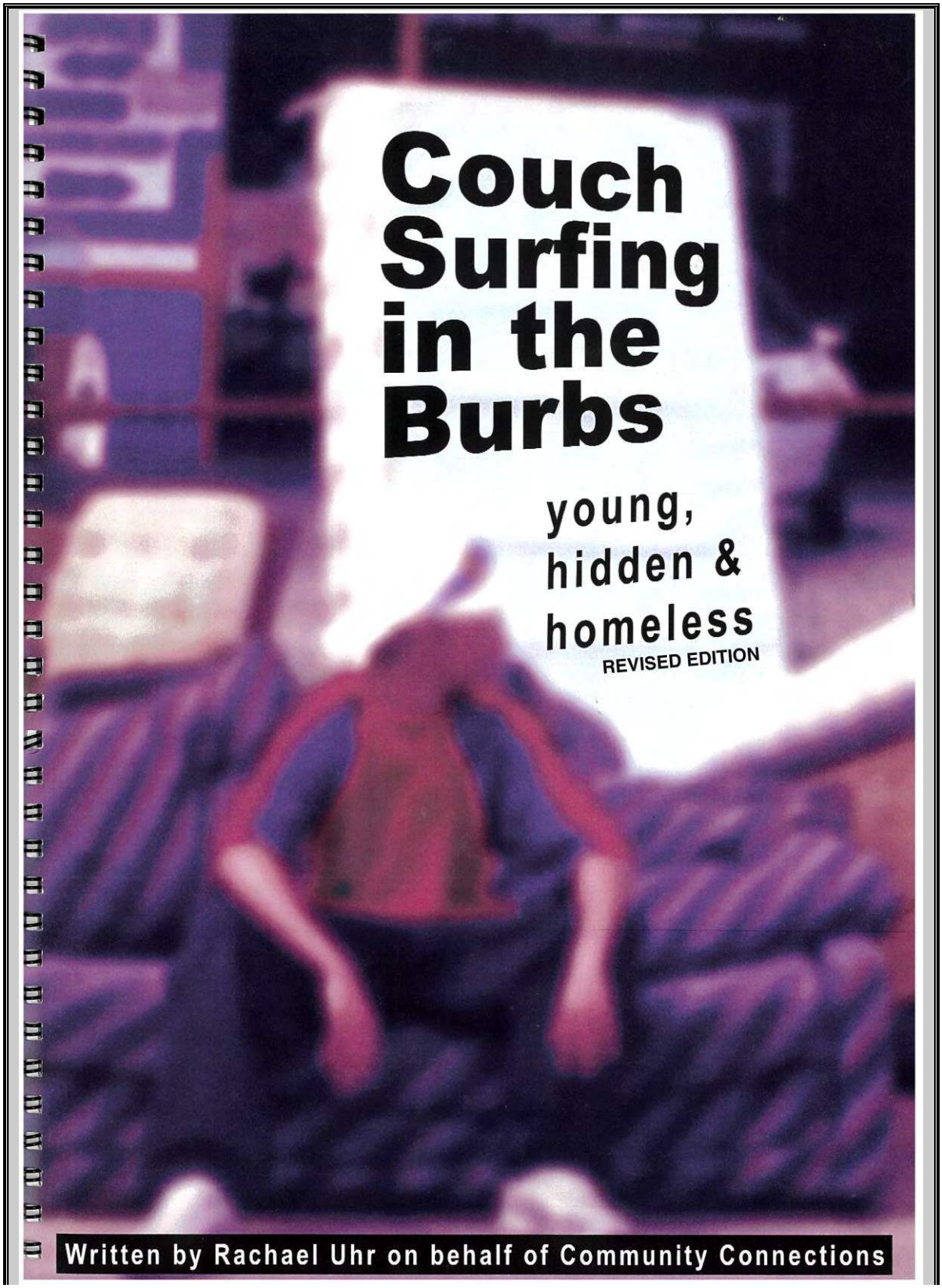
Couch Surfing in the Burbs
young, hidden & homeless
REVISED EDITION
Written by Rachael Uhr on behalf of Community Connections

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

'Couch Surfing in the Burbs' could not have come together without the support, help and assistance of a number of people and organisations. I have truly enjoyed working alongside those people to produce this document on behalf of Community Connections.

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Brisbane City Council	Libby Wright
Brisbane Youth Service	Lisa Canning
Centrelink	Judy Hitchcock
Community Connections	Con O'Meara
Community Connections	Louise Villanova
Community Connections	Jan Logan
Department of Families (Senior Policy Officer)	Jennie Day

Department of Families (Fortitude Valley) Linda Studley
School Based Youth Health Nurse Jill Diggles
Yeacha Dhargo Duncan Johnson

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All the best

Rachael Uhr

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Issue

Homelessness is not as simple as being without shelter. The experience of homelessness is multifaceted and inclusive of factors such as transience, insecurity, instability and overcrowded dwellings. One type of homelessness is secondary homelessness - the continual movement between temporary accommodation options, without secure housing elsewhere.

In their day-to-day work Community Connections, along with other localised services, observe secondary homelessness among many young people in the North East corridor of Brisbane.

For young people a natural and preferred option is to remain in their local community. This can involve movement between houses attached to their community of family, friends and friends' families. The length of time this movement can be maintained is directly related to the significance of the community connections and the options available.

The use of informal accommodation within a local community is a relatively sustainable option and can provide a point of stability and safety for young people amid the chaos of family breakdown and early home leaving. The question is "How can young people gain access to better responses to find and maintain sustainable accommodation within their local areas?"

Part of the difficulty in developing a response to such a question, is that secondary homelessness, in particular homelessness within the suburbs, is hidden. The experiences of these young people are not visible to the general public, to the local community and sometimes to the places where they stay. Often young people in this situation do not see themselves as homeless.

The Research Process

To further explore these issues, funding for a project was made available to Community Connections through a Brisbane City Council Community Development and Assistance Grant. A Project worker was employed to engage young people, key stakeholders and service providers to:

- Develop a model that includes strategies to identify, locate, engage and support young people experiencing secondary homelessness in the North East corridor of Brisbane
- Provide a forum in which young people's experiences of secondary homelessness are documented
- Substantiate this experience as a part of the homeless process
- Provide a mechanism for this information to be placed on the agenda of statutory and non-statutory organisations.

The project undertook a process of exploratory research. Qualitative data was gathered through talking with appropriate agencies, and interviewing 23 young people (aged 12-18 years) from the North East corridor of Brisbane who were homeless or had experienced homelessness in the previous 12 months. The purpose was not to explore the reasons why young people leave home, but to gain an understanding of support, service and accommodation options and choices available to a young person homeless in the local area.

To achieve this, the process was supported and aided by a reference group made up of people from government and non-government agencies working in the areas of early intervention, health, Indigenous, families, justice, income, outreach, education and training services.

Upon analysis of the information gathered, themes emerged as significant to the research findings:

- Personal protective factors- including significant personal relationships, community connection and measures of resilience
- Out of home accommodation- prior to after leaving home
- Information and options
- Intervention points
- Homelessness as a constructed concept.

It should be noted that while the research was undertaken within the North East corridor of Brisbane the experiences of the young people interviewed were not restricted solely to this geographical area. It should not be presumed that the phenomena of "couch surfing" is apparent only in this region at the exclusion of all others, and it is possible that the experiences explored within this report may be transferable to other regions.

Research Findings

1. A majority (78%) of the young people interviewed initially utilised their informal networks of friends, friends' families, family members and community to meet their accommodation and support needs, before accessing formal homeless services. This finding accords with information provided by other service providers and other research.

2. The importance of naturally formed supports, within a young person's community, as a method of meeting their accommodation, income, food, survival, social and emotional needs. When supporting young people, who leave home early, there is a need to recognise the significance of these natural supports, develop processes that are inclusive of this network and provide opportunities to better support these relationships.

3. The significance of family and family members, and the need for services to be considerate of this when working alongside young people at every point in the homeless continuum.

4. Secondary homelessness among young people is often hidden. These young people do not see themselves as homeless and consequently do not access 'homeless' services, until all other options are exhausted.

5. Friends are identified as paramount supporters. There is a need for continued development of peer support models that are inclusive to a range of young people. These models should recognise that distribution of information and options needs to occur in a number of forms, acknowledging that young people's ingestion of information happens in different stages, dependent upon their personal circumstances.

6. The need to undertake community education processes with family, friends and friends' families, services and systems, in order to:
    - Breakdown community perceptions of homelessness
    - Recognise the movement between houses as a legitimate form of homelessness
    - Deliver information and options available to support homeless young people

7. That support services need to think beyond their core work and recognise their role in early intervention by providing essential support and referral opportunities for young people experiencing secondary homelessness, and support also for members of the young people's community.

8. Family, friends and friends' families, the young person's community of support, are often the people who are first to know about a young person's circumstances and already provide a level of support and assistance. These are significant points, or soft entry points, for service providers to develop relationships, provide practical assistance and meet needs.

9. People in the community and systems that have contact with young people experiencing family conflict and early home leaving, need to develop skills in relation to identification of young people 'at risk', initial assessments and appropriate referral points.

10. To further breakdown the barriers to accessing information, options and systems, with the need to develop better practices in relation to working alongside young people by:
    - Consulting throughout the process resulting in a sense of control over personal circumstances
    - Seamless delivery of services
    - Provision of accurate information to make informed choices.

11. Access to essential services such as Centrelink, SAAP and the Department of Families is often contingent on factors such as age. The consequences of this can mean a limitation of options and choices and can result in extended contact with particular systems. This has the potential to place young people in crisis for a long period of time.

Recommendations

1. There is a need for the development of a holistic response to young people who are homeless in their local community. This response should ensure the following:
   - Efficient and effective identification of these young people
   - Access to appropriate services
   - Identifying and assisting natural supports
   - Coordination of response
   - Informing community about the realities of homelessness for these young people.

2. Government and non-government agencies need to adjust their policy frameworks and delivery of services to:
   a) Formally recognise that secondary homelessness is a significant form of homelessness for young people, and
   b) Provide support to the young people and their community networks in these situations.

2. PROGESS SINCE THE LAUNCH

Following the successful launch of the report in March 2003, the Couch Surfing Working Party was formed and is currently working to further recommendations by progressing action areas that are linked to the findings developed in the report. The working party is a dynamic entity that has consisted of workers from the following organisations:

Community Connections
Brisbane City Council (BCC)
Albert Park Flexi School
Jabiru Youth and Community Services
QLD Health- School Nurses
Youth Advocacy Centre (YAC)
QLD Youth Housing Coalition (QYHC)
Office of Youth Affairs (OYA)
Young Parents Program (YPP)
Department of Families
Centrelink
Visible Ink
Department of Housing
Red Cross
Queensland Government Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy (QGYSPS)
At Risk Resource and Outreach Service (ARROS)
Child and Youth Mental Health Service (CYMHS)

Seven action areas have been developed by the working party as integral focal points to the future progression of the research findings within the community and the sector. The working party propose that these action areas, as is with the research, are transferable across geographical regions. These include:

1. To link with the employed project worker at QYHC to further the scope of the action areas.

2. To explore 'best practice' methods for working with families and significant others.

3. To strategically distribute a reprinted report in order to effectively disseminate the research to its widest potential.

4. To review the Department of Families procedure in identifying and gaining best possible outcomes for young people with whom they come into contact, but do not necessarily take into care. This action area explores ways of linking young people, families and significant others to community resources more efficiently.

5. To develop and facilitate community education or training specifically targeting families and school communities.

6. To contribute to education within the sector which maximises the capacity of services to provide an appropriate coordinated response to young people and significant others. Strategies would include the use of suitable language and practice wisdom to allow workers to respond in the most effective manner to young people who may be experiencing "couch surfing".

7. To raise awareness at a government and policy level with a view to increased community education and understanding enabling improved provision of greatest outcomes for young people and their significant others.

The working party currently meets on a monthly basis and at the time of this publication was focused on action area two. We would like to invite any enquiries and involvement, as we believe that it is through active participation that change will occur. Please contact **Community Connections** on **(07) 3266 5199** or e-mail **coco@gil.com.au** for further information.

3. INTRODUCTION

3.1 COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Community Connections is a community-based organisation that works within an early intervention framework. The focus of the organisation is to work with young people who are at risk of leaving home and school early. The service aims to provide support and assistance to young people and their families in the North East corridor of Brisbane who are experiencing conflict. Community Connections aims to help young people (aged 12 –18) to remain connected to family and community. If the young person is unable to continue to live at home, assistance is provided to access appropriate support and to strengthen the capacity of the community to provide this.

Community Connections consists of a Youth Support Coordinator who undertakes developmental work with independent and 'at risk' students and support staff at Kedron, Wavell and Kelvin Grove State High Schools. In addition the service has two Reconnect workers who provide support and assistance to young people and their families (if appropriate) who experience high degrees of family conflict. Community Connections currently employs a project worker who is developing a community placement model using host families to provide short-term accommodation to young people in schools who are experiencing family conflict. Community Connections works largely with young people who are attached to schools and the school community as well as young people who no longer attend school. Most referrals to the service occur via schools and Centrelink offices within the North East Brisbane geographical boundary.

Source: Department of Families: Future Directions Consultation Paper 2002

3.2 HISTORY OF THE PROJECT

Current literature in the field of youth homelessness identifies the strong correlation between homelessness, family breakdown and isolation from community. Chamberlain & MacKenzie (2001:6) identified that when young people 'drop out of school and leave behind their local ties they are likely to become deeply involved in the homeless subculture. At this stage, some make the transition to chronic homelessness'. Furthermore they identified that of high school students experiencing homelessness, '80% were staying temporarily with other households or moving around' (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2001:18). Research undertaken by Crane and Brannock (1996:45) identified that 47.5% and 15% of young people surveyed stayed with friends and other family members respectively when they left home.

In mid 2001, Community Connections staff, Community Connections Reference Group and members of a North East service provider interagency began to look more closely at some of the issues associated with young people and homelessness in their local areas. It was clearly identified that whilst some young people sought out and became entrenched in homeless services in the inner city, other young people remained in their local area. These young people moved between different houses of friends and families, however, a safe, secure and appropriate place to call home still eluded them.

Community Connections were keen to investigate this phenomenon further as little research had been done in regards to this localised 'hidden homelessness'. As it is hidden within local communities, areas and suburbs it is not an obvious form of homelessness and often goes unnoticed by the sector.

Along with other local services, Community Connections began to question how they could increase their ability to connect with young people experiencing family conflict and suburban hidden homelessness. These young people are often not identified by bigger systems such as schools or Centrelink and are therefore at risk of becoming isolated or falling through the gaps. Yet, as evidenced by the support done by the organisation, in many cases young people remained within their local communities, utilising their informal support networks such as friends, family friends, friends' families and their own relatives.

Community Connections believes that by using an 'early intervention' approach, the opportunity for young people to become entrenched in the culture of chronic homelessness decreases. Therefore, the likelihood of those young people being represented in the inner city, where homeless specific services exist, is also lessened.

A Brisbane City Council Community Development and Assistance Grant application was successfully tendered and Community Connections received funding to employ a project worker for six months. The project was to explore how young people (aged12 –18 years) from the North East corridor of Brisbane negotiate their way through homeless process whilst not being identified by

agencies that would be considered as the first point of contact for young people who leave home and school early.

3.3 PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The project worker worked alongside a reference group to identify and engage with a wide variety of key stakeholders including young people and service providers to reach the following objectives:

- Develop a model that included strategies to identify, locate, engage and support young people experiencing secondary homelessness in the North East corridor of Brisbane
- Provide a forum in which the young people's experiences of secondary homelessness in the North East corridor were documented
- Substantiate this experience as part of the homeless process
- Provide a mechanism for this information to be placed on the agenda of statutory and non-statutory organisations.

The focus was on young people who leave the family home early and undertake a process of homelessness by utilising their informal networks of friends, friends' families, and family members within their community before accessing formal homelessness services.

'Couch Surfing in the Burbs' was not intended to explore the reasons why a young person became homeless. The aim was to develop a greater understanding of the pathways homeless young people followed within the North East corridor of Brisbane and recommend how the sector can better respond.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 EMPLOYMENT OF PROJECT WORKER

In August 2002 Community Connections employed a project worker to undertake the research that became the basis of this report.

4.2 PLANNING STAGE

The first phase of the research project was to identify, develop and design the research question, goals and objectives, target population and relevant stakeholders. With the framework for the research clearly defined, the project then developed a longitudinal plan that included processes such as literature review, agency visits and research methodology to reach the articulated goals.

4.3 AGENCY VISITS

Agency visits were undertaken as an initial step in the research process. Approximately 60 services were visited from the greater Brisbane area (Appendix 1). These services included both government and non-government agencies that worked with and supported young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The services represented were from housing, health, education and training, Indigenous, care and protection, counselling and generalist and specific youth services for homeless young people.

Organisations were visited to discuss the topic being explored. The primary aims of the visits were to:

- Engage the agencies that had the most contact with the research target group
- Gain a greater insight into their roles in working with this group
- Identify the topic present in the work that they were currently doing

Conversations with workers provided a canvas in which to develop a greater understanding of the target group, how to engage with that group and common perceptions of what occurs for this group.

The information gathered through these visits was useful in developing an initial overview of information. Drawing on the wealth of experience from workers in these organisations, the general perception seemed to be that young people who experience suburban homelessness move between different houses in local areas for accommodation, hence the phrase ‘Couch Surfing’.

4.4 REFERENCE GROUP

The research process was supported by a reference group that was established with interested parties identified in the agency visit phase of the project. The group met monthly and consisted of people from various government and non-

government agencies relating to early intervention, health, Indigenous, families, justice, income, outreach and education and training services. The members of the reference group were:

Brisbane City Council	Libby Wright
Brisbane Youth Service	Lisa Canning
Centrelink	Judy Hitchcock
Community Connections	Con O'Meara
Community Connections	Louise Villanova
Community Connections	Jan Logan
Department of Families (Senior Policy Officer)	Jennie Day
Department of Families (Fortitude Valley)	Linda Studley
School Based Youth Health Nurse	Jill Diggles
Yeacha Dhargo	Duncan Johnson

The reference group had the responsibility to meet the following objectives:

- Disseminate and provide information related to the topic
- Brainstorm emerging ideas and themes
- Assist in the development and co-ordination of the project processes and its' phases
- Provide support to the project, the project worker and the project findings
- Engage with service providers and the wider sector to develop and assist in the dissemination of the findings and recommendations

4.5 LITERATURE REVIEW

The project worker conducted a literature review to determine the following:

- Provide a basic theoretical context for the research topic.
- Identify and outline previous relevant research to determine how this project linked to existing research.
- Integrate and summarise information that was already known and documented in the area of youth homelessness, in particular suburban homelessness.
- Inform and assist in the development of the research process and the tools to be utilised.

4.6 EXPLORATORY RESEARCH

For the purpose of this project it was decided that a process of exploratory research would be undertaken. Exploratory research takes a broad look at the phenomenon under study to draw out commonalities and experiences. The primary purpose of exploratory research is to gather information so that a description and analysis of what is going on can be made.

