

THE YOUTH AFFAIRS NETWORK OF QLD.  
AND  
THE SOUTH EAST QLD YOUTH ACCOMMODATION  
COALITION

INVITE YOU TO A FORUM ON

THE REPORT ON ASPECTS OF YOUTH  
HOMELESSNESS

TO BE HELD  
MONDAY SEPTEMBER 4, 1995

8.45am - 1.30pm at 4th floor, McWhirters Centre (Cnr. Wickham &  
Brunswick Sts. Valley)

**This forum is to clarify the implications of the report, identify areas which the field does and does not support and to look at strategies for pushing the implementation of the recommendations which are supported.**

**Agenda:**

- 8.45-10.45— Introduction by YANQ & SEQYAC  
— Talk by Alan Morris - Chairperson of the House of Reps. Standing Committee on Community Affairs  
—Talk by Dr. Chris Chamberlain - Co author of the National Census of Homeless Secondary School students
- 10.45-11am Morning Tea
- 11-12.15pm Small group discussion on particular aspects and recommendations of the report and strategies for implementing those parts which are supported by the field
- 12.15-1.30 Feedback from small groups and interactive discussion of where to from here, *discussion of strategies* to push implementation of recommendations
- 1.30pm A LIGHT LUNCH WILL BE SERVED

WE URGE YOU TO ATTEND AS THIS IS AN IMPORTANT REPORT WHICH  
CAN BE USED TO IMPROVE SERVICES FOR HOMELESS YOUNG PEOPLE

PLEASE RSVP TO SIMON DILLY AT SEQYAC on ☎ 3252 2555 or PENNY  
CARR at YANQ ☎ 3852 1800 BY FRIDAY AUGUST 25/8/95



# Overview of the *Report on Aspects of Youth Homelessness*

The Inquiry into Aspects of Youth Homelessness was advertised in December 1993. Responsibility for the Inquiry rested with the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs, which called for submissions shortly after this time. A second round of submissions was called for in September 1994, after the release of a Discussion Paper. The Committee conducted public hearings in all capital cities around the country as well as in Campbelltown, Cairns, Newcastle and Toowoomba.

The report concerns itself primarily with 12-18 year olds. It identifies the issue of youth homelessness as part of much broader issues such as the changing nature of society (the family; education and work) as well as policies and practices that have reduced government intervention in the lives of young people and families. It suggests that youth homelessness is a result, rather than a cause, of these social changes.

## Implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child

The report makes 129 recommendations. These include recommendations on how the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child can be integrated into Australian law in a nationally consistent way.

The Committee argues for a Child and Youth Bureau which would sit in the Attorney General's Department. The Bureau's work would include:

- monitoring State/Commonwealth protocols
- receiving annual reports from State/Territories Health portfolios and measuring achievements against mental health objectives identified for children and young people
- incorporating the Convention on the Rights of the Child into Commonwealth and State/Territory legislation
- monitoring and auditing Australia's compliance with CROC

The report also recommends that the Council of Australian Governments

(COAG) be the vehicle for consultation between State/Territory and Commonwealth governments in relation to dealing with Australia's compliance with CROC.

## Income support

Other significant recommendations relate to income support. The report argues for a single, integrated assessment system that can be accessed through either the Department of Social Security or the Department of Employment, Education and Training. It also urges consistency in the assessment process and a common training program for social workers in both departments who will be responsible for assessments.

Some recommendations are designed to redress anomalies which exist between the DSS and DEET. They include a recommendation for DEET to adopt exemption provisions for young people on AUSTUDY similar to those available to young people receiving Young Homeless Allowance (now the independent rate of Youth Training Allowance) who, due to exceptional personal circumstances, sometimes have difficulty meeting the activity test's requirements.

The Committee recommends that young people on either form of benefit at the homeless rate be subject to continuous review. This would initially be to set a case plan, which could be developed in conjunction with the relevant State welfare departments and community organisations.

## Dissenting report

Most of the report was supported by the entire Committee. However, four of the Committee's 18 members issued a four-page dissenting report, disagreeing with some parts of the main report. They did not support the following statements:

- ♦ the Committee supports that the available evidence on the extent of youth homelessness does not support the proposition allowance are easy to obtain (2.58, p 36)
- ♦ the Committee concludes that there

are more beneficiaries (of "homeless" benefits) because the numbers of homeless youth has increased (2.55, p 35) and

- ♦ the Committee doesn't support that the allowance itself acts as an incentive to leave home (5.127, p 131)

They disagreed with these conclusions on the grounds that comprehensive data was not available on why young people leave home.

The four dissenting members also did not agree with recommendations that all State/Territory governments should be informed of their obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and that the principles of the Convention should be incorporated into policy and operational procedures. Their disagreement here was based on what they described as failure to reach a balance over the rights of parents and children, where serious allegations of physical and/or sexual violence are made against a parent or parents.

