

**OUR
HOMELESS
CHILDREN**

**REPORT OF THE
NATIONAL INQUIRY INTO
HOMELESS CHILDREN**

**HUMAN RIGHTS AND
EQUAL OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION**

Australian Government Publishing Service
Canberra 1989

NOTES

1. This Report frequently quotes from written submissions to the Inquiry. These are referred to by the letter 'S' and a number. Particulars of a quoted submission can be found in Appendix B.
2. Quotes from the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child are exactly as they appear in the Declaration adopted in 1959. The United Nations has since adopted a policy of using gender neutral language in official texts. This policy is reflected in the new Convention on the Rights of the Child presently being concluded.

ISBN No: 0 644 08597 5

Typeset by MacQuade's Bureau Pty Limited.

Printed by M.A.P.S. Litho Pty. Limited.

Photograph used in cover design courtesy of John Fairfax & Sons Limited.

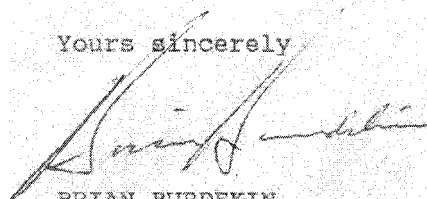
10 February 1989

The Hon. L.F. Bowen MP
Deputy Prime Minister & Attorney General
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Attorney

It is with deep concern that we present the Report of our National Inquiry into Homeless Children and Young People. On behalf of the many thousands of children affected, we respectfully request that the Government give urgent consideration to the Report and to the recommendations we have made.

Yours sincerely



BRIAN BURDEKIN
Federal Human Rights Commissioner
(Chairman of the Inquiry)



JAN CARTER
Director
Social Policy & Research Centre
Brotherhood of St Laurence



FATHER WALLY DETHLEFS

PREFACE

This Report has been made possible by the many thoughtful written and oral submissions received from members of the public, community organisations, homeless children, and Federal, State and Territory governments. The problems which it identifies require responses not only from governments, but from our communities and, indeed, each of us as individuals. In compiling the Report, we found a major difficulty to be the lack of research in Australia on the plight of homeless people in general, and homeless children in particular. We also found many dedicated individuals and organisations working with very little information and very few resources — often unaware of developments elsewhere in Australia that could have assisted their efforts. We have tried, therefore, within the limits of our resources, to include material that will give the Report some continuing value as a reference for those working with homeless children.

We have attempted to take account of all relevant reports and studies previously made by government and non-government bodies. We record here our appreciation for the light which these have thrown on our efforts. We also wish to place on record our appreciation to staff of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission for their dedication, professionalism and sheer hard work. Many contributed but we wish to thank particularly Bill Chapman, Meredith Wilkie, Warren Simmons, Jim Fouras, Amanda Bowden, David Mason and Patricia Mohan.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PART 1: BACKGROUND	1
Chapter 1: THE NATIONAL INQUIRY INTO YOUTH HOMELESSNESS	3
The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission	3
Background to this Inquiry	3
Terms of Reference	3
The Commissioners	4
Procedure of the Inquiry	4
This Report	6
The Scope of the Inquiry	7
Children and Young People	7
Homelessness	7
Homeless Children and Young People	7
Chapter 2; GOVERNMENT RESPONSES TO YOUTH HOMELESSNESS	9
Introduction	9
National Studies and Programs: Background	10
Study into Homelessness and Inadequate Housing: 1984-85	10
Youth Services Scheme	10
Senate Standing Committee on Social Welfare: Report on Homeless Youth	11
Evaluation of the Youth Services Scheme	11
Ministerial Review	12
Federal-State Accommodation Program	12
Supported Accommodation Assistance Program	12
SAAP Review	14
Federal Income Support Provisions	16
May Economic Statement 1987	16
State Welfare Responses	16
Child Welfare	16
Juvenile Justice	19
Conclusion	20
Chapter 3: DEVELOPMENTS SINCE THE INQUIRY BEGAN	27
Introduction	27
Income Support	27
Accommodation	27
Western Australia	27
Victoria	28
Northern Territory	28
Inquiries into Homelessness	28
South Australia	28
Queensland	28
New South Wales	28
Northern Territory	29
Legislative Responses	29
New South Wales	29
Victoria	30
Queensland	30

Administrative Responses	30
South Australia	30
New South Wales	30
Other Developments	30
Federal	30
Chapter 4: THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD	33
Introduction	33
Meaning and Content of the Declaration of the Rights of the Child	33
Role of the Family	33
Right of the Child to 'Special Protection'	34
Right to Social Security	35
Right to Adequate Housing, Medical Services and Nutrition	35
Protection Against Neglect, Cruelty and Exploitation	36
The Significance of the Convention on the Rights of the Child	37
PART II: THE DIMENSIONS OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS	41
Chapter 5: THE EXPERIENCE OF HOMELESSNESS	43
Introduction	43
Duration of Homelessness	43
In the Beginning	44
Accommodation Options	45
Income	48
Offending	49
Drug Dealing	50
Prostitution	50
Transience	51
Violence	51
Health	52
Exploitation	53
Police	54
Welfare Authorities	55
Youth Workers	56
Education	56
Employment Prospects	58
Conclusion	58
Chapter 6: THE INCIDENCE OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS	65
Introduction	65
Estimates of Total Homeless Youth	65
Estimate of Homeless 12-15 Year Olds	67
Estimate of Homeless and At Risk 16-17 Year Olds	68
Estimate of Homeless and At Risk 15-24 Year Olds	68
Age Range	68
Other Demographic Features	69
Conclusion	69
Chapter 7: THE COSTS OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS	73
Introduction	73
Homelessness and Poverty	73
Costs to the Individual	74
Costs to the Community	75
Direct Government Costs: Division of Responsibility	75

