



A call to care for young people
experiencing homelessness in the
Macarthur region

Macarthur Homelessness Steering Committee 2024

We acknowledge and pay respect to the Dharawal & Gundungurra people, the traditional custodians of the lands on which we work.

Sovereignty was never ceded; it always was and always will be, Aboriginal land.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

HOMELESSNESS - DEFINITIONS	4
INTRODUCTION	5
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
MHSC - WHO ARE WE	9
BACKGROUND	10
IDENTIFYING THE GAPS	11
SURVEY FINDINGS	12
THE BARRIERS	13
LOCAL CASE STUDIES	18
OUR PROPOSAL	27
REFERENCES	28

**All names, images and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals.*



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HOMELESSNESS

A person is defined as homeless if they are living in:

- non-conventional accommodation (sleeping rough) or
- short-term and emergency accommodation

Non-conventional accommodation: street, park, squatting, improvised dwellings, cars, tents, railway carriages

Short-term or emergency accommodation: refuges, crisis shelters, couch surfing or no tenure, living temporarily with friends or relatives, emergency accommodation arranged by a specialist homelessness agency (eg hotels and motels)

[AIHW, 2024a]

Unaccompanied Youth

Youth who are independently experiencing homelessness due to being kicked out or fleeing from unsafe homes and who request assistance from Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) on their own.

[Department of Communities and Justice, 2021]



INTRODUCTION

The Macarthur Homelessness Steering Committee (MHSC) has commissioned Youth Solutions to prepare this Advocacy Paper to shed light on the critical issue of the lack of a dedicated place to go for 16 and 17-year-old youth experiencing homelessness in the Macarthur region. The aim of the paper is to advocate for urgent attention to address this alarming service gap.

Drawing upon key insights from the Macarthur Youth Homelessness Forum held in December 2022, an online survey conducted by the MHSC in 2023 targeting schools and local service providers, as well as a site visit and consultation in early 2024 with Platform Youth Service in Penrith, this paper consolidates crucial findings.

Access to safe, secure and appropriate housing is a basic human right which is recognised at the State and National level and globally. MHSC recognises the responsibilities and commitments to the following:

The Convention on the Rights of the Child
The NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People
National Agreement on Closing the Gap
United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Successful resolution of this issue in the Macarthur region requires careful planning, commitment and cooperation of all levels of government as well as local community organisations. No single party or organisation can adequately address this unmet need acting alone.

“Homeless young people are less likely to stay engaged with school, find jobs, get access to rental housing and maintain friendships. They are more likely to experience depression, poor nutrition, substance abuse and mental health problems. In fact, without the right support, many will struggle with homelessness their entire lives.”
(Kids Under Cover)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Macarthur region, in Sydney's south-west, encompasses three local government areas: Campbelltown, Camden and Wollondilly. The region covers 3067sq km and is home to more than 300,000 residents. Each local government area in Macarthur has a greater proportion (~4%) of First Nations people than the greater Sydney average (1.7%).

Every night, up to 300 young people across the region – aged 14 to 18 – don't have a permanent bed. They are couch surfing, sleeping rough or living temporarily with friends. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare determines these young people are homeless.

In 2019/2020, over 9000 young people accessed Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) in NSW, the majority aged 16-17 years, who often presented 'unaccompanied' [Yfoundations, 2021]. First Nations people are also overrepresented, with close to 30% of people assisted by SHS identifying as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander [AIHW 2024a]. Half of these cases were young people under the age of 25 years [AIHW, 2024a].

The rate of homelessness among young people in the Macarthur region is significantly higher than the NSW average, reportedly 35 per 10,000 people [Homelessness NSW 2024].

Housing – or lack of – is also an issue in greater South Western Sydney. Median waiting times for crisis housing are close to 4 months and general housing applicants can wait for up to 28 months to secure accommodation. Both wait times are higher than the NSW average [Homelessness NSW 2024].

