

Engaging young people

Using the pathways young people take in and out of homelessness as the foundation for a person centred service culture

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About Melbourne City Mission

Melbourne City Mission work with the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our society. From children living with a disability, or young people with nowhere to call home, to people who need assistance into education or employment, Melbourne City Mission work alongside them, so they can build a better future for themselves. Melbourne City Mission help people find their own path to independence, providing them with the support they need along the way. While Melbourne City Mission support people experiencing disadvantage, we also advocate for social change to reduce the number of people experiencing disadvantage and to intervene as early as possible to limit the damage done by the experience.

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Contents

Executive summary	7
1. Introduction	9
2. Understanding youth homelessness	11
2.1 How many young people are homeless?	11
2.2 Why do young people become homeless?	13
2.3 Research typologies	14
2.4 Conclusion	15
3.0 Research Approach	16
3.1 Research methods	16
3.2 Sampling	17
3.3 Sample characteristics (baseline)	17
3.4 Analytical framework	18
Chapter 4: Life at ‘home’: Pathways into homelessness.....	21
4.1 Independent pathway	22
4.2 Dissenters.....	25
4.3 Cultural conflict	26
4.4 Escapers	28
4.5 Conclusion	29
Chapter 5: Entry into the homelessness service system	31
5.1 A brief overview of early intervention.....	31
5.2 Patterns of service contact	31
5.3 Experiences of ‘first contact’	32
5.4 Histories of repeat contact with the homelessness service system.....	35
5.5 Random entries into the homelessness service system	36
5.6 Conclusion	37
Chapter 6: Experiences of the homelessness service system.....	39
6.1 Young people’s homelessness service use.....	39
6.2 ‘Light’ service users: ‘What’s going to happen to me?’	41
6.3 Light users short term hopes for the future: Service responses.....	43
6.4 Moderate and intensive service users: Expectations for service delivery	44
Chapter 7: What happened? The impact of service interventions.....	48
7.1 Young people’s housing outcomes	48
7.2 Details of study drop-outs	48
7.3 Housing outcomes by initial pathway into homelessness	48
7.4 Outcomes for those who were ‘Stuck’	49
7.5 Outcomes for those who were ‘In Limbo’	52
7.6 Outcomes for those ‘Moving On’	54
7.5 Conclusions.....	57
Chapter 8: Families of origin and families of choice: Opportunities for intervening in youth homelessness	61
Chapter 9: Conclusions.....	67
References	71

Executive summary

Since the mid-1990s there has been a gradual shift towards the prevention of – and early intervention in – youth homelessness, and for good reason. Research shows that if young people are **not** helped early on, they often become trapped in the homeless population where their problems get more complex and are more costly to resolve (Crane and Brannock 1996; Johnson and Chamberlain 2008).

Whilst early intervention makes good sense both morally and economically (Lindblom 1997; Freeman 1999; Chamberlain and Johnson 2003), a key challenge facing services and program designers is **how** to ‘get to’ young people at risk of homelessness, or who are in the early stages of their first homelessness episode.

This report has been commissioned by Melbourne City Mission, Victoria’s largest funded youth homelessness service, to:

- Build knowledge and capacity across its own workforce, as well as the broader specialist homelessness services sector.
- Inform future service and system design.

The report examines how young people make first contact with the homelessness service system, and what their experiences of that system are like. The report addresses:

1. What pathways do young people take into the homelessness service system?
2. What are young peoples’ service histories and experiences?
3. What service offerings most effectively facilitate positive outcomes for young people, including preventing homelessness?
4. What is the capacity for the service system to take family context and connection into account when addressing homelessness?

The reports draws on 45 in-depth interviews with people aged between 16 and 24, and then follow up interviews with 26 of the original participants six months later. Of the 45 people we interviewed, most were single, one quarter had been in State out-of-home care, nearly two thirds had received treatment for mental health issues and over a third reported problematic substance use.

The 45 participants’ experiences of home and family were diverse, and **we identify four pathways into homelessness**. Each pathway can be regarded as existing on a continuum with **Independents** at one end, with less complex issues and a more recent history of homelessness; and **Escapers** at the other end, who often have lengthy histories of homelessness and interactions with assistive service systems, more complex needs involving significant mental health and substance misuse issues, and lengthy periods of child abuse, neglect and trauma. Between these two poles sit those who experienced **Cultural Conflict** and also the **Dissenters**. Each pathway shows that young people enter the homelessness service system with different experiences of family and of the support available to them.

Using our pathways framework to examine young people’s entry into and their initial experiences of the homeless service system, we show that the most young people (64 per cent) had accessed the service system previously, but attempts to resolve their problems had failed. The fact that agencies are insufficiently resourced to affect permanent solutions often results in disillusionment, and young people start to learn ways to make the system work for them. However, this is often directed towards surviving homelessness rather than escaping it.

Building on these pathways, **we identify three patterns of service use – light, moderate and intensive**. The key empirical point is that about one fifth of the sample accounted for over 80 per cent of the services used. Unsurprisingly, higher levels of complexity were strongly associated with higher levels of service use.

Drawing on our longitudinal data to examine **what happened to the participants** we identify **three patterns – those who were ‘stuck’, those who were ‘in limbo’ and those who were ‘moving on’**. People who were ‘stuck’ were heavily reliant on services for daily survival and housing with no

indication they aspired to getting out of this cycle, and most had entered homelessness via the Escapers pathway

Those who were 'In Limbo' were living in short term housing, either arranged via services or with friends/family of friends. They had some plans for the future, but limited resources to achieve this.

Some of those who were 'Moving On' were often living in accommodation arranged by a housing service, but this was long-term housing, and the young people had plans and the resources to make a successful attempt at moving into Independent living after their tenure expired. They had aspirations for the future (e.g. a job, private rental, education, raising children in a good environment). Others people who were 'Moving On' had returned to live with their families and also had positive aspirations about the future. Finally, some who had 'Moved On' were living in private rental. These young people typically had jobs or a partner with a job, or were living in low cost accommodation that they could afford on their benefit payments. They had plans to move to better housing once their current lease expired and were planning for the future. Dissenters and low service users were the most likely to have 'Moved On'.

The report also considers the role of family in the homelessness experiences of young people, including both families of origin – with whom young people typically lived before becoming homeless – and their subsequent families of choice, who often provided an alternate source of stable accommodation following the dissolution of the young person's family of origin. For some young people, especially Escapers, family reconciliation is not possible or appropriate. However, for others, such as those experiencing Cultural Conflict or Dissenters, supporting and strengthening relationships would enhance the housing options and resources available to them. For those with Cultural Conflicts, this task is more difficult, as often the conflicts over old and new 'ways of life' are deeply entrenched and isolate the young person from both their family and, importantly, their community.

The report concludes with a discussion of the key service and policy implications of our findings, two of which are relevant to mention here.

First, the pathways framework helps to make sense of the diverse experiences of at risk and homeless young people. The pathways framework emphasises that people's experience of family are often very different, as well as highlighting the point that behavioural and emotional characteristics cluster in different ways in each of the pathways. We argue in the report that a pathways framework which utilises a biographical approach, offers important clues to the types of services young people might require, and the likely duration of an intervention. Related to this we observed a strong link between the pathways people take into homelessness and patterns of service usage. Pathways with lower levels of complexity typically use services less and were more likely to 'Move On'.

Second, while the focus of front line services on resolving presenting issues is, in the context of a resource scarce environment, understandable, an unintended consequence can be the creation of a 'deficit' based service culture. In our view more attention and resources should be directed towards **CREATING A PERSON-CENTRED SERVICE CULTURE** that works with young people in ways that enable them to focus on, and ultimately achieve their aspirations. A focus on young people's hopes and aspirations, on their futures, tempered by an understanding of their pathways into homelessness, strikes us as the most promising way of establishing positive and meaningful relationships, and securing sustainable pathways out of homelessness and into mainstream social and economic life.

1. Introduction

Australia did not have a problem with youth homelessness prior to the late 1970s. The oil crisis, structural adjustments to the Australian economy, scaled back welfare regimes and changes to traditional family structures changed that, and researchers began to note the appearance of homeless young people, as well as homeless families (Jordon 1994). Unlike many other countries, Australian policy makers responded relatively quickly. In 1985 the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) was established and SAAP explicitly identified youth homelessness as a priority area.

Since the mid-1990s there has been a gradual shift towards prevention and early intervention, and for good reason. Research shows that if young people are not helped early on, they often become trapped in the homeless population where their problems get more complex and are more costly to resolve (Crane and Brannock 1996; Johnson and Chamberlain 2008). Early intervention makes good sense both morally and economically (Lindblom 1997; Freeman 1999; Chamberlain and Johnson 2003).

Australian research suggests that family violence and family conflict in one form or another are the most common precipitating factor in young people first becoming homeless (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1989; Chamberlain and Mackenzie 1998; Rosenthal *et al.* 2006). Supportive family relationships are thus a crucial resource that can prevent homelessness, and also lessen its impact. But young people's relationships with family vary considerably and this has important implications for the shape and form of early intervention approaches.

While early intervention makes sense, a key challenge that services and program designers face is how to 'get to' young people at risk of homelessness, or who are in the early stages of their first homelessness episode. Despite a raft of research studies identifying various risk characteristics that are correlated with an increased likelihood a young person will become homeless (Dryfoos 1990; Karabanow 2004; Koegel, Melamid and Burnam 1995; National Youth Commission 2008; Withers & Batten 1995), few studies have examined in any detail how young people make first contact with the homelessness service system, and what their initial experiences of that system are like. As such, there is currently little understanding of how best to prevent a young person's first homelessness episode becoming a pathway to more entrenched homelessness. With these gaps in mind, in this study, we address the following questions:

1. What pathways do young people take into the homelessness service system?
2. What are young peoples' service histories and experiences?
3. What service offerings most effectively facilitate positive outcomes for young people, including preventing homelessness?
4. What is the capacity for the homelessness service system to take family context and connection into account when addressing youth homelessness?

In answering these questions, our aim is to better understand the pathways through which young people leave home, enter and make their way through the service system and, hopefully, as a result, end up in appropriate housing. As such, as we address each of these research questions, we examined issues of process in order to illuminate an understanding of *how* young people enter and move through the homeless service system, the role family plays in this process, and the outcomes young people experience as a result. Drawing on 45 in-depth interviews with homeless and at risk young people this report examines the pathways young people take into the homeless service system. The report then builds on this opening question to examine what young peoples' experiences of homelessness services are like, what they expect, what services are offered, and to what extent they assess such services as effective. We then examine the role families can and do play in reducing homelessness, and whether this might vary for different subgroups of homeless young people. The later issue is important as policy settings often treat the young homeless people as a relatively homogeneous group, with similar issues and needs. Research, on the other hand, shows that young homeless people are a heterogeneous group, and that their issues and needs vary considerably (Toro *et al.* 2011). We elaborate on this issue later in the report.

Finally, in order to assess what service offerings most effectively facilitate positive outcomes for young people, we draw on longitudinal data from 26 follow-up interviews taken, on average, six months after the initial interviews. The capacity of longitudinal research to contribute to better homelessness program design and development is well recognised in the international literature (Blasi 1990; Sosin *et al.* 1990), but due to relatively high levels of mobility, mortality and imprisonment retaining participants among highly marginalised populations can be difficult .

The report is structured as follows: In the next chapter we review what is known about youth homelessness, focusing on two specific issues – how many young people are homeless, and the reasons why young people become homeless. In the following chapter we then outline our research approach, provide a description of the sample, and then explain our analytical framework. Following this are five empirical chapters. Chapter Four starts by examining the participant's experiences at home. Young peoples' experiences of family conflict are indeed diverse and we identify four key pathways into homelessness. Next, we examine their entry into the homeless service system and their initial experiences. Chapter Six looks at how young people use homelessness services, drawing attention to the fact that the expectations of those with little prior experience and low levels of service use are very different to those who report intense service usage. Drawing on our longitudinal data, Chapter Seven examines what happened to the young people – did they exit homelessness, did their circumstances improve in other ways, or did their problems remain unresolved? In Chapter Eight we focus directly on families, highlighting the point that while reconciliation is an important approach, it is not appropriate for all homeless young people. In the final chapter we discuss the policy implications of our findings.

2. Understanding youth homelessness

In both the policy and public domains, when the issue of youth homelessness is discussed and debated, two questions are commonly asked. The first is, 'how many young people are homeless?' The second is, 'why do young people become homeless?' In this chapter we address each of these questions in turn.

2.1 How many young people are homeless?

The issue of how many youth are homeless has long generated controversy. A 1982 Senate inquiry noted the shortage of information on the extent of youth homelessness in Australia. It reported that 'so unreliable are the statistics available on the extent of youth homelessness that the Committee was hesitant to refer to them at all' (Senate Standing Committee on Social Welfare 1982, p.30).

Seven years later, when the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities (HREOC) report, *Our Homeless Children* (1989) was released, it suggested that there were as many as 20,000-25,000 homeless children and young people across the country. However, it recognised that this was likely to be a conservative figure. The report went on to suggest that a more likely figure was 50,000-70,000. The large gap between the estimates created confusion in the minds of policy makers, the media and the public, and drew attention to three reasons why estimating the number of homeless people is difficult.

First, the two estimates were derived using different definitions of homelessness. Some people classified as homeless under one definition were classified as housed under the other. Without a clear, agreed upon definition of homelessness, it is difficult to establish who is homeless and consequently how many people are homeless. Second, there are obvious methodological difficulties trying to count a highly mobile population that in many cases do not want to be identified. Third, researchers use two different approaches to count homeless people. Point-in-time estimates tell us how many people are homeless on a given night, while period-prevalence estimates tell us how many people experience homelessness over a given period of time, generally one year. Each approach produces different estimates.

Nonetheless, since the HREOC report was released, efforts to enumerate homelessness and homeless youth in Australia have improved. Nowadays there are two primary sources of information on the number of homeless youth. The first comes from data collected each year by specialist homelessness services (SHS), and the second comes from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

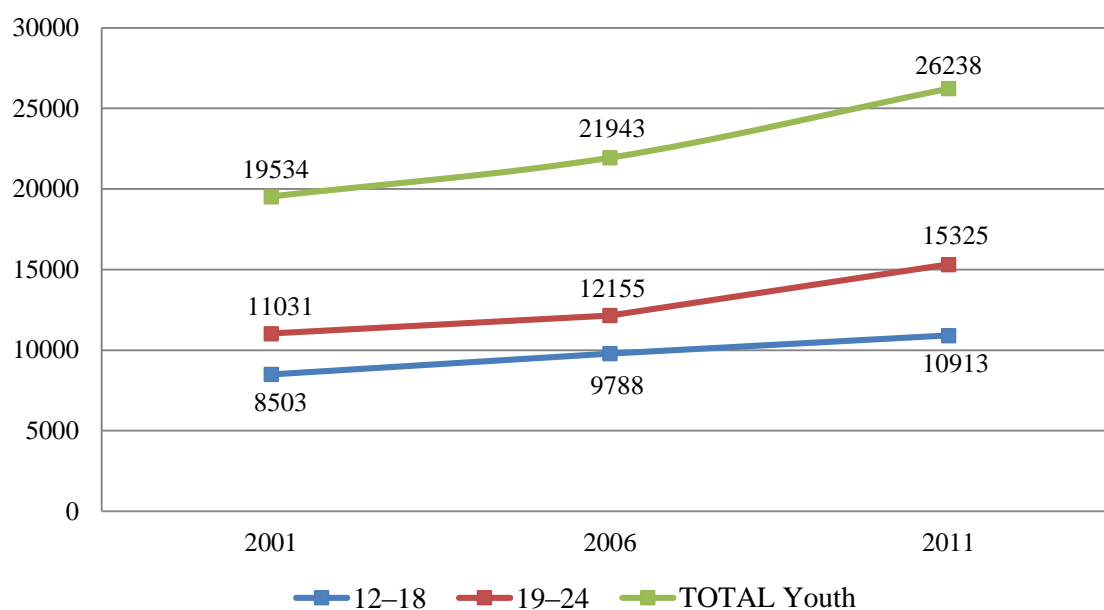
As part of their funding requirements, specialist homeless services collect information on all persons who request assistance from their services. Each year, data from all SHSs are aggregated to produce an annual report. This is a period-prevalence count. In the period 2013/2014 specialist homeless services reported that 254,00 Australian's accessed homelessness services across the country and that 17 per cent were between the ages of 15-24. Nearly half of the young people who accessed specialist homeless services were homeless (54 per cent) and the rest were 'at risk' (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2014). Most clients were born in Australia, the majority were single and unemployed, and few were actively participating in education. The SHS database provides valuable information for policy makers and service providers. However, many homeless people do not use these services. One study found that only 40 per cent of homeless people had sought assistance from service providers while they were homeless (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010).

The second and most most widely used estimate of youth homelessness comes from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). Every five years the ABS conducts a census of the Australian population. As part of the census, the ABS carries out a special strategy to enumerate the number of people who are homeless on census night. This is a point-in-time count. The ABSs special enumeration strategy started in 1996, and while changes to the methodology and definition prior to the 2011 census created some controversy (Chamberlain 2014), it nonetheless remains the most

influential estimate. On census night in 2001, the ABS estimated that 81,894 Australian's were homeless, and that 19,534 (23 per cent) were aged between 12 and 24 years (Figure 1, below). In 2006, the ABS reported that 89,728 people were homeless on census night, of whom 21,943 (25 per cent) were aged between 12 and 24 years. Most recently in 2011, the ABS reported that 105,237 people were homeless and that 26,238 (25 percent) were between the ages of 12 and 24 years.

From 2001 to 2011, there was a 34 per cent increase in the number of young people who were homeless. This is a substantial increase and is particularly worrying sign given that for much of this period (2001-2008) Australia enjoyed a period of sustained economic prosperity. That changed with the global financial crisis that occurred in 2008. Unsurprisingly we observe the largest increase (20 per cent) in homeless youth in the period between 2006-2011.