Income Support — Short-term	76
Family Allowance and Family Assistance Payments	76
Long-term Social Security Costs	77
Housing Costs	78
Medical and Health Costs	78
Short-term Costs	78
Longer-term Costs	78
Community Services Costs	79
Education and Training Costs	79
Crime Prevention and Correctional Services Costs	80
Costs to State Governments	80
Costs to the Community	80
Approaches to Reducing or Eliminating These Costs	81
PART III: FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO YOUTH HOMELESSNESS	83
Chapter 8: FAMILIES UNDER STRESS	85
Introduction	85
Incentives to Leave Home	86
Reuniting Children with Families Where Possible	87
Family Conflict	88
Fragmentation and Reconstitution of Families	88
Neglect	89
Abuse	90
Response by State Welfare Services	91
Community-based Services	94
Conclusion	94
Chapter 9: FAMILY POVERTY AND ISOLATION	99
Introduction	99
Extent of Family Poverty	99
Nature of Family Poverty	100
Unemployment	100
Sole Parent Families	100
Income Support	100
Housing Costs	101
Effects of Family Poverty	101
Social Isolation	102
Addressing Family Poverty and Isolation	102
Income Support	102
Family Support Program	103
Other Federal Support	105
Conclusion	105
Chapter 10: CHILDREN IN THE CARE OF THE STATE	109
Introduction	109
Children in Care	112
Children Leaving Care	112
Deinstitutionalisation	114
Programs for Children Leaving Care	116
Conclusion	117

Chapter 11: YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT	121
Introduction	121
Extent of Youth Unemployment	122
Causes of Youth Unemployment	122
Nature of Youth Unemployment	123
Duration	123
Hardship	123
Accommodation	124
Impact of Unemployment	125
Desire for Employment	125
Chapter 12: THE SITUATION OF ABORIGINAL CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE	129
Incidence and Nature of Homelessness	129
Causes of Aboriginal Youth Homelessness	131
Housing Need	131
Lack of Income	131
'The Welfare'	132
Institutions	132
Family Constitution	133
Alcohol Abuse	134
Migration to Urban Centres	134
Approach to the Provision of Services for Aboriginal Communities and Young People	135
Conclusion	135
Chapter 13: THE SITUATION OF YOUNG REFUGEES	139
Introduction	139
Income Support	140
Alternative Accommodation	141
Other Services	141
Conclusion	142
PART IV: INCOME AND SHELTER	145
Chapter 14: INCOME SUPPORT FOR HOMELESS YOUNG PEOPLE	147
Approaches to Income Support	147
Incentives and Disincentives	147
Welfare and Need	147
Current Approach	148
Young Homeless Allowance	149
YHA Eligibility	149
Number of YHA Recipients	150
Criticisms of YHA	151
Eligibility Criteria	151
The Rate of YHA	155
Criticisms of the Implementation of YHA	156
Independent Austudy	159
Job Search Allowance	160
Findings and Recommendations	161

Chapter 15: YOUTH SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION PROGRAM	169
Aims of Supported Accommodation Programs	169
YSAP Services	169
Refuges	169
Community Placement Schemes	170
Detached Housing Support Workers	170
Services for Groups with Special Needs	171
Assessment of the Program	176
Lack of Planning and Co-ordination	177
Lack of Alternatives	178
Lack of Expertise, Time and Resources	181
Rejection of 'Difficult' Young People	182
Unsuitable for Very Young People	182
Findings and Recommendations	183
Chapter 16: COMMONWEALTH STATE HOUSING AGREEMENT	189
Introduction	189
Nature of the Public Sector	189
Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement	189
CSHA Programs	191
Mortgage and Rent Relief Scheme	191
Crisis Accommodation Program	191
Local Government and Community Housing Program	191
Young People's Access to Public Housing	192
New South Wales	192
Victoria	193
Queensland	194
South Australia	195
Western Australia	195
Tasmania	196
Northern Territory	196
Findings and Recommendations	197
Chapter 17: PRIVATE SECTOR ACCOMMODATION	203
Cost	203
Discrimination	204
Capacity to Sign a Lease	205
Common Law	205
Law Reform	206
Perception of Incapacity	206
Guarantors	206
Findings and Recommendations	207
Chapter 18: ACCOMMODATION SERVICES	211
Introduction	211
Objectives of Accommodation Services	211
Prevention	211
Rights	212
Range of Options	212
Support	212
Integration and Co-ordination	213
Outreach	213
Service Models	214

