



Community Connections

CASEWORK | COUNSELLING | GROUP FACILITATION

Still, the System Fails Us: Under 16's experiences of homelessness in Queensland.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Community Connections is a community-based organisation that practices an early intervention framework to respond to young people (aged 12-18) who are at risk of leaving home and school early. Community Connections operates the Brisbane North Reconnect program, as well as contracting Student Wellbeing Officers in Brisbane North schools. Community Connections provides support to young people and their families to minimise trajectories of homelessness, disengagement from education and family conflict. When this report refers to Reconnect workers, it is meaning the Treasury funded Reconnect workers who form part of the Community Connections team (see The Treasury, 2025, for more on the Reconnect Program).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Community Connections, part of Community Living Association Inc., acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we live and work; The Turrbal, Yuggera, Yugerabul, Kabi Kabi, Jinibara, and Quandamooka peoples. We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of all these tribal groups and recognise the important connection they continue to have to Land, Sea, Sky and Waterways across this region. We pay our respects to Elders past and present. We also recognise the emerging leaders who continue to share cultural knowledge, language and care for Country practices.

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.

Community Connections would also like to acknowledge the contribution of workers within the youth sector, and reports published previously (for example, see Dunbavan & Inner

Urban Youth Interagency, 2001). In addition to hearing the experiences of young people themselves, we acknowledge that workers share varied knowledge regarding the context of young people's experiences. Additionally, we would like to thank Brisbane Youth Service's Quality, Research and Innovation team for sharing data on young people's connection with their service (detailed below).

RESEARCH PROBLEM AND AIM

This project is centred around the research question, "*What would it take to understand under 16's experiences of homelessness?*". This question was posed after observations from Community Connections workers, alongside conversations within the youth sector more broadly, identified young people under 16 years who experience homelessness were often overlooked or underserved within system and service delivery. This includes that of statutory bodies. Additionally, these experiences remain largely invisible in data and policy. Therefore, the aim of this Participatory Action Research (PAR) is intended to add to a body of evidence whilst platforming the experiences of young people who have navigated homelessness when under 16 years.

This project uses Chamberlain and Mackenzie's (1992) definition of homelessness, encapsulating the diversity of homelessness which fall within three categories. The first category is *primary homelessness*, whereby people are without conventional accommodation (also known as 'rooflessness'). The second category is *secondary homelessness*, experienced by people frequently transient between forms of accommodation (e.g. couch surfing, temporary accommodation). The last category is *tertiary homelessness*, felt by those living within accommodation below minimum standard accommodation (e.g. caravan parks, boarding houses). The use of this definition was chosen to be representative of the variety of forms in which homelessness can take place, rejecting the notion of homelessness only meaning without a roof. When homelessness is referred to within this paper, this is the definition in which it represents.

This project also frequently refers to young people's ability to make informed decisions. A key factor of appropriately skilled, trauma informed youth work is the ability to assess a

young person's decision-making capacity. This is known by the legal framework of Gillick Competency, whereby young people can make their own decisions permitting they understand the "physical, emotional and spiritual consequences of their decisions both in the short and long term" (Youth Advocacy Centre, n.d.). This framework informs a worker's assessment and intervention regarding confidentiality, safety assessments and the making of adequate adjustments in communicating with clients so they can "give valid consent" (Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), n.d.). This is frequently referred to as informed decision making. These assessments reflect the diminishing guardianship of parents to children that naturally occurs in families within Australian society and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which states children have a say in decisions, especially if normative expectations (e.g. living with parents) is the source of emotional, physical or spiritual abuse (UNICEF Australia, 2025). Skilled workers continually conduct assessments for a young person's Gillick Competence in understanding the short and long term impact of decisions, being a safeguard in practice. If young people are determined not yet competent, workers should collaborate with young people to find a trusted adult in their life to assist.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Snapshot of youth homeless - Nationally

The rate of homelessness in Australia has been steadily increasing, including for young people aged between 12-24 (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2023). In the 2021 Australian Census, there was a total of 28,204 young people (aged 12-24 years) recorded as being homeless, comprising 23% of Australia's homeless population (ABS, 2023). Of this figure, 5,708 were young people aged between 12-15 years (ABS, 2023). From this data, it is unclear if young people are situated as homeless within a family and/or group composition, or as individuals. Additionally, due to the transience associated with homelessness alongside the experienced social and economic disadvantage, this figure is likely to be under representative of the true experience of homelessness for young people. What we do know is that young people enter homelessness for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to; family conflict, family and domestic violence, poverty, poor housing conditions, overcrowding, and the

increase cost of living (Buckner, 2008; Embleton et al., 2016; Mission Australia, 2019). Whilst the true nature of youth homelessness for under 16's is likely underrepresented nationally, the growing number of young people entering homelessness demands greater response.

Snapshot of youth homeless - Locally

In collaboration for this PAR, Community Connections reached out to Brisbane Youth Service (BYS) for greater insight into the prevalence of youth homelessness for under 16's within the Brisbane region. BYS is a specialist youth service offering coordinated case management, alcohol and other drug support and homelessness support to young people aged 12-25 years. BYS is a central drop-in space in Brisbane city and is often a 'first to know' point for young people experiencing homelessness within this region. In 2022, 52 young people under 16 years were recorded as presenting to BYS, an 11% increase since the previous year (See Figure 1 in Appendix A). Of those who presented, 53% identified as female, 41% identified as male, and 6 % identified as gender diverse. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young peoples comprised 33% of presentations, and 6% identified being part of the LGBTIQAP+SB communities. Of these young people, 40% had previous involvement with Child Safety Services, 13% had current involvement, 73% identified having good/great family support, 59% had good/great friend support, and 33% had good/great professional support. This data shows that young people under 16's presenting to BYS has increased across time, and that young people are more likely to be supported by natural supports (including family and friends) than systems.

Statutory body responsible for under 16's.

Child Safety Services, falling within Queensland (QLD) Governments Department of Family, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety, is the statutory body responsible for responding to children and young people who have been harmed or are at risk of harm under the age of 18 years (Legal Aid Queensland, 2025; QLD Government, 2024a). The Departments assessment regarding intervention is based on whether the child or young person has suffered, is suffering, or is at risk of suffering significant harm, and where they do not have a parent or carer willing and able to provide protection from harm occurring (QLD Government, 2024a).

The *Child Protection Act 1999* is the legal framework guiding Child Safety Services, defining harm as;

“any detrimental effect of a significant nature on a child’s physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing.... Harm can be caused by physical, psychological or emotional abuse or neglect, or sexual abuse or exploitation. Harm can be caused by a single act, omission or circumstance, or a series of acts, omissions or circumstances” (QLD Government, 2025a).

Any person can make a report to Child Safety Services, however, the *Child Protection Act 1999* details that mandatory reporters including teachers, doctors, nurses, police officers, child advocates under the *Public Guardian Act 2014*, and early childhood educators and care providers, must report if there is a *reasonable* suspicion that a child has suffered, is suffering, or is at risk of suffering harm without the presence of a willing/able parent to protect them (QLD Government, 2025a). The role of mandatory reporting suggests that there could be multiple contact points for children/young people at risk to be connected to Child Safety Services for intervention that would prevent a child’s need for youth housing. However, (as detailed within the locally provided data from BYS above) despite young people having previous or current engagements with Child Safety Services, there remains an increasing number of young people 12-16 years presenting to housing services who are ineligible to access housing itself because they are under 16 years (see ‘Policy responses to youth homelessness in Queensland’). Following policy, youth housing services then refer under 16s to Child Safety Services, a cohort recognised by Cooper (2017) as rarely prioritised.

Policy responses to youth homelessness in Queensland

Within the Queensland (QLD) context, there has been an increase in fund allocation to supporting young people experiencing homelessness. Principle 11 of the *Housing and Homelessness Action Plan 2021-2025* (QLD Government, 2021) outlined the QLD Governments commitment to supporting young people through an integrated framework of housing with support. From this commitment, the ‘*Towards ending homelessness for young Queenslanders 2022-2027: A policy and integrated framework of housing and support*’ report

was published (QLD Government, n.d.), developed in conjunction with non-government and government organisations and after hearing from 80 QLD young people. Three core areas were identified as requiring increased attention, namely; the need for earlier service access, accessible housing products, and responsive housing support services. Although capturing the voices of young people and their lived experience which contributed to entrance into and exit out of homelessness, it is unclear the exact demographic of the people whose voices are included. However, it is noted within the report that there is a *need* to explore options available for homeless young people aged 12-15 years (QLD Gov, n.d.), highlighting the little documented knowledge on how this cohort are navigating homelessness.