Nor did they agree with the main report that State and Territory governments should allow gay and lesbian couples or individuals to accommodate young people who leave home because of issues about their sexuality and parent's inability to accept the young people. The dissenters argue that this issue should be resolved by State/Territory governments.

Finally, they disagreed that 'homelessness' benefits should be administered by two Departments. The dissenters hold the view that involving as few departments as possible would reduce anomalies and possibly save on administrative costs.

Overall, the Report is thoroughly researched and well worth reading. It reports and makes recommendations on many more issues than those discussed here. Unfortunately, however, it fails to address one of the most important issues of all: the inadequate levels of income support currently available to homeless young people.

Penny Carr  
Policy and Research Officer  
YANQ

## **FEEDBACK FORM**

If you are unable to attend the forum but wish to have your comments recorded about the Inquiry Recommendations please use the following space.

This information will be used to give feedback to those present, and have input into any recommendations which might result from the forum.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### CHAPTER 2

#### Background to and Definitions of Youth Homelessness

1. The Committee recommends that, given current arrangements, the Departments of Social Security and Employment, Education and Training establish a common client information data system to ensure better comparability and greater cohesiveness in analysing Commonwealth income support payments to young homeless people. (para 2.39)

### CHAPTER 5

#### Current Income Support Arrangements for Young Homeless People - The Administrative Framework

2. The Committee recommends that the government undertake a review of the policy and administration of income support payments to young homeless people with the view to establishing a single integrated assessment system which can be accessed through either the Department of Social Security and/or the Department of Employment, Education and Training. (para 5.19)

3. The Committee recommends that the Department of Social Security and the Department of Employment, Education and Training conduct a Post Implementation Review on the operation and effectiveness of the common eligibility criteria for the homeless rate of payment after 12 months of implementation. Included in the PIR should be a consultation held between the two departments and peak non-

government youth and welfare organisations, parent groups and some locally based organisations to determine to extent to which the revised eligibility criteria adequately respond to the needs of young homeless people, whether they are in full time training, education or looking for work. This report is to be made available to the public. (para 5.31)

4. The Committee recommends that the Departments of Employment, Education and Training and Social Security establish the same quality client service standards for young people and their families in the assessment of applications for the homeless rate of payment. The Committee considers it essential that the Commonwealth has a common process and identical standards of service. At a minimum this should include:

- . the young person being interviewed by a social worker on the day of claim;
- . consistency in the way contact is made with the parent/guardian, taking account of privacy requirements;
- . in rural or remote communities, a mutual referral arrangement to social workers in either department, depending on the availability of social workers;
- . both departments entering into a contracting arrangement which would allow social workers from either department to undertake the assessment for the homeless rate of payment; and
- . the establishment of common training programs for social workers employed by both departments. This should include: all aspects of a common assessment procedure; guidelines relating to contact with parents and State and Territory welfare authorities;

Commonwealth/State/Territory Protocol arrangements;  
professional practice, standards and accountability issues.  
(para 5.45)

5. The Committee recommends that the Department of Social Security and the Department of Employment, Education and Training establish equivalent criteria for homeless youth payments, removing existing anomalies in conditions applying to income and assets testing.  
(para 5.50)

6. The Committee recommends that young people receiving AUSTUDY at the homeless rate should be eligible for an Educational Allowance to assist with the additional costs of education. (para 5.56)

7. The Committee recommends that a review be undertaken into the policy and procedures of AUSTUDY overpayments to ensure that guidelines are in place which take into account the needs and circumstances of unsupported young homeless people. (para 5.63)

8. The Committee recommends that the Department of Employment, Education and Training adopt similar exemption provisions for young people receiving AUSTUDY as is available to young people on YTA who, due to exceptional personal circumstances, are having difficulties at some point in meeting the requirements of the activity test. (The YTA exemption provisions are outlined in the Guide to the Administration of the Social Security Act Part B: Activity Test Procedures for activity test exemptions in special circumstances)  
(para 5.64)

9. The Committee recommends that DEET ensure that a thorough assessment of the circumstances of a young person receiving the homeless rate of payment be undertaken before a decision to suspend or cancel a payment is made. DEET must ensure that a

professional social work assessment is carried out so that additional support services are provided, if necessary. (para 5.65)

10. The Committee recommends that the current guidelines used by the Department of Social Security when considering breaches and penalties for young homeless people be applied to the Youth Training Allowance. (para 5.71)

11. The Committee recommends that the Department of Social Security undertake a Post-Implementation Review of Payments to Third Parties for young people receiving the homeless rate of YTA, Sickness Benefit or Special Benefit after 12 months. This review should include the number of nominee arrangements, details of the nominee and an assessment of the adequacy of these arrangements for the client group. (para 5.91)

12. The Committee recommends that the Departments of Social Security and Employment, Education and Training develop a review mechanism and schedule for homeless payments to young people. These reviews should be undertaken by social workers within the departments and should provide a comprehensive assessment of family and personal circumstances. (para 5.101)

13. The Committee recommends that both the Independent YTA at the Homeless Rate and AUSTUDY at the Student Homeless Rate be subject to an initial two week review and assessment followed by continuous six week assessments of personal and family circumstances. A central feature of this payment will be the development of a comprehensive case work plan which will provide the basis for the review. The case work plan, which could be undertaken in conjunction with State welfare departments and relevant community organisations, will cover the following areas:

- a) assessment of accommodation needs and referral, where appropriate;
- b) assessment of current education, training and workforce status and the development of an appropriate long term plan to access one of these options;
- c) assessment of the appropriateness of individual counselling and/or family mediation and family therapy; and
- d) referrals to relevant specialist services such as personal counselling, family mediation and therapy, health, drug and alcohol counselling.