There is an urgent need for a youth refuge in the Macarthur region for young people aged 16 to 17 experiencing homelessness. At present, options for young people experiencing homelessness in the Macarthur region are limited.

Young people are often placed in:

- **Temporary accommodation** – including unsupervised motels, often outside of the region. This arrangement may be reviewed every few days, creating uncertainty, instability and insecurity. Young people can feel unsafe in an environment which may also accommodate older people in transition.
- **Relocated to refuges out of the area.** Displacement from your own community has significant wellbeing issues, including isolation, disrupted education and work, and discontinuity of welfare and service supports.

The Macarthur Homelessness Steering Committee (MHSC) has worked in the Macarthur region for 8 years raising awareness of, and responding to, the plight of housing disadvantage in the area. Committee partners include Argyle Housing, Nagle Centre, St Vincent de Paul, Homes NSW, Partners in Recovery, Macarthur Legal Centre, Campbelltown City Council, Camden Council, Wollondilly Council and Sector Connect.

MHSC conducted a needs assessment survey with 20 community services and 9 high schools across the region in 2023. The findings were alarming, but not surprising.

All services (100%) and 90% of schools surveyed had conducted referrals for young people seeking support for safe accommodation.

Most frequent presentations were young people aged 16-18. However, all age groups (12-25) were identified as having service delivery gaps and a lack of access to safe and timely accommodation options.

Young people's primary concerns...

Co-occurring & complex support needs
Desire for permanent & safe accommodation
Domestic & family violence
Unstable & unsafe homes
Limited access to health services
Limited access to technology
Limited educational supports
Food insecurity issues
Limited transport

Experiences of...



couch surfing



sleeping rough



exploitive & unsafe
arrangements



domestic & family
violence

Sector workers and educators identified a number of barriers for young people experiencing homelessness in accessing safe and appropriate accommodation in the Macarthur region.

These included:

- Limited crisis accommodation
- Accommodation availability (limited options, long waitlists)
- Restrictive service eligibility criteria

The MHSC and its collaborators and supporters are ready to take the next step to respond to the needs of the young people in the community. Our research and anecdotal evidence highlight a need that must be urgently addressed. Coupled with the skyrocketing cost of living and housing crisis, the situation is only going to worsen. Macarthur needs a youth refuge to accommodate our homeless youth and give them the support they need to get their lives and stability back on track.

WHO WE ARE

The **Macarthur Homelessness Steering Committee (MHSC)** has been in operation for more than eight years and seeks to raise awareness of and respond to the plight of housing disadvantage across the Macarthur region in NSW.

Over the years, the committee has provided funding to assist with a range of needs, including brokerage support, emergency housing and medical costs associated with significant psychological distress among community members as a result of displacement and/or accommodation issues.

The partners represented on the committee include Argyle Housing, Nagle Centre, St Vincent de Paul, Homes NSW, Partners in Recovery, Macarthur Legal Centre, Campbelltown City Council, Camden Council, Sector Connect and Wollondilly Council, as well as lived experience consumers and advocates.

The committee works tirelessly to host annual winter sleepouts and dinners “under the stars” to generate the necessary income to cover the substantial gaps in homelessness service provision across the Macarthur area.

We believe a refuge for young people aged 16-17 is essential, as the next step in our mission to respond to youth homelessness in the Macarthur region.



BACKGROUND

The rate of homelessness in South Western Sydney is concerning with over-crowded residences and unstable housing identified as key concerns for the region, compounded by significant population growth [SWSPHN 2023].

Median waiting times for priority and urgent housing is close to 4 months, with general housing applicants waiting up to 28 months to secure accommodation [Homelessness NSW 2024]. Both these wait times are longer than the NSW averages.

Children and adolescent represent an important priority population for our community. The rate of homelessness among young people across the Macarthur region is significantly higher than the NSW average, reportedly **35 per 10,000** [Homelessness NSW 2024]. Given the expected population growth across the Macarthur region [NSW Government 2024], the number of youth experiencing homelessness will inevitably increase.

