

STILL, THE SYSTEM FAILS US



UNDER 16'S EXPERIENCES OF HOMELESSNESS IN QUEENSLAND



Community Connections
CASEWORK | COUNSELLING | GROUP FACILITATION



COMMUNITY
LIVING ASSOCIATION

ACKNOWLEDGING LANDS AND YOU

Community Connections, part of Community Living Association Inc., acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we live and work; The Turrbal and Jaggera people, the Jinibara people, and the Gubbi Gubbi people. We pay respect to all our ancestors, Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, and non-Indigenous, past and present, for shaping who we are and guiding us into the future.

Community Connections would like to thank young people for taking their time to participate in this research project. When shelter and basic needs aren't getting met, we can appreciate how participating in research is low priority. However, there was such passion and energy from participants for change to occur, and we acknowledge the exhaustion expressed by young people in repeating their story and feeling that results fall short. We acknowledge the resourcefulness and resilience of young people in navigating life with limited resources and support - thank you for sharing and trusting us with your stories

WHAT'S THIS REPORT ABOUT?

This report looks at what happens to young people under the age of 16 who experience homelessness in Queensland. It asks a simple but important question:

What would it take to understand under 16's experiences of homelessness?

The report is based on direct voices of young people with lived experience, as well as youth workers who support them. It was written through a Participatory Action Research (PAR) process, meaning the research aims not just to understand the problem, but to help create change.



What "homelessness" means here

Homelessness doesn't just mean sleeping on the street.

In this report it includes:

- Sleeping rough
- Couch surfing
- Moving constantly between places
- Staying in unsafe or overcrowded housing

Many young people don't even identify themselves as "homeless" because they're staying with friends or family temporarily.

HERE IS WHAT WE HEARD

1. Young people rely on friends and family first

When young people under 16 first leave home, they almost always turn to friends or extended family for help. They don't go to systems like Child Safety or housing services.

This is because:

- They feel safer with people they know
- They don't trust formal systems
- They've often had bad experiences with authorities



Friends and family are the main way young people find somewhere to stay, even though these arrangements are usually unstable and short-term.

2. Child Safety often doesn't respond well, if at all

Even though Child Safety is legally responsible for children under 18 years, the report found that:

- Many under-16s are not prioritised
- Responses are slow or minimal
- Young people are often told to “go home”, even when home is unsafe
- Some young people are offered **no response or real solution at all**



This leaves young people stuck without safe housing and increases their risk of harm.

3. Under 16s are locked out of housing services

Youth housing, shelters and foyers are **only allowed to accept young people aged 16+.**

That means:

- Under 16s are repeatedly referred back to Child Safety
- Housing services can't legally help even when they want to
- Young people are left to fend for themselves

This gap in the system was identified repeatedly by both young people and youth workers.



4. Young people end up in dangerous situations

Because services don't respond, young people end up:

- Sleeping in parks, toilets, cars, tents, or abandoned buildings
- Couch surfing with unsafe adults or strangers
- Being exposed to violence, exploitation, drugs, and harm

Some young people **deliberately get arrested or go to hospital emergency departments** just to have a roof over their head for the night. Some young people **try to go to youth detention** for ongoing access to shelter and food.

5. Systems are being used in ways they were never meant to be

Young people described using:

- Trains (riding end-to-end to sleep)
- Watch houses and youth detention and
- Emergency departments



This isn't because they want to be there — it's because nothing else is available.

6. Youth workers make a real difference — but are stretched thin

Community-based youth workers were consistently identified as:

- Trusted
- Helpful
- Flexible
- Able to advocate and problem-solve

They help young people:

- Negotiate staying with family or friends
- Access food, money, ID and Centrelink
- Work through family conflict
- Stay connected to school and community



But workers are under-resourced, overworked, and affected by long-term funding cuts.

7. Self-determination matters

Young people want:

- To be listened to and believed
- To have choices
- To make decisions about their own lives
- Support that respects their independence

When young people are treated as capable decision-makers (and assessed properly for capacity), housing and wellbeing outcomes improve.



WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE CLEARLY SAID

Young people were blunt and honest. One group summed it up by saying:

**"THE WHOLE SYSTEM
IS FUCKED
IN THE HEAD"**

They described being passed around, ignored, or given phone numbers to services that couldn't help. Many felt exhausted from telling their story over and over, with no real change.

SO, WHAT DID WE FIND OUT?

The report concludes that:

- Young people under 16 experiencing homelessness are largely invisible
- Systems designed to protect them are failing
- Housing options for this age group are virtually non-existent
- Community and youth services are doing critical work but lack funding
- Early intervention works, but needs more investment

Without change, young people are pushed into unsafe situations that often lead to long-term homelessness and involvement with justice and health systems.



WE DEMAND CHANGE AND CALL FOR...



1 Less reliance on Child Safety, particularly as the only response

2 Genuine listening to young people's voices

3 Housing options for 12-15 year olds

4 Respect for young people's rights and self-determination

5 Greater funding for community based youth services

6 Earlier, outreach based intervention

Young people under 16 are experiencing homelessness now.

We hear you, and we demand urgent change now



Scan the QR code or click here for the Full report



Community Connections
CASEWORK | COUNSELLING | GROUP FACILITATION



COMMUNITY
LIVING ASSOCIATION