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Key College, A School for Homeless Youth: A Follow-up of Ex-students.

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### **Abstract**

Homelessness has a detrimental impact on health, social, and economical outcomes. Although homelessness affects all groups, young people have the highest rates and are the age group most at risk of experiencing homelessness. Interventions which seek to address youth homelessness are varied and many have not undergone rigorous evaluation. One approach to intervention is to improve homeless youths' ability to engage with society and through employment. Employment improves economic resources which in turn supports housing stability. However homeless youth may lack the skills to obtain and maintain employment and therefore education and training is an important step towards this goal. This study sought to follow up ex-students of an alternative education programme for homeless youth located in Sydney Australia. Thirty one participants consented to their involvement and were administered an online survey. The survey examined ex-students' current situations in terms of employment/education, housing, finances, life satisfaction, and their perspectives of their time at Key College. The results show 38% of those surveyed are still homeless, 64% are unemployed, 55% are living below the poverty line, 73% are satisfied with their lives overall, and almost all participants expressed positive perspectives of Key College. The results were compared to data sets of comparable populations. It was concluded that although the ex-students remain disadvantaged, they have made considerable progress towards stabilising their lives.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing
EET	Employment, Education, and Training
FHCSIA	Family, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs
MIAESR	Melbourne Institute of Applied Economics and Social Research
NAHA	National Affordable Housing Agreement
NYC	National Youth Commission
YOTS	Youth Off The Streets

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## **Introduction**

Homeless people are among the most marginalised, excluded, and disadvantaged in the community (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2006). Young people who experience homelessness are likely to suffer outcomes which impact upon their long-term functioning and prosperity (Barker, Humphries, McArthur, Thompson, 2012; National Youth Commission [NYC], 2008). However many authors report there is minimal longitudinal data available regarding the transitions of homeless youth to adulthood (Altena, Brilleslijper-Kater, & Wolf, 2010; Pollio, Thompson, Tobia, Reid, & Spitznagel, 2006; Sanabria, 2006; Slesnick, Dashora, Letcher, Erdem, & Serovich, 2009). This is largely due to the transient life style associated with homelessness which makes it difficult for homeless services to locate clients and collect follow up information (Rashid, 2004). Key College, an alternative high school for homeless youth, expressed a desire to do exactly this.

The aim of this research is to follow up ex-students of Key College, and using an online survey uncover their current housing, financial, educational, employment, and life satisfaction status. In addition, the survey also asks ex-student about their time at Key College including their attendance, qualifications and grades, and their perspectives of what Key College did well and what could be improved. This research benefits Key College who can use the findings to reflect on their practice, and as a point of comparison for future research. In addition, this study will report the current socio-economic circumstances of individuals who have experienced youth homelessness. This data will extend what is known about the long term outcomes of this population, specifically, the extent to which they are able to stabilise their lives as they progress to adulthood. This information is crucial to improving services which support youth in exiting homelessness and reintegrating into the community. Furthermore, educational

programmes for homeless youth have been identified as requiring further research (Murphy, 2011). This study intends to contribute to this gap in the literature by presenting the opinions and perspective of ex-students of an alternative high school for homeless youth.

### **Description of Key College**

Key College is an independent and fully accredited high school for homeless youth located in Sydney in the inner-city suburb of Redfern. The school was first opened in 1996 and is run through a non-denominational community organisation called Youth off the Streets (YOTS) chaired by Father Riley. The service relies on funding from the Government as well as corporate and private donations. Young people who access the YOTS service have high needs in the areas of homelessness, drug and alcohol addiction, and most have histories of abuse (Father Chris Riley's Youth off The Streets, n.d).

YOTS asserts a holistic stance is essential to breaking the cycle of abuse, poverty, addiction, and homelessness - and offers disadvantaged youth a full continuum of care. These services include a street outreach programme, drug and alcohol dependency services, counselling, crisis and transitional accommodation, legal aid, mentoring, and family programmes. In addition, a central philosophy to YOTS is the importance of education in breaking this cycle. YOTS acknowledges that mainstream education is often not appropriate for youth who are experiencing homelessness; and subsequently operates four accredited alternative high schools.