The goals of exploratory research include:

- Become familiar with the basic facts, people and concerns involved
- Develop a well grounded mental picture of what is occurring
- Generate many ideas and develop tentative theories and conjectures
- Determine the feasibility of doing additional research

- Formulate questions and refine issues for more systematic inquiry
- Develop techniques and a sense of direction for future direction.

(Neuman, 1991:20)

4.7 INTERVIEW PROCESS

Through a semi-structured interview process the research aimed to collect qualitative data. This data was used to describe the nature of the research question in terms of words. The research did not intend to seek the numbers of young people who experience this type of homeless, rather the interviews collected information about this experience in regard to whom, what, which, when, where and why (Wadsworth, 1993:85).

Semi-structured interviewing occurred with a sample of 23 young people. Each interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

The interview focussed on the young people's experiences of supports, services and accommodation options both prior to and after leaving home. The same process was followed for each interview with a standardised proforma used (Appendix 2). The conversations in relation to these topics were explored through open and closed questions and supported by 3 diagrams that outlined some of the possible support, service and accommodation options available to young homeless people (Appendix 3). These tools were not introduced into the conversation until the person being interviewed had identified their initial responses and these were explored. As stated previously the aim of the research was not to determine the reasons why they had left home but the support, services and accommodation options utilised.

4.7.1 Young People Sample

To identify young people to interview, the study undertook a process of 'purposive sampling'. This type of sampling involves the selection of specific cases with the purpose of attaining particular information. Sampling is used in order to select unique cases that are especially informative, to select members of a difficult to reach, specialised population and to identify particular cases for in-depth investigation (Neuman, 1991:206).

4.7.1.1 Specific Criteria

It was identified that there were specific qualities or characteristics that each interview subject needed to possess in relation to their homeless experiences. The following is an outline of the specific criteria that young people being interviewed needed to fulfil.

- **Aged between 12 – 18 years**
- **Either currently experiencing homelessness or have experienced homelessness within the past 12 months.**

- **Either originally from the North East corridor of Brisbane or having experienced forms of homelessness within this geographical boundary.**

This was in order to gain a clear perspective of recent events in the persons' life prior to becoming homeless and after becoming homeless.

4.7.1.2 Proportional Criteria

Whilst each young person who participated in the research needed to fulfill the above criteria, it was decided to include further criteria for a representative sample. The process of determining the ratio of male to female and Indigenous to Non-Indigenous occurred through purposive sampling. This aimed to gain a true representation of the target group being researched and to gather an accurate insight into this group of young people and their experiences (Neuman, 1991:206).

It was determined that the proportional breakdown of the group of young people interviewed should optimally be a split of 50% male and 50% female.

Anecdotally, services report that there is a higher proportion of young men than young women who are identified as homeless, however, the Burdekin Report (1989) and Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2001) challenge this notion. Burdekin (1989:69) identified that 'approximately equal numbers of boys / young men and girls / young women are referred to or request assistance from youth services' whilst Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2001:19) identified that in Queensland the male to female ratio of the homeless student population equalled 47% to 53% respectively.

A further proportional breakdown of those interviewed included one-third from an Indigenous background and two-thirds from a Non-Indigenous background. The proportion of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous young people who experience homelessness has not been quantified thus an accurate ratio could not be determined. This breakdown was based upon current localised literature. Information gathered through previous reports and local studies suggest that there may be an over-representation of Indigenous young people currently experiencing some degree of homelessness. Dunbaven (2001:36) researched 92 homeless young people aged 12 –25 on the streets of Brisbane with 31.5% of respondents identifying as Aboriginal and 6.5% as Torres Strait Islander. Wilson and Day (2001:3) identified that Indigenous young people represented 4.8% of the population aged 10 –14 years and 4 % of the population 15 –19 years. Indigenous young people under the age of 16 represented 20.2% of people seeking assistance from SAAP services and 14% of those aged 16 –25 years (Wilson & Day 2001:3).

The research aimed to undertake a process of inclusive representation by actively seeking young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and young people who identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual and/or transgender.

To meet this goal a various number of services, community groups and networks were contacted in order to locate young people within the criteria. Unfortunately this was not successful and these groups were not specifically identified in the research.

4.7.1.3 Other Criteria

Of the sample, it was decided that the homeless experiences of young people should be drawn from a multitude of places and services. This was in order to gather a diversity of experiences by using representatives from a variety of accommodation which included:

- Staying with friends, relatives and friend's families
- Residing in medium to long term accommodation
- Residing in independent accommodation
- Residing in emergency accommodation
- Literal rooflessness and / or sleeping rough

To achieve representation from each of the accommodation options available to homeless young people, the project canvassed numerous services and community-based options. Young people who participated in the project were accessed through a varied number of services that work alongside people who have and/or are experiencing homelessness.

4.7.2 Interviews with Young People

Interviews with young people occurred over a period of one month. Services who were either situated within the geographical location or were likely to be accessed by young people from the geographical location were contacted. Services were given information by the project worker, which outlined the specific people the project was aiming to interview (Appendix 4). They were also provided with young people specific information that outlined the details of the project so that they could make an informed decision about their participation (Appendix 5). Services determined individual suitability matched to the project criteria and approached young people on behalf of the project worker to organise the time and location for the interviews.

4.7.2.1 Confidentiality

A crucial component of the interview process was to ensure complete confidentiality. No identifying information about a person who contributed to the project was used in the report. Every person interviewed had full control over what information was used. On completion of the interview and upon reflection of the interview, young people were given the choice to delete any recorded pieces of information.

To ensure that no young person was identifiable, some of the quotes used in the report were amended to remove names of people and services.

To further protect the identity of the young people who participated, coded names were used in the report. Each person was given the option to decide if they wanted to choose a code name or one to be assigned by the interviewer.

4.7.2.2 Consent

In arranging the interviews, young people were initially approached by the organisation they were known to. Information about the interviews was passed onto them and they made a decision if this was a process they were willing to participate in. If they agreed to participate, arrangements were made with the interviewer whereby they were met in a place, time and space that they felt comfortable. In some cases workers personally introduced the young people to the project worker prior to the interview. Young people were also given the option of having a support person of their choice to sit in on the interview.

Before each interview occurred, a clear process was followed that outlined the purpose of the project, the information being sought, the possible locations that the information would be disseminated to and the individuals rights and responsibilities in relation to the interview process. If this was agreed upon, the individual signed a consent form (Appendix 6).

Young people were not interviewed if it was considered by the interviewer that they did not have the capacity to make informed decisions and choices.

4.7.2.3 Recording of Interviews

Each interview was audio taped and transcribed verbatim for the purpose of accuracy.

4.7.2.4 Renumeration

Young people were given an in-kind payment for their time and contributions. This was in recognition that the young people who participated in the project were the experts of their own personal experiences. Their contribution to the project was invaluable to the production, analysis and development of the report.

4.8 DATA ANALYSIS

The data gathered through the interview process was converted into a transcript and analysed according to the supports, accommodation options and services identified. Through the analysis process a number of themes emerged including:

1. Personal Protective Factors
2. Out of Home Accommodation
3. Information and Options
4. Intervention Points
5. Homelessness as a Constructed Concept

Utilising these themes as the basis for analysis, consistencies were identified, explored and documented. The reference group then assisted in developing the key findings, determining the research recommendations and exploring the dissemination of the report information.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

5.1 DEFINITION OF HOMELESSNESS

The development and adoption of one comprehensive and widely accepted definition of homelessness has been subject to much debate. Homelessness can vary broadly in definition from actual rooflessness, to include concepts such as insecure and unsafe places of accommodation, spiritual homelessness and threats to personal safety.

In 1989, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) undertook a 'National Inquiry into Homeless Children'. The resulting report, commonly known as the 'Burdekin Report', provided a significant and important insight into the needs, issues and concerns of young people in Australia who experience homelessness. This report established a definition of homelessness that described it as:

'…a lifestyle which includes insecurity and transiency of shelter. It is not confined to a total lack of shelter. For many children and young people in signifies a state of detachment from family and vulnerability to dangers, including exploitation and abuse broadly defined from which the family protects a child.'
(1989:7)

From a legislative perspective, the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) Act 1994 provides another definition of homelessness. In this context, the definition is not young person specific and is used as a means of determining in what circumstances a person is eligible for an accommodation service. The SAAP Act defines that:

'a person is homeless if, and only if, he or she had inadequate access to safe and secure housing. A person is taken to have inadequate access to safe and secure housing if the housing to which the person has access:
a) damages, or is likely to damage, the persons health; or
b) threatens the persons safety; or
c) marginalises the person through failing to provide access to:
(i) adequate personal amenities; or
(ii) the economic and social support that home normally affords.
d) places the person in circumstances which threaten or adversely affect the adequacy, safety, security and affordability of that housing'
(SAAP Act, 1994)

In further defining homelessness from an Australian perspective, cultural considerations should be given to the meaning of homelessness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The definition from this perspective is complex and cannot be understood without 'reference to the historical experience of Indigenous people in this country and the legacy of colonisation' (Keys Young, 1998:iii). The report entitled 'Homelessness in the Aboriginal and Islander

context and its possible implications for the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program' (1989:iv) undertook a consultative process identifying five types of homelessness that included:

- *Spiritual homelessness that relates to the separation from traditional land or from family.*
- *Overcrowding*
- *Relocation and transience resulting in temporary, intermittent and cyclical accommodation*
- *Escaping unsafe or unstable environments*
- *Lack of access to any stable shelter, accommodation or housing.*

As identified in Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2001:15), some Indigenous young people often move frequently between houses within their extended family network. The difficulty is that whilst this type of transience is recognised as a component of Indigenous culture, there are distinct differences between those young people whose 'whereabouts are known and supervised' and those who are 'drifting between households, with little supervision and irregular school attendance' (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2001:15). Defining homelessness within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context is further challenged by the recognition that 'home is wherever a family member extends sustenance' (HEROC, 1986:129).

The National Youth Coalition for Housing (NYCH) definition of homelessness also provided a useful theoretical framework. This takes into consideration the housing situation from an individual perspective and incorporates a combination of factors that contributes to a person's lack of safety and security in relation to their accommodation. NYCH describe homelessness as:

The absence of secure, adequate and satisfactory shelter as perceived by the young person, and for homelessness to exist, at least one of the following conditions, or any combination of conditions should be operative:

a) an absence of shelter;
b) the threat of loss of shelter;
c) very high mobility between places of abode;
d) existing accommodation considered inadequate by the resident; for such reasons as overcrowding, the physical state of the residence, lack of security of occupancy, or lack of emotional support and stability in the place of residence; and
e) unreasonable restrictions in terms of access to alternative forms of accommodation
(NYCH, 1997)

Additionally, Chamberlain and MacKenzie's (2001) framework compliments existing definitions describing the use of informal networks within temporary accommodation options. The definition of Primary, Secondary and Tertiary accommodation types or options as follows:

Primary: *Literal homelessness or rooflessness. People without conventional shelter such as living on the streets, sleeping in parks, squatting in buildings, cars or improvised dwellings for shelter.*

Secondary: *People in temporary accommodation with no other secure housing elsewhere. Staying with other households (friends or relatives), boarding houses on a short-term basis, emergency accommodation such as refugees, hostels and night shelters.*

Tertiary: *Occupants of single rooms in private boarding houses that live there on a long-term basis (3 months or more). Homeless because the accommodation does not have a minimum standard- no own bathroom, kitchen, a separate room for eating, sleeping and secure of tenure by a lease.*

(Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2001)

For the purpose of this research project it was decided that an appropriate definition of homelessness would include:

- An Indigenous definition
- The NYCH definition
- Chamberlain and MacKenzie's concept of types of homelessness

Using these definitions the research aimed to explore the support, service and accommodation options of young people who had experienced, or were currently experiencing, secondary homelessness within the local community of North East Brisbane.

5.2 SUBURBAN OR HIDDEN HOMELESSNESS

There is very little documented information pertaining to young people and homelessness in their local areas or suburbs. It has been acknowledged that when young people leave home that they are likely to move from one temporary place to another, including staying with friends, friends' families and family members (Chamberlain and MacKenzie, 1992:286; Smith, 2000:26; Crane & Brannock 1996:19). Fitzpatrick's (1989:14) research into hidden homelessness within a Scottish housing estate, stated that most young people who left home initially tried to stay with family members. When they ran out of family members willing to accommodate them they began to stay with friends. When they ran out of close friends to assist them, young people relied on anybody and everybody to accommodate them.

Unlike young people who find themselves in the inner city, sleeping out in squats and parks, young people who remain accommodated within their local network do not come to the attention of agencies that provide accommodation or specialised support (Fitzpatrick, 1998:13). They are not obvious in their homelessness but experience the same lack of safety and security in their current accommodation. Fitzpatrick's (1998:16-18) research suggested that it's because of their social networks, familiarity of the area, territorially and lack of knowledge of, fear or confidence to seek assistance that they remain in their local

area. It is suggested that during the period of crisis that young people needed to remain in a familiar place.

Crane and Brannock (1996:45) stated that 62.5% of young people they interviewed went to either a friends' or relatives place when they first left home. They identified that it was common for this sample to move around 'for a period of weeks or months, and when this broke down, they then become homeless from their perspective' (Crane & Brannock, 1996:46). This suggests that whilst young people have a roof over their head, however unsafe and insecure it may be, that they consider themselves not to be experiencing homelessness.

As these young people try to remain as long as possible with relatives, friends and friends' families they are hidden from view. As they are not obvious to the public eye and services, there is no way to know how many young people are actually experiencing this type of homelessness.

Further to the literature is the anecdotal information about this type of homelessness and its role in accommodating young people within local communities. Through agency visits, workers expressed that some of the people with whom they worked experienced the continual movement between houses of their family, friends, and friends' families both before and after leaving their home of origin. For many this was a reflection of the young person's lack of information and options, a connection to their social support network and their desire to remain in an environment that was known to them. Anecdotally, suburban homelessness seemed prevalent in areas where there were fewer housing and support services available.

5.3 COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS

Children and young people's lives are 'shaped by the relationship of their intimate family world and the wider range of relationships they experience through their childcare, school and involvement with their community' (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2002:11). These relationships are significant in the supporting of a young person to remain connected to their community, particularly if a young person experiences difficulty at home.

Over the course of the past few years there has been significant research into the relevance between homelessness and young people's connection to family, school, friends and the broader community. It has been identified that when young people lose contact with these significant groups they are increasingly marginalised as they have fewer opportunities to engage in relationships that aid in the development of a sense of identity and ability to become independent members of the community (Goldman, 2000:45). Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2002:6) have identified that when young people are no longer at school or home and leave behind local ties that they can become 'deeply involved in the homeless subculture'.

6. ANALYSIS

6.1 INTERVIEW BREAKDOWN

Twenty-three young people were interviewed for the purpose of attaining information in relation to secondary homelessness in the North East corridor of Brisbane. Of the young people interviewed, twelve were female and eleven were male. Seven of the young people identified as either Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. All of the young people were currently experiencing a variety of accommodation options. One young person was staying in the family home and the remainder were in emergency accommodation, medium to long-term accommodation, staying with friends, in boarding houses and sleeping rough.

6.2 PERSONAL PROTECTIVE FACTORS

When young people leave home early, this doesn't necessarily mean that they leave behind their community, their social networks and supports. Indeed, it is these factors that sometimes emerge as a source of protection and may be crucial to coping. The roles of significant personal relationships and community connectedness can continue to offer natural supports to a young person in a time that is confronting, but in an environment that is familiar.

When young people first begin to experience difficulties at home, they may develop skills, abilities and strategies as a means of better managing their situation. These strategies are contingent upon their relationships with family, friends, friends' families, school and community and the role they have in providing the following:

1. Significant Personal Relationships
2. Community Connectedness
3. Resilience

A combination of these personal protective factors provided young people a place in which to receive respite, accommodation, food, social and emotional support. It is when these naturally existing personal factors, or community of supports, are no longer able or willing to fulfill those needs that a person may look for other alternatives and options.

6.2.1 Significant Personal Relationships

The significance of personal relationships is a factor that affects considerably the way a young person is able to cope with the stress and potential trauma of extreme family breakdown that results in early home leaving. These natural relationships are often the first place a young person utilises to confide their difficulties, seeking out a person whom they trust, who will listen and who can offer elements of support and assistance. It is these relationships, formed through family and social settings, which can help to maintain ones' connection to

community and greatly reduce the impact and potential harms of family breakdown and homelessness.

Family Relationships

Michael is a young man who originated from a small community in Queensland. At the age of 13 years, Michael left that community and his family home to move to Brisbane to reside with his Auntie and cousins.

Michael is from an Indigenous background and places an enormous importance on family and the role that has. Throughout his life he has relied on his extended family network as a means of support, a place to stay and people who he can talk with and trust. He believed that in dealing with circumstances that it is best "to keep it in the family" as he didn't want other people to know about his situation and as a result get involved. They "were always there" and they "just took care of me". As a result Michael has had very little need for contact with services over the past few years.

When Michael was experiencing difficulties at home he would go to his Aunt's and "stay there for a while… just now and then like, for a month or something". He found that because they were related they "knew the bad part of my father… they would talk with me then, tell me what he was like and everything". They helped him to handle the situation by telling him to "stay away and come up to their place or something".

Even though Michael's closest significant relationships were with his Aunts in the community, he maintained contact with other aunts, uncles, cousins, brothers and sisters who "are all over the place". He stated that he "always had family to go to". Michael "took a while" to make the decision to leave home permanently, and took up his Aunts offer to move in with her where he stayed for approximately two years. Following that Michael lived with his girlfriend's parents and considered this a long-term option. Michael still went back to his hometown for holidays to visit his family and spoke to his Aunt in Brisbane "all the time". When asked what was really important to have around you, Michael replied, "family's really good".

Strong relationships with extended family members such as siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins can be significant to young people who leave home early as a result of family conflict. Extended family members were often cited by young people as a consistent person in their life who may not have been able to change their circumstances but were able to provide meaningful and practical support before, during and after leaving the family home.

Of the young people interviewed, 70% identified a relationship with a member of their family as significant or important to them. Whilst in most of the cases the young people did not reside with the family member/s they spoke of, overwhelmingly they identified that extended family members offered them a source of protection in coping with their circumstances. For some young people these family members provided a safe place in which they could go for respite from the difficulties. Other times it was a place where they could seek advice and information, speak openly about their family problems or get help. These family members were often identified as significant because of the longevity and nature of the relationship and the trust and respect that had built over the course of that time.

Tina:	"I talk to my mum more than my friends. I tell Mum everything – I just tell her everything".
Jim:	"Always rang him up… so he knew I was safe, I wasn't hurt and stuff".
Angel:	"My grandmother's door is always open".

For 30% of the young people interviewed, a parent was identified as a key relationship in their life, despite having left their home of origin in the course of their journey. Even though young people stated that conflict with the parent was the cause of their leaving, this relationship was maintained to some degree after they had left. It seemed that through the process of moving from home, some young people developed independent living skills and learnt new skills in communication and negotiation. These skills assisted in providing an opportunity to forge a more respectful and honest relationship with their parent.