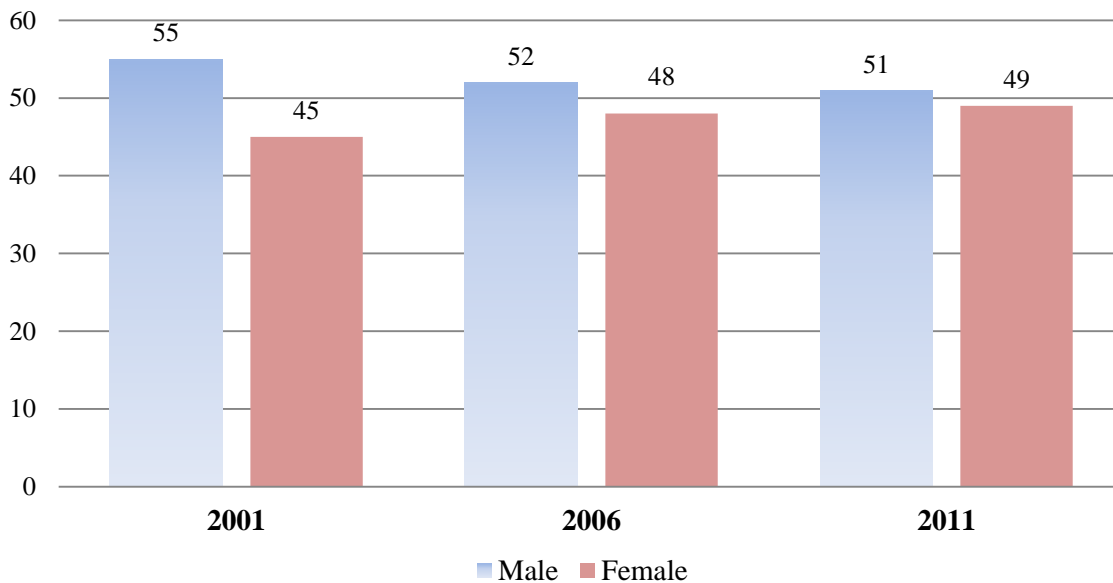
Figure 1: Number of homeless youth, census night 2001, 2006 and 2011



Despite the large increase in the number of young people experiencing homelessness between 2001 and 2011, the profile of homeless youth remained relatively steady. As a proportion of the total homeless population, young people account for approximately one quarter in each of the census results. Further, young people aged 12-18 (teenagers) account for around 43 per cent of all homeless youth, and this has also remained relatively steady over the ten-year period. However, the gender profile of homeless young people has changed, albeit very slightly. In 2001, 45 per cent of homeless young people were female. By 2011 this had increased to 49 per cent (Figure 2 below). The gender profile of homeless young people is similar with the gender profile of the overall homeless population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012a).

The 2011 census reported that the majority of homeless people aged 12-24 years were living in severely overcrowded conditions (52 per cent) or staying in supported accommodation (21 per cent). Just over one in ten homeless young people were staying with other households (12 per cent) or in boarding houses (11 per cent). On census night in 2011, the ABS estimated that four per cent of homeless young people were sleeping rough, although the ABS acknowledges their estimate likely undercounts rough sleeping across all age groups.

Figure 2: Gender profile, homeless youth, ABS census 2001, 2006 and 2011, per cent



2.2 Why do young people become homeless?

Central to any explanation of youth homelessness are structural factors such as tight housing and labour market conditions. Prior to the early 1970s, when young people had problems at home it was relatively easy to find work and a place to live. Since then, conditions have changed. In the mid-1980s unemployment rates among young people began to rise, peaking at just over 20 per cent in October 1992. The rate of youth unemployment has subsequently declined, but it has remained relatively constant at around 13 per cent for the last decade. But this is still more than twice the unemployment rate reported among adults.

Similarly, changes to the housing market have created problems for young people. For the general population, young peoples' first step into independent housing typically involves moving out of the family home and into private rental. However, over the last two decades vacancy rates in private rental markets across Australia have been at record lows, in part due to the high cost of purchasing a home. High house prices means that many people who traditionally would have purchased a house have been squeezed out of the homeownership market. A consequence is that such people are now staying in private rental for longer, reducing the amount of private rental stock available to young people. In addition, young people often experience discrimination trying to get access to private rental housing because of their age, their lack of a rental history, and a perception that young people lack a stable income. The reduction in, and residualisation of, public housing stock has further reduced the housing choices available to young people.

While structural changes in the housing and labour markets have contributed to the number of young people at risk of homelessness, other factors that have contributed include a lack of support for young people with mental health problems (Rosenthal *et al.*, 2006) and substance misuse problems (Rice *et al.*, 2005); a lack of support for people leaving the care of Child Protection authorities and the juvenile justice system (Stein 1997; Courtney and Dworsky 2006; Mendes and Moslehuddin 2006). However, by far the most significant cause of youth homelessness is conflict in the family (Pinkney and Ewing 1997). While public and media perception is that young people leave home because they are attracted by the 'excitement' and 'freedom' of the streets, most homeless young people are often running from dysfunctional and abusive families. This point is repeatedly confirmed by Australian studies. The HREOC report noted that family conflict 'features strongly in most studies of young people leaving home' (1989:88) and the National Committee for the Evaluation of Youth Services Support Scheme (1983) found that 78 per cent of young people had experienced some form of conflict prior to leaving home, with the rate increasing to over 85 per cent

for those who left home before they were 16. More recent research confirms that family conflict remains a root cause of youth homelessness (Rosenthal *et al.*, 2006; Johnson *et al.* 2008). However, as these studies illustrate, what constitutes family conflict remains poorly defined and has been used to describe a broad range of issues. This then creates problems for services trying to respond to family conflict through prevention programs and early intervention activities.

Some young people leave home because of conflict with their parents about their sexual preferences; and some leave home because their parents are domineering and restrict their freedom. Another group leave home because they have mental health issues and their parents (or other family members) cannot cope; and some leave home because they can no longer deal with their parents' mental health or substance abuse issues (Rosenthal *et al.*, 2006). In other cases family conflict results from traumatic family problems such as physical or sexual abuse, or neglect. The key point to reflect on here is that by framing the causes of youth homelessness in terms of a generic concept such as family conflict it is easy to obscure important differences in the ways young people experience conflict at home. This lack of distinction can hinder effective service delivery and policy development by failing to recognise the unique needs and experiences of different groups of homeless young people.

One way researchers have tried to account for the wide range of backgrounds, experiences, and trajectories of homeless young people has been through the development of various typologies. These typologies offer, in theory at least, the opportunity to refine service delivery and policy development in ways that better reflect the heterogeneous nature of homeless youth. In the next section we review such research typologies of homeless youth.

2.3 Research typologies

Prior to Australia's first significant experience of youth homelessness in the late 1970s, US researchers as far back as the 1960s, had attempted to develop typologies of homeless youth (Shellow *et al.* 1967). A central reason behind this work was the recognition that despite many similarities, homeless young people were a diverse group. Early attempts to create typologies of homeless youth tended to divide them into those who were 'running from' something, such as abuse or neglect, and those who were 'running to' something. Researchers have subsequently used a variety of distinctions (and methodologies to derive them) to classify homeless youth. Indeed a review of the relevant literature shows that researchers have developed typologies based on the reasons young people are homeless (Martijn and Sharpe 2006) and on their current housing status (Mayock *et al.* 2008). Others have created typologies based on abuse and neglect (Rew *et al.* 2001), while others have used cluster analysis to classify youth based on a number of risk and protective factors (Milburn *et al.* 2009). Given that family conflict is such a pervasive issue it should come as no great surprise that groupings of homeless youth based on the characteristics of family relationships are also quite common.

In the US, researchers have used the characteristics of familial relationships at the time of sampling to develop typologies of homeless youth. For instance, Tierney, Gupton and Hallett (2008) identified four groups of homeless and 'at risk' youth, based on the way the young people interacted with their family. The first 'accompanied youth', are individuals who are under 18 and live with a parent or a guardian in an unstable environment. The second group, 'unaccompanied youth', are young people under the age of 18, who are living apart from their parents or legal guardians in unstable or inadequate living situations. The third group are 'throwaway youth'. This group is made up of young people who have been asked to leave home by a parent or other adult in the household and prevented from returning home. The final group are 'systems youth' who are young people who have been involved in government systems, such as juvenile justice and foster care, due to abuse, neglect, incarceration, or family homelessness.

In Australia, a familial approach was also used by Johnson, Gronda and Coutts (2008), although their focus is on familial relationships *prior to* the young person first becoming homeless.

They argue that there are two distinct groups of homeless youth and their pathways into and out of homelessness are quite different. The first pathway is where young people leave home because of fights with their parents, resistance to parental control and/or a desire for independence. They refer to this group as ‘Dissenters’. Dissenters often maintain a connection to the mainstream, typically through their ongoing involvement at school, and they generally have a short experience of homelessness.

The second pathway is where young people leave home because of abuse, neglect or trauma. They refer to this group as ‘Escapers’. Escapers often become homeless at a younger age, leave school earlier (and consequently have lower education levels), and typically have little, if any, social, economic or cultural capital available to them when problems occur. Without these resources Escapers face significant barriers getting out of homelessness and they often end up chronically homeless as a result.

The two pathways identified by Johnson *et al.*, highlight that the nature or severity of family conflict influences the way young people enter into and respond to homelessness. The differential experiences of the Dissenters and Escapers emphasise how young people’s life histories (or biographies) have important implications in terms of when, where and how early intervention and prevention services might be delivered, the nature, scope and intensity of service provision, and importantly, the likelihood of family reconciliation.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, we sought to identify how many young people are homeless and why this is the case. A review of the literature suggests that the enumeration of homelessness is complex, with different reporting methods and assumptions holding with them different accounts of the problem. However, whatever the method, figures have consistently shown a rise in the number of homeless young people over the last ten years, although their proportion of the total population of homeless people has remained relatively constant.

For the slight majority of young people, homeless was experienced as an insecure residence that was shared by far more people than the dwelling could reasonably accommodate. While a proportion of these young people may have been living with family, the nature of their housing meant that their housing security was greatly ‘at risk’. For others, the high cost of private rent meant that the number of people residing in a dwelling far exceeded the number of people on the lease; a lease that may terminate at any point in time due to defaulting on the rent or eviction for other reasons. For other people, homelessness consisted of short-term tenures in either supported accommodation or boarding houses. Other people were patching together shelter by staying with friends and relatives or sleeping rough.

The two primary structural factors that are known to contribute to youth homelessness, and indeed homelessness more broadly, are access to employment and the housing market. Here, research shows that the economic downturn has hit young people particularly hard. While youth unemployment peaked in the mid-1980s, rates are still much higher than for Australian adults. Combined with poor rental and employment histories, young people face significant barriers to securing private rent, especially in the current housing climate where demand often outweighs supply.

Given these trends, one would expect youth homelessness to have drastically increased over recent decades, but the proportion of the homeless who are young people has remained relatively constant. To counter these expectations, protective and ameliorating factors are at play. While these are currently poorly understood, they may include a combination of better homeless service provision and preventative action and support provided by families and peers, in the form of a place to live, albeit often in overcrowded conditions, or insight into successful service pathways. These pathways are what we seek to explore, among other things, in the following research study.

3.0 Research Approach

The primary concern of this project is one of process, that is, developing an understanding of *how* young people enter and move through the homeless service system, the role family plays in this process, and the outcomes young people experience as a result. The most appropriate methodological approach for understanding, describing and analysing a process is the grounded theory (Morse 1994, p. 224). Grounded theory methodology is a broad term used to describe qualitative research methods that typically involve in-depth, open-ended interviews with participants aimed towards emergent processes of theory construction (Charmaz & Bryant 2008).

In this project, we take Glaser's (1992) more emergent and less mechanistic approach to grounded theory than the more popular approach advocated by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Glaser's method foregrounds the analytical processes of abductive logic (Shank 2008), where new theoretical premises are sought from the literature to explain observations in the data, known as rich points (Agar 1993). This process sits between inductive research, where all findings are presented as coming solely from the data with no pre-existing conceptual insight; and deductive research, where a pre-existing framework shapes the nature of data collection and thus the scope of possible findings.

Following an abductive method of grounded theory, in this study we commenced with the existing literature on youth homelessness and the homelessness service system and conceptual insights regarding a loose typology of Dissenters and Escapers (Johnson, Gronda & Coutts 2008). However, we actively sought to extend our understanding beyond Johnson and colleagues binary conceptualisation, in ways that acknowledge the complexity of youth homelessness and service system responses. As such, we conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with a range of key informants to map the broad contours of the process under investigation, and then further interrogate our emerging findings both with the literature, and also with additional, follow-up interviews.

3.1 Research methods

Approval for the study was obtained from the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee (Ref #: 46/14). We then drew a convenience sample of 45 individuals who were accessing one of three service sites located in metropolitan Melbourne and regional locations. A semi-structured baseline interview was conducted with all 45 individuals, lasting between 30 and 90 minutes. Respondent's responses were tape recorded with their permission, and each participant received a \$30 gift voucher as a token of appreciation for their time. The baseline interview was broken into two sections. First, we invited the young people to share with us, in a way that was meaningful to them, their:

1. Housing history
2. Familial relations
3. Service system experiences
4. Aspirations

We followed a loose interview guide that ensured we collected information of relevance to the research questions, but in a way that prioritized the young people's perspectives. In this way, we were mindful of existing theories and research on young people's homelessness and interactions with the service system, but at the same time open and amenable to new ways these processes could be understood and experienced from the perspective of young people themselves.

Once respondents felt they had concluded their description, we collected some basic demographics information (age, gender household type) and information on education, employment, income sources, current living circumstances, mental well-being and the like.

A second interview was conducted with 26 of the respondents six months later; the sample for which was determined by whether the participant wished to participate in a second interview. The second interview focused on what had happened with a specific interest in the services they had received, their housing circumstances and their relationships with family. The second interview also

canvassed a range of other issues that the young people considered important to them. The purpose of this interview was to establish what had changed (if anything) and what had made a difference.

3.2 Sampling

A purposeful sample was used to select participants who were between 16 and 24 years of age, were currently homeless, had been homeless or who were at risk. A purposeful sample is ‘crucial to identify the types of informants who are most likely to possess an “insider’s knowledge” of the research domain’ (Thomas, 1993, p. 37). This strategy does not employ any processes of randomization as to do so would identify potential participants from an overly diverse range of backgrounds, experiences, and situations that would make identifying key features and processes impossible. Instead, a small purposefully selected group was chosen as their ‘typicality and relative homogeneity provides far more confidence that the conclusions adequately represent the average members of the population than does a sample of the same size that incorporates substantial random or accidental variation’ (Maxwell, 1996, p. 71). At the same time, we do not claim our sample is representative of homeless youth, or of homeless youth that use services.

3.3 Sample characteristics (baseline)

The baseline sample comprised of 45 people, aged between 16 and 24. Table 1 below shows a relatively even split between males and females, and that most of the participants were single (69 per cent). Just over one in ten had a child (13 per cent). Just under two thirds were homeless when we first interviewed them, and the average age they first became homeless was 16. Just over a quarter reported they had been in the Child Protection system (27 per cent). While this figure is much lower than a recent Australian report which found that 63 per cent of homeless youth had been in the Child Protection system (Flatau *et al.* 2015), our results are consistent, albeit it at the lower end of the range, with other Australian and international research reports that draw on more robust statistical sampling methodologies. A significant majority (75 per cent) of those who had been in Child Protection, had also been in Residential care. This finding is important as young people who end up in Residential care often have very traumatic backgrounds and complex needs. A minority reported some form of involvement with the criminal justice system, with just over one fifth indicating they had been involved with Juvenile Justice and nearly one third reporting they had criminal charges laid against them at some stage in their lives. We also found that the use of homelessness services was high, with the 45 participants reporting that they had used such services over 600 times. There are two inferences we can draw from this. First, many young people appear to bounce around the system, with various sorts of interventions failing to provide the sorts of longer-term, sustainable solutions they require. Second, high levels of previous service use suggest that in many cases the opportunity for early intervention may have passed. This raises the question of what sorts of alternative interventions might be required. We pursue both issues later in the report.

When we examined the mental wellbeing of the participants we found that 60 per cent reported they had previously received treatment for mental health issues. This is a very high figure, and while comparable rates among domiciled peers are hard to establish, the data confirm the mental health issues are widespread among homeless youth. Most of the participants who reported mental health issues had been treated for anxiety and/or depression, but a small number also reported problems with bi-polar and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Problems with drugs and alcohol were also quite common – just over a third reported problematic use of alcohol and similar number reported problems with amphetamines. About one in ten reported problems with heroin.

Table 1: Select demographic and social characteristics of the baseline sample.

Characteristics	Sample N=45
GENDER (%)	
Male	53
Female	47
HOUSEHOLD TYPE (%)	
Single	69
Couple	18
Single parent	9
Couple with children	4
AGE	
Mean	20.3
Range	16-24
HOUSING	
Age first homeless	16
Homeless at first interview, (%)	64
INSTITUTIONAL ENGAGEMENT (%)	
Ever been in foster care	27
Of those, how many in residential care	75
Ever involved with JJ	22
Have criminal charges	31
Involved with both JJ and FC	35
Number of times used services	
Total	639
Average	15
MENTAL WELL BEING (%)	
Received treatment for MH issues	60
Of those who have:	
Generalised anxiety	48
PTSD	7
Depression	30
Bipolar	7
SUBSTANCE MISUSE (%)	
Alcohol	35
Amphetamines	33
Heroin	11

3.4 Analytical framework

Consistent with our abductive, grounded theory approach, we began our analysis with an existing understanding of the following three points. First, our primary research focus was to understand the processes through which young people enter and move through the homelessness service system. Second, a key focus of both the program and research study was on the nature of the young people's relationships with their family before, during, and after the intervention. Third, and relatedly, we know from the literature that family conflict is a common precursor to homelessness among young people, but also that there is considerable variation in the relationships homeless young people have with their families. In order to reconcile these three analytical foci, and with reference to the data

provided in interviews, we centred upon the chronological accounts young people provided of their experiences, beginning with their lives at home, prior to becoming homeless. The results presented in subsequent chapters follow this chronology, beginning with their entry into the homeless service system, their experiences of the homeless service system and then service outcomes.

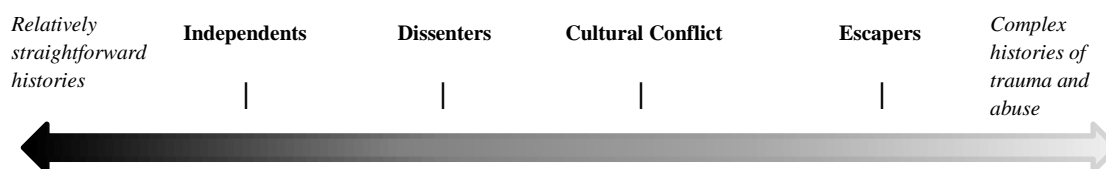
In our analysis, we began with the existing categorization of homeless young people as ‘Dissenters’ and ‘Escapers’, described by Johnson *et al.* (2008). However, after interrogating these categories with the interview data, two additional pathways were added, including ‘Cultural Conflict’ and ‘Independents’. Our analysis of the processes through which young people across these four pathways moved through the homelessness service system revealed that the chronological phases of (i) becoming homeless and entering the service system, (ii) experiencing the service system, and (iii) the range of outcomes available to young people were shaped, to some extent, by their pathways into homelessness, but that if early intervention failed (or was not available, as the case may be), young people often became trapped and new issues emerge and the pathways start to merge. While Dissenters and Escapers, for instance, look very different when they first become homeless, if they remain homeless for long periods their characteristic start to converge. While our four pathway categories can be reduced down to two basic types of young people with ‘complex’ or more ‘basic’ needs – loosely mapping onto Johnson *et al.*’s (2008) original typology, our data provide a more nuanced understanding of the facets of these categories, and how subtle changes affect young people’s service experiences and outcomes. As such, in the following five results chapters, we begin with our emergent typology of four categories of young people, and carry these through the following chapters. Within each chapter, we interrogate our data with existing research literature, and also use young people’s accounts to refine and critique existing knowledge or ways of operating.