In terms of practical support provided to young people, the QLD Government allocated \$75.9 million (excluding GST) towards the Homelessness Program funding in 2024-2025, divided amongst 39 non-government organisations to deliver specialist homelessness services within QLD to young people (QLD Government, 2025b). In addition to this funding, in February 2024, the QLD Government announced '*Homes for Queenslanders*', an investment incorporating several commitments for vulnerable young people (Queensland Government, 2024b). This investment includes the construction of 8 new youth foyers, a youth subsidy, an integrated Youth Support Centre in Brisbane in partnership with Brisbane Youth Service (BYS), 8 new supported accommodation services, additional night workers, and an investment in new mobile services. It is unclear the direct eligibility for each of these proposed initiatives, however, in terms of a young person accessing accommodation, youth foyers alongside specialist homelessness services housing options remain only available to young people from the age of 16 years (BYS, 2025a; Foyer Foundation, 2024), leaving those under this age responsible to the QLD's Child Safety Services.

Early intervention approach; Ruby's reunification.

In 2025, BYS was the first Queensland service to launch Ruby's Reunification Program, an early intervention program "designed to keep families together and prevent children from entering the homelessness system" (BYS, 2025b). Funded by the Department of Family, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety, the Ruby's model through BYS supports young people (aged 12-15) and their families through the provision of short-term respite

accommodation for young people in 24/7 staffed houses (BYS, 2025b). Alongside the respite aspect, workers support families and young people to navigate family conflict and strengthen relationships, with the goal that young people can safely reunify and re-enter the family home (BYS, 2025b).

The introduction of this model in QLD stems from its operation in South Australia (SA) since 1993 (Uniting Communities, 2025). Different to the QLD model, the SA model of Ruby's age eligibility extends from 12-17 years (Uniting Communities, 2025). An analysis of Ruby's clients in SA between 2014-2018 showed that 89.8% of clients who had exited the program during this time had no follow up contact with homelessness services within the state, and "more than 70% of young people return[ed] to the family home" (Uniting Communities, 2025). However, it is unclear from this data whether young people are *remaining* with family long-term, or if they are entering and navigating homelessness without service engagement. Additionally, the model requires both family and young person participation. This limits access to respite housing for young people who may not have a parent or carer willing and/or able to commit to the program, or whom family/carers are not safe for the young person to return to, and where Child Safety services aren't providing intervention. Nevertheless, the introduction of Ruby's within QLD does extend a housing intervention option to young people at risk of homelessness under the age of 16 years, a first within the state which extends beyond the parameters of statutory bodies.

METHODOLOGY

Participatory action research (PAR) is an approach to research which generates knowledge through inclusion of participants impacted by the identified research problem (Cornish, Breton, Moreno-Tabaraz et al., 2023). Accordingly, such a framework has been described as a "systematic approach to investigation that enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives" (Stringer, 2007), and "combines getting a better understanding of issues and using this understanding to change some aspects of practice" (Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2008). The ideal outcome of participatory action research is ultimately that change occurs

based of a better understanding of the experiences of those impacted by the core issue, potentially providing “greater opportunities to encourage self-determination and to strengthen client and/or community capacity” (Baum, MacDougall & Smith, 2006).

PAR is typically conducted in cycles which evolve throughout the research process (Baum et al., 2006). There are four steps included within a cycle, namely; to plan, act, observe, and reflect (Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), 2012). As each cycle progresses, the research focus evolves (DHHS, 2012). This research project evolved across three cycles.

Data collection was achieved using several methods, including:

- two youth focused surveys
- a worker focused survey capturing both quantitative and qualitative data and
- a focus group discussion with young people accessing a local Brisbane based service, the Red Cross Night Cafe.

Community Connections workers advertised the research project digitally across interagency networks, in youth spaces/services, and at community events (e.g. Homeless Connect), offering both digital and paper form access. Criteria for young people to participate in the research included the need for the young person to be under 25 years of age at the time of survey completion, and having experienced homelessness within Queensland when under the age of 16 years. This collection design evolved across the action research cycles and was chosen to enable a variety of data collection points which capture the experiences of young people, acknowledging the challenge in capturing transient young people’s voice within research and the research process.

RESULTS

PAR Cycle 1 - 2022: Young person digital survey

In 2022, Community Connections conducted a digital survey distributed to young people, aiming to understand the demographics and experiences of homelessness when under 16 years of age (See Appendix B ‘Youth Survey- 2022’ for copy of survey questions). The

survey yielded 3 responses all aged between 17-23 years at survey completion. 1 young person identified as being male, 1 female, and 1 did not identify a gender. 1 young person identified as being Aboriginal and the other two did not identify a cultural identity.

The age of which the young people who exited home into homelessness varied between aged 10-15 years, none of whom identified as returning home and had stayed between 4-15 different places since entry into homelessness. Two of the three young people had formal first contacts (Child Safety and Police) when leaving home whom helped them identify where to stay. Both young people's main location prior to 16 years was within a Child Safety placement. Comparatively, the other young person identified having no supports and mainly staying in public spaces or intermittently with friends.

When asked what young people liked/didn't like about where they stayed, the two young people in Child Safety placements identified it "not being easy, but I got through it", and liking "animals" being in their life, but also didn't like "being hurt 24/7" and their placement "not feeding me properly". The young person utilising public spaces found sleeping on friends couches helpful and identified when sleeping rough that "safety is the worst thing".

When asked what the young people would like to see the Government and/or organisations do better to support young people who are homeless, the young people identified the need for a "youth centre", offering "a warm meal and shelter... or a umbrella if it rains" and "finding emergency accommodation [is] not enough, [finding] units where there are communal areas to socialise". Young people were also asked if they had a message to decision makers (Government officials). One young person wrote "talk to young people and understand them...have them around you". Another young person spoke to the importance for young people to be able to maintain family connections;

"Please help those who are not able to see there children please please give them a chance at seeing there grandkids or children and I am a young person who can't see my youngest siblings please let me see them I'm sick of not seeing them I heard that they don't remember me anymore and it's sad for me".

PAR Cycle 2 - 2023: Young person survey, digital and paper

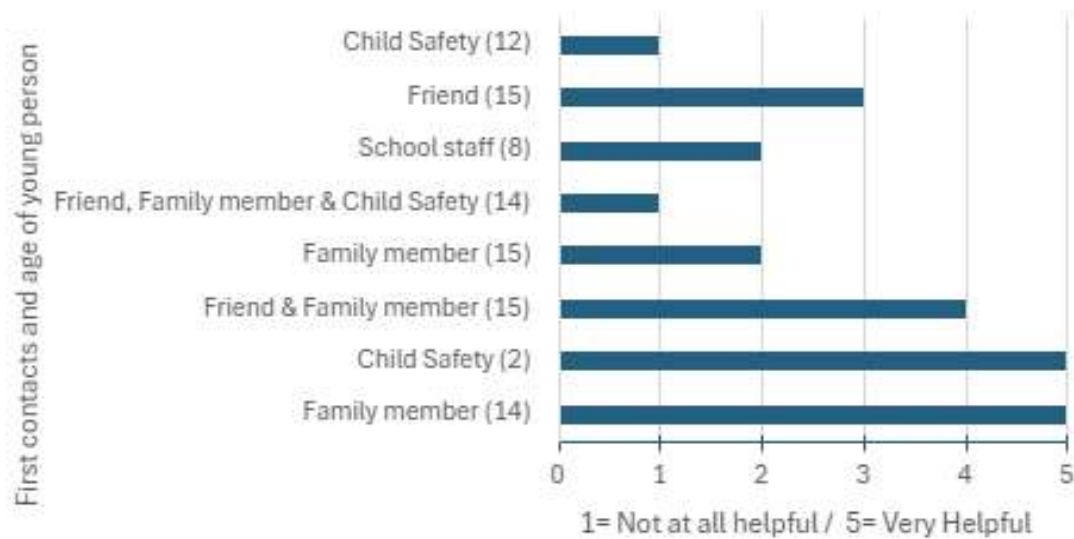
On completion of the first PAR Cycle in 2023, the team reflected on accessibility of questions and difficulty connecting with the target cohort. This informed the revision of the survey questions. Young people both linked to Community Connections and externally to other supports were invited to participate in a revised digital survey around their experience of homelessness when under 16 years, with access to paper survey copies also available (See Appendix B 'Youth Survey- 2023' for copy of survey questions). Data collection was open for four months from the June 2023 to October 2023. A total of 9 young people completed the survey, however, 1 was excluded from data analysis due to leaving home after 16 years of age, leaving 8 valid responses. Questions explored demographics of young people and aimed to understand the age young people left home, number of places stayed prior to turning 16, and key contacts young people utilised to navigate their homelessness alongside their assessment of helpfulness from these contacts.

