

Final Report

Youth homelessness: four policy proposals

authored by

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Schools are strategic sites for early intervention. The 1994 national census of homeless school students found that homeless teenagers usually have their first experience of homelessness while they are still at school (MacKenzie and Chamberlain 1995). The researchers estimated that 25,000 to 30,000 students experience a period of homelessness each year, and that most homeless students drop out of school. Since 1995, the early intervention perspective has been widely adopted around the country. This report focuses on three issues:

1. understanding the main causes of, and pathways into youth homelessness (Ch.3 and 4)
2. identifying effective prevention and early intervention strategies in schools (Ch.5, 6 and 7)
3. outlining policy initiatives to strengthen Australia's early intervention capacity (Ch.8)

Research design

The causes of, and pathways into youth homelessness were investigated using two qualitative databases, containing 1,600 case histories of young people who were homeless at the time of the 2001 census. The first data set was collected as part of the second national census of homeless school students. Schools provided 1,220 case studies of homeless students. The second data set was provided by SAAP agencies. They provided 812 case histories, including 377 on young people aged 12 to 24.

Strategies for prevention and early intervention in schools were investigated using the qualitative data that was collected as part of the second national census of homeless school student (N=1,220). In addition, we conducted field interviews with welfare staff in 92 schools and eight *Reconnect* services to find out more about best practice in schools and communities. The schools were in all states and territories.

The discussion of policy uses information from the database on homeless school students, quantitative data from earlier research, evaluations of various pilot programs, our model of the homeless 'career' (Ch.4), field knowledge gleaned over the last 10 years, and inputs from practitioners involved in service delivery in 2004. During fieldwork, we visited schools and agencies across the country to find instances of good practice. Not only did we obtain a lot of information about what is happening in local communities, but we also had lots of dialogue about what seems to work, and what needs to be done. This discursive knowledge base informs our policy proposals to strengthen Australia's early intervention capacity.

Framework for thinking about cause

Policy makers often want to know what are the 'causes' of youth homelessness. It is commonly assumed that if we could identify the 'causes' of youth homelessness, then perhaps we could prevent the problem. Chapter 3 outlines how structural factors – including changes in the youth labour market - explain why youth homelessness increased between the 1970s and the present day. Chapter 3 also points out that risk levels are higher for young people from certain social backgrounds (structural factors).

However, we argue that it is not pre-determined what will happen when young people are in conflict with their families. Teenagers and parents can negotiate family conflict in different ways, and there are different possible outcomes. Welfare staff in schools and youth workers can make a difference, because the structural factors that contribute to young people becoming homeless do not pre-determine everything else that happens in their lives.

Homelessness as a 'career' process

The notion of a 'homeless career' describes how people go through various stages before they develop a self-identity as a 'homeless person'. The 'career' model is useful because it draws attention to the different types of interventions needed at different point on the homeless career trajectory. Preventative strategies are broad based activities directed to all students in schools to build up protective factors. Early intervention strategies focus on assisting young people who are at the earliest stages of the homeless career, or who are attempting to remain at school and make the transition to independent living.

Prevention

In order to undertake 'prevention', schools need a strong welfare infrastructure, as well as programs targeted towards students with special needs. Preventative strategies typically focus on promoting student well being, building resilience, supporting social learning and connectedness. Many schools now have an extensive welfare team. Some schools have well-developed pastoral care programs. Other schools have special programs both within and outside the mainstream curriculum. Overall, there has been an improvement in the welfare infrastructure in many schools, but this improvement has not been uniform across the country and there is a lot of variation between schools.

Early intervention

Early intervention strategies come in two forms. First, early intervention strategies can focus on young people who are in the 'in and out' stage, or perceptibly at risk. These strategies focus on family reconciliation. Second, early intervention can mean supporting homeless students to remain at school and make the transition to independent living. This may involve 'family reconciliation', but these students do not return home. For some independent students, school is the point of stability in their life and they are determined to complete their education. They need help with income and accommodation, but not long-term support and counselling. Others experience an emotional crisis following the breakdown of family relationships. Everything starts 'to go wrong at school'. These students also need help with income and accommodation, as well as long-term support and counselling. They are at great risk of 'dropping out'.

Welfare team

All schools require an experienced welfare team to provide ongoing support and counselling for homeless teenagers and other young people at risk. The welfare team must have the capacity to engage parents (or carers), as well as students. In some cases, parents are reticent to visit schools for these discussions, and schools need a capacity to carry out home visits. Welfare staff must also have the capacity to support some families and students for a sustained period of time. Schools that were doing

well always had positive school leadership on issues of student welfare, a full-time school counsellor, a well-organised welfare team, clear procedures for case management, regular meetings, and close links with local services.

Reconnect program

Some early intervention strategies focus on young people who are either acutely at risk, or in the 'in and out' stage. An evaluation of *Reconnect* (Department of Family and Community Services 2003) found that most of these teenagers were still with their parents at final contact, and some who had been in temporary accommodation had returned home. The evaluation found a significant improvement in the capacity of young people and their families to manage conflict, better communication, and improved attitudes to school. The evaluation of *Reconnect* found that it had been highly successful, and our interviews with school welfare staff confirm this. Across Australia, there are an estimated 15,000 students seriously at risk of homelessness at any time. Currently *Reconnect* assists about 5,500 to 6,000 clients per year. There is a strong case for expanding *Reconnect* two to three-fold to ensure that service provision matches the need for these services. This is necessary if early intervention is to begin to reduce youth homelessness over the longer term.

Community placement option

Many homeless students need help with accommodation. Often, they stay temporarily with friends or relatives when they first leave home. After that, some attempt to move into shared households, while others look to SAAP for accommodation. However, SAAP agencies work with many clients who have been homeless for long periods of time. A significant proportion of SAAP clients have complex needs, including problems with substance abuse and dealings with the criminal justice system. Students in SAAP come into contact with the homeless sub-culture. There is a pressing need for an accommodation option that gives homeless school students an alternative to SAAP. Most homeless teenagers stay temporarily with other households when they first leave home. These informal arrangements could be turned into longer-term placements for homeless students, if they were funded through an improved adolescent community placement scheme. Pilot programs would be the best way to test out how to do this.

Funding community coordination

Welfare staff in schools must know what community services are available to be able to make appropriate referrals, and bring services into schools. In some states, schools and welfare agencies participate in community network meetings that exchange information and act as a forum for discussing issues. One of the main benefits of network meetings is that staff form personal and professional relationships, and this lubricates getting things done, despite institutional barriers. These networks have developed most effectively in Victoria which has a funded School Focused Youth Services (SFYS) program. This deploys 41 workers to facilitate coordinated service delivery between schools and community agencies. We came across a number of school clusters where the development of an interagency community was outstanding. The Victorian initiative is impressive and provides a model that should be developed by the Commonwealth and states across Australia.

National standards for secondary schools

We need national benchmarks for student welfare in secondary schools (see: point 5). Such standards would not prescribe any one model for how student support services should be organised, although there are many examples of good practice (Ch.5 and 7). However, the standards would specify an appropriate level of resources and the various service delivery parameters. A first step towards national standards, would be for an appropriate Commonwealth Department to initiate a national review of pastoral care and student welfare services in Australian schools.

Even though a response to youth homelessness may be the trigger for a review, welfare staff deal with a range of issues – substance abuse, suicide, and early school leaving – which are often inter-related. The main objective of the proposed review would be to draft national standards, and to recommend good practice strategies for school and agencies.

Early intervention has been widely adopted as a preferred policy direction, but a coordinated national approach has not been achieved. There are formidable obstacles to developing a national policy, because education is the responsibility of the state and territory education departments. Thus, there is no central authority that could standardise the provision of welfare in Australian schools. However, there could be an agreement by state and territory education ministers around national goals for the provision of welfare in schools. The agreement would provide a basis for achieving national standards over the longer term.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 From 'street kids' to 'early intervention'

It was the publication of *Our Homeless Children* (the 'Burdekin Report') that brought youth homelessness to a broad community audience in the late 1980s (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1989). The report received front-page headlines when it was released in February 1989. There were many follow up newspaper articles over the next few months and some dramatic television documentaries (Fopp 1989; National Clearinghouse for Youth Studies 1989).

A distinguishing feature of the policy and advocacy responses that followed the Burdekin Report was the primary focus on 'street kids'. The Burdekin Report published the findings of a wide-ranging inquiry by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission on the plight of homeless young people (HREOC 1989, Ch.5). The report noted that some young people experience only a short period of homelessness. However, the report contained many examples of teenagers who were chronically homeless. Similar themes were taken up in media coverage of the issue. Press articles were often accompanied by photographs of young people living in derelict buildings or sleeping in public places.

The Burdekin Report evoked a great deal of public commentary from politicians, welfare agencies, policy experts and other community leaders, as well as stimulating a lot of interest in the general community. With the media demanding to know why so many young people were without stable accommodation, policy makers and researchers began to consider strategies to ameliorate the problem. The Commonwealth Government announced new initiatives. On budget day 1989, the Treasurer announced a '\$100 Million Social Justice Package for Young Australians' over the next four years (National Clearinghouse for Youth Studies 1989). This funding package included increased accommodation for homeless teenagers, improvements in the Young Homeless Allowance, and several pilot projects.

It is important to provide services for young people who are 'chronically' homeless, but these young people are only one segment of the youth homeless population. Most young people who experience homelessness have their first experience while still at school. This has led to the focus on 'early intervention'.

The issue of homeless school students first came to public attention when MacKenzie and Chamberlain (1995) reported findings from a national census of homeless school students. The researchers contacted all government and Catholic secondary schools across the country. Ninety-nine per cent of secondary schools completed a census return and schools identified 11,000 homeless students in census week (MacKenzie and Chamberlain 1995). The researchers estimated that 25,000 to 30,000 school students experience a period of homelessness each year.

MacKenzie and Chamberlain (1995) argued that most young people have their first experience of homelessness while they are still at school and that schools are 'sites for early intervention'. However, they found that:

In almost all of the 100 schools we visited ... homeless students had dropped out ... we estimate that between two-thirds and three-quarters do not complete the school year. (MacKenzie and Chamberlain 1995, p.26)

If homeless young people drop out of school, they usually join the ranks of the homeless unemployed, and some make the transition to chronic homelessness. In the mid 1990s, secondary schools were generally ineffective at providing welfare support to homeless students.

These findings were discussed in the House of Representatives (1995) *Report on Aspects of Youth Homelessness* (the 'Morris Report'), which concluded that early intervention is:

probably the one area of public policy which could deliver to the community the greatest returns in terms of increased social cohesion through the reduction in the levels of family breakdown and long term welfare dependency. (House of Representatives 1995, p.360).

The report gave particular attention to improved family support services and an early intervention strategy focused on schools. Governments have continued to fund services for the traditional groups in the homeless population, but since 1995 there has been an explicit turn in youth policy towards building an early intervention and prevention capacity in schools and local communities.

1.2 Commonwealth initiatives

One of the first initiatives undertaken by the Howard Government in 1996 was on youth homelessness, with an expressed focus on 'early intervention'. A Prime Ministerial Taskforce was set up to oversee a large pilot program:

The Youth Homelessness Pilot Programme signals the Government's intention to increase the service emphasis on early intervention strategies – that is, before the first key transition, a permanent break from home and family, is reached. This will ... assist family reconciliation through early intervention. (Prime Ministerial Youth Homeless Taskforce 1996)

The Taskforce funded 26 pilot projects at a cost of \$8 million over two years. There was an ongoing action research program, and an extensive evaluation. The Taskforce reported encouraging results from the pilot projects and this led to the establishment of the *Reconnect* program.

Reconnect provides support for homeless teenagers and young people 'at risk'. The target was 100 services across Australia, and there was recurrent funding for the program of \$20 million per year. In 2004, there were 98 services around Australia with about 240 early intervention workers. There were other developments that have contributed to the national early intervention capacity. The Full Service Schools program was a one-off initiative of \$22m that accompanied the implementation of the Youth Allowance. The funds went to 65 clusters, with most projects involving several schools. This program funded a wide range of support activities, usually supporting

young people at risk. The evaluation of this program concluded that the notion of early intervention had become widely embedded in many schools and communities.

1.3 State and territory provision

Since 1995, the early intervention perspective has been widely adopted around the country. However, there is considerable variation in the provision of early intervention services on the ground.¹ In New South Wales, school counsellors are trained psychologists. In 2004, there were 790 school-based positions, but many counsellors work across a small cluster of schools. All 46 districts have a student welfare consultant who advises schools.

In Victoria, student welfare coordinators are trained teachers who take on welfare responsibilities. Every secondary school has a student welfare coordinator, and larger schools have more than one. These positions are now being introduced into primary schools. Victoria has a School Focused Youth Service program which funds 41 workers to facilitate coordinated service delivery between schools and community agencies.