Chapter 4: Life at ‘home’: Pathways into homelessness

Early research characterised youth homelessness as a process whereby young people first make a tentative break from home, often returning a number of times, before making a permanent break. When young people make a permanent break, if their situation is not resolved quickly then they often transition to chronic homelessness. Chamberlain and Mackenzie (1998) described this process as the youth homelessness career.

More recently, researchers have opted to use the pathways concept in preference to the careers model. The reasoning behind this is that the career model assumes a degree of ‘linearity’ and ‘inevitability’ in the progression towards chronic homelessness, but also ignores the different problems young people experience at home, and their differential impact. While the career idea was important, as it drew attention to the idea of homelessness as a process, researchers from both Australia and overseas suggest the pathways approach is better. This is because the pathways approach emphasises the ‘sameness’ of some careers and, at the same time, is a means for distinguishing differences in careers (Weitzman et al. 1990; Butler & Weatherly 1995; O’Dwyer 1997; Anderson & Tulloch 2000; Scottish Executive Central Research Unit 2000; Casey 2001; Clapham 2002;2003). Our purpose is to use the pathways approach to first distinguish between the paths that different groups of young people take into homelessness, and to then examine the different social and service structures they encounter along the way. We identified four distinct pathways into homelessness among the 45 participants in our study. We refer to these pathways as Independent, Dissenter, those experiencing Cultural Conflict and Escapers, which can be regarded as existing on a continuum (Figure 3). This continuum locates Independents at one end, with less complex issues and a more recent history of homelessness; and Escapers, who have often lengthy histories of homelessness and interactions with assistive service systems, more complex needs involving significant mental health issues, and often lengthy periods of child abuse, neglect and trauma, at the other. Between these two poles sit young people experiencing Cultural Conflict and also Dissenters.

Figure 3: Continuum of homeless young people according to case complexity and history of homelessness



In previous research young people experiencing conflict at home because of different cultural expectations have been classified as Dissenters (see Johnson *et al.*, 2008). We found, however, that these young people faced substantially different family relationships, pathways into and experiences of homelessness. With respect to the continuum, we locate Dissenters at the less severe end of the spectrum, as those experiencing a Cultural Conflict were often new migrants and refugees, and as such had less social capital and cultural resources at their disposal to draw on to sustain their move from home. In addition, Cultural Conflict young people, especially refugees, were often not living with their biological parents and thus in some respects, these young people experienced conditions akin to Escapers who were housed with foster parents or extended family members when their biological parents were unable or unwilling to care for them. Given these differences, we separate Dissenters from those experiencing a Cultural Conflict.

We now turn to describe each of our four groups in turn, marking out their defining features. To do so, we draw heavily on the voices of homeless young people themselves, in order to use their words and experiences to describe their experiences, and centre young people as the key source of data for this report.

4.1 Independent pathway

Although only three people travelled the Independent pathway, in many ways their experiences of housing are very similar to their mainstream peers. Terry, Sylvia and Danni had all left the family home, but the reasons for leaving had nothing to do with conflict, or other problems at home. Rather their decision to leave home was informed by a desire to live independently, or with a partner, but importantly, it was always their choice to move out. For instance, Terry first moved out with his partner when he was 15 and then, when he was 17, he moved back home again. In his descriptions of these housing transitions, choice was central.

No, I actually moved out when I was 15 and then I moved back in when I was 17. That was my choice as well ... I moved to [Suburb] with my partner at the time, his place. Then we got our own apartment and then, yeah, just once that relationship ended I moved back in with my parents. Then when I was 21 I moved back out again.

For those on the Independent pathway, moving out was a period of high expectations and hope. However, this often soured as the challenges of independent living combined with personal problems but also a dramatic shift in family circumstances precipitated their entry into homelessness.

An increasingly common feature of the housing trajectories of young Australians is that up until their mid-20s they often move back and forth between various forms of independent living and their family home. What distinguishes the experiences of the three Independent young people, is that the option for them return home disappeared at some point. Up until recently, Terry, like most other young people, was confident that if things didn't go as planned he could always fall back on his family and return to the family home. Indeed, initially, everything was going well for Terry but then he 'got involved in drugs pretty badly'. As a result of his drug use Terry's behaviour became increasingly erratic and his relationship with his family started to 'go bad'. When his drug use escalated he fell behind in his rent. In-arrears and with his neighbours complaining about anti-social behaviour Terry was subsequently evicted. Whereas in the past Terry always had the option of returning to the family home, when he tried to return his parents 'made it clear they don't want me back home'. With no family home to go to, an eviction against his name, and few resources, Terry's housing options started to rapidly diminish. He then started to couch surf until these options also ran out.

I had my own apartment. That was going okay for a few months and then unfortunately I got involved in drugs pretty badly, ice especially. I started dealing. Then I just kind of lost myself in that. I started getting a lot of noise complaints and complaints from neighbours of people constantly coming in and out of the place. Then I got evicted from my apartment. I then moved into my partner at the time, his place. That was just a crazy drug fuelled ... I don't know, the whole time I was living there was just ... yeah, it was really messed up ... I got evicted in April 2015. Then I lived a month at my ex-partner's house. After that I moved to a friend's place for a few weeks where I was staying clean and stuff and also trying to find my own house. That lasted a month and then their lease ended and they found themselves a new place and then I kind of didn't have anywhere to go and then I was couch surfing from friends' houses and then just kind of got to the point of where I kind of just overstayed my welcome at all my friends' places. My parents, when they found out that I was getting evicted they decided to just cut off all communication with me. So there's been no support on that end.

Terry was initially able to draw on family as a housing resource and then, when this resource became unavailable, he was able to turn to the housing provided by his former partner and in turn, his friends. But these housing resources quickly diminished, leaving him homeless. However, for the quality and quantity of resources that he has been able to access, Terry can be seen as relatively advantaged compared to the other Independents. For Sylvia and Danni, within a short space of time, returning to the family home was not an option, making their 'tentative' move to independence 'permanent', regardless of their capacity to maintain this.

Similar to Terry, both Sylvia and Danni were quite young when they first made a tentative move toward independence. Both decided to move out of the family home and live with their boyfriends. While the two experienced different levels of ‘housing’ during this relationship, when their relationships broke down, neither had a place to stay. Here, unlike Terry’s periods of cycling between family housing and independent living, both Sylvia and Danni tried to go back home after an initial departure, but were not able to because things had changed in their absence.

For Sylvia, her mother had left the family home and had no room available for her at her new residence, and her father was terminally ill. After a brief period with her grandparents that she described as ‘tough love’, and with no family home to return to and nowhere else to stay, Sylvia also started to couch surf:

I moved in with my partner at his, my ex-partner, sorry. And, yeah, I lived with him for a time period but then got kicked out of his house. I tried to go back to my mother's but I couldn't, so I was couch surfing, trying to find housing but I couldn't because of my age.

[And later]

Interviewer: ... but you chose to move out of home to go and live with him?

Sylvia: I did and it was in the transition of where my family was breaking up and my mum was planning to leave the house, so there was no going back.

Similarly, Danni’s mother’s accommodation also changed during her short absence. While Danni left the family home without the assurance of stable accommodation with her partner, as the other two Independents had, she found herself with no family housing resources to fall back on once the relationship ended.

I think I was 16 and I chose to move to Queensland with my partner, and we had nowhere to live so we were on the streets for two years. That ended up ending really badly and when I came back to Melbourne my mum didn’t have the accommodation for me; she was living with her sister who wouldn’t allow me to live there.

The three people on this pathway had managed to live independently and two had periods where they had successfully maintained independent accommodation, albeit for Terry and Sylvia in accommodation where they were completely dependent on a partner, and Danni who gave up home life with no assurance of housing in pursuit of a relationship. Given the typical volatility of teen relationships, it is unsurprising that all three experienced relationship breakdown and subsequently lost their housing. However, when each could not find alternative accommodation, they found that, for various reasons, there was no longer a family home to return to. With the option of returning home no longer available, no social network on which to rely for more than a short period, and difficulties accessing affordable alternative accommodation, all three ended up homeless.

Apart from the experience of living independently, a number of other factors distinguish this pathway. Table 2 shows that the average age at which people on this pathway first became homeless was 18.7, which is nearly five years later than Escapers and approximately two years later than people on the other pathways. This age disparity is important, as research indicates an association between the age people first become homeless and how long they remain homeless, with younger ages linked to both more serious behavioural issues, as well as longer homeless durations. Linked to this, our Independent participants were, on average, two years older than the other participants at the baseline interview. What also stands out is that none of the Independents had been involved with the Child Protection or Juvenile Justice systems during their childhood, both of which are associated with higher probabilities of long-term homelessness.

Table 2: Demographic and social characteristics of the baseline sample, by pathway

	Independent N=3	Dissenter N=19	Cultural N=9	Escaper N=14	TOTAL N=45
GENDER (%)					
Male	33	63	44	50	53
Female	67	37	56	50	47
HOUSEHOLD TYPE (%)					
Single	67	84	56	57	69
Couple	-	-	44	29	18
Single parent	-	11	-	14	9
Couple with kids	33	5	-	-	4
AGE					
Mean	22.3	19.9	20.3	20.3	20.3
HOUSING					
Age first homeless	18.7	16.5	16.9	14	16
EDUCATION					
Year 10 or below	33	50	22	64	48
Year 11 or higher	67	50	78	36	52
INSTITUTIONAL ENGAGEMENT (%)					
Ever been in CP	-	16	22	71	33
In residential care	-	33	100	60	60
Ever involved with JJ	-	21.1	-	43	22
Both CP and JJ	-	6	-	46	13
MENTAL WELL BEING (%)					
Received treatment for MH issues.	68	53	44	79	60
Of those who have:					
Anxiety*	100	50	75	27	48
PTSD*	-	-	-	18	7
Depression*	-	30	-	45	30
Bipolar*	-	10	25	-	7
Self-harm/Other	-	10	-	9	7
SUBSTANCE MISUSE (%)					
Reported a problems with substances	100	47	44	57	53
Of those that reported a problem					
Alcohol	67	37	33	50	35
Amphetamines	67	21	22	88	33
Heroin	-	21	-	13	11

In short, people who take the Independent pathway have relatively low levels of complexity. They are older and have more experience – both of work and maintaining their own housing to varying degrees. Their first experience of homelessness occurred at a later age and they became homeless because their families could no longer offer them accommodation. In contrast to this pathway where people were ‘pulled’ out of home by the prospect of living independently, the remaining pathways into homelessness can be, in one way or another, traced back to family conflict. Key to understanding these pathways is that the nature of the family conflict varied in intensity, form and duration, as we begin to explore in the following section.

4.2 Dissenters

There were 19 people who we classified as Dissenters. All were living in the family home prior to becoming homeless, and on average they had their first experience of homelessness when they were 16.5 years of age (Table 2). Unlike the Independents, Dissenters typically did not choose to leave the family home and were most often forced out:

This is practically my first time being homeless and yeah, it started a couple of months ago; got kicked out of home because, for some stupid reason. It wasn't even a reason (Patrick).

She kicked me out when I was 13 ... 13, going on 14. Because I smashed her boyfriend's car. Yeah. I just kinda chucked a brick at it, and then he yelled at me, and then he grabbed me, and I grabbed him. Then he just shoves me, and I went to go jump on him, and then my mum just told me to pack my stuff and leave (Dana).

My sexuality, I've become gay. I told my parents and they weren't so supportive of it and kicked me out (Leon).

Sometimes, leaving the family home was a mutual decision, but in other cases Dissenters left because they felt life at home was no longer acceptable. Zac told us:

Basically what happened was it wasn't a very good place to live, it wasn't very hygienic. I was very unhealthy myself physically and probably mentally, so I told my Dad that I was going to snap at some point, and then eventually I did. And then he called the police on me, and it was actually quite rude, because I was actually drunk, and I was at the back of my property, or my Dad's house, and the police come, and they asked me to walk out the front to talk to them, and then they arrested me for drunk in public. And then, yeah, I was brought down to the Wangaratta police station, and that's when I started getting referrals to everyone, because I didn't want to go back home.

Similarly, Mike said:

I was having a bit of falling out with my older brother and my mum. They kept saying I was this and I was that, you know, saying I was a bad person. I started getting in to smoking weed and, yeah, I pretty much got kicked out and didn't really want to be there anyway.

Very few of the Dissenters had been in the Child Protection system (16 per cent) and a similarly low number had been involved with the Juvenile Justice system (21 per cent). There was clear evidence that mental health issues were a common problem with just over half (53 per cent) reporting they had received treatment, most often for anxiety (50 per cent) and depression (30 per cent). However, it is not clear whether these problems precipitated homelessness or were a consequence of homelessness itself. Substance misuse was a problem for a minority, with alcohol misuse the most common (37 per cent). What was clear from reading the transcripts was that conflict at home arose because of disputes regarding their parent's values and rules, and young people critiquing the lifestyle or choices of their parents. While family values and household rules may vary from house to house, it is the rejection of prescribed rules or parents' social choices which are at the heart of this group's problems.

Although there is variation among the Dissenters, a number of patterns stood out. First, problems at home often occurred as a result of young people directly questioning and challenging the authority of their parents, including choices in their parent's partner or other lifestyle choices, and typically rebelling against what they perceived as excessive parental control. Willy and Pavla's experiences are typical.

Willy had been in trouble at home for various minor problems missing school and ‘mucking up’ with his mates, but he had always ‘tried hard to change my behaviour’ after he got into trouble. Willy struggled at school for many years and only had a few friends, in part a result of his autism, but also because his family ‘moved around a lot’ as his father was in the military. Willy’s father was strict and while Willy recognised he had done ‘many stupid things’ his father eventually issued Willy with an ultimatum – stuff up again and he was out. When his parents were out one night Willy ‘borrowed’ the family car and had a small crash, scratching the front fender. On finding this out, and noting that Willy was not covered by their insurance policy as he was unlicensed and underage, his father took him to the police station where he received a warning. At home Willy’s father told him:

On the conversations we had in the past, if we cannot trust you then that’s the time that we will have to kick you out of home.

Willy’s father subsequently threw him out. At 17 years of age Willy was homeless.

Pavla also had problems with her parents’ rules, but in her case it related to her boyfriend. Her mother didn’t approve of her boyfriend, and the pair ran away for one or two nights at a time. Each time, Pavla would return home.

First time, and then the second time I ran away just to be with him again but this time it was just me and him but we stayed at his friend's place. That was for another two nights. I didn't contact Mum or anything again. She was really worried. She reported me missing to the police again, the second time. The first time she reported me missing. Then once they caught me at Epping Station they took me home to make sure I was safe. The third time, yeah, same thing, ran away again to be with friends and all that. This time my mum's cousin took me in because she didn't want me out on the streets. I had places to go but I would have loved to be at home but I just wanted to be with him so badly.

Other young people in the Dissenters group had ongoing conflict with their parents. This was emphasised in cases where parents tried to restrict or control their son’s or daughter’s choice of partner, such as in Pavla’s case above. Others described their parents - or their parent’s new partner – as excessively strict, even in the face of their own poor behaviour, such as in the case of Benji, below, who had a history of violence against his parents who each took out an Intervention Order to remove him from their house.

Had an argument with my parents, well, old man. He got a prevention order. I moved into mum’s, had an argument with her, she got a prevention order.

As Benji’s example shows, and as was common for the Dissenters, once they are thrown out of the family home, or once they decide to bring things to a head and leave, there is little scope for them to return. Unlike the Independents, the Dissenters do not make a ‘tentative’ move towards independence, cycling between independent living and returns home when things go awry. For Dissenters, the quest for independence was experienced in the form of conflict when they resided in the family home. Once an, often abrupt, decision to move out had been made, their move to ‘independence’ was often swift. Once they left home, going back was problematic; in large part because this would admit failure and prove their parents’ fears and doubts about their immaturity and poor decision-making correct.

4.3 Cultural conflict

For nine people, their problems at home also stemmed from relationship problems with their parents or guardians, but unlike the Dissenters here the clashes involved emerging identities that conflicted with their parents’ or guardians’ cultural expectations. In some cases these young people were migrants or refugees, and in some cases they were second generation Australians, but in every case

their parents or guardians retained traditional cultural values from their countries of origin, and expected their children to comply with them unquestioningly.

The young people who took this pathway became homeless, on average, when they were nearly 17 years of age. Very few had been in Child Protection (22 per cent) and no-one reported that they had been involved with the Juvenile Justice system. However, just under half (44 per cent) reported they had received treatment for mental health issues, most commonly anxiety (75 per cent). Substance misuse was low, but about one third reported problems with alcohol (33 per cent) and just under a quarter (22 per cent) reported they had problems with amphetamines. It is important to stress that these substance problems may have emerged or worsened after they became homeless, and once strict parental controls were removed, but our data is insufficient to establish the temporal sequencing of homelessness and substance misuse. Slightly more females took this pathway than men (56 versus 44 per cent), although we are in no way inferring that females experience these issues more often than men, although our data do reveal that young women and young men did experience cultural conflict in slightly differently ways.

Ying's experience leading to homelessness is typical of the other men on this pathway. Ying's family came from Xinjiang, a province in the Northwest of China. Ying's parents were very strict and expected him to follow their rules without question. Ying was subject to years of verbal abuse and, as the eldest child, much was expected of him. Until his teens, Ying thought that this was just the way things were, but at secondary school he 'started to learn that we as kids have rights'. Ying started to stand up for himself and 'fight back' but this created further problems at home. Ying's situation was complicated by the fact he was gay. Not only did this mark him out as an outsider at school, it created further conflict with his parents. Eventually, the combination of Ying's emerging identity as a young gay man, his growing awareness of his rights, and his parent's ongoing physical and verbal attacks, created a great deal of stress and anxiety. Ying spent much time trying to resolve the tension – he initially denied his sexuality and pretended everything was normal at home. But, after he realised that no matter what he did he could 'never be winning with them', Ying had no other option but leave.

Hannah's experience leading to homelessness is typical of the other women on this pathway. Hannah's parents were from Saudi Arabia. Hannah was close to her mum, but they often clashed, heatedly, over her choice of partners, her choice of clothes and her refusal to accept 'traditional' female roles. While Hannah loved her mum, she found the ongoing conflict too much and recognised that her mum and her just:

...did not get along ... she loves me but two different minds. She's traditional Muslim Arab and I'm more like free of the like ... traditions, like I don't follow by religion or nothing. I just wear whatever I want, do whatever I want.

Hannah started to 'run away' from home in her late teens, initially only for a few nights. However, as her relationship with her mum continued to worsen, Hannah started to spend more time on the streets and couch surfing at friends' houses. Not long after, she became involved with welfare services. At this point the opportunity for early intervention was lost.