Presently, there is no Youth Refuge for young people aged 16 to 17 years in the Macarthur region, with young people experiencing homelessness forced to relocate out of area. Displacement from ones community has significant wellbeing issues for young people, who experience isolation, disrupted education, and highlights discontinuity of welfare and service supports [Gultekin et al. 2019].

Homelessness is linked with poor outcomes in a range of domains including health, education, employment and involvement with the criminal justice system [AIHW, 2024b; Chikwava et al. 2022].

Research also demonstrates that homeless youth are more likely to experience complex mental health issues, with higher rates of hospital admissions than non-homeless young people [Russell et al 2021].

IDENTIFYING THE GAPS

In 2023 the **Macarthur Homelessness Steering Committee** conducted a needs assessment among local service providers and schools in the region, to understand the prevalence of youth homelessness and the barriers to accessing appropriate support in the region.

Participants

In total, 20 community services and 9 local schools participated in the survey. Representation from youth, accommodation and social services was achieved, and included NSW Police, Youth Justice, the Benevolent Society, Legal Aid NSW, Macarthur Legal Centre, Neami National, Uniting (Doorways for Youth), Big Yellow Umbrella, Traxside Youth Health Services, St Vincent de Paul, Humanity Matters, Macarthur Family and Youth Services, Yourtown, South Western Sydney Local Health District Drug and Alcohol Youth Service and Youth Solutions.

Local educators working with young people were also surveyed with representation from the Department of Education South West Macarthur Schools, Sarah Redfern High School, Elizabeth Macarthur High School, Eagle Vale High School, Robert Townson High School, Mount Annan High School, Campbelltown Public School and Bradbury Public School.

Findings

All Services (100%) and 90% of schools surveyed had conducted referrals for young people seeking support for safe accommodation. On average the most frequent presentations were young people aged 16 to 17 years or 18 and above. However, all age groups (12 to 15, 16 to 17 and 18 to 25) were identified as having gaps in service delivery and access to safe and timely accommodation options in the Macarthur region when needed.

SURVEY FINDINGS

20 local community services & 9 schools surveyed



100%

OF WORKERS HAD SUPPORTED A YOUNG PERSON AT RISK OF EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS



90%

OF EDUCATORS HAD SUPPORTED A YOUNG PERSON AT RISK OF EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS



1786

YOUNG PEOPLE REFERRED ANNUALLY

Primary concerns of young people

- Co-occurring and complex support needs
- Desire for permanent & safe accommodation
- Unstable and unsafe homelife
- Limited access to health services
- Limited access to technology
- Limited access to educational supports
- Food insecurity issues
- Limited access to transport

Experiences of...

- Couch surfing
- Sleeping it rough eg parks, under bridges
- Exploitive and unsafe arrangements
- Domestic violence
- Refuges (if available)

THE BARRIERS

Sector workers and educators identified many barriers for young people (at risk of, or experiencing homelessness) in accessing safe and appropriate accommodation in the Macarthur region.

These included:

- Limited crisis accommodation
- Accommodation availability (limited options with long waitlists)
- Complex support needs not being met
- Restrictive service eligibility criteria
- Accessibility issues (transport, affordability)
- Lack of awareness about services which may offer support

1. No crisis accommodation available

The most prominent theme in the survey data was the limited options to house and accommodate young people in crisis. Many sector workers highlighted that access to crisis care was even more limited for young people under the age of 18 years. Stories of relocation into unfamiliar territory were common, due to the limited options in the Macarthur region.



There is no crisis accommodation. There is no after-hours services or anywhere police can access urgent assistance when faced with a young person in crisis.

- *Sector worker*



There is no refuge available to them. They are forced to relocate out of area where, in most cases, they have resided their whole lives, have community connections and awareness of the area. Young people particularly aged 16-18, are not supported by any agency.