Key College is one of such schools and specialises and provides an opportunity for homeless youth to gain an education in an alternative setting. Key College is a small school; it has only 2 teachers, and functions similarly to a primary school classroom with all students in one large classroom. Each year approximately 30 students are

referred to the school, mostly from refuge services where youth are able to access short term emergency accommodation and basic services. Key College offers a trial to any student who may wish to enrol, however by the end of the year there is usually a core of 8 to 10 students remaining. Since the opening of Key College in 1996, approximately 150 students have attended the school (not including youth who leave within the first term). The students' academic levels range between year 7 to year 12 (equivalent to year 8 -13 in the New Zealand school system), and most are working at a year 9-10 level (equivalent to year 10-11 in New Zealand). The school provides a one year individual learning programme where students are supported in working towards a formal high school qualification – either year 10 which is equivalent to NCEA level 1 in New Zealand, or year 12 which is equivalent to NCEA level 3 in New Zealand. On average, 8 students complete a high school qualification each year. Aside from academic qualifications, Key College strives to support a range of vocational and life skills to improve students' ability to function in society. Students are able to complete life skills training, alternative certificates (such as first aid and music), and given work experience placements. In addition, it is recognised that housing, legal, and health issues may prevent youth from learning effectively; Key College functions as a gateway where students are able to be linked to other services within the YOTS organisation to overcome these issues. Ultimately, Key College strives to support youth in obtaining positive and healthy lifestyles by providing an individualised, holistic, and supportive learning environment.

### **Key College Philosophy**

The basis of the Key College programme is derived from a philosophy of positive youth development called the “Circle of Courage”. This model was developed by professors Larry Brendtro, Professor of Child Behaviour Disorders, and Martin

Brokenleg, Professor of Native American studies from Augustana College, South Dakota. The Circle of Courage has been used widely in both education and youth work and reflects principles of child rearing from indigenous culture, where children develop respect and responsibility without punishment (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 2005). The Circle of Courage conceptualises four interconnected areas of developmental needs which are considered universal to all children; belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. These values are described as the “foundations of psychological resilience” and difficult behaviour is understood as a “brake in the circle” where one or more of these developmental needs are unmet (Brendtro et al., 2005). The Circle of Courage advocates for schools to support the development of these four traits by employing the following principles: A strengths based approach, an emphasis on building relationships, a focus on developing a sense of attachment and belonging, and demonstrating respect for youth by treating them as adults and allowing youth opportunities to take responsibility for their decisions and actions; (Brown, n.d).

### **Differences Among Homeless Youth**

As it has been mentioned, Key College serves homeless youth. However the concept ‘homeless youth’ has been described as an umbrella term, incorporating many groups of young people with different circumstances and needs (Moore, 2005). It is noted that within the population of homeless youth, the literature refers to a number of different subgroups which are thought to have different characteristics. These categories and their definitions vary somewhat between researchers, although there are threads of cohesion where core categories are apparent. The categories discussed below are in no way definitive but have been commonly cited throughout the literature:

- “Accompanied youth” are without stable housing but have remained with their families.

- “Unaccompanied youth” are those without parental supervision and without stable housing.
- “Runaways” leave home without parental permission.
- “Push-outs/throwaways” have been asked or made to leave home and are prevented from returning.
- “System youth” are those who are residing in institutions such as out of home care, juvenile detention centres, rehabilitation, or mental health facilities.

Arguably the most common distinction, and the one which has received the most research, is categorising homeless youth based on where they sleep at night. Youth may be identified as “shelter residing,” which refers to youth who seek out services such as refuges to spend the night; or “street youth,” who reside in environments such as under bridges or in abandoned buildings (Center for Higher Education Policy Analysis [CHEPA], 2007; Moore, 2005; Thompson, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2006). Research has uncovered a number of consistent differences between these two groups.