The outcomes of this case work plan must be reviewed as part of the broader review of the continuing entitlement to the payment. (para 5.102)

14. The Committee recommends that the Departments of Social Security and Employment, Education and Training undertake a review of the current definition and operation of the continuous support criterion for eligibility of payments at the homeless rate and establish one common and equitable approach. (para 5.114)

15. The Committee recommends that the Department of Social Security and the Department of Employment, Education and Training develop methods and procedures around continuous support which build on family support and encourages reconciliation. (para 5.118)

16. The Committee recommends that the assessment for homelessness be made separately from the provision of continuous support. The extent to which continuous support provided by parents excludes payment of income support at the homeless rate will be part

of the recommendation made by the social worker following a thorough assessment of the personal and family circumstances. (para 5.119)

17. The Committee recommends that the word 'homeless' be replaced by 'supported' because of the lack of clarity and interpretation of the term 'homeless' within the community. The current definition of 'homeless' and the eligibility criteria for the supported rate of the Youth Training Allowance and for AUSTUDY will remain the same. (para 5.124)

18. The Committee recommends that the payment available to young people who are unable to live at home, following assessment of their family and personal circumstances, be called the Independent Youth Training Allowance at the 'Supported' Rate, or AUSTUDY at the 'Supported' Rate. (para 5.125)

## CHAPTER 6

### The Housing Needs of Homeless Youth

19. The Committee recommends that the Department of Housing and Regional Development review the appropriateness of placements of State Wards and young people under 16 years of age in SAAP services with State and Territory governments, as well as with community service providers. (para 6.25)

20. The Committee recommends that the Department of Housing and Regional Development, in conjunction with State and Territory governments, develop a new SAAP category which provides specific supported and supervised accommodation services for young people under 17 years in acknowledgment of the reality that young people of this age are being placed in crisis, medium and long term accommodation under SAAP. (para 6.27)

21. The Committee recommends that the Department of Housing and Regional Development and the State and Territory governments undertake to bring in legislative change which allows for the provision of specific accommodation services, with supervised support, for young people under 17 years of age. **(para 6.28)**

22. The Committee recommends that each State and Territory establish a single point of contact for all its accommodation services for young people, similar to the service operating in South Australia. **(para 6.44)**

23. The Committee recommends that the Department of Housing and Regional Development, together with State and Territory governments, give consideration to developing balanced levels of supply of crisis, medium and long term supported accommodation. **(para 6.45)**

24. The Committee recommends that accommodation services for young people be established in local communities which will allow young people to maintain their links with school and friends as well as providing a greater opportunity for family contact and reconciliation. **(para 6.46)**

25. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth and State/Territory governments actively work towards the establishment of an appropriate award for SAAP workers which provides for minimum standards, consistency in skills and qualifications required of people working in the field and for the establishment of adequate career paths and training programs. **(para 6.67)**

26. The Committee recommends that funding levels to SAAP services be set at a level which ensures that adequate training programs and staff supervision arrangements are provided as an integral part of the SAAP service structure. **(para 6.68)**

27. The Committee recommends that supervisory and support structures within SAAP and other youth services establish clear lines of accountability for all workers within the services. (para 6.69)

28. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth and States urgently develop appropriate training programs for SAAP workers to ensure staff in these services have the skills to undertake the broader case management tasks identified through the new SAAP agreement. (para 6.70)

29. The Committee recommends that there be a greater focus in all Commonwealth and State and Territory programs on developing integrated youth and family services so as to ensure a more multi-disciplinary approach to the issues surrounding family breakdown and youth homelessness. (para 6.71)

30. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth and States, together with the relevant non-government organisations, develop strategies to address the low morale of staff working within the non-government youth and accommodation field. (para 6.72)

31. The Committee recommends that the Department of Housing and Regional Development identify more clearly the nature and scope of case management and assessment within SAAP. (para 6.85)

32. The Committee recommends that the Department of Housing and Regional Development identify, with State and Territory governments and community service providers, the skills required by workers in SAAP youth services to undertake case management functions. (para 6.86)

33. The Committee recommends that there be a major review to determine the appropriateness of the location of JPET within the



Department of Housing and Regional Development, to ensure that duplication and fragmentation of services to homeless unemployed people is not compounded. (para 6.91)

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **Family Mediation and Counselling Services within the Attorney-General's Department**

34. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments immediately establish funding arrangements for the extension of Adolescent and Family Therapy and Mediation Services in a national program as a preventive measure for young people leaving home prematurely. (para 7.19)

35. The Committee recommends that targets be established for ensuring the establishment of adequate coverage of mediation and family therapy services in all States and Territories within the next 3 years. (para 7.20)

36. The Committee recommends that any additional DSS or DEET funding for mediation services, be directed to further developing the existing network of mediation services. (para 7.31)

37. The Committee recommends that adolescent and family mediation/therapy must remain a voluntary process to ensure that long term and enduring outcomes are achieved for young people and their families. (para 7.32)

38. The Committee recommends that mediation services be provided by government departments other than the Department of Social Security or the Department of Employment, Education and

Training, to ensure neutrality and credibility of the services and the independence of the workers. (para 7.33)

39. The Committee recommends that additional resources be provided to relevant community agencies with expertise in adolescent/family mediation and family therapy to develop models of practice which will be inclusive of the needs of:

- . Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families;
- . Non-English speaking background young people and their families;
- . Poorer and less articulate young people and their families; and
- . Young people and their families who live in isolated and more remote communities in Australia. (para 7.39)

40. The Committee recommends that appropriate officers of the Family Court be represented on all interdepartmental committees involved in the development of initiatives in the area of child/youth and family policy. (para 7.55)

41. The Committee recommends that the Family Court be given additional resources to extend its counselling services to parents and adolescents, where difficulties in relationships are identified and to provide educational courses for parents and adolescents, where families are being reconstituted. (para 7.56)

42. The Committee recommends that the Family Court develop protocols with other key agencies to exchange relevant information about 'at risk' families. (para 7.57)

## CHAPTER 8

### Linking Youth and Family Policy

43. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments develop a national family policy which includes the Family Support Services Program. **(para 8.23)**

44. The Committee recommends that this national family policy should ensure that there is specific Federal assistance to family support services. Such services should include:

- (1) relationship counselling;
- (2) adolescent and family mediation;
- (3) health and mental health specifically targeted at families with adolescent children;
- (4) information and advocacy; and
- (5) home/school liaison. **(para 8.24)**

45. The Committee recommends that, where the Commonwealth provides funding to State and Territory governments for family support services, monitoring processes including appropriate outcome indicators be established and annual progress reports be provided to the new Child and Youth Bureau established within the Attorney-General's Department. **(para 8.25)**

46. The Committee recommends that specific programs aimed at meeting the needs of young people be located, where appropriate, with mainstream family agencies. **(para 8.52)**

47. The Committee recommends that training courses be developed for all workers responsible for families and young people to improve skills in assessment, conflict resolution and mediation. (para 8.53)

48. The Committee recommends that the Department of Social Security resume responsibility for youth income support policy, in order to integrate it with the broader family income support responsibilities. (para 8.63)

49. The Committee recommends that the Department of Social Security urgently review the impact of a range of income support measures relating to income and assets testing, and eligibility criteria for families and young people under the age of 18 years. The review should advise the government whether there are any disincentives operating to discourage families from supporting their children. (para 8.64)

50. The Committee recommends that the Department of Social Security and the Department of Employment, Education and Training develop a unified approach to youth income support eligibility, as it relates to family income and assets testing arrangements. (para 8.65)

## **CHAPTER 9**

### **The Care, Support and Protection of Young People - The Role of the Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments**

51. The Committee recommends that the Department of Housing and Regional Development and State/Territory governments, together with the non-government sector, undertake an urgent review of current care options for young adolescents. This recommendation should be implemented in conjunction with recommendations 6.25, 6.27

and 6.28 relating to SAAP Pilots for under 17 year olds in Chapter 6.  
(para 9.66)

52. The Committee recommends that a minimum payment to foster carers be developed based on the work done by the Institute of Family Studies on the costs of children and that all State/Territory governments move towards a common standard minimum payment.  
(para 9.75)

53. The Committee recommends that relatives caring for children should not be economically discriminated against and should receive the same financial support as other carers. (para 9.77)

54. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth government, in conjunction with the States/Territories and relevant non-government agencies, examine the current practices relating to foster payments and income support payments to young people.  
(para 9.78)

55. The Committee recommends that the Departments of Social Security and Employment, Education and Training, together with the States and Territories, examine the way in which Commonwealth income support payments and State/Territory foster payments relate, to ensure there are no disincentives or hardships created for foster carers. (para 9.81)

56. The Committee reiterates Recommendation 9.8 made by the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade in its report entitled *A Review of Australia's Efforts to Promote and Protect Human Rights, November 1994*, which relates to the protection of the rights of children in Australia and recommends that the Australian Government introduce legislation which incorporates the Convention on

the Rights of the Child into domestic law. A timeframe for introduction of the legislation should be provided. (para 9.104)

57. The Committee recommends that complementary legislation on the care and protection of children up to the age of 17 years be established by the Commonwealth government in cooperation with the State/Territory governments and the non-government sector. (para 9.105)

