

Thursday, 30 June, 2016

Bring families and kids in from the cold

Too many families with children are living in cars or are couch surfing. **yourtown** (formerly BoysTown) is calling on the future federal government to give more attention to preventing homelessness by looking at what contributes to homelessness and creating effective solutions to housing shortages.

yourtown supports the call to action by other major charities across Australia to target the serious issue of homelessness. According to **yourtown** CEO Tracy Adams, **yourtown** works with vulnerable families with children in a Family and Domestic Violence Refuge and Specialist Homelessness Service. The organisation also talks with thousands of children, young people and parents/carers annually via the Kids Helpline and Parentline virtual services.

"We've found a lot of the families who are homeless end up that way because they are struggling with unemployment, escalating debt, limited family supports, mental health issues and drug and alcohol issues. Often this is intergenerational. Family and domestic violence also continues to contribute to homelessness across all socio-economic and cultural groups.

"We need solutions that address these issues including family support services within each community for all families, not just for those reaching crisis point, that provide non-stigmatising access to counselling, skills development and social support.

"Any system review must recognise that chronic intergenerational homelessness has a complexity that has no quick solution and requires individual support responses for families.

"We know programs that recognise this complexity do work. **yourtown** includes responses to health, social, justice and economic needs of families alongside their housing needs as part of **yourtown's** accommodation services.

"The resulting social return on investment provides real outcomes for families. A 2013 evaluation of our family homelessness service identified a number of outcomes for families accessing the service. These included:

- improved physical health
- improved safety by avoiding ongoing abuse/violence
- parents and children at risk of custody intervention being able to remain (safely) united
- placement into stable, long-term, independent housing
- improved emotional wellbeing for parents/carers and children
- increased participation in employment/education for adults
- reduced offending behaviour among adults
- sustained tenancy in stable, long-term, independent housing among those receiving outreach support."

Ms Adams said Government funded social services also benefitted through cost re-allocation, including:

- reduced health and justice costs
- reduced burden for public accommodation shelters and other medium term accommodation
- reduced costs associated with preventing parents/carers from experiencing violence.

"Demand on all homelessness and other associated refuge services is often beyond capacity. This is certainly the case with **yourtown's** accommodation services. Last year, both of our residential facilities were nearly always at 100% occupancy," she said.

“Specialised accommodation services are not just about a roof over heads but the support of families and individuals to build and maintain a home.

“We cannot afford as a nation not to invest in initiatives that prevent homelessness and transition those who are homeless into secure accommodation.”

yourtown (formerly BoysTown) works with young people to find jobs, learn skills, become great parents and live safe happy lives. For more about **yourtown** visit www.yourtown.com.au

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Interview/filming opportunities

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