Shelter residing youth are often homeless for the first time (McCaskill, Toro, Wolfe, 1998, as cited in Toro et al., 2007), have spent less time being homeless (on average four months) (Ensign & Bell, 2004 as cited in Moore, 2005), are more likely to be female, white, and younger (averaging 15 years old), (Thompson et al., 2002, 2006), to be in school, to use drug and alcohol infrequently, have lived with their parents previous to admission, are likely to return to their family home after a bout of homelessness, and are without severe behavioural difficulties (Thompson, Pollio, & Bitner, 2006; Thompson, Pollio, Constantine, Reid, & Nebbitt, 2002; Pollio et al., 2006). It is suggested that shelter residing youth are more likely to be in a crisis situation and less likely to have an extensive history of homelessness (Thompson et al., 2000, 2002; Pollio et al., 2006).

Conversely, street youth are more likely to be male, to have been away from their home for longer, and less likely to be attending school (Cohen & Van Houten, 1991). Street youth have been identified as having significantly higher rates of engagement in deviant behaviours such as crime, prostitution, and drug use (Toro et al., 2007). These behaviours propel a downward spiral where risk is increased for a range of other negative outcomes, for example mental illness and victimisation (Van Wormer, 2003 as cited in Moore, 2005). These negative factors are considered harder from which to recover; subsequently, street youth are more likely to report multiple, and longer experiences of homelessness (average of three years) (Ensign & Bell, 2004 as cited in Moore, 2005).

Identifying separate categories under the umbrella of *homeless youth* reflects important differences regarding reasons for homelessness, and the conditions experienced once homeless (Sanabria, 2006). Recognition of this variance is crucial to service evaluation and development. Researchers are increasingly calling for services to respond to groups in different ways based on the separate needs/risks/behaviours of different groups of homeless (CHEPA, 2007; Sanabria, 2006; Slesnick, Prestopnik, & Glassman, 2007). However, categorising homeless youth is problematic; largely because there is often overlap between categories, and individuals may not remain static in one group (Sanabria, 2006; Thompson et al., 2000; Toro, Dworsky, & Fowler, 2007). This can make it difficult for researchers to determine the most appropriate label (CHEPA, 2007; Toro et al., 2007). Blurred definitions and variation among researchers has resulted in difficulties interpreting and comparing research data - as it can be unclear which group the findings are able to be applied to (Moore, 2005). Although challenging in light of the variances in the population, a concise and inclusive definition of homeless youth is necessary in order to produce quality studies (ABS, 2012a;

Sanabria, 2006). Definitions of *homeless* and *youth* are described below, followed by a description of Key College students.

### **Definitions of Homeless**

Definitions of what constitutes homelessness vary among policies, legislation, agencies, service providers, and researchers internationally (Moore, 2005). The following is a list of definitions which have been used to inform major Government initiatives. These definitions demonstrate the variation surrounding the identification of the homeless.

#### **United States.**

The Runaway and Homeless Youth Act in the U.S distinguishes “homeless youth” as young people under 21 who have no home to which they can return. They are identified as unable to live in a safe environment with a relative and have no alternative options. This may be a result of their family being homeless, being force to leave home and instructed not to return, or leaving a home in which they were unsafe. Youth who run away from home, but are able to return, are considered separate from this group (42 U.S.C. 5732a as cited in Moore, 2005).

The McKinney-Vento Act takes a broader stance and defines homeless children and youth as individuals who lack a “fixed, regular, adequate night-time residence; this includes children who are sharing a residence due to loss of housing or other economic hardship, who are living in motels/hotels, camping grounds, emergency and transitional shelters, or awaiting foster care placement” (U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2005 as cited in Cunningham, Harwood, & Hall, 2010, p.8).

#### **Europe.**

The European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion define homelessness as being without a “home”. “Home” refers to an adequate space which a tenant has control over legally, and is able to enjoy both privacy and social relations within the space. This definition differentiates between *rooflessness*, where individuals lack shelter of any kind, *homelessness*, where individuals have temporary shelter, and *living in insecure housing*, where the risk of having to leave is high due to insecure tenancies, eviction, or violence (European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless, 2011 as cited in ABS, 2012a).