Like the Dissenter pathways, the problems these young people faced had little if anything to do with complex behavioural issues stemming from emotional or physical abuse, but rather stemmed from a clash between emerging identities of young people and their parents' traditional family values. In most of these cases, the Cultural Conflict young people were forced out of home, and like Dissenters, there was little scope for returning home. In addition, unlike Independents, the options available to young people with Cultural Conflict for alternate housing were constrained by a lack of friends and extended family members with available housing space, and a limited understanding of the Australian service system. Friends and family from similar cultural backgrounds often held, or had parents who held, many of the same views as their parents and were thus not willing or able to offer alternate accommodation. At the same time this group of people did not have a good understanding of the Australian welfare and not-for-profit service system.

4.4 Escapers

The experiences of 'Escapers' preceding homelessness was different from that of the other groups in many important ways. The key difference was that from an early age they had to contend with physical and/or psychological abuse. Not surprisingly we found that 80 per cent had been involved with the Child Protection system and 60 per cent with the Juvenile Justice system. Half had been involved in both the Child Protection and Juvenile Justice systems. Their first experience of homelessness happened when they were very young (14 years of age). Most reported they had been treated for mental health issues (80 per cent), which is significantly higher than the average reported across the sample. Most struggled with depression (62.3 per cent). Substance misuse rates were higher than average, in particular the use of amphetamines which fully 60 per cent reported problems with.

Across the group of Escapers there was strong evidence of sustained instability in the housing and domestic arrangements prior to becoming homeless. Not only was there little domestic stability in their lives, for many, home was a site of danger and drama. Indeed the predictability, constancy, safety and security that depicts many idealised notions of home (Mallett 2004), were rarely identified by this group. In every case the disruption and the drugs, the violence and the associated residential instability meant their schooling suffered. For young people, schooling is a primary connection to the mainstream. While low rates of high school completion were evident across the sample, problems at school were most pronounced for the Escapers – 80 per cent of whom had not gone beyond Year 10.

Richard's experiences are reflective of this. Richards's problems at home started when he was very young – at five he was put into foster care but returned to his mother's care when he was nine.

My mum was an ice addict and a heroin addict. The day I got kicked out when I was 5 years old, the last thing my Mum ever gave me was a knife to the back of the neck. I've still got the scar to fucking prove it ... And then basically she stabbed me and kicked me out and well yeah, I ended up on the streets. And it was since then I've been here, there and everywhere.

Despite the violence Richard was not put in the care of the state but was left to fend for himself. Like many of the Escapers, Richard started to avoid going home, eventually staying out overnight to dodge the problems at home. This 'in and out' behaviour typically precedes a permanent break from home. Richard's 'in and out' behaviour started when he was 11, and at the age of 12 Richard made a permanent break from home.

Tess's situation was similar, but it was her step-dad who caused problems. He was a violent man and he used to 'belt me, belt my mum'. Alongside the violence perpetrated by her stepdad, Tess's mum neglected her. When Tess turned up at school one day her principle made a report to DHS:

...because there were bruises all over me ... I was always scruffy and I wasn't coming to school with the right food.

At nine Child Protection became involved. She stayed with DHS for about three years, most of it in residential care. In residential care Tess got:

Involved with other streets kids [and] started drinking and taking drugs and hanging out with older kids.

At 13 her parents decided that they didn't want anything to do with her and she was made a ward of the state. At 13 Tess had her first serious encounter with the law and spent time in a youth detention centre. On release and back in the care of the state she was physically and sexually abused. When Tess was abused in foster care she decided to leave for good. With no home to return to Tess' only option was the street.

Surrounded by violence, denied access to mainstream institutions such as school and with life constantly in a state of flux, most found the transition to homelessness was relatively seamless. Although there was some naivety about where to go and what to do, most were already ‘streetwise’.

4.5 Conclusion

As the four pathways presented in this chapter show, young people entering the homelessness service system come with very different experiences of family, and of supports available to them. These differences then translate into different ways of engaging with the homelessness system. While the following chapter maps out young people’s ‘first contact’ with the homelessness system prior to our study, for some, particularly Escapers, these histories are extensive and current service use cannot be separated from these. In the following chapter, we outline the divergence in experience in relation to contact with the homelessness service system.

Chapter 5: Entry into the homelessness service system

In this chapter we examine the processes through which participants made contact with the homelessness service system. As outlined in the previous chapter, for some, in particular the Escapers, their history with social service systems has been long and complex. For these young people, their most recent entry into the homelessness service system marks only the latest step in their search for security and stability. As we will outline in the next two chapters, for Escapers this most recent encounter with the homelessness service system may be strategic, as it offers a good chance of providing the resources they need; and can even be considered routine, as it is how repeatedly, or long-term homeless young people have come to cobble together the various supports they need to get by. For other people, most notably the Independents, their entry into the homelessness service system is anything but routine, and is accompanied by the realisation that their life has not worked out as planned, that they have exhausted all other forms of support, and are now in need of more significant support. In the following chapter, we map out the diversity of homeless service interaction, following the continuum we mapped out in the previous chapter. We begin first, however, by providing a brief overview of the literature on the temporal facets of youth homelessness, in particular, regarding early intervention.

5.1 A brief overview of early intervention

Thinking about homelessness as a process can help to identify key points to target interventions. For example, in a study of female headed families living in poverty, Wasson and Hill (1998) modelled homelessness 'as a three-state process' in which families move from their own residence, to doubling up with other families, and finally into homeless shelters. This is the same process as can be observed in the experiences of many of the people in this study. Prevention in this context, and following Wasson and Hill (1998) would target young people in their own residence, while early intervention strategies would assist people who were doubling up.

In Australia the best known model of youth homelessness was developed by Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1998). They also identified three stages. The first stage is when young people make a *tentative break* from home and family; again, a stage that is observable in our research. If the underlying family problems are not resolved, young people often begin to move back and forth between home and elsewhere. This signals the second stage of the homeless career which is referred to as the *in and out stage*. The *permanent break* is the next stage. At this point, family reconciliation is unlikely and young people are unlikely to return 'home' on a continuing basis. Again, prevention and early intervention are most appropriate at, or prior to, the *tentative break* and *in and out* stages, respectively.

In its broadest sense, early intervention strategies focus on people who are at the earliest stages of their homeless career. In the case of young people, early intervention refers to measures taken as soon as possible after a young person has become homeless, which may occur during the tentative break or in and out phases, depending on context and family relationships. However, once young people make a permanent break from home, especially when the home environment or family relationships are poor, then the opportunity for early intervention is over.

5.2 Patterns of service contact

The first two issues that we want to establish in this chapter on service entry are: (1) how many of the young people from our sample were presenting to a homelessness service for the first time; and (2) how long they had been homeless for. These questions are important for a number of reasons. First, if the experience of homelessness is relatively new then opportunities for early intervention and family reconciliation are better. In contrast, when young people have been homeless for a longer period of time, they are more likely to be immersed in the homeless subculture, have a more complex

range of issues, and little desire to rebuild family connections. Indeed experienced youth workers know that it is much more difficult to assist young people who have been homeless for some time.

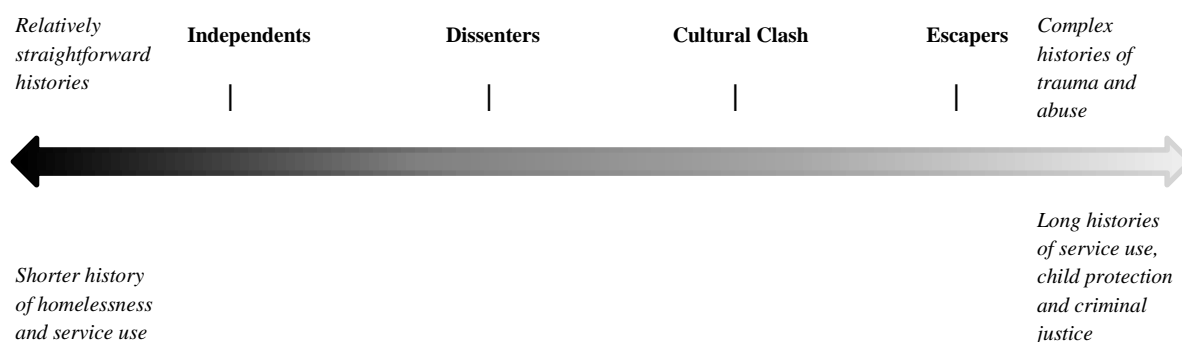
In our sample, we found that just over one third of the participants (36 per cent) had previous contact with homelessness services (Table 3), but the proportion of people in each pathway varies. Most people on the Independent pathway were presenting for the first time (67 per cent), as were those who had experienced Cultural Conflict at home (56 per cent). Among the Dissenters, there was an even split between first time presenters and those who had previously used homeless services. In contrast everyone classified as an Escaper had previously used homelessness services.

Table 3: Contact with homelessness services, by pathway, per cent

	Independent N=3	Dissenter N=19	Cultural N=9	Escaper N=14	TOTAL N=45
First contact	67	47	56	-	36
Previous contact	33	53	44	100	64
TOTAL	100	100	100	100	100

To map these pathways onto our continuum from Chapter 4, we can see that histories of homelessness service usage map identically onto our previous continuum. The poles are occupied by Independents at one end, who have much shorter histories, and a much greater likelihood of ‘first contact’ at the ‘less extreme’ end of our continuum; and Escapers who have much longer histories of service use at the more extreme and complex end of the continuum. Again, Dissenters and those with Cultural Conflict bear many similarities; with the latter having the added complications of fewer cultural resources and often rigid authoritative parental figures with whom there is often little chance of negotiation or reconciliation if religious or cultural rules are violated.

Figure 4: Continuum of homeless young people according to case complexity and history of homelessness



5.3 Experiences of ‘first contact’

When people become homeless for the first time it is often a period of great uncertainty and anxiety. In this context, homelessness is a new experience and it is not uncommon to find that people have no idea of what to do or what to expect. Gerry, who was in the Dissenter category, said that he:

Didn’t know where I was going to live or what was going to happen to me... I didn’t know there were support programs out there.

Those presenting for the first time were generally in the early stages of homelessness – on average first time presenters reported that just over 10 months had elapsed between their first experience of homelessness and the baseline interview, with eight people (or half of the first time presenters) having been homeless for less than one month (Table 4).

Table 4: Length of time between first homeless experience and first interview, by first or previous contact, months

	Duration (months)¹
First contact (N=16)	10.5
Previous contact (N=29)	67.8

During the intervening period, many had couch surfed, which can be thought of as the youth version of ‘doubling up’ described by Wasson and Hill (1998). After a period, previously supportive extended family, friends or others became less supportive, and all avenues for temporary housing were exhausted. With no other options, people found themselves on the streets. In our study, very few were referred to homelessness service sector while they were in the ‘doubling up’ phase of their homelessness career, likely because while their immediate needs for food and shelter were being met, there was little reason to seek alternate supports. The following excerpt from Nicholas is typical of the Dissenters, who moved out with little consideration as to how they would survive if the friends and family he relied on reneged on their offers of support:

Well that was the first time. I was literally homeless for a week or two and then I went to the friend’s house and then after the second time moved in with my girlfriend at the time, and then moved back, and then moved with the parent, with my mother. And then I’ve, I think the end of January this year I’ve moved in, back in with that friend and the mother has not changed at all. So I’m out, I’ve got until the 11th ...

[and later]

I have couch surfed and, as I said before, I did stay with a girlfriend for a month or two, and then moved back in with them and then the house, so I have moved around a bit and I’m glad I don’t have as much stuff currently as I did then. That was insane. That’s I think one of the biggest inconveniences having a lot of stuff, and then having to switch it between houses...

[and later]

I went to [Homelessness service] I think a month of two ago. Not so much, so.

This process of ‘doubling up’ and couch surfing often went on for extended periods. During this time, there was little engagement by Dissenters with the homelessness service system, although they may have had contact with other social services for clothing, food and financial support. These services may provide an avenue for earlier intervention than is possible by the time people present at a homelessness specific service.

For the Independents, there was also limited opportunity to intervene in their homelessness prior to them presenting at a homelessness service. Most were in private rental, or living with partners prior to becoming homeless, and like Dissenters, while they were housed – albeit often in inappropriate or substandard conditions – they saw little need for specialist homeless services until their situation became urgent and desperate. Here, Sylvia’s situation is typical. Prior to seeking help

¹ This is a crude proxy indicator for the duration of ‘homelessness’ as some participants will have been housed in the period between first becoming homeless and their first interview.

from a refuge, she lived sporadically with partners, back at home, and with friends, until all of these possibilities dried up. With nowhere left to turn, she finally sought help from a refuge, but by this time, her history of having no appropriate accommodation was lengthy.

I've honestly lost count [of how many times I've had nowhere to stay]. The very first time was when I was 16 going on 17. I moved in with my partner at his... my ex-partner, sorry. And, yeah, I lived with him for a time period but then got kicked out of his house. I tried to go back to my mother's but I couldn't, so I was couch surfing, trying to find housing but I couldn't because of my age, so they popped me in refuges.

Similarly, as described in Chapter 4, after being evicted Terry also moved around until he's worn out his welcome with his friends and ex-partners. Having no place to go, he finally turned to a homelessness service:

On Friday I came here and just had to get my first assessment done. They asked me when I got paid and I'd gotten paid last week, so got told that I would have to self-fund my own accommodation over the weekend, which I did. I was staying at a backpackers over the weekend. Now I've reached a point where I've spent all my money stupidly and now ... now I'm just waiting to see what happens.

Most of those who reported this was their first contact had moved in and out of home on a number of occasions, but there were signs that the 'in and out' stage was coming to an end for many of them and some had started to sleep rough. Pavla had left home on a number of occasions but she had always found a place to stay. The final time she left she had nowhere to go and ended up sleeping at Flinders Street Station. She said that she was 'scared because I didn't know what was going to happen to me while I within those hours that I was asleep' and that she was 'really cold'.

It is usually assumed that people who sleep rough have a long term problem with homelessness. Indeed as Cameron Parsell (2014, pp.237-238) has pointed out that in the minds of many policy makers, rough sleeping has become inextricably linked with the idea of long-term homelessness (cf the Labor Government's White Paper, *The Road Home* 2008). However recent evidence has emerged that shows rough sleeping is relatively common among the newly homeless as well (Chamberlain and Johnson 2015). Our findings corroborate this.

Young people who have had no previous contact with homelessness services tend to find to find their way into 'the system' in one of two ways. Sometimes they were 'lucky' and the first service they approached made a direct referral. Zac was referred directly to an Agency and it was and remains his first and only contact with homelessness services. According to Zac the caseworker:

...straight away helped me out ... helped me out a lot actually.

While this route was the most direct, smoothest and least stressful, it was also the least common. Most often people found out about the HSS through friends or acquaintances that had some direct knowledge of the homelessness service system; others found out via the internet; and others found out from young people they had met who were experiencing similar problems to them.

Effective early intervention relies on getting to young people as early as possible but this is often challenging. Young homeless people, like their adult counterparts, often wait until they are in extreme crisis before they seek assistance and this makes early intervention difficult. For people with no knowledge of how the way the system works, or what services are available, where to start is often a daunting task. Nonetheless the fact that over one third of the participants were in the early stages of their homelessness careers is a positive sign.

However, just under two thirds of the participants were further down the track, and for many of them the opportunity for early intervention was over. All had made a permanent break from home and on average over 5 years had elapsed between the time they had first left home and the time of the

first interview (Table 4). Among the Escapers this pattern was most pronounced – every escaper had prior contact with homeless services and as a group they had been homeless the longest (67 months).

In contrast to those who were making a hesitant, often random, and very recent entry into the homelessness service system, among those who had presented previously, most had been homeless for some time, living temporarily with friends and other family members, living in short-term supported accommodation and refuges, and sleeping rough.

5.4 Histories of repeat contact with the homelessness service system

For many young people with extensive histories of service use, their experiences with welfare system had started at a young age. Like those reported in the previous section, their experiences began quite similarly. Here, Escaper Kerin provides a typical example. After a lengthy history of abuse by his father, and arguments with his mother's new partner, he found himself with nowhere to live. He then moved in with 26-year-old twins who he met through his mother.

I met actually Jody and Kevin previously when I was in with Mum, and they're twins, 26 year olds. They took me in, 'cause I was only young, and they said they would look after me and that. But they didn't really look after me. They got me into a lot of trouble.

[and later]

We stayed up there for a couple of weeks, and then I just moved around mates' houses for a long time. And then I caught up with an old friend, Daniel, this was about a year and a half ago.

However, these periods of staying with a variety of friends and family members soon transitioned into needing more intensive support. Here, Kerin turned to a variety of youth specific homelessness agencies and has found accommodation through such agencies on several occasions, in two different states.

I've stayed in a couple [of refuges]. I stayed in [Refuge], which is [run by Agency], Tasmania. I was over in Tassie for three months ... I only came back last Saturday. I stayed in [Another Refuge] over in Tasmania and [Another Refuge] over here in Moorabbin.

Seeking help from homelessness services has now become Kerin's first point of call. In Hobart, he immediately found a service upon arrival, and managed to secure accommodation despite not meeting their eligibility criteria.

I was just walking around [Hobart] trying to figure something out. And then I stumbled across [An Agency], which is a housing joint over in Tassie. I was, like, 'blah, blah, blah, I'm fresh from Victoria. What can you do?' ... Like, I'm here for a fresh start. And they're, like, 'When did you get in?' I was, like, 'Two hours ago. And they're, like, 'What the fuck?' and they're, like, 'Look, we can't help you technically for seven days, but there is a shelter over in [Suburb], which was only about 15 minutes away, and I was, like, right, and I went over there and I was there for three weeks. And then went to [Agency], and [that] just did not work out.

Indeed by the time they entered the homelessness service system on this most recent occasion, many of those with repeat contacts were 'service savvy', having been in refuges and other forms of temporary accommodation many times previously. Escapers and others who had become entrenched in homelessness had learnt how the system 'worked' but they were also more wary of services and

prone to use them in a pragmatic way that served their immediate needs, rather than resolving long term problems.

5.5 Random entries into the homelessness service system

A common issue that emerged from the transcripts was the irrespective of whether this was the first time they had entered the homelessness service system, or was just their most recent instance, luck and chance played a key role. For example, Patrick was sleeping rough before a Salvation Army worker found him and drove him to one of Melbourne's homelessness service agencies. Which agency he was brought to, and whether this was the most appropriate agency to meet his needs was thus in the hands of the worker.

Interviewer: And how did you come here? How did you find out about [Agency]?

Patrick: One of the Salvation Army workers.

Interviewer: So they go there to the bridge and talk to people, or...?

Patrick: Yeah, they come during, like at night, but I, the first time I found out about this place one of the Salvation Army workers brought me here. She told me about, like they could help with things and stuff, so So she, yeah, I didn't know where it was so she drove me out.

While Escapers were savvier and had friends and refuge and supported accommodation co-tenants who could share their experiences of different services, many also stumbled into different services purely by chance. Tess, who was made a Ward of the State while in Juvenile Detention at age 12 and who had an extensive history of homelessness service use, provides a case in point when she says:

I think I was just walking through the city and I walked past [a new Agency]. And yeah they were really good, and yeah.