In one example, the parent was no longer able to provide care to them due to external circumstances, however throughout this stressful situation, this young person continued to maintain contact with their parent, often residing with them when opportunities arose. This example highlights the importance of the role of parents and family in a young person's life, even if they are no longer living in the family home.

It appears that the role of family members in supporting a young person experiencing difficulties at home occurs for a number of different reasons. A number of people identified that this related to the trust they had for family members, as opposed to services and systems. Many young people talked about the experiences of isolation throughout the family conflict, but identified siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles as people to whom they could talk about their situation with shared understanding and without fear of system intervention. It was expressed that the family's capacity to assist was based on their level of knowledge of household dynamics. This knowledge impacted on the family's ability to give the level of support required to the young person.

Ghost:	"I would talk with someone who had a little bit more responsibility, like my sister, so they can intervene if they feel it's necessary"
Ella:	"(My Brother) was there the whole time with me, like he was always around making sure that I was alright, making sure that I was being fed and if need be he'd go and shop with me, food, you know what I mean"
Madeline:	"My sisters, I've got three sisters, my two eldest ones had left home for a while so I talked to them … like no one else knew"

The importance of family as a source of support and assistance was more evident with Indigenous young people who, for the most part, possessed a strong connection and knowledge of their extended family. For these young people, family members were whom they trusted and sought support with their difficulties. Three of the Indigenous young people interviewed, identified that they had utilised their family network for both accommodation and support. None of these three had entered into the SAAP (Supported and Accommodation and Assistance Program) accommodation system at any point, relying on aunts, uncles, brothers and sisters to meet their housing needs.

Friendships

At the age of 12, Ella could no longer live in the family home. Due to circumstances beyond her control, the family had to separate leaving Ella little choice but to call her friend's mum and ask her if she could stay with them. When she first left home she lived with them for a couple of months and would continue to stay with them when she needed to over the course of the next 3 years. She explains, "I've known her since I was born, basically, like sisters. They all love me. Like part of the family".

Ella reflected on the significance of her friend and her friends' family. She felt they played a consistent and important role in her life stating that she doesn't "even put my mum down for next of kin, I put them down 'cos I know that if there's one person to call, they'll come… like they're the only people I know that would actually come". Ella said her friendship provided her with emotional support. She identified that her friend is a person with whom she can talk openly with, she can be honest with and she can tell her whatever she needs to tell her. Ella said that, "there's not many people who'd still want to be your friend after (all) you go through". Ella stated that her friendship was unconditional and non-judgmental of her personal and family circumstances.

Ella said that, "no matter where I am I always call them and tell them where I am."

Friends were consistently identified as significant supports with which young people trusted most of their personal information. These relationships offered a safe place where young people could speak about their difficulties at home, be listened to and be supported. It was often these friends and their families who provided a place for them to stay in difficult times and when a permanent break was made from the home. 78% of the young people interviewed identified that it was a friend's house that was the first place they went to stay when they left the family home.

The majority said they placed great importance on being discrete about their personal circumstances. They did not want other people to know about the extent of their problems and identified a need for privacy. Some young people spoke about being embarrassed about the situation they were in, felt isolated and alone in their experiences. For many of the young people who didn't feel comfortable talking about their family situation, most spoke of at least one friend whom they had confided at least part of their story.

In exploring this further, many of the young people spoke about trusting peers as opposed to people of authority. They stated friendship provided a very natural place in which to discuss concerns. As most friendships are formed through the socialisation process of school, young people spent most of their time with people who shared common interests and concern for each other. Young people discerned who would be privy to their information, entrusting only a small number of people.

In general, young people identified that these relationships provided a place where they could be listened to and supported, where they could talk out their concerns without fear of that person intervening in the situation. Furthermore, these friendships allowed a young person to further explore the options and choices available to them. Essentially, friends helped them to cope with their circumstances and gave them a safe place that was away from the family home and issues.

Angel:	"I'd tell them that I can't live at home anymore and if they had any ideas, like a place to go and they always offered their place but I felt like I was intruding".
Peta:	"Told one friend about what was wrong at home and all my family and stuff, what's going on with school and how I am at school… she wouldn't tell anyone".
Madeline:	"She didn't know everything. When I was around there we were so happy hanging out with each other, really got along".

It seems that it is often the case that young people are likely to get to know the families of their friends from both the school and the local area. In a number of the cases these families provided as much support as the friend, often offering assistance and accommodation. This was more common with friend's families that they had known and spent a considerable amount of time with.

Young people tended to have at least one family who were aware that they were no longer able to live in the family home, even if this was not explicitly expressed. These families offered varied responses with some taking a proactive role providing assistance and support to them. This sometimes involved the provision of long-term accommodation in that family home, and in some circumstances for up to six months.

Young people also spoke about families who allowed them to stay for extended periods of time, even though they did not know the young person very well.

Tina:	"Actually there is one person's mum and dad who knows everything 'cos I told them, 'cos they were really easy to talk to".
Madeline:	"They were a really friendly family… I suppose my friend may have told them, but they never mentioned it to me, but probably knew anyway".

Other families provided support without realising the extent of the young person's difficulties. Young people believed that some of these families had some knowledge of their situation, but not a comprehensive understanding. These families provided a place to go to and accommodation on a short-term basis. They were not fully aware of the reasons why this overnight stay was needed. Young people would not negotiate this in the context of needing a place to stay, but would organise to stay at their friends house for the weekend or to complete schoolwork. These families would provide a safe place of respite from the difficulties at home, young people recognising the value of this in coping with their circumstances.

Angel:	"They knew that I was having hassles but they didn't know to what extreme… they thought that it was sort of, she'd be right, give her a couple of days and she'll go back".

6.2.2 Community Connectedness

One's connection to the community is largely influenced by personal relationships. It is community that can provide a significant protective factor to young people, offering consistent relationships with people and places that are significant to them. This connection can be of great importance to a young person who is either at risk of or has left home early. It provides a point of

stability by offering a degree of support and assistance in an environment that is familiar.

For many young people the prospect of moving to a new location is fuelled with feelings of fear, anxiety and possible isolation. This disconnection not only means leaving behind the people who provide a level of support, but a familiar environment made up of shops, transport, streets, schools and social opportunities as well. These community structures are known entities that a young person may trust. This allows a person to feel a sense of control in a situation that is somewhat out of control.

Locations

Plants is a young man who left home when he was 13 years old and spent over a year moving in his local area between the houses of family, friends, friends' families and sleeping rough. Plants was not aware of other accommodation options and his connection to his local area was paramount. He stated that, "it was just a good location for me…. I was living at a mate's and it was just a good setting". For Plants this was very much associated with feeling safe and secure in a location where he knew the people, places and what to expect. He stated, "that is why I moved around instead of the city because I made some bad choices in the city a couple of times and ummm, that is why I moved".

In his experience, both before and after finding out about accommodation options available to him, all of the places where Plants had stayed were on the north side of Brisbane. The first location Plants stayed was with a grandparent. After this broke down, Plants negotiated to stay with a friend's family whom he knew through school. After he "got kicked out of there… I lived on the streets for about 4 months" where he explained that for him it was "like where am I sleeping, when is my next meal… like for some weeks I wouldn't eat for about three weeks… not like a proper meal… I had a little bite here and there, not a proper meal… I had no money or anything". Plants would try and find a place to "crash" but if this were not possible he "would just walk around until it was like late at night, like twelve, and then would just like you know crash."

Plants described his accommodation as "like I have stayed at one house like a week and then the next week I am out on the streets and then I would go to another house and be there for two weeks and the next day I am out". He stated that during this time he "lived on the streets more than I have lived in a house, or slept in a bed".

It was during some of this time that Plants continued to go to school and remained connected to his local area stating that, "when I went to the second school I was on the streets…it sucked actually but I just had to go".

It was when Plants began to have contact with the Department of Families that he became aware of alternative accommodation options available to him. He was referred to emergency shelters, but would not stay in locations other than the northside of Brisbane stating, "I didn't like the south side, that's a place I can't go near". Plants stated that if he knew about emergency accommodation he "would have been living in them a year ago… but I didn't know because before I got my FSO I was already on the streets and I was streetwise".

The young people indicated that the location or area from which they originated provided a point of stability when conflict in the family home resulted in them leaving. The familiarity of the area and the people within that location was a source of comfort and security for the person experiencing an accommodation crisis. This was particularly pertinent for young people who had lived in an area for an extended period of time and who had significant relationships within that space.

It also appeared that when a person first leaves home, the connection to an area or particular side of town would often affect many of the choices and options. Many young people opted to reside with friends in their local community. Much of this was due to their local community being a known entity. Maintaining familiarity seemed to aid their ability to better manage their situation in terms of survival and coming to terms with their accommodation and family status.

Young people spoke about their lack of information and knowledge relating to the choices available to them. For many of the young people, the fact that options existed outside of their local area was unknown, and thus the only choice they saw was to remain in their local community. By staying locally, they negotiated meeting their basic need for food and accommodation, whilst maintaining their social support networks. It seems that these local supports were paramount to young people in this time of uncertainty.

Ella:	"It was pretty bad. I didn't like that at all, 'cos it wasn't just a different suburb; it was out of Brisbane completely"
Peta:	"Yeah, I have to know the area I live in"
Pete:	"Just like you know all your friends in really one area and if you move out of that area you have to really travel to see them and it doesn't really work out".

Young people often tried to remain connected to their local area for as long as possible moving between different places within that community, utilising their different supports. Some people maintained this for an extended period of time whilst others had exhausted all their options and had no other choice but to look for support outside of their local area.

Interestingly, when young people found out about accommodation and service choices outside their local area, there was still a strong desire to live near their area of significance. They often chose emergency and medium to long-term accommodation options close to known people and familiar areas.

A number of the young people interviewed said they had to move cities or towns in order to gain accommodation with family or friends. In these situations, people discussed the difficulty of leaving behind their friends and community. In particular the process of having to build new support networks often proved a difficult task. Coupled with this was having to get to know a new area and the facilities available to them.

As suggested earlier, for young people who had moved locations regularly, their connection to the local area was not as significant and they looked outside of that region for supports and services earlier. This alludes to the possibility that they may not have the same connection to their community as a direct result of moving locations, therefore not seeming to have as strong relationships or support networks to assist them when in crisis.

Ghost:	"I didn't have any friends in Queensland"
Tina:	"We moved so many times and mum just got sick of the houses. Mum wanted to get away from down there, we moved up here"

Schools

Tina left home after experiencing conflict with her step-parent. She acknowledged that her mother was a primary support. When she told her mum that "I cant handle living here", her mum helped her "to find a place to move into… help me look for like apartments an' stuff, somewhere to share accommodation". Tina moved in with her mum's friend who lived in the same neighbourhood. She remained in this placement for "three months".

Throughout this period of time Tina continued going to school as she had close friendships there and the support of the teachers and the guidance officer. Tina cited her English teacher as supportive stating, "I talked with her about everything". Her teacher had contact with Tina "in the morning and during the day… she knew everything…so I talked to her, 'cos she knew I was upset". Tina stated that "she was just there for support … I was glad of it".

Another person in the school who provided assistance was the Guidance Officer, a person who she sought help from once her placement began breaking down. She stated that approaching them "was scary, but I knew I had to do it, 'cos I knew I had nowhere else to go". She "told her (the Guidance Officer) that I had to move out and she said we can get someone to help you go through this stuff".

The Guidance officer "got me an interview with one of the guys… and that's when he introduced me into this place". Both the Guidance officer and the community worker "gave me names of places and numbers" and from these Tina was able to organise to access medium to long-term accommodation in her local area.

Tina stated that school was important to her during this crucial time. She stated that "I hate changing schools, so I wanted to stay in the same one… I wanted to have one stable thing at least".

The role of school and the relationships formed through school provided a large component of the community connectedness articulated by young people. It provided a place where young people could socialise with their peers, have contact with adult role models and develop abilities relating to a multitude of things, including life skills, communication and negotiation. As identified by the young people interviewed, school provided the context where friendships were formed, trust developed and opportunities for discussion were created.

Schools also provided a place for young people to go five days a week, and this was beneficial for a number of reasons. School gave the young person something else to think about other than their own concerns. It provided stability and consistency, contact with friends, a location that they did not have to negotiate, time they did not have to fill in and a place in which they could organise accommodation at friends' houses.

Michael:	"Just went to school just to learn and have fun when lunchtime come".
Peta:	"They didn't hassle me about my assignments and stuff. I just didn't have anything done, nothing, I got most of my assignments done late, yeah".

Whilst some young people didn't engage with the school about their difficulties in or out of home, for other young people, school provided access to staff and support people. Guidance Officers, School Based Youth Health Nurses, Reconnect Workers, C.E.C's (Community Education Officers), Youth Support Coordinators, School Chaplains and Teachers were considered by the young

people to be significant in providing various levels of support and assistance with both school and personal problems. This support varied according to their individual roles, the relationship with the young person and what they could offer.

Young people often identified specific teachers who were aware of their situation. The teachers fulfilled a range of roles such as providing a person with whom they could speak, offering referral paths to other staff, and assistance with maintaining schoolwork standards and expectations. Teachers alongside the school support staff often offered a place where young people could go to talk and be listened to; discuss options, receive information and be referred to appropriate support agencies.

Most young people identified that once they had left home it was difficult to maintain their schooling, but that going to school was a priority. For 60% of the young people interviewed they continued to go to school after they had left the family home and were not staying in any long-term accommodation options. Whilst some were able to maintain this for a longer period of time, others left because they couldn't maintain looking for accommodation while attending school. As well, some young people were asked to leave due to poor attendance or behavioural issues.

Of the young people interviewed, many had returned to their studies, placing a high importance on continuing their education as a means of seeking employment. 61% of the young people interviewed were currently engaged in education or training. Only 9% of young people remained in the same school, whilst the other 52% utilised alternative education options such as TAFE, JPet and Albert Park Flexi School.

Ella:	"like no matter how I was feeling he'd always make me feel better about the situation and he'd be like "you can do it, you can get there" you know, yeah. Always gave me help with school and stuff that I needed help with".
Angel:	"They gave me a bit of leeway. They didn't ask too many questions".
Madeline:	"I think Flexi School is probably the best place, a real turning point when I went there. It was like a family environment and I had no family so felt very much embraced there. I was encouraged, I got work through them, they've given me confidence so I started making like a career which is making me even more independent".

6.2.3 Resilience

One of the significant characteristics possessed by young people who leave home early is their capacity to cope with changes and challenges and to bounce back during difficult times. This is often referred to as resilience. In managing their situations to develop options and choices, young people utilise a vast number of skills. They show an enormous capacity to be creative and resourceful in adversity, drawing on the support and assistance of their significant personal and newly formed relationships.

Before leaving the family home, young people had to find ways of coping with their situation. Whilst some chose to leave regularly for long periods of time, others developed strategies in which to manage the circumstances. They were often very resourceful in how this was achieved. The young people developed strategies to either protect or assist them in facing, avoiding and/or dealing with conflict. Most of the young people interviewed were very adept at reading the signs and signals of impending conflict and would respond according to their own personal strengths, abilities and capacity to cope.

A recurring theme in the interviews was the use of the person's bedroom as a place where they could flee from or hide from altercations. This was seen as a safe space, particularly when they wanted to forget about the problems or wanted to avoid any impending arguments.

Young people in the research cited avoiding and ignoring the person that was most likely to antagonise situations and interactions. Some found that by being around siblings they were less likely to experience conflict, whilst others identified that going to school was a good method in coping with the situation. School, being a legitimate reason to get out of the house, provided a safe environment that allowed them to socialise with their support network and forget about the difficulties at home.

Ghost:	"I'd wait 'till I get home or I could just stay at home and try to diffuse the bomb before it went off, you know"
Tina:	"I'd stay in my room and listen to music and not worry about it"

The identification of a particular goal or ambition was often used by the young people as a means of focusing on something other than the difficulties at home or not having stable accommodation. For a number of young people, this involved working toward finishing a particular grade at school. The most common reason that people wanted to achieve an academic level was so that they could get a 'good' job.

For other young people the ambition that aided them in their journey was to prove a particular perception of them as incorrect. Judgements cast by family, friends

and services had created enormous conflict for some people, resulting in a strong commitment to disproving these beliefs. These judgements inspired some of the young people to constantly strive toward achieving their goals.

Ella:	Family services used to say to me, "You're going to turn out just like your (sibling)".
Soxy:	'Yeah 'cos I want to have year 12 skills, 'cos if you don't have that you can't do a… course'
Angel:	"I'd skipped altogether about 2 years at school and could hardly read and I just wanted to get back into it and try, show people that I can do something better than hang around on the streets"
Plants:	"Everything I do I try to do it on my own, so I can go, "I've accomplished this on my own" and if someone goes "oh did you do that?", yeah I did that, not someone else helped me out"

Leaving home early necessitated that young people had to further develop aspects of their communication, negotiation, coping and survival skills. Aspects of this included having to adjust to new environments quickly, having to live in different environments than they were used to and negotiate with people and services in order to meet their needs. Some young people developed skills in being able to seek out accommodation in varied circumstances, becoming adept at socialising in order to find a place to stay.

6.3 OUT OF HOME ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation options for young people are limited by the information and options available to them. When they were experiencing difficulties at home, accommodation choices were very much associated with their personal points of reference, firstly looking toward family, friends and friends' families to provide a place where they could stay. Most utilised these networks for as long as possible, staying as closely connected with the people and places that are significant to them. It seems when young people remained connected they gained a sense of stability, security and safety amid the chaos of experienced difficulties in the family home and associated issues.

6.3.1 Prior to leaving home

Angel moved out of her community and home when she was 14 years of age. She was from a small town that had very few options and choices available to a young woman experiencing difficulties at home.

Before she moved to Brisbane, Angel stated that whilst she still resided at home she would "stay there for probably one day, probably a month". Angel identified that she called it "home until I was about thirteen when it started getting patchy. I still called it home but wasn't really there".

The period before Angel made a permanent break from her family of origin she spent her nights by either walking around, staying with her grandmother, with friends, with friends' families or sleeping rough.

Her first accommodation option was to regularly stay with her grandmother. This was maintained until the arrangement created difficulties for both herself and her Grandmother stating that she "thought better not get my grandmother into this whole fighting issues".

It was at this point that she began staying with friends' families. Angel would "swap or change" friends' houses every "3 or 4 days", until "friends were starting to get a little bit 'sus' about it". Angel said "some parents wanted to call my home and stuff" but she would avoid this by offering to leave the home. Angel tried to keep her circumstances "as hush-hush as possible" by moving constantly between different houses of friends and groups of friends.

Angel found that it wasn't until an argument with her mother, very late one evening that she was unable to find a place to stay. Having no other option available to her, she "found a nice comfy, cosy little place down at the skate park" where she "stayed for a couple of days". This became an option that she would use when she could not find a place to stay or didn't want her friends to work out how "extreme" her hassles at home were.

