

# Trace A Place: The South Australian Response to Young People who are Homeless

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As with any homeless group, the support needs of young people are complex and multi-faceted. As a result young people need a service such as Service to Youth Council's Trace A Place which is able to provide flexible ongoing and where necessary intensive support.

In 1994 the South Australian Youth Supported Accommodation Assistance Programme (SAAP — Youth) sector experienced a restructure, with an aim of improving assessment and access to services for young people 12–25, especially those with complex needs. In an attempt to realise this aim and to ensure that young people reached the most appropriate services, Trace A Place became the central assessment and referral service for metropolitan Youth SAAP services.

Since this time Trace A Place and the Youth SAAP services, have developed a sector built on strong relationships and equity of access for young people. This has included the development and implementation of the Multi Agency Referral Form which is now used successfully across the Youth SAAP sector as a shared needs assessment and case planning tool.

The Youth SAAP sector in South Australia consists of 29 services delivered by 13 organisations. Trace A Place works primarily with the services located in the Adelaide Metropolitan area. Young people must refer through Trace A Place to access (or after hours — Crisis Response Unit) those services providing intensive emergency and transitional accommodation. These services provide 30 emergency and 30 transitional placements.

Trace A Place employs a model of case management, providing both crisis intervention and ongoing support to any young person experiencing accommodation difficulty. Trace A Place deliver information, assessment of their needs and referral and advocacy to accommodation and support services. Unlike other South Australian SAAP sector entry points (families, domestic violence) who provide a primarily phone based service, Trace A Place provides young people with a shop front service that delivers support over the phone, face to face and on an outreach basis.

Each year Trace A Place has requests for assistance from approximately 1900 young people. Of this group about 900 are provided with ongoing case management. Approximately fifty per cent of all young people Trace A Place works with are below 18 yrs of age with the other half being 18–25 yrs of age.

The majority (77%) of young people who are case managed by Trace A Place are supported for a period of 3 months or less. 14% are supported for up to 6 months and the remaining group are supported for up to 12 months (6.5%) or more (2.5%).

76% of clients are able to be referred to the accommodation they need when request. For 70% of clients this accommodation is emergency supported accommodation. As with all homeless populations, young people present with a range of other barriers including mental health issues (34%), violence towards them (24%) or their violence towards others (14%) and reported drug and alcohol misuse (30%).

## **The Role of Trace A Place in Supporting Young People**

Homelessness for young people is a process rather than an event and we know that many young people are homeless for a period of time longer than the initial incidence of unstable housing. This is demonstrated in Trace A Place statistics with 23% of our clients being supported for 3 months or more.

Recent research (Mallett, Rosenthal, Keys, Myers, and Tattam 2006<sup>1</sup>; Johnson, 2006<sup>2</sup>) has clearly identified key pathways for young people into and through homelessness and that these pathways will require different individualised responses to successfully assist young people to independence. To be successful many of these responses need to be sustained and flexible. As such young people need ongoing support for the entire period they are homeless if they are to successfully transition out of homelessness. Trace A Place is able to provide flexible support for as long as the young person requires this and is able to reengage with a young person as necessary, if they become homeless again.

Their life stage often creates further barriers. Young people often have more poorly developed skills to be able to live independently including negotiating interpersonal relationships to sustain their accommodation. Young people often

have limited to no resources to assist them to establish stable housing and have never before had to consider such tasks. Trace A Place is able to provide young people with support to navigate services and provide advocacy with family and service providers. Trace A Place also has the capacity to negotiate with services for young people when they find accommodation breaking down due to behaviour and assist young people to recognise ways to sustain their accommodation through behaviour change



As with other populations, SAAP accommodation is seen as a last resort for young people so by the time a young person gets to the point of needing to access SAAP, they have often broken down the majority of their supports. Often these young people have limited support from other services or links to the community and have little knowledge of their accommodation and support options. Trace A Place is often one of the first services young people will have contact with when they become homeless. For these young people Trace A Place play a key role in ensuring they are informed about their options for accommodation and are assisted to negotiate the youth sector services to receive necessary individualised support.

The South Australia Youth SAAP services operate independently of each other and the support provided by that service often ends once the young person is no longer accommodated with them. Trace A Place however provides case management to these young people from their first contact with SAAP until they are

able to move to stable accommodation. Trace-A-Place is the only service that follows these young people and assists them to negotiate the Youth SAAP system through referral and advocacy on their behalf. Trace-A-Place knows the young person's history, the places they have been accommodated and most importantly is able to build a relationship with these young people during the length of their period of instability.

In a number of small research projects completed by Trace A Place, young people have reported that this service is important and useful in helping them to access services and find out about their options. Young people have stated that Trace A Place helps them work towards both short and long term accommodation goals while providing them with support and advocacy with other services.

### Next Steps

While Trace A Place aims to provide holistic support to young people there are still fractures in services to clients.

Trace A Place is not always able to elicit a response from key services such as child protection and accommodation services. There are also lengthy waiting lists for independent accommodation and limited exit points for young people. Therefore a more integrated, sector based response needs to ensue where young people are seen as the responsibility of a number of service both non government and government including health, justice and education services.

Trace A Place is currently engaged in a number of networks with a focus on integrated services for clients, with the hope of achieving more holistic, client focussed outcomes to ensure clients can both access and maintain housing. ■

### Footnotes

1. Mallett, S., Rosenthal, D., Keys, D., Myers, P., and Tattam, A. (2006) *Key Findings — Moving out, moving on: Young people's pathways in and through homelessness*, Key Centre for Women's Health in Society, University of Melbourne
2. Johnson, G. (2006) *On the Move: A longitudinal study of pathways in and out of homelessness*, RMIT