At the time of completion, young people were aged between 15-18 years of age, half (4) identified as male, 2 identified as female, 1 identified as being non-binary, and 1 was unsure of their gender identity. Half of the respondents also identified as being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, 2 identified being Australian and 2 did not provide a response. 5 respondents were located within Queensland when first leaving home, and 3 were located outside of the state. 5 young people were between 14-16 years when first leaving home, 1 was 12 years, and 2 were under the age of 10 (8 years and 2 years).

The number of locations young people stayed prior to turning 16 varied greatly. 3 young people identified staying between 2-6 different locations, 3 young people stayed between 8-10 locations, and 2 respondents described staying at "over 50" locations, or "too many". Young people identified first contacts for navigating leaving home as friends (n=3), family (n=4), child safety (n=3) and school staff (n=1). Of these first contacts, there was a variance in experience of helpfulness (see Figure 2), with some young people identifying natural supports (family and friends) and Child Safety as being helpful, and others identifying natural supports, school staff and Child Safety as unhelpful. It is noteworthy here that the young person who found Child Safety 'very helpful' when exiting home at age 2 is an outlier within the data in terms of age on

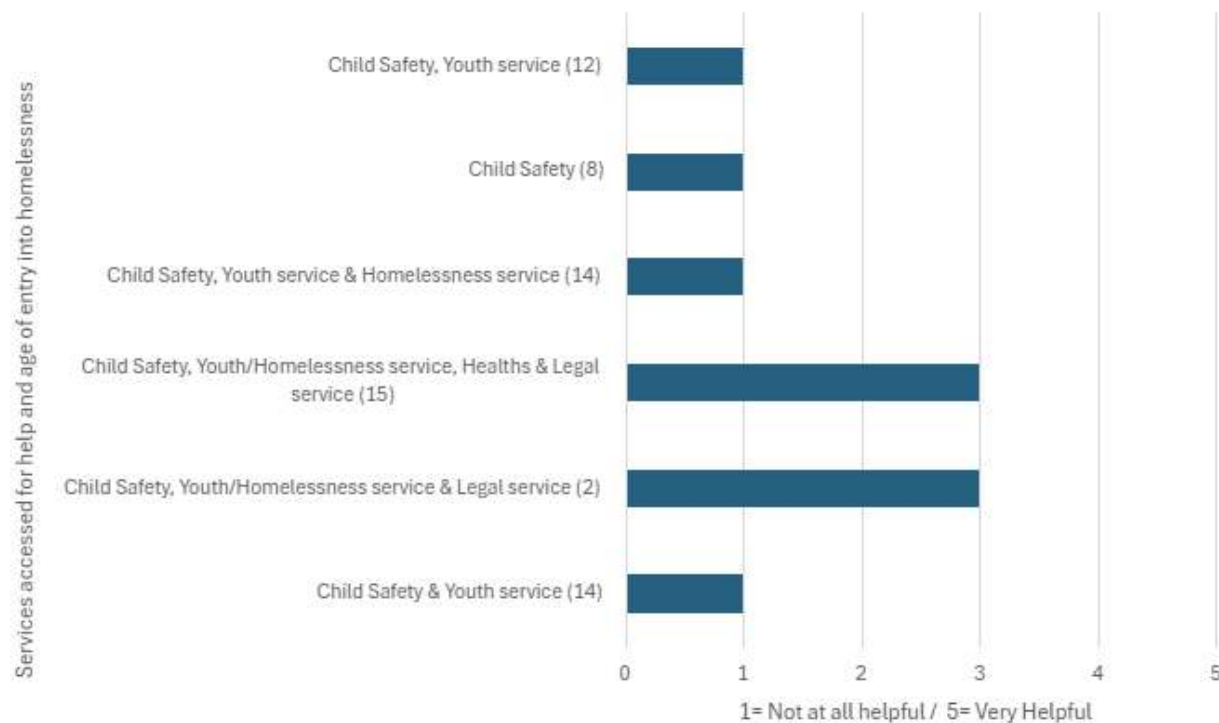
exit of the family home, and Child Safety would have taken direction in the facilitation of child removal for this young person.

Figure 2: First contacts- Were they helpful?



Post engagement with their first contacts, young people were supported by family (n=2), friends (n=3), youth services (n=2), school staff (n=1), or Child Safety (n=2), or a combination, in figuring out where to stay. As mentioned above, one of these young people supported by Child Safety was aged 2, remaining under the care of Child Safety and a Child Safety placement being their identified main location prior to 16 years. Other main locations stayed by young people prior to 16 years included extended family (n=1), friends (n=2), or young people were ‘moving between places often’ (n=3). When asked if young people sought help from formal services (e.g. child safety, homelessness/ youth services, legal services/ youth justice), 6 of the 7 respondents who completed the question had sought help of Child Safety, 5 had also engaged with youth or homelessness services, 2 with legal services, and 1 with health care services. One respondent did not ask for help from services, an outlier within the data who only relocated once since leaving home to reside with a friend. The 6 remaining who did access services prior to 16 had an average to not at all helpful response (See Figure 3).

Figure 3: Services accessed before 16 Were they helpful?



Few young people (3) provided extended descriptions of what was helpful/ not helpful. The young person entering child safety at 2 years and being within a placement found “getting housing” helpful. 2 other young people spoke about what is not helpful, one saying “no immediate help” and it’s a “long process”, while the other young person detailed;

“Whilst these services can provide various methods of support, they can do little to nothing with providing actual housing before 16. The responsibility will typically fall to child safety who takes months to respond, and if not engaged, then it's the young person's responsibility to find housing which is close to impossible”.

PAR Cycle 2 - 2023: Youth Practitioner Digital Survey

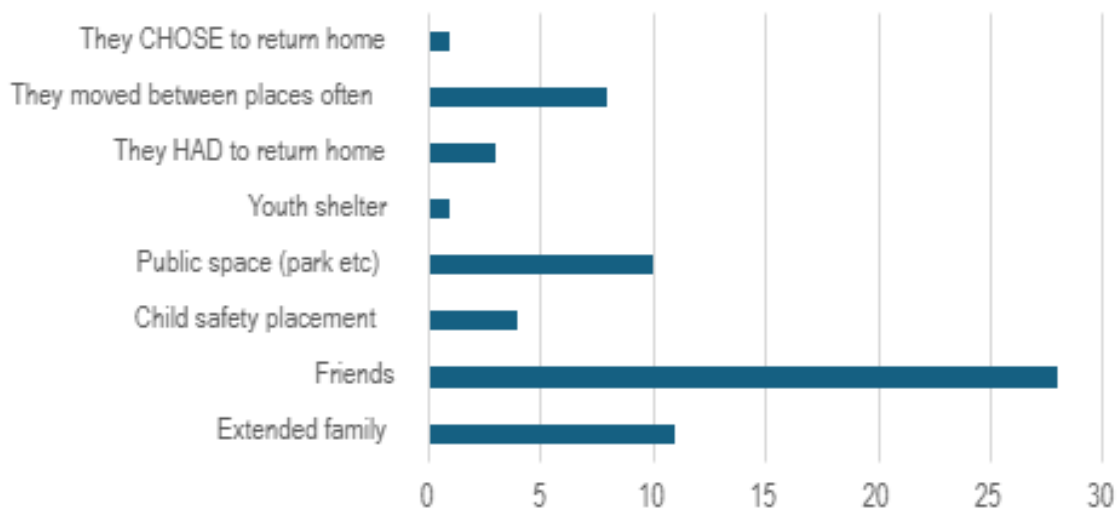
Community Connections also identified youth workers who directly support young people under 16 to access and maintain safe and stable accommodation as holding significant experience which would contribute to research insights, particularly given the challenges in accessing young people themselves. A digital worker survey was used to gain insight into the

perspectives and experiences of workers across the sector. The survey asked workers to draw on their experience and identify locations that young people stay when unable to return home, observations on how young people navigated where to stay, what worked well or did not work well to sustain their housing options, and what made returning home possible, if applicable. (See Appendix B ‘Worker Survey- 2023’ for copy of survey questions).

A total of 30 worker surveys were completed, which included 15 workers from generalist youth services, 5 from specialist housing services, 3 from Youth Justice or legal services for young people, 2 from Queensland Government organisations providing health care, and 5 from ‘Other’.

When asked the two most common locations young people stayed when unable to return home, workers identified friends (n=28) and extended family (n=11) as the most common categories. It is of significance however, that the third highest location was in public spaces (parks etc) (n=10), followed by young people moving between places often (n=8). Only 4 responses selected Child Safety placements as a top two common location, with the remainder of young people locating themselves either at a youth shelter (n=1), having to return home (n=3), and choosing to return home (n=1) (See Figure 4).

