



The Hon. Fiona Patten MP  
Chair  
Legislative Council, Legal and Social Issues Committee  
Parliament House  
Spring Street  
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

Dear Ms Patten

### **Inquiry into homelessness in Victoria**

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Legislative Council's Legal and Social Issues Committee inquiry into homelessness in Victoria. We appreciate the Committee's flexibility in allowing the Commission additional time to provide this submission, noting our priority efforts have been directed to addressing issues for children and young people arising from COVID-19.

The Commission's statutory functions include monitoring the child protection, out-of-home care and youth justice systems and advising Ministers, government departments, health and human services on matters relating to the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable children and young people.

While there are many drivers of youth homelessness and a range of critical gaps in the support systems for young people facing or experiencing homelessness, we will focus our input on issues about which we have unique access to information, namely the connection between issues for young people leaving care and homelessness among those young people.

We are therefore writing to provide information about the Commission's inquiry into services provided to children and young people leaving out-of-home care and case examples from young people who we spoke with to specifically inform the Committee's considerations.

### ***The Commission's inquiry into services provided to children and young people leaving care***

The component of the Commission's current work program that is most relevant to the Committee's Terms of Reference is our current inquiry into services provided to children and young people leaving the out-of-home care system.

There is mounting evidence in Victoria that young people who have grown up in out-of-home care face an unacceptably high risk of homelessness, poor physical and mental health, unemployment and involvement in the youth justice system.<sup>1</sup> Housing instability is a major issue for care leavers<sup>2</sup> and a lack of emotional, social and financial support to successfully transition to independent living significantly increases the risk of care leavers becoming homeless.<sup>3</sup>

Our inquiry is exploring what needs to change to improve outcomes for young people transitioning from care. It includes an examination of the correlation between the lack of

comprehensive support for young people leaving the care of the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services and an increased risk of homelessness.

The final report will detail our findings and contain recommendations to government to improve service responses for young people who are leaving, or have left, care to live independently. Our findings will be informed by consultations with young people, a review of files of young people currently in care or who have left care, quantitative analysis of whole-of-population out-of-home care data and consultations with key out-of-home care stakeholders.

The report will be tabled in Parliament later this year, after which time we will be able to provide a copy to the Committee and would welcome the opportunity to discuss the findings further.

### **Case examples – young people’s experiences of leaving care**

It is critical that the voices of young people inform decisions so that policies and programs respond to their needs. Earlier this year, before the emergence of COVID-19, two young people with experience of out-of-home care, Jess and Archibald,<sup>4</sup> agreed to share their experiences and insights with us, to inform the Committee’s considerations. Their stories and views are set out in their own words in **Annexures A and B** and illustrate the challenges young care leavers face in trying to secure stable and appropriate accommodation.

As Jess and Archibald’s experiences illustrate, young people leaving care can find themselves in a range of unstable living contexts. Jess told us about her experience living in transitional housing for an extended period. Archibald told us about his experience couch surfing and highlighted the precarious circumstances he faced:

*I just move around, pretty much mates’ houses. I can stay there [with a relative] sometimes but not often, so I find my way around place to place.*

Young care leavers face several structural barriers in entering the private rental market related to their age, low income, lack of rental history and limited social and employment networks that they can call upon to provide references. Jess reflected on some of these issues when sharing her own experience, noting the additional pressures of securing accommodation at a young age:

*What family kicks someone out at 18 and says enjoy? Even when you’re looking for rentals – when you look at your credit rating it’s gonna be lower cos of your age and then when you look at a private rental you won’t have a good history, so you won’t get picked over someone who’s older who will be more responsible or whatever.*

The impact of trauma and mental health issues can make it even more difficult for young people to secure suitable living arrangements. Jess talked about uncertainty in finding future living arrangements that were appropriate to her needs:

*Due to my anxiety and other mental health issues, shared accommodation isn’t suitable for me and private rental is well out of my budget and so I’m stuck on where to go. Although I am able to stay where I am for the time being, I don’t know how much longer I can stay here as tenants are only supposed to live here for up to two years and my two years has passed.*

Positive supports that are individualised and responsive to young people's lived experience can make a real difference to their lives, as Archibald reflected:

*I don't want to be involved in any handout shit. I am working hard on myself now and I have one support in [Springboard worker]... She's just a good person. She gives me the time, treats me like a person, listens to me...*

Jess also expressed the importance of responding to the lived experience of young care leavers:

*If I could say one thing to the Government, it would be for them to put themselves in our shoes. Imagine what our lives would have had to be like to end up in care, imagine the difficulties we have faced and then imagine the difficulties we continue to face because the Government isn't doing enough to support us.*

We encourage the Committee to consider Jess and Archibald's experiences, views and suggestions as it formulates recommendations for reform.

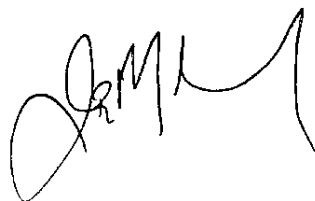
Should you require any further information at this stage, please contact Lachlan Zangari, Team leader, Analysis on 8601 5242 or at [Lachlan.Zangari@ccyp.vic.gov.au](mailto:Lachlan.Zangari@ccyp.vic.gov.au).

Yours sincerely



Liana Buchanan  
**Principal Commissioner**

17 July 2020



Justin Mohamed  
**Commissioner for Aboriginal Children  
and Young People**

20 July 2020

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<sup>1</sup> Mendes, P. (2009). 'Young people transitioning from state out-of-home care: Jumping hoops to access employment', *Family Matters*, No. 83.

<sup>2</sup> Campo, M. and Commerford, J. (2016). *Supporting young people leaving out-of-home care*, (2016). Child Family Community Australia Research paper no.41, p.6.

<sup>3</sup> Osborn, A. and Bromfield, L. (2007). *Young people leaving care*, Research Brief No 7, Australian Institute of Family Studies, Melbourne.

<sup>4</sup> Jess and Archibald are not the young people's real names. The young people chose these pseudonyms to protect their privacy. Some identifying information has also been removed and some minor clarifying edits have been made, but otherwise the accounts are in Jess and Archibald's own words.