In Queensland, medium to large secondary schools have at least one guidance officer. In July 1997 a 'youth support coordinator' pilot program was introduced to address student homelessness and early school leaving. This was subsequently funded as an ongoing program, with 13 services supporting 35 schools. This will be increased to 113 positions over 2003 to 2005.

South Australia's system for student support is similar to Victoria's. There are 290 equivalent full-time student welfare coordinators (400 workers) who are in secondary and primary schools across the state, and 135 generic welfare officers located in district offices.

Western Australia has 166 welfare officers. They are located in district offices and move between different schools. A senior high school with 500 or more students typically has: a nurse, a psychologist, a school-based police officer, and a part-time chaplain. Smaller schools have fewer resources.

In Tasmania, there has been a lot of activity in recent years to strengthen the welfare infrastructure in high schools (Years 7-10) and senior secondary colleges (Years 11-12). Tasmania has social workers and guidance officers in schools, but they are managed through district offices. There are also youth workers in some schools.

The ACT has high schools and senior colleges, similar to Tasmania. High schools typically have at least one full-time counsellor, while senior colleges have a welfare team. A new initiative is the employment of youth workers in all secondary schools.

Schools in the Northern Territory are well provided with welfare support in Darwin and Alice Springs. There is a counselling position in every secondary school, a school nurse, a home-school liaison officer, and in many cases a community based police officer. Schools in remote communities do not have the same resources.

¹ The information for the states and territories was supplied by personnel from their education departments. The information has been summarised.

Overall, there has been an increase in early intervention capacity around the country. There have been evaluations of several component programs such as *Reconnect* (Department of Family and Community Services 2003), the School Focused Youth Service Program in Victoria (Success Works 2001), and the Youth Support Coordinators Program in Queensland (Department of Families, Youth and Community Care 1999). However, an overall assessment of the effectiveness of early intervention has yet to be done.

1.4 Issues for this report

This report focuses on three issues. First, people often want to know what are the structural causes of youth homelessness, because they think this will help them 'fix' the problem. In Chapters 3 and 4, we argue that economic factors largely explain why youth homelessness has increased over the past 30 years. However, we argue that homelessness is a process and there are always contingencies on the homeless 'career path'. Welfare staff in schools can make a difference, because the structural factors that contribute to young people becoming homeless do not pre-determine everything else that happens in their lives. The notion of a 'homeless career' (Chapter 4) provides the analytical model that underpins an early intervention and prevention policy framework.

Our second focus is on effective early intervention and prevention strategies in schools. It is now accepted that most young people have their first experience of homelessness while they are still at school. Preventative strategies in schools focus on providing assistance to young people before they have made a 'tentative break' from home and family. Early intervention strategies come in two forms. Strategies can focus on young people who are at the earliest stages of the homeless career or perceptibly at risk. But not all young people can remain at home or be reconciled with parents. Early intervention also involves supporting young people to remain at school and make the transition to independent living. These issues are discussed in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

The discussion about what is happening on the ground lays the basis for thinking about what could be done to strengthen Australia's early intervention capacity. Formulating policy involves drawing on evidence from research, assessing the findings of evaluations, thinking about the practice implications of the 'homeless career', and drawing on the insights of experienced practitioners. The fieldwork undertaken for this research also sensitised us to some of the policy gaps that are discernible on the ground. In Chapter 8, we draw together this knowledge to suggest four policy initiatives:

- An expansion of the *Reconnect* program to achieve national coverage.
- A pilot program to trial the feasibility of an adolescent community placement program for homeless school students.
- A program to fund the coordination of early intervention services in local communities by linking schools and local agencies.
- National benchmarks for the provision of student welfare in secondary schools.

2 RESEARCH DESIGN

2.1 Understanding 'cause' and process

Our first research issue focused on the main causes of, and pathways into youth homelessness. We investigated these questions by analysing two qualitative databases, containing 1,600 case histories of young people who were homeless at the time of the 2001 census.

The first qualitative data set was collected as part of the second national census of homeless school students (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2002). The census was carried out in the second week of August 2001, at the same time as the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) was conducting the fourteenth National Census of Population and Housing. All government and Catholic secondary schools across Australia (N=1,937) were asked to provide their best estimate of the number of homeless youth in their school, and 99 per cent of schools completed a census return (1,930 schools out of 1,937). They identified 12,200 homeless students. Schools were also asked to provide two case studies of homeless students where they had detailed knowledge of what had happened. Welfare staff returned 1,220 case histories.

Our second qualitative data set comprised case histories provided by Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) services. We contacted all SAAP services across the country at the time of the census (N=1,228). Most of these service providers were aware that the ABS was implementing a special strategy to enumerate the homeless population. We invited them to take part in a case study project to 'gather qualitative data about the experiences of homeless people that is not collected by the census'. They provided 812 case histories, including 218 on young people aged 12 to 18 ('teenagers') and 159 on 'young adults' aged 19 to 24. The information from these case histories provides insights into young people at different stages of the homeless career. We used information from these case histories to illustrate our arguments. All names used in the report are fictitious.

These case histories provide detailed information on the 'causes of youth homelessness', the different pathways into homelessness, and the reasons why some young people are able to exit from homeless. Welfare staff in schools and SAAP agencies provided information ranging from short paragraph length accounts to detailed case histories. The analysis of this data was informed by the concept of the 'homeless career'. This involved looking for patterns in the experiential process that young people go through. We re-read the databases many times, before selecting the examples to illustrate typical patterns.

2.2 Strategies for prevention and early intervention

Our second research issue focused on effective prevention and early intervention strategies in schools. We wanted to know:

1. Which strategies are used to prevent homelessness?
2. Which strategies help to facilitate family reconciliation?
3. Which strategies assist students making the transition to independent living?

We investigated these questions using two data sets. First, we used the qualitative data set that was collected as part of the second national census of homeless school students. Welfare staff in schools provided 1,220 case histories of young people who were homeless at the time of the 2001 census. There was detailed information on how schools had supported some homeless students over long periods of time. We refer to this data in Chapters 6 and 7.

Our second data set was semi-structured interviews with welfare staff in 92 schools and staff in eight Reconnect services, carried out in 2004. The purpose of these interviews was to gather additional information about early intervention, and to investigate strategies that are employed to prevent homelessness. We had a list of topics to ask welfare staff, but these were field interviews with an emphasis on naturalism. We conducted interviews in all states and territories, but the *Reconnect* services were in four states (New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania). Seventy schools filled out a questionnaire.

We contacted schools where we thought we would find examples of 'best practice'. The notion of 'best practice' may have a scientific basis in research and evaluation studies, but more often it relies on the collective professional judgment of leading practitioners. In some cases, departmental officials offered certain schools as exemplars of 'best practice', or we had prior knowledge of best practice gained from fieldwork over the last 10 years. In other cases, we used information from the case studies to identify potential 'good practice' schools, and some schools self-referred. The sampling strategy was 'purposive', in that it was shaped by the search for innovative and effective practice. However, in some communities we visited a number of schools - including schools not pre-selected on good practice criteria - to assess whether there was variation in service provision between schools and within communities.

Ten years ago we visited 100 schools across the country, following the first national census of homeless school students (MacKenzie and Chamberlain 1995). In the current study, we used this experience as a 'benchmark' to make comparative judgments. We also asked experienced practitioners about change over time. In particular, we comment on patterns of 'best welfare practice in schools', and on the links between schools and community agencies. In our view, there have been significant changes over the past 10 years, and most experienced practitioners independently suggested this as well.

2.3 Policy development

The final research aim was to identify policy options that might improve our ability to assist homeless teenagers. Policy analysis is as much an 'art' as it is a 'science'. It involves drawing on evidence from research, assessing the findings of evaluation studies, thinking about homelessness as a career process, and utilising the insights of experienced practitioners.

The new fieldwork was carried out at the end of this project. By this time we had formulated many of our policy ideas, based on previous experience, existing research, the 'homeless career' model, and the qualitative databases. The new fieldwork was particularly useful, because it enabled us to test out policy ideas with school welfare staff and service providers. This reinforced many of the insights gleaned from other

sources, but it also generated some important caveats and useful elaborations. The fieldwork also generated new ideas which are incorporated into the policy chapter. This discursive knowledge base underpins the policy recommendations in Chapter 8.

3 FRAMEWORK FOR THINKING ABOUT CAUSE

Our first research issue focused on the main causes of, and pathways into youth homelessness. This is our focus in Chapters 3 and 4. Policy makers and advocates often want to know what are the 'causes' of youth homelessness. It is commonly assumed that if we could identify the 'causes' of youth homelessness, then perhaps we could prevent the problem. These arguments emphasise structural factors:

It is obvious from the evidence that there is a very direct link between the economic circumstances of particular family units and the incidence of homelessness among children. It is also equally obvious that the collapse of the youth labour market since the mid-seventies has reinforced the link between youth unemployment and homelessness ... Structural issues such as these need to be spelt out and confronted. (Dwyer 1989, p.12)

This chapter discusses the structural factors that help to explain why youth homelessness increased between the 1970s and the present time. We also point out that risk levels are higher for young people from certain social backgrounds. However, we argue that structural factors do not explain everything and are a blunt instrument for thinking about practice. Some people in the same structural position become homeless, but others do not. The process of becoming homeless is always a 'lived experience'.

Policy makers and service providers need to understand the inter-relationship between the structural factors that cause homelessness and the role of human agency. Structural factors affect risk levels, but structural factors cannot pre-determine that family conflict will lead to homelessness. Interventions can prevent homelessness or facilitate family reconciliation.

3.1 Structural and individualistic explanations

Sociologists have often argued that it is not possible to establish causal relationships in the social sciences in the same way that it is possible to establish 'cause' in the natural sciences. This is because men and women are actively engaged in making their own lives and consciously reflect upon events and social processes. People are influenced by the social structures and cultural traditions of the society into which they are born, yet at the same time they are actively engaged in 'making their own history'.

A number of authors have pointed out that there has been a tendency for homelessness researchers to opt for either structural or individualistic explanations of homelessness (Fopp 1995; Neale 1997; Blasi 1990; Shlay and Rossi 1992; Neil and Fopp 1993; Hallebone 1997; Avramov 1999). Structural explanations locate the reasons for homelessness in macro-level phenomena such as imbalances in the housing and employment markets (Weitzman, Knickman and Shinn 1990; Elliott and Krivo 1991; Fopp 1992; Shinn and Weitzman 1994; Shinn, Weitzman, Stojanovic and Knickman 1998). These arguments suggest that the appropriate response to addressing homelessness 'requires intervention on a broad societal scale' (Neale, 1997:49). From a structural perspective the main drivers of homelessness are unemployment and a lack of affordable housing.

In contrast, individual theories of homelessness emphasise agency or human activity. Fopp (1995) has argued that media explanations of homelessness are often of this character. In populist versions of this approach, individuals are viewed as responsible for their situation because of various personal deficits, such as alcoholism, feckless behaviour and so forth. According to Fopp (1995) these approaches 'blame the victim'. Neale (1997) argues that evidence of victim blaming can be found in 'the stereotypes and images of deviants, dossers, alcoholics, vagrants and tramps'. This approach has its origins in the work of American sociologists such as Howard Bahr (1973) who studied men on 'skid row'. Their approach emphasised the individual characteristics that lead men to become 'disaffiliated' from mainstream society.

In our view, neither structural nor individualistic explanations of homelessness are adequate (c.f. Giddens 1984). Structural accounts emphasise poverty and unemployment as the primary causes of homelessness, but structural accounts fail to explain why most poor people and most unemployed people do not become homeless. By ignoring personal vulnerabilities, structural frameworks struggle to explain why 'one person in an otherwise similar position is more likely to become homeless than another' (May, 2000: 614). In May's words, 'too often it can appear as though a person's homelessness is an inevitable consequence of their structural position ... with the specifics of how that position "translates" in to homelessness left largely unexplored' (May 2000: 614). Structural accounts tend towards 'structural determinism', and ignore human agency.

On the other hand, individualistic accounts seek to explain homelessness in terms of individual pathologies, but they ignore the structural context in which individuals live and experience the life course. Elliott and Krivo (1991) argue that a primary emphasis on the individual serves to divert attention away from the interrelation of structural factors and micro processes. The problem of homelessness is depoliticised and returned to the realm of personal responsibility.

3.2 Alternative framework for thinking about 'cause'

A more nuanced understanding of homelessness has evolved by drawing on both structure and agency paradigms. This position was articulated in the Burdekin Report (1989), which is still a point of reference in the debate about youth homelessness. The Burdekin Report (1989) began by suggesting that there are two ways of thinking about 'cause'. One approach focuses on the dynamics of what happens in families, such as relationship breakdowns, failures to handle interpersonal conflict, and so on. The other approach focuses on structural factors such as the large number of families in poverty, high levels of youth unemployment, housing policy and the lack of community services. The Burdekin Report pointed to the fact that the risk levels are higher for young people from certain socially disadvantaged backgrounds, but that welfare practitioners have to respond to the immediate issues that arise from family conflict.

