

# A Wraparound Model of Youth Housing to Support Long-term Transitions to Independence

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Youth who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness (for example, young people leaving care, or victims of family or domestic violence) have a complexity of problems requiring tailored solutions which are multi-layered and multi-faceted. We propose an enhanced model of youth housing that incorporates the strengths and most effective elements of other models. This will create a sustainable and wrap around approach to support youth to achieve long-term housing and still be supported while developing their independence.

This enhanced model proposes an apartment building that supports independent living for youth housing and also affordable housing, to build a mixed community who have special access to on-site health and support services. These supports and services are available at the discretion of individuals, who voluntarily interact with the services. On-site social workers can work alongside youth to identify strengths and interests, build on these aspects, and reinforce protective factors. This model of youth housing needs to continue support past the age of 18 years as long as is necessary,

as young people all develop the skills, knowledge, and confidence to live independently at different rates. This is a critical aspect of the model; no young person should have a time limit on the support they require and should never have to worry about how they will find their next home.

Drawing on the experiences and evidence provided by models such as housing first, youth foyer, and common ground, provides a strong foundation for building sustainable long-term positive outcomes for youth. In conjunction with the reinforcement of protective factors for



young people (for example, positive social connections and support, employment, adequate housing, and access to health and social services)<sup>1</sup> for young people the model will reflect strengths-based approaches.

An apartment building brings the opportunity for individuals to live independently in a home that they can call their own, while they work on developing their independence. A housing first model, states that you must first provide a house to individuals who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness, so they can achieve safety and stability before engaging with other support services. The Infinity Project in Canada showed how this model has positive outcomes for youth, with a 95 per cent retention rate in housing, 100 per cent engagement with community activities and supports; and 87 per cent of those under 18 having a stable income.<sup>2</sup> The housing first model has also proven to improve housing stability for youth living with mental illness,<sup>3</sup> which is crucial when 13.9 per cent of youth (aged 4 to 17 years) in Australia are living with mental illnesses.<sup>4</sup>

The development of positive relationships is vital for young people transitioning to adulthood; these relationships create a strong support network for a young person to rely on. Research shows that for young people, especially those leaving care, it is critical to have a strong relationship with a trusted adult.<sup>5</sup> Living in a community that has social cohesion also has positive impacts on reducing mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, especially leading into adulthood.<sup>6</sup> Tenants from the common ground model in Brisbane highlighted the advantages of single-site, high-density living as the ability to form friendships and support networks.<sup>7</sup> The evaluation also highlighted the benefits of common spaces that are multifunctional such as rooftop gardens, kitchens, and computer rooms, which were all purposeful and also served as areas of socialisation.

Case management and easily accessible support services is another key factor of this enhanced model. An evaluation of the Education Foyer Model in Victoria highlighted that having availability

to community health services increased the number of young people who attended routine health visits,<sup>8</sup> which is a protective factor. They also identified that a positive education culture, constant education support and alignment of interests and strengths to educational opportunities increased completion rates. This is further supported by Youth Foyer models in the United Kingdom, which report approximately 90 per cent of ex-residents being in some form of education.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, when there are direct opportunities and pathways to employment, work experience and/or work skill development young people increase their confidence and capability to pursue employment.<sup>10</sup>

To make such a model successful, the demographic mix of this apartment block is vital to successful integration and the creation of positive relationships. Unfortunately, research is limited on suitable demographic mixes, especially in relation to young people. Hence, this leads us to another question: what is the ideal demographic mix that will support apartment youth housing to be sustainable?

The future of youth housing needs to be disrupted and supported by new evidence-based ideas. This is highlighted by the high number of youth who are still experiencing or at risk of homelessness. While the current models discussed above have had positive impacts to an extent on young people, they still have all experienced shortfalls most commonly in the implementation stage. This enhanced model is based on the common elements and strengths of other models as well as reinforcing protective factors for young people. Thus, the enhanced model proposed sees young people living in private apartments in a block of mixed youth and affordable housing. Having affordable housing within the building also provides a pathway for young people who wish to transition to more independent living.

Within the building there will be support services provided such as a case manager, social workers, a dentist, a doctor, a nurse, mental

health support, and employment services. Having these easily accessible and free services so close to young people's living quarters will likely increase engagement. Through these services, young people have the opportunity and support to develop independent living skills, pursue education, find employment, connect to the community, and form relationships all before moving to alternative housing. The unique feature of this enhanced model is the lack of a time constraint for these young people; they have the freedom to stay as short or as long as necessary for them to reach a level of independence for them to feel confident to enter adulthood.

#### Endnotes

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