

# A Call for Contributions for the April 2010 edition of Parity

## Out of Sight: Young People, the Hidden Homeless

### Introduction

The overwhelming number of young people experiencing homelessness are not sleeping rough. They are not the highly visible “street kids” that occupy so much of the public media attention when it comes to youth homelessness. On the contrary, most youth homelessness is largely invisible and hidden from public attention.

According to Chris Chamberlain the author of *Counting the Homeless*, approximately 30 000 young people (aged 12 to 24) were in the secondary homeless population at the time of the last Census.

“Couch surfing” is one type of secondary homelessness defined in the Census. It refers to young people who stay temporarily with friends and family, often in unsafe or inappropriate circumstances. Other types of secondary homelessness experienced by young people include boarding and rooming houses, caravan parks and young people who are in temporary accommodation within the homelessness service system.

The above figure is probably an undercount as it is notoriously difficult to get an accurate picture of the exact numbers of young people who move in and out of temporary accommodation, who alternate between couch surfing, rooming or boarding house accommodation and the occasional visit to a refuge.

The April Edition of *Parity* will be devoted to discussing the situation of young people who are forced, by the absence of alternatives, to seek and use inappropriate and unacceptable types of accommodation.

### A Proposed Outline: Some Questions

- Who are the young people that make use of these inappropriate types of accommodation? What do we know about their numbers, their demographics and their pathways into homelessness?
- Young people experiencing homelessness may move through different forms of temporary accommodation. What are some of the typical pathways for young people forced to make use of these types of temporary accommodation?
- Should there be a role for boarding and rooming houses and caravan parks as an accommodation option for young people experiencing homelessness? If so, what role might that be?
- Is couch surfing a useful concept to describe this kind of homelessness? Does it serve to disguise or further hide a young person’s homelessness? What are some of the trajectories of couch surfers? Where do they go when this option is unavailable or untenable?
- At what point do young people experiencing homelessness seek assistance from the homelessness service system and what are their options once they enter the system?

- What is the role of mainstream (non-homelessness) services and programs in preventing young people entering these forms of temporary accommodation, supporting them while they are in it and helping them exit from it?
- How do we make sure hidden homelessness is identified and responded to by schools and other universal services so that young people get a chance to finish school, get a job and break the cycle of homelessness?
- What are the dangers and risks for young people in making use of these forms of temporary accommodation? Are these the same or different for young men and women? Are there different dangers and risks in the different kinds of temporary accommodation?
- What are the service and program responses to the needs of young homeless people in these forms of unsuitable temporary accommodation? What policies or policy frameworks underpin these?
- What are some of the pathways out of these types of accommodation into affordable and permanent housing? What kinds of housing options do young people in temporary accommodation actually want?
- What are some best practice examples of the kinds of supports that are available for those young people living in these kinds of unsuitable temporary accommodation?
- What should be the policy, program and service response to the situation of young people who are forced to make use of these unsuitable kinds of accommodation?
- Moving forward under White Paper reforms, what cross-sector responses exist to intervene early to prevent long-term homelessness for young people? What gaps exist and how could these be filled by cross-sector collaborations?
- Likewise, moving forward under White Paper and public and social housing reforms, what new housing options will be made available to young people experiencing homelessness and those at risk?
- How are particular cohorts of young people — for example, those leaving care, indigenous, CALD, those with disabilities, Same Sex Attracted and Transgender — currently being responded to and what new initiatives are being implemented to reduce the amount of time a young person remains in temporary accommodation?
- What are the practice challenges for specialist youth homelessness workers working with young people in highly unstable and possibly unsafe circumstances? How are support needs addressed with the young person in the face of this instability?
- Project *i* found that even though young people needed time out from family when there is conflict and violence in the home, they often wish to maintain some kind of connection with family, whoever that may be. How do young people in temporary forms of accommodation stay connected with family? How do support services assist in this process?

**NB: These are only some of the many issues that could be discussed and questions that might be asked. Please feel free to contribute on any issue connected to young people and homelessness not covered here.**

## Contributing to this edition *Parity*

### Deadline

All contributions are welcome and need to be submitted by **Friday, 23rd April, 2010**.

### Submissions

All contributions should be submitted as Word attachments to an email addressed to **parity@chp.org.au**

Contributions are usually between 900 words, (single page) and 1800 words (double page). If additional space is required please contact the *Parity* Editor. Please send submissions as a MS Word attachment to **parity@chp.org.au** or ring **(03) 9419 8699** to discuss. Images and artwork are welcome.

### Assistance

Feedback and input can be provided with drafts. If prospective contributors have any questions at all they should contact Noel Murray, *Parity* Editor at **parity@chp.org.au** or **(03) 9419 8699**.