### **New Zealand.**

Statistics New Zealand has been strongly influenced by the European definition and recognises social, legal and physical domains in their conceptualisation of adequate housing. Homelessness is identified as a living situation where individuals are without shelter, in temporary accommodation, are sharing accommodation, or are living in unsuitable conditions with no other options available to them (Statistics New Zealand, 2009 as cited in Statistics New Zealand, 2012).

### **Australia.**

In Australia there are two widely accepted definitions of homeless. One is used by homeless services to identify individuals eligible for homeless services and includes individuals at-risk of homelessness (Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing [AIHW], 2012a); and the other was developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and is used to enumerate the homeless population (ABS, 2012a). The ABS definition was developed in 2008 and is the most widely accepted statistical definition of homeless used in Australia. The ABS definition is based on cultural conceptualisations of home influenced by the European and New Zealand definitions, and therefore reflects the understanding that homelessness does not necessarily mean

“rooflessness.” This definition includes individuals who are living in a range of sub-standard accommodations. What is considered sub-standard is based on shared cultural standards of the minimum standard of acceptable accommodation in Australia (ABS, 2012a). This definition is paraphrased below:

An individual is considered homeless when they do not have any other suitable alternatives and their current living situation has the characteristics of one or more of these key elements: is inadequate, or has no tenure/has a short and non-extendable tenure, or the tenant does not have control over access to space for social relations (ABS, 2012a). Those who reside in accommodation which falls below this standard are then grouped into primary, secondary or tertiary homelessness: a) Primary homelessness refers to those without “conventional accommodation” including those living on the streets and other public places. b) Secondary homelessness refers to those who move frequently between different forms of temporary accommodation, such as emergency shelters or short-term stays with friends/family. 3) Tertiary homeless includes those who are living in medium and long term placements (13 weeks or longer), or caravan parks. The ABS definition does not include groups of individuals who are at high risk of becoming homeless; for example, families who are “doubled up” (one or more family per house), or children who are in institutional care (ABS, 2012a). The definition of homeless developed by the ABS has been used in the present study to identify homelessness.

### **Definition of Youth**

Although homelessness affects all age groups, the focus of this research is on homeless youth. It appears that the literature is somewhat split in terms of how old “youth” is. Some authors define their sample as ranging from 12 to 18 (Pollio et al., 2006; Sanabria, 2006; Slesnick & Prestopnik, 2005; Thompson et al., 2000; Thompson

et al., 2002); while others have extended this age to 24 (AIHW, 2007, 2011c; Everson-Hock et al., 2011; Mendes, 2009). Data gathered by the ABS classifies youth as people aged between 12 and 24 (ABS, 2012b). In the present study, the ABS definition is employed and “youth” or “young people” will refer to individuals aged between 12 and 24.

### **Characteristics of Participants in the Present Study**

The ex Key College students surveyed in the current study are a group of individuals who attended Key College between 1996 and 2011. These individuals are currently aged between 16 and 34 years old, and while attending Key College were aged between 14 and 18 years old. Previous to attending Key College they had attended other secondary schools, but had either dropped out or been excluded. Given the specialised nature of the school, all of the participants were experiencing some form of residential instability when they were enrolled in Key College. The ex-students involved in the study have therefore all experienced youth homelessness (and may still be). Most students are referred to Key College by crisis refuges, some by other youth services such as residential programmes or juvenile justice, and others by the Key College outreach service which recruits homeless youth residing on the street. Based on the ABS definition of homelessness, the participants of this study have experienced primary, secondary, and/or tertiary homelessness.

### **Summary and Outline of the Thesis**

This introduction has outlined the setting and sample of the present study. In the following section the literature regarding homeless youth will be summarised. The literature review begins with a broad discussion of the prevalence, causes, and consequences of youth homelessness, then continues on to discuss intervention strategies with a particular focus on education-based programmes. The subsequent

section outlines the methodology used in this study; followed by the results section where the data from survey is presented. The final section will discuss the findings, the implications of these, and give recommendations and conclusions.