58. The Committee recommends that national practice standards and uniform administrative arrangements be established in the area of child protection and family support services. (para 9.106)

59. The Committee recommends that all Commonwealth Departments and State/Territory governments be informed of their obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to safeguard the rights of the child and that the principles of the Convention be incorporated into policy and operational guidelines. (para 9.107)

## CHAPTER 10

### Education and Intervention

60. The Committee recommends that the current Commonwealth and State/Territory government Protocol for the Care and Support of Young People under 16 years, include an obligation by each State and Territory to provide appropriate education services. This obligation should include a requirement to report specifically on the educational requirements of young people at risk of abuse and/or neglect. (Para 10.15)

61. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth government, in conjunction with the States and Territories, report to the Parliament by the end of 1996 on:

- 1) the number of young people who fail to progress to secondary school;
- 2) the reasons why these young people fail to enter secondary education;
- 3) the number of young people who leave school before the compulsory school leaving age;
- 4) the reasons why these young people do not complete the years of compulsory schooling; and
- 5) the alternatives provided to young people of compulsory school age who are not attending school. (para 10.23)

62. The Committee recommends that in the auditing of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, an examination should be made about whether current practices within State/Territory education departments are excluding young people from school. (para 10.44)

63. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government, in conjunction with State and Territory governments, provide a State by State summary of all the specific programs and educational facilities available for young people of school leaving age who are not able to participate in traditional forms of schooling. (para 10.45)

64. The Committee recommends that State and Territory governments provide details of the number of young people under

school leaving age who are involved in various forms of alternative education. (para 10.46)

65. The Committee recommends that the Department of Employment, Education and Training immediately take steps to include the payment of AUSTUDY to those young people under school leaving age, who have been assessed as meeting the 'homeless' criteria. This assessment will be subject to the same eligibility provisions currently applying to Special Benefit. Adequate resources should be made available to DEET, to ensure that professional assessment and follow up support services are available. Under the Protocol, these should only be cases referred back from the States and should constitute a small number of young people. (para 10.67)

66. The Committee recommends that the STAR program be broadened and adequately funded to enable greater attention to be paid to the needs of individual young people who are at risk of leaving school due to family breakdown and homelessness. Funds from the STAR program should be made available to individual schools to meet a range of needs of individual students, as well as for program initiatives within schools. (para 10.85)

67. The Committee recommends that funds be made available for schools and community organisations to develop appropriate education facilities and programs for young people of school age, who require alternative education opportunities. (para 10.86)

68. The Committee recommends that accountability mechanisms for the funds provided under the STAR program be established to require State/Territory education departments to demonstrate that the program specifically targets children identified at risk, particularly those referred to the State/Territory welfare department through the Protocol. (para 10.87)



69. The Committee recommends that schools become a focal point for early intervention and that Commonwealth and State/Territory governments undertake a full review of pastoral care and student welfare support services within primary and secondary schools with a view to:

- 1) establishing national standards for determining the ratio of counsellors to students and to schools;
- 2) identifying those schools which require substantial pastoral care and specialist counselling and resources to support disadvantaged families and young people;
- 3) establishing national qualification requirements for specialist support staff in schools;
- 4) developing a greater partnership between schools and local community services in responding to the problems identified within schools; and
- 5) ensuring primary schools are given adequate access to counselling and specialist support staff in recognition of the value of prevention. (para 10.101)

## **CHAPTER 11**

### **Parental Roles and Responsibilities**

70. The Committee recommends that in cases where allegations of abuse are made about a family member/s as part of an application for a payment from the Commonwealth at the homeless rate, and where these allegations are so serious that parents/guardians are not contacted, a referral must be made to the appropriate State/Territory

welfare department. This would require a full protective investigation by the relevant child protection service and would apply to all young people up to the age of 18 years. The current Protocol outlines the procedures to be followed for referrals under these circumstances. (para 11.31)

71. The Committee recommends that the National Child Protection Council address the extent to which the current child protection legislation in the States and Territories provides parents with an opportunity to address claims made against them. (para 11.32)

72. The Committee recommends that State Welfare Ministers monitor closely and report on the following aspects of the Commonwealth and State/Territory Protocol on the Care of Young People:

- 1) the number of 'at risk assessments' acted on by the State/Territory welfare departments following referrals from the Commonwealth Departments of Social Security and Employment, Education and Training; and
- 2) the outcomes of these 'at risk assessments', including parental contact, substantiation of allegations, and details of care and support provided to the family and/or the young person. (para 11.35)

73. The Committee recommends that the monitoring of the Commonwealth and State/Territory Protocol include information on the following:

- 1) the number of requests from parents for information about their children;

- 2) departmental responses to this request;
- 3) the number of disclosures made to parents where young people have given their consent;
- 4) the number of disclosures to parents made under the public interest provisions where young people had not given their consent; and
- 5) information not disclosed due to concerns about the safety of the young person. **(para 11.38)**