The Burdekin Report drew particular attention to family poverty, youth unemployment, and poor welfare services as the major causes of youth homelessness. It found that young people are more at risk of becoming homeless if: they come from Indigenous families; if they have grown up in poor families; if they have been in the state care and protection system; and if they have arrived in Australia as unaccompanied refugees (HREOC 1989, Ch.9, 10,12,13).

Other researchers have also focussed on the relationship between agency and structure and not simply counterposed the two extremes (Brandon 1980; Weedon 1987; Hutson and Liddiard 1994; Tomas and Dittmar 1995; May 2000). In summary, Burdekin and others reject the notion that homelessness can be reduced to only structural or individual factors. Youth homelessness is best explained by the interrelation of agency and structure that causes 'some people, and not others, [to] become homeless in any given set of circumstances' (Neale, 1997: 57).

Structural factors are important for explaining why youth homelessness increased between the 1970s and the present time. Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1998: Ch.11) point out that when young people became homeless in the 1960s, they were only homeless for a short period of time because they usually found a job. This was the era of the 'long boom' when the unemployment rate was no more than one per cent most of the time, and there were 'jobs for everyone' (Groenewegan 1972). Once homeless teenagers acquired an income, they moved into shared households or boarded with other families and rarely needed help from welfare agencies. The decline of the youth labour market does not explain why some young people become homeless in the first place, but it does explain why today's homeless teenagers find it difficult to return to secure accommodation.

Chamberlain and MacKenzie (1998: Ch.11) also point out that risk levels are much higher for young people who come from alternative family types (blended families, single parent households etc.), and that many more young people now grow up in alternative family types, compared with 30 years ago. Brandon (2004) has calculated that 26 per cent of children (under 15) do not live with both biological parents.

Table 3.1 shows that 80 per cent of homeless students come from alternative family types. The largest group (38 per cent) were from single parent households (including parents who were separated or divorced). One-third (33 per cent) of the young people were from blended families and nine per cent were from other family types (e.g. brought up by relatives, step parents etc.).

Table 3.1: Family situation of homeless students identified in the census and in the cases studies

	Census* (N=9,782)		Case studies** (N=1,184)	
	%		%	
Biological parents	20		23	
Single parent	38	80	37	77
Blended family	33		30	
Other	9		10	
	100		100	

• Information on 80 per cent of cases

** Information on 98 per cent of cases

Why this should be so is complex, but probably stems partly from the dynamics of step-parents and their step-children, and the greater financial vulnerability of single parent households. Overall, then, structural factors are important for explaining why youth homelessness increased between the 1970s and the present time. Risk levels are higher for young people from certain social backgrounds. However, it is not pre-determined what will happen when young people are in conflict with their families. Teenagers and parents can negotiate family conflict in different ways, and there are many possible outcomes. The risk levels are certainly higher for young people from certain social backgrounds, but the process of becoming homeless is always a 'lived experience'. Understanding the 'lived experience' of homeless young people is a prerequisite for early intervention and prevention.

3.3 Becoming homeless is a 'lived experience'

Young people leave their parental home because of conflicts within the family. It is only by examining the diverse circumstances that surround these conflicts that we come to an understanding of the complexity of individual cases. The cases in this chapter come from the school students' database.

Many teenagers in blended families experience 'emotional hurt' because of their parents' marriage breakdown, or they feel 'unwanted' by step-parents. For example, after her parents divorced Rosa, 15, went to live with her father:

Rosa has been very upset because her father has a relationship with a woman who does not like her ... There has been conflict on and off all year ... Last Saturday night Father said she couldn't go to the disco because he was driving the woman to Canberra. He told her that she had to stay home to look after her brother and her two step-sisters ... There was a terrible argument. He told her to get out.

These 'critical junctures' are defining moments on the homeless career path.

Critical junctures often involve violence or bitter verbal disputes. Angelo's parents are divorced and his mother is married to a man who is a 'heavy drinker'. The relationship between Angelo and his stepfather deteriorated when Angelo's brother left home. The conflict:

... came to a head at the student's birthday party where the step-father went into a rage and physically assaulted a number of Angelo's friends ...

Just under 40 per cent of homeless young people are from single parent households, including parents who are either divorced or separated. Sometimes the conflicts involve teenage rebellion and 'testing boundaries':

Jason has been rebelling at home ... aggressive ... refusing to do chores ... smoking dope in the house ... Mum told him to leave four weeks ago ... has been staying temporarily with an older male in a caravan...

In other cases, young people move frequently from one biological parent to the other, following family arguments.

Some parents have 'problems' of their own. Fiona, 16, has four brothers and sisters. According to the school, it has always been a volatile situation at home. Mum drinks heavily, then she gets into fights with her children:

One day at the beginning of last term, Fiona was crying at school. She had been in a physical fight with her mother. She had scratches on her arm and a bruised neck. Mum had kicked her out.

About 10 per cent of homeless students have been brought up by relatives or foster parents. In some cases the whereabouts of parents is unknown:

Paul, 14, has not lived with his parents for five years. His mother is a heroin addict ... his father is a biker with the Hell's Angels ... Paul was living with relatives ... but he has run away.

In other cases, there are homeless students whose parents have abandoned them. Hayley is 15 and her brother, Kris, is 13:

Mother moved to Adelaide with her new boyfriend. There was no explanation given to the kids ... They went to Shepparton to live with mother's former partner ... but he couldn't take them permanently ... now staying temporarily with another family.

One-fifth of homeless students come from conventional nuclear families. The largest group are from families where the parents have a rigid parenting style. Melissa, 17, lived at home until the end of Year 11. According to the school psychologist:

Her parents are very strict. There is no flexibility on any issue. I worked with the parents on several occasions to no avail. The mother knows exactly what she wants for her daughter and there is no compromise on anything.

The problem escalated when Melissa started going out with Stavros:

Father said he wasn't suitable. Mother insisted she stop seeing him. Melissa 'agreed', but continued to see Stavros without her parents' knowledge.

Her parents found out and there was a major row. Her mother called the police, insisting her daughter be removed:

Mediation was entered into ... but to no avail ... Mother refused to sign the Centrelink form so she could get Youth Allowance ... Mother said she could either leave school and get work to support herself ... or she could come home and toe the line.

Homeless students who come from nuclear families often leave home because of over-strict parenting.

3.4 Conclusion

Homeless teenagers come from all family types, but the risk levels are higher for young people in non-nuclear families. The Burdekin Report (HREOC 1989, Ch.10,12, 13) pointed out that the risk levels are also higher for young people who: come from indigenous families; have been in the state care and protection system; or who arrived in Australia as unaccompanied refugees.

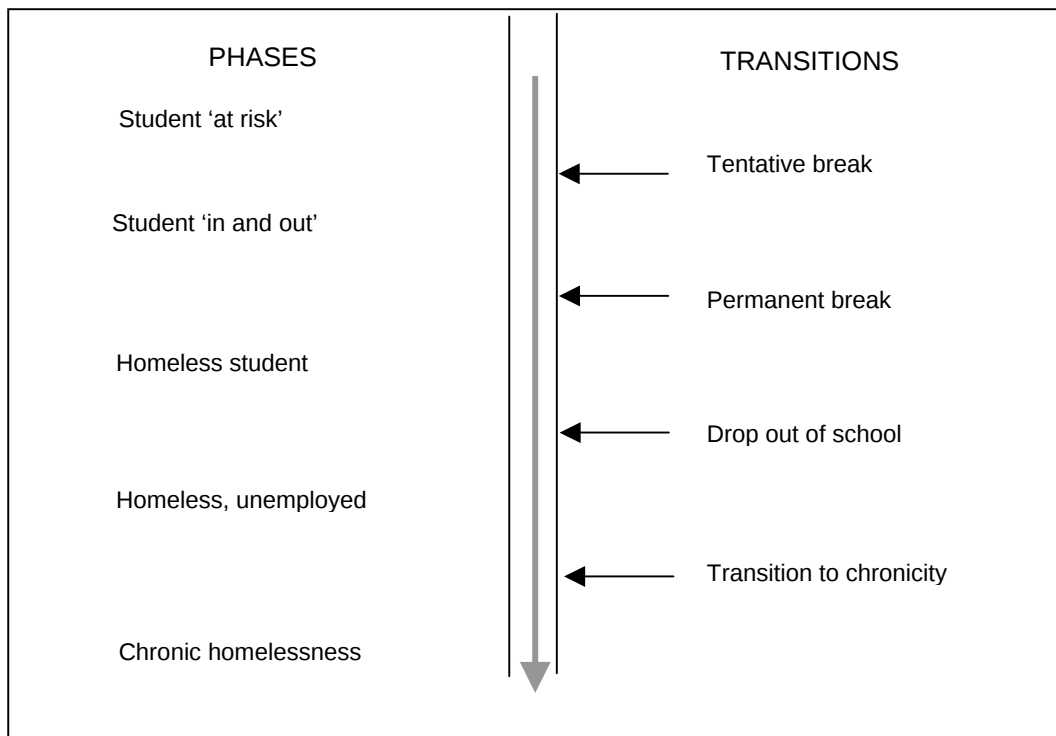
We support measures to improve the employment prospects for young people, particularly those who are the most vulnerable, although it is difficult to envisage that we could return to the social and economic environment of thirty years ago. Affordable housing is also a major issue and the long-term decline of provision of public housing is a concern that needs to be reasserted on the public policy agenda. However, homelessness is a process and there are always contingencies on the homeless career path. It is never pre-determined what will happen to young people from particular backgrounds. Welfare staff in schools and youth workers can make a difference, because the structural factors that contribute to young people becoming homeless do not pre-determine everything else that happens in their lives.

4 HOMELESSNESS AS A 'CAREER' PROCESS

This chapter argues that a national early intervention and prevention policy should be premised on the idea that youth homelessness is best understood as a 'career process' (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1998). The notion of a 'youth homeless career' draws attention to the fact that people go through various stages before they develop a self-identity as a 'homeless person' (Goffman 1968; Becker 1966; Snow and Anderson 1993; Hutson and Liddiard 1994), and that different types of interventions are needed at different points on the homeless career trajectory. In this chapter, we refine our model of the youth homeless career (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1998), and detail what the continuum of interventions should look like.

The 'youth homeless career' is what sociologists call an 'ideal type', following the methodological approach of the German sociologist, Max Weber (1864-1920). Ideal types are analytical models which are constructed by researchers for the purposes of empirical research and understanding the world. They are heuristic devices which are used to order reality, so that the core characteristics of a social process (or social formation) can be seen more clearly. Ideal types do not attempt to identify that which is 'ideal', in the sense of the preferred option. Nor are ideal types a mirror image of the world, because young people experience homelessness in many different ways. Ideal types are heuristic devices which help us to make sense of a reality which is complex and multifaceted.

Figure 4.1: Youth homeless career



Our ideal typical model is shown in Figure 4.1. There are five phases on the homeless career trajectory and four biographical transitions. In the first three phases young people are still at school, but their housing situation is becoming increasingly precarious as they make the transition from 'at risk' to homelessness. In the final phases, young people are homeless and unemployed. There are four transitions: the tentative break, the permanent break, dropping out of school and the transition to chronicity.

The 'youth homeless career' is an ideal typical model that is used to order reality, so that the core characteristics of the temporal process can be seen more clearly. Individual cases do not necessarily reproduce the model in every detail and people can move along the career trajectory at different speeds. Teenagers can also exit from homelessness. The cases in this chapter come from the school students' database, unless otherwise stated.

4.1 At risk

The first phase is when young people become *at risk of homelessness*. The term 'at risk' is widely used in policy circles to refer to a range of problematic conditions (see, for example, Carter 1993; Department of Employment, Education and Training 1994; Batten and Russell 1995; Withers and Batten 1995; Dryfoos 1990 and 1994), and the concept is used in somewhat different ways and for different purposes.

When school counsellors make a judgment that a young person might be 'at risk' of homelessness, they usually take into account a range of things. They will consider what the young person tells them about their family situation and how they get on with other family members. Counsellors may have information about how the young person is going at school – perhaps their schoolwork has started to deteriorate, or they have become 'withdrawn'. Occasionally, they may know what has happened to older brothers or sisters. In some cases, welfare staff will have formed impressions of parents when they met them previously, and so on. In daily welfare practice, experienced counsellors make judgments about 'risk', by taking into account a complex body of qualitative information.

The concept of 'at risk' has been criticised (Crane and Brannock 1996; Wyn and White 1998; Bessant 2000; Bessant, Hil and Watts 2003). According to Dwyer and Wyn (2001) 'at risk' can be a dangerous label because it individualises the problem. Billis (1981, p.372) expresses similar concerns when he notes that the use of 'at risk' as a framing concept can lead to 'an assumptive leap from associating particular problems with some conditions to explaining these problems as caused by these conditions'. It is in this context that Wyn and White (1998, p.29) claim that 'risk' is part of a framework that is based on 'a personal deficit model, and thus the continued individualisation of what are social problems'.