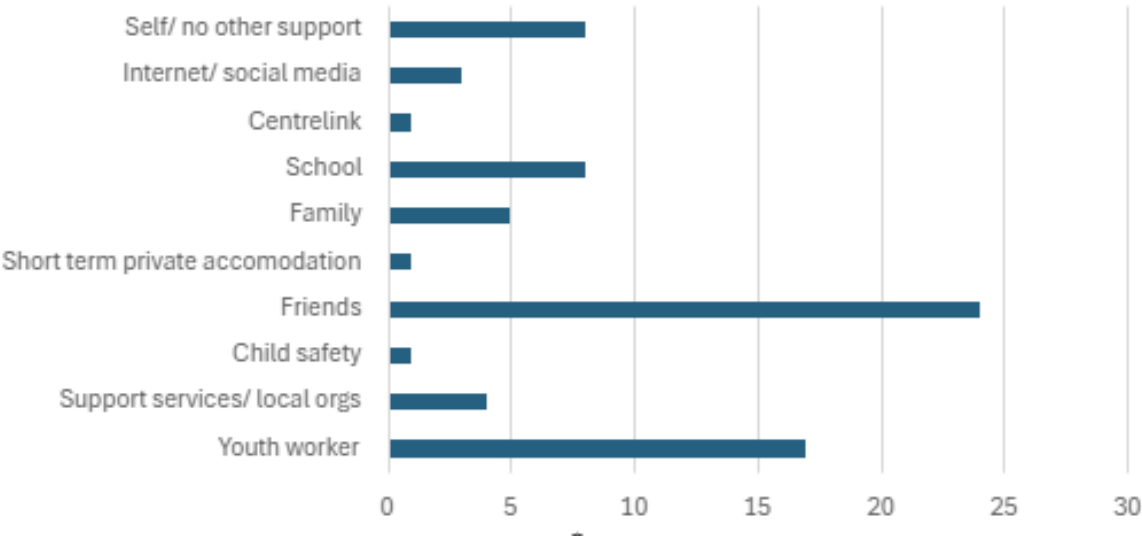
Figure 4: Most common locations young people stay



Workers more specifically detailed young people sleeping rough at schools, on the streets with/without others, in parks, under bridges, at the beach, in public toilets, at shopping centres, in cars, in abandoned buildings, in tents, couch surfing at other young people's residential accommodation, at caravan parks, at non-related individuals referred by friends, with 'random' people they have met, with older young people, or returning to family whom Child Safety had removed the young person from. Workers also described young people being located within 'trap houses' or committing crime to be intentionally incarcerated for access to shelter. Of the additional location sites that workers listed, BEROs emergency accommodation (a service within CLA Inc) and hotels paid for by youth services were two locations provided within service delivery.

Like the findings from young people's surveys above, when asked 'how young people figured out where to stay', workers identified friends (n=24) and youth workers (n=17) as the two most common supports young people utilised (See Figure 5). Formal system supports scored low, with only 1 worker response for both Child Safety and Centrelink as a resource which supported young people to work out where to stay.

Figure 5: Who helped young people figure out where to stay?



Workers were also asked what did and did not work well about where young people stayed. In terms of what worked well, workers identified the value in young people having assistance from services to feel supported, to navigate Centrelink, negotiate housing options (e.g. with friends/family) and support with other challenges young people are facing. However, the value in young people having greater independence was also noted, with one worker noting "the reason young people leave [Child Safety placements is] they want more self-determination". Shared housing/student accommodation in the private sector was listed as being more successful because it is one of the more affordable options and young people have greater self-determination. Additionally, access to financial support (Centrelink payments, grocery vouchers, and short term funding to stabilise accommodation provided by extended family or friend's) sustained housing, as young people could contribute to the household and ease the cost of living for the household. In addition to financial contribution, workers detailed household contributions in other forms (e.g. completing household duties) as a tool for sustaining housing, as well as shared expectations in terms of contributions and longevity of stay. Access to safe adults was also a shared theme with workers, as well as the sense of community/support young people might experience when situated with friends, extended family, or peers, particularly when young people feel safe, respected and are treated with kindness. This form of support was identified as positive as it also extends beyond services and systems operation hours.

Workers also detailed what did not work well about housing arrangements which young people were situated. Risk to a young person's safety was a strong theme, including risk to physical, emotional and mental health, exposure to violence, exposure to elements, victimisation, and substance use or exposure. Workers also detailed young people's lack of resources as impeding housing arrangements, including food insecurity, zero or insufficient income (including to contribute, meet, or maintain financial contributions), and lack of material goods (including bedding). Being located away from school and community also impacted young people's ability to remain in housing. Additionally, workers identified that young people's family which they are "fleeing from" may locate them or block school enrolment, whereby young people had to return home where it was potentially unsafe.

Unstable or insecure housing was also a core theme identified by workers. In addition to the above safety risks, workers identified overcrowding, other household members with complex needs and relationship breakdowns as core barriers, which included unspoken/unclear expectations and/or boundaries (e.g. length of stay, unequal power relations, and reduced independence and self-determination). One worker described the lack of stability with housing as inhibiting "making meaningful progress in any other domain challenging (e.g. education, health, court/YJ attendance etc)".

Lack of services and system supports was also identified as impacting young people's housing arrangements. Workers identified the benefit of young people having access to a youth worker to support communication (including facilitating conversations around expectations) and relationship building/repair, either at new accommodation arrangements or if the young person was returning home. Child safety was identified as providing no/limited support to young people with complex support needs and/or who have been entrenched in homelessness for some time. One worker identified that

"due to their age they weren't able to access housing services and child safety/police reported they had to return home. Because they have left home for reasons mostly related to safety they would be couch surfing between people they knew/people they didn't, putting them in risky situations".

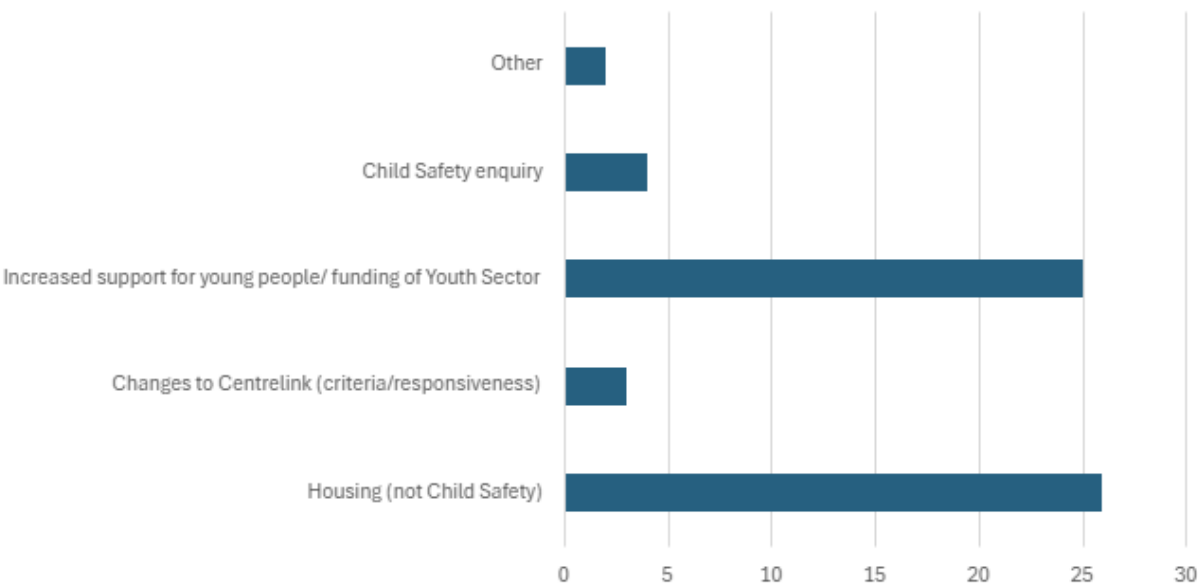
Workers shared additional and increased concerns for young people who are pregnant, parenting small children or who have mental health challenges.

When asked if any young people under 16 returned to the family home and if so, what made this possible, 5 workers identified no young people having returned home. One worker explained "other than police dropping them back home but they would leave home again straight away". Ten workers detailed young people returning home due to exposure to elements when sleeping rough, missing siblings, being "forced" by Child Safety, safety issues, or having no other option/being a necessity. These workers also described young people returning to unsafe home environments. Other workers (14) detailed "some" or "very few" young people they had contact with returning home. What made this possible was ongoing family intervention services (e.g. Reconnect Program), parental support, conflict

resolution/mediation, access to material resources (e.g. financial resources/support), ongoing physical and mental health safety planning, advocating to Child Safety, and supporting informed decision making for young people considering independence.

When asked what the Government and/or organisation can do to better support homeless young people under 16 years, workers strongly identified the need for a variety of housing options outside of Child Safety (n=26) and increased support to young people and their families, alongside an increase of funding to the community-based youth sector to provide support (n=25) (See Figure 6).

