



WEARING OUT YOUR WELCOME

Homelessness amongst affluence:

Homeless and at risk young people in Banyule and Nillumbik

Executive Summary

The municipalities of Banyule and Nillumbik, located in Melbourne's north-east, are often accorded a low priority for funding directed to disadvantage and homelessness and are often regarded as affluent and stable.

There is only one five-bed crisis accommodation option in Banyule and Nillumbik for young females, offering supported crisis accommodation to single young women as well as young women with accompanying children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. There are no crisis accommodation services in Banyule or Nillumbik for young males. There is also a chronic shortage of affordable housing, which has a significant impact on young people who generally have low incomes.

In response to a growing number of services unable to find emergency accommodation for young people at risk of homelessness in Banyule and Nillumbik, the Banyule Nillumbik Youth Services Network launched an investigation. The objective of this research was to gain an understanding of the number of young people aged 12 – 24 years living in the City of Banyule and the Shire of Nillumbik who are at risk of homelessness and the issues they face. As part of the research Nillumbik Community Health Services were successful in an application to School Focused Youth Services for a secondary school survey. A student needs survey to be completed by all secondary school students in the region and a series of focus groups with local youth-associated service was undertaken.

Eight government and three non-government schools participated in the survey. Altogether 6,954 students completed the survey. 23 people participated in the focus groups. The main findings were:

- 98 students were homeless and most were attending a government school (88 per cent)
- One in ten students is potentially at risk of homelessness
- Many homeless young people in Banyule and Nillumbik were 'couch surfing' (34) with friends or relatives (i.e. temporarily staying with friends or relatives);
- Of students 'potentially at-risk' of homelessness 54 per cent were female and 46 per cent were male
- The proportion of students 'most at-risk' of homelessness rises from 1.0 per cent in year 7, peaking in years 10 and 11
- The proportion of students 'potentially at-risk' of homelessness hovers around 10 per cent from years 8 to 12
- Some 64 per cent of students who were 'potentially at-risk' of leaving school were male compared to 36 per cent females;

- Young people at non-government schools were at a lesser risk of leaving school than their government school peers
- Almost 20 per cent of year 10 students in government schools are at-risk of leaving school
- Nine per cent of students with no risk or low risk of homelessness were still potentially at-risk of leaving school
- Approximately 50 per cent of students 'most at-risk' of homelessness are potentially at-risk of leaving school and
- Approximately 30 per cent of students most at risk of homelessness are highly at-risk of leaving school.

Focus group participants recounted many instances where crisis accommodation was very difficult or impossible to find, and it was often far outside the young person's community placing additional burdens on young people's desire to remain in education. As a result, most young people 'couch surf' at a friend's or relative's house, which often leads to relationship breakdowns. Other couch surfing environments are not conducive to education, with overcrowding an issue.

The research demonstrated that youth homelessness amongst secondary school students aged 12 – 18 years is a problem in the municipalities of Banyule and Nillumbik. In addition to a high number of homeless young people, approximately one in ten school students are potentially at-risk of homelessness. Schools are important points of intervention with 70 per cent of young people most at-risk of homelessness not at a high risk of leaving school.

Recommendations to Banyule Nillumbik Youth Services Network, relevant State Government Departments and the sector emphasise the need for early intervention strategies that:

- enables homeless or at risk of becoming homeless students from Banyule and Nillumbik to access support and services locally
- prevents young people from accessing an overcrowded, insufficiently resourced and difficult to navigate youth crisis accommodation system, becoming more vulnerable and more at risk of chronic homelessness
- eases the demands on the DHS funded services for young people on guardianship or custody orders as they leave care and enables them to have real accommodation options.

To achieve these strategies Banyule Nillumbik Youth Services Network will need to heighten awareness of the issues, extent of at risk of homelessness and the nature of homelessness as demonstrated by this research, advocate for local responses and form alliances to ensure that resources and services are available to young people, their families and school welfare services for early intervention approaches.

Table 9: School students at risk of homelessness – Year Level Breakdown (All Schools)

Year Level							
Risk level for homelessness	7	8	9	10	11	12	All Years
Potentially at risk	64	105	123	127	112	82	613
	5.8%	9.2%	10.1%	10.1%	10.5%	9.5%	9.4%
Most at risk	11	30	51	59	47	33	231
	1.0%	2.6%	4.2%	4.7%	4.8%	3.8%	3.5%

Table 10: School students at risk of homelessness – Year Level Breakdown (Government Schools)

Year Level							
Risk level for homelessness	7	8	9	10	11	12	All Years
Potentially at risk	57	98	111	106	97	72	541
	6.3%	10.6%	10.9%	10.6%	11.9%	10.7%	10.1%
Most at risk	11	30	46	48	44	30	209
	1.2%	3.2%	4.5%	4.8%	5.4%	4.5%	3.9%

Case study

Ahmed*, an 18 year old male was referred to the student welfare coordinator after the school followed up on a number of unexplained absences.

Ahmed was couch surfing with friends, and the family he was living with wanted him to leave.

Ahmed had a very strained relationship with his father and whilst he enjoyed a better relationship with his mother, she felt an obligation to agree with his father. The relationship became increasingly strained when his parents wanted to move the family interstate. Ahmed's parents felt they had tried to help him in the past but he had not cooperated, and they were unwilling to continue supporting him.

Ahmed was not significantly motivated to support himself. He lacked an income for a long period of time before his student welfare coordinator was able to convince him to apply for Youth Allowance.

Ahmed left school in search of employment to afford renting in the private market. He is currently unemployed and did not complete year 12.

* Ahmed's name has been changed to respect confidentiality.





School Focused Youth Service



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