There are other substantive concerns with the concept of 'at risk'. For Bessant (2000) risk based research relies upon normative assumptions about 'the social and economic dependence of young people' and it 'delegitimises young people as speakers and active subjects' (Bessant 2000, p.41). According to Bessant (2000, p.41), the 'at risk' project has largely replaced classifications like 'delinquency' and 'maladjustment' that were central to the sociology of deviance. The sociology of risk 'has become a new way to frame old problems and preserve old projects' (Bessant

2000, p.32). Bessant, Hil and Watts (2003) argue that there is no objective basis for identifying young people who are 'at risk'. 'The reality (is) that the category of "at risk" is not empirical' (Bessant et al. 2003, p.59). They are scathing of attempts to measure the 'at risk' population, but what they most object to is 'labelling'.

The possibility of labelling young people by using categorical terms such as 'at risk' does not mean that stigmatisation is inevitable. The practice discourse about 'risk' is more about well-being, resilience, community involvement, and young people's rights to assistance. Whether or not a term involves stigma is an empirical matter and cannot be presumed *a priori*. The notion of at risk might emphasise individual factors, but other factors relate to the structural circumstances in which young people struggle.

It is important that the theoretical and methodological objections to the concept of 'at risk' do not obscure the real issues faced by many young people. Dwyer and Wyn (2001:150) highlight this dilemma: 'how do we take risk factors seriously without demonising those affected, but how do we avoid demonising them without belittling the difficulties they are trying to face'. Bessant, Hil and Watts (2003) fail to offer any alternative to the discourse about risk, and it is at the level of practice that this is felt most keenly.

Welfare teachers encounter young people who are at risk on a regular basis. Their notions of at risk are based on perceptions of the building storm clouds in a young person's life and close relationships with the young people themselves. For example, Jake, 13, has six siblings:

Mother drinks heavily ... She is abusive to her (de facto) partner and the children ... Jake was placed in care for a short period some years ago ... Jake says he hates his mother and her drinking. Many agencies have tried to help without much success ... Jake is heavily into crime and his crimes seem to be getting more violent. We have offered counselling, but Jake refuses.

Critics of 'at risk' provide no guidance as to what should be done in a case like this. They also ignore the potential benefits of assisting young people before they become homeless.

4.2 Tentative break

The first discernible indicator of homelessness is when the young people make a *tentative break* from home and family. This is the first biographical transition along the career trajectory. It is denoted by a young person leaving home for at least one night without their parents' permission. This is usually called 'runaway' behaviour, and most young people who run away stay temporarily with friends or relatives. Running away is a major biographical experience for most teenagers, and it can be made sense of in different ways. In some case, it will be a once only experience and the young person will not run away again. In other cases, the underlying family problems are not resolved, and some young people begin to move in and out of home.

This signals the second stage of the homeless career, and we refer to it as the *in and out stage*. The 'in and out' pattern identifies a pattern of episodic leaving home by young people for relatively short periods of time, from a few days to a couple of weeks.

Some young people move through the in and out stage quickly, whereas others remain in the phase for a sustained period of time. Olga, 15, lives in a blended family:

She has left home for the fourth time in nine months.
She stays away for about two weeks on average. This
time she's gone on a merry go round of friend's places.

It is common for younger students to remain in the in and out stage for some time, whereas older teenagers tend to pass through this stage more quickly. This is a critical time to engage in early intervention where it is possible to facilitate family reconciliation. Typically, these young people are staying with friends in their community of origin.

Some schools are adept at identifying young people in the 'in and out' stage. Many schools provided case studies which indicate that there is often 'advanced warning' if the young person is at risk of dropping out. Jordana is 14:

She failed year 8 and semester one of Year 9. She is
currently doing no school work ... very negative about
school ... she knows a lot of street kids ... hangs out with
older kids who deal drugs ... some of her friends are out
of home as well.

Marty is 15:

He is coping OK at school, but seeks constant approval
from staff ... However, out of school he mixes with older
guys, some of whom have been involved in breaking and
entering and also 'dealing'. He looks to them for approval
... he has been involved with the police on one occasion.

When young people are in the in and out stage, it is critical what happens to them at school. Early intervention and effective support can make a difference.

4.3 Permanent break

The *permanent break* is the next biographical transition. It signifies that the young person no longer thinks of him- or herself as belonging to the family unit, and that he or she is unlikely to return 'home' on a continuing basis. This concept is used in a metaphorical sense to denote a major transformation in a young person's sense of personal identity. The permanent break is usually marked by an event that is of major symbolic importance to the young person, such as a bitter quarrel.

Some young people who make a permanent break want to remain at school. However, they need support to make the transition to independent living. A second group want to remain at school, but they become overwhelmed by other problems in their life and think about dropping out. Support at school is particularly important for these young people. A third group leave school at about the same time as they make the permanent break.

Earlier, we met Melissa who left home after a dispute with her mother about her boyfriend. Her mother refused to sign Melissa's Centrelink application for Youth Allowance. However, Melissa remained at school, living with a friend's family for two months while her application for Youth Allowance was investigated:

It took forever for Centrelink to interview all the parties, including school personnel ... It appeared that family violence was uncovered which meant that she could get the allowance.

Around the same time, Melissa got a part-time job. Once the benefit was approved, she made the transition to independent living, moving into a shared flat with two other girls. Melissa is able to manage financially, providing she keeps her part-time job. According to the school, Melissa is 'aiming to go to university and we think she'll make it'.

Other young people do not make the transition to independent living so easily. Earlier, we met Angelo who left home after his stepfather assaulted a number of his friends. Angelo stayed temporarily with different friends. On census night, he had been out of home for 10 weeks:

His self-esteem has been seriously eroded ... He can't understand his mother's position ... His interest in his studies has diminished. His behaviour is erratic ... He is only managing with considerable support.

Some teenagers experience an emotional roller-coaster ride as they try to come to terms with family breakdown. They need ongoing counselling and support, as well as help with a range of practical issues.

The concept of the 'permanent break' is used in a metaphorical sense to denote a major transformation in a young person's sense of personal identity. Once young people have made this break, early intervention strategies that are designed to facilitate young people returning home are unlikely to be successful.

Schools still have a critical role to play because they can support students who want to remain at school and make the transition to independent living. Some young people experience emotional turmoil as they try to come to terms with family breakdown. They need ongoing counselling and intensive support. Others mainly need practical assistance with applications for income support, help with accommodation, and assistance with budgeting. This is 'early intervention' in a broader sense of the term. It is designed to keep young people at school while assisting them to live independently. Early intervention in this broader sense is equally important.

4.4 Transition to chronicity

Homeless students who drop out of school usually become involved in the homeless sub-culture. We understand the term 'sub-culture' in much the same way as Snow and Anderson (1993) in *Down on their Luck*:

It is not a subculture in the conventional sense ... in that it is neither anchored in nor embodies a distinctive set of shared values. Rather ...its distinctiveness resides in a pattern of behaviours, routines, and orientations that are adaptive responses to the predicament of homelessness ... The matrix of social-service and control agencies and commercial establishments that deal directly with the homeless also shapes their routines and options. (Snow and Anderson 1993, pp.76-77)

Some teenagers become immersed in the sub-culture quickly, although others remain on the margins. The latter group leave home and school, but they do not accept homelessness as a way of life. Some make the transition to independent living, usually with assistance from friends or professional support services. They typically experience some months of homelessness.

However, many teenagers who become immersed in the sub-culture will make the *transition to chronicity*, or chronic homelessness. This denotes the acceptance of homelessness as a 'way of life'. It is a biographical transition which takes place gradually, rather than a dramatic event. These teenagers come to accept petty crime, substance abuse, drug dealing and prostitution as a normal part of everyday life (O'Connor 1989; HREOC 1989; Hirst 1989). It is difficult to help young people who have made the transition to chronicity, because they no longer express a strong disposition to change their lifestyle.²

On census night, Jane, 17, had been homeless for two years:

This young woman has stayed all over the place ... several refuges ... now living in a squat, using heroin and working as a prostitute ... There was a brief period in her life when ... intervention could have worked ... but it was not available ...

Benny, 18, has been homeless for three years. He has been itinerant for much of that time:

His step-father was an alcoholic ... He doesn't know where his mother is ... has spent time sleeping rough, at refuges, at various friends' places ... in prison ... in boarding houses, in a squat in Fitzroy ... unable to get a flat ... no references, no savings, no job.

Young people who make the transition to chronicity typically experience a sustained period of homelessness. The whole thrust of 'early intervention' 'is to stop this happening to as many young people as possible.

4.5 Defining key concepts

This chapter has outlined the theoretical model for a national early intervention and prevention policy framework. The homeless career typology is useful because it draws attention to the fact that different intervention strategies are needed at different stages of the homeless career. It also draws attention to the distinction between early intervention and prevention.

According to Crane and Brannock (1996), early intervention is about providing assistance to young people who are either in the early stages of the homeless career or perceptibly 'at risk'. This is how we will use the term.

² The next two examples are from the SAAP database.

Preventative strategies focus on:

the development and implementation of policies, practices and strategies which address structural or external factors contributing to youth homelessness, or which focus on factors which are both protective and situational. These responses are not targeted to specific individuals or families on the basis that they are considered vulnerable to homelessness. (Crane and Brannock 1996, p.15)

Preventative strategies facilitate protective factors in young people such as their connection to school and community. In a climate of scarce resources, preventative initiatives will often begin with young people thought to be more at risk of homelessness. Thus, there is a grey area along the intervention continuum where prevention becomes early intervention and vice versa. As Carter (1993, p.140) puts it, 'we can conceive of protective factors as the other side of the coin to the risk factors'. Risk factors include family conflict, social isolation, failure at school and so forth. Protective strategies might include counselling facilities for young people and their families, special programs for students with different educational needs, and so on. Preventative strategies are generally regarded as 'socially desirable in [their] own right' (Billis, 1981, p.371).

Early intervention strategies come in two forms. First, early intervention strategies can focus on young people who are at the earliest stages of the homeless career or perceptibly at risk. As we have seen some young people move in and out of home for a sustained period of time. This is when early intervention strategies should explore all possibilities for family reconciliation.

Once young people make a permanent break from home, then the opportunity for early intervention in this sense is over. However, schools still have a critical role to play. They can support young people who want to remain at school and make the transition to independent living. This is early intervention in a broader sense of the term, and it is equally important. In some cases, there is an element of 'family reconciliation', because counsellors support young people to rebuild links with parents, but these teenagers do not return home.

5 PREVENTION

Preventative strategies in schools focus on building protective barriers that lower risk levels. These strategies include: promoting student well being; building resilience; supporting young people to succeed in school; encouraging a sense of belonging to the community; and providing support for students 'in trouble'. These activities are also likely to protect young people from inter-related issues such as 'early school leaving', 'youth suicide', 'drug taking' and 'bullying'. Preventative strategies are often regarded as socially desirable in their own right.

In order to focus on prevention, schools need a strong welfare infrastructure, as well as programs targeted towards students with special needs. When we carried out 100 field visits to schools in the mid 1990s (MacKenzie and Chamberlain 1995), it was common to find that the student support person was a teacher employed part-time. In many schools, we heard of students who were unable to find the welfare coordinator when they needed help. There were also complaints from welfare staff that they had no time to visit families. Many schools reported that homeless students only came to their attention when they dropped out.

In Chapter 1, we pointed out that most states and territories have expanded the number of welfare personnel in schools in recent years. Our fieldwork in 2004 also indicates that there have been some major changes in schools. Many schools now have a more extensive welfare team. In some schools there are well-developed pastoral care programs. Other schools have special programs both within and outside the mainstream curriculum. Many schools have forged links with local community services.

This chapter examines the factors that contribute to prevention. These are strong welfare teams, leadership and teamwork, pastoral care programs, mentoring and special programs. It is difficult to measure the effectiveness of strategies to prevent homelessness. One cannot quantify how many students did not become homeless because a particular program was in place. However, it is possible to identify the programs that schools believe are working well. Our illustrations are drawn from the field visits and questionnaires.

5.1 Student support infrastructure

In some states, school counsellors are trained psychologists. In other states, the student welfare coordinator is more likely to be a teacher who has elected to do student support work. This is usually a full-time or near full-time position. A minority of schools employ a youth worker in their welfare team, and some schools employ social workers. Other schools have access to youth workers, social workers and family counsellors through their links with community agencies.

For example, one high school in Queensland has a student welfare team that consist of a full-time guidance officer, a full-time community education counsellor (mainly for Indigenous students), a school health nurse, a youth support worker (shared across four schools) and a chaplain (three days per week). This team meets at a set time each week to discuss homeless students and young people at risk.