### **Literature Review**

This section will review the literature on homeless youth with a particular focus on the Australian context. The literature review includes a description of the prevalence, characteristics, causes, and consequences of youth homelessness; followed by a summary of the Australian Government's response to homelessness; and a review of international literature regarding intervention approaches. The literature included in this review has been sourced from the online data bases PsycINFO, Academic Search Premier, Australia/New Zealand Reference Centre, Education Research Complete, ERIC, and Google Scholar. A combination of the following search terms were used to locate relevant literature: Homeless *or* "residentially unstable" *or* "inadequate\* hous\*" *or* runaway\* *or* "street youth" *or* unaccompanied *or* 'at risk" *or* disadvantaged *and* Youth *or* teen\* *or* "young people" *or* adolescen\* *or* "young adult\*" *and* Intervention *or* programme\*. This search produced 67 relevant articles. Reference lists were also reviewed for additional research. The remainder of this chapter seeks to clarify the issue of youth homelessness and what is being done to address it.

#### **Description of Homelessness: Prevalence, characteristics, causes and consequences**

##### **Prevalence.**

There are a number of challenges to determining an accurate prevalence of homelessness. Estimates can vary depending on how homelessness is defined, and the sampling techniques used (Toro et al., 2007). Internationally there is a lack of reliable prevalence data as there remains continued debate regarding who should be counted in this population, and how to go about counting them (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2008;

Moore, 2005). Attempts to count the homeless are complicated by two main challenges: fluctuations as homeless people often move in and out of homelessness, and difficulties counting 'hidden' groups of homeless. 'Hidden' homeless people include those who have no contact with community services and are therefore never included in official statistics (census data) (AIHW, 2011). In New Zealand there is no official count of homelessness as a result of these challenges (Statistics New Zealand, 2012). The Australian Census of Population and Housing attempts to include these individuals by sending field staff to locations such as parks and deserted buildings where homeless people are known to frequent; however it is possible some individuals may be missed (ABS, 2012c). Another group of hidden homeless are people who are staying in other households temporarily who report this residence as their usual address in the census. As a result of these hidden groups, it is acknowledged that approximations of homelessness based on census data will be underestimated (ABS, 2012b). While there is a need to continue to improve data collection; Australia has one of the most developed methods for counting homeless internationally. Prevalence data is therefore able to provide an informed indication of the extent of homelessness in Australia (Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs [FHCSIA], 2008a). A brief description of the method used to count homeless and the most recent estimation ensues.

Every five years the ABS conducts the 'Counting the Homeless Project' where the prevalence of homelessness in Australia is estimated. This estimate is based on census data in combination with data compiled from all Government funded homeless services across Australia (ABS, 2012c; Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2003). The most recent census count was in 2011 however the data from this collection has not yet been released. The most up-to-date data available was published in the 'Counting the

Homeless 2006' (Chamberlain & Mackenzie, 2008) following the 2006 census. On census night in 2006 using the ABS definition of homelessness, it was found there were 104,676 homeless people in Australia, 0.5% of the total population. This equates to 53 homeless people per 10,000, a rate which remained stable since the 2001 census (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2008). Forty four percent of homeless were found to be residing temporarily with family or friends, 21% in boarding houses or other temporary accommodation, 19% in shelter provided by the homelessness service system, and 16% in improvised dwellings or 'sleeping rough; (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2008).