- *Sector worker*

THE BARRIERS

Others relayed situations where young people were sent to refuges or temporary accommodation designed for older adults, which meant they were at risk of experiencing harm and were denied safe transitional housing. Additionally, in the instances when young people were engaged with support services (mental health or AOD caseworkers), contact was often lost due to forced relocation out of area.



There is no service that has a bed for 16-17 year olds, only one hotel that I am aware of in Macarthur will take an under 18 into temporary accommodation while they wait to find a refuge in some other part of the state. There are no services to house them.

- Sector worker

2. Limited availability & long waitlists

The second most prevalent theme was the limited availability of options for young people in the Macarthur region. Survey participants identified the long waitlists of existing support services which cater for 18 years and above: “services are getting smashed” and “there are no services with available accommodation”. Other sector workers identified that for young people under the age of 18, there is a complete lack of permanent housing options, leaving services feeling helpless in keeping marginalised young people safe and catered for.

THE BARRIERS

3. Catering for young people with complex support needs

The third theme from survey data related to the complex support needs that young people often present with, and the inadequacies of existing services to address these needs. In particular, survey participants noted co-occurring mental illness and substance use issues, unemployment, and lack of 'living skills' as barriers for young people in gaining appropriate accommodation. Survey participants relayed stories of a stretched community services sector, with limited caseworkers, early intervention and ongoing social supports. Young people's circumstances were the reason why services were inadequate, pointing to the effects of marginalisation.



There's a lack of mental health supports and youth workers in the area. Lack of caseworkers to assist them in managing their situation.

- *Educator*



Lack of funding to be able to provide in depth and ongoing mental health support.

- *Sector worker*

Evidence of disappointment in the level of care previously received by community services was also identified:



Young people have noted a lack of compassion and care, they do not receive emotional support.

- *Educator*

THE BARRIERS

4. Stringent and impractical eligibility criteria

The next common barrier identified was the stringent and often impractical eligibility criteria of existing services in the region and beyond. Sector workers relayed that age restrictions were often a limitation in accessing services for young people under 18 years, and the need to have appropriate legal documents to receive care, which for young people who were not Australian citizens was an ongoing difficulty. Survey respondents spoke about how eligibility criteria often ignored the complex life trajectories of some young people accessing support, including those under the age of 18 years with children in their care, or those with complex and co-occurring AOD and mental health needs.



Services have strict criteria for homeless young people and when not suitable they are left to fend for themselves.

- *Sector worker*



The referral submissions requires a review of the young person's offences and behaviours. As a service working with behaviours, this presents ongoing barriers.

- *Sector worker*

The way in which some service providers conceptualised homelessness was also not consistent, calling for a greater understanding and a standardisation of the term.



Certain agencies do not recognise 'couch-surfing' as homelessness, when that is often temporary and conditional.

- *Educator*

THE BARRIERS

5. Accessibility

With pockets of regional areas in the Macarthur area spread over 3067 sq km, access to suitable transport options, was identified as an additional factor which impeded accessibility to existing support services. Further, access to finances to navigate a system which required young people “to travel to multiple services for advice and intake” was considered impractical and unattainable, particularly for young people with limited finances or social supports. Camden Council and Campbelltown City Council have been actively working to provide low and no cost outreach activities to connect young people in the region to community services.

6. Limited awareness

Despite there being agencies to support young people with welfare-related concerns, survey participants described a confusing referral landscape which was difficult to navigate. Service providers relayed that young people were often unaware of existing services and there was a “general lack of knowledge” about where to go for help. Providing education about who can help is considered integral in connecting young people with support.



Knowing who to contact is a barrier, it is hard to navigate the different services and young people often do not know who can help.

- Educator

JUNE'S STORY

June was 17 years old when she resided with her mother in the Campbelltown LGA. A highly creative and hardworking Year 12 student, June attended her local high school and was completing her HSC while working a part-time job within walking distance of both her home and school.