During this time Angel identified 3 or 4 families with whom she stayed more regularly and for longer periods of time. She believed that they "sort of caught on but they didn't want to say anything" about her situation. 'They were happy to have (her) there but (she) felt like a burden" identifying that she "wasn't part of the family" and she "felt that she was imposing".

Angel identified that she moved out of home when she came to Brisbane to rent a room with an independent friend from her town.

It was established in the interviews with young people that the build up to leaving the family home was often a long process that involved a final decision being made by the young person, their care-giver (usually a parent or parents) or an outside organisation.

Some young people sought refuge from a difficult home environment by staying with friends or relatives. Whilst not every person identified doing this, a vast majority cited that residing with friends or family members for both long and short periods of time was a method to cope with the conflict. In some circumstances, the person was likely to have spent considerable periods of time out of the family home before finally leaving. For some young people this meant negotiating different accommodation options regularly whilst for others it meant staying with family members for long periods of time.

Staying with family members was often an easy way to escape the home and the conflict, particularly for Indigenous young people with close family ties. For young people staying with their other parent, an aunt, uncle, brother, sister or grandparent was deemed an acceptable place for a young person to stay, creating no further difficulties with the primary care giver when explaining where they were going and why.

Michael:	"No, stayed at my aunties… just now and then like, for a month or something".
Peta:	"Went from home to my sister, then to my aunty and home… And then out"
Tina:	"I mean a lot of the time I've been away from her, 'cos I was living with my dad for about a year and a half".

For the most part, many of the young people interviewed did not have any other family members outside of their immediate family of parent/parents, brothers and sisters. When asked about other family members, a common response was that they had either never met the extended family, they were not located in the same area or they had no connection with them.

The lack of connection with family for some Non-Indigenous and Indigenous young people meant that a greater importance was placed on the role of friends and friends' families as a source of support and respite.

Madeline:	"Yeah, I'd go for weeks then come home and mum would say, how was your weekend and I'd go, "Yeah it was a good weekend"
Tina:	"Every now and then, like on weekends and stuff… just to get away and just to have fun and to stop worrying about problems"

Prior to making the final break from home, only one young person used SAAP accommodation services as a place to be accommodated when they were experiencing difficulties.

6.3.2 After Leaving Home

Carina stated that she left home when she was sixteen years of age. Her relationship with her mother could be described as supportive which resulted in Carina "moving back to my mum's" when she had no other options available to her. Carina identified that further to her mum she had support from "four families", often staying with them for extended periods of time. Carina stated that in the initial times before and after leaving home her accommodation "was always with the same families."

The first place she went to stay upon leaving home was with her friends' family. She negotiated this placement and the family "helped me get all my stuff out" of home. Carina stayed with this family for "5 months" and even though her circumstances changed and she moved out she still believed that "I could still go back there now".

In the two years since leaving home, Carina had stayed in numerous accommodation options, inclusive of family members, friends' houses, friends' families houses, friends-of-friends houses, private rental, an emergency youth shelter, caravans, pubs, boarding houses and to a limited extent sleeping rough.

Carina appeared to remain closely connected to her local area initially but this changed over her period of homelessness. As her 'risk taking' behaviour increased, her friendships changed, resulting in her use of accommodation options from further afield and in more precarious places.

Carina would negotiate her accommodation by going to people's houses and identifying to them that she had "no where to go". She would try to find a place "for the night" and through negotiations would end up "staying there for a couple of weeks, (if) they said it was sweet for me to stay". Carina stated that many of her newer friends "didn't have a place themselves… moving from place to place".

At one stage Carina was "staying with a friend" who was renting medium to long term accommodation. It was through this friend that she found out these options and placed herself on waiting lists. Whilst waiting for a vacancy she continued to move around between accommodation options, finally stabilising in a boarding house.

Following this period she was offered accommodation with a medium to long term housing service and she accepted that option. Carina stated that in getting to that point she has "stayed in lots of places".

When a young person first leaves the family home, they often have limited knowledge about the choices, options and supports available to them. With little information, the most natural place to find accommodation is to utilise houses belonging to friends and friends' families from the local community. Often these people have offered significant support and assistance to the young people before leaving home. This usually occurs in the provision of accommodation when they needed respite or a safe place when they had nowhere to go.

The interviews revealed that leaving the family home occurred in three main ways. These were:

- Intervention of a service such as the Department of Families.
- Parent asking the young person to leave
- Young person making the decision to leave.

In the last scenario, young people sometimes left quickly, but generally had spent a varied amount of time thinking about it as an option. In circumstances where young people had spent considerable periods of time away from the home prior to permanently leaving, the decision seemed to be the next step, fuelled by a particular event.

Soxy:	"No, No (didn't have any warning). I just thought I was gonna have a break from them for a couple of weeks. I didn't really want to go there".
Peta:	"I just wanted to get away from there'. 'I thought about it for a couple of days".
David:	"Dad couldn't handle me so he gave me to his brother… so Dad gave me to him".
Jim:	"I lived with mum for a while but they bashed me so I left… that's when I went to my uncle's".
Patricia:	"…thinking about it for a while, maybe a month or two… then I actually got up the courage to say it out loud".

Of the young people interviewed, 22% did not go to a friend's or a family member's house when they first left home. Of that group, 13% were placed in accommodation by the Department of Families, one went to independent private rental accommodation, one to a boarding house and one to a youth emergency shelter. The other 78% went to friends' houses mostly staying with their friends' family, when they first left home.

A major priority on leaving was to find a place to stay. The young people interviewed placed a high degree of importance on the need to have a roof over their head and would employ numerous skills in order to achieve this outcome. Sleeping rough was clearly the last option for people. For many they did not consider this an option at all. As this was a last resort, young people would sometimes stay with friends, friends' families, other family members and people who they didn't know well and didn't necessarily feel comfortable with in order to have accommodation.

Madeline:	"I never consider sleeping on the streets or anything. Yeah, I probably would have just kept doing what I was doing".
Tina:	"I'd rather have somewhere to sleep, I'd rather live somewhere I don't like than to live on the streets, cos' I'd hate it".
Ella:	"She'd be worried about me having a room and I was just glad to have a roof".
Patricia:	"I didn't think about it really, like as long as I had a bed and food I didn't really care".

Staying with Family, Friends and Friends' Families

As stated previously, 78% of the young people interviewed stayed with family, friends or friends' families when they first left home. For the majority of young people, the initial place they stayed was a negotiated placement with a family that was intended to be a long-term option. For only two young men, this first accommodation option was not a negotiated choice but rather unplanned and a short-term measure.

For those who stayed with families that were known to them, there existed a number of barriers to maintaining this option. Young people explained reasons that limited their capacity to remain in that particular family home that included:

- Overcrowding
- Feeling like an imposition
- The fact that it was not their family of origin
- An inability to contribute financially
- Not wanting to interfere with friendships
- Unsafe and/or unhygienic environment.

Angel:	"They were happy to have me there, but I just felt like I was a burden, I wasn't part of the family".
Pete:	"After a while you lose that feeling for each other… 'cos you're too close together… you're all together all the time".

Ella:	"Him, his mum and his little brother, yeah and me… my brother and… then his girlfriend… six of us".
Tina:	"Cause it wasn't my family I didn't feel, you know everything they did, I was excluded".
Madeline:	"She'd just got married… had like her daughter and the baby… I didn't want to burden her".

It appeared that when staying with a family member, friend or friend's family, this option could be further sustainable when some of the following factors existed:

- An ability to contribute financially
- Families that provided practical help and assistance
- Feeling like a member of the family
- Personal space within the house
- Being able to be honest about the extent of the difficulties at home
- Clean and safe living environment

Pete:	"I feel better giving money for food and that… you feel part of the house too".
Plants:	"Yeah she would take me to sign in, take me to court and she bought me clothes at one stage, I spent Christmas with her, with her family".
Patricia:	"She moved all her clothes out and so I had somewhere to put my clothes … so it felt more comfortable, and I figured I had nowhere else to go so make the most of it".
Jim:	"It was clean and shit like that… we'd just sit in our own room, they'd sit and watch TV in the lounge room and if we wanted to go out, we'd just go out".

Staying with family, friends and friends' families were accommodation options sustained by some young people for long periods of time, even if this involved the constant movement between houses. The notion of not having one stable place resonated throughout the interviews with young people utilising any option available to them in order to have a place to stay. Some young people changed houses every couple of days staying with friends, friends of friends, friends-of-friends-of-friends etc… This then placed them in a situation where they were becoming less attached to their local area and supports and more susceptible to engaging in risk taking behaviors such as use of drugs, alcohol and/or illegal activity. For the young people who moved frequently between houses they were either unaware of other accommodation options or didn't want to utilise these options because of fear of those systems and the people who used them.

61% of the young people interviewed stayed at more than three different friends' houses. 79% of these young people stated that they had moved so frequently that it was impossible to recall the number and locations they had stayed. For this group, accommodation was opportunistic, utilising every friend and interaction in order to negotiate a place to stay.

Plants:	"Like I have stayed at one house like a week and then the next week I am on the streets and then I would go to another house and be there for two weeks and then the next day I am out".
Pete:	"About eight months… I've just been out and about… just at friends' places and in my car and stuff like that".

Young people used a number of different tactics to secure accommodation on a regular basis. They identified that in order to find a place they would often 'hang out' at a person's house until later in the evening when they would ask if they could stay the night. Sometimes they would elaborate their story informing friends' families that they were currently not getting on with their family, not being completely explicit about the extent of those difficulties.

The reasons provided by young people why they were not forthcoming with their personal circumstances were related to the anxiety, shame and isolation associated with their family and housing situation. Coupled with this was the fear of people's reactions to their circumstances and their possible interventions. For these reasons young people maintained that it was as simple as negotiating to go to stay at a friend's house for the night. It was in these circumstances that the host family may not have been aware that the young person was no longer living at home. They were of the belief that their child had a friend over for the night.

Plants:	"I would just go there and go like can I crash here, and if they said no I would just cruise or just sit there, hang out, chill out and then if they said yeah I would just crash there".
Angel:	"Me and my mum were having troubles at home, can I crash over at your place for a couple of days".
Ella:	I ran into my brother's ex-girlfriend… and she said, "if you need anywhere to go, just come round here". I went round there the next day and she let me stay… her and her boyfriend broke up… he let me stay for like six months".

Another method used to gain accommodation was to be fairly upfront about needing a place to stay. This occurred with both well known and newly made friends. Young people said that there were occasions where they had befriended a person and asked them directly. They would explain their difficulties at home and their need for accommodation for the night. In a couple of situations this

became a longer-term placement whereby their friend would discuss the situation with their family and an invitation to stay would be extended.

James:	"I opened up to him and I told him all the things I had, and he straight away said, 'You can stay at my place' so I said ok".
Pete:	"I just say that I don't talk to my family or anything… they just offer, 'do what you want, stay the night here', yeah, so it's pretty good".
Plants:	"I actually didn't know him, I was staying over at my mate's house… he come over… and I go, 'I just got kicked out of home' and he was like 'oh come over to my house, hang on a minute, mum can Plants come over and stay at our house?".
Jim:	"I met him through a friend and we started hanging round for a while and I asked him, "look can I live with you?" and he asked his parents and they said yes".

Young people were sometimes required to stay in conditions that were cramped, unhygienic and unsafe. Despite these conditions they would, for the short term at least, accept accommodation of this type to ensure that they had a roof over their head.

Many of the young people spoke about the physical space in which they slept, identifying that often they would be sleeping on couches and on mattresses in the living room, having no personal space in which to leave belongings. Often these houses would be overcrowded with many more people than bedrooms; one person identifying that at one stage the family house where they were staying had six people in a two-bedroom house. Overwhelmingly the young people interviewed showed an incredible capacity to put up with anything just to have accommodation.

Tina:	"She said, 'if you apologise since you have no where to go you can stay here for longer for $10 a day', so I ended up doing that… Had to swallow my pride, even though I was not in the wrong".
Madeline:	"You could hear and see into the lounge room so everything that was going on, I could hear it…but it was better than living at home".

Pete:	"His son got really jealous that I got closer to him than what he did (his son) and he started taking stuff from the house and saying I took it".
Ella:	"I was sleeping on a mattress in the lounge room kind of thing, you know what I mean, and living out of my suitcase, and that really sucked, it was really bad".
Patricia:	"(My child) was four months old… I was sleeping on a mattress in the lounge room".
Angel:	"I thought that yeah, maybe she'd take care of me. She promised everything would be all right… all she done was get drunk".

Other Accommodation Options

For some of the young people interviewed other options utilised were boarding houses, private rental accommodation and sleeping rough. The reasons they chose these options were varied, but largely linked to either a lack of appropriate information and knowledge of housing or not feeling comfortable in SAAP accommodation services.

Boarding Houses

For 26% of the young people interviewed, boarding houses were an option utilised when seeking accommodation. In a small number of cases, a boarding house was a location that was an organised, long-term arrangement. In one circumstance this was an arrangement made by a parent while in the other, it was a community run and supported boarding house. Boarding houses were seen as a place to gain access to accommodation quickly, without needing large sums of money for bond. In these circumstances, boarding house accommodation was either sought out with the assistance of agencies working specifically with homeless young people or organised by the individual who required a place to stay when there were no other options available to them.

The experience of staying in a boarding house was varied and dependent on the condition of the property and the other people staying there. Each young person identified that having their own personal space and a few facilities was a benefit, but it was identified that staying in one particular boarding house was not an option that was maintained for long periods of time.

Ella:	"I was like fifteen, living in a boarding house full of old men".
Madeline:	"The guy upstairs I talked to I thought was really cool, and another guy had alcoholic syndrome and there was the guy next

	door and the girl who kept trying to kill herself. It was insane. It was nuts in that house".
James:	"It was ok at first, but then I was so down that the people that were there just irritated me. They were at each other's throats every night".

Private Rental

Private rental was an accommodation option used by 17% of the young people interviewed. In two of the cases the individuals knew the accommodation services and options available to them. Instead they sought independence and choice over where they wanted to live and with whom. In the other scenario, the young person was not aware of alternative options, choosing private rental to meet their accommodation needs. Each of the young people who stayed in private rental experienced difficulties in both attaining and maintaining this option. Some of the problems they experienced included discrimination, financial difficulties and issues associated with residing with other people.

Madeline:	"I had money saved up, I had enough bond and I'd got 2 weeks rent… and money for connections and all that kind of stuff… I wanted 2 bedrooms 'cos of having a baby…. no one would say yes".
Ghost:	"I afforded rent, but like food became a problem".

Sleeping Rough

Of the young people interviewed, 48% had experienced not having a place to stay and either walking around all evening or sleeping in cars, squats, buildings, parks or improvised shelter. In 22% of these cases, the young person had no other options available to them and they were unaware of emergency accommodation at that point. For these young people, sleeping out began to occur within their local area, when they were unable to negotiate a place to stay with either friends or family. For one young person, sleeping rough occurred very soon after leaving home and their local area. They then slept out in the Brisbane CBD.

Of the 48% who had slept out approximately half said sleeping rough was an option that they used regularly when no other place was available with friends, family and/or in accommodation services. For 17% of the young people interviewed, sleeping rough was a long-term option for them, whereby they had become accustomed to it. In each of these scenarios, they were aware of housing options available to them but either would not or could not access them.

Their use of emergency accommodation was generally restricted to single nights irregularly as a means of respite from the streets.

Each young person expressed the first time they slept rough was as a result of having nowhere else to go. Generally, they found this experience frightening and intimidating. Each described their ability to quickly adjust to sleeping out. The adjustment seems to be related to having skills in building a strong peer network made up of people experiencing a similar situation. People explained that during their first experience of having no other option, they began by walking around, staying in well-lit public places.

Jim:	"I left the next morning and started hanging out at Queen Street Mall. Cos I didn't know what the streets were like so I stayed awake for a few nights… just hanging around where the cameras were and shit".
Plants:	"people just see me as… living on the streets, that's not good but I adapted to it".
Angel:	"I used to sleep at the skate park for a couple of days, but mainly just walk the streets at night".

SAAP Accommodation Services

Of the young people interviewed, 22% had never experienced staying in a SAAP accommodation service, having stayed either with friends or family members. Interestingly of that five, three identified as either Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, again expressing the significance of family members and/or friends.

78% of the young people interviewed had had contact with either emergency or medium to long-term SAAP accommodation services. Of that group, 17% had only experienced emergency, 17% had only experienced medium to long-term and 43% had been in both types of services. It was consistently stated that access to housing services was limited to the information available to an individual and their connection to formal support services. In every case, excluding one, access to a SAAP service occurred via either a service intervention or through word-of-mouth. In the other case a member of their extended family referred them to an accommodation service.

Of the young people interviewed 61% said that they were referred or placed in emergency accommodation as a result of accessing a welfare service. It was not until they were in an absolute accommodation crisis without another option, that young people approached either a school representative or agency for assistance. It was usually during this time they found out that these services existed. The fear and isolation of early home leaving seems to contribute to the

reasons why young people wait until an accommodation crisis before accessing assistance.

Further contributing to this is the lack of information passed on to young people about availability of support and accommodation services at early intervention points.

Patricia:	"I didn't even know that it was a shelter where I could go…I thought that shelters were for like druggies, and you know, dropouts I had no idea".
Plants:	"I didn't even know… then I found out about shelters and now I am just cruising along".
James:	"You don't know what they're like, don't know who to trust, who to talk to".
Ghost:	"I wasn't educated in the ways that I could have moved out in Brisbane… like people that knew how to help and stuff; I wasn't educated in that".
Angel:	"I just thought there's gotta be something in Brisbane. And there's a lot more housing opportunities, some opportunities for like my age group, yeah".

Young people mainly spoke of their understanding that places like shelters were part of the community, but were not sure where to go to find them and what they would be like. Once reaching emergency accommodation, most young people found it to be a place where they found out about other options and received support and assistance in attaining them.

Whilst some young people adjusted to the shelter system, finding it a place where they could stabilise and access support, others experienced difficulties in that system. This occurred for a variety of reasons and was largely contingent upon the individual, their expectations and previous experiences. These reasons included factors such as: the complexities of sharing a space with other residents with competing needs; the instability of being in an emergency shelter with new people moving in constantly; and the short term nature of this accommodation type. In most emergency accommodation options the maximum occupancy is three months and it was not often that a young person stayed for the full period of time.

Ella:	"Shelters are just really; you just get fucked around all the time. You can only stay in there like a month or three months you know, and that's not a very long time really".
Soxy:	"The people that were staying there, they were little brats I can tell you that. They were assholes. You'd worry about getting stabbed or something".

For other young people, the shelter was a positive experience where they were able to remain in the emergency shelter, until a vacancy existed in a medium to long-term place. These young people found the staff facilitated this process by teaching living skills and exploring and supporting appropriate options. They found they had people to talk with, and for some, it was the first time they discovered their experience was not unique only to them.

Ghost:	"Without doubt once I got into the stream…youth help and stuff like that, everything started getting a lot better".
Patricia:	"Yeah, like they really helped. They had heaps of information and everything so if you wanted to know something they could tell, you could ask them".