Figure 6: What can the Government and/or organisations do better?



In respect to housing options, workers described;

“Age restrictions mean more young people are sleeping rough or accessing unsafe accommodation options, making them more vulnerable to exploitation. Not all young people will want to be in a placement with a worker or other young people they don’t know or trust. They have often been homeless or couch surfing for long periods of time and have skills to live independently/ with support available”.

Workers identified the need to change funding guidelines of homelessness services or provide age specific services catering specifically to 12-15 year olds as necessary, as “child safety generally don’t do much after this age”. The theme of self-determination was also present in

how housing supports should service young people, one worker describing the need for “secure environments on weekends (peak time)” where young people “can choose to come and go and self-refer but resources are simple (ie basic cabins)”, another explaining the need for housing services to be “trauma informed as many young people suffer through homelessness to avoid child safety and police involvement due to historic traumatic experiences”.

Greater support to young people and families through service delivery and increased funding to the community-based youth sector to deliver these services, was another core theme identified by workers. Workers identified being “spread thin” and the value of and increased need for additional skilled trauma-informed workers, alongside early intervention and responsive outreach model services which respect young people’s right to self-determination. For example, one worker described “meeting them at their place of stay, [and] respecting young people's wishes by not structuring interventions around their assumed return to live with parents”, particularly when it is not safe or practical to do so. Increased funding and service delivery was linked to greater support for young people and their families. This included for worker/service collaboration, increased access to material items (e.g. clothing, phone/credit, sanitary and hygiene products), and independence skill-building for young people. Another worker described the need as

“Government prioritising the safety, wellbeing, growth and futures of such young people who, without early intervention often end up becoming caught up in other systems / long term service or social safety net reliant and with sadly many opportunities missed - and alot of this suffering could be avoided if solid intervention were provided”.

Increased funding and service delivery was argued as required to adequately respond to the needs of young people and their supports (including families).

Beyond the need for housing options and greater funding/support within the community based youth sector, workers identified the need for changes to Centrelink processes (n=3) (e.g. flexibility in criteria/ rapid responses/ ID requirements, financial supports to host families/friends), for an enquiry into the practices of Child Safety (n=4), more accessible mental health/health care services (n=1), and law reform around parent to adolescent violence (n=1).

In respect to Child Safety, one worker described a need for a “review / overhaul of the child safety system and how they are supporting this cohort. Young people are rejecting and self-placing rather than be in this system because something(s) is desperately wrong”. Other workers identified needing a “decrease [in] mandatory involvement with Child Safety under 16”, as workers identified little intervention/responses from Child Safety for this cohort, and rather echoed the need for increased service delivery within the community-based youth sector as described above.

Workers were lastly asked for suggestions on providing better outcomes for young people. Like the findings above, workers (n=11) identified the need for increased funding to the community-based youth sector to be able to increase support for young people, particularly in the early intervention space and where workers can provide responsive community-based outreach support. One worker shared the need for a

“long term commitment and investment to early intervention, services, programs to support vulnerable families and children / young people. A substantial investment in the early intervention space, in the long term, will save billions of dollars and save an infinite amount of suffering and tears of many”

Notably, however, was the need for services outside of traditional working hours when young people currently have limited support options. In addition to the above, 4 workers again suggested youth specific housing options for the 12-15 year old cohort, 1 worker emphasised accessibility to financial support, and 3 workers spoke to the importance of self-determination for young people, one worker saying;

“Provide the support young people identify that they need. Listen to young people and give them a chance to do what they want to do. Allow them the opportunity to make mistakes and learn from them, rather than deny them access”.

Five workers also identified the need for the Child Safety system to be interrogated, one worker arguing for increased investment in the system to provide a more timely and extended response. Another worker argued for “Child Safety to be held accountable for recognised poor decisions”.

PAR Cycle 3 - 2023: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

In 2023, Community Connections also completed an outreach visit to the Red Cross Night Cafe in Brisbane City. The Red Cross Night Cafe offers “information, support, hot meals, showers and fresh air for young people in a safe space away from the streets” (Australian Red Cross, n.d.). On the night of the consultation the café was unable to operate at full capacity due to volunteer shortages, thereby young people were invited to receive a hot meal and then immediately exit the service. Red Cross staff told young people about the Community Connections workers presence and the research consultation purpose. Young people were invited to participate voluntarily. Community Connections workers were seated at a table to the side of the café and waited for young people to approach. It is acknowledged that young people’s choice to engage with the research within this setting has limitations, as it is possible that young people were looking to extend their visit and access temporary safe shelter. Communications Connections workers aimed to minimise this limitation by reiterating the voluntary nature of the research when engaging young people, offering the young people choice in how they participated (e.g. complete the initial paper-based survey and/or participate in the focus group discussion), and advising the young people that they can withdraw their answers/participation at any time.

Four (4) young people meeting the research eligibility requirements verbally consented to and participated in the focus group discussion. After explaining the research purpose and aim, Community Connections asked the following questions:

- 1. If you spoke with someone for help, what was helpful and what was not helpful?*
- 2. What would a helpful response to youth homelessness under 16 look like?*
- 3. What would you want people to know about under 16’s experiences of homelessness?*

There were overlapping themes which expanded upon or complimented responses across all questions. Due to this, the results below have been collated using the data provided within all questions. Accordingly, the data has been themed into ‘helpful and unhelpful forms of support’ and ‘unintended system use’.

Helpful and unhelpful forms of support

Material Goods and Support

In terms of access to material goods and support, young people detailed needing access to “more food” and “cities that have public showers and places to charge [a] phone” as basic necessities. Young people found services such as the Red Cross Night Café helpful for access to temporary shelter, food and clothing, Brisbane Youth Service (BYS) for its accessible workers and drop in space and 3rd Space for access to showers and beds during business hours. Beyond these identified services, young people noted often getting provided with resources or service contacts which were unhelpful for a variety of reasons, including being inaccessible or outside of eligibility for support. More specifically, young people detailed being provided with food which needs a microwave, stove, or utensils to cook/ consume. In lieu of service access, young people self-identified building and sustaining natural relationships within the community to access food which required no preparation, such as with local shops or cafés who would provide food at the end of the day or at certain times when food would be disposed of (e.g. items in hot boxes).

Extended community and service delivery support

The value of extended community and service delivery support was another shared theme amongst young people, particularly in reference to systems navigation and advocacy. Young people identified wanting “*supports to navigate systems and processes like Centrelink and getting a birth certificate*” and “*more choices for support*”. Young people shared frustrations regarding financial support accessibility, critiquing the process of accessing Centrelink payments and detailing that it “took over 3 months for payments” to be received, how it was “hard to provide documents” or you “need ID (identification) for Centrelink and need [forms of] ID to get ID”. Furthermore, young people discussed the stopping of payments or inability to apply without a valid address, sharing that “*Centrelink payments get cut off or you can’t apply with no address. [You’re] needing to get a job but can’t when [your] basic needs aren’t getting met*”. Additional to financial accessibility support, broader natural community support was detailed as “*people [who] believe you and understand family isn’t perfect*” and “*that communities are welcoming, supporting each other and bring people in for a shower and be*

non-judgmental". In extending on this, two young people identified the value in supportive community members and the need to foster community capacity building, sharing their story of a community member unknown to them offering short term shelter/access to amenities whilst they worked out next steps.

Increased Accommodation and Housing

Young people also identified a strong need for "more accessible housing" and "more youth shelters", suggesting system/service delivery be available in the evenings and using an early intervention framework, *"not just responding when it is a crisis"*. Young people identified BYS as helpful in supporting young people in crisis as "workers would put you in hotels for a couple of nights" or "paid for flight tickets to get [back] to family" however, critiqued system delivery, wanting *"Child safety [to be] actually helping, [as] everyone says to call them"*. Young people described their experience with Child Safety, being "suggested shelters that won't take under 16's" or they "would just give numbers to services who can't help", "would act like leaving home is just a phase", or they were told they are "full and there is nothing they can do". In the visibility of their homelessness, young people also described unhelpful police responses, sharing that "Police remove you from public places and take your stuff", often moving young people on from where they are found. Young people identified that Murri Watch would have been helpful for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, but "they won't help under 16's".

Unintended System Use

When asked what young people would want people to know about their experience of homelessness when under 16, the overwhelming response by the group was *"that the whole system is fucked in the head"*. Young people were fatigued by the disservice of systems, naming the Department of Child Safety, Centrelink and the Police. During this discussion, young people identified the following strategies they utilised when systems were not responding to their needs, including catching trains all the way to the end of the line and back to sleep and getting "into fights to go to the watch house for somewhere to stay", detailing that

“young kids do crime to go to juvie just to get off the street”. Young people also agreed that accessing hospital emergency departments was also a method of obtaining shelter, sharing that “it’s normal to sleep there, they’re always open, and you have a roof over your head”. Albeit not being the intention of the transport, justice or health departments, young people were resourceful in finding alternative forms of shelter when statutory bodies were not responding and young people fell outside of service delivery models eligibility criteria. One young person suggested funding re-investment, saying to “re-invest money into homelessness, so much money is put into updating public transport which already exists”.