74. The Committee recommends that the auditing of the Protocol be undertaken by the Child and Youth Bureau in Attorney General's Department, following its establishment. **(para 11.39)**

75. The Committee recommends that the National Child Protection Council immediately initiate a national review, involving State/Territory governments and non-government welfare agencies, of the adequacy of child protection practices in Australia, in terms of the extent to which the broader family welfare responsibilities, as well as the investigatory role, are being met. **(para 11.43)**

76. The Committee recommends that requests for information made to the Departments of Social Security and Employment, Education and Training by parents about their children under the Disallowable Instrument be audited by the Child and Youth Bureau. This should include:

- 1) the number of requests from parents for information about their children;
- 2) departmental responses to requests;

- 3) the number of disclosures made to parents where young people have given their consent;
- 4) the number of disclosures to parents made under the public interest provisions where young people had not given their consent; and
- 5) information not disclosed due to concerns about the safety of the young person. (para 11.54)

## CHAPTER 12

### Mental Illness and Youth Homelessness

77. The Committee recommends that training resources be made available to all front line youth and family workers in government and non-government agencies, to improve their knowledge and skills in the area of mental illness and young people. (para 12.33)

78. The Committee recommends that national standards for competencies for all youth workers and family support workers include knowledge and skills in recognising signs of mental disturbance, as well as alcohol and drug abuse among young people. (para 12.34)

79. The Committee recommends that the National Strategy on Mental Health urgently address the mental health needs of children and young people by redressing the current inequities in mental health funding, which substantially disadvantages children and young people in their access to services and facilities. (para 12.47)

80. The Committee recommends that a separate National Strategy on Mental Health be developed for children and adolescents,

in order to clearly identify the objectives, goals and benchmarks established for this group. **(para 12.48)**

81. The Committee recommends that a national benchmark be established, to stipulate the percentage of the mental health budget which will be spent on mental health services and facilities specifically for children and young people by Commonwealth and State/Territory governments. **(para 12.51)**

82. The Committee recommends that each State and Territory report annually to the Child and Youth Bureau on achievements against the mental health objectives identified for children and adolescents. **(para 12.52)**

83. The Committee recommends that urgent attention be given to developing the NHMRC's work on the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention. **(para 12.53)**

84. The Committee recommends that all relevant Commonwealth departments address the mental health issues of youth homelessness in their policy and program development. **(para 12.69)**

85. The Committee recommends that the Department of Human Service and Health ensure that all other Commonwealth departments providing services to young people are represented on any National Mental Health Policy group focussing on young people. **(para 12.70)**

86. The Committee recommends that the Department of Housing and Regional Development and the Department of Human Services and Health urgently consider and report on:

- 1) the appropriateness of SAAP services for young people with diagnosed mental illnesses;

- 2) the development of specialist residential services for young people with mental illness and/or challenging behaviour;
- 3) the knowledge, skills and training required of staff to work with such young people;
- 4) developing appropriate skills among SAAP workers to more effectively assess and refer young people who may require mental health services; and
- 5) the appropriateness of case management for these young people within the SAAP environment. (para 12.71)

87. The Committee recommends that Commonwealth and State/Territory funds be made available to establish mental health outreach teams in rural and remote communities. (para 12.73)

88. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth, in conjunction with the States and Territories, develop a strategy to attract and retain qualified child and adolescent psychiatrists, both in urban and rural areas in Australia. (para 12.78)

89. The Committee recommends that funds be made available, from the mental health budget, for the immediate establishment of early psychosis units for young people in each capital city in the first instance. This is to be accompanied by a full evaluation of the effectiveness of such services as early intervention models. (para 12.84)

90. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth government ensure that adequate funding is provided for the Australian Adolescent Mental Health Surveillance, in order that Australia establishes a data base on the mental health of adolescents which will inform public policy and budget decisions. (para 12.90)

91. The Committee recommends that research funds be made available to explore the relationship between youth homelessness and mental illness. **(para 12.91)**

## **CHAPTER 13**

### **Special Needs Groups**

92. The Committee recommends that the major Commonwealth Departments involved in providing specific services to young people and families (the Departments of Social Security, Employment, Education and Training, Attorney-General's, Human Services and Health and Housing and Regional Development) develop an integrated model of service delivery for rural and remote communities. **(para 13.19)**

93. The Committee recommends that the Departments of Social Security and Employment, Education and Training take immediate steps to ensure that local offices of Social Security and the Commonwealth Employment Service in remote and rural communities are able to receive and assess all claims for income support at the homeless rate made by young people. **(para 13.20)**

94. The Committee recommends that the Department of Social Security ensure that all assessments of Young Homeless Allowance include an examination of existing extended family networks of young people in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. **(para 13.34)**

95. The Committee recommends that the Department of Social Security thoroughly review the entitlements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family members, including extended family members, who are caring for a young person, to ensure they are receiving their full income support entitlements. **(para 13.35)**