Those with extensive histories often 'shopped around' a variety of agencies and services until they found a worker, or a style of working that met their needs. Similar to Tess, Kerin noted with respect to one refuge he stayed in,

Like, one worker, she sat there and told me that he treats us like we're in a hospital like we're patients and we're sick and we need to be helped. And I was, like, you fucking calling me - so I got some fucking thing there - like, that was the way they treated us. And that's when I told them to shove it up the fucking arse, and I went back to Youth Care, and I was there for about four weeks.

In other instances, mirroring the young people's relationships at home, it was the Agency who severed ties with their client. These often occurred after altercations and breaches of behavioural standards such as for abusive language, physical aggression, substance use or breaking curfew or social rules. Regardless of the cause of the service/client separation, these breaks in the relationship illustrate differences in values, understandings of the problems faced by young people and the best solutions, as we will explore in the following chapter. Here, while rotating through services was more common for Escapers, we found that even people on the Dissenter, Cultural Conflict and Independent pathways were likely to end up following a similar trajectory if interventions were not successful. These issues will be explored in more detail in the following chapter.

5.6 Conclusion

The key point to take from this chapter is that many young people accessing services have done so previously, but attempts to resolve their problems had failed. For young people who have a history of contact with homelessness services, their complex needs coupled with the fact services are often insufficiently resourced to affect a permanent resolution, often results in dismay and disillusionment. This can make it more difficult to intervene effectively. That said, some young people were getting access to services in a timely manner, and for these young people the prospects appear much brighter. In all cases except for the Independents, family were not available as a resource for the typical 'in and out' of home transition from living at home to living independently. For others, friends and extended family members were the next source of support. But often these friends and extended relatives were 'overused' and those with problematic behaviours such as drug use and violence in particular, quickly exhausted these sources of support. As we elaborate on in the following chapter, for those with longer histories of out-of-home accommodation and who had exhausted all others forms of housing support, the service system was now the only available resource. Once in the service system, there was little scope for permanent, independent housing or returns to home, at least in the short to medium term. In the next chapter we turn to examine the participants' experiences of homelessness services in greater detail, paying attention to the pathways through which they have come to the service system, and their current location within this context. Clearly, some people's experiences are limited, while others have, over the years, developed an intricate knowledge of how the service works and can use it to their advantage.

Chapter 6: Experiences of the homelessness service system

In this chapter, we examine how young people experienced the services provided to them by homelessness service providers. We do this for each of the four pathways but also with reference to those new to the service system, as well as those with previous experiences.

Our analysis revealed that it was the interaction of the pathways into homelessness and whether young people were entering the service system for the first time, or had a prior experience that influenced the way they used and interacted with services. As such, and to gain a deeper understanding, in this chapter we break our sample into groups along these lines. The first group are those with little or no experience of the service system, who we call light users. The next two groups are those with previous experience but here we distinguish between those who have used services only a handful of times, and those who have used services many times, whom we characterise as moderate and intensive users, respectively. Within these broad accounts, however, we mark out where pathways into homelessness also play an important role.

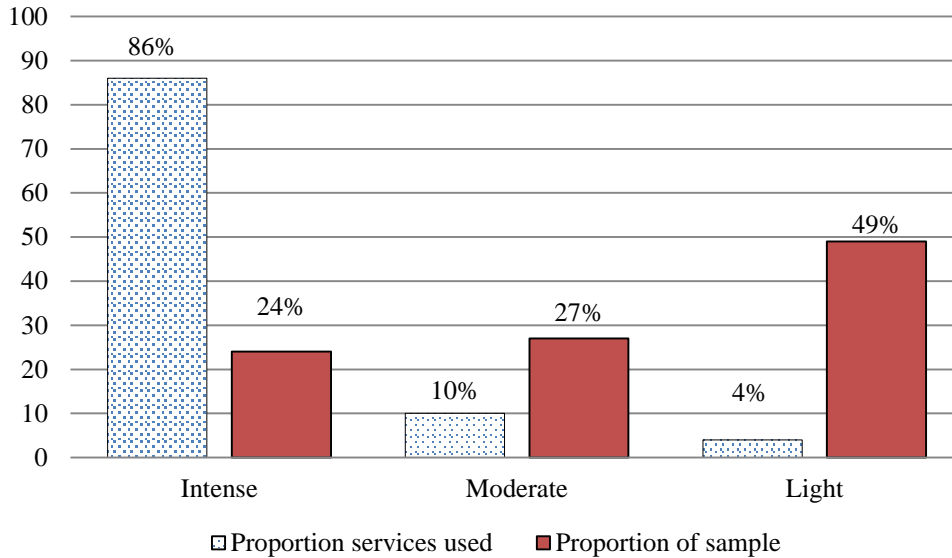
We begin by providing a statistical overview of the service usage of the young people in our sample before drawing on the qualitative data to provide a detailed account of these pathways and experiences.

6.1 Young people's homelessness service use

In the previous chapter we reported that about one third of the sample were presenting for the first time and that the remaining two thirds had previously used homelessness services. Further, we also identified variation in the pattern of service use by pathway. When we examined the number of services people had used previously we found that the use of services was unevenly distributed across the sample as well - some young people had used lots of services, some had used a few, and some had not used any. To better understand patterns of service use we created three groups - those that had used services between 0 and 2 times (light users), those that had used services between 3 and 10 times (moderate users), and those that had used services 11 or more times (intensive users). Our analysis revealed that light users accounted for 50 per cent of the sample but for only four per cent of the services used (Figure 5 below). Moderate users accounted for a quarter of the sample but for only 10 per cent of the services used. In contrast were the intensive service users, who also accounted for approximately one quarter of the sample, but for 86 per cent of all services used.

The uneven distribution of service usage follows a well-established pattern, known as a power law distribution. In the context of homelessness service use this pattern was first identified by Randall Kuhn and Dennis Culhane (1998) in their study of shelter users in the New York and Philadelphia. They found that 18.2 per cent of New York shelter users consumed 53.4 per cent of the system days. Here we see a similar, albeit stronger pattern and this has important policy and practice implications which we elaborate on in subsequent pages.

Figure 5: Service use patterns, per cent



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In terms of the composition of the three service use categories some important findings stand out. First, and as might be expected Escapers account for over half of intensive services users, but not all Escapers were intensive services users (Table 5 below). Most Dissenters were light users, but just over a quarter (27 per cent) of all the intensive users were Dissenters. Those experiencing a Cultural Conflict were evenly spread across the three categories, while Independents were either moderate or light users.

Table 5: Patterns of service use by pathway, per cent

Pathway	Intensive users N=11	Moderate users N=12	Light users N=22	TOTAL N=45
Escaper	55	42	14	31
Dissenter	27	33	55	42
Cultural Conflict	18	8	27	20
Independent	-	17	4	7
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

Intensive services users have distinctive demographic and social characteristics. In comparison to light and moderate service users they were more likely to be male (73 per cent vs 47 per cent), slightly older (21.5 vs 19.8 years of age), and have their first experience of homelessness at a much younger age (13.4 vs 16.8 years of age). Unsurprisingly, 55 per cent of intensive users had been in the care of the state at some point in their lives, as against 27 per cent of those in the light and moderate service use groups. Further, we found intensive users had poor engagement with the education system, with 64 per cent attaining Year 9 or lower, which is four times the rate reported in the other two groups (15 per cent). The physical and mental health of the intensive users was very poor – the nine intensive service users all reported a drug and/or alcohol problem, and this is just under three times the rate reported among light and moderate service users (38 per cent). Further, 91

per cent of the intensive service users had received treatment for mental health issues, while only half of the light and moderate services users reported they had received treatment for mental health issues. Finally, 82 per cent of the intensive service users reported that criminal charges had been laid against them, while only 15 per cent of the light and moderate users had.

Even though our sample is small the data confirm that there is considerable variation in the characteristics and experiences of young homeless people, but there are also discernible patterns as well. First, those with the most complex needs tend to be intensive service users. Second, while the pathways approach provides useful insights into the likely needs of young people, pathways through and out of homelessness are not pre-determined. The fact that some intensive users were Dissenters and some light and moderate users were Escapers highlights the fact that people experience homelessness, and homelessness services, in quite different ways. This raises the next questions we intend to pursue which are: what role do homelessness services play in young people's experience of homelessness; and what factors shape the different patterns of interaction between young people and services designed to end homelessness? To better understand how young people experience homelessness services we now turn to the voices of young people themselves.

6.2 'Light' service users: 'What's going to happen to me?'

For those young people who were new to homelessness and the homeless service system, their entry into the system was often characterised by a degree of naivety. Many had little understanding of what was happening to them administratively, or the consequences of their decisions. Terry (Independent pathway), provides a case in point. After being evicted from his apartment, and outstaying his welcome with friends, he turned up at a homelessness agency on a Friday. However, because he had an income, he was advised to stay at a backpackers for the weekend, which exhausted his remaining funds. He had then returned to the agency on Monday morning, where he was recruited for interview. The following is a truncated version of Terry's description of entering the service system:

Interviewer: Have you stayed in a refuge ever?

Terry: No, I haven't.

[and later]

Interviewer:[What are] your first impressions and what the dealings were on Friday, how do you ... what do you think of the service?

Terry: I think it's pretty helpful. I mean, the services they kind of offered to help me with, not only surrounding the housing but also my mental health and drug rehabilitation and stuff like that. They've got a lot of support going and a lot of different side services. They seem pretty good. I'm just a bit nervous and I don't really know what to expect from this point onwards.

[and later]

Interviewer: What is it that you would like to be offered, and see, and so on?

Terry: Maybe just a bit more communication. For example, today, when I walked in, I mean I kind of just walked in and said, "Hi, my name is Terry. I've been in before." Then they told me to sit down and I didn't get told how long I'd be waiting for or what I was even waiting for. Yeah, there just needs to be a bit more communication.

[and later]

Terry: ... on Friday, I got told how long I'd have to wait for, roughly. Also I got told straightaway that I would have to help myself over the weekend and stuff.

Whereas today I don't really know what's happening. I told them that I have run out of money and stuff like that. I have no idea what I'm kind of ... what to expect.

Terry's uncertainty about 'what to expect' was common among those who had little interaction with the service system. This was especially the case for those who had short histories of homelessness, and who had previously had a family or friendship support network on which to rely. For these people, the realisation that they no longer had a functional support network, coupled with their newfound reliance on a detached, bureaucratic and depersonalised service system to provide support was a daunting and anxiety producing prospect.

It feels like anyone [workers] is seeing me that, as I am weak and I can't do anything by myself, and it's like I don't know how strong you want me to be now, because I want to be strong for myself, I want to do things on my own, but there is only a certain amount of things I can do because I don't know any of this. This is a new game for me (George, Cultural Conflict).

It [service use] was awkward to start with, just because I've never really—I've never been kicked out of home and I didn't know what I was doing and all that (Willy, Dissenter).

For other light service users, the provision of information and the prospect of assistance was a very welcome relief. Patrick told us that:

Quite frankly just, they just told me about how they run things and if I needed help they can help me with certain aspects and stuff.

Among those who reported a positive experience with services a number of key factors stood out. First, the provision of clear and unambiguous information was vital. However, this involves more than just providing information about what services are (or are not) available. Rather what stood out is the importance of *helping* young people to understand how the system works, what is happening, and what options are available. This can involve providing information about mundane matters like how long it will take before they get to see someone to more elaborate explanations of the broader processes they will encounter, for example the purpose of assessments and what happens next. At each stage it is crucial that young people are informed about what is happening, and it is critical that services follow through on what they have told young people will happen. When this does not occur, young people's trust in the service, or the service system, is quickly eroded. This erosion of trust can occur from the first contact a young person has with a service, as was the case for Rob:

I was paying \$13 for board and I was a mess. But [Agency] hasn't called me back and I would have done this [interview] a while ago when I wasn't so tired but they just didn't call back ... Yeah, because it's kind of the reason why I was here [at the Agency] the second time, because it was like – anyway I don't really want to talk about that. (Rob, Dissenter).

For young people new to the system, a lack of knowledge and understanding about 'what happens next' is indeed daunting and services can easily forget this. Clear jargon free information delivered in a non-judgemental way can make a big difference, even if others services are not available.

So pretty much Tuesday and Wednesday I sat around doing nothing and I only got feedback a couple of times throughout the day and I think it would have been better if I was notified more on what was happening throughout the day, and I—it was confusing to me then not knowing what's happening and I—the only times that really I was spoken to was when I first came in and sometimes at midday

and then—Tuesday was on and off talking but yesterday it was—first came in midday and then before they closed; I was told that they'd got a place, so that's really all I had and I was getting no information or feedback on what was happening for a few days, which I would've liked to have known how everything was going (Willy).

Obviously, for most young people presenting to a service for the first time, they are hoping that the service can resolve their problems, particularly accommodation quickly. But this is not always the case.

6.3 Light users short term hopes for the future: Service responses

Light users were typically presenting for the first time and many needed somewhere to collect their thoughts and come to terms with what had happened to them. In most cases they were still in a state of shock about their circumstances and making decisions is often very difficult in the context of being kicked out of home and a service system they did not fully comprehend. To reiterate Terry's experience, as described previously,

No, honestly, I really wasn't prepared to move out, anyway. I mean, I wasn't employed. I didn't ... I wasn't mentally well either. I've been suffering really bad depression and anxiety since I was about 16. Yeah, and I guess my parents and also me, I thought the best solution would be to kind of just get my own place and try and just like ... I don't know, that everything would fall into place once I had my own place and stuff. But, no, the opposite happened (Terry, Independent)

Nonetheless, underpinning the light users' narratives was a recognition that they needed time out from the family or their current situation and an opportunity to sort things out. Central to this was getting somewhere to stay. When we asked Patrick what sort of accommodation he was looking for, he told us:

Patrick: Probably just a spot on my own, because I don't like shared accommodation, and like what I've been told about it as well because my cousins and my family used to do it and they said it's not a good idea. It might be like a good idea being away from the family and stuff, but it's not really a good thing; too much trouble and too much hassle and so and so...

Interviewer: Yeah, it's hard to find someone that you'll match with well, you know, that can get along well. So are they putting, have you been putting your name down on any lists or anything, do you know?

Patrick: I got called from one of the Salvos which is, that went with me to Info Exchange and he called people here and yeah, they said, he said that they told him there's a temporary housing for a week next week or something, and I'm supposed to come and talk to them tomorrow but I thought it would be a better idea if I come in today instead of coming in in the morning .

Difficulties finding accommodation are ever-present problem for homelessness services and often some time elapses before alternative accommodation can be found. How this time is used can be crucial as it provides an opportunity to build a supportive relationship with young people, which can be the foundation for future success. Young people do not want, nor should they be put on the 'service roundabout' as this likely produces high levels of anxiety, but also some resentment at a system meant to help them. This service failure may be experienced by young people as staff that are overly strict, rigid rules and an over reliance on appointments. These service problems, especially for Dissenters and Cultural Conflict young people mirror the problems they encountered at home. As Albert told us:

I came here once, a month ago for— to stay here in a program and I only stayed — I was supposed to be staying every — once a week, but I only stayed there

just one day and after that I never went back because it was just fucking boring ... yeah, I never went back because it was just boring, a waste of my time ... I just couldn't do anything/ I had no freedom or anything in there, I was trapped ... But I'm like, when I go to my friends and stuff I can just do whatever I want (Albert, Cultural Conflict).

When young people do not have a good understanding of what will happen to them, why and how, they often fall out of the service system and back to less appropriate forms of housing, such as sleeping rough or couch surfing with friends. This often exacerbates other issues, such as drug and alcohol abuse. When young people experience these problems it is often difficult to help them navigate a way out of homelessness.

Nonetheless, early intervention is still possible for most light users, and family reconciliation remains a likely possibility as well. At this stage young people are generally not involved with other homeless young people and this separation is important. If light users are put into shared accommodation with more experienced users they quickly 'learn the ropes' and become involved with the homeless subculture where their problems start to get worse and their approach to services starts to change as well.

Light service user such as Rob, describes how he felt both unsafe and also comfortable with more violent and experienced refuge residents:

I got referred to places like [Suburb] for six weeks. Places where I just feel unsafe. I feel more safe in the city than I feel in the country because you walk alone in the country there's not many cars around even and the city's always alive no matter what time it is. ... I was in a house, everyone from there has either been in prison, going to prison or just got out of prison. I fit in there though, that's strange because I've never been to prison, haven't been to juvie, I'm not like all these other tough kids that go ramble on about how many friggen people they etc., etc., and then you know talk about how they going to go beat up someone else and I just laugh and play along.

When this acculturation happens, opportunities for early intervention and family reconciliation start to diminish, and interactions with services also start to change.

6.4 Moderate and intensive service users: Expectations for service delivery

For some young people, their previous experience in the service system and history of staying in a variety of refuges and support accommodation facilities meant that they were more discerning consumers than those whose experiences of the service system were limited. While there was variation in the way that moderate and intensive users interacted with the service system, moderate service users were knowledgeable enough to try and start tailoring solutions that met their key needs. In contrast, intensive users were far more pragmatic, less trusting but often more demanding as well. Their past experiences of service systems left them wary and distrustful and this shaped the way they engaged with services. Indeed intensive service users engaged with services in a very different way than the other two groups - service use had become a way of life and was a process to be managed to secure short-term material needs with the least personal costs. However, in noting this distinction, care should be taken not to approach moderate service users' in the same manner as intensive users. While moderate users have expectations for the types of services they will receive, there is still a good chance of making a successful intervention into the young person's homelessness.

Moderate users typically had previous contact with emergency accommodation facilities and had developed distinct preferences for the type of accommodation that they desired going forward. Indeed it was clear that among this group their past experiences with services was starting to dictate what they were prepared to do and, importantly, what they were not. Here, Sean provides an example. He had a history of homelessness service use over the previous four years, interspersed

with periods of gaol time, returns home, staying with friends and sleeping rough. From his previous experiences, he had identified his desired refuge based on the fact that the workers had similar histories of drug use, and who understood the needs of the residents without making any judgements or placing unachievable demands on young people.

Sean: I've stayed in [Agency 1], [Agency 2], [Suburb 1], [Suburb 2]. I stayed at a lot of places.

Interviewer: Yeah. What was [Agency 1] like?

Sean: That's the best refuge ever.

Interviewer: Is it?

Sean: I'm hoping to go, like I'd rather sleep in a park and wait for a week or two just to go back there.

Interviewer: Okay.

Sean: It's the best refuge.

Interviewer: So what makes that one different to others?

Sean: Because all the workers there they've been through something.

Moderate service users are often beginning to make a transition to more permanent homelessness and many of them had started to pick up skills and knowledge from other homeless young people. Many of these skills were survival skills and, while they help young people get by, they also tend to make it more difficult to exit homelessness, as well as make these young people more challenging to work with. In part this challenge reflected the young person's emerging understanding that the system was engineered by policy makers and politicians in such a way that it could not permanently resolve their core problems.

