



AHURI Research Webinar:

Redesigning the system to reduce youth homelessness

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AHURI Research Webinar: Redesigning the system to reduce youth homelessness

WESTIR Limited attended a webinar hosted by the [Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute](#) (AHURI) on 29 April 2020. The webinar discussed a new AHURI report titled '[Redesign of a homelessness service system for young people](#)' undertaken by researchers from Swinburne University of Technology and the University of South Australia.

The webinar was presented by Associate Professor David MacKenzie from the University of South Australia, who is one of the report authors. He outlined the key elements of the study, including a range of interventions that could be used to reduce youth homelessness.

The study adopted a 'systems thinking' approach, which conceptualised the 'system' as a place-based community of interventions, programs, policies and institutions that affect young people, and are, in turn, affected by young people. This system was envisioned as an ecosystem around young people that extends beyond Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS). Using a range of diagrams (included below, see Figure 1 and 2 on Page 5), Associate Professor MacKenzie was able to illustrate the intimate relationships between different systems, such as education and homelessness services, which can shape a young person's risk of homelessness.

Associate Professor MacKenzie also spoke about the drivers of youth homelessness. These drivers are numerous and can be interconnected. For example, in recent times, family conflict and domestic violence has not decreased, more young people are being referred to care and protection services, housing affordability has not improved, and youth benefits remain too low.

Some of the main findings of the report '[Redesign of a homelessness service system for young people](#)' that were shared included:

- A significant proportion (44%) of all individuals who need and seek help from homelessness services, are young people and children.
- Young people leaving out-of-home care (OOHC) into independent living arrangements are particularly vulnerable to experiencing homelessness.
- Between 40 and 50% of young people exiting homelessness services move into a situation of further homelessness.
- Engagement in education and training—as well as supported pathways towards employment—was raised as a crucial factor in the future options that homeless young people may or may not have.
- Access to social housing remains highly problematic for young people, with youth-specific housing still being an underdeveloped policy concept.
- There are continued calls for more crisis accommodation, yet this approach alone will not end homelessness. More efforts need to be focussed on front end (early intervention) and back end (sustainable housing) options.

- Aboriginal young people are generally over-represented in homelessness services. A choice of Indigenous and non-Indigenous support options needs to be considered.

A range of policy development options for reducing youth homelessness were also outlined (See Figure 3 on Page 6). These included:

- Redesign systems with a focus on community-level organisation, planning, access and outcomes measurement.
- Improved access through Youth Entry Points.
- Invest in early intervention and prevention.
- Invest in youth-specific social housing for young people.
- Integrate Youth Foyers into the exit pathways for young people leaving Specialist Homelessness Services. The Youth Foyer model is a housing model for at-risk or homeless young people, where the condition to supported transitional housing is a commitment to education, training and employment activities and pathways. Foyers, and foyer-like projects, have been developed in many jurisdictions and have supported hundreds of young people at-risk or experiencing homelessness.
- Extend state care until a young person is 21 years old.

Associate Professor MacKenzie then spoke about the 'Community of Schools and Services' (COSS) Model as a place-based collective impact model of early intervention that is having success in reducing youth homelessness in the community. Originating in Geelong (Victoria) with [The Geelong Project](#), there are two other pilot programs: one occurring in Albury (NSW) and another in Greater Western Sydney, in Mount Druitt (NSW). The COSS Model (See Figure 4 on Page 6) has had success in reducing youth homelessness by 40% and reducing the number of disengaged young people by 20%.

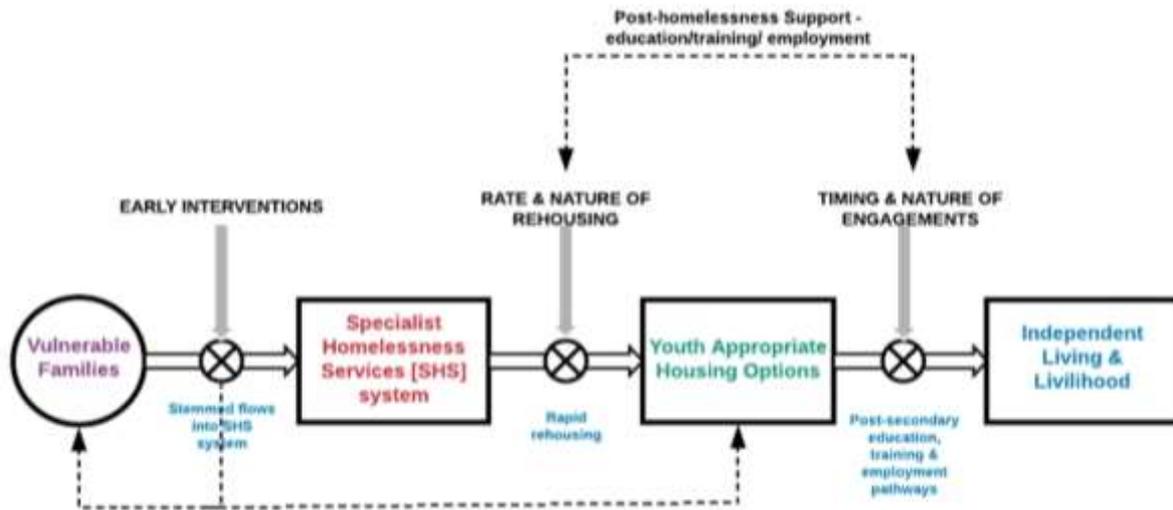
The presentation finished with outlining how the youth homelessness system needs to be redesigned. The system redesign, essentially, needs to put more resources towards prevention and housing supports rather than emergency or crisis responses. There also needs to be a shift from a siloed service delivery based on target programs to place-based service delivery underpinned by collective impact.