June's mother, who lived with severe and inadequately managed mental illness, had become increasingly aggressive and threatening towards June over the past year.

June knew she could not tolerate living in an abusive environment much longer but had hoped she could stay at home until she finished school.

One night June came home from work and discovered her mother had packed a bag of her clothes and told her she could no longer live in the home, effective immediately.

June hastily grabbed a few personal items and her HSC study materials and left the house.

June then contacted a close friend from school to ask if she could sleep at her place for the night.



Her friend's mother said June could stay with their family for a few nights but that an extended stay would not be feasible as the household was already overcrowded.

The next day the friend's mother contacted Campbelltown City Police to get assistance for June. Shortly after, the Campbelltown PAC Youth Action Meeting (YAM) coordinator met face-to-face with June. Together they contacted Link2Home to find a place for June to stay.

June was placed by DCJ Housing in temporary accommodation (TA) in a local hotel, where she was told she would stay until a place at a youth refuge became available. June was dismayed to learn there was no crisis refuge in the Macarthur region for a 17-year-old, so wherever she eventually went would involve relocating.

Names, images and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals.

June had been advised she would be living in the hotel for up to a week, but she ended up staying there for 30 days as there was no availability in a crisis refuge.

June felt lonely and unsafe in the hotel, which was also used by DCJ Housing to accommodate single men including some who had just been released from prison. The blinds on the window of her room were broken and she had to use a towel to cover the window for privacy. When she left her room, she was routinely subjected to insults, harassment and sometimes propositioned for sex by men who were living in, or hanging around, the hotel. She was regularly asked if she had drugs or wanted to buy drugs.

June also had to give up her job as she didn't feel safe walking back to the hotel after dark. She felt like a prisoner in her room and left only to travel to and from school during daylight hours. This further intensified June's feeling of isolation, anxiety and depression.

On a few occasions June thought she had secured a place at a youth refuge, but those plans would fall through.

Every three days, DCJ Housing would decide whether to extend June's stay in the hotel. She lived with the stress and uncertainty of whether she would be staying in the hotel, transferred to a different hotel or sent to a youth refuge.

With the help of a youth-focused homelessness service, June eventually secured a place for three months in a crisis refuge. However, this accommodation was located a fair distance from the Campbelltown region.

This meant June had to spend nearly 90 minutes each way on public transportation to get to and from school. She was happy to be out of the hotel, however, the relocation to a distant suburb resulted in a great sense of personal loss and social disconnection for her.



ANNA'S STORY

Anna, a 16-year-old girl living in the Macarthur region, faced significant challenges due to domestic and family violence. She was in Year 10 at a local high school where she was highly regarded by teachers and staff.

Anna loved her school – she saw her friends there and it was a place where she had access to adults whom she trusted.

Anna resided in a shed behind her mother and step father's house. The shed was equipped with a mattress and a small chest of drawers for her clothes. The shed, however, was not suitable for habitation. It lacked running water, the walls were mouldy and it leaked when it rained.

While there was enough space for Anna in the house, her stepfather prohibited her from living there. She lacked a key to the house and she was only permitted inside for essential needs such as toileting, showers and occasional cooking, subject to her stepfather's approval.

Despite her challenging circumstances, Anna did her best to attend school regularly. School was a haven for her, a place where she felt safe and supported. There were times when Anna arrived late, hungry and without a uniform, but the school ensured her basic needs were met by providing food and a clean uniform.

Anna increasingly became the target of her stepfather's emotionally abusive and controlling behaviour. He insulted her, threatened to kick her out, referred to her in degrading terms to her face and in the presence of others, and gave her menacing looks.

He restricted her communication by taking her phone and charger from her. He hacked into her social media accounts and taunted her with screenshots from her phone. Anna's step father made sure she knew he was aware at all times where she was.