Leanne was made a ward of the state at 16 when her mother requested that she not return home after being discharged from a psychiatric unit. Since then, Leanne's mother has repeatedly reiterated that her daughter is the cause of the problems in her life, and that she is better off not being her mother. Since age 16, Leanne has pieced together housing from friends, private rentals, supported accommodation and foster care, but none have been long-term or able to sustain her through periods of poor mental health. At these times, Leanne's mental health deteriorates further and she ends up being hospitalised. Upon her discharge, she once again has no place to live. Throughout this cyclical process, Leanne remains positive about the services that she occasionally calls on for support, when all other avenues are exhausted. She is realistic that the supports they provide will only ever be temporary and contingent on desperate need, meaning that Leanne must find her own way into stable and secure housing; which remains an elusive and likely unattainable goal given her health issues and inability to secure stable employment or adequate sickness benefits.

I think they [Homelessness service agencies] did the best they could considering that there were so many other people as well that they have to get through, and I don't know, sometimes I feel like I have friends I can just stay with for a little while whilst other people have the time to sort themselves out, and I realised that it's a lot of hard work for the workers who are trying to organise all of this and there isn't a place for everybody, and I know they'd wish there was but there isn't, and I could accept that. So I think they're just doing the best they could, and once I was in there in ways it was a very lovely experience and they were very helpful, and I really don't think I could have done much without them.

While Leanne was exceedingly positive, other moderate service users' confidence and respect for the system had begun to wane. In the following excerpt, moderate service user Nicholas describes how his requests for assistance, before he was kicked out of his current accommodation, were not recognised or acted upon by the service he attended.

Nicholas: [Agency 3] I went to I think a month of two ago. Not [helpful] so much so. When I booked the initial appointment and then I had the interview I did say to the lady, "I'm not going to have much longer here [in my current accommodation]. It's [the problems are] snow balling. I've tried to fix it, [but]

this lady is hell bent on kicking me out and as I said before she has twice already, so I know she's not bluffing." Really not helpful.

Interviewer: Did they just put your name down on a list or do you know?

Nicholas: Not even that.

Interviewer: No?

Nicholas: No they, she did give me sheets for tips and tricks and that with rentals. So I've read through all that and it was interesting to read but a lot of it I already knew because I like to read anyway. But other than that no, compared to [Agency 2], sorry not [Agency 2] ... Compared to [Agency 1] I really didn't find [Agency 3] to be all too helpful. I understand where they've coming from. She was explaining there's not a lot they can do.

Here, as Nicholas describes, his previous service encounters were used as a tool to evaluate the quality of his most recent service experience. While participant's often acknowledged the constraints that hampered services' ability to provide housing, the primary consideration of young people was the worker's attitude, and their willingness to go the 'extra mile' to help in ways other than the provision of housing. To provide an example, Nicholas continued his description of his most recent service encounter by comparing the Agency 3 worker's lack of action with the personal service provided by a worker at Agency 1:

I do feel like I was fortunate that [Worker at Agency 1] was able to help me as much as she did because she really went beyond, above and beyond. Like when I was homeless, we'd go on little Salvo runs, so one of my shirts would get ripped or something, we'd go down Salvos and get a couple more shirts.

This was a continuation of his previous accounts of this worker's 'above and beyond' actions to take him to appointments, secure him identification and a Medicare card, and vouch for him to Centrelink, including in-person interviews, when his mother failed to show up to support his claims:

The lady did help me because I wasn't on Centrelink then. She did help me get my points, all my points of identification because I literally went there with nothing. So she helped me get my Medicare card, my bank card. She did, bank card I know was a problem because she vouched for me. She vouched for me to Medicare. I just had to, I had to go in there and I had to say the names of all the cards and then middle names and date of births and stuff like that, so because they're my family obviously I'd know that. So typed it all in, got my card. That was my first point of identification. Then, and no birth certificate was the last one, but she was really, really helpful. She got me all my points of identification. She actually drove me into the city. We went and got my birth certificate, the original so got that. That's been useful.

Over time however, and with permanent solutions difficult to come by, some young people started to interact with services in a very different way. They started to use services more often and in ways that helped them survive on a day-to-day basis, rather than as a resource for exiting homelessness. Indeed, the pragmatic approach of intensive service users highlights the fact that the way people engage with services, and how they use services, reflects their past experiences – both with family and other mainstream institutions, but also with the service system itself. Intensive service users lack trust in both the system, but also people in the system as well. This lack of trust combined with a recognition that services are often limited in what they can do, meant that intensive service users tended to use services in a more instrumental manner. Service use was not necessarily about finding a long term solutions to their problems, but rather to address immediate material needs – service use had become a key part of their day-to-day survival strategies. Escaper, Owen, who was a heavy drug user and who first entered residential care at age 14, provides an example of how services are now relied on to meet his daily needs:

Owen: Got kicked out of that one, went to another [Shelter]. Got kicked out of that one. Then I ended up coming here.

Interviewer: Okay. How long have you been coming here now?

Owen: I pop in basically every day. Even when I was in a refuge, which I used to be in that one there [Name]. I basically ended up coming here every day anyway just for a visit. Got kicked out of [Shelter], got let back there, got kicked out again, went back again.

Intensive users have often been disconnected from mainstream institutions and networks for a long period of time, drug and alcohol issues are common, as are mental health problems. Sometimes these issues led to their homelessness; sometimes they were a consequence. But, whatever the sequence they always make exiting homelessness more difficult. In most cases, given the predominance of Escapers in this category, intensive service users have never had a functional network of family or friends, but even if they did at one point, they are now in no position to draw on the social and economic resources that family and friends often provide. Intensive service users are typically embedded in their own networks of friends, but those are mostly composed of other homeless people. While networks with other homeless people can create a sense of belonging and validation, networks made up of other homeless people tend to create problems as well. To continue with Owen's experiences, his long history of service use makes placing him in accommodation difficult, thus further entrenching his homelessness and making a successful intervention even more challenging:

I've cracked the shits at them [workers at agencies] a couple of times, just because they've tried putting me in refuges where people who want to bash me live.

The opportunity for early intervention and family reconciliation is over for intensive users, but they can still be assisted. Indeed if there is anything to take from the chronic homelessness literature from the US, it is that those with the most complex needs can be assisted out of homelessness given the right levels of support coupled with stable accommodation (Larimer *et al.*, 2009; Sadowski *et al.*, 2009; Tabol *et al.*, 2010; Tsemberis 2010). But, this can take time and resources, and many homelessness agencies simply do not have them. Indeed without these resources intensive service users are likely to graduate into the adult homelessness system and also become permanently entrenched in the homeless population.

This chapter has examined how young people experienced the services provided to them and described how these experiences varied based on the length of time young people had engaged in the homelessness service system, and their level of service use. The key point to be taken from this chapter is that surviving homelessness is learned: young people who first become homeless have not learned 'the system' and as a result, they are often scared, anxious and not sure what is going to happen to them. These young people need clear and direct information, and for the service expectations that they are given to be followed through. At this point, a young person's expectations for future independence and housing stability are positive. They are grateful for the information and services that are provided, and see them as stepping stones to independent living in the future. However, when service expectations are not met, or where housing options are inadequate and inappropriate, these system failures exacerbate young people's vulnerabilities and they enter a path of repeat service use and ever-diminishing housing alternatives. Over time, these repeat experiences acculturate young people to rely on the system, as their own resources, such as friends and extended family, have been eroded over time. Eventually, intense and long-term users of the homelessness service system come to rely upon it to meet even their basic daily needs. When service use becomes a routinized part of daily life, young people are often deeply entrenched in homelessness and no longer view services as a means of escaping homelessness, but as a means of surviving it.

In the next chapter, we turn to the longitudinal data gathered from a sub-set of the young people interviewed, to examine how their pathways into the homelessness service system, their experiences of the system, and the way they engage with the system played out over our relatively short follow-up period.

Chapter 7: What happened? The impact of service interventions

In this chapter, we draw on longitudinal data to explore what happened to the people we interviewed. Our analysis revealed three primary housing outcomes - the majority of young people were 'Moving on' and were in stable housing, typically in the private rental market, or with family. Some people were 'In Limbo' in that they had desires to move into more secure, stable housing, but were unsure of what the future held given they were in short-term or insecure housing, most typically provided by the housing service system. Finally, in a small number of cases people appeared to be 'Stuck', relying on the homelessness service system to meet their ongoing housing needs, with few resources or aspirations to move into mainstream housing.

In the following analysis, we first define and describe our housing outcome categories before returning to our previously identified categories of young people (as identified in Chapters 4 and 6) to examine how the young people's histories shaped their housing outcomes.

7.1 Young people's housing outcomes

Of the 45 young people interviewed initially, 24 participated in the follow-up interview. These 24 young people gave a detailed account of their housing and homelessness service experiences in the six months since the initial interview. These data provided the basis of our three housing outcome categories. A further ten young people agreed to participate in follow-up data collection, but were unable to be contacted. For these ten young people, consent had been obtained to access their case notes. From these 10 cases, we were able to categorise the housing outcomes of a further two young people, giving a total of 26 housing outcomes included in the analysis.

Of the 26 young people whose housing outcomes we were able to categorise, 19 had 'Moved On' to stable housing, four were 'In limbo' and three were 'Stuck', leaving 19 for who their housing outcome was unknown.

7.2 Details of study drop-outs

Of the 19 young people who either did not participate in follow-up interviews or did not provide consent to access case notes, nine were Escapers and most were moderate or heavy service users. Other longitudinal studies also report higher attrition rates among those with more complex needs and longer histories of homelessness. We suspect the housing outcomes of this group are likely to be poorer, particularly given the high number of Escapers, but we have no way of confirming this.

7.3 Housing outcomes by initial pathway into homelessness

Returning to the 26 young people who completed follow-up data collection, their housing outcomes reveal some interesting patterns (Table 6). We separated the outcomes for those 'Moving On' into three types, based on the nature of their housing tenure. These differentiate young people who have moved on, but who are currently living in accommodation provided by a housing agency. Typically, such housing was long-term, and was accompanied by services to assist the young person move towards independence, such as employment, education and life skills support (e.g. cooking, budgeting, and counselling). In the following table, we designate this as Moving on (Services). Another group of young people who had 'Moved On' were now living in private rental accommodation, either independently, with their partners or sharing with friends. These young people may or may not have been listed on the lease or rental agreement, but we designate this outcome as Moving On (Private). Finally, a significant number of the young people were living with family members at follow-up. This may have been either back 'at home' in their parents' house, or in a new housing arrangement with siblings, a parent or grandparent who they may or may not have lived with previously, or with other family members, such as step-parents, or other extended family

members. In these cases, family members provided financial and material support to allow the young person to find stable housing. In these cases, relationships with relatives had also improved. We designate this outcome as Moving On (Family).

In the following table, we present results for each outcome, beginning with those who are ‘Stuck’ and moving through each column consecutively. We combine the data from Table 6 alongside the voices of the young people themselves.

Table 6: Housing outcome at follow-up, by pathway, (N)

	Stuck	In Limbo	Moving On (Services)	Moving On (Private)	Moving On (Family)	Total (n)
Escapers	2	0	1	2	0	5
Cultural Clash	0	2	1	1	1	5
Dissenters	1	2	2	7	2	14
Independents	0	0	0	1	1	2
Total (n)	3	4	4	11	4	26

7.4 Outcomes for those who were ‘Stuck’

The three people who were classified as being ‘Stuck’ relied on the homelessness service system to meet their ongoing housing needs. All three were male, and two were Escapers (Owen and Dennis) with extensive histories of Heavy service use and histories of drug and alcohol misuse. Bill the third person who was “Stuck” was a Dissenter who reported a moderate level of service use but who had ongoing mental health issues. What draws these three young men together is their pattern of ongoing service use, from which there is little intention or action towards achieving a longer term outcome. Of the three, Bill was the least Stuck in the system, perhaps due in part to his shorter period of homelessness service use, and perhaps due in part to a lack of trauma, such as was experienced by the Escapers. At the time of our second interview, Bill was about to commence a Certificate I in Transition Education to improve his literacy, and was going to the gym regularly. Similarly, Dennis had engaged in various educational programs while in Youth Detention, and had been drug free during this time also. Owen was the most Stuck, with ongoing substance use issues that impeded his functioning.

While Bill was the least Stuck, like the others, he had a history of violence and inappropriate behaviour that had resulted in him being evicted from homelessness services:

Interviewer: When I saw you, you had stayed at [Suburb] overnight, what did you end up with after that? What did they find for you?

Bill: I was actually in CAP.

Interviewer: Right, and how long were you there for?

Bill: Up to eight weeks.

Interviewer: Okay. Yep. And after that, do you know?

Bill: I got kicked out on the eight weeks.

Interviewer: Because your time was up?

Bill: No. Because of being stupid.

Interviewer: What’d you do?

Bill: Threatening workers.

Given their histories of non-compliance with service requirements and current mental health, criminal justice and substance use issues, the prospects for independent living in the near future were poor. All three were reliant upon the HSS to meet their ongoing housing needs. However, in addition to relying upon the HSS, ‘Stuck’ young people also expected more of the service system than the other young people we re-interviewed. Given that he was the most Stuck, Owen’s interview provided the most candid account of his expectation that the service system provide not just housing, but all of

his basic needs. Further, Owen had learnt how to manage the system so as to produce the most favourable outcomes that met his daily needs:

Owen: We ended up going – I ended up staying in his house. A couple nights in St Albans and then I – then his landlord come over and told me that he had a vacancy at another house. And I was like sweet! So I got moved in there.

Interviewer: A rooming house?

Owen: Yep. I hate it. Who cares?

[and later]

Interviewer: And how much rent is that?

Owen: \$380

Interviewer: \$380?

Owen: State Trustees pays it.

[and later]

Interviewer: Ok, alright, that's not too bad.

Owen: These State Trustees, they're putting \$40 in my account tonight

Interviewer: Oh, good.

Owen: I conned them. I told them that it was my mate's 40th and I needed money to get a present. But no, it's not to get a present. It's to get alcohol so I can have a drink up.

Interviewer: Ok. What do you do with the money that they give you, food, and drink?

Owen: No, I ring up [Agency 1] and get food. I got yesterday; it was a big fucking bag of food there from [Agency 1]. I was like, sweet!

[and later]

Owen: [My Housing] is just until I get into [new Housing Service]. 'til a vacancy comes up at [Housing Service] ... There's a support worker there 24/7 ... They're like little units, which you share with people. You've got your own room, lock on the door ... Because the rent is cheaper there. Which means I can get more money out of State Trustees more often.

Through years of experience with the homelessness and other service systems, Owen had identified ways to work these systems to maximise the money available for use on what would be considered by services to be 'inappropriate' items, such as alcohol and drugs. In turn, his use of funds on these items made him more reliant on agencies to cover his food and housing needs.

In contrast, Bill relied less on manipulation to architect desired outcomes. Rather, Bill was more grateful for the services he did receive, but frustrated that he could not be provided with "a permanent place". Bill lacked a foreseeable path to more independent living and was reliant on the HSS and he had frustrations with the HSS, feeling that they should be doing more to accommodate him after he was evicted from his most recent housing:

And they kicked me out for two weeks and then I went back to [Agency 1], have a meeting: me, [Name], my case worker, and the boss, and my DHS worker, and my Service Connect worker. We had a meeting at [agency] and friggen was talking about the housing, like about CAP and there's a possibility I'll be coming back in two weeks. [But] in two weeks time, had a meeting for it and in the meeting, we discussed about the CAP. And so there was a promise that I'll come back to CAP but they just shit in my face and say 'No. You're not coming back to CAP'

[and later]

That's just nasty. Like, they promised me I'd be coming – they promised me to – if I come back to CAP ... I even bought her [the staff member he threatened] flowers. Yeah, just to say sorry. And it's like they shit in my face. Yeah. ... I ended up in SRS. Did not like it. Smelt disgusting and everything.

Here, Bill also expresses the sentiment that the HSS owes him certain things, and that he has the right to make some demands regarding longer-term accommodation. Between these periods of longer-term housing, however, Bill gratefully accepts whatever accommodation is on offer; making a distinction between finding him somewhere to sleep, and finding him a suitable short-term 'home'.

Like your whole main goal is housing here [at Agency 2] and you find somewhere, they pay for the bond, they pay for the two weeks in advance. Like at other refuges, 'You have to go here'. [But at Agency 2], you won't get put back in the [inappropriate] place, but this [other] place. They help you find another place to go. Like they won't leave anyone. If anyone gets [thrown] out, they probably won't even make them get a house like, but [Agency] is really good for housing.

Dennis's experiences sit between Owens and Bill's. Prior to incarceration, Dennis had been housed at a rooming house. A homelessness service paid his rent for the first week, upon the conclusion of which, he left. The reasons Dennis gave for leaving were that the rent was expensive, the conditions were bad, there were no cooking facilities, and the rooming house had a shared bathroom. After the rooming house, Dennis was then housed for six weeks at a youth refuge, but was kicked out for 'not engaging with the workers' who were 'offering him other services/supports when he only wanted to address housing issues'.

When asked about what his ideal housing would be, Dennis did not describe independent living, but instead listed ways that the HSS could change to be more accommodating of him, although with respect to his previous experiences with such housing, he noted that 'although they [staff] are helpful, you have to be in the right frame of mind to engage in their programs'. For Dennis, the provision of accommodation was a secondary concern to the autonomy afforded to him by these services. While the HSS met Dennis's need for housing, and offered programs and services to address the underlying causes of this need, Dennis was not in the 'right frame of mind' to address these causes – which were related to his ongoing drug use.

The three young people made claims for the HSS to meet their needs and expectations, but without any concessions that they should be looking to eventually exit the HSS, or address the root causes of their service use. When asked what could be improved at the services that he accessed, Owen's comments were telling, and exemplify the mindset of those who were 'Stuck'.

Make sure the iPads are always charged up. They're never charged up half the time ... Make sure there's always food in the fridge. Actually, I don't, I haven't had breakfast this morning ... And they need better food ... they need Weetbix. Toast, and like Cornflakes, Sultana Bran, something like that. They need more Milo as well. Get more Milo out there, will you? I'll be happy.

As Owen's final statement exemplifies, the concerns of the those who were Stuck in the system was about how the system itself could make them 'happy', rather than alleviate their need to use the system. Owen's complaints about breakfast products is a much more trivial version of Dennis's concern that the housing provided to him came with 'too many rules', or Bill's frustration that his housing preference was denied; however all three accounts deflect attention away from how the young person could move towards independence.

Bill, Dennis and Owen make implicit and explicit demands of the services that are providing them with support. When services demand young people ‘engage’ to address the root causes of their situation, in Bill and Dennis’s cases, or take responsibility for purchasing their own food, in Owen’s case, the Stuck young people we followed up often pushed back at the system; often resulting in them being evicted or excluded from housing options for inappropriate behaviour, Owen told us that:

Well, I was in [Housing] for a bit but I, kind of moved out there as quick as I could because I ended up breaking into the vending machine, taking all the Coke and taking all the money and, pissing off. Then I ended up, ran into a mate that used to live there.

On one level some of these experiences might appear trivial, but they are not. These behaviours reflect what happens when people become deeply entrenched in the service system and rather than penalising or judging these young people, services and policy makers need to better understand the context that creates the behaviour. Young people who are stuck have learnt how to survive as best they can, and this means using services in ways that some policy and public opinion makers are too quick to condemn.

