youth workers who outlined in discussions the lack of affordable housing and the lack of crisis accommodation in the area for young people.

In July 2000 Council had a meeting with key stakeholders to discuss the issue further. Findings of that meeting included:

- Lack of services for homeless children – services see children as young as 8
- There is a need for safe houses
- Holroyd homeless children tend to end up on city streets – either Parramatta or Kings Cross
- State Government cuts in funding is creating gaps in services not just in Holroyd but across Western Sydney
- Department of Housing can only assist those 18 years and over
- There is community opposition when programs such as refuges are funded locally

In Western Sydney and Holroyd in particular:

- Transient young people share accommodation with different friends for a short period of time
- Homeless youth are squatting and sleeping in clothing bins
- There are limited services available in the local area
- There is no brokerage scheme available in the local area
- Young people with high needs, eg drugs and alcohol or mental health issues are even more disadvantaged

The outcome of the meeting identified what was needed in Holroyd. This included:

- Brokerage schemes financed by Docs
- Increased lobbying of local members of Parliament
- A crisis accommodation service for young people 15 years and under and also for 15 – 18 years
- Accommodation services that are sensitive to gender issues
- Accommodation services for young people with high needs.

The Council resolved to write to both the Minister for Housing and Minister for Community Services outlining their concerns.

The Minister for Community Services wrote back informing Council on their current initiative *Care 2001*. This is about linking resources to need, reviewing and redeveloping existing services and developing new services. The initiative involves all out of home care services, community partners and the Department.

The Minister for Housing wrote back telling Council about their current programs such as Crisis Accommodation Program which is administered by the Office of Community Housing. In 1999 the Department established the Homelessness Action Team who assist people who have been in crisis accommodation for long periods of time to find long-term housing linked too appropriate support services.

Holroyd Council in June of this year adopted a Model Policy on Homelessness. This model recognises that Homelessness is a social justice issue and that there are a number of appropriate roles for Council to pursue to assist with this problem. This model has been referred to councils City Health Plan steering committee for further development of local policies and procedures.

Local Housing Costs

One of the issues in the local area is there are few private housing options for young people that are affordable. Western Housing for Youth provides some accommodation for young people under 18 and Western Suburbs Community Housing and the Department of Housing provide assisted accommodation for those over 18 years. Otherwise there is the private rental market where costs are unaffordable and young people face difficulties in securing tenancies.

Table A: The Rent Report for the March quarter 2001 listed median rents in the area at:

Type	One Bedroom	Two Bedrooms	Three Bedrooms	Four Bedrooms
HOLROYD				
Unit	\$150	\$215	N/A	N/A
Separate House	N/A	\$210	\$240	N/A
All Dwellings	\$145	\$220	\$250	\$280
PARRAMATTA				
Unit	\$170	\$210	N/A	N/A
Separate House	N/A	\$220	\$270	N/A
All Dwellings	\$165	\$210	\$280	\$300

A 2 bedroom unit in the area would cost on average of \$215 per week (\$430 per fortnight) and a young person receiving Youth Allowance would get approximately \$290.10 per fortnight plus rent assistance.

State Wide Research

Across NSW Homelessness is a growing problem. In 1989 when the Burdekin report was written there were 70, 000 Australian children and young people homeless. Now it is estimated that there are over 100,000. According to the Homeless Persons Information Service In NSW in 1999, people seeking crisis accommodation and support rose 24.8% to 33, 462.

Shelter NSW reported in 1999 that in the previous five years, over \$231 million had been cut from the supply of public housing with \$99 million of those cuts in 1999.

In 1999 the new Commonwealth / State Housing agreement took effect and resulted in an amount of funding available to the states being reduced by over \$10 million per year. At the end of 2000 in NSW there were 96, 500 people on the public housing waiting list yet only 1, 285 public housing dwellings were constructed in that year.

Quantifying the number of homeless people is difficult at both a local area such as Holroyd LGA and across the State. Not all homeless people use services like accommodation or welfare and they do not fill in forms such as the census.

On the Census night in 1996 across Australia there were:

- 20, 579 people in improvised dwellings or sleeping out
- 23, 299 in boarding houses
- 12, 926 in SAAP funded accommodation
- Estimated 48, 500 staying with friends or relatives.

This meant that on Census night in 1996 there were an estimated 105, 304 people homeless nationally.

When Burdekin completed his report in 1989 it was estimated that there were 70, 000 children and young people across Australia who were homeless.

Reasons for young people being homeless may include:

- Serious abuse at home
- sustained family conflict or complete family breakdown
- lack of income or social standing
- discrimination in the housing sector

Homeless young people are at high risk of serious illness. Malnutrition, lack of hygiene facilities, inadequate sleep, exposure, violent injury, substance abuse and sexual exploitation are all factors they face living on the streets.

What is being done locally?

There are a number of local agencies that are assisting homeless young people as well as Holroyd and Parramatta Council.

Holroyd City Council had HATCH as its beneficiary of funds raised at the family festival this year.

Parramatta City Council provides some assistance for homeless young people through its Community Donations Program. Each year they give \$800 to 8 homeless youth services to be spent on manchester, school aids etcetera. They also provide blankets to Parramatta Community Aid and Telopea Family Support at the beginning of each winter for distribution to needy people. They have facilitated the Safe Haven project within the Parramatta LGA and they have funds set aside to provide a local one off brokerage service.

Table B outlines what is available locally in Holroyd, Parramatta and across Western Sydney.