96. The Committee recommends that the Departments of Social Security and Employment, Education and Training work closely with local Aboriginal organisations and communities to develop appropriate models of service delivery for young Aboriginal people claiming the homeless rate of income support. (para 13.36)

97. The Committee recommends that Departments of Social Security and Employment, Education and Training ensure that all officers involved in the assessment of eligibility for the Young Homeless Allowance and AUSTUDY at the Student Homeless Rate receive adequate training, taking into account cross-cultural sensitivity, in the relevance of family structures and relationships within Aboriginal communities. (para 13.37)

98. The Committee recommends that the Departments of Social Security and Employment, Education and Training consult with ATSIC in determining the appropriateness of the definition of 'homelessness' used in determining eligibility for payments of income support for young people from within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. (para 13.38)

99. The Committee recommends that the National Mental Health Strategy specifically address the issue of increasing access of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and young people to relevant psychiatric services. (para 13.48)

100. The Committee recommends that the Attorney General's Department be allocated additional funding to develop a culturally appropriate model of adolescent and family mediation, in consultation with relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. (para 13.54)



101. The Committee recommends that additional funds be provided to the Attorney-General's Department to develop culturally appropriate models of adolescent and family mediation for families and young people from non-English speaking backgrounds. These service models are to be developed in full consultation with relevant ethnic organisations. **(para 13.73)**

102. The Committee recommends that Commonwealth departments ensure that all programs providing services to families and children establish models of practice which are responsive to the cultural differences of families from non-English speaking backgrounds. **(para 13.76)**

103. The Committee recommends that the relevant Commonwealth departments involved in providing a range of services to young people who become homeless undertake joint research into youth homelessness and family breakdown amongst young refugees. This research is to be done in consultation with the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia. **(para 13.83)**

104. The Committee recommends that all Commonwealth departments involved in the provision of services to young homeless people ensure that data is collected on the number of young people from non-English speaking backgrounds who are using the services. **(para 13.84)**

105. The Committee recommends that all Commonwealth departments identify ways in which programs and services for young people and their families are accessible and culturally appropriate to families and young people from non-English speaking backgrounds. **(para 13.85)**

106. The Committee recommends that relevant Commonwealth Departments allocate funds for the establishment of ethno-specific services for young people and their families. These services should be evaluated and reported on in Departmental Access and Equity Plans. (para 13.86)

107. The Committee recommends that research funds be made available to gather data on the extent to which a young person's sexuality has contributed to family breakdown and to eventual homelessness. (para 13.98)

108. The Committee recommends that at least one specialist SAAP service be established in major capital cities for young people who identify as gay or lesbian. (para 13.99)

109. The Committee recommends that all SAAP services provide training to staff on issues relating to the sexuality of young people. (para 13.107)

110. The Committee recommends that issues associated with the safety of young people who identify as gay or lesbian be addressed by SAAP services. (para 13.108)

111. The Committee recommends that adolescent mediation and family therapy services ensure that staff have the necessary training and skills to be able to work effectively with families in the area of young people's sexuality. (para 13.109)

## CHAPTER 14

### A Structural Analysis of Youth Policy

112. The Committee recommends that a Child and Youth Bureau be established within the Attorney-General's Department to commence the work associated with incorporating the Convention on the Rights of the Child into Commonwealth and State/Territory laws. (para 14.18)

113. The Committee recommends that this National Child and Youth Bureau monitor and audit Australia's compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. (para 14.19)

114. The Committee recommends that the National Child and Youth Bureau oversee legislative, policy and program initiatives in the area of youth and family policy across the range of relevant departments to determine the extent of their compatibility with the principles and obligations of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. (para 14.21)

115. The Committee recommends that the Attorney-General report regularly to the Prime Minister on Australia's performance in meeting its obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This reporting should focus on the implications for the development and coordination of youth and family policy at the Commonwealth level, as well as clarifying the relationships and responsibilities between Commonwealth and State/Territory governments for children and families. (para 14.22)

116. The Committee recommends that The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) become the vehicle for consultation between Commonwealth and State/Territory governments in relation to dealing with aspects of Australia's performance identified as a result of the auditing of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. (para 14.23)

117. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government consult with State and Territory governments to determine ways of monitoring State and Territory governments' obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. (para 14.24)

118. The Committee recommends that relevant Commonwealth Departments incorporate and articulate the principles of the UN Convention of the Rights on the Child in corporate mission statements within Portfolio Budget Statements. (para 14.25)

119. The Committee recommends that relevant Commonwealth Departments, through their annual reports, report on the extent to which particular programs are meeting the obligations towards children, young people and families as identified in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. (para 14.26)

120. The Committee recommends that relevant Commonwealth Departments, through their annual reports also report on the policies and programs within their portfolio with a focus on prevention and early intervention in the areas of child and family support services, including the percentage of Departmental budgets allocated for this purpose. (para 14.27)

121. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government, in conjunction with the States and Territories and non-government agencies, develop national standards to ensure appropriate levels of accountability by government for the quality and outcome of child and family welfare services which are privatised or contracted out. (para 14.36)

122. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments ensure that joint consultative committees be established at the State level, consisting of key

departments at both levels of government who have responsibility for services for families and children. (para 14.39)

123. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments initiate the development of similar models of coordination and integration of youth services to that currently operating in the Hunter Region. (para 14.47)

124. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments allocate resources to implement and maintain effective regional coordination models in the longer term. (para 14.48)

125. The Committee recommends that an independent evaluation be undertaken of the coordination and integration strategies to establish a national model of 'best practice' for the provision of services to disadvantaged young people. This should include at least, the DSS Youth Service Units, the Youth Access Centres, relevant State/Territory and regional strategies. (para 14.57)

126. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments undertake a national consultation with the non-government sector to identify 'best practice' models for the coordination and delivery of accessible services to young people. (para 14.58)

127. The Committee recommends that the evaluation of all Commonwealth government pilot projects focussing on coordination and integration of services include an assessment of the extent to which the aims and outcomes compare with other similar projects. (para 14.59)

128. The Committee recommends that all Commonwealth departments involved in providing coordination mechanisms for service delivery to young people develop consistent objective performance criteria for evaluation. (para 14.60)

129. The Committee recommends that no further funding be allocated for pilot projects in the area of coordination of youth services until a full evaluation of current models has been undertaken. (para 14.61)



*REPORT ON ASPECTS OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS*

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The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs tabled its report on aspects of youth homelessness on 5 June 1995.

This is the first time the Federal Parliament has, in such a comprehensive way, conducted a national inquiry which accurately documents the extent of the problem, details the contributing factors leading to youth homelessness and, in the final chapter of its report, recommends a restructuring of Federal/State machinery to ensure better support and service delivery to this vulnerable group in the Australian community.

The Committee, in its 376 page report, has made 129 recommendations which can broadly be divided into three main categories. These are: a) procedural and administrative - relating to income support and other departmental arrangements, including improved data collection; b) measures dealing with prevention and early intervention at the Federal and State levels, also involving the community sector; and c) a structural realignment of responsibilities which provides a clearer focus for youth matters at the Federal level and also confers greater obligations and involvement by State governments for the support and protection of children at risk.

Chapter 14, which deals with the coordination of youth policy at the Federal and State levels, makes proposals for change which aim to improve the fragmented nature of present arrangements and oblige all responsible ministers to elevate youth on the policy agenda and thereby to assume a higher priority for all governments. This can be achieved by creating a Child and Youth Bureau within the portfolio of the Attorney-General's Department, thus enabling the Department which has responsibility for auditing Australia's compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child at the Federal and State levels to also oversee and coordinate youth policy at the Federal level across all executive departments.

This Child and Youth Bureau would report directly to the Prime Minister, thus invoking the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and ensuring that youth issues are included in discussions between the Prime Minister and State Premiers at their regular meetings. This would give youth policy a priority which it does not have at present.

It is important to recognise that, while the Committee's proposals have been directed to the appropriate ministers, it is also necessary for all those working with families and the youth of Australia to examine the evidence gathered by the Committee and to evaluate the merits of the report's recommendations. Ultimately, the test of the report's worth will be the extent to which it receives support from governments, the community and those most affected by this very complex and distressing problem.



## MEDIA RELEASE

### REPORT ON ASPECTS OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

The Inquiry into Aspects of Youth Homelessness commenced by the House of Representatives 18 months ago has concluded and the Committee's report was tabled in Parliament today by the Chair of the Committee, Mr Allan Morris, Federal Member for Newcastle.

The Report contains 129 recommendations and its findings cover a wide range of State and Federal Government issues. It has generated substantial public interest as one of the most important social problem facing Australia today.

The Report essentially finds that the best place for our youth to grow is within their families and that while *The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* establishes that children do have rights, it is pertinent to note the Convention also clearly states that so do families.

"I believe that State Governments have abdicated their responsibilities. That in the process of deinstitutionalisation, foster and substitute care has received scant attention resulting in a shift of income support for homeless youth to a Commonwealth benefit." Mr Morris said.

"This report also concludes that the Youth Homeless Allowance is *not* an incentive to leave home and there are more children suffering homelessness than receiving the allowance."

At best estimates in May 1994, 21,000 young people between the ages of 12 and 18 were suffering homelessness and a further 9,000 were living independently but were requiring support. However at the same time less than 20,000 in the same age group were in receipt of the Homeless Allowance.

"This should not be surprising given that in 1992-1993 neglect and abuse was substantiated against almost 22,000 young Australians. It is also important to note that some 60% of recipients were from single or blended families." Mr Morris concluded.

The Report recommends that a Bureau of Youth and Child Affairs be established in a move towards a review of state and commonwealth policy to ensure that governments are in unison with the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

A main thrust of the Report is that increased support for young people and their families be available at the earliest signs of the kind of trauma that is likely to lead to youth homelessness.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CALL ALLAN MORRIS ON (06) 277 4767