In South Australia, another high school has large number of students from poor socio-economic areas, with many 'from backgrounds of extreme poverty and second generation unemployment'. The school has a minority of students with learning disabilities and some students have a family history of mental illness. The Senior School Counsellor manages a group of about 40 independent students. There are also teachers who take on case management:

We have a case management approach ... with most staff having a maximum fifteen students in their care group. This structure allows for a greater degree of relationship building with individuals. It helps encourage attendance ... because there is regular contact with a significant adult.

A country school in Victoria has 450 students from Years 7 to 12. The welfare team consists of a full-time youth worker, a school chaplain (three days per week), a school nurse (2.5 days per week), a social worker (one day per week), and a guidance officer (one day per week). They work:

... closely as a team ... students are aware that if things are not going well for them ... they can come to a member of the welfare team for assistance ... students know that assistance is available to them within the school.

A Catholic girls school in a capital city has a full-time school counsellor who is a trained psychologist. She sees about one-quarter of the students each year. The school also employs a family therapist whose services are advertised in the school's newsletter. Often parents approach her directly and she worked with 70 families last year. There is a dynamic Principal who is committed to student welfare. The school has an extensive pastoral care system and many special programs to enhance students' life skills.

Senior secondary colleges are separate schools for young people completing Years 11 and 12. A senior secondary college is likely to have at least three to four times more homeless students than a conventional high school (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1998, p.150). There is less monitoring and supervision of students, and marginal students can easily get lost. Senior colleges do not work so well for young people who are troubled by family breakdown or other major issues in their lives.

In order to support at risk students, one senior secondary college in Tasmania has developed a student services department. This is staffed by six teachers who are released from half of their teaching responsibilities. Students use this area to arrange course changes and to seek assistance with careers planning. They can also seek assistance with personal issues. There is a guidance officer who is a trained psychologist, employed two days per week. There is also a full-time youth worker who works primarily with homeless and independent students, as well as a school chaplain.

Across the country, there is considerable variation in how the student support system is organised in schools. In part, this reflects the fact that schools have different philosophies about the role of welfare. It also reflects the different levels of resources that are available to schools to provide welfare. There is also a greater need for a

strong welfare infrastructure in some schools. Overall, there has been an improvement in the welfare infrastructure in many schools, but this improvement has not been uniform across the states.

5.2 Leadership and teamwork

Some Principals promote their schools in terms of student welfare. In one 'leading' High School the Principal told us, 'This is an academic school, but we look after our kids. We turn losers into winners'. In another school, a Deputy Principal said, 'One of our strengths is that we build relationships with our students. We have a strong welfare team'. A Principal in Sydney told us, 'This is a caring school. We support all our young people'.

These principals promoted academic excellence in their schools, but at the same time were committed to welfare and to supporting all their students. In a remarkable school in Tasmania, the philosophy of participation, equity and student excellence was embedded deeply through the entire working of the school. This school was in a disadvantaged community, but it also produced excellent academic results. We encountered several country schools that demonstrated a similar strong ethos of community involvement, participation and support for their students.

In schools where student welfare support was well developed, the school leadership was either directly championing this work, or providing the support needed to carry it out. In these schools, it was common for welfare staff to say that 'the Principal is excellent', or 'she has given me a budget', or 'he really backs me up', or 'I can talk to her any time'.

Most schools thought that an important ingredient of a successful welfare program was teamwork. According to one welfare coordinator:

Teamwork is crucial ... Our Student Welfare Team does not look at itself as simply a group of people working together but as a team where all members have the same goals and commitment to those goals. We trust each other. We share information ... We bounce ideas off each other to achieve positive outcomes. We are all aware of our respective roles and responsibilities ... welfare has a positive connotation in this school.

According to the guidance counsellor in another school:

I feel that working in a partnership with all the parties involved in the young person's life is crucial to success. If the school has an understanding of the young person's situation, then we are able to cater more effectively for their needs ... Our approach generally involves the school counsellor, year coordinator and other staff members as necessary.

In another school, the Deputy Principal described the six welfare staff as a 'closely knit team'. The welfare team meets weekly to ensure that all students are catered for, and that services are provided in a coordinated way. The team also shares the case management workload.

We visited many schools that had a strong welfare infrastructure. There was always evidence of strong leadership and good teamwork. In these schools, there was a dominant cultural ethos that schools should try to meet the needs of all members of their community. According to one youth worker, 'we work together to ensure that the college meets the needs of all members of its community'.

5.3 Pastoral care

Preventative strategies focus on providing services that facilitate protective factors for all young people against homelessness. One strategy with a long history is 'pastoral care'. Pastoral care is about building a strong relationship between young people and their pastoral care teacher. It includes a range of measures whereby schools attend to the welfare needs of their students. We identified three ideal typical models of pastoral care, based on fieldwork during 2004: the 'minimalist model', the 'classic model', and the 'whole of school' approach.

5.3.1. *Minimalist model*

In the minimalist model of pastoral care, students see their pastoral care teacher for five or 10 minutes every morning, and sometimes for another five minutes in the afternoon. The home group teacher attempts to get to know the young people, and to build good relationships with them. However, he or she does not teach them and there is no pastoral care period in the curriculum. Teachers say that most of their time with students is taken up with administrative matters.

It is common to find year coordinators designated as responsible for student welfare. The year coordinator can be responsible for 100 or more students and s/he is expected to liaise with home group teachers and subject teachers to identify students with special needs. One teacher responded to a question about a dedicated pastoral period by saying: 'there isn't any time in the curriculum – we're flat chat'. Other teachers have never experienced a different way of working.

5.3.2. *The classic model*

The classic model of pastoral care is based on 'home groups', but there is a lot more contact between the students and their home group teacher. The classic model was the preferred approach during the late seventies and early eighties, when pastoral care was first introduced. In some cases, the pastoral care teacher also takes his or her students for one or more of their compulsory subjects in Years 7 and 8. A pastoral care program is introduced into the curriculum, particularly for students from years 7 to 10. In principle, home group teachers stay with the same home group as they progress through school.

In one school with a classic pastoral care program the pastoral teacher was called the 'form group mentor'. On the first day of term, the form group mentor welcomes students back to school, reviews what has happened the previous year, and sets goals for the new year. He has daily contact with the students and he normally teaches them for one or two subjects per week in Years 7 and 8. Where possible, the teachers stays with the same home group for their first four years at school. If another member of staff has concerns about a student, they are encouraged to discuss their concerns with the form group mentor in the first instance. The form group mentor also has contact with

the parents if there are concerns about student absences or other issues. The form group mentor usually knows his or her students very well.

One notable South Australian high school has an effective pastoral care program that other schools have followed. Teachers start with a home group of 15 to 20 students and where possible the teachers follows them through to Year 12. This enables staff to and students build strong relationships, and staff often get to know parents as well. The pastoral care lesson each week is well organised and all 'care teachers' are expected to put as much effort into this lesson as in to any other subject. Pastoral lessons are part of a teacher's load and not an extra-curricula contribution as in some schools. There is a framework of pastoral care themes and activities posted on notice boards for all to see - the 'care program' for younger students and a 'personal development program' for older students. During a field visit, there were discussions with two assistant principals who both articulated a strong school philosophy of 'student well-being'.

5.3.3. *Whole of school approach*

The third pastoral care model is the whole of school approach where pastoral care is embedded throughout the curriculum. This was the case in one school which had undertaken a radical reorganisation of the whole curriculum. In this school, a teacher takes a group of students for most of their work in Years 8 and 9 following the format typical in primary schools. The class teacher undertakes activities in his or her class that might otherwise be part of a pastoral program in a conventional high school. The key principles underpinning this approach are consistency, transparency, and student empowerment – 'students have to make decisions'. The current Principal had experienced the change process from the beginning and is deeply committed to the school. This school is in a disadvantaged community, but has achieved literacy and numeracy results in the top five in the state. Some country schools provide examples of this model as well, where teachers adopt a community school approach.

In one catholic school a mini school was set up for Year 9 students in large Victorian house across the road from the main campus. In this setting a whole of school approach to pastoral care was implemented. Year 9 has been identified as a 'difficult year' for many students. These students have two main teachers, and much of their work is organised around projects. Year 9 teachers get to know their students really well. The school has a classic pastoral care program for students in other years. In addition, there are programs on bullying, drug and alcohol education, body image, leadership training, resilience, and peer support training.

Pastoral care is about building strong relationship between students and their pastoral care teacher. When this works well, the pastoral care teacher is often the first person to know that a young person is 'in trouble at home' or 'in trouble at school'.

5.4 Mentoring

Pastoral care is provided for all students, whereas mentoring is an individualised strategy targeted at specific young people. Mentoring involves an older person building a long-term, supportive relationship with a younger person. The adult may become like an older brother or sister.

Some schools recruit volunteers for mentoring. In other cases, some reimbursement may be necessary. One school in South Australia uses volunteers:

We have a community based mentoring program. Volunteers undertake training to work as mentors in the school. They have to have police checks and observe the requirements of mandatory reporting.

The mentors spend time with the 'at risk' students 'sharing interests', 'offering work experience', or taking time out to have 'a regular chat'. The school reported that the program was successful at 'building self-esteem', 'developing social skills', as well as providing adult role models for kids who have run away from home, or been kicked out.

A Victorian school runs a program called 'Plan-It Youth', using adult mentors:

Each week 10 students meet with their mentors for two hours. They get to know each other, and the mentor takes a special interest in the young person.

The school reported that there was a marked improvement in the behaviour of most students in the program.

Another school in New South Wales employs eight mentors on a part-time basis. They are called 'special aides'. Each mentor works on a one-to-one basis with a small group of students, building close relationships based upon trust. Sometimes they get to know the whole family, providing support for parents, as well as teenagers. According to the school, the mentors have 'extraordinary passion, energy and patience'. The mentors were said to be, 'the foundation upon which these students succeed'.

Many schools have experimented with peer mentors where older students are trained to provide support to Year 7 or 8 students. The emphasis is on building vertical relationships between students to break down the disorientation that some students feel upon entering high school. It is also promoted as a method for older students to learn values and as an exercise in active school citizenship. These programs are quite common but take time to facilitate and support.

5.5 Special programs

Most schools that have a well-developed pastoral care program usually have a range of special programs. Some programs are open to any young person in the school, whereas other programs are targeted towards high-risk groups.

One country school with a strong pastoral care infrastructure has a range of special programs designed to encourage personal growth, self-confidence and a sense of responsibility to others. All students in years 7 and 8 have to do some community service, such as working with the elderly or delivering 'meals on wheels'. In year 9, students are encouraged to attend an alpine school, where they take part in activities that will take them 'out of their comfort zone'. All students undertake various public speaking programs, designed to increase their self-confidence.

Another school has an externally funded program targeting at risk students. These students 'are experiencing difficulties coping with the standard timetabled lessons and with school life in general'. One staff member is responsible for this program. The students undertake 'many and varied enterprising tasks', are actively involved in community service, and undertake work placements. The school has strong links with local businesses that 'willingly provide work placements'. There is also a special program for students with learning difficulties. These students are provided with one-to-one counselling, and have their own room where 'they can work at their own pace'.

Another school has a 'transitions' project which focuses on career pathways for young people who are interested in apprenticeships or going on to TAFE. The project worker will see students on an individual basis to discuss career option and provide information. The project worker is located in a community setting, so that past students can also access the service.

A Catholic school runs a number of programs for students who have special needs. The school provides a special program for students in Years 7 to 9 who have learning difficulties. There are support staff that can assist young people on an individual basis. Students in Years 10 to 12 can join a special program that involves work experience and examines vocational options such as TAFE courses and apprenticeships.

A school in South Australia has a pastoral care program that emphasises building strong relationships. This school offers 'parent information nights' which are designed to skill parents in conflict resolution and other parenting techniques. The school has recently introduced a personal development program into the curriculum. The school also has links with external services – such as the local *Reconnect* program – which provide services for young people who are homeless. Special programs are generally found in schools with a strong commitment to working with marginal students.

5.6 Conclusion

Preventative programs typically focus on promoting student well being, building student resilience, supporting young people to succeed in school, encouraging a sense of belonging to the community, and so forth. These strategies provide protective factors for young people who might be at risk of homelessness. These strategies also protect young people from inter-related issues such early school leaving, youth suicide, drug taking and bullying. Preventative strategies are often regarded as socially desirable in their own right.

Overall, there have been improvements in the welfare infrastructure in many schools, but these improvements have not been uniform across the country. Schools with an effective welfare infrastructure usually have: a committed principal who provides overall leadership; a welfare team who are well resourced; a strong pastoral care program; and special programs to assist young people with special needs. In Chapter 8, we suggest that there should be national standards for the provision of welfare in all schools.