7.5 Outcomes for those who were ‘In Limbo’

Four people were classified as being ‘In Limbo’ at the time of the second interview. Two people, Hannah and Albert, entered the HSS after a Cultural Clash, and both were light service users. The other two, Pam and Nicholas were Dissenters and both were moderate service users. All but one of these four participated in a follow-up interview, with Hannah’s account derived from her case notes.

Like those who were Stuck, young people ‘In Limbo’ were living in accommodation that was temporary. Two foresaw a time in the near future where they would need to be placed in new accommodation sourced for them by the HSS.

Nicholas, on the other hand, was currently living with the family of a good friend, in what could be described as a high conflict environment. This was the same house that Nicholas was living in at the time of our first interview, when he feared he was about to be kicked out and was seeking pre-emptive assistance to find other accommodation. Nicholas saw his current housing situation as temporary, thus classifying him as ‘In Limbo’, but given the lack of support the HSS had provided him during his last attempt to seek assistance, he planned to move into private rental accommodation with friends once they had saved enough for the bond. As such Nicholas’s longitudinal experiences offer little with respect to how best to reform the HSS; other than to reiterate that his attempts to secure housing *before* becoming homeless were unable to be recognised by the HSS and thus not acted upon, leaving Nicholas to continue living in high conflict and insecure housing.

Finally, Hannah’s current situation was derived from her case notes, as she did not participate in the follow up interview. Since our original interview, Hannah and her son had presented at a homelessness agency after sleeping with her boyfriend and son in her boyfriend’s car. Hannah had been denied a refuge placement as this was not a family unit (for her and her son), which she only found out when she arrived at the refuge to take the place. The error had been that she was referred as a single vacancy. A week later, Hannah had not re-presented to the Agency and had her support period closed. While Hannah’s case does not provide detailed insight into the experiences of those who are In Limbo, it highlights the importance of providing accurate, timely and necessary information and services to those who are vulnerable. As Hannah did not have a contact phone number, the service was unable to contact her regarding other places or supports. As a result, Hannah may not receive much needed housing support until her situation reaches a point of desperation. In this respect, while Hannah was looking to make a positive change for herself and her son, her experience over time may become closer to those who are ‘Stuck’.

Pam and Albert saw themselves on a path towards independence, or moving on through other means. This was entirely different to those who were ‘Stuck’ who did not imagine a future

independent from the HSS. In addition, unlike those who were Stuck, young people 'In Limbo' were engaging in activities that were moving them towards future goals.

I wish I could back home, but yeah, I think I'm going to be independent, well, finding my own accommodation (Pam).

I want to complete every media and gaming course at TAFE so I can become a video game designer (Albert).

While those 'In Limbo' still faced considerable barriers to independent living, they positively reflected on how services had enabled them to address some of the underlying issues that had caused, exacerbated or lengthened their homelessness, such as drug and alcohol use, low educational attainment, or mental health issues. Unlike those who were Stuck, they were ready and willing to 'engage' in ways acceptable to the HSS and themselves, as Pam describes:

I've got to admit, engaging with workers; if you don't engage, you don't get far. You don't get far because they don't know and then they assume which is understandable. So, yeah. Engaging is very big in this area, [laughs], this system.

[and later]

I guess I've been lucky now, I've kind of picked my workers [laughs] to who I feel I can open up and be more open with, and engage with more. So I've been pretty lucky with who I've got now; I'm able to talk to them, yeah, engage well, so I'm very lucky to have them. They're good ones.

However, for those 'In Limbo', the short-term nature of their current housing, and capacity issues within the HSS, meant that should suitable and supportive accommodation not be found upon the conclusion of their current tenure, they could easily find themselves in a worse position, and further from their goal for of living independently. For example, Pam had spent the night in a crisis refuge prior to our first interview. At follow-up, she had been found crisis accommodation where she had been living for the last six weeks, and could remain for another three. Pam was hopeful that she would be accepted into long-term accommodation with another organisation, but, as she described, "it's a waiting game. Always is in this area". Similarly, after a period of couch surfing and staying at a caravan park, Albert was placed in housing next door to the TAFE he attended, but feared that the accommodation would be closed down, leaving him with few alternate housing options:

But apparently that renovation was supposed to happen ages ago. So that way it looks, I don't think this place is ever going to get renovated, which is another concern, because a dude that works at TAFE, who runs or has some sort of connection to this building here, said that it could potentially get shut down next year, I'm not sure, which is a big problem because I don't think there's any other accommodation. I think this is the only one ... The only other people I can go to is my godparents, but I don't think they'll take me because they've got their own problems on their hands where they are.

For these two young people 'In Limbo', the barriers they faced to independent living were low levels of education, mental health, drug and alcohol issues. The young people In Limbo needed support to address these issues, and needed stable and secure housing while they did so. Whereas the Stuck young people had more entrenched housing barriers and had made few, if any, attempts to address them, young people in Limbo were making more significant steps towards future housing stability, most notably by engaging in education.

I do VCAL on Monday, Tuesday and Friday, and I do media studies, which is my VET course, on Wednesday (Albert).

I'm studying, yes. Yeah. With the organisation [Education service]. Have you heard of that? It's an amazing organization. You get one-on-one once a week

for at least an hour with the teacher. You do your own test and that says whereabouts you're at, so where you start from. It varies from ages; you can be whatever age. It's for free. Centrelink pays you too. You see them and get paid from Centerlink to see them (Pam).

The two Young people In Limbo that lived in HSS-provided accommodation were generally positive about the HSS, as it had helped them to move from a position of crisis, to more stable accommodation. However, these experiences should be contrasted with those of Hannah and Nicholas where their needs were misrecognised or unrecognised, and thus the opportunity to support them *prior to* a crisis was lost.

7.6 Outcomes for those 'Moving On'

Moving On to stable housing was the most common outcome for those participants who were followed up, with 19 young people no longer in need of homelessness services. We observed three ways in which young people 'Moved On'. This was in either: long-term HSS-provided accommodation, typically accompanied by extensive support services; moving into private rental accommodation, either by themselves or with friends or partners; or moving (back) in with family.

Of the original sample of 19 Dissenters, 14 were reinterviewed and 11 had 'Moved On, with seven of them moving into private rental. Young people living in private accommodation often found these houses themselves, through rental market websites, notices and billboards, or through word of mouth. Matty's experiences are indicative here:

Interviewer: Tell me a bit more about when you got this place? At this stage, I know you were linked in with [Agency] and they were helping you out, like they were probably looking for places or giving you some listings, but ...?

Matty: Yeah, we got put through the church on the corner. They helped us, they wrote out the cover letter.

Interviewer: For the real estate agents?

Matty: Yeah, and they helped us apply for 'em, and that. But that was like it. We found this through ourselves. We had to go back to [Agency] every six weeks. They'd help you for six weeks and then you have to go back in and reapply and then you get ...

Interviewer: You get more support, okay. What did they help you with? In the end were they able to help you with anything?

Matty: No, not really nothing

Interviewer: Financially?

Matty: Nup. I was working.

Not surprisingly, in these instances, the young people often bemoaned the lack of assistance provided by the HSS. However, what young people did appreciate was assistance submitting applications when a property had been found, letters to support rental applications, and assistance paying the bond.

[Agency] did help me both with jobs and with housing. They had a housing part in [Agency] as well ... They got me two weeks of my advanced rent, which was nearly \$500 (Donald, Dissenter, Light service user, now living in private rental accommodation).

So, [Agency] put in for my rent for the first two months, because I wasn't working or anything so they helped me out, which is good. Been struggling recently a bit with rent, but otherwise, it's all been good (Anna, Dissenter, Light service user, now living in private rental accommodation).

Other than providing listings, agencies were not often able to provide young people with the practical support they required to apply for rental properties, which involved travelling to potential houses, meeting real estate agents and submitting forms in person. Anna's experience here is again indicative of many who had moved in to private rental accommodation:

Anna: Already found a place, yeah ... it's just rented by me ...

Interviewer: And how did that come about? How did you find this place? Did you get help with that?

Anna: I did ask for help but didn't get much of it. Just wanted to live by myself for a little while.

Interviewer: The help you asked for, was that through [Agency] or through the refuge?

Anna: Through both ...

Interviewer: Were they looking for something else for you?

Anna: They were in the process of looking for something else and then I already found a place s I just said, 'Don't worry about it, it's fine.' They said the process started after two weeks, they start doing that, they start going out with you [to look at properties].

Interviewer: And you wanted to be quicker than that?

Anna: Yeah.

Most young people found paying the rent a challenge, but not an insurmountable one. While housing was expensive, most of the young people who had 'Moved On' to private rental were managing to cover their rent and bills, and most had secured employment to help them to do so. Some young people in private rental had positive aspirations for moving into bigger or better accommodation in the future, or further enhancing their incomes to secure a better lifestyle. For example, Brenda ran into rental arrears when there was a problem with her Centrelink payments. Now that her payments had returned to normal, she made additional rental payment each week to clear her debt. However, these additional payments also underpinned her future plan to move from her current apartment to a house:

I pay an extra \$100 per week, a fortnight, so until it's paid off. But I've told my real estate agent that I want to keep paying so that I'm always ahead. But I want to be a month, to a month and a half, in front before I leave so that even if I do find another house within that month, I don't have to worry about paying for two houses.

[and later]

Yeah, she [baby] needs a backyard. She needs a house. She needs somewhere to feel like it's home. I know this is home, but this more for when she turns 16 and she doesn't need a backyard anymore, so.

As such, unless unforeseen circumstances arise, these young people had a good chance of living independently from the HSS.

Four young people who had Moved On had done so with the assistance of supported accommodation provided by the HSS. These young people included Dissenters Willy and Zac, who were both Light services users; Moderate service user and Escaper, Georgia; and George, who experienced a Cultural Clash and who was also a light service user. George did not participate in a follow-up interview, but his current case notes indicated that his file had been closed shortly after he was accepted into a supported accommodation facility.

George had originally left home after reporting verbal and physical abuse by his parents, which had intensified after they were dissatisfied with his high school results and subsequent university offer and he refused an arranged married. George was becoming increasingly fearful that his parents would find out that he was gay, which precipitating him leaving the family home while continuing his university studies. George was housed in accommodation near his university, a short

time after which his file was closed. It is assumed that given his long-term housing, ongoing studies and future plans, George had Moved On, but no further data in this section are drawn from his case.

Willy and Zac had entered the HSS system for the first time at the time of our initial interview. Zac had been referred directly to an agency, and was still living in the same accommodation at follow-up. Willy 'was moving around' between different crisis accommodation centres for a few weeks, including a period where he went on a holiday with his family in an effort to reconnect, before:

I got a longer term stay at [Agency], and I was there for two months, I think. Maybe even a bit more, and since then I've ... we've found a place called [Service] ... now I've got a place to stay for 12 months.

Escaper Georgia had a longer history of HSS use, and had been housed in a variety of services over the course of her homelessness. At the time of our first interview, she was about to move into transitional housing; housing that she has remained in over the course of the study. As such, all three of these young people had Moved On and were now doing well, and making gradual moves towards independent living.

I've been living in [Suburb] for just over a year now. I am also studying a diploma in web design. I'm three months into that course now, it's an 18 month course through [Education provider]. I have reconnected with my – well, I eventually – not reconnected, but connected, with my biological sister. My dad passed away recently. I never met him. But I went to the funeral and I got to meet a side of my family that I never knew I had. So I also met my biological sister (Georgia).

I love it [living here]. It's easy to get travel for anything. It's nice and welcoming. It gives me a place long term, so I don't have to stress for a long period of time, which means I can plan my future easier. And the support, because I'm living in a place for a longer period of time, I can understand how to save and how to cook and everything. And it just makes everything easier then, in the long run (Willy).

I mean, I'm a lot happier now. And I definitely like the fact that I'm independent, on my own. And I quite enjoy working too. I'm meeting new people, and it's just good being able to do things myself (Zac).

These three were still supported by the HSS, but all were taking steps towards independence through employment or education. While they may not be able to return to their families or origin should further housing crises occur, they are beginning to resemble the young people who were Independent at the outset of our study.

Four young people who had Moved On had moved back into, or remained in, the family home. Within this small group there was some diversity of experience, and pathways out of the HSS. Two of the young people were Dissenters, including Helen, who was in the family home at our first interview, but at risk of homelessness; and Patrick, who had left the family home after conflict, but was now living with members of his extended family. Asad had left the family home due to a Cultural Clash, but was now also living back at home. Finally, Independent Danni had been previously unable to move back home as her mother was living with her sister, who did not want Danni to live with them. At the time of follow-up, Danni was living in private rental accommodation, but with her mother. Like those who had moved on to private rental, the HSS was not able to provide much support. Danni notes that 'the most they could do was write a reference letter for me'.

Patrick, Asad and Helen each had significant issues with family members that caused them to be homeless, or at imminent risk of homelessness. However, only Helen, who was still living at home at the time of our initial interview, received support from the HSS to work through these issues with her family, and build relationships to the point where she is no longer considered 'at risk':

Interviewer: When I saw you, things seemed to be on the up at home with your brothers and you mum and [Agency] was going well. I think you were studying ... So, yeah. Let's pick up from there and fill me in how everything's been going?

Helen: I'm still at home. So it's ever been. And at [Agency], the period had stopped. Like, it came to a point where it was good enough to see if we can train, continue on our own. And it's been pretty good. Mum and mine's connection has probably been a bit better. Mum and mine's connection and relationships are probably better. We're actually planning a trip overseas soon, which is great.

For Patrick and Asad, however, a move back into family housing was the initiative of family, who invited the young person back. Asad and Patrick provide their accounts of this pathway:

So I already had reconnected with my brother at that point. And I thought it was time to take a step further and just deal with the demons in my closest, and that's just [Mother] and [Father]. Like, my parents. So, I met up with [Father], because we would communicate with from time to time over emails and what-not, and this one day, this one day I received an email saying, well, you know, [Mother] and I spoke over about it and if you wanted to come back home, well, you can. Your room is still there. I thought very long about it and I built up the courage to say, 'Alright, let's do this'. And so now I'm back living at theirs. So that's, for me, I mean that, it might not sound much to somebody randomly, but to me that's a massive step. It's, I haven't crawled back, because I can deal with it on myself. I can deal with stuff on my own. But it's just, I need to get that baggage off my back (Asad, Cultural Clash, Light service user).

After that [living in the supported accommodation I was in at the time of the first interview], my step-mum asked me if I wanted to move back, to move in wither, and I said, 'Yeah'. Yeah.

The HSS played little role in facilitating a return home for young people who were already out of the family home. As Patrick noted at a later point in the interview:

They just yeah, they were going to put me on a waiting list for housing, accommodation, so just wait. I needed to wait. So after that, I just told my [step-]mum and then she's like, 'Oh, do you want to come home?' and I thought, 'Yeah, why not?' [laughs]. She's hardly home. It's like me and my brothers, and my nephews, so yeah.

7.5 Conclusions

It is heartening to note in this chapter that the majority of the young people we re-interviewed had Moved On. Most of these young people were light service users. Indeed, fifteen of the 19 young people who had Moved On were in this category (Figure 6).

A bar chart with the y-axis representing the number of respondents (0 to 10) and the x-axis representing five categories: Stuck, In Limbo, Moving On (Services), Moving On (Family), and Moving On (Private). For each category, there are up to three bars representing difficulty levels: Light (blue hatched), Moderate (red solid), and Heavy (green solid). The 'Moving On (Private)' category has the highest count for the 'Light' difficulty level at 10 respondents.

Category	Light	Moderate	Heavy
Stuck	0	1	2
In Limbo	2	2	0
Moving On (Services)	1	1	0
Moving On (Family)	4	0	0
Moving On (Private)	10	1	2

Returning to the continuum of service use, we can map the housing outcomes for young people loosely onto the types of young people who first entered our study, and their patterns of service use (Figure 7).

Relatively straightforward histories

Independents

Dissenters

Cultural Clash

Escapers

Complex histories of trauma and abuse

Shorter history of homelessness and service use

Long histories of service use, child protection and criminal justice

More autonomous clients

Least autonomous clients

58

most likely to end up in private rental. At the other end of the continuum, Escapers were more likely to need ongoing support, and in some cases this support had become the young person's everyday reality; where the HSS was relied upon, and even manipulated, to facilitate destructive behaviours, such as alcohol and drug use. These in turn resulted in behaviours that saw them evicted from the HSS, particularly for violent behaviour; further exacerbating the young person's vulnerability and reliance on the system. Breaking this cycle is not the only challenge facing service providers but it remains a critical one. By the time some young people present to the homelessness service system their behaviour has often become entrenched. For youth agencies to effectively respond to the needs of these people significant resources and considerable time is required. But of equal importance, agencies need to understand why people become Stuck and how the system has contributed to that.

Chapter 8: Families of origin and families of choice: Opportunities for intervening in youth homelessness

Families often play a role in the housing difficulties young people face – family problems contribute to homelessness, but, importantly families are often the key to resolving it. Studies of both youth and adult homeless people identify family support as a crucial factor that enables some individuals to exit homelessness and remain housed. Family relationships are thus a crucial aspect of any intervention designed to end homelessness generally, and youth homelessness specifically. Indeed around the Western world the focus on family reconciliation as a key to preventing and/or resolving youth homelessness is growing. In this chapter we focus on the role that families, both families of origin and families of choice, might play, and how services might better integrate families into their programs of support.

In the preceding chapters two empirical points stand out as crucial. First, the pathways analysis made clear that family conflict comes in many different forms and with different consequences. Second, if the right services are not available early on in a young person's experience of homelessness, then the risk that they will become embedded in the service system, disconnected from mainstream institutions, and drawn into support networks of other people in similar circumstances where social and economic capital are limited, is far higher. When this happens, resolving homelessness is more complex and costly, and thus less likely in the context of limited resources available to the homelessness service system. While certain groups were more likely to become entrenched in the homeless population than others (e.g. Escapers), no matter what pathway people take into initial homelessness, if early intervention fails then young people are at acute risk of becoming deeply entrenched in homelessness.

Our first task is to assess what the implications of our key findings might be with respect to the way services need to take family relationships into account. Starting with Dissenters, it is clear to us that unless the fundamental differences in the young person's and/or parents' behaviour are addressed, there is little scope of a return home, at least in the short term. However, it is equally clear that with some 'time out', opportunities for family reconciliation among this group remain a high priority. Indeed, more so than any other pathway, individuals in this group expressed a strong desire to build relationships with the families again. For instance Helen recognised the rebuilding her relationship with her mum was '...going to be hard [but that] we are a family we'll sort of get through it'. Helen and her mother were now linked in with a family reconciliation worker and Helen explained to us that their relationship as well as her housing circumstances had improved markedly.

Interviewer: So all in all it sounds like it's been a really positive experience to be linked in with these guys. It sounds like ...