Anna constantly worried where she would live from one day to the next. She looked at the “Ask Izzy” website to explore her options. She contacted a local youth homelessness service, but she was dismayed to learn there were no youth refuges in the Macarthur area that would take a 16 year old. There wasn’t a waitlist for one, they simply did not exist. She was offered a place at a youth refuge in the Blue Mountains, but Anna could not bear the thought of leaving her school, job and friends.

So Anna made the decision to remain in the community and took it upon herself to find a safe place to stay.

On several occasions, she was able to stay in the homes of friends. One family took Anna in for a couple of months. She felt safe there. She had a bed, the family cooked for her and took her to school. While grateful for this family’s support, Anna knew this was a temporary solution.

On another occasion she was placed by DCJ Housing in a hotel located in an adjacent local government area. Due to the uncertainty of how long this placement would last, Anna had to pack up all her clothes and personal items in shopping bags and take them with her to school each day.

In a nine month period, Anna stayed in at least six places besides the shed, leading to exhaustion and detrimental effects in her physical and mental health. The constant uncertainty about her living situation also hindered Anna’s ability to keep up with school assignments.



DOMINIC'S STORY

Dominic, a 16-year-old male living in the Macarthur region, experienced more than six years of physical abuse from his parents before coming to the attention of the authorities.

In 2023, Dominic absconded from his family home, prompting police intervention due to concerns surrounding his sudden departure.

Despite the need for urgent accommodation and ongoing case management, Dominic was unable to secure these supports locally due to service eligibilities.

While accepted into a youth refuge, it was located outside the Macarthur region.

This lack of local support had severe consequences for Dominic, preventing him access to his school and peer supports in the Macarthur community.

Dominic required an extensive medical review for the injuries he had sustained over the years and, from a police investigation perspective, his relocation hindered this process.

Furthermore it disengaged him from youth officers he had built a rapport with, who could have provided referral support for ongoing DV counselling.

Dominic's relocation disrupted existing support options, and isolated him from his friends and school community, underscoring the urgent need for a youth refuge in the Macarthur region.



PETER'S STORY

Peter, a young person from the Macarthur region, has been sleeping rough for eight months. Peter lives in his car, and when able, couch surfs with friends.

Despite his intent and need for stable accommodation he has been unsuccessful accessing safe options.

Peter proactively sought support for his substance use issues, and has been engaged with alcohol and other drug (AOD) and mental health service providers. Peter's hospital admissions decreased significantly as a result and his mental health improved.

With caseworker support, Peter secured short term emergency housing in 2023. The refuge was out of area and Peter relocated out of the Macarthur region.

Due to being disconnected from peer workers and clinicians he had built a rapport with, Peter's mental health deteriorated significantly.

Peter also experienced bullying at the refuge which he believed was due to his episodes of self-injury and gender orientation.

Peter's preference was to relocate back to his original community to access familiar services and live in his car.

Peter experienced difficulties in gaining employment, and had no access to proper nutrition and hygiene products. His primary concern, though, was for his physical safety.

Peter felt hopeless about securing access to a safe refuge without being displaced and removed from social support services in the Macarthur region.



Names, images and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of the individuals.

SAM

Sam is 17 and lives with her Pop in Campbelltown. She is completing Year 12, has a part-time job and has a good support system of friends and some family in the Macarthur region.

But Pop has told Sam she needs to find her own place.

Sam's goal is to find a house with her cousin. But rentals are hard to find – and expensive.

A refuge is not an option for her as Liverpool, the closest refuge, does not have any vacancies and everything else is too far for Sam to travel to and from school and work via public transport.

If the house with her cousin doesn't work out, Sam is facing the prospect of living in temporary accommodation (TA) while trying to complete her final year of school. She wants to give her HSC her best shot, but she knows it's going to be hard.

BELL

Bell lives in the Macarthur region with her sister and her sister's partner and attends a local high school.

She pays \$200 a fortnight towards rent and has lived with her sister for four years.