DISCUSSION

Four themes were dominant across each PAR cycle and data collection points. Namely, the gravitation towards and value of natural supports, the role of service delivery in supporting natural relationships and the need for increased investment, the right to self-determination for young people, and the need for an interrogation into statutory system responses/responsibilities.

Strengthening and sustaining natural supports

The reliance on friends and family (natural supports) was consistent across the PAR data, primarily being the first contact young people engage with upon entering homelessness, and who are supporting young people in their navigation. This finding is consistent with what is known about help seeking for young people more generally, with the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) (2018) finding young people aged 14-15 years are most likely to seek support from family and friends first, followed by formal services or online sources. The PAR findings are also consistent with other studies which highlight the reliance and preference on family and friends for support (see New South Wales Commission for Children and Young people (2002) and Rickwood, Deane, Wilson & Ciarrochi (2005) for example). PAR data highlighted how safe and reliable natural supports sustained housing for young people, particularly when young people continued to have access to their community and peer support

networks. In these cases, young people's reliance on natural supports can be protective, permitting natural supports are able to sustain their support.

Contrary to above, the PAR data also showed that natural supports were largely unable to sustain housing young people, particularly when natural supports were assisting the young person to navigate the homelessness experience without additional service support. Financial means, forms of contribution (e.g. household tasks), shared expectations, and maintaining positive relationships impacted on housing stability, both for the informal accommodation provider and young person. When financial stability and expectations were unclear, housing stability decreased. Additionally, there is an increased risk to young people unable to utilise or retain housing with natural supports. This was identified within the data when young people in the absence of housing with natural supports were mostly using public spaces and identified having low support/engagement from Child Safety. This increased risk to their physical and mental health, alongside their risk of victimisation or feeling without choice but to return to the family home from which they exited.

Confidential support, information sharing, supported facilitation of conversations around expectations/ required contributions, and systems expertise by community youth workers supported informal housing arrangements and contributed to increased stability. As above, young people are more likely to lean on natural supports for help, however, there is risk to relationship breakdown particularly when navigating homelessness without service support. Across the data, the need for early intervention strategies and community services intervening before young people enter homelessness, or when they are first engaging their natural supports around homelessness navigation, is a junction point from which young people can explore what is needed to return to the family home (if safe and appropriate to do so), increase stability in housing arrangements, and prevent overall risk, as supported within current service delivery models/ research (see AIFS, 2020; Carr, Whittington, Farrell & Dieckmann, 2015; Department of Social Services (DSS), 2025; Parpouchi, Moniruzzaman & Somers, 2021, for example) . Additionally, early intervention services with trauma-informed, young person-centred practitioners which extend safe invitations within 'first to know spaces' (e.g. community based-youth workers collaborating with schools through groupwork facilitation where natural

friendship supports are located) increases entry points for young people to access additional supports. These invitations can open referral pathways for support with the nurturing of natural relationships to stabilise home, rather than responding to young people in times of crisis. This then seeks to prevent entrenched homelessness through building upon natural relationships which act as “protective factors which can reduce future interactions with the service system and reoccurrence of youth homelessness” (DSS, 2024), whereby natural relationships can be both the pathway in to and out of homelessness (Crane, 2009).

Community relationships were another form of natural relationships which young people utilised, albeit only for a few young people within the data. Young people identified access to material items and temporary shelter by few community members and argued that community capacity should be increased to better support young people, including those experiencing homelessness. Portrayal of young people in media and wider social discourse influences community perceptions about young people’s needs and experiences, as well as community willingness to provide safeguards when young people need assistance (e.g. factors leading to homelessness). Increased political rhetoric across the country of ‘increasing youth crime’ (See Richards, 2025, for example) hinders community capacity/willingness to support this cohort, as public perceptions of young people are inconsistent with evidence showing the contrary, that youth crime has steadily been decreasing since 2009 (ABS, 2024; Sato, 2024; Youth Advocacy Centre, 2024). Although there is value in building community capacity to better respond to and support young people more generally, which could decrease risks linked to early home leaving and entry into homelessness, it is unlikely that communities will be responsive to this without a shift in discourse which is truly representative. Instead, it appears that negative perceptions of young people (who hold very little power and control within society) within political discourse and the broader media have distorted the reality that young people are disproportionately both victims of crime and overrepresented in homelessness data

Greater re-investment within the youth sector

Youth workers were identified as assisting young people in their navigation of homelessness. The PAR data identified this was most successful when youth workers supported young people and their natural supports to stabilise housing for the young person.

This was both in terms of supporting young people and their families in a reunification process that leads to the young person returning home and when supporting young people in their transition to independence. Youth workers used a wide range of strategies to support the stabilisation of young people's housing including navigating and advocating to systems (including Centrelink and Child Safety), relationship building, exploring expectations and boundaries in households and natural relationships, supporting conflict resolution and mediation, safety planning, supporting informed decision making for young people, and accessing material items. This was particularly significant when service provision is formatted on an early intervention and outreach model (e.g. Reconnect Program), and which nourishes safety and self-determination for the young person (See 'Supporting the right to self-determination').

Other provisions through BEROS emergency accommodation for young people self-placing within the Child Safety system, and through youth services able to temporarily fund hotel stays or travel were identified of value. However, the data clearly identified the need for a change in the housing/homelessness sector to cater for the younger 12-15 year old cohort, and provide responses separate to Child Safety reliance. Notwithstanding the role of these services in responding to young people's housing crisis, evidence shows that earlier identification, strategies and interventions could prevent the need for increased crisis service access (AIFS, 2020; Carr, Whittington, Farrell & Dieckmann, 2015; DSS, 2025). The core role of service delivery within the data highlighted the value in supporting and strengthening natural supports for young people, as natural supports extend beyond service delivery hours of operation, outlive the longevity of service eligibility and/or capacity, and ultimately reduces demand on services by increasing young people's connection to safe and natural communities.

Service capacity and resources inhibited outcomes for young people, particularly in being able to nurture natural relationships to sustain housing. This is both due to an increase in youth homelessness more broadly, as well as the limitations to funding within the community-based youth sector. An increase in funding, concurrent with an increase in youth workers, was identified as strongly being a required response to support young people away from and out of early homelessness. The impact of funding cuts to the youth sector was identified by workers as impeding on service delivery, being spread 'too thin'. For example, in 2012, Premier

Campbell Newman released the Qld's State Budget, detailing a \$380 million cut in funding to community funding (Hon Julie Collins MP, 2012). In the same year, the Youth Affairs Network of Queensland (YANQ) conducted a survey aiming to understand the impact of QLD State Government funding cuts to the youth sector, both organisationally as well as the impact on young people directly. The survey yielded 72 responses, with 42 responses reporting cuts to staff, funding, or both. 26 of these organisations reported an estimated \$2,331,119 loss in funding, 2 organisations reported 13.75-18% funding loss, and 14 youth services recorded a loss of 45.75 full time equivalent staff. 72% of respondents identified how the funding had direct impact on young people, with decreased service capacity and staff, forced closure or merging of programs/services, and less available resources, to list a few (YANQ, 2012). Since these cuts, youth services have had to often compete for allocations of funding via grant applications (see QLD Government, 2023 for example) which are often short term and low-cost, responding to deliverables set by funding providers, and result in fragmented service provision.

Increases in funding and service delivery was linked to greater support for young people and their families within the data, including worker/service collaboration, increased access to material items (e.g. clothing, phone/credit, sanitary and hygiene products), and independence skill-building for young people. Less community-based youth workers also means that early intervention entry points which are opportunities to minimise youth homelessness are reduced, as workers are juggling responding to high caseloads and reduced resourcing. Arguably, a re-investment into the community youth sector would respond to the gap in young people navigating their homelessness unsupported and without response from statutory systems, a response which there is an evidence base which shows positive outcomes (For example, see Carr et al., 2015, and DSS, 2024).

Supporting the right to self-determination

Young people's right to self-determination was a presented theme across the data, including the right for young people to be heard and understood, exercise decision making and have choices respected, maintain choice in family and peer connections, have greater independence, and have varied choice in services and their service engagement. The

Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC, n.d.) acknowledges variance in the meaning of self-determination for different groups of people, however, argue that

“at its core, self-determination ‘is concerned with the fundamental right of people to shape their own lives’. In a practical sense, self-determination means that we have the freedom to live well, to determine what it means to live well according to our own values and beliefs”.

