Health and Youth Homelessness

Presented by Adrian Foon
Project Manager
Youth Accommodation Association NSW Inc (YAA)
Overview

• A brief look at YAA NSW Inc and it’s related projects.
• The context of being homeless and the issues young homeless people experience.
• Are homeless youth a higher risk target group? A comparative look at the difference between the generalist youth population and homeless youth.
• A snapshot of the feedback from the accommodation sector around the health needs of homeless young people.
• What the HOT Project - YAA will focus on in 2005 - 06.
A brief look at YAA NSW Inc and it’s related projects.

- The Youth Accommodation Association NSW Inc (YAA) is a peak body representing the interests of homeless young people and youth accommodation services in NSW.
- YAA works towards reducing the risk and impact of homelessness for young people through structural / systemic advocacy
- YAA was established as a peak body in 1980 and receives core and project funding from the mid 1980’s.
A brief look at YAA NSW Inc and it’s related projects (2).

• Vacancy Line Project:
  – Coordinates the Youth Emergency Accommodation Line (YEAL) that has the daily listing of vacancies in crisis refuges and an updated online vacancies of Medium - Long Term services.
  – Coordinates a directory of Youth Accommodation services in NSW.

• HOT Project:
  – Provides direct education and resources to young people and youth workers on issues relating to HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis and Sexual Health.
The context of being homeless and the issues young homeless people experience.

- ‘For homeless youth, additional factors such as lack of self-esteem, economic power, psychological and social problems make this group separate and distinct from the rest of the general youth population.’
  - Mitchell & Rosenthal 1994
The context of being homeless and the issues young homeless people experience (2).

- There are a number of factors that lead to a young person becoming homeless:
  - breakdown or conflict within the family,
  - economic pressures upon the family,
  - domestic violence,
  - sexual abuse,
  - rejection from family and peers as a result of same-sex attraction,
  - developmental difficulties including the onset of mental illness,
  - substance abuse
  - and violence.
The context of being homeless and the issues young homeless people experience (3).

- To think of homelessness in general is to think of a person in terms of their housing situation. We may seek answers to such questions like:
  - How long have they been out of home?
  - Do they have somewhere to live?
  - Is where they live safe?
  - Will it be available tomorrow?
The context of being homeless and the issues young homeless people experience (4).

- For young people, we need to look beyond young people as homeless youth to young people who are dealing with a range of issues.
  - Education,
  - Employment,
  - Criminal justice system,
  - Poverty,
  - Drugs and alcohol,
  - Family conflict,
  - Relationship (including same sex attraction) and
  - Self esteem issues.
Are homeless youth a higher risk target group?

- Project I, a 5 year study of homeless young people (aged 12 - 20 years in 2001) in Melbourne conducted by La Trobe University’s Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society (ARCHS) identified a number of issues young homeless people experienced:
  
  a) Sexual Health and involuntary sex.
  
  b) Drug and Alcohol
  
  c) Injecting Drug Use
  
  d) Education
  
  e) Sources of income
  
  f) Mental Health and self harm
Are homeless youth a higher risk target group? (2)

Of those who had engaged in vaginal sex:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Secondary high school students</th>
<th>Project I: Homeless youth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- 20% of Year 10</td>
<td>- 94% reported ever having engaged in vaginal sex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 48% of Year 12</td>
<td>- 87% in oral sex</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lindsay, et al., 1997
- 20% of Year 10
- 48% of Year 12
- 94% reported ever having engaged in vaginal sex
- 87% in oral sex
- 28% in anal sex
- 11% had 5 or more sexual partners in a 3 month period.
- Were sexually active at a younger age (14 years and 4 months).
**Are homeless youth a higher risk target group? (3)**

**Condom use**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Secondary high school students</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- 73% of males and 55% of females (Year 10 Students) and 56% and 44%, males and females respectively (Year 12) had always used a condom.</td>
<td>- Less than one-third always used a condom when engaging in vaginal and/or anal sex</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

National Survey of Australian Secondary Students (NSASS) 1997
Are homeless youth a higher risk target group? (4)