Helen: A lot has changed like because one, I think the last couple of times I've seen her, the last couple of times I've seen her she's, like what's the word, mediated a conversation between me and my mum and I think we learnt a lot more about how we, as a pair see our family and how, our household. So we've seen a bit from each other's perspective and that works. And like I think a lot, a lot has changed because of that, so yeah.

Interviewer: Do you think you've changed a lot?

Helen: I think I've become more happier. I think I'm a bit more happy to be at home knowing that my mum's actually trying. I know that my mum's trying to help me a bit more now. Because I use to have like, I used to think that, you know she doesn't care, she doesn't, she's got other stuff to think about why would she need to think about a little 16 year old. I was a stupid kid.

Interviewer: You think so?

Helen: I was a stupid kid. I use to think of the stupidest things ever and like, oh my god it was embarrassing sort of thinking about it now.

Interviewer: But you were young.

Helen: Yeah I was a young weirdo. So, yeah no but she loves me I know that, so. I think this program's helped me realise that a lot more as well.

The relationship between Helen and her mother was improving and Helen was now back at home, involved in education and getting on with her life.

In fact, there was abundant evidence that through family-focused interventions that brought together children and parents, relationships between family members could improve. Pavla told us that the involvement of a worker had helped her and her mum. Much of this was to do with the trust that had been built up between the worker and Pavla. She told us that she:

... trusted [Worker] and I've opened up to her a lot. I reckon she's helping. Mum reckons she's helping because I am opening up to someone because I used to hide inside.

While there are often setbacks along the way, and rebuilding trusting relationships takes time, the benefits are obvious, as Pavla's interview indicates.

Interviewer: Do you see yourself running away again?

Pavla: No.

Interviewer: Do you think you can talk to your mum a bit more now?

Pavla: I've still got trust issues with her because when I had problems she would tell her sister and then her sister would pass it on and everything. It was like Chinese whispers.

Interviewer: Through the whole family, yeah.

Pavla: Yeah, so I still have trust issues with her.

Interviewer: Does she know that's something you're concerned about?

Pavla: Yeah, I said to her on Tuesday night when we had a lady come over to meet us all, I said I do have trust issues with my mum and she has the same thing with me, so we're kind of on the same page in the same book. But we're trying to separate and go from ... reading the same book but different pages

Sometimes the opportunity for family reconciliation is not available and a young person's family cannot or will not provide the support, stability and a springboard towards independence that families generally do. We found however that while families of origin might not provide assistance, the family of good friends can provide a surrogate family that, if supported, can provide a pathway back onto the 'in and out' phase that can be used as a springboard to independence.

Eliza (Dissenter): Like I had nowhere to go and I didn't know what to do. But then I just explained to my friend's Mum or something and she was so supportive of it. And this is a different family to when I went, and then her and her husband said to me that I can stay as long as I want, they will help me and support me and everything like that, and so I was pretty helped with that and then, yeah, so it was pretty good. I felt like I had nowhere to go and then I'd see my best friend and, yeah, her family helped me out a lot.

Interviewer: Okay. So they would be the people who are, I guess, supportive in your life?

Eliza: Yes.

Interviewer: Is that still ongoing, that support?

Eliza: Yes. Yes.

While policy initiatives tend to focus on young people's family of origin, policy makers and service providers need to consider ways that might engage and support families of choice – families of choice may well be the best way to prevent young people becoming entrenched in homelessness and losing contact with mainstream.

In some cases, Dissenters chose not to access their social networks as their need for support may be read as a sign of failure, or instability that fractured or stressed the friendship previously. When we asked about Sean's social networks he told us that:

Interviewer: There's no friends?

Sean: I do have friends but I, they're not the kind of, it's hard to say, because when if I say like this it doesn't sound like they're my friend but I'm too embarrassed to go there and say I need help. I don't do that.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. But if you did they probably would help you wouldn't they?

Sean: If they knew they probably would help me but I'm not going to be like that.

Interviewer: You don't want to do that, yeah.

Sean: Yeah.

Interviewer: So they're ...

Sean: Because then they think of me less, they think I'm back using, they think I'm doing this, you know what I mean (Sean; Dissenter; Previous service use history).

Sean's experiences are important as they highlight how the dual stigma of homelessness and coming from a 'dysfunctional family' can influence patterns of interactions between friends and also family. When young people are embarrassed or ashamed about their circumstances, they often conceal their problems from potential support networks. The loss of these networks as a source of support is important as they can help prevent homelessness or at least assist to resolve it relatively quickly. Assisting homeless young people to overcome their embarrassment is thus a key to opening up potential sources of emotional and social support.

While the opportunities for Dissenters to rebuild family relationships, or alternatively get support from a family of choice, are relatively high such opportunities are much more limited for young people whose problems stem from a clash over cultural expectations. While their circumstances mirror those of the Dissenters in many ways, there are important differences. Young people who take this pathway are likely to be dealing with more entrenched cultural expectations rather than more short-term evaluations of *behaviour*, such as hanging around with 'undesirables', drug use and the like. Harsh (physical) discipline is also a common factor here. Further, the families of young people who come from different cultural backgrounds are often deeply enmeshed in a tightknit local community – this means that on the one hand, cultural capital can be high, but on the other hand, when young people are excluded from their family of origin this often prevents them from accessing support from their community. Latjor's experience here is typical:

I come from South Sudan. And came here, adapting was a bit of an issue because I had to adapt to the culture here, yet somehow maintain the culture that I have and it clashed and that's how I became homeless ... My mother asked me to leave, because I, she thought I was letting go of our culture and I was getting wild and out of control. And she also had a partner that didn't like me. And when I grew up and opened my eyes a little bit, I realised that there was abuse happening, which was physical abuse and stuff like that. And it just got worse and worse, and I got kicked out on my arse, basically.

If family reconciliation is not possible and the families of good friends cannot be relied upon for any assistance, then interventions need to focus on providing these young people with the resources needed to become independent. This implies intensive support in the short term, and longer term support to assist young people work their ways through emergent problems that may imperil their housing stability – the sorts of problems all young people experience when they first try to live independently. While attempts to rebuild family relationships are crucial by the time young people on this pathway come to homelessness services the opportunity for family reconciliation is generally over. As Latjor also told us:

They don't want me anymore. It's that simple. She said to me "I don't want you anymore. I kicked you out for a reason. You're not my child anymore.

In contrast to these two groups are the Escapers. For Escapers a return home is not desirable, as the parents are typically not functionally well enough to provide support. Mental health and substance misuse issues are prevalent for both parents and their children. For young people taking this pathway families are often a source of abuse and neglect, and the desire to rebuild family relationships is absent. Escapers have rarely had the sort of familial support and care that most young people take for granted, and their early experiences of homelessness coupled with their heavy service use means that for most homelessness has become a functional way of life. For Escapers, early intervention should have happened many years before hand – indeed by the time they 'hit' the homeless service system they are system savvy, wary and have great difficulty building meaningful attachments to, and with other people. Indeed, long term exposure to violence and abuse, and a service system that appears indifferent to them means that they have often adapted their behaviour to fit extremely challenging circumstances. Further, most have complex issues such as drug and alcohol problems, mental health issues and the ongoing impact of trauma, and these issues take a great deal of time to resolve. As we noted in the previous chapter, unless services are resourced to properly deal with the complex issues facing Escapers they will likely continue their current trajectories and end up in the adult homeless population. Families are not the key for this group – indeed they are the principle source of Escapers' problems.

Escapers, however, have support in the form of friendships. These relationships are typically with other homeless people and they generally lack reciprocity, stability and trust that characterise positive social ties. Assisting Escapers to exit homelessness permanently requires interventions that can radically shift in their life trajectories. The starting point for this group is building trusting relationships. This requires a great deal of persistence, as well as resources. Indeed Escapers often have low expectations of what services can do and combined with their drug and mental health issues and anger at people and the system, resolving their problems is difficult, but possible. Long-term intensive support, work and training opportunities coupled with extensive counselling in stable, permanent accommodation are key to securing a sustainable pathway out of homelessness for Escapers.

The experiences of Independents in many ways then present the service system with a different set of challenges. We know that Independents cannot return home for a range of reasons, including estranged relationships, but more often because their families no longer have the resources to support them. Independents have tried to forge an independent path, but unlike their peers in the broader community they have no one to fall back on. Their circumstances are rarely as complex as Escapers and for many all they need is assistance to get back on their feet. Some, whose loss of housing stemmed from drugs or relationships problems, needed additional professional support. Again here, providing support to a third 'family of choice' member to take on the young person may be a viable alternative to focusing solely on reintegrating the young person in the family home.

The pathways approach, in combination with patterns of service usage provide important insights into the varying needs of young people, as well as providing insights into where to start, and whether family reconciliation is appropriate. In some cases we can see that family reconciliation approaches warrant serious consideration, but in other cases services need to focus on providing support that enable young people to more confidently secure a permanent pathway to independent living.

In this chapter we examined the role of family in the homelessness experiences of young people, including both families of origin – with whom young people typically lived before becoming homeless – and their subsequent families of choice, who often provided an alternate source of stable accommodation following the dissolution of the young person's family of origin. This chapter provides an insight into the diversity of family conflicts that precipitate a young person's entry into homelessness and how services can take family relationships, both in families of origin and of choice, into account within the service intervention. For some young people, especially Escapers, family reconciliation is not possible or appropriate. However, for others, such as those experiencing

Cultural Conflict or Dissenters, supporting and strengthening relationships would enhance the housing options and resources available to young people. For those with Cultural Conflicts, this task is more difficult, as often the conflicts over old and new 'ways of life' are deeply entrenched and isolate the young person from both their family and their community. As a way forward, we suggest that the key actors in a young person's life be documented as they enter a service encounter. Supportive and appropriate 'family of choice' members should be included within the intervention, as these actors may provide a cost-effective means of housing young people in a more normative environment than is available in shelters and crisis accommodation. With intensive support, these key actors offer better hope of re-integrating the young person into employment, education and social networks; offering the best hope of a pathway to Independent living. However, without intensive service support, it is likely that these family and friendship resources will be 'burnt out' by the experience of housing a vulnerable youth, and lost to the young person as a source of future support.

Chapter 9: Conclusions

A MORE DIVERSE POPULATION

When early intervention and prevention first emerged as viable policy responses to youth homelessness, the implicit assumption was that people ‘at risk’ of homelessness, as well as those early in their homeless ‘careers’ were a homogeneous group with relatively low needs. If they remained homeless and exposed to hostile environments they subsequently became susceptible to a host of negative outcomes which are more difficult and costly to resolve (Johnson and Chamberlain 2008). Thus, early intervention was presented as both a cost effective, but also a morally appropriate response (Chamberlain and Johnson 2003). The assumption of homogeneity influenced the design of the homelessness service system which was, and to an extent remains, geared to towards relatively short interventions, with an emphasis on family reconciliation and/or reunification. For many young people, a relatively short period of assistance appears to be sufficient. As the data in our longitudinal chapter attests, many young people move on with their lives quite quickly. For them, homelessness is a short and temporary experience from which they recover quickly.

However, since the 1990s the situation has also changed; there is much more variation in the **experiences** that cause extreme housing instability and homelessness among young people, **and** the **characteristics** of homeless young people are now much more varied than in the past. But, the way that early intervention and prevention approaches are operationalized in the area of youth homelessness fail to fully recognise the impact of these changes. As our analysis makes clear, when some young people present to the homelessness services for the first time, their circumstances are already very complex. For many people, Escapers in particular, early intervention should have occurred many years before as by the time they present to homelessness services they are often already disconnected from mainstream institutions and disaffiliated from any supportive networks. Young people experiencing Cultural Conflicts experience the same issues of being disconnected from support networks, but there is greater scope for early intervention. While policy and practice recognises that some young people have complex needs, it is often framed in terms of those who have made a transition to more chronic forms of homelessness.

The diverse biographies and characteristics of young people raise some important and challenging issues for both service providers and policy makers.

THE CHALLENGE OF COMPLEXITY

When people with complex needs first present to a homelessness service, the type, intensity and duration of assistance they require is likely to be very different than what those with less complex needs require. Young people with complex behavioural and emotional difficulties require more intensive and much longer forms of assistance than what has traditionally been available. Links with family are often non-existent, and many have experienced multiple forms of trauma that make forming meaningful attachments to others difficult. It is also the case that many people who present with complex needs have had previous experience with various ‘systems’ and those experiences have often been poor. These factors make the initial presentation at a homelessness service a critical moment – a moment which can shape subsequent relationships and the trajectories people take. But, by maintaining a short-term, crisis driven focus and failing to provide the resources agencies need to respond in different ways to the different needs of homeless young people, existing program design combined with a lack of housing options are implicated in the high levels of ‘churning’ observed among some groups of homeless young people. And, as we have seen, once people start churning through the homelessness system they start to use it in ways not intended by policy makers (or service providers). Rather than being a springboard to a new and thriving future, services use becomes a routinized part of day-to-day life. When service use shifts from being a means of addressing immediate needs to a way of surviving homelessness, the risk of becoming entrenched in marginal social, economic and cultural spaces is high. In short, when churning occurs, scarce

systemic resources are stretched further, the circumstances that led the young person into homelessness can be exacerbated, and the opportunities for positive outcomes diminish accordingly.

DEALING WITH DIVERSITY

The key issue for policy makers and service providers is to consider in what ways the system could be changed to better deal with the heterogeneity of at risk and homeless youth? There are five strategies that should form a key part of agency practice aimed at more effectively engaging young people.

Better communication is essential

Our first suggestion relates to communication, not only with respect to *the way* agencies communicate with people, but also *what* they communicate. We found that communication was often a major issue for the participants in this study, as it was often presumed that the young person had some knowledge of the homelessness service system. While workers are generally familiar with both the language and the logic of the system, it should not be assumed that the same applies to the people using services. Furthermore, a common source of anxiety and distress for young people stemmed from a lack of information about what was happening next. We found many examples where workers made time to clearly explain to clients how the system worked, what they were doing to assist the young person, and what the next steps were. Equally though, there were instances where information was not provided in ways that helped and/or made sense to clients. In short, the regular exchange of information in a jargon free manner is essential part of building meaningful and trusting relationships that form that backbone of any successful intervention.

Assessment – Moving towards a person centred approach.

Our next two suggestions relate to assessment and case planning. In terms of an initial assessment, there needs to be a shift from focusing primarily on the presenting issues to an approach that incorporates a deeper, more rigorous assessment of a person's biographical circumstances – that is, there needs to be a broad shift from a problem centered approach to a person-centred approach. As we make clear in the report, people's biographies offer important clues to the types of services they might require, and the likely duration of an intervention. Young people who have experienced Cultural Conflict require quite different services to Escapers, Independents and so on. The pathways approach offers services a person-centred framework that can help to identify critical junctures and experiences in young people lives, and how they have shaped their current circumstances.

Assessment – Understanding the impact of protracted homelessness

It is typically the case that if people remain homeless, their circumstances generally become more complex and difficult to resolve. Thus, agencies need to be sensitive to the fact that, irrespective of which pathway people take, if people have been homeless for a substantial period of time, their characteristics and needs tend to become more uniform, with high levels of complexity the common feature. This means that a second key element in any biographical assessment involves determining the duration of a person's homelessness. Further, assessing duration should not be limited to the current episode of homelessness, but should aim to determine the total length of time a person has been homeless (cumulative duration). By combining clear communication, with a stronger focus on biography and a better understanding of duration, agencies can provide more relevant and responsive services.

The role of families: Taking a young person's perspective

In addition to enhancing existing assessment procedures, it is important to reflect further on the role of the family. Families are often framed as a precipitating factor in young people's homelessness, and we found ample evidence to support this. Families can also play a key role in enabling young people to exit homelessness and sustain housing (Mayock et al. 2011); but these relationships do not always exist in the way that policy makers imagine. First, for some people the abuse and neglect they experienced from their family was of such a magnitude that the likelihood (let alone the desirability) of reunification is low. However, this does not mean that family has no place in the lives of those homeless young people whose previous experiences of family were brutal and violent. Rather, the way that participants framed family was broader than the nuclear unit – family could mean a friend's parents, or an older relative. Policy makers need to consider ways of including alternative family configurations in their service approaches to enhance peoples' opportunities for garnering the support they need to exit homelessness permanently.

For other young people, several reported that efforts to re-engage with their family had been successful and relationships were now much improved. Three factors stood out here: First, this generally happened only when existing family problems did not involve sexual or physical abuse. In cases where there was sexual and physical abuse, people rarely expressed any desire to rebuild family relationships, at least in the short to medium term.

Second, improved communication was at the heart of any change. The best way of facilitating better communication between family members was through an independent, third party. Some existing service responses provide this sort of assistance and there was evidence that this approach could yield positive longer-term outcomes. However, opportunities to access services capable of providing this sort of assistance were limited. While reunification between family members is often considered by the homelessness service system to be the optimal outcome, reconciliation between family members is another very important outcome. Reconciliation opens up the opportunity for ongoing emotional and financial support that would otherwise be denied to homeless young people, and these are crucial resources that young people require if they are to successfully make the transition to independent living.

Third, it was evident to us that reconciliation/reunification was most often achieved when ALL family members accepted some responsibility for the problems that existed between them and had precipitated the young person's homelessness. This can be hard to achieve, but past difficulties can often be resolved if services have enough time, and this is ultimately an issue of sufficient resources.

Dealing with the past but planning for the future

While the above three factors were linked to improved relationships, they occurred in the context of young people's broader transition to independence, which in itself present numerous challenges, but also opportunities. Participants in our study were trying to deal with emerging issues around identity and belonging, as well as sorting out ways to secure their future aspirations. In this context it is worth elaborating on the participants' aspirations, as what struck us was that these aspirations were not merely dreams, but instead offered a way of building sustainable pathways out of homelessness.

As we have noted, existing services responses tend to be driven by a crisis sensibility that focuses on immediate presenting issues. The assumption here is that by addressing these problems, only then will a route out of homelessness become viable. There is some truth to this. However, if too much emphasis is placed on presenting problems, a deficit based service culture can emerge, whereby service responses are driven by the perceived client's limitations. Services can easily overlook the skills, knowledge and abilities that young people themselves possess to overcome challenges.

Yet young adulthood is the time when people are intensely involved in imagining and planning their future lives: jobs, careers, relationships, travel, further education, starting a family and various other economic and non-economic goals and experiences that mark a transition to independent adulthood. Building a person-centred service culture, one that nurtures and encourages people's aspirations, provides a platform for a very different journey through the service system. A person centred service culture emphasises young people's strengths and abilities, and explicitly accepts that the most important journey is about the future. And, while the past is always implicated in the present, to gain traction with young people, effective person-centred service responses must be sufficiently well resourced so that both past experiences and future aspirations of young people can be addressed.

Within this new approach, the onus then is on policy makers to resource the homelessness service system sufficiently so that youth agencies can work more effectively with the diverse needs of the people that present to them for assistance. Historically, homeless young people have been seen as a relatively homogeneous group. This is not the case. Service providers have long been aware of this. Now is the time to establish policy settings that better reflect the diverse strengths and needs of homeless young people to support them in their transition towards independence.

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