In the context of youth development, scholars (See Catalano, et al., 2004; Hui & Tsang, 2012; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, for example) argue self-determination is offered through positive and supportive environments which nurture young people’s autonomy to make informed decisions for themselves and allow them to act. Within the context of youth work, the facilitation of informed decision-making necessitates that young individuals demonstrate Gillick competence, as previously outlined. Consequently, the promotion of self-determination within a service delivery framework must be predicated upon the young person’s capacity for informed decision-making, as evidenced by their Gillick competence.

In many cases within the data, young people’s ability to exercise self-determination contributed to housing stabilisation. Where self-determination was hindered, data showed negative impacts on young people’s experiences of homelessness. This is consistent with studies elsewhere (See Hui & Tsang, 2012; Moore et al., 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2017 for examples), highlighting greater outcomes for young people’s mental health, family relationships, and educational outcomes when adolescent’s self-determination is nourished. Young people under 16 years being restricted in choice to housing supports, underserved through service/system delivery, having inhibited access to financial resources and material items, amongst other factors, is therefore impeding on their self-determination within the current context of navigating homelessness in QLD when under 16 years.

As *the* statutory body responsible for ensuring safety of young people under 18 years in QLD, the Child Safety’s Practice Manual (QLD Government, 2025c) arguably under acknowledges the role of young people having meaningful participation in decision making about their lives. For example, Child Safety work from the Strengthening Families, Protecting Children Framework for Practice, which states that Child Safety will “listen to children’s, families’ and communities’ views and involve them in planning and decision making”. However,

as it pertains to engagement and participation in decision making itself within the Child Safety Practice Manual, children are acknowledged as being helped to understand decision making and to have a *say* in decision making, whereas parents hold the right to *participate* in decision making (the exception being for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations, where participation is documented as shared across children, parents and family members) (The State of Queensland, 2025b). Self-determination is equally important for Child Safety to practice with young people seeking assistance from the department. However, inconsistencies between their framework for practice and the practice manual signify there is a power imbalance from which young people's role in decision making is under acknowledged, despite legal frameworks for assessing Gillick competence. Clear practice instructions that promote children's choice in decision making processes will arguably produce stronger child centred outcomes for 12-15 year olds.

Review of system delivery

Re-occurring through the data by both young people and workers was the inadequate function of the systems for under 16s experiencing homelessness. Data showed this firstly as poor responses by formal systems (namely, Child Safety and Centrelink) in responding to young people experiencing homelessness, and secondly, the resourceful ways young people utilised alternative systems for support or shelter. Young people and workers identified the misuse of the justice system, with young people purposefully getting incarcerated, as well as using transport services and emergency departments for their unintended use to access shelter. Access to financial support through Centrelink was a barrier, leaving young people without financial means to support themselves or contribute to their housing arrangements. Child Safety responses which led to placements or safe reunification with families was low or not tried, with greater responses to those of younger ages (e.g. under 12). Inadequate responses by Child Safety meant young people were often returning to unsafe housing options or sleeping rough and exposed to other risks. When young people were getting placed under the care of Child Safety, workers acknowledged they would often leave their placements. Data from workers argued for an inquiry into the system more broadly.

In May 2025, the QLD Government (2025d) announced a Commission of Inquiry into QLD's Child Safety System, which commenced on July 1st, 2025. The parameters of the inquiry are still to be set however, the inquiry was launched following concerning findings within the Children in Care Census 2024, highlighting poor responses to young people in out-of-home care (See Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety, 2024; The State of Queensland, 2025c). Although interrogation of the treatment of young people under the provision of care with Child Safety is required, it is unclear how, or if, this inquiry will make assessments on how young people are received by or responded to by Child Safety, those 'falling through the gaps' of the systems intended purpose. Additionally, historically there have been inquiries into the 'failures' of this system, as PeakCare's Tom Allsop argues "the child protection system is not suffering through a lack of recommendations...It is suffering from a lack of government action and commitment to doing the things we know work", a sentiment echoed by [former] National Children's Commissioner Anne Hollands and found within the data collected from youth workers more broadly (Van Vonderen, 2025).

LIMITATIONS

There were numerous limitations which presented within this research project, primarily around staffing and data collection processes. Future research could yield greater results and additional data which could further contribute to a body of evidence, however, increased funding to achieve this within the community youth sector would be required for this to occur. Additionally, further data analysis by researchers could provide detailed results which explore how experiences differ depending on variables experienced by young people, such as demographics for example.

In terms of the project planning and delivery, the research was conducted by the Commonwealth Treasury funded Reconnect Program Youth and Family workers within the Community Connections team. There was a changeover of staff between PAR cycle 1 and 2, with data collection thereafter being carried out by two workers (one part-time and one full-time worker) who also carry caseloads, facilitate groups, and participate/ establish various projects, amongst other tasks. Accordingly, time to allocate towards this PAR was limited. Additionally, it was a hope of Community Connections to conduct this research in consultation and

collaboration with young people more generally. That is, to have young people's input into the project design, data collection and outputs. However, time allocated towards this PAR alongside other work commitments of the Reconnect workers rendered this hope difficult. The PAR research project topic is under researched and larger in scope than what Reconnect workers can do within our roles, which are primarily funded to support young people and communities directly.

Data itself was also difficult to obtain. It is unsurprising that for transient young people who have been disappointed by service/system responses or who are fatigued by sharing their story without real change occurring, that participating in a research project is low priority. This is in addition to accessing this cohort more generally, particularly giving the 'invisibility' of their homelessness and many young people not having connection to housing/youth services. Many young people who are couch surfing might not identify themselves as homeless, and more associate homelessness with 'rooflessness'. Additionally, as detailed above, the context of which data collection occurred at the Red Cross Night Café was also a limitation. This is due to the service being unable to operate at full capacity the evening Reconnect workers visited, and whereby young people were invited into the service to complete the survey or otherwise grab a meal takeaway. It is possible that young people may have engaged in the survey process to access temporary shelter, however, Reconnect workers within Community Connections sought to mitigate this limitation by sharing the voluntary nature of the survey and the young people's right to withdraw. Accordingly, there is a multitude of reasons which make this data under-representative of the true extent and experiences of young people facing homelessness when under 16 years of age.

In respect to data collected by youth workers/service providers, it became evident during this project that services rarely record an 'unmet needs' register. That is, data recorded which captures if young people seek support of their services but are ineligible due to age, for example. Whilst engaged services acknowledged that they are often approached by young people under 16 years experiencing homelessness, it is rarely documented due to service ineligibility. Additionally, it was also widely acknowledged that the youth sector is overworked and under-resourced, meaning that the provision of data and completion of surveys is not always a priority for workers who are busy 'doing the work'. It is recommended that services establish and record an 'unmet needs' register, to further gather data and add to a body of

evidence which more accurately captures the prevalence of young people under 16 years seeking supports for their homelessness experience.

CONCLUSION

This PAR study sought to better understand the experiences of homelessness for young people when under 16 years of age in QLD. Through three PAR cycles, data collected identified that young people gravitate towards natural supports (i.e. family and friends) for support when entering and navigating homelessness. When young people and their natural supports were supported by youth specific community services, this increased housing stability. However, service eligibility for housing provision and support, alongside significant funding cuts to the community sector impacting service capacity and resources, means that young people experiencing homelessness are underserviced and, in many cases, unsupported. Consequently, this places young people at greater risk of entrenched homelessness. The decrease in funding within the community youth sector, alongside the role of youth workers in supporting natural relationships to increase housing stabilisation for young people is a gap in respect to preventing and/or supporting youth out of homelessness. Greater investment in the community youth sector could increase service capacity, and consideration of funding guidelines could also increase eligibility.

Young people's right to have appropriate support to self-determine as they grow older was a key theme identified throughout the study, whereby housing outcomes/ pathways out of homelessness increased if young people were able to exercise this right. Therefore, service delivery in terms of best practice in response to these findings, should foster young people's right to self-determination. Services which focus on early intervention and outreach models, and which are young person-centred and holistic in approach, were suggested as most effective in supporting young people's self-determination and navigation out of homelessness and/or the risk of homelessness entry.

Statutory systems (including Child Safety and Centrelink) were found to be largely unhelpful and unresponsive to young people experiencing homelessness, which in many cases increased risk. There were many identified pathways from which young people's status of homelessness and risk would have been notified to Child Safety, given the number of

mandatory reporters from which young people encounter. Nevertheless, the data shows very few young people received an adequate response. Increased interrogation of these systems is required to respond to the needs of young people under 16 experiencing homelessness.