Bell, 17, is pregnant which has strained her relationship with her sister. She says the situation is causing her mental health to deteriorate.

Bell is currently completing her Year 12 certificate and wants to continue high school until the baby is born and then finish the remaining subjects the following year.

However, living with her sister is no longer an option. Bell was told Liverpool/Fairfield had the closest refuge and she agreed to go, even though she would have had more support in the Macarthur area.

Two months later, she is still waiting for refuge accommodation.

Currently, Bell is still living with her sister and under a lot of stress due to the living situation. She would prefer an accommodation option in Campbelltown that could help her to continue her last year of high school and keep her closer to her support network, at such a vulnerable time in her life.

ASHLEY

Ashley is a 15 year old young person from the Macarthur region. Due to family breakdown and mental illness, Ashley was unable to stay at home.

Ashley has been couch surfing with newly established friends and boyfriends, and during this time she was sexually assaulted.

Ashley is too young to receive support from homelessness services in the region, with no crisis refuge available for young people aged 16-17.

As a result, Ashley was relocated out of area to a refuge that was able to take her in. Consequently, Ashley is unable to continue seeing her case manager in Campbelltown, and her mental health has deteriorated significantly.

BREE

Bree is a 17 year old young person from the Macarthur region. Bree was referred to Platform Youth Services in Penrith for accommodation due to no refuge availability in the Campbelltown LGA.

Bree became homeless due to family breakdown and met the criteria to be housed at Penrith House. Bree was accommodated for 6 months and was supported to obtain Centrelink, address mental health and substance use concerns.

During her stay, Bree become transient due to residing so far from home. Bree's caseworker eventually lost contact, and was unable to refer to more appropriate options closer to her support networks.



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NAOMI

Naomi is a 18 year old young person from the Macarthur region who was referred to Platform YS in Penrith for refuge accommodation.

At the time of referral, Naomi was navigating sexuality concerns, which caused a family breakdown at home.

Naomi's risk taking behaviour increased significantly during this time, and she had become involved in criminal activities with friends.

Despite meeting the criteria for refuge support, Naomi chose to remain in the family home, as relocation would make it too difficult to maintain school attendance and counselling supports.

KATE

Kate is 17 years old and resides in the Macarthur region. Kate was referred to Platform YS for accommodation support due to family relationship breakdown and a lack of housing options in her local area.

Assessment had begun for Kate, and she was accepted for crisis accommodation within 3 days of the request being made.

Kate however chose to stay within her family home, as having refuge placement so far from supportive social networks was not ideal.

While returning home is a great outcome, we do not know whether the reason for family breakdown has been addressed.



OUR PROPOSAL

Macarthur has a strong network of community services and government agencies that work collaboratively in the best interest of our young people. Now, we are seeking a commitment from all levels of government, developers and services to provide the support and funds to establish a youth refuge in the Macarthur region and ongoing support for a service to operate the refuge.

What we know works:

- flexible length of stay
- well trained & supportive staff (with access to staff with lived experience)
- good quality, safe, secure and private accommodation
- incorporating Aboriginal workers to support cultural safety
- trauma-informed care
- person-centred care
- support for a broad range of needs (AOD, mental health, child protection, family domestic violence, sexual assault and behaviour problems)
- self-contained accommodation (with kitchen & private bathrooms)
- options for pets
- ongoing support & aftercare to minimise re-occurring homelessness [Batterham et al. 2023]

Key recommendations:

- 1. By 2026, we want to see a youth refuge in the Macarthur region, for crisis accommodation support and medium term accommodation for young people aged 16-17 years.**
- 2. The committee deem it important that the refuge is staffed 24/7 hours a day, with access to kitchen facilities to ensure warm meals can be prepared. Access to private bathrooms is also essential.**
- 3. Importantly, wrap around therapeutic services to support the longevity of the Refuge must be considered and offered on site.**

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