6 EARLY INTERVENTION

6.1 Two types of early intervention

Chapter 4 pointed out that early intervention strategies come in two forms. First, early intervention strategies can focus on young people who are in the 'in and out' stage, or perceptibly at risk. These strategies focus on family reconciliation. This is the type of early intervention that we have emphasised in the past (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1998), and this is the focus of the Commonwealth Government's *Reconnect* program.

Second, early intervention can mean supporting homeless students to remain at school and make the transition to independent living. This can involve 'family reconciliation', but these students do not return home. On the basis of talking to many schools, we think that this is now the larger group. Table 6.1 shows that two-thirds (63 per cent) of the young people in the case studies had been homeless for three months or longer. They were still at school, but trying to make the transition to independent living.

Table 6.1: Duration of homelessness of students identified in the case studies

Case studies* (N=1,094)	
	%
Less than 4 weeks	13
1 to 2 months	24
3 to 5 months	26
6 months or more	37
	100

Information on 92 per cent of cases

This chapter tries to give a more nuanced understanding of early intervention than in our earlier work, using cases from the school students' database. First, we review the argument about family reconciliation. Then we point out that for some independent students, school is the point of stability in their life and they are determined to complete their education. These young people need help with income and accommodation, but they do not need long-term support and counselling.

Another group experience an emotional crisis following the breakdown of family relationships. Everything starts 'to go wrong at school'. They need help with income and accommodation. They also need long-term support and counselling, and are at greater risk of dropping out.

Finally, we point out that some young people come from families that have problems going back many years. In these cases, the term 'early intervention' is not appropriate for the work done by schools.

6.2 Early intervention to facilitate family reconciliation

If the young person is in the 'in and out' stage, early intervention usually means investigating the possibility of family reconciliation. This will not be appropriate if the young person has been sexually or physically abused. However, in many cases young people become homeless after a period of intense conflict with parents. Skilled counsellors can assist families to work through these difficulties. In some cases,

counsellors organise for students to have 'time out', whereby the young person stays temporarily with another family.

According to a counsellor in Tasmania:

We regularly assist students who are homeless or in danger of becoming homeless. Our aim is always to keep them at home. If this is not possible, we try to put them with relatives. This gives both sides a break, while we try to fix the problem.

Another counsellor said:

Our first objective is to try mediation. We investigate the possibility of reconciliation between the student and the parents. We find there is great support from students' friends. Students are often accommodated with other families for a few days, while we sort things out.

Many workers use respite care because it is a better option than sending students to a SAAP service, where they meet people involved in the homeless sub-culture. Respite care is an attempt to mobilise the social capital in communities, in order to provide informal supported accommodation on a short-term basis.

There is variation in what happens to homeless teenagers. In some cases, the issues are resolved quickly. Jane, 16, lives with her mother who is divorced. According to the counsellor, both women are 'strong willed'. Things 'came to a head' when Mum issued an ultimatum: two girls were not to visit the house. Jane moved out. The school offered both women counselling. According to the counsellor, 'Jane's back home and everything seems to be going O.K. All her friends are allowed to come round'.

Lucy, 16, is from a Lebanese family in Western Sydney. There had been conflicts with her parents over her behaviour at home, her choice of friends, and her refusal to use her Lebanese name. The conflict came to a head after an incident at school, and Lucy was 'thrown out'. She stayed with various friends, before going to a refuge:

After several family conferences her parents agreed to have her back home. There have been various compromises on both sides. She is still at home and the situation is O.K.

In other cases, the guidance officer will refer the family to a *Reconnect* service for counselling. Linda, 15, left home after a period of acute conflict with her mother:

The student stayed with different friends for four weeks. I guided both women to mediation (*Reconnect* service), where mutually acceptable boundaries were established. Student and mother are now reconciled.

Some young people seek assistance when they are at risk. Serge, 17, is from a non-English speaking background. His parents are 'very traditional' in their outlook, and they wanted him to achieve 'outstanding results' in Year 12. Serge felt under a huge amount of pressure. Initially, he came to the counsellor for stress and anger management, after various 'incidents' at home. According to the counsellor:

The situation was volatile ... Serge was becoming increasingly disillusioned and frustrated. He recognised his potential for violence ... His parents had started to talk about removing him from the house ... and taking out an 'apprehended violence order'.

The welfare team identified reconciliation as the goal, because both sides 'wanted to salvage the relationship'. Serge and his parents agreed they had to learn new strategies for dealing with each other. Eventually, it was decided that during the week Serge would live in supported accommodation run by the Marist Brothers, but return home on the weekends:

... appropriate boundaries were established for the student and his family for his return on weekends ... the student was able to study and he stopped being violent ... things were much better.

This strategy led to a significant improvement in relations between Serge and his parents. He completed Year 12 and went to university.

Family reconciliation is an important component of 'early intervention'. It is necessary to work with both the young person and his or her parents – because reconciliation is about both sides making compromises. Many parents and teenagers are able to make these compromises, but they need a detached outsider to help them through the process. Effective counsellors facilitate teenagers and parents to see the other person's point of view – and this is the basis for compromise. In some cases, it will result in the young person returning home. In other cases, the young person will return home for a while, before moving on to independent living, but this will be achieved with parental support.

6.3 Early intervention to support independent students

Independent students are young people who can no longer live at home. Some are adequately housed, others are homeless and some are at risk.

For many homeless students, school is the point of stability in their lives, and many of them are determined to do well. Tracy's stepmother suffered post-natal depression, and Tracy was sent to stay with another family. When she returned:

Her father wouldn't speak to her. She was left to eat on her own in her caravan at the back of the house. Her mail was opened ... She was forbidden to make phone calls.

Eventually, she contacted the School Chaplain who helped her find a room with another family:

She works at a local supermarket ... School is the point of stability in her life. She is very determined to finish her studies. I am happy to support her in any way I can.

School is also the point of stability for Matt, 15. Matt has no father and his mother died last year:

At first, he stayed with his older brother. Then he moved in with his sister ... This lasted for about three months ... since then, he has stayed with different friends. He is very keen to do well at school, and his attendance is excellent. His reading and literacy are improving. School is the point of stability in his life.

Alex, 16, is a very able student who 'holds his own' at school. Alex was thrown out by his mother:

... following months of emotional abuse and threats. Mother blames him for all the evils and ills in her life – everything is Alex's fault.

Alex contacted a teacher who looked after him and brought him to school the next day. The guidance officer organised for him to stay at a refuge. From there, he moved into longer-term supported accommodation:

Alex has a part-time job ... managing OK financially ... doing well at school.

Noyemzar, 17, joined her school's accelerated learning program in Year 7. Staff describe her as 'exceptionally able'. Her relationship with her step-father has been tense. There are issues about sexual abuse of her older sister, who has moved out of home. Noyemzar blames her mother for not protecting her sister. Noyemzar was 'eased out of home' earlier in the year. She is currently staying with friends:

... much calmer now that she has moved out of home. She attends school regularly and is coping well with schoolwork. She has a part-time job ... seeking a high Year 12 score ... She actively seeks us out when she is upset, and we keep an eye on her.

For many homeless students, school is the point of stability in their lives and they are determined to complete their education. They often need help to make the transition to independent living, and some ongoing support from an adult they can trust. These students are determined to remain at school, and in some cases they do very well at Year 12. Counsellors can also help them to re-open lines of communication with their parents.

For other homeless students, school starts to go wrong once they lose stable accommodation. These teenagers usually need intensive support. Shane moved to Adelaide from another state, so that he could live with his mother. There was a major disagreement and Shane and his girlfriend were told to leave:

I referred them to the *Reconnect* worker. Her agency paid for two nights accommodation at a caravan park ... They have moved in with the girl's uncle, but this is a temporary solution. They are not able to concentrate at school, because they are constantly on the look out for housing.

In other cases, young people have emotional problems. Gwen, 16, comes from a family where there have been ongoing difficulties for many years. Her father suffers from depression and is 'excessively controlling'. Gwen lives in a 'shared house' but the accommodation is unstable. She is:

... agitated and distressed ... exhibiting excessive mood swings. There is also evidence of self-harm ... She has seen the social worker ... I have organised an appointment with a psychiatrist. Her school performance has been badly disrupted. Things are not going well.

Gwen is acutely at risk and will probably need intensive support over a long period.

Eric, 17, left home because his stepfather is violent and his mother does not intervene:

Stepfather is extremely physically abusive ... Eric has had many days off school ... and has wanted to leave on many occasions ... we are providing ongoing counselling and constant support ...

There are many cases like this.

Sonia, 17, lived with her mother and stepfather. Her stepfather resorts to physical abuse, and Sonia left home after a violent argument. She has stayed at different friend's places:

She is not coping very well and her schoolwork has suffered. She is on medication for anxiety and depression ... I fear for her well-being.

For some homeless students, things start to go wrong at school. Some exhibit 'acting out' behaviour and flaunt the school rules. Others are distressed and cannot concentrate. These homeless students need help with income and accommodation, but they also need ongoing support and counselling, as they come to terms with family breakdown. These students are often at risk of dropping out. It is preferable that they are not placed in SAAP accommodation, where they will meet people involved in the homeless sub-culture.

6.4 When early intervention is no longer possible

In some cases, the term 'early intervention' is probably a misnomer for the work done in schools. For instance, the young person may have experienced a sustained period of homelessness before joining the school. Wanda, 15, had attended five high schools, before she enrolled in a school in suburban Melbourne:

This girl had been in and out of home for a number of years. She had already had two stints on the streets. She came to us when she moved in with her father. This broke down quickly, and she returned to the streets. I tracked her down to a squat in Dandenong.

In cases like this, the young person requires intensive support. The social welfare coordinator helped her obtain supported accommodation. He organised a roster for someone to drive her to school each morning. The school provides breakfast and lunch. The school also pays excursion fees, and Wanda has a mentor whom she sees on a regular basis:

We are committed to supporting this student for as long as she wants. There are a number of teachers whom she trusts. She has been through terrible times – drug abuse, chroming, loneliness – but over the past few months we have noticed considerable improvement. She is on her way to completing Year 9.

In other cases, the term ‘early intervention’ is probably a misnomer because the young person comes from a family where there have been problems for many years. In some cases, these teenagers come from families where one or both parents have been in prison. In other cases, parents have been in and out of psychiatric institutions. Some families broke down many years before.

Roy, 14, has been in 40 foster homes. He was reunited with his mother, but:

The reconciliation broke down after two months ... He reported that she physically abused him ... She said he was uncontrollable ... He has been staying with friends.

Liam’s parents have spent time in prison for dealing heroin. Liam, 14, refuses to live at home and ‘beds down wherever he can’. He has no income and survives by selling marijuana:

The school provides breakfast and lunch. We have funding from the Department to employ a teacher’s aide (a mentor).

Julia’s mother has been in and out of psychiatric facilities. Julia, 14, has run away from many foster placements, and her school life has been ‘up and down’. There is now a ‘fairly steady network of people she can talk to at school’. Her most recent placement is ‘working out’, and the school sees this as ‘real progress’.

The term ‘early intervention’ is not appropriate for the work done by schools in these cases. There are young people who come from families that have problems going back many years. Others students come from families that break down before the student is 10 years of age. These are children who enter the state care and protection system before their teenage years, often experiencing multiple foster care placements. They are a particularly high-risk group. There is a case for providing more adequate welfare support in primary schools, following Victoria and South Australia’s lead. However, the caveat on this proposition is that it must not compromise the provision of student welfare support in secondary schools.

7 PRACTICE AND PROGRAMS

We have seen examples of early intervention in the preceding chapter. Now we draw the argument together, focusing on good practice in four areas: the provision of support and counselling services; assistance with income and accommodation; special programs for independent students; and the development of links between school welfare teams and local welfare services. This chapter draws on: the school students' database; questionnaires filled out by schools; interviews with welfare staff; and our field experience over the past decade.

7.1 Support and counselling

All schools require an experienced welfare team who can deliver ongoing support and counselling for homeless teenagers and other young people at risk. The welfare team must have the capacity to engage parents (or carers), as well as students. In some cases, parents are reticent to visit schools for these discussions, and the welfare team needs to have the capacity to carry out home visits. The welfare team must also have the capacity to support some families and students for a sustained period of time.

Peter, 16, has been supported for two years:

He lives with his mother who is an alcoholic ... when she drinks, she gets violent and attacks the boy. These episodes occur in cycles ... Peter has come to school showing signs of assault ... The police are regular visitors to the home. Usually, he stays with friends ... but sometimes he has slept rough because she has attacked him in the middle of the night.

The Court had recently issued a 'restraining order' prohibiting the boy from returning home, and he was staying in emergency accommodation. The counsellor sees Peter most days:

His schoolwork has suffered, but his attendance is good. He sees school as a refuge. We have a fund for disadvantaged students. We can help with books, clothes, lunch etc.

Some young people require long-term support, as they come to terms with family breakdown.