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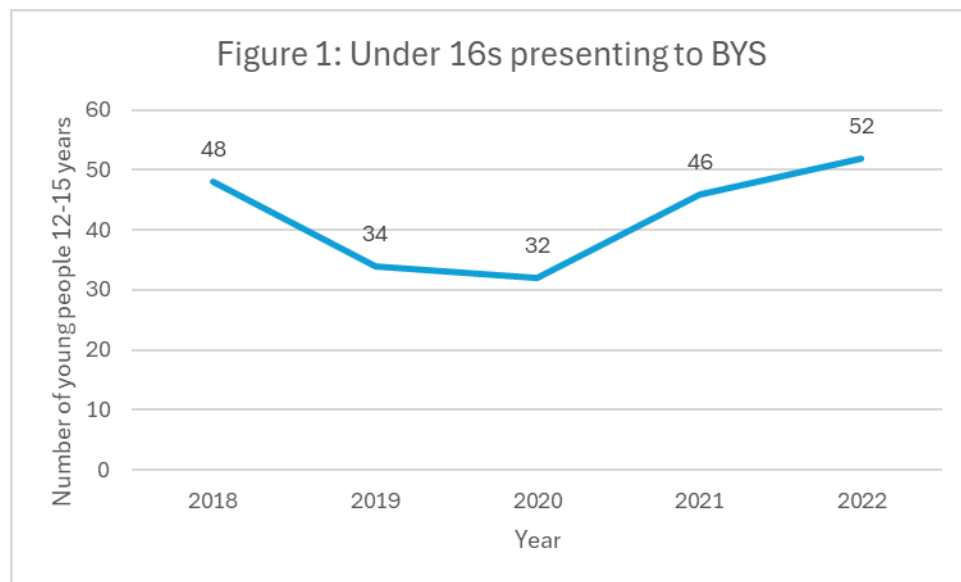
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APPENDIX

Appendix A

Figure 1



Youth Housing Survey 2022

Thank you for taking the time to complete our survey!

WHY?

This survey is being conducted by Community Connections to help us collect information about young people, who were under the age of 16 when they experienced homelessness. We are hoping to use this data to advocate for better housing options for young people.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

The information we collect will only be used by our own organisation. Your personal details will be removed if we use the data for reporting. It is helpful for us to see if there are patterns among certain ages, genders, suburbs or cultural groups.

There are some contact numbers at the end of this survey in case you would like to talk to someone about an issue more privately.

1. What is your age?

2. What is your gender?

3. What suburb do you live in

4. What is your cultural identity?

5. Have you ever had to leave home?

Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes
☐ No

6. How old were you the first time you had to leave home?

7. How long did you leave home for?

8. How many times have you left home?

9. How many places have you stayed?

10. What was the main location you stayed at before you turned 16?

Mark only one oval.

☐ Friend's place
☐ Extended family
☐ Youth shelter
☐ Public place
☐ Child safety placement
☐ Other:

11. How did you figure out where to stay? (Did you get help to look at your options? e.g. friend, family member, youth worker, teacher, Guidance Officer, etc)

Appendix B Youth Survey – 2022

12. What did you like about where you ended up staying? What made it easier to stay there?
Your answer

16. What would you like to see the government and/or organisations do to better support young people who are homeless?
Your answer

13. Was there anything that you didn't like about where you stayed? What didn't work?

14. Did you have to leave earlier than you expected? Did you have to keep moving between places and if so what were the reasons?

15. Did you return to live at home? If so, what made this possible?

17. Please rank the following from 1 (the most important) to 8 (least important) to help us understand what other issues are important to young people in Brisbane.

Mark only one oval per row

	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5	Column 6	Column 7	Column 8
Access to mental health support	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Finding a job	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Finding a safe place to live	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Connecting to other young people	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Alcohol and drug information or support	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Access to domestic violence information or support	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sexual assault information or support	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

18. Finally, given that young people under the age of 18 are unable to vote in local, state and federal elections, what message would you like to get across to the people responsible for making decisions that affect you?

Thank You!

If answering this survey has brought up difficult memories or emotions, please contact kids help line 24 hours a day on 1800 55 1800 or via web chat <https://kidsline.com.au/>

Or you are welcome to call or email Karen, Eden and Kelsey
Community Connections
Nurdah
3266 5199
reception@communityliving.org.au



Community Connections
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Youth Homelessness Survey 2023

Purpose:

This survey is being conducted by Community Connections to help us better understand the experiences of young people who were/are homeless under the age of 16. Experiences of under 16 year olds who are/have been homeless is not well documented or understood within research or policy. By collecting this data, we are hoping to advocate for better visibility, support, and housing options for young people.

Confidentiality:

Data collected will be collated by Community Connections, and used to demonstrate the experiences of young people under 16 who have been/or are homeless. Community Connections will securely store the data and will remove any identifying information prior to sharing key findings.

If you would like to discuss confidentiality or the purpose of the survey, or have any further questions, please contact Community Connections main office on (07) 3266 5199 or kmcarrhur@communityliving.org.au

By completing this survey, you confirm that you have read and agree to the purpose and confidentiality outlined above regarding this survey.

1. What is your current age?

2. What is your gender?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male
- ☐ Non-Binary
- ☐ I don't know/unsure
- ☐ Other

3. What is your cultural identity?

4. Did you live in Queensland when you first left home?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

5. What age were you when you first left home?

6. How many places did you stay at before turning 16?

7. Who did you first go talk to after leaving home?

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Friend
- ☐ Family member
- ☐ School staff
- ☐ Homelessness service
- ☐ Youth service
- ☐ Child Safety
- ☐ Police
- ☐ Other

14. Community Connections is looking to speak further to young people about their experiences of homelessness under the age of 16.

Would you consent to being contacted by a Community Connections team member to better understand in more detail your experience?

Please provide an email or contact number if you consent to being contacted.

Thank you for your time in filling out this survey.

If answering this survey has brought up difficult memories or emotions, please contact Kids Help Line 24 hours a day on 1800 55 1800 or via web chat <https://kidshelpline.com.au/>.

Or you are welcome to call or email us
Community Connections - Nundah
3266 5199
kmcarthur@communityliving.org.au



Community Connections
CARE HOME COUNSELLING GROUP FACILITATION

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Youth Housing Survey - Workers

Thank you for taking the time to complete our survey!

Purpose:

This initial scoping survey is being conducted by Community Connections to help us better understand the experiences of young people who were/are homeless under the age of 16. Experiences of under 16 year olds who are/have been homeless is not well documented or understood within research or policy. Anecdotally, we know the challenges of finding safe and stable accommodation or support for this demographic, and we value gaining insight into the perspectives and experiences of workers across the sector. By collecting this data, we are hoping to advocate for better visibility, support, and housing options for young people.

Confidentiality:

Data collected will be collated by Community Connections, and used to demonstrate the experiences of young people under 16 who have been/or are homeless. Community Connections will securely store the data and will remove any identifying information prior to sharing key findings.

If you would like to discuss confidentiality or the purpose of the survey, or have any further questions, please contact Community Connections main office on (07) 3266 5199 or kmcarrhur@communityliving.org.au

By completing this survey, you confirm that you have read and agree to the purpose and confidentiality outlined above regarding this survey.

1. What organisation do you work for?

2. What type of services does your organisation provide? Tick the one that is most applicable.

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Generalist youth services
- ☐ Specialist housing services for young people
- ☐ Queensland Government organisation providing health care services
- ☐ Peak body or research
- ☐ Queensland Government providing case management services
- ☐ Non-Government organisation providing mental health services
- ☐ Private practitioner
- ☐ Youth justice or legal services for young people
- ☐ Other:

3. If you are working with a young person who is homeless, do you support them to find accommodation?

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Yes, I support young people to find accommodation.
- ☐ No, I refer them to another organisation to find accommodation.
- ☐ I refer them to another organisation to find accommodation, and continue supporting them in other areas of their life.

4. Drawing on your experience, what are the two most common locations that young people (under the age of 16yrs) stay when unable to return home? Please tick 2 boxes.

Check all that apply

- ☐ Youth shelter
☐ Extended family
☐ Friends
☐ Public space (park, etc)
☐ Child safety placement
☐ They HAD to return home
☐ They CHOSE to return home
☐ They moved between places often

5. Please list other locations where young people (under the age of 16yrs) have stayed when out of home (if applicable)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

6. How did they figure out where to stay? (did they get help to look at their options? e.g. friend, family member, youth worker, teacher, Guidance Officer etc)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

7. What worked well about where they stayed?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

8. What did not work well about where they stayed?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

9. Did any young people who were homeless under the age of 16 return to live with their parent(s)? If so, what made this possible?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

10. What can the government and/or organisations do better to support young people (under the age of 16yrs) who are homeless?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

11. What suggestions do you have to provide better outcomes for young people?

12. Would you like to participate in future research or advocacy about this topic?

Please provide an email or contact number if you consent to being contacted.

Thank you for your time
If you would like to contact someone from Community Connections see our contact details below.

Community Connections
Nundah
3266 5199
btaylor@communityliving.org.au



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