Table B: Assistance available

Type of assistance	Within Holroyd	Within Parramatta	Within the region
Crisis Accommodation up to 17 years	No	8 beds 4 male/4 female	47 beds 25 male/ 22 female
Crisis Accommodation over 18 years	No	36 beds male	N/A
Crisis Accommodation women and children under 25	7 rooms	No	N/A
Substitute Care beds	Yes	12 beds	N/A
Medium term Accommodation up to 17 years	No	23 beds 16 male / 7 female	24 Beds of which 8 are dedicated for mental health
Medium term Accommodation 18 years and over	16 yrs – 25 yrs 6 beds	No	10 beds
Medium term Accommodation women and children under 25	2 houses	6 beds	
Community Placements	Yes 15 – 19 years	Yes	
Long term accommodation	Yes 4 services	Yes 4 services	N/A
Assistance with food	Yes weekdays	Yes- weekdays , nights and weekends	N/A
Availability of showers and laundry	Yes Monday mornings only	Yes Mornings M - F	N/A
Assistance with financial	Yes Centrelink Limited travel assistance - weekdays	Yes Centrelink Limited travel assistance- weekdays	N/A

This is based on information contained within the Youth Resource Directory.

Models of Care

Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)

This is the main funding program of refuges and accommodation services and is administered by the Department of Community Services.

SAAP is a tied grant arrangement between the Commonwealth and all of the State and Territories. SAAP provides recurrent funding for operating costs to non – government, not for profit groups to provide a range of assistance and support to those in crisis and or homeless.

At the crisis end the objective, if appropriate, is for reconciliation within the family; but for those unable to return home the objective is to provide transitional supported accommodation until the longer term, more stable accommodation or housing can be found.

The SAAP program has undergone many reforms initiatives to develop improved mechanisms for reporting data, introducing case management skills and strategies, develop national standards and develop a new funding model.

The current SAAP agreement, SAAP IV, is based on a Memorandum of Understanding between the Commonwealth, States and Territories. It is based on four strategic themes:-

- Client Focused Service Delivery;
- Integrations and Collaboration between SAAP and other service systems;
- Increased performance, knowledge and skills; and
- Working Together.

Since the introduction of SAAP IV a number of services have reviewed their operations and changed their focus to ensure they are meeting the requirements of client focused service delivery. This has meant the loss of a number of crisis refuge beds where services are instead focusing on working with young people rather than accommodating them and moving them on. In the longer term the client outcomes will be improved but in the shorter term there are less overnight beds to refer young homeless people too.

Accommodation types within the SAAP Program

Crisis Accommodation

Generally provides care up to 3 months but can be less. The service may refer the young person onto other accommodation services such as medium term.

Medium – Long term Accommodation

This provides accommodation up to 12 months or longer. These houses provide support, case management, independent living skills and advocacy.

Community Placement

The Department of Community Services is interested in funding innovative models of care that lead to improved client outcomes. One such model has been the Burdekin Associations use of community placements. This model relies on community care placements for crisis accommodation.

As defined by The Burdekin Association Community Care is a form of supported accommodation for young people who are homeless or at risk of becoming

homeless, provided by trained carers in private homes. Community Care provides culturally and socially appropriate care environments to meet the individual needs of the young person. Trained carers in the local area, enabling young people to maintain links with their local community, provide homes. 24-hour support is provided to carers and young people in this setting. Community care offers respite from crisis as well as stable environment in which to learn new skills. Community Care is not a substitute family or institutional care.

Community Care is successful because it is

- A “normal” living situation where a young person is more likely to develop the skills for living successfully in the community
- A flexible and individualised form of care tailored to the needs of the young person.
- A safe and stable living environment within which the young person can work on their chosen goals
- Local, reducing disruption to the young person’s life and allowing them to keep in contact with their support networks

Brokerage

Brokerage is a non-residential program provided to young people. This program is designed to support a young person in the community so that they may learn to live independently. It is an important aspect of the continuum of care for the prevention of homelessness.

Brokerage may provide one-off financial assistance to a young person where

- a) No other source of funds is available and
- b) the cost is in line with the young person’s case plan.

The main use of these funds could be for accommodation related costs such as private rental bond or crisis and / or short-term community accommodation for young people who are unable to be accommodated within an existing service. Alternative accommodation may include a back-packers hostel, caravan accommodation or hotel.

What else can be done?

The problem of youth homelessness has no easy solution in Holroyd or across the State. Additional funding is needed to provide more accommodation as well as additional support services.

There is a need for local support services such as food, showers and cash assistance. Whilst there are some services available in weekdays across Holroyd and Parramatta food is only available in Parramatta in weekends.

The Cumberland Prospect Docs area appears to have no funded brokerage program. Organisations such as WHY have to access brokerage funds when possible from Alive in Glebe or an organisation in Penrith.

Recommendations

1. That Westhirn lobby DOCS for the funding of a local brokerage service.
2. That consideration be given to the provision of shower facilities within youth centres within Holroyd.
3. That discussions be held with the SAFE Haven project in Parramatta to discuss the need for food services in the Holroyd area.
4. That funding is sought for Holroyd Community Aid to increase their material assistance to young homeless people. Eg a Council grant.
5. That funding is sought for Holroyd Youth Services to increase their food assistance parcels to Homeless Young People.
6. That the Homeless Youth Resource be widely distributed in the community including all services listed and school counsellors.
7. That Westhirn facilitate a meeting with all local housing and youth organisations to
 - Provide information on services they provide and develop improved networks
 - Join together to lobby for brokerage funding for the area
 - Look at alternate models of crisis accommodation such as Community Placements

References

Holroyd City Council
Holroyd Social Plan 1999 - 2003

Holroyd City Council
City Health Plan

Department of Housing
Rent and Sales Report no 55
March Quarter

Wesley mission
Address to the Homelessness Summit
Parliament House Sydney
Tuesday 15th May 2001
www.wesleymission.org.au