Of the 17 % of young people who moved directly into medium to long-term accommodation, this occurred through the facilitation of a service they accessed. In two circumstances, this happened through the intervention of the Department of Families whilst the other two had to leave their current place and in crisis approached the support people within their environment to find out what choices they had.

For most of the young people interviewed, there was a lack of knowledge about accommodation options available and it was not until the housing provided by family, friends and friends' families was exhausted that they sought out information. This was closely aligned to a young person's isolation in their experience, wanting to remain connected to their local area, fear of approaching a service and lack of knowledge of services.

6.4 INFORMATION AND OPTIONS

The dissemination of information and options to young people who are experiencing family breakdown and early home leaving can occur at any point throughout this process. It is clear, that with information, provision of choices evolve related to accommodation, income, support and practical assistance.

The role of family, friends, friends' family, schools, services and statutory services play a critical role in how young people can attain this information. It is usually through these interactions they are able to gauge what choices and

options are available. Given this, it is imperative that the people in whom they trust, possess this information or have an ability to attain that.

Ghost was 16 years old when he left home. He was residing with his stepfather, his stepfather's new partner and their child. He said that the last year and a half of this arrangement was quite difficult and strained. Ghost was approached by his stepfather to move out of the home. He stated that, "like I can get you a flat under my name but you have to pay for all the stuff, you know". Ghost saw this as a way that he "could still be mates with him but at a distance …he'd go along with his family but still be there to have the contact".

Ghost approached Centrelink to try and get Youth Allowance but couldn't claim "independency because my step-father earned too much and then we tried to get some kind of benefit for him for looking after me, they said 'No we can't give you a benefit because you're not his father'". Ghost stated that he "could get no subsidy whatsoever, no help whatsoever, so there was no choice but to leave school". Centrelink "didn't show any real sincerity or concern for the situation". They "gave us no alternative support; they didn't give us any numbers of anything like that, names of any organisations or maybe names of cheap accommodation".

Ghost stated that he "didn't like school at all, so there was no real urge for me to go on an academic level, but because my friends went I would have went as well". He said that the day-to-day contact with friends helped him get through the hassles he was experiencing at home. Ghost got full time work at a supermarket, stating that "they snapped me up real quick, because they got cheap labour during the days of school hours when they couldn't get anyone". Ghost said that living became a stretch, "like I afforded the rent, but like food became a problem".

Managing the expense of living became increasingly more difficult. As a way of seeking assistance, he phoned his real father who was unable to assist financially, but offered Ghost the option of moving to his place. This meant moving to a new state with a parent whom he had not had contact with since he was 6 years of age. He had no other option stating that that he "can't do anything, so I had to move up here".

Ghost then began residing with his father, "his de facto wife and six year old daughter" where a similar situation arose. Ghost stated that "he had a new family… and I moved in and kind of got in the middle between my father and my stepmother".

Ghost then left his father's house after a year and a half when he rented a room with some people he knew through his work. He states that "because of the situation I was in I had no choice, or thought I had no choice". This accommodation option "went very, very sour" so he moved out again to a place that only lasted only 3 days. Upon moving out of this place he found he had no other accommodation alternatives. Ghost did not know about any accommodation or support services that existed.

Fortunately, Ghost ran into some friends who "knew about JPet, and so they took me there". JPet helped him to find an emergency shelter where he stayed for a considerable period of time. Both services worked together with Ghost to find youth specific medium to long-term accommodation. Ghost states that "if anyone's in trouble they'll find themselves in Centrelink". "With kids trying to move out of home let them somehow know that there is an option".

In the course of the interviews with young people, it became evident that when they began to experience difficulties at home young people were not highly aware of options and choices, having little information at their disposal. To access information one needs to have an understanding of who is in a position to help and what assistance they can provide. Young people utilised a number of methods of seeking information, including talking with friends, family members, school representatives and services.

In the initial stages of leaving home, it was clear that approaching people for information was a frightening and foreign idea, essentially limited to the people with whom they had an existing relationship. It became evident that the longer young people's experiences of being homeless lasted, the less young people perceived they had to lose in approaching people about their circumstances. They developed proficiency in talking and negotiating with people in order to seek information and options. Most young people cited that their friends and family were often good at listening and supporting, but like themselves, were not aware of what existed outside their own personal points of reference. The result was that these relationships offered emotional support but usually not a lot in relation to practical information, options or choices.

Angel: "I'd tell them that I cant live at home anymore and if they had any ideas, like a place to go and they always offered their place but I felt like I was intruding".

Ghost:	"My good, good friends, they would have never been in that situation to know about it (the information and options)".
Patricia:	"Because they all lived with their parents and so they had no idea that there were shelters and stuff".
Plants:	"They are all home kids there, none of them really live in shelters or other places with mates and that. They all live at home".

For many of the young people, access to information informed their ability to acquire services relating to income, accommodation, support and education and training. For some this did occur through friends and family members, in their initial stages of leaving home. This seemed to be largely connected to their friends or family members knowledge of systems, ability to acquire that information and previous experience in accessing them. Some young people identified that they gained knowledge through friends and family to meet some of their needs in relation to income and education, but mostly their knowledge did not extend beyond that to include accommodation and support services.

Plants:	"My Nan told me… my sister moved out of home like two years ago… my Nan helped her out… like they planned to get a healthcare card for her and… like she had money set up and that".
Madeline:	"She (my sister) took me to Centrelink to see a social worker who explained my situation".
Ella:	"Mum used to say these places can give you stuff here, these places can give you stuff there".
Tina:	"Mum helped me look for like apartments and stuff, somewhere to share accommodation and then we heard about this place. She went with me to Centrelink to get my pay".

From the interviews, it was clear that the longer a person experienced unstable accommodation, the more likely they were to associate with other young people who were in similar circumstances, with perhaps more knowledge than them. Young people spoke about the information that they now possessed. Through staying in shelters and by accessing services they were able to find out about their options from both service providers and other young people. Furthermore, they saw this as an opportunity to pass on information to other young people who may be less informed. Many reflected that information would have been of great assistance to them if they had received it earlier- this being the primary reason

why they talk with other young people about the information they have learned in their journey.

Ella:	"Like I've told people, 'cos I met this fella at school who was, he was living at Hebron House and I sat him down and told him all about Redback and YAC and he was like 'oh, sweet man' and I gave him all the phone numbers and everything".
Jim:	"Just hanging around each other ever since and so I started sleeping on the streets… he was bought up on the streets in Melbourne".
Plants:	"I would just say "I know a place where you can crash tonight if you want it, take it".

For the young people who were attached to the school system, this was the only place that they could conceivably go for information and options. In circumstances where relationships between schools and broader community networks were in place, this assisted young people enormously through clear referral pathways.

James:	"I was actually doing good at school and then when I started having problems I started going downhill…they asked if anything had happened and I said 'yeah I'm having problems at home' so they gave me a card and said ring Reconnect and went through them".
Angel:	"I talked a lot to my guidance officer – about school and stuff before I left home".
Peta:	"She got everyone that was helping me and then I decided… move into one of those houses where everyone else goes, like when you leave home, a friends house or just wait at home to see if things get better".

Whilst some young people confided in a member of the school community and found this person's assistance helpful, others found that approaching the school was not helpful. Some young people identified that members of the school possessed an understanding that they were having difficulties at home, but provided no forum in which to discuss these concerns. In most of these cases, it was the lack of information at the school member's disposal that affected their ability to respond to the young person's circumstance.

Angel:	"(Teacher said) that it wasn't good for me to stay at home, but he couldn't offer any other option for me, though".

Madeline:	"I think she felt like I'm not qualified to be a counsellor but if I can help her out a little bit then it will take a little bit of stress out".

The final place young people identified as providing information about possible options, were established services. This was sometimes connected to schools, but mostly occurred in conjunction with accessing accommodation or other services. What is concerning is that for a majority of the young people, their access to services was contingent upon their accommodation crisis. This meant that they did not seek information or support until they had very few options left. This further compounded feelings of fear and isolation as they experienced having no place to go, limited ability to plan ahead, fewer opportunities to stabilise and little time to prepare their access to systems and services.

Once having had access to one service, most young people found that this was where they learned about many of the others that existed. The support and assistance that services provided was often described as being informative. Young people stated services generally possessed the correct information in relation to housing, income and support options, and also an understanding of their housing and family situation. Whilst not all experiences were positive for the young person, most described a sense of relief in being able to discuss their housing and family concerns alongside a provision of choice. Each of these choices assisted young people to gain their independence and have greater confidence in accessing other services to meet their needs.

Angel:	"They provided a lot more information. They knew what it was about. They gave me a lot more options".
Soxy:	"Met JPet and other accommodation options through staying at Orana… they just sat down and talked to me".
Ghost:	"Like once I described my situation they jumped straight into the pool, you know, like ringing up everyone about accommodation and things".
Pete:	"We applied for a heap of Housing Commission houses and stuff like that… yeah they've helped me out; they've been there for me".
David:	"Family Services they were saying, 'How old are you now, you might be right to go and get paid'…helped me apply for a key card, health care card and I went and applied for my own Medicare Card and my Tax file number, then they took me to Centrelink and filled out the Youth Allowance forms".

Centrelink provides a critical role in being a first to know agency, as it is one of the most recognised services. All young people interviewed possessed some knowledge of this service and it's possible assistance to him or her in their circumstances. For a couple of young people, Centrelink was the first agency they approached for assistance upon leaving home. Others recognised its existence and understood the possible help it could provide, but did not approach it until they had accessed other services and were supported in that process.

Jim:	"Yeah I knew about Centrelink… I applied for it … I went a week after and they said 'No, cant give it to you' but then 2 months later they granted me and stuff".
Ella:	"Well from being 13 and trying to get on a payment. I said, like 'pay me' and they wouldn't pay me and I had to go and organise it through Family Services".
Madeline:	"I asked mum about Centrelink…once I turned 16 I think then I was allowed to get money… so I just asked her about it and how to go down and talk to them about it".

A second highly recognised service by the young people interviewed was Kids Help Line. Every person interviewed had heard of the service, and understood that young people could phone there for assistance. A number of young people stated that they tried to access this service, with only a few given the opportunity to speak with a phone counsellor. Other young people identified that they tried to contact the service when they needed help, but had spent long periods of time on hold, choosing to hang up. For some young people they did not access this service as their preference was to speak with someone face-to-face, rather than speaking on a phone.

Angel:	"I tried ringing a couple of times, but I just got a phone line and it would go on and on and on, and then I'd just get…and hang up. I think 'what the hell, help me'".
Tina:	"They don't really know anything; they don't know what you tell them…there not in the situation…they don't know the whole atmosphere".

6.3.1 Barriers in Accessing Information and Options

Through the interviews young people identified a number of barriers in accessing information and options. Many spoke about feeling a sense of loneliness in their experiences and not wanting too many people to know about their circumstances. This is an enormous barrier to overcome as young people need

to feel safe in order to present their personal information and feel they can trust the listener.

The lack of trust that many of the young people possessed for services was a powerful and recurring theme. Feeling isolated and not being able to identify a person from whom to seek support and assistance further compounded an ability to invest trust. For some young people this was closely related to previous contact with statutory services and the impact this had on their lives. Other young people stated they feared what people would do with their information, and the consequences to themselves and their family members as a result of disclosing. Some young people, therefore, decided that it was easier to deal with the issues alone and/or with friends, than to discuss with services and workers.

Patricia:	"Didn't trust anyone, like any of the adults and stuff".
Madeline:	"I guess it's really hard to find somebody that you can trust, that would be able to say, 'What's going on. I can help you out'".
Pete:	"The department threatened if I didn't go mum would lose the other kids and stuff like that….told me I had to go there and that".

It may be the case, for some young people, that by talking about their family and accommodation problems, it became an issue that was real, harder to avoid and one they had to face. By not having an understanding that family breakdown occurs to other young people, their confidence in speaking out about the problems was somewhat stalled. Furthermore, as some young people were not aware of their options and choices, they felt limited in their capacity to address particular issues. It was through having a range of choices that they are able to gain a sense of control in their current situation. The research found that when young people spoke with someone who possessed relevant knowledge and correct information that could assist, this enabled a greater insight into their own experiences.

Ella:	"Not many people know about all of these things, not many people are in that situation and think, and like I said to you before, they think 'I'm the only one' so they don't want to go out blabbing about it".
Madeline:	"Like if I don't talk about it and just forget it and it's gone. If I don't deal with it I just don't think about it and that was probably the worst thing, thinking what the hell's is going on".

A second barrier to accessing information and options existed for young people who came from rural and remote communities. These young people reported

that they were given limited opportunities and places in which to discuss their concerns. Another barrier for rural and remote young people was the small size of the community and the associated difficulties. In some circumstances confidentiality was not maintained or their stories and experiences acknowledged. For some rural young people, because options did not exist in their community or access was limited, they assumed when moving to Brisbane that it would be a similar situation. Only one young person moved to Brisbane because they felt that there would be better support and options available to them.

Angel:	"There was nothing. There was no-one because of my age, I had nothing".
Jim:	"I didn't know about it (support service), 'cos we're from the bush".
Plants:	"I didn't even know it was (youth shelter) there".

For the majority of the young people who were not from rural communities, a barrier to accessing support was the lack of knowledge of services that existed in their local area. This seems to be closely connected to the relationships agencies have with the people in whom young people have confided. Some young people stated that when they found out about information and options, this was sometimes further complicated by the expectations and criteria placed on accessing these services. Some young people discussed having difficulties utilising services because of factors such as age and level of living skills.

Ella:	"I was like 13 and stuff and all the youth organisations they don't really like, housing people, they don't want to house you until you're at least 15 and Centrelink they don't want to pay you until your 15. So you've got two years of being fucked".
Soxy:	"I thought that if I got my skills more up to scratch I'd move".

Another barrier that existed for young people was dissemination of different information from support workers. This raises the question about at what point do workers give information to young people, or if it is appropriate to support young people through the process by giving pieces of information along the way. In many of the cases, young people had contact with schools and other services in relation to their earlier difficulties and associated behavior. Young people very clearly stated that they wished that they had been made aware that they had other options available to them at these points, rather than waiting until they were in crisis. This seems to be contingent upon workers assessments of the situation and what information should be discussed at which point. Accordingly some young people were not always informed of the full range of options and choices available to them. A concern here is that workers may make value judgements

about the level and type of information they think young people require. Common examples that were cited by the young people included not being informed of the possibility of income support from Centrelink; and not being advised of their legal rights in relation to their age and whether or not they were legally able to leave home. The second scenario cited has the potential to see young people staying in abusive family relationships because of myths and misinformation surrounding the legal home leaving age.

Madeline:	"I didn't think they could really help, you know. I just thought that the guidance officer was there to help you with school like, and not really stuff at home".
Ella:	"Good information, earlier"

It was evident that in relation to early home leaving the biggest barrier to overcome in relation to finding appropriate options and choices for young people was community perceptions. Young people experience living in a broader community where homelessness and family breakdown is not discussed or is portrayed without hope or positive outcomes. As a result young people, as do the wider community, view homelessness as a circumstance that happens to a particular population within a particular locality. It is due to this that it becomes hidden and clouded by perceptions rather than the realities. These perceptions hinder young peoples access to assistance, and in some circumstances when they do access support, incorrect information is provided based on these perceptions.

Patricia:	"We'd see each other at school but you weren't really allowed to tell anyone that you lived there (in a youth shelter), like a confidential thing, and so we would just see each other and give a wink, you know and keep going".

6.5 INTERVENTION POINTS

When family breakdown resulting in early home leaving occurs for young people there are a number of opportunities and points in time where interventions can occur. When young people were asked to comment on interventions the response was mixed demonstrating they could be negative or positive, subtle or profound and useful or useless. These interventions occurred in a number of differing contexts and the outcome was largely dependent upon the people/agency who provided it and the person who was met with it. What was obvious and consistent based on what the young people reported was that intervention points are an opportunity to engage the young person and their family around the issues that existed, with the chance to offer options, choices, information and practical assistance.

As young people are not a homogenous group, there is a real need to utilise different methods of intervention, with timing being of the essence.

Characteristics of positive and useful interventions named by young people included:

- Consultation throughout the process resulting in a sense of control over their personal circumstances
- Seamless delivery of services
- Provision of accurate information in order to make informed choices.

When this had not occurred, the results of an intervention were negative with far reaching effects on the young people and their interactions with systems in the future.

Interventions can occur using a number of different opportunities in various settings. Family, friends and significant personal relationships are an obvious point of intervention, with these relationships closely related to a young person's immediate community. To meet the needs of young people from a holistic perspective, these personal relationships should be supported within the context of the societal systems such as schools, statutory services, non-statutory service es and the broader community. At times these varied intervention points are inter-related making it a complex phenomenon often as a result of competing interests and priorities.

Meg left home when she was eleven years of age. Before leaving home Meg was having regular contact with the Department of Families. She would see her FSO on "Monday, Wednesday and Friday… (to do) paper work and they were just asking questions". At one stage Meg was also placed in a foster family for one week. Meg stated that "Because I wasn't in Family Service's care, the only reason they put me in a foster family was because they thought I was uncontrollable and I needed time away from home sort of thing, I needed to get away from home, not time away".

After having an altercation with one of her parents and attending school the next day, she was called "out of second period at school… (to) go up to the principal's office" where she was met by a police officer who was there to inquire about her injuries which she had sustained at home. Meg knew the consequences of this intervention stating, "'cos the coppers came to the school and I knew as soon as I got home that that was it, I was going to fucken cop it ten times worse, not just from him but also from her too, I thought I am not going to do it so I took off".

Meg organised to stay with her best friend's family. She stated that she "went to her house… talked to her mum and that and I was just I don't want to go back home, so she rung up my parents and arranged me to stay there and the arrangement was my parents did not come out to the property whatsoever". Whilst she thought that this placement would last longer, "it only lasted a month".

Throughout this period of time Meg continued to go to school as it provided the "only way I could see him (her brother)". She continued to have contact with Family Services. She stated that the Department did not assist her to find accommodation upon leaving her friend's family because she "wasn't in their care, like it was up to my parents". Department of Families gave her "this brochure thing with their number and all these other numbers on and shit if I needed help".

Meg stayed in the local area "all up about six months… just cruising around from mate's house to mate's house". She stated that to arrange a place to stay she would "just show up at their door around nine or ten o'clock… and just say I need somewhere to stay". Meg stated that the families wondered why she was not at home but she "always spun a bullshit story, I wasn't going to tell them the truth". She explained that "most of my mates have friggin like younger brothers and sisters and shit and like instead of seeing someone crashing on their lounge they just used to wake me up at 6:00 or 6:30 and give me something to eat and then send me on my way". When she couldn't find accommodation Meg would sleep rough in the local area.

Meg was not aware that accommodation options existed, but having the number to Crisis Care she phoned them and they referred her to an emergency youth shelter. Meg stated that she stayed "in shelters for about six or seven months" until she finally ran out of accommodation options and had to begin sleeping rough. She stated "I was used to having a bed at night, sleeping and a meal, not this fucken slab of concrete you know and a blanket and shit, I wasn't used to that whatsoever".