It is also common for independent students to need ongoing support as they develop skills for independent living. Stuart, 16, had left home after serious conflict with his stepfather. Initially, he stayed with friends, before moving into a shared flat with two other youths. His accommodation was 'stable'. However, he was still seeing a counsellor on a regular basis.

Stuart needs assistance to deal with negative peer pressure, build self-esteem, manage stress, and develop personal skills.

Schools also support younger students who are not ready to make the transition to independent living. A counsellor in South Australia was supporting a 13 year old girl who had been made a ward of the state. The girl had missed two years of schooling. The school was providing ongoing counselling, access to a dietician, help with uniform, and liaising with the girl's foster parents. The counsellor had set up a small support group of other students to encourage her, and the student had a 'learning support tutor'.

In many cases, welfare staff endeavour to keep the lines of communication open between students and their parents. Robbie, 15, is the eldest of six children. Robbie has been in and out of home many times. He has slept on the streets and stayed with friends. His father 'can be very harsh':

The latest dispute is over the theft of some money.
Robbie is adamant that he didn't take it. He says he's
never going back. I am trying to mediate ... but Dad
does not compromise.

The provision of an effective welfare infrastructure always involves the provision of counselling and support services. In some states school counsellors are trained psychologists. In other states, the student welfare coordinator is more likely to be a teacher who has chosen to do student support work. There are also schools that employ social workers and youth workers in counselling positions. In general, there seems to have been an increase in the number of counsellors with formal training, particularly in psychology and youth work.

Most schools also have teachers in their welfare team. In many cases, these will be year coordinators who have a special responsibility for student welfare. In other cases, an Assistant Principal will take overall responsibility for welfare. Some schools also have professionals from community agencies working on their welfare team. The size of the welfare team will vary depending on the school population and the needs of students. However, in all cases, there must be effective procedures in place for the welfare team to work together, and clear lines of responsibility.

One Queensland school has a welfare team that consists of a head guidance officer, a school based youth worker, a chaplain, a nurse, the head of the middle school, two behavioural management teachers, and a youth support coordinator from a community agency. This team meets at a set time each week to discuss homeless students and young people at risk:

The purpose of these meetings is to assign case managers to each of the young people, to design individual education and management plans, and to monitor progress. Sometimes, two to three people may be working with the same young person. For example, a homeless student may need counselling, health information from the nurse ... and help with accommodation from the youth worker. We have a collaborative approach which activates support around a young person when they need it.

Schools that were doing well always had a full-time school counsellor, a strong welfare team, regular meetings, good links with local services, and clear procedures for case management. There was also strong support from the Principal for welfare and pastoral care. According to the head guidance officer in this school: 'We have a very supportive Principal. We have the best conditions to work under'. In another school, the counsellor said, 'The Principal's great'. In these schools, welfare staff feel valued and supported.

7.2 Income and accommodation

Students who have not made a permanent break from home may need emergency accommodation. Some counsellors have lists of families who are prepared to take young people for respite care. Typically, this involves another family looking after a young person, while problems at home are sorted out. In some cases, welfare staff will ask relatives to look after a student for a short period of time. Often these 'breaks' allow parents and teenagers to reflect on their relationship, and a compromise can be negotiated.

In cases where the young person has made a 'permanent break', then they have many material needs. The most immediate needs are usually income support and accommodation. It is time-consuming to get young people on to youth allowance at the 'living away from home' rate, and some welfare staff refer homeless students to external agencies for this assistance. A school psychologist in Western Australia told us about a 16 year old girl who had been 'thrown out' by her step-mother. The staff member was providing ongoing support, but:

I referred her to our local JPET agency to apply for the 'living away from home' allowance. They will take the student to Centrelink and help with the paperwork ... the JPET staff have specific skills and have time to transport students.

In other schools, welfare staff have regular contact with Centrelink social workers, and they will telephone them to discuss particular cases. This is usually the case in Victoria and Queensland, where local coordination agencies have provided schools with list of services and telephone numbers. Some schools also encourage welfare staff to accompany homeless students to Centrelink interviews – especially if the student is upset or lacking in confidence. This is a better option than sending students on their own.

Homeless students often need assistance with accommodation. Again, some schools refer young people to outside agencies for assistance, but other schools take this task on themselves. One Catholic school in New South Wales has accommodation for boarders, and this is also used for homeless students:

We have one homeless student in the boarding school this term. He is on independent youth allowance, and contributes part of this towards his board. In the holidays, he relies on relatives for accommodation.

A Catholic school in Victoria has a house on campus which a staff member lives in. The teacher has various caretaking responsibilities, and part of 'the deal' is that they will accommodate homeless students. There is a room where a student can stay for a night, a weekend or a few weeks if necessary. The Principal said, 'it is very reassuring to know that the accommodation is there, although we only use it occasionally'.

Schools with a strong welfare team usually have links with local SAAP services. Welfare staff often approach these services for assistance. John lived with his mother until her male friend moved in. John moved in with his father, but this broke down after two months. The counsellor approached a local service provider, and:

John moved in for year 11 ... There are three other students in the house, one who is doing HSC. The youth worker offers good support and John has settled down well.

Young people can also be referred to 'alternative families' for accommodation. The court had removed two brothers from a mother who had 'alcohol and drug problems'. They are living with a gay couple. The eldest boy had been 'in and out' of home, and had problems at school:

He is going from strength to strength. He has become more articulate, confident ... is planning to do year 11 ... His foster fathers have provided the first stability in his life ... He has changed from being an ... angry self-mutilating adolescent ... to a student with an academic future.

In most cases, welfare staff provide homeless students with a range of supports. Katerina, 17, attends a Catholic school in Queensland. She left home because of sexual abuse. Her support worker described her as 'very depressed' and 'constantly talking of suicide'. Over the next few months, the support worker assisted her to find emergency accommodation, helped her apply for youth allowance, arranged for her school fees to be waived, and assisted her to find longer-term accommodation. Most importantly, the counsellor provided ongoing support and counselling.

In other cases, counsellors have to be sensitive to the needs of students from minority groups. Pierre, 15, is gay. The welfare coordinator found him short-term accommodation through the local Gay and Lesbian Network. Then she found him longer-term accommodation with a Salvation Army couple who had an older gay son:

Pierre is doing fine at school. He is a trumpeter in the Salvation Army Band ... no contact with 'natural' family ... but has magnificent links with the school, the Salvos and the Gay and Lesbian Network.

It is often best to refer homeless students to a local family if this option is available. In some rural communities there is no SAAP accommodation, and referring young people to other families is the only option. Some welfare coordinators have a list of families who are prepared to take students in an emergency.

7.3 Special programs

A minority of schools have special programs to support homeless students. One school in Western Australia organises a 'breakfast club' from Monday to Thursday each week. The breakfast club is staffed by the school's youth worker, the school chaplain and the Aboriginal and Islander Officer. Other teachers sometimes lend a hand. The breakfast club is about building relationships between staff and students, as well as providing a nourishing breakfast. Students are encouraged to help staff prepare and cook food, and to clean up afterwards:

Many strong relationships develop between staff and students because of the regularity of the program and the relaxed atmosphere ... Afterwards, students can play pool and table-tennis ... or just chat to staff ...

The breakfast club is sponsored by a local building company, who have taken this on as a 'special project'. The breakfast club is a simple, practical initiative that works well.

At a senior secondary college in Tasmania, independent students are invited to dinner once a week. Participating staff cook for between 10 and 20 students, and any leftovers are taken home. This project began as a response to concerns about independent students having nutritional meals, but the dinners are also about building relationships:

This is an opportunity for independent students and teachers to get to know each other in a casual setting. It is about building trusting relationships. This is important for students who do not have parents in their life. Company and communal activity are good for the soul!

At a school in Queensland, the guidance officer and the youth support worker organise lunch for the school's independent students every Monday. 'We usually buy take away pizzas, fried chicken or something like that'. The purpose of the meeting is to provide support, build relationships, and to discuss issues. 'People sit around and chat and often things come up'. This is an effective way of maintaining contact with independent students. It also provides independent students with an opportunity to meet each other.

7.4 Links with community services

When we visited schools in the middle 1990s, there were few that had good links with community welfare services. We concluded that:

Schools often operate as self-sufficient worlds, where the primary task is classroom teaching. Likewise, welfare agencies often have no contact with schools. This cultural Berlin Wall has to be breached if early intervention is to work. (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1998, p.145)

There are now many schools in all states and territories that have strong links with community welfare services. For example, a school in Brisbane told us about a 'student accommodation officer' who works across four schools. She assists homeless students and young people at risk with 'all aspects of their accommodation needs'. She will also link them into other support services. According to the guidance officer:

The project has been running for two years and is incredibly successful. It meets pressing needs in schools, and is based on proactive intervention.

A social welfare coordinator in Victoria talked about local welfare services as 'amazing'. She can refer students to a family support project and a community health centre. There is also 'supported accommodation for homeless students' in her community:

There is a lead tenant program, where young people live independently but there is an adult present ... providing a sense of security ... The SAAP service (a youth refuge) is brilliant with young people in housing crisis.

A South Australian school works with 'many welfare agencies'. The school has a number of students with mental health issues, and the welfare team has forged links with the local psychiatric hospital. The school also has a significant number of homeless and independent students:

We work closely with Centrelink, Abstudy, the SA Housing Trust, and Aboriginal Housing ... to try to get financial assistance for homeless students and to get accommodation for them ... Counsellors support students to access agencies. We organise medical appointments for them, and take them to appointments if needed.

A Catholic school in New South Wales was supporting a young woman from an Arabic speaking family:

She suffers from the tension of living between two cultures. She struggles with the oppressive discipline within the family and her desire to be a modern, attractive Australian girl ... Her father became physically violent ... She walked out.

The school had assisted with emergency accommodation and was providing ongoing support. The counsellor had also enlisted the help of a youth worker from an ethnic community agency to 'work with the mother to see if there might be a solution to the family's problems'.

A senior secondary college in Tasmania works closely with a local housing service. The agency provides accommodation for students in a block of flats located near the college. Representatives from a 'work pathways program' attend the college for two sessions per week. At risk students can be referred to a project that runs adventure based camps. The college is linked to a JPET program. Independent students are referred to an *Anglicare* project on 'financial planning and budgeting'.

When we carried out fieldwork in the mid 1990s, there were few schools that had good links with local community services. We concluded that this 'cultural Berlin Wall' has to be breached if early intervention is to work. There are now many schools in all states and territories that refer students to local services – and many welfare agencies that come into schools.

7.5 Conclusion

All schools require an experienced welfare team who can deliver ongoing support and counselling for homeless teenagers and other young people at risk. The welfare team must have the capacity to engage parents as well as students. The welfare team must also have the capacity to support some students for a sustained period of time. Schools that were doing well always had a Principal who was strongly committed to welfare. These schools usually had a full-time school counsellor, a strong welfare team, regular meetings, clear procedures for case management, and good links with local services. Many schools now work closely with local service providers – and welfare agencies often come into schools.

8 POLICY

Our policy proposals draw together information from the database on homeless students, quantitative data from earlier research, evaluations of various pilot programs, our model of the homeless career, field knowledge gleaned over the last 10 years, and inputs from practitioners involved in direct service delivery. During fieldwork, we visited schools and agencies across the country to find instances of good practice. Not only did we obtain a lot of information about what is happening in local communities, but we also had lots of dialogue about what seems to work, and what needs to be done. This discursive knowledge base informs our policy proposals to strengthen Australia's early intervention capacity:

- An expansion of the *Reconnect* program to achieve national coverage.
- A pilot program to trial the feasibility of an adolescent community placement program for homeless school students.
- A program to fund the coordination of early intervention services in local communities by linking schools and local agencies.
- National benchmarks for the provision of student welfare in secondary schools.

8.1 Early intervention to support family reconciliation

The theoretical model for a national early intervention and prevention policy framework was outlined in Chapter 4. Responses to youth homelessness can be conceived of as a continuum of interventions along the 'homeless career' process: preventative strategies in schools; early intervention to facilitate family reconciliation; early intervention to support independent students; and intensive support for young people who become long-term homeless (Chapter 4).

In 1996, the Prime Minister's Youth Homelessness Taskforce oversaw a large pilot program focusing on early intervention (Prime Ministerial Youth Homelessness Taskforce 1996). In 1999, the Commonwealth launched the *Reconnect* program with recurrent funds deploying early intervention workers in communities across Australia. *Reconnect* focuses on young people who are either acutely at risk, or in the 'in and out' stage.

An evaluation of *Reconnect* found that three-quarters of the young people were in Years 9 and 10, and just over half were living with one or both parents when they contacted *Reconnect* (Department of Family and Community Services 2003). Most of these teenagers were still with their parents at final contact, and some who had been in temporary accommodation had returned home. The evaluation found a significant improvement in the capacity of young people and their families to manage conflict, better communication, and improved attitudes to school. It is clear that *Reconnect* deals mainly with teenagers who are either at risk, or in the 'in and out' stage. It also appears that about 70 per cent are reconciled with their parents and in most cases their family situation had improved.