Youth were disproportionately represented in the homeless population. Of the total homeless population in 2006, 21% (21,940) were teenagers aged between 12 to 18, and a further 10% (10,504) were young adults aged 19-24. These figures amount to approximately 32,400 homeless youth between the ages of 12 and 24 (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2008). This age group made up 18% of the general population (AIHW, 2007), and 31% of the total homeless population, the largest age category of homeless (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2008). These figures reveal that the rate of youth homelessness was 0.9% of the general youth population, nearly double that of the overall rate of homelessness (0.5%). It appears that youth aged between 12 and 24 were disproportionately represented in the homeless population in 2006 (Chamberlain & Mackenzie, 2008; FHCSIA, 2008a). It is important to note that despite this finding, figures from the 2006 estimate show that the number of homeless youth aged between 12 and 18 had decreased by 21% since 2001. This significant change is thought to be a result of an increase in early intervention targeting 12-18 year olds between 2001 and 2006 (Chamberlain & Mackenzie, 2008). It is hoped that the Counting the Homeless Project 2011 may reveal this downward trend in youth homelessness has continued.

### **Demographics of homeless youth in Australia.**

Census data are also used to gain an indication of the demographics of homeless youth. It was found that of the estimated 32,400 homeless youth, 30,000 of these young people belonged to the secondary homeless population at the time of the last census. This group includes young people who stay temporarily with friends and family, or in temporary/crisis accommodation within the homelessness service system (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2008). It was found there were similar proportions of males and females, 48% and 52% respectively; and that indigenous youth made up approximately 25-32% (ABS, 2011a). The distribution of homeless youth across Australia was found to vary among states. The Northern Territory had a rate of 50 homeless people aged between 12-18 per 1000, the highest in Australia; followed by Western Australia with a rate of 21 in 1000; Tasmania - 16 in 1000, South Australia - 15 in 1000, Queensland - 11 in 1000, Australian Capital Territory - 10 in 1000, and New South Wales and Victoria had the lowest rates at 8 in 1000 (ABS, Census, 2011a).

#### **Causes of homelessness.**

There is no single cause for youth homelessness. Each young person who becomes homeless will have their own set of unique circumstances which has led to their situation (FHCSIA, 2008a). These may be long standing issues where the individual has experienced a range of disadvantage throughout their lives, such as long term poverty or mental health issues. Or, homelessness may result in a time of crisis. Likewise, homelessness may occur only once, or it may be reoccurring (FHCSIA, 2008a). Research highlights numerous risk factors associated with homelessness, and several of these have been identified as causal to homelessness (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2003; Homelessness Taskforce, 2008 as cited in NYC, 2008). These causal factors, often overlapping, are described as “pathways” into homelessness and are as follows: housing stress caused by poverty and other financial issues; family breakdown

or conflict, poor life transitions - particularly out of institutions including state care and the prison system, and untreated mental health and substance abuse disorder (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2003; FHCSIA, 2008a). The department of Family, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FHCSIA) (2008a) assert that identifying pathways into homelessness highlights important areas for early intervention. These pathways will be described in more detail below.

***Housing stress and poverty.***

Experiencing poverty makes maintaining stable accommodation difficult (housing stress) and is causal to homelessness (FHCSIA, 2008a). Factors which contribute to poverty include structural issues such as unemployment, social inequality, and high cost of housing (FHCSIA, 2008a; Homelessness Australia, 2012; Kids Help Line, 2010). Unemployment has repercussions on economic status and the ability to maintain stable housing. Unemployed people receiving welfare payments may not be able to afford rental prices, especially with the current rising costs of housing in Australia. Individuals and families may experience housing stress where continued tenure is uncertain due to inability to pay rent, and have to resort to unstable living conditions predictive of homelessness; for example, “doubling up” where two or more families live in one home, or staying temporarily with others (FHCSIA, 2008a; Moore, 2005, Toro et al., 2007). Youth homelessness may have resulted from family poverty where parents are unemployed, or youth may have left home for other reasons then experienced difficulties finding employment, leading to their homelessness (AIHW, 2011). The National Youth Commission (2008) reports that young people are marginalised in the labour force market making it difficult for youth to find stable employment which provides an adequate income. As a result, unemployment has been consistently higher among young people than any other age group over the past 30

years (Homelessness Australia, 2012). Once homeless, the impact of social inequality and labour market marginalisation only strengthen, making it increasingly difficult for homeless youth to find employment and secure stable housing (NYC, 2008).