- Of those experiencing non consensual sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Secondary high school students</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• 10.1% of Year 11 boys</td>
<td>- 58.8% of young women and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 16.5% of Year 11 girls</td>
<td>- 45.2% of young men</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Hibbert, et al 1996
Are homeless youth a higher risk target group? (5)

Alcohol and other Drug Use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Young people aged 14 to 19</th>
<th>Project I: Homeless youth</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- 19.5% had smoked tobacco daily</td>
<td>In the last 3 months:</td>
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<tr>
<td>- 8.3% had consumed alcohol daily, 39.5 weekly and 34.6% had consumed less than weekly.</td>
<td>- 72% indicated they smoked tobacco everyday (5 times the national average)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- 11.8% of females and 9.6% of males had put themselves in the higher risk category. (Higher risk category is defined as 7 or more standard drinks on any one drinking occasion (males) and 5 or more standard drinks on any one drinking (females))</td>
<td>- Approximately 80% had consumed alcohol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 24.6% had used marijuana / cannabis in the last 12 months.</td>
<td>- 40% of young women and 29% of young men’s patterns of alcohol consumption had placed them in a higher risk category¹</td>
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<tr>
<td>- 0.4% had used heroin in the last 12 months.</td>
<td>- 70% had used marijuana / cannabis</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- 26% had used heroin</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The 2001 National Drug Strategy Household Survey
Are homeless youth a higher risk target group? (6)

Injecting Drug use

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<tr>
<th>Young people aged 14 to 19</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-0.6% of young people had injected a drug</td>
<td>In the last 3 months:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 22.9% had injected heroin in the last 12 months.</td>
<td>- 28% of young people had injected a drug in the last 3 months.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>- Of the percentage of heroin users, 26% had injected heroin.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- 11% had shared needles or injecting equipment.</td>
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</table>

The 2001 National Drug Strategy Household Survey
Are homeless youth a higher risk target group? (7)

- Research findings relating to Education include:
  - 38% of young homeless people were attending school or other educational institution (JPET)
  - 20% indicated they attend school more often after they become homeless where 46% attended less as result of homelessness.
  - A small number of young people (10%) were expelled, suspended or withdrawn from an educational program in the last 3 months.
Are homeless youth a higher risk target group? (8)

- Research findings relating to sources of income:
  - 74% were on Youth Allowance
  - 85% were unemployed
  - 62% worked less than 20 hours a week and 26% worked between 20 to 40 hours per week.
  - In 3 months, young people supplemented their income by pawning goods (31%), borrowing money (30%), selling drugs (23%), stealing (16%) and begging (13%). Few young people were involved in pornography, or trading sex for money or a place to stay.
Are homeless youth a higher risk target group? (9)

• Research findings relating to Mental Health and self harm:
  – 26% had reported a level of psychological distress indicative of psychiatric disorder.
  – 14% had reported clinical levels of depression
  – 12% had reported clinical levels of anxiety
  – 12% had reported clinical levels of psychosis
  – In the last 3 months, 11% had attempted suicide and 36% had self harmed.
HOT Consultation

What are some of the health needs and concerns of Homeless young people?
- Free health care: pathology tests, x rays, dental care.
- Access to affordable specialist e.g chiropractor, physiotherapists.
- Not comfortable in accessing services, low self esteem, stigma.
HOT Consultation (2)

How are their needs met?
- One service has a pilot project involving GPs and medical vouchers for free service.
- Having a stable place to live, subsidised rent, savings plan, education, family issues, conflict resolution, case management etc are offered.
- Close working relationship with the Sexual Health Clinic.
- Independent Living Skills Course.
- Self Esteem and Healthy Choices Program.
- Emergency Brokerage Fund: funds for specialist service / care.
HOT Consultation (3)

What are some of the good strategies and practices that as a worker or as a service have implemented and used with young people?

- GP Voucher system
- Feel Good Night workshops
- Honest approaches to information exchange, free and open discussion and the provision of information
- Brokerage funds and flexible service delivery which is responsive to individual needs.
HOT Consultation (4)

What are some of the barriers that impact on services / workers in addressing the needs of homeless young people?