The presentation was followed by a Q&A session focused mainly on the COSS Model. The main themes coming out of the session included:

- The need for education and homelessness services to work together in a collective impact model.
- The importance of leadership groups that allow people to meet together and discuss what the data is showing. Outcomes measurement needs to be embedded in the work to show how well (or not well) the initiative is going.

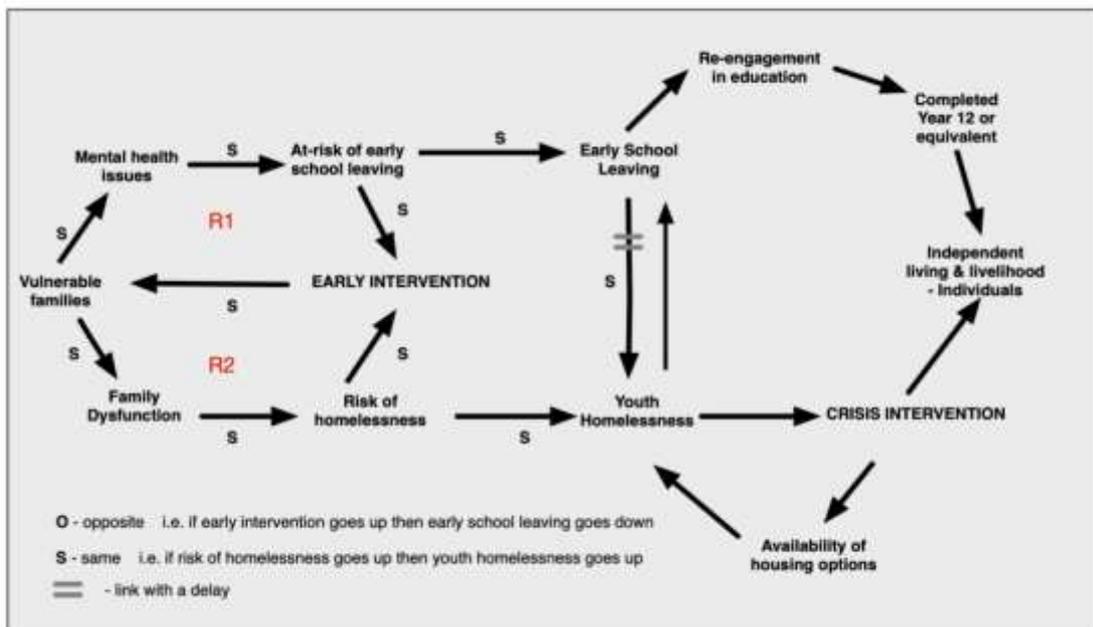
- The community model needs to have buy-in from all services and needs to address disadvantage as a whole.
- Governments are part of the solution but true reform takes at least a decade. There is a need to 'stay the course' and have the right discussions.
- Communities are different in urban and regional areas so one size does not fit all. There is a need, however, to be faithful to the science of risk and outcomes measurement.
- There are online resources currently being developed for those who are interested in joining the COSS model community of practice.

Figure 1: A 'stock' & 'flow' diagram of the youth homelessness system



Source: AHURI 'Redesigning the system to reduce youth homelessness' webinar, 29 April 2020

Figure 2: A causal loop diagram of the youth homelessness system



Source: AHURI 'Redesigning the system to reduce youth homelessness' webinar, 29 April 2020

Figure 3: Policy options for reducing youth homelessness



Redesign the homelessness system for youth in terms of community-level organisation, planning and outcomes measurement - a 'collective impact' model.

Source: AHURI 'Redesigning the system to reduce youth homelessness' webinar, 29 April 2020

Figure 4: The Community of Schools and Services (COSS) Model



Source: AHURI 'Redesigning the system to reduce youth homelessness' webinar, 29 April 2020