A *Reconnect* service provider described a 'typical' case. The client was a fourteen year old boy close to being expelled from school because of continual misbehaviour. His parents had separated and he was living with his mother. The boy was violent, and blamed his mother for the marriage break up. The *Reconnect* workers facilitated

Mum to receive grief and relationship counselling, and respite care was arranged to give the boy some 'time out'. Despite the escalating conflict, both sides wanted something better, and boundaries were re-negotiated. School remained an issue but additional support was put in place. After three months, the student was still at home and the situation had stabilised.

We asked school welfare staff about *Reconnect*. Where schools were linked to a *Reconnect* program, the response was always positive:

They're excellent. I don't know what we'd do without them (Social Welfare Coordinator, Melbourne).

They're fantastic. They do a lot of family mediation. They're quite happy to come to school. They are very flexible. (Assistant Principal, Adelaide)

We have a local *Reconnect*. We've used them heaps. They're great. (Guidance Officer, Brisbane)

We're in regular touch with them. They're absolutely brilliant. (School Chaplain, Perth).

Welfare staff reported that *Reconnect* is a successful initiative. However, some schools had not heard of the service – 'we've only just heard about *Reconnect* but it sounds good'. The *Reconnect* services that we visited all reported that they were working to capacity, and most did not advertise because this would only increase demand. The evaluation of *Reconnect* found:

The main challenge for the program is how to meet demand for services at current resource levels. The effectiveness of the program in assisting young people and families in highly disadvantaged areas suggests that the program model could usefully be expanded to other areas should funding become available. (Department of Family and Community Services 2003, p.87).

But what is the real demand for *Reconnect*? During 2002-03 *Reconnect* assisted 5,500 to 6,000 individual clients and also provided group work support to others. An examination of the list of *Reconnect* services indicated that about 50 per cent of communities do not have a *Reconnect* program. On this basis alone, the number of services could probably be doubled to achieve national coverage. However, we could make a more informed estimate of demand, if we knew the number of students at risk of homelessness.

In 1996, we surveyed 42,000 secondary school students to measure the 'at risk' population (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 1996). This is the largest national survey of at risk students, and provides the best indicator of possible demand. The survey found that one per cent of students were at risk of homelessness. Australia has a secondary school population of about 1,500,000 students (ABS 2003). Thus, there are about 15,000 students seriously at risk.

Currently Reconnect assists 5,500 to 6,000 clients per year. There is a strong case for expanding *Reconnect* two to three-fold to ensure that service provision matches the need for these services in the community. This is necessary if early intervention is to begin to reduce youth homelessness over the longer term. *Reconnect* was an important initiative. The evaluation of *Reconnect* found that it had been highly successful (Department of Family and Community Services 2003), and our interviews with schools confirm this.

8.2 Community placement option

Early intervention also involves supporting homeless students to remain at school and make a successful transition to independent living. Schools identified 8,500 homeless students in census week 2001, as well as another 3,700 who had been homeless within the preceding three months, but were now attempting to live as independent students (Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2002). Table 6.1 showed that two-thirds (63 per cent) of the young people in the case studies had been homeless for three months or longer. They were still at school, but trying to make the transition to independent living.

For some homeless students, school is the point of stability in their life, but for others 'everything starts to go wrong', and they need long-term support (Chapter 6). Both groups usually need help with accommodation. In many cases, they stay temporarily with friends or relatives when they first leave home (Chapter 6). A minority go to youth refuges (SAAP). After that, some attempt to move into shared households, but others look for supported accommodation because they cannot afford to rent in the private market. The main option is SAAP.

Some SAAP agencies are attempting to develop early intervention initiatives, and there is some innovative work going on. However, many SAAP agencies work with clients who have been homeless for long periods of time. The dominant culture of SAAP youth services reflects this. About two-thirds of SAAP clients aged 12 to 18 are unemployed, and most SAAP clients aged 19 or older are also unemployed (including 'not in the labour force'). Some SAAP clients have problems with substance abuse. Others have mental health issues. Some are involved with the criminal justice system. We need an accommodation option that gives homeless school students an alternative to SAAP. Experienced welfare teachers and SAAP workers regard this as 'common sense'.

In Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania, there are Adolescent Community Placement programs where young people can live with other households on a long-term basis. The adults recruited to such programs are properly screened and receive some training and support. The carers are paid for accommodating the young person. Such placements are used both for statutory clients and SAAP clients, because in practice the line between these two groups is often unclear.

Most homeless teenagers stay temporarily with other households when they first leave home. These informal arrangements could be turned into longer-term placements for homeless students, if they were funded through an adolescent community placement scheme. Some funding would be required, but these placements would draw on the community's social capital. While the logic underpinning this argument is strong, the record of Government departments on

developing community placements has been problematic. A new initiative will need careful development. Pilot programs would be the best way to test out how to do this.

8.3 Funding community coordination

The third area for policy development is the coordination of early intervention services in local communities. The aim is to create an effective and efficient community based service systems to ensure that schools are well linked into the network of service provision in the local community. Welfare staff must know what services are available, be able to make appropriate referrals, and bring services into schools. Our fieldwork indicated that this is uneven across the country.

Hooper-Briar and Lawson (1994) have identified four emergent models of inter-professional collaboration. They refer to them as 'community-based', 'home and neighbourhood-based', 'school-based' and 'school-linked' models.³ The four models are 'ideal types', along a continuum of inter-sector and inter-professional collaboration.

The 'community-based' model involves the provision of services in a range of locations within a local community. These locations might include a community health centre, Centrelink, a neighbourhood house, a specialist youth service, and so on. There is a low level of coordination between the community agencies, and schools are not linked into the system of service provision. This was the *status quo* in the mid 1990s.

The 'home and neighbourhood-based' model is a 'one-stop shop' where families are able to go to a single location and obtain the full range of health and community services. The 'one-stop shop' could be located in a shop, a resource centre, or a house. This model offers greater coordination between the service providers, but schools are outside of the system.

The 'school-based' model involves the location welfare and community services at the school. This model has been popularised by Joy Dryfoos (1994) in her book, *Full-Service Schools*. Dryfoos argues that schools in the United States must take on a much broader responsibility for the education and welfare of young people, and provide an array of support services. These will be 'full-service schools' which provide a broad range of educational, recreational and welfare services that students and their families might need.

The 'school-linked' model involves welfare services targeting children and families who are referred by the schools. Families in the school's catchment area are defined as the population that needs to be served. Working agreements are developed between schools and local services, and a priority is given to information sharing and coordination.

The school-linked services model has emerged in many communities throughout Australia. Generally, the networking arrangements are loose and based on personal contact between welfare staff in schools and agency workers. School and agency staff participate in community network meetings that exchange information and act as a forum for discussing issues. Sometimes the network participants will undertake a joint research project, or combine forces for the purposes of advocacy. One of the main

³ A fifth model - 'saturation-oriented' - is said to be a combination of the other four, but this model is only 'in the planning stage'.

benefits of network meetings is that staff form personal and professional relationships, and this lubricates getting things done, despite institutional barriers.

These networks have developed most effectively in Victoria which has a funded School Focused Youth Services (SFYS) program. This deploys 41 workers to facilitate coordinated service delivery between schools and community agencies. They have brokerage funds to support local initiatives. We came across a number of school clusters where this initiative was outstanding.

In one disadvantaged community in Melbourne's South-Eastern suburbs, the local SFYS officer operates out of the local Community Health Centre. She has created a network with 15 schools and 20 community agencies. They have two meeting per term for sharing information and talking about programs. The SFYS officer has produced 'a really useful local service directory'. The school welfare coordinator said:

We have links with all kinds of community services ... We have a fantastic Community Health Centre. They have family counsellors, youth workers ... They do outreach ... I do basic counselling, but for more complex issues I refer on.

In a country town in Northern Victoria, the SFYS officer is a retired school principal. He was described as 'just wonderful'. He had a wealth of information and supports highly active inter-agency groups:

The School Focused Youth Service has funded two of our special programs. We couldn't do without them.

In another community in suburban Melbourne, the SFYS officer is involved in organising the local network of welfare teachers:

They do a lot of promotion of services ... They will run training courses for school staff. They have produced a directory of local services which is updated regularly. They invite local service providers to our meetings which is very useful.

Coordination in local communities is essential for early intervention strategies to be effective and efficient. The Victorian initiative is impressive and provides a model that should be developed by the Commonwealth and states across Australia. Based on information from Victoria, we estimate that a full national program would cost \$40 million.

8.4 National standards for schools

The House of Representative's report on *Aspects of Youth Homelessness* (1995) was the first official document to suggest that an early intervention response to youth homelessness could improve family stability, increase social cohesion, and reduce long-term welfare dependency. The report placed major importance on schools in an early intervention strategy, noting that 'the extent to which schools are able to support these young people has an important impact on their future homeless status' (House of Representatives 1995, p.241).

Most states and territories have increased the number of welfare personnel in secondary schools. Victoria has significantly raised the complement of student welfare coordinators in schools and quarantined this allocation. South Australia has been steadily increasing the state's student welfare capacity year by year. Queensland will expand its Youth Support Coordinator program from 13 positions to 113 over 2003 to 2005. Other states also made improvements to welfare provision. Tasmania now has social workers and youth workers in most schools. The ACT has recently funded youth workers in all secondary schools, in addition to existing student counsellors.

Our fieldwork indicated a marked improvement in the welfare infrastructure in many schools, but we also found significant variation in how welfare is provided in different states. In some states, school welfare staff are attached to particular schools and have full-time positions. In other states, counsellors move around a cluster of schools. Some schools have two part-time counsellors covering a full-time load. We also found variation in the provision of preventative strategies in different states.

One quantitative indicator of how well schools support homeless students is to express the number of homeless school students (including TAFE) as a proportion of the homeless population, aged 12 to 18. Table 8.1 uses information from the second national census of homeless school students to make this calculation.

In the ACT, 58 per cent of homeless teenagers aged 12 to 18 were still in the education system, the highest percentage in any state (Table 8.1). In Victoria and Tasmania it was about 50 per cent. About 40 per cent of the homeless were still in education in New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia. It was 36 per cent in the Northern Territory, and 27 per cent in Western Australia. These figures suggest that homeless students are more likely to drop out of school in some states rather than others.

Table 8.1: Estimated number of homeless young people aged 12 to 18 in different segments of the homeless population, by state and territory, 2001

	ACT N=400	Vic N=4,663	Tas N=1,008	NSW N=6,242	SA N=2,394	Qld N=6,381	NT N=1,464	WA N=3,508	Aust N=26,060
Education	58	51	50	42	40	39	36	27	41
Unemployed	40	47	50	56	59	60	62	71	58
Full-time work	2	2	0	2	1	1	2	2	1
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2002, p.31

When homeless teenagers drop out of the education system, they become unemployed and some make the transition to chronic homelessness. In the ACT, 40 per cent of homeless youth were unemployed. This rises to about 50 per cent in Victoria and Tasmania, to 60 per cent in South Australia and Queensland, and to 71 per cent in Western Australia.

We need national benchmarks for student welfare provision in secondary schools. Such standards would not prescribe one model for how student support services should be organised, although there are many examples of good practice (Chapters 5 and 7). However, the standards would specify the appropriate level of resources and various service delivery parameters. A first step towards national standards would be

for an appropriate Commonwealth Department to initiate a national review of pastoral care and student welfare services in Australian schools.

Even though a response to youth homelessness may be the trigger for a review, welfare staff deal with a range of issues – substance abuse, suicide, and early school leaving – which are often inter-related. The main objective of the proposed review would be to draft national standards, and to recommend good practice strategies for school and agencies.

A review would need to consider:

1. National standards for determining the ratio of counsellors to students in schools
2. National standards for the provision of pastoral care in schools
3. National qualification requirements for the various welfare staff working in schools
4. An appropriate funded program to coordinate strategies between schools and local community services
5. A formula for allocating additional welfare resources to schools with special needs

These proposals are similar to the recommendations first raised in the House of Representatives Report (1995, p.274).

Some services for homeless people are provided by the state governments (e.g. Victoria's School Focused Youth Service or Queensland's Youth Support Coordinators program). However, programs such as *Reconnect* are funded and managed by the Commonwealth, while the SAAP program is a joint Commonwealth-State special program. This makes developing a coherent national policy a complex issue with no simple way forward.

Early intervention has been widely adopted as a preferred policy direction, but a coordinated national approach has not been achieved. There are formidable obstacles to developing a national policy, because education is the responsibility of the state and territory education departments. Thus, there is no central authority that could standardise the provision of welfare in Australian schools. However, there could be an agreement by state and territory education ministers around national goals for the provision of welfare in schools. This agreement would have to be negotiated at MCEETYA (the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs). The agreement would provide a basis for achieving national standards over the longer term.

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