- Young people do not have follow up tests recommended by doctors due to the expense involved
- Huge unmet demand - not enough beds, especially males and Drug and Alcohol clients.
- Limited outreach / after care facilities.
- Increased admin requirements that take a worker away from direct work with young people.
- Geographic isolation.
HOT Consultation (5)

Where do young people get their information from? e.g youth workers, pamphlets, videos, workshops, guest speakers etc.

- Youth Workers, Community Health Centres, Youth Services, Pamphlets and Workshops.

- Their peers, counsellors, newsletters and internet.
Sexual Health

Does your service provide condoms and lubes and if so, are they easily accessible to young people?

- Condoms are provided and stocked primarily in bathrooms.
- Each resident is given a Care Bag upon intake that has items for personal use: toothbrushes, soap and condoms.
Sexual Health (2)

If your service does not provide condoms and lubes to young people, where would you advise / refer young people to access condoms and lubes?
- Community Health Centres and Sexual Health Clinics.
Sexual Health (3)

If a young person discloses that they are sexually active, what support might a service / worker provide in terms of accessing a G.P / sexual health clinic to get a sexual health check up?

- They are encourage to see a GP at the sexual health clinic
- One to one chat with the youth worker on safe sex negotiation, sexual boundaries and safety, having an exit plan, watch your drink, contraception, Chlamydia and others STI’s and condoms.
Alcohol and Other Drugs

What support might a service / worker provide to a young person who identifies that they have a drinking or drug related dependency?
- They are supported to access AOD Counsellors at Community Health Centres.
- They can be referred to a rehabilitation service and ongoing phone support and contact is provided.
- The Independent Living Skills courses includes a module on Healthy Living which concentrates on lifestyle decisions and their effects.
Alcohol and Other Drugs (2)

If a young person returns to a service from a night out under the influence of alcohol / drugs, what support is given to ensure their immediate safety and the other residents safety?

- Safety of other residents and the youth worker is paramount, young person remains in their room and is monitored
- Depending on the level and extent of intoxication, they can be referred to an AOD service or a hospital.
Alcohol and Other Drugs (3)

What is the existing service policy on alcohol and other drug use and / or possession of alcohol / drugs and injecting equipment on the premises?
- No drugs and alcohol in the service.
- If drugs are found they are handed to police or destroyed in front of a witness.
- Referral will be made to a specialist service to provide support for the young person.
Mental Health / Suicide / Self harm and risk taking behaviour

What are some of the mental health issues and concerns of young homeless people?

- The cycle of drinking and drugging on weekends increases the sense of hopelessness young people feel.
- Borderline personality disorder, post traumatic stress disorder, psychosis, depression, self harm.
- Eating disorders, social disorders and phobias, drug induced conditions (schizophrenia, dissociative disorders).
- Inability to have empathy – through witness and experience of abuse, both sexual and physical violence.
Mental Health / Suicide / Self harm and risk taking behaviour (2)

What level of support is provided to a young person in need of mental health assistance from the SAAP service?

- Referrals to community health for counselling and referrals to other mental health services.
- The level of risk (to themselves, property, worker, clients) is taken into account when offering support.
Nutrition

What are the current concerns in relation to nutrition for young homeless people? (e.g. obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, dental health)

- Poor diet, low immunity, kidney and liver problems due to excessive alcohol consumption, bulimia, low blood pressure, anaemic and poor dental health.
Are young people responsible for preparing their own meals?
- Young people are assisted to choose a healthy menu and prepare meals for a group household.
- In accordance with our in house living skills program, residents are rostered for preparation of the evening meal.
- Meals are chosen which are simple to prepare, cost effective and nutritious.
Nutrition (3)

Who does the shopping? What input and level of interest do young people have in relation to the food purchased in the service?

- Young people participate in choosing the menu, list of ingredients and make suggestions to the grocery list.
- Both worker and young people construct a shopping list.
Nutrition (4)

Do young people have access to resources, workshops or guest speakers regarding nutrition?
- Young people have access to a Living Skills Program which includes nutrition.
Final Comment

• What the HOT Project will focus on in 2005 - 2006.