Throughout the interview process, it was clearly evident that there were significant points where interventions occurred, both successful and not so successful. Furthermore, there were numerous times when an intervention could have occurred, which may have had a positive impact on the persons' circumstances. Young people's view of these successful interventions varied according to their opinions and that of the person with whom they were engaging. Intervention is often debated in relation to early and later, with the research supporting the need to provide intervention points throughout the entire homelessness continuum.

6.5.1 Family

Peta left home when she was sixteen years old. Before leaving home, from the age of nine years, Peta began staying with different family members spending approximately four years living with other people. She stated that she would tell her family of origin that, "I'm gonna stay for a couple of nights and then I'd end up staying a month or something". In some circumstances she lived with other family members for periods of "about a month", "three months" and one time she "stayed there for about three years".

Peta stated that even though she spent considerable periods of time out of the family home that "nobody knew what was going on" as she did not speak with her extended family members about the hassles she was having at home. Peta states that when she made the decision to leave home that "I'd go to anyone's house, anywhere but home, anywhere but family".

The family is one point where interventions occurred and in some circumstances could have occurred more effectively. In the above scenario, the young person was not living in their home of origin regularly from the age of nine years. Whilst the extended family members were providing an intervention to Peta, these were deemed ineffective to her once she had made the decision to move out of home. These relationships were significant to her during this time, but they provided no forum for her to discuss her difficulties at home.

For many of the young people interviewed the role of family members was limited in their capacity to assist. A number of young people spoke about relatives who lived in other geographic locations, only being able to provide support via phone conversations and sometimes a place to go to. In the cases where family members were significant personal supports to the young person, their ability to intervene in the situation was limited not only by geography but also by family dynamics and lack of information and options.

The role of family and the extended family network provided significant interventions to some of the Indigenous young people who were interviewed. These young people reported that family members provided crucial support and assistance offering accommodation, connectedness to Indigenous culture and guidance. For these young people interventions occurred within the family network, providing consistent support and options even when other service interventions occurred in their journey.

For some young people the difficulties at home stemmed from their interactions with a stepparent. Whilst they still had a relationship with their natural parent, interventions were dictated by their relationship with a new partner. Some young people identified that their parent did not manage the conflict, resulting in the severing of that relationship. In other cases where the young person moved out

of the family home, the parent acknowledged the difficulties and attempted to maintain their relationship. In these cases the result was a more positive experience for the individual as the parent maintained that relationship by offering different levels of assistance and support.

Ghost:	"If I really felt the need to talk to someone who had a little bit more responsibility, like my family, like my sisters, so they can kind of intervene if they feel its necessary".
Tina:	"I told her I couldn't handle living there… she ended up asking her friend that was behind us if I could move in there… then when I moved in there Mum helped me look for like apartments and stuff".
David:	"My Aunty… they knew I had troubles with all my stuff so they just said yeah you can stay here until your flat comes through, we will help and guide you and all that stuff".

Families can play a significant role in the intervention in a young person's circumstances. Whilst they may not be able to fulfill all of the needs, when the assistance was supportive and consistent the young people were able to maintain a relationship with those people. These experiences assisted young people to remain connected to their community and family, which sometimes limited their feelings of isolation.

6.5.2 Friends and Friends' Families

Pete's first experience of home leaving was through the access to SAAP services. He has stayed with three medium to long term housing services. Having had some bad experiences in these SAAP services, Pete has spent "close to 8 months… out and about… at friends' houses and in my car". He maintains that usually he was not at a friends' house "for more than 2 or 3 days", choosing to move on. Pete is currently residing with a friends' family and sees this as a long-term option. He wants to stay at this location until a vacancy exists as he (with the support of another service) has "applied for a heap of Housing Commission houses and stuff like that". He states that he has "settled down now, (and) just need a permanent place to stay".

Pete's current accommodation was negotiated with his friend who spoke to their family who was happy for him to stay for a "while". Pete stated that, "this family here I can practically call home, like they're really nice. He helped me out". He further states that he "feels part of the house too".

Pete discussed the difficulties of staying with other families and believes that by contributing financially and practically to the household the stay lasts longer. He says that, "I feel better giving money for food and that. I feel that I'm staying here, using their food, the hot water and that… he doesn't want it, but I'm going to give it (money) to him anyway".

Friends and friends' families often provided an array of practical and emotional support in relation to food, accommodation, financial aid, transport and clothing, offering different degrees and points of intervention. The capacity of these families to assist was largely dependent upon their relationship with the young person, their own ability to provide support and the knowledge and skills they possessed.

It seems that when a family is aware of the nature of the young person's circumstances and family issues the intervention is far more effective. By offering their home as an accommodation alternative, they are already providing an intervention point. Unfortunately, the success of this intervention is contingent upon the level of support received by the young person, family and friend and their ability to adjust to the new circumstances.

Young people interviewed stated that staying with friends and their family was often the first place they went to. However, it was evident that only in a small number of circumstances this was maintained for a long period of time. As a result of conditions of overcrowding, lack of personal space, an inability to contribute financially and feelings of being an imposition these options were often short-term.

In other circumstances, the friends and families did not have a full understanding of the difficulties faced by the young person. For these young people the interventions were important but simplistic in that they offered them practical assistance. In these situations the young person would not talk about their housing and family circumstances, choosing to keep that information private. Concerning for some young people was the fact that they were very young and moving from friend's house to friend's house with little or no intervention provided by the people they were staying with. Compounding this was the fact that some young people were very discrete in their movements and cautious about the length of time spent at a person's house should they raise suspicions.

Madeline:	"I'd stay a while at my best friend's house… they never mentioned it to me, but probably I think they knew anyway just the way I was".
Meg:	"When I would be walking down the streets to their house and I thought what story am I going to spin them…whatever she said I would start my bullshit story from there…no, they never said anything".

In the situations where the young person and 'host' family had the capacity to negotiate the accommodation and discuss the expectations of the stay, it was more likely that the stay lasted longer. For some young people this happened naturally with their friend's family, whilst for other young people this process was supported by a service or community agency. In the circumstances where this intervention did work more effectively, the young person was more honest about their situation, they were included into the family unit and they contributed to the life of the family.

Plants:	"I told her all my situation… (I) thought you know it would help if I told her and she was sweet with it, like she understood… then I was like living at my mates house for about four months".
Peta:	'I think that I talked to (friends') mum… she asked me if I wanted to come and stay here and I said I was thinking about it, and I thought about it for a couple of days".
Jim:	"My mate is letting me stay there 'cos he don't want me on the streets. I just gotta buy my own food and that 'cos that's all he asked for".

The role of friends and their families are significant to young people who leave home early. It is during this period of time that interventions can provide an impact on the lifestyle and circumstances of the young person. It is during this time that young people are often still connected to their local community, are wanting to remain in the home of a family and are not aware of the options available to them. In practical terms, intervention at this point is difficult and is largely contingent upon what terms the young person has entered the family home. It is dependent upon what information is shared, what supports exist and the capacity of all involved to provide a forum in which an effective intervention can occur.

To achieve a better outcome from a young person's perspective, it is evident that being upfront about their personal circumstances allows an opportunity for this accommodation and support option to last for a longer period of time. This provides a point in which the conditions attached to the housing offered is clear for all involved. The degree of support, with the option to explore other opportunities and choices, further assists the effectiveness of this type of intervention. This is contingent upon a young person's and a familiy's ability to access information.

6.5.3 Schools

To Madeline "school was the stepping stone to start your life, your career and everything". During the period of conflict in the family home, Madeline found that, "I had the ability to keep really good marks, but because of other things, they were effecting my life so much". She stated that, "I was a really good student, like getting A's and B's all the time, then towards the end of year eleven I went down, down to E's". Madeline found that because of her drop in grades, the school treated her with punitive measures stating, "they just ignored me and treated me like 'you just don't care about school' and stuff so it was more like, 'if your not going to work hard then there was just nothing'". She further stated that, "when you get that sort of reaction from teachers you think 'well what's a guidance officer gonna do, they're gonna do the same thing'…they just make you think like, 'you have to come to school and you have to do your work and whatever's happening at home doesn't matter'". Madeline stated that, "if a teacher or somebody at school had said to me, 'Your grades are dropping, what can we do to help?' she would have found this helpful. Instead, she found that "it's really hard to find somebody that you can trust, that would be able to say, 'what's going on, I can help you out'.

School is a significant protective factor to young people who experience family conflict and/or leave home early. It was often identified by young people as a place that provided stability, a social connection and the opportunity to access assistance. Furthermore, young people identified that completing components of school was considered to be an important life goal as it would assist them attaining employment. School is where young people spend a considerable period of their early life and have the opportunity to foster relationships with peers and adult role models. It is for these reasons that schools are a critical intervention point in providing numerous opportunities to engage with young people regarding the issues that exist in their life.

It was stated by some of the young people that when their school was aware of their personal circumstances, they were sometimes assisted to maintain their attendance and remain connected. In some cases individuals were given extra time and assistance in consideration of their circumstances, with some young people stating that this allowed them the opportunity to continue working towards their goal of completing school while focussing on the issues associated with early home leaving.

As stated previously, only two of the twenty-three young people remained at the same school in which they were attending upon leaving home. In both of these circumstances school provided a crucial element of stability for them. They identified members of the school community whom they trusted and reported that the schools used community agencies to provide ongoing support and assistance to them. These schools had already established strong connections with

community agencies that specialise in assisting young people who experience family breakdown and early home leaving.

Tina:	"The counsellor was…she was the one that actually got me an interview with one of the guys…that's when he introduced me to this place, then he got me Centrelink".
Peta:	"Yeah, I talked to her (the Guidance Officer). She helped me get like all – what to do and everything"
Anita:	"She'd talk about how much trouble she'd had in her life like I wasn't the only one"

Most of the other young people who did not remain at the same school were still able to identify a teacher or support staff member who provided a point of intervention. For some young people this was as simple as checking in with them regularly to see if they were 'ok', offering them support in relation to school matters and referring the young person to guidance officers. Some young people identified this type of intervention as useful. They could keep the details of their personal circumstances private, but were able to receive some support and assistance with school associated difficulties.

Pete:	"I wasn't the best student, like not in behavior but like smart wise, but I always had support there".
Ella:	"My Japanese teacher… she was like more about my well-being… how I am and everything".
Michael:	"I could talk to them at school, they'd sit down and listen to me talk".
Marie:	"I slept in class… sometimes they thought that I didn't want to be in school anymore… I didn't want to be at home either".

Some young people identified that when their accommodation and personal issues reached crisis point, it was members of the school community whom they would entrust with part of their story. It was expressed that whilst they may not have had a relationship with the support staff throughout the duration of their difficulties, they utilised these services when they needed them. As school was often the only service that young people had extensive contact with at that point, it was realistic that they turned to this system when experiencing difficulties. Schools appear to be the points of intervention that must require information and access to appropriate supports.

Tina:	"I'd moved into (person's) house…it was then when I told her (Guidance Officer) that I had to move out".
Ella:	"I ended up telling the Deputy as well about the situation at home, about mum and everything".

A large number of young people expressed difficulties within the school systems. Whilst most identified that school was important to them, it often did not provide the opportunities to engage around the issues at home. Young people identified a number of barriers to seeking assistance within the school system. This appeared to be related to their experiences of punishment. Punitive measures seemed to be often associated with the individuals' behaviour that would then be directly associated to the issues of family conflict or early home leaving. For some, this resulted in either spending long periods of school time in 'trouble' and in detention or them no longer attending. In these circumstances schools were not providing effective interventions in order to address the individual's needs.

Meg:	"I wouldn't talk to no **** about it but I would take my anger out on the, like the school, like the teachers, fucken classmates and shit".
Soxy:	"They don't want to know you, so em', so they kicked me out, piss off".
Jim:	"They always stuck up for the teachers… I ended up getting my grade ten… after they said they'd expel me, I said I'm leaving anyway".
Plants:	"I spent more time in the principals' office that I would in a class room".

For some of the young people, the school system made circumstances more complex which further compounded their difficulties. Some young people identified that the school environment was not conducive to their attendance, citing that some students and teachers would not be sensitive to their situation, their culture and their needs. This would make school life difficult to cope with, often resulting in the young person leaving that system thus further disconnecting themselves from the community.

David:	"Because I was the only Aboriginal person in the classroom so then I had the whole classroom against me…I would just be sitting there trying to do work and they would you know 'you Abbo', 'you Coon' and all that shit".

Madeline:	"It was like, 'Why do you live with your sister? Where's your parents?'… 'I want to speak to your mother', 'Why do you want to speak to my mother?', 'I don't'".
Anita:	"I basically kept to myself sort of thing…it even said on my report card that I wasn't really that good at social skills, although I was new there".

For many of the young people interviewed, leaving school mostly occurred over a period of time when their accommodation and family circumstances became more difficult to manage. They were either asked to leave or left of their own accord citing that it became increasingly harder to find and maintain accommodation and still attend mainstream schools. This even occurred when significant supports existed at school and there was still a sense of motivation from the young person to attend school.

Ella:	"I stopped going to school 'cos they wouldn't accept me back… 'Cos my attendance was pretty bad…I started living in boarding houses…it was like too hard, 'cos I couldn't afford it, it was just too hard".
Madeline:	"I felt like the teachers just treated me like a child and I thought, 'you have no idea', you know".
Ghost:	"'Cos it was at the end of year ten and it fell nicely into the Christmas break. I didn't return to year eleven".

Schools are clearly a critical component of young people's lives, particularly more so when experiencing difficulties at home. It provides social contact with peers and adult role models, a point of stability and opportunities to inform and educate. It became evident that when the school system was aware of the issues associated with family breakdown and early home leaving their response provided enormous support and assistance. If staff in the school system are skilled in identifying 'at risk' students and have the ability to source appropriate responses, it seems that they are more likely to better assist young people in meeting their school and personal needs.

The connection between schools and community agencies offered the opportunity to better respond to young people's circumstances. When this was utilised as a point of intervention, the young people were able to access specialised assistance, maintain connection to community and sustain their schooling. Interventions within the school system occurred effectively when the school acknowledged the issues and needs of independent and homeless students, their staff had access to knowledge and information and they utilised the skills of specific community agencies. Each of these contributed to the breaking down of barriers in accessing support and assistance.

6.5.4 Department of Families

Patricia was in Care and Protection of the Department of Families, living with her Grandparent for a number of years. Patricia and her Grandparent made the decision that she could no longer live in that residence.

Patricia left her home of origin and was placed in a foster home. She stated that she, "stayed for three weeks when she kicked me out". From here another placement was organised with a foster family. Patricia stated that she went to "a place where a lot of kids were… I got stuck with people that had like seven kids… (in) a three- bedroomed house". She stayed with this family for about one month when "they kicked me out and my grandmother took me back".

In leaving both foster homes, she was given little warning that the placement was ending. She stated that, "it was like pack my bags and then I left… but I didn't know where I was going". Patricia was given no other options in relation to her accommodation, stating that "even if I had some other options, but I didn't have a choice at all".

Patricia stayed with her grandmother 'for about five weeks" following her placements with the foster families. This broke down again and she was told "pack your bags, you've got half and hour, you're leaving". Patricia was not informed where she was being relocated to next. Some people arrived at her grandmother's house in a car, she got into the car and "got dropped off a this place and it was a shelter". She stated that, "I thought it was really rude that Family services didn't tell me and my grandma". It was not until Patricia entered the shelter system that she became aware that services existed for young people who could not live at home. Even though Patricia was in the Care and Protection of the Department of Families, at no point did they talk with her about what accommodation options she had or what to expect when accessing different forms of accommodation. She was never informed of the next location she would be staying until she began organising this for herself.

For 52% of the young people interviewed, the Department of Families provided a statutory intervention in relation to either Care and Protection issues or Juvenile Justice issues. Of those, 35% of the young people had some contact with the Department in relation to Care and Protection with 17% of those young people having contact in relation to juvenile justice matters and only one person who experienced both.

In relation to Care and Protection, 13% of the young people left home as a result of Department intervention and were placed in either a foster home or SAAP accommodation. The other 22% experienced Departmental interventions at other points in their life, usually before leaving home. For these young people it was evident that the use of foster families was an option by the Department for time out of the family home. These time outs however were generally short in duration.

In the situations where the Department of Families intervened young people often described these as not very positive experiences. The young people reported mostly negative experiences, which is understandable given the nature of being removed from the family home by a Child Protection agency. For those who can recall this period, their experiences were not positive for a variety of reasons including that there were changes to their accommodation and family structure and they were not invited to have input into that experience.

Other reasons the experience was negative included:

- Fear of the consequences of Departmental involvement
- The way in which these interactions occurred
- The Placements offered by the Department
- Lack of information and support provided
- Lack of control young people have over their own destiny.

Often these fears had been carried throughout their homelessness experience, with many young people distancing themselves from further interactions with the Department.

Angel:	"They just said that if it happens again – we just sort of kept everything under control 'cos I didn't want to move to a foster family".
Pete:	"She'd call me in for a meeting and there'd be like ten other different people there".
Ella:	"They said to me 'your not going home until you're eighteen', and I just said, 'watch me, watch. I'm going home, don't you worry'".

For the young people who had contact with the Department of Families in relation to juvenile justice issues, their experiences were substantially different. For these four young men this was their first point of contact with a service and as a result had provided them with further options and choices. Interestingly, these four young men had all left the family home in which their father was primary care giver. In three of the cases the young men and their fathers had moved around considerably, possibly being the reason why these young people disconnected from the community quickly. For three of the young men, they began sleeping rough at an early age and relatively soon after leaving the family home.

The types of support that these young men received included access to workers who were able to explain accommodation and support services available. Whilst

concurrently supervising Juvenile Justice orders, the Department used this opportunity to provide referral to agencies, assist with attaining income, emotional support and practical assistance.

Michael:	"(It's) a good thing… they can make appointments for me and everything".
Plants:	"Would say like we have found somewhere for you to go, and then I would go there and he would say I have found another place, so we would go there".
David:	"I just go talk all my problems out with them and they just bring me home, shout me lunch, and then I just you know mellow out".

The role of the Department of Families in relation to young people who have left home has been significant for 52% of the young people. The Department of Families is mandated to protect children and young people under the age of eighteen. What is concerning is that all of the young people interviewed engaged in risk taking behaviors, had experienced family breakdown and had left home early, yet less than half (48%) of them had no contact with the Department whatsoever. Departmental contact in relation to the young people interviewed generally occurred as a result of child protection matters when they were under twelve years of age or when they were on court orders.

The reasons for why 48% of young people do not cross the path of the Department of Families could be related to a number of factors including resourcing and access issues. Furthermore it could be a result of the state's definition of 'at risk' and whether this is inclusive of young people who leave home early as a result of family breakdown. This in itself does not necessitate Departmental involvement in a young person's life, regardless of how young they are.