An Integrated Service: Logan City (Queensland)	214
A Staged Accommodation Service: BABI (Queensland)	216
A Community Placement Service: The Community Placement Scheme (Victoria)	217
Detached Housing Support	219
Head Leasing Transfer Scheme (New South Wales)	219
Wombat Youth Accommodation Services Group Inc. (Victoria)	220
Accommodation Programs for Children with Special Needs	220
Residential Alternatives for Teenagers (A.C.T.)	220
Intensive Neighbourhood Care Scheme (South Australia)	221
Rileys Inner City Youth Advocacy Service (New South Wales)	222
Public Sector Accommodation Models	223
Community Tenancy Scheme (New South Wales)	223
Information, Outreach and Referral	224
Housing and Young People's Outreach Service (Tasmania)	224
Community-based Management	225
Conclusion	228
PART V: OTHER SERVICES	233
Chapter 19: HEALTH NEEDS AND SERVICES	235
Introduction	235
Health Status	235
AIDS	236
Particular Issues	237
Drug and Alcohol Abuse	237
Intellectual Disability, Mental Illness and Emotional and Behavioural Disturbances	238
Existing Services	239
Innovative Models	240
Specialist Services	241
Findings and Recommendations	242
Chapter 20: SUPPORT NEEDS AND SERVICES	249
Introduction	249
Preventive Services	250
Findings and Recommendations	251
The Commonwealth's Role	251
The Role of State Welfare Authorities	252
Support Needs of Homeless Children •	254
Findings and Recommendations	256
Chapter 21: LEGAL NEEDS AND SERVICES	259
Introduction	259
Access to Entitlements and Services	259
Access to Housing	259
Access to Income Support	259
Youth Workers and Legal Resources	259
Criminal Justice and Child Welfare	260
Approach to the Provision of Legal Services	263
Findings and Recommendations	264
Chapter 22: ROLE OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM	271
Introduction	271
School as a Factor in Homelessness	271
Related Influences	273

Potential of the School to Assist	273
Education Prospects While Homeless	275
Accommodation	275
Income Support	276
Personal Support	276
Other Needs	277
A Sobering Comparison	278
Findings and Recommendations	278
Chapter 23: JOB TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS	283
Introduction	283
Employment Programs — Federal	284
Policy	284
Training Programs	285
Access by Homeless Young People	286
Community-based Training	286
Employment Programs — States	287
Victoria	287
South Australia	288
Queensland	289
Community-based Training and Employment Services for Homeless Young People	289
Findings and Recommendations	291
PART VI: ROLE OF GOVERNMENT AND NON-GOVERNMENT SECTORS	297
Chapter 24: A YOUTH ACCOMMODATION AND SUPPORT SERVICES PROGRAM	299
A New Program	299
Problems with the Current Response	300
Lack of Clear Demarcation of Responsibilities	300
Lack of Agreed Policy Objectives	301
Failure of Planning and Co-ordination	301
Lack of Standards	302
Inadequate Resources and Other Support	302
Inadequate Training and Conditions for Workers	303
Roles of the Government and Non-Government Sectors	305
The Commonwealth	305
The States and Territories	306
Local Governments	306
Community Organisations	308
The Business Sector	308
The Proposed New Arrangement	309
The Partners	309
Scope	311
Guidelines and Sanctions	311
Training and Conditions of Service	312
Co-ordination	313
Conclusion	314
SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS	321
Income Support	321
Commonwealth Responsibility for Homeless Children	321

- Benefit Levels and Conditions
- Access to Income Support
- Youth Supported Accommodation Program
 - Crisis Refuges
 - Detached Housing Support Workers
 - Reuniting Families
 - Appropriate Accommodation Services
 - Access to Other Services
 - Accommodation for Children with Disabilities
 - Accommodation for Drug Dependent Children
 - Accommodation for Aboriginal Children
- Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement
 - Commonwealth Responsibility
 - State Responsibility
 - Crisis Accommodation Program
 - Independent Accommodation
 - Local Government and Community Housing Program
- Private Sector Accommodation
 - Measures to Increase Private Sector Accommodation
 - Legal Reform
 - Prohibition of Age Discrimination
- Accommodation Services
 - Principles for all Youth Accommodation Services
- Health Needs and Services
 - Health Education for Young People
 - Multi-service Health Centres
 - Outreach Services
 - Provincial Services
 - Psychiatric and Therapeutic Services
 - Drug Treatment
 - Sensitivity of Services to Special Groups
 - Integration of Services
 - A National Conference
- Support Needs and Services
 - Commonwealth Responsibility
 - Upgrading of Services
 - Family Support
 - State Children's Welfare Services
 - Services for Abused Adolescents
 - Children in Care
 - Provision of Comprehensive Services
 - Appropriate Service Delivery
 - Youth Worker Training
- Legal Needs and Services
 - Access to Legal Services
 - Police Interrogation and Custody
 - Bail
 - Legal Representation
 - Training for Law Officers
 - Youth Advocacy Services
 - Training for Youth Workers
- The Role of the Education System
 - School Teachers and Homeless Children