6.5.5 Services

James was attending school regularly when he began experiencing difficulties in the family home. James first approached the Guidance Officer at his school with whom he had had an ongoing relationship. The Guidance Officer, identifying the issues at home assisted him to contact a Reconnect service that "tried to get him back with his family but it didn't work". He and his family worked with this service for a period of time stating that, "we were having meetings with me and my mum and step-dad to try and figure out what the problem was".

When this situation didn't diffuse, James left the family home and was referred to an emergency shelter on the other side of town. He stayed with this service for one month whilst maintaining contact with the Reconnect service that was assisting him "to be more independent, more independent living, housing". After getting "kicked out" they "rang up some other places and got me another place". He moved to a shelter that was closer to his area of origin and settled in this shelter for "three months", the longest time possible in the emergency shelter system according to SAAP regulations.

Upon leaving here he went to another emergency shelter. He stayed there for "a couple of weeks" and when he left and "went to a friends' house… (for) probably a week". He then moved on to another friend's place where he "stayed a month or so". Following that placement he went to another emergency shelter for "a week" then he went to live in a boarding house for two months. In the time following he stayed in more emergency accommodation, boarding houses, friends' houses and had also spent a few nights walking around, on the streets.

James states that he didn't know "before he got out of home" about emergency shelters and found accessing this system to be difficult. He stated, "at the shelter you don't know people, you're by yourself". He stated that, "it's pretty bad" because he felt isolated and fearful as a result of not being around people who he actually knew. James further stated that, "you don't know what they're like, don't know who to trust, who to talk to". James said that "after a while I got used to it, just a ritual".

The intervention of services can happen at many points for young people who experience family breakdown and early home leaving. The difficulty is that there are a number of barriers that exist in young people's access to these services. As stated previously these barriers can include lack of information and options at their disposal, fear of services, difficulty in disclosing issues and inappropriate referral options. It was clearly evident amongst the young people interviewed that although they had contact with services such as schools and Centrelink, for the most part they were not aware of other options and choices in relation to their circumstances.

It is deemed important, in terms of early intervention, that young people gain access to appropriate services whilst they are still connected to their community and have the assistance and support of their naturally occurring relationships. This is largely contingent upon the identification of 'at risk' young people and the ability to link them to places able to meet their needs. As established previously, for many young people these systems and services are unknown to them until they are in crisis and seek out this information. This is concerning as it is reliant upon fragile factors such as the individual and their trust of those around them and their ability to communicate their needs.

For young people, their access to accommodation services usually occurs once they have no other housing options available. Once entering this system they quickly learn about the choices and options available to them. However, this is not the most effective way for young people to get the support they need to achieve stability or their goals. It could unfortunately result in them becoming more entrenched in the homelessness process.

The young people interviewed clearly expressed that generally their access to services was helpful and useful in relation to meeting their needs. Whilst they identified that some services were not able to provide what they were looking for, at least this provided the opportunity to seek out other services, the confidence to do so and the skills in which to negotiate and communicate their needs.

Patricia	"They had heaps of information and everything so if you wanted to know something they could tell, like you could ask them".
Ghost:	"A lot of information was given to me. I was glad, I was comfortable".
Madeline:	"They have more than other organisations, they have pamphlets around, people coming in and talking about, there's a network of people who can get involved with".

For some young people their access to services was limited by the lack of trust they shared for systems, and in some cases for workers. This was particularly prevalent among young people who had negative experiences accessing places earlier in their life. It was evident these young people would take longer periods of time to connect with a service and entrust them with personal information about their circumstances. If a young person accessed a service that did not listen to and believe their story, telling it again became more difficult and contingent upon their relationship with a service or worker.

Angel:	"They prescribed me to the hospital so I went to the hospital. We went in there and mum, sort of said, 'Well, she's the trouble' and they believed her over me".
Ella:	"He was on our side, so I thought, yeah I'd give 'em a shot".
Patricia:	"If I told them anything they would tell her and then it would come back on me".

It was clearly identified that young people found the provision of practical assistance as helpful. They acknowledged that access to practicalities such as transport, food, accommodation and clothes eased their situation considerably, allowing them to focus on the bigger issues. They further identified that when

support people were able to accompany them to meetings and services that their access was made easier. This also gave them confidence to access these services again and skills in negotiating with people attached to them. It seems evident that the provision of practical assistance provides an intervention point that further aids the development of trust with the service and its workers, providing a soft entry point in which to begin addressing other needs and issues.

Plants:	"They will just go, 'do you want a feed' and that and they will help you out in all sorts of ways. If you have problems you just give them a call".
Pete:	"They'll come out and help you, you don't have to go to them for help and they'll ring up and check up on you to see if you're alright".
Ella:	"If I needed to be at an appointment or something and couldn't get there, they'd always come and pick me up and take me there and drop me back again and they'd take me out for lunch… just little things that helped at the time".

Young people found that their involvement with services was often a better experience when this was coordinated with other agencies in order to meet the spectrum of needs. These interventions were made more effective when the young person perceived they were given control over their circumstances. This was done by providing information and options and by supporting young people in taking responsibility in the determination of their future. This was better achieved in some circumstances; often relating to the length of time a young person was associated with a particular service and the relationship with individual workers. This was evident in the cases where young people made a smooth transition between emergency and medium to long-term accommodation.

Ghost:	"They did a lot of case management, 'what can we do to help you with court, what can we do to help you with finding a job, what can we do to get you and your parents talking again'".
Madeline:	"I was encouraged, I got work through them, they've given me confidence so I started making a career which is making me more independent".

The biggest barrier to services being a successful intervention point is access for young people at an appropriate time. When this opportunity is made available, the usefulness of this intervention is contingent upon a number of factors. These factors are:

- Dissemination of information
- Understanding of options

- Coordinated responses
- Trust with the service and it's workers
- Practical assistance.

When these were used young people developed a sense of control and ability to determine their own needs and how to address these.

6.6 HOMELESSNESS AS A CONSTRUCTED CONCEPT

The term 'homeless' as a concept is a way of describing an individual's personal circumstances in relation to accommodation. It is a term that can vary in description and meaning, ranging from actual rooflessness to include concepts of unsafe, unstable and transient accommodation. These definitions are largely used by services and government agencies as a means of describing persons' circumstances and their eligibility to services.

For the young people interviewed, homelessness was *not* a term that they used in relation to their circumstances. They would often describe their accommodation in broader, more nondescript terms such as "staying with friends" or "don't get along with my family". What is interesting about this is the possible reasons why this occurs and the consequences of this on young people's access to information, options, choices and services.

Ghost described his circumstance as "in between houses, yeah, in between houses. I didn't see myself as homeless but definitely had nowhere to go, like I'd stay in a friend's house for a day or so". It wasn't until Ghost entered into accommodation services that his understanding of his situation became clearer stating, "At that point I lost my job so I wasn't working, had nowhere to live, I was homeless basically, you know".

It seemed evident from the interviews that young people's perceptions of homelessness is largely associated with the people who sleep rough in the city centre coupled with images of poor health and hygiene. Many young people held the belief that homelessness was the point where a person had no roof over their head and had no access to health facilities for showering and washing. They did not perceive that the situations they were describing in the interviews actually placed them within the definitional continuum of homelessness.

Jim was sleeping rough in the city centre but did not see himself as homeless. He did not hang out with many of the other people who were also sleeping rough as he perceived his circumstances as different. He stated, "Yeah I didn't really hang around the 'streeties', like the friends I made they were like, had a shower. I had clothes, washed 'em every day, showered every day".

In the situation described, Jim associated homelessness in relation to the 'streeties' that did not shower regularly or wash their clothes. He perceived his

circumstances as different because he did not fulfill the criteria that he had for determining homelessness; clearly identifying what he could personally do to avoid being described as homeless.

For other young people, homelessness related to the term 'streeties'. It is a term that is sometimes used to describe homeless, street frequenting people. This term seems to be closely linked with their perception of homelessness as they were considered the people who had nowhere else to go and literally had no permanent shelter. For some of the young people it seemed as simple as that.

David was sleeping rough in the city centre and was accessing food through the street vans and hostels but he saw his circumstances as different to those around him. The people who looked out for him were "homeless themselves" but because David always had a place to go back to if he chose then he was not in the same situation. David stated that he would go to a service for food and there "are heaps of homeless people you know. It made me think much, you know where will I be in a couple of years time… I don't want to be like them".

It seems evident that for a young person to identify as homeless they would take into consideration factors such as clothes and general appearance. Each of the young people who slept out used this as a method of gauging their own accommodation status, clearly stating that homeless people looked different to themselves. For them not to become homeless they would have to maintain their appearance so that others would not identify their circumstances.

When Angel began sleeping out she determined that, "I kind of figured out as long as I don't look homeless, I'm not homeless". She had determined that her appearance was the factor that could indicate her homeless status and this was attained from her knowledge that "there's heaps of kids and homeless people out there" and she did not appear like any of them.

Perhaps the main reason why young people didn't use the term to describe themselves is that it made their situation more realistic and it identified that their circumstances were closely aligned to the people who are forced to sleep rough in the city centre. It is further associated with the fact that many of the young people interviewed had not slept rough and had always managed to gain access to accommodation of some description. By young people having a place to stay, a roof over their head, they can then perceive this to mean that they are not homeless.

When Ella was asked to describe how she viewed her accommodation when moving about she stated that she would describe it by the place she was staying, "staying with friends, staying with mum, staying at a boarding house".

When asked if she would have used the term 'homeless' she further stated, "No, I don't think I did, I really don't think so… I was probably in denial more to the fact, I didn't want to believe it".

The greatest implication for this was the access to appropriate supports and services, as many of these are contingent upon the terminology of homelessness. It is within this framework that determines a young person's eligibility for service provision, funding sought and utilized, and the type of support provided. If this is correct then it makes further sense that some young people would wait until an accommodation crisis before accessing services. It is only at this point where they are possibly facing the prospect that they are going to be without accommodation and may be like the people who sleep rough in the city centre that they seek help.

Taking this into consideration, it is important that service providers are aware of this and the barriers that it places in front of young people and their access to agencies. This does not mean that the term 'homeless' should be lost. Because government and the youth service sector use the term homeless to describe a person's circumstances and to define service provision, there is a need to continue using this term. Perhaps what needs to occur is that service providers and government become aware of this set of factors and use different terminology in informing people about the service it provides. In general, if young people don't identify as homeless and they don't access until crisis point, then services should use other terms that are better related to how the individual perceives their personal circumstances.

Patricia: "Basically because I had somewhere to live I didn't figure I was in a crisis… I didn't know it was a shelter where I could go".

7. FINDINGS

1. For many young people (aged 12-18 years) who experience family breakdown and early home leaving, they utilise their informal networks of friends, friends' families, family members and community to meet their accommodation and support needs, before accessing formal homeless services. Through anecdotal evidence and that provided by the research, this was substantiated experience in the North East of Brisbane and beyond, with young people utilising this type of accommodation as a method of negotiating their homelessness.

2. The importance of naturally formed supports to young people as a method of meeting their accommodation, income, food, survival, social and emotional needs. When supporting young people who leave home early there is a need to recognise the significance of these natural supports, develop processes that are inclusive of this network and provide opportunities to better support these relationships.

3. The significance of family and family members, and the need for services to be considerate of this when working alongside young people at every point in the homeless continuum.

4. Continued development of peer support models that are inclusive and available to a range of young people. These models should consider that the distribution of information and options needs to occur in a number of forms acknowledging that young people's ingestion of information occurs in different stages, dependent upon their personal circumstances.

5. The need to undertake community education processes with family, friends and friends' families, services and systems in order to meet the following objectives:
   - Breakdown community perceptions of homelessness
   - Recognising the movement between houses as a legitimate form of homelessness
   - Deliver information and options available to support homeless young people

6. For support services to think beyond their core work, recognising that the relationship it has with young people and community can provide essential support and referral opportunities. It is through the provision of these services that they have contact with young people who may experience family conflict and early home leaving and are still connected to their local community.

7. The importance of soft entry points as a means of developing relationships, providing practical assistance and meeting needs. This concept is inclusive of family, friends and friends' families as often they

are the people who are first to know about a young person's circumstances and already provide a level of support and assistance.

8. To further break down the barriers to accessing information, options and systems, with the need to develop better practices in relation to working alongside young people by:
   - Consulting throughout the process resulting in a sense of control over personal circumstance
   - Seamless delivery of services
   - Provision of accurate information to allow young people make informed choices

9. Access to essential services such as Centrelink, SAAP and the Department of Families is often contingent on factors such as age. The consequences of this can mean a limitation of options and choices and can result in extended contact with particular systems. This has the potential to place young people in crisis for long periods of time.

10. The importance of developing skills and abilities in relation to identification of young people 'at risk', initial assessments and appropriate referral points. This should be inclusive of people in the community and in systems who have contact with young people who are experiencing family conflict and early home leaving.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There is a need for the development of a holistic response to young people who are homeless in their local community. This response should ensure the following:
   - Efficient and effective identification of these young people
   - Access to appropriate services
   - Identifying and assisting natural supports
   - Coordination of response
   - Informing community about the realities of homelessness for these young people.

2. Government and non-government agencies need to adjust their policy frameworks and delivery of services to:
   a) Formally recognise that secondary homelessness is a significant form of homelessness for young people, and
   b) Provide support to the young people and their community networks in these situations.

9. CONCLUSION

All of the young people who participated in this project were by definition homeless. Each person's experience was different however the most significant commonality that people spoke of was their attachments to other people. These attachments, whether they were naturally occurring social relationships or relationships with workers were key in how each young person experienced their homelessness.

The research process substantiated the experience of young people who move between temporary accommodation provided by family, friends and friends' families in their community, with no secure housing. 'Couch Surfing' occurs as a means of providing a point of stability amid the chaos of family breakdown and early home leaving. Couch surfing is the preferred choice of most young people when they first leave home prematurely, but it is also necessitated by the lack of information about possible services, supports, options and choices. It is this process coupled with the role of their significant personal relationships that could ensure homeless young people remain in their local community, albeit hidden.

From an early intervention perspective, these young people are still very much connected to their local area and the people within it. If this was better identified within this context and supported with appropriate information, and options the chances of a young person drifting along the homeless continuum is likely to decrease, hence reducing the possibility of somebody becoming chronically homeless.

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11. APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1: Agency Visits

At Risk Resource and Outreach Service (ARROS)
Albert Park Flexi School
Bahloo
Brisbane Youth Service
Brisbane City Council
Child and Youth Mental Health Service (CYMHS) - Nundah, Koping, Extended Hours
Carina Youth Agency
Cathay Club
Centrelink - Chermside, Mitchelton, Fortitude Valley and Nundah
Chameleon House
Department of Families – Chermside, Fortitude Valley and Homeless and Individual Support Section
Drug ARM
Indigenous Community Health Centre
Indigenous Youth Health Service
Job Placement, Employment and Training - Lawnton, Fortitude Valley
Job Track
Kedron State High School - Guidance Officer
Kelvin Grove State High School – Guidance Officer
Keriba Warngun
LASER - Aspley and Stafford
Murri Men's Group
Nundah Community Centre
North West Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Ass. Inc. (NWAICA)
Orana Youth Shelter
Othilas
Picabeen
QLD Health – QLD Government Youth Suicide and Prevention Strategy
Reconnect – Open Doors, Inala, Ipswich, Brisbane South, 8 Mile Plains, Goodna
Red Cross Café Homelessness Project
Salvation Army - Youth Outreach Service
Save the Children
School Based Nurses
Teen Challenge – Hebron House
The Lodge
The Resource Centre
Youth Bail Accommodation Support Service (YBAS)
Yeaca Dhargo
Young Parents Program
Youth Advocacy Centre (YAC)
Youth Emergency Services (YES)
Youth and Family Support Service (YFSS)
Youth and Community Combined Action – Zillmere

APPENDIX 2: Interview Proforma

Couch Surfing in the Burbs
Interview Schedule

1. Introductions

2. Research

I am doing research about young people who leave home early and I would like to chat with you about your experiences. I am talking with a number of people about their experiences also. The information that you give me will be put together in a report titled 'Couch Surfing in the Burbs' that may be seen by government and community agencies. The report will be completed by the end of March.

3. Rights of person being interviewed
   - Participation is entirely up to you
   - Able to stop interview at any time
   - The information given does not have to be used, that is until it has been published
   - Don't have to answer any questions that they are not comfortable with
   - Ownership of the material

4. Interview will be taped for accuracy
   Receive and in-kind payment for participating

5. Acknowledge that they are consenting to be interviewed
   Sign Consent form

The interview is not about the reasons why you left home but it is a chat about your experiences before you left home and then your experiences after. I would like to know about the people and services that have helped you or not helped you and the places you have stayed.

DATE: _____

TIME: _____

LOCATION: _____

ORGANISATION: _____

CODE NUMBER: _____

CODE NAME: _____

PRIOR TO LEAVING HOME

SUPPORTS

Can you tell me about some of the people who supported you or you spoke with when you were having hassles at home?

- ☐ Who?
- ☐ How
- ☐ What?
- ☐ When
- ☐ Where?
- ☐ Why / Why not?
- ☐ Diagram

SERVICES

Can you tell me about some of the services that you had contact with when you were having hassles at home?

- ☐ Who?
- ☐ How?
- ☐ What?
- ☐ When?
- ☐ Where?
- ☐ Why / Why not?
- ☐ Diagram

If appropriate: Can you tell me about the some of the places where you have stayed while you were still at home?

AFTER LEAVING HOME

PROCESS

Can you tell me about some of the places where you have stayed after you left home?

- ☐ Who?
- ☐ How?
- ☐ What?
- ☐ When?
- ☐ Where?
- ☐ Why / Why not?
- ☐ Diagram

SUPPORTS

Can you tell me about some of the people who supported you when you left home?

- ☐ Who?
- ☐ How?
- ☐ What?
- ☐ When?
- ☐ Where?
- ☐ Why / Why not?
- ☐ Diagram

SERVICES

Can you tell me about some of the services that supported you when you left home?

- ☐ Who?
- ☐ How?
- ☐ What?
- ☐ When?
- ☐ Where?
- ☐ Why / Why not?
- ☐ Diagram

INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS

Age _____ Gender _____

CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Aboriginal ☐ Torres Strait Islander ☐

Anglo/ Australian ☐ South Sea Islander ☐

Other _____

HOW WOULD DSCRIBE YOUR CURRENT HOUSING SITUATION?

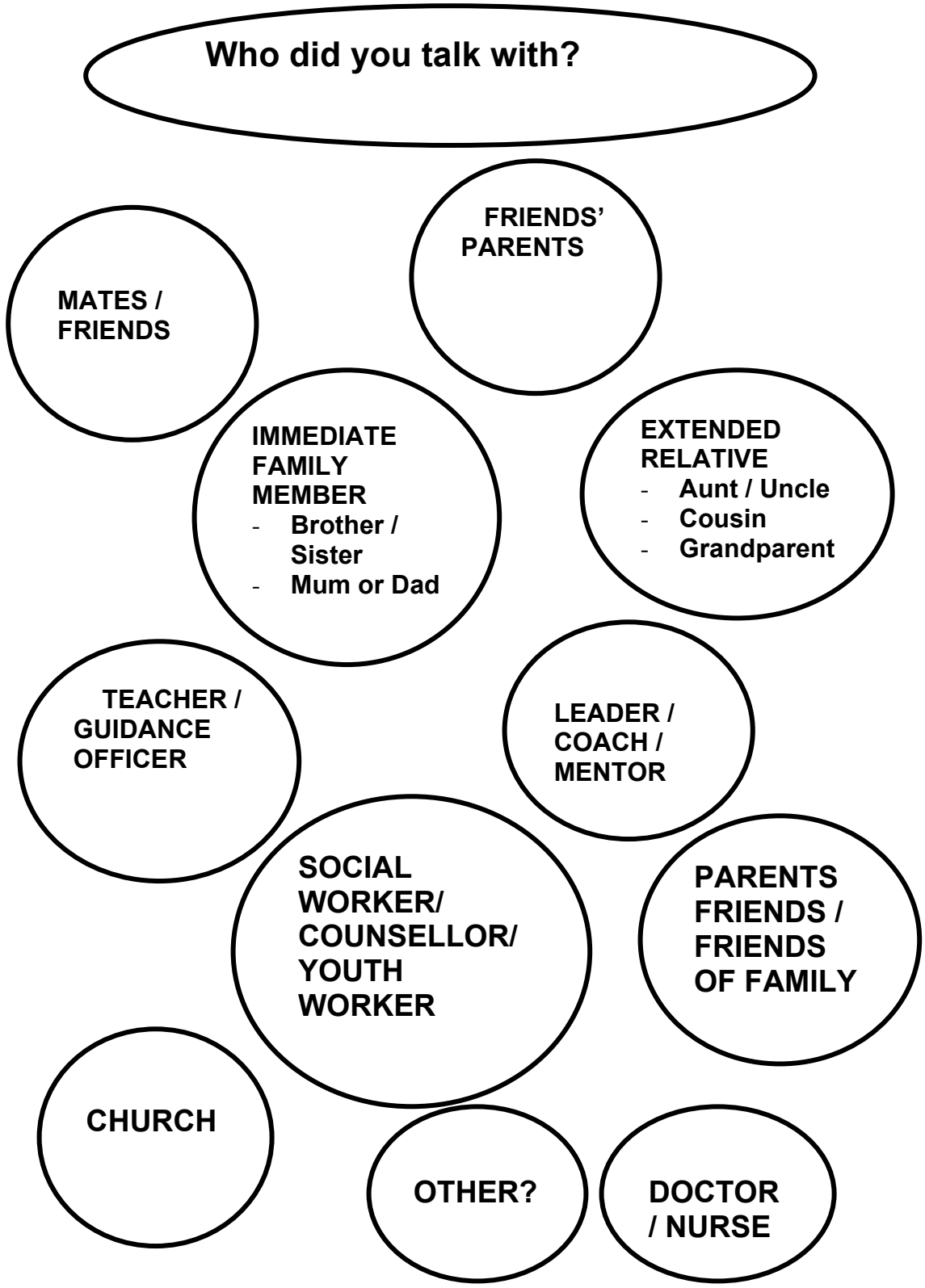
_____

_____

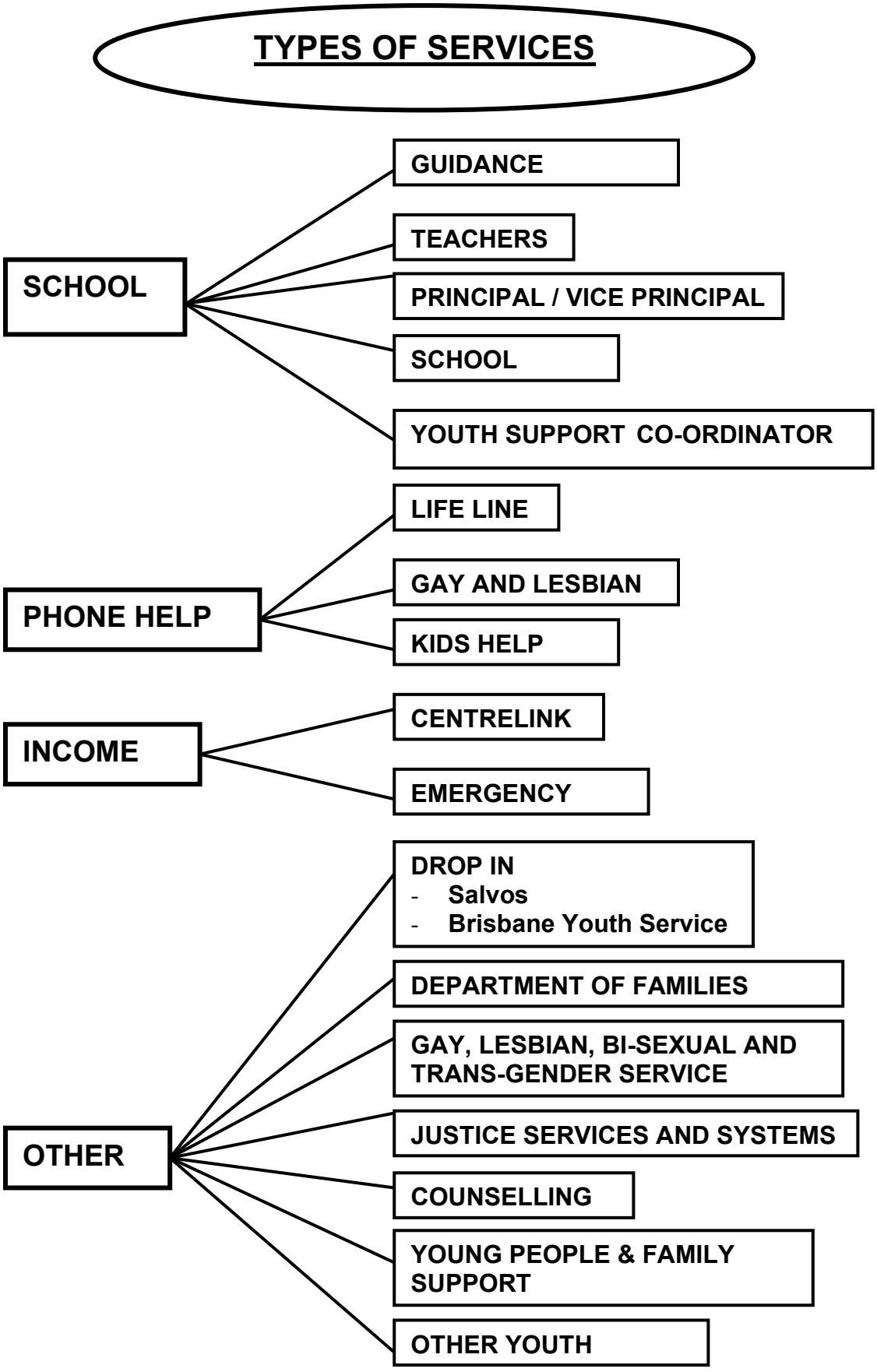
_____

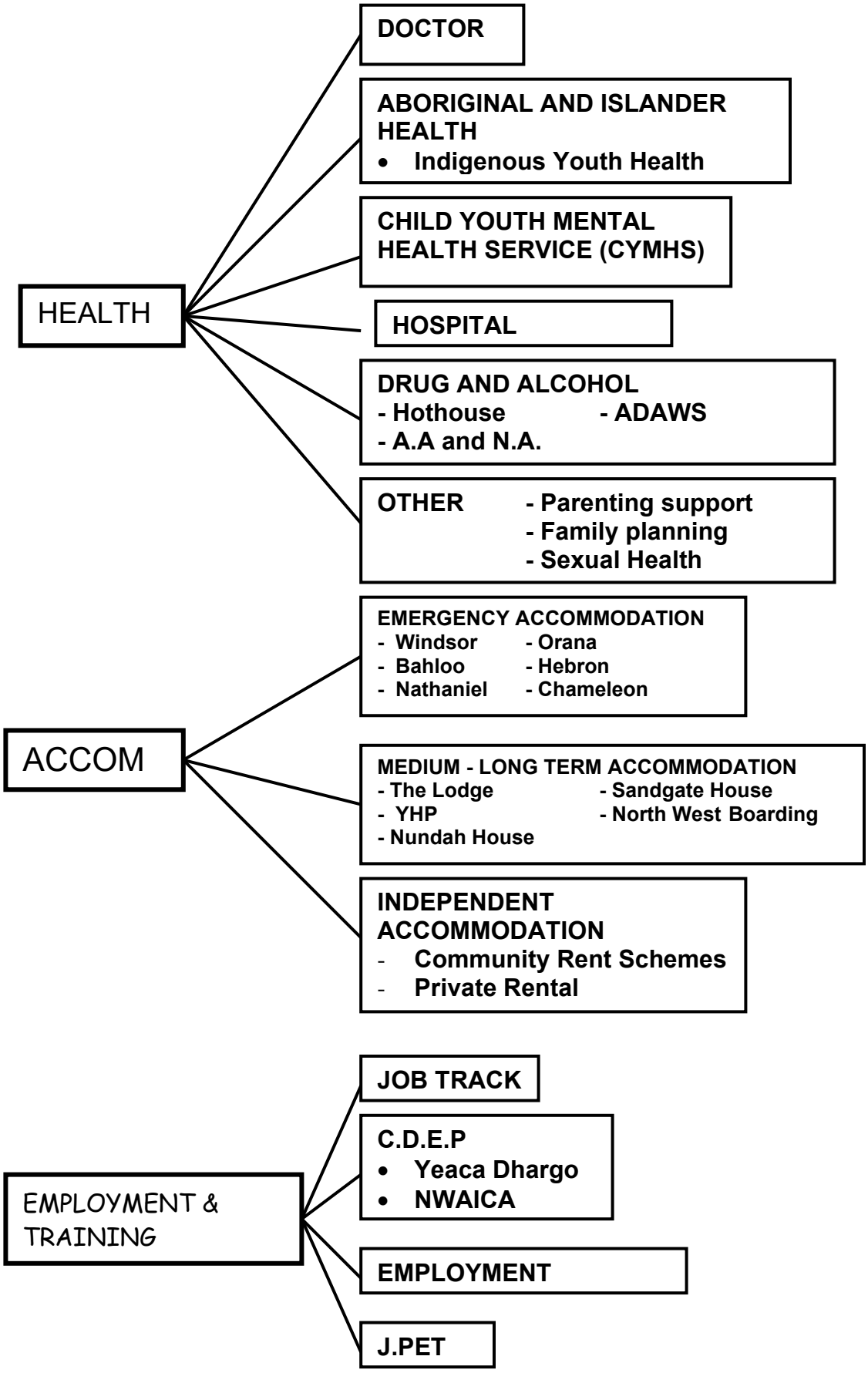
_____

APPENDIX 3A: Supports

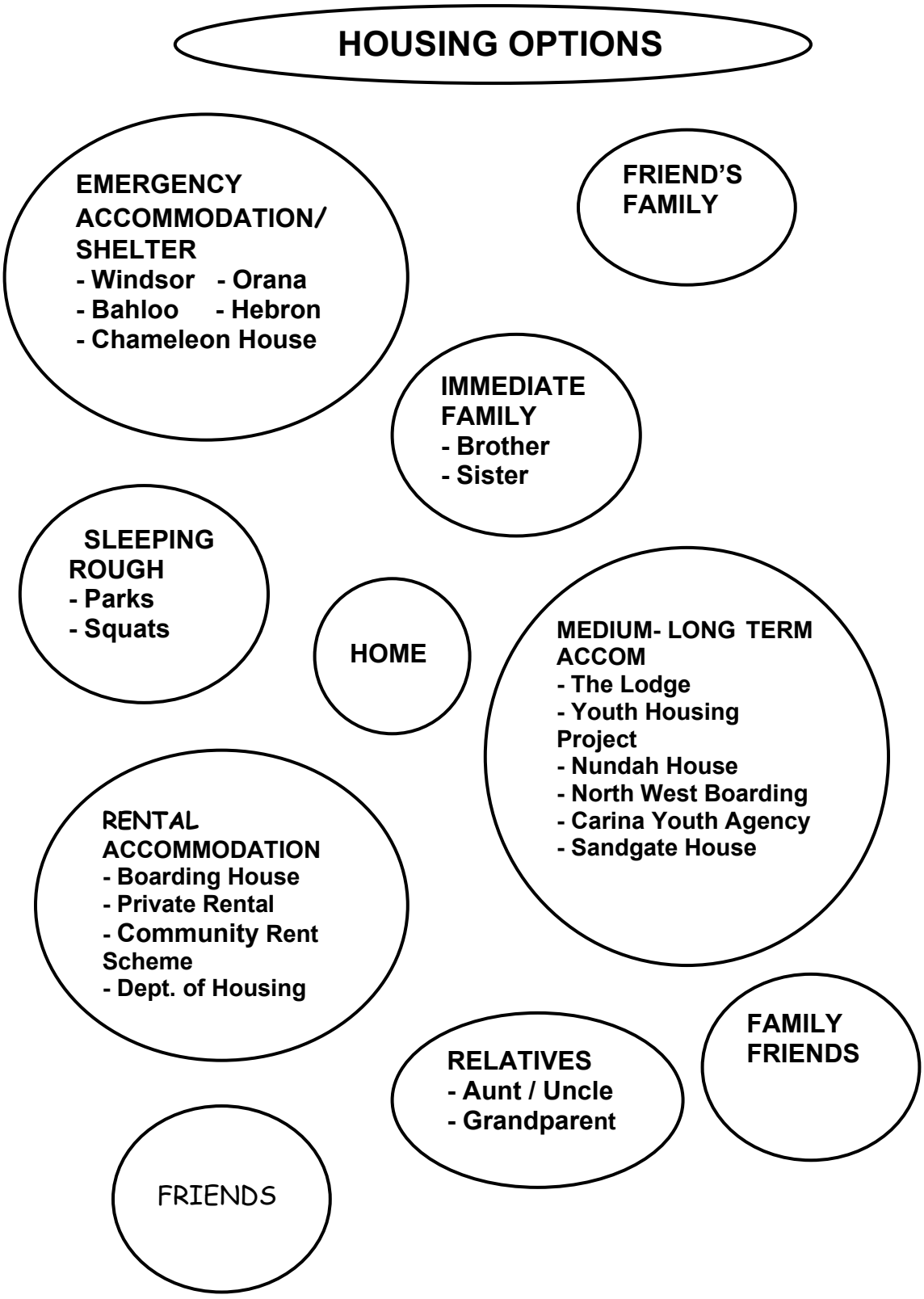


APPENDIX 3B: Services




HEALTH
DOCTOR
ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER HEALTH
• Indigenous Youth Health
CHILD YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE (CYMHS)
HOSPITAL
DRUG AND ALCOHOL
- Hothouse - ADAWS
- A.A and N.A.
OTHER - Parenting support
- Family planning
- Sexual Health
ACCOM
EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION
- Windsor - Orana
- Bahloo - Hebron
- Nathaniel - Chameleon
MEDIUM - LONG TERM ACCOMMODATION
- The Lodge - Sandgate House
- YHP - North West Boarding
- Nundah House
INDEPENDENT ACCOMMODATION
- Community Rent Schemes
- Private Rental
EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING
JOB TRACK
C.D.E.P
• Yeaca Dhargo
• NWAICA
EMPLOYMENT
J.PET

APPENDIX 3C: Accommodation



APPENDIX 4: Letter to Services

RE: Couch Surfing in the Burbs

Community Connections is a non-government community-based organisation that works within an early intervention framework. The organisation focus is working with young people who are at risk of leaving home and school early. Community Connections provides support to young people and their families in the North East corridor of Brisbane who are experiencing conflict. The organisation aims to help young people to remain connected to family. If the young person is unable to continue to live at home assistance is provided to access appropriate support.

Currently I am undertaking a six-month project funded by a Brisbane City Council Community Development Grant. The project is exploring how young people (12 –18) from the North East corridor of Brisbane negotiate their way through secondary homelessness whilst not being identified by key first to know agencies.

Over the course of the past few months I have met with staff from approximately 60 services, including your own. These consultations have been invaluable to the project and have resulted in the development of a broad overview of information. This information 'Couch Surfing in the Burbs' has subsequently been collated and forwarded to each participating agency.

I am now developing an interview process to speak with young people and identifying organisations that have contact with this group. We are looking for young people to participate in the interviews that will be conducted from Mid January to mid February. The information gathered from the young people and services will be collated and complied with the development of a report to be completed by March 2003.

The interviews will be approximately 30 to 60 minutes in length. No identifying information will be used in the report and young people will be renumerated for their participation. The information I am seeking is around young people's experiences since leaving the family home, not about the reasons that led them to leaving home.

The project is hoping to interview 30 young people (10 from an Indigenous background and 20 from a Non-Indigenous). The specific criteria that the project requires is that the person is:

- Aged 12 –18 years
- Either experiencing homelessness of have experienced homelessness in the past 12 months
- Either originally from the North East corridor of Brisbane or having experienced forms of homelessness within this geographical boundary.

At this stage I am keen to find out if your service is interested in participating in the interview phase of the project. If you are then I would love to hear from you so we can discuss the details further and I can forward the young people's specific info sheet. If you and / or your service have further questions about the project and it's processes I would be more than willing to provide further information or talk with the relevant parties. I can be contacted on 3266 5199.

Once again thank you for participation to this point. I look forward to working alongside you and your organisation in the stages ahead.

Yours sincerely

Rachael Uhr
Project Worker
Community Connections

APPENDIX 5: Letter to Young People

My name is Rachael Uhr and I work for a community-based organisation called Community Connections. Community Connections provides support to young people (aged 12 –18 years) who may leave home and school early by working with both them and their families (if appropriate). Community Connections works on the North East side of Brisbane.

I am currently doing a research project and writing a report about young people that leave home early. I am looking to find out about the people who supported you and the types of accommodation you used within your local area. That includes staying with family members, friends, friends' families, youth shelters and other accommodation. I am looking for young people who I can talk with about these experiences.

To participate in the project, it will involve a conversation with me for approximately 30 – 60 minutes in length. No identifying information will be used in the report and you will be given a $15.00 gift voucher for your involvement.

If you have any questions, are interested in participating and:

- Are aged between 12 –18 years
- Are from the North East of Brisbane or have moved about in the North East of Brisbane
- Have left home early and have moved about in this area in the last year (regardless of where you are currently living now).

You can either contact me on 3266 5199 or talk with your support worker. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Rachael Uhr

APPENDIX 6: Consent form

Couch Surfing in the Burbs
Consent Form

I understand and agree to the following:

- ★ That I will be interviewed and asked questions for the purpose of writing a report entitled 'Couch Surfing in the Burbs'
- ★ I can choose to stop the interview whenever I wish
- ★ Until the research is published, I can choose to not have the information I have given to be used.
- ★ The interview will be taped so that the information given is correct
- ★ My name will not be used so no-body will be able to identify my information
- ★ I accept an in-kind payment for participating in the interview

_____
Name

_____ _____
Signed Rachael Uhr