***Family breakdown and conflict.***

Family breakdown is a broad category and includes conflicts and maltreatments such as neglect and abuse (NYC, 2008; Thompson et al., 2002). Youth may leave home to escape violence or maltreatment, or they may be forced to leave by parents after a breakdown in the relationship (AIHW, 2007, 2011; FHCSIA, 2008a; NYC, 2008). It is understood family conflict is integral to the pathway into youth homelessness, and that youth are often leaving intolerable situations and families under extreme pressure (NYC, 2008). Research has consistently demonstrated that youth most commonly report family related issues as the primary reason for their homelessness (Chamberlain & Mackenzie, 2008; Kids Help Line, 2010; NYC, 2008; Pollio et al. 2006; Thompson et al., 2002). For example, Cohen and Van Houten's (1991) study found that 61% of a sample of homeless youth expressed their primary reason for leaving home was an issue with their parents; one third stated neglect, one quarter reported abuse, either physical or sexual, and one fifth reported parental drug or alcohol use. Current Australian studies have produced consistent findings; the Specialist Homeless Services Collection, published by the AIHW (2012), states that escaping violence, abuse, and conflict is the most common cause of homelessness identified by young people who present at homeless services. Young people who leave such situations may do so quickly without the necessary resources to live independently. Homelessness results when access to other suitable accommodation cannot be obtained given their economic and social status as an unsupported young person (Kids Help Line, 2010).

***Poor life transitions.***

Transitions from state care or long-term placements in detention centres increase risk of homelessness (FHCSIA, 2008a; Kids Help Line, 2010). While youth in institutionalised care are not considered homeless based on the ABS definition of homelessness, young people who leave these facilities are vulnerable to homelessness (Everson-Hock et al., 2011; FHCSIA, 2008a; Mendes, 2009, NYC, 2008). The relationship between state care and homelessness is understood as a result of foster youth being deprived of a normative, gradual transition to adulthood. Foster youth age out of the care system when they turn 18 and at this time youth undergo a sudden and much earlier transition to independence than other young people (Courtney et al., 2007). Many discharged foster youth struggle with this transition due to a lack of financial, social, and individual resources which puts these youth at risk of experiencing housing instability (Courtney et al., 2007; Courtney, 2009; Toro et al., 2007). Consequently, youth who have experiences of state care have been found to be largely over-represented in the homeless population (NYC, 2008). For example, it was found that 1 in 5 young people and 40% of adults utilising emergency accommodation services in Australia had experiences of state care. This finding indicates these experiences may increase the likelihood of on-going issues with homelessness (NYC, 2008).

Several researchers have explored this relationship with follow-up studies of youth who have aged out of the child welfare system. Fowler, Toro, Tompsett, & Hobden (2006) found that of 264 youth who had aged out of state care on average 3.6 years ago, 17% had spent time on the streets, and 30% had experienced unstable housing such as “couch surfing.” Similarly, Courtney and Dworsky (2006) found 14% of a sample of 732 former foster youth had experienced homelessness for at least one night since leaving care; While the Casey Family Programme (2005 as cited in Moore, 2005) and Pecora et al., (2005 as cited in Courtney, 2009) both reported 22% of the ex-

foster youth in their respective studies had experienced at least one night of homelessness. These studies demonstrate the increased risk of homelessness faced by ex-foster youth, and support the conceptualisation of transitioning out of care as a pathway into homelessness.

***Untreated mental health and substance abuse.***

Mental illness and substance abuse have been recognised by The National Youth Commission as core contributing issues leading to homelessness. Mental illnesses, including addiction, can lead to homelessness by impacting upon employment - leading to loss of housing; or by affecting relationships which results in individuals having to leave the home (NYC, 2008). The commission also recognises that youth may become homeless as a result of conflict or loss of housing caused by a family member's mental health or substance abuse issues. The relationship between youth homelessness and mental health and substance abuse issues is demonstrated in the disproportionately high prevalence rates among this population. Data collated from homeless accommodation services in Australia in 2005 revealed that approximately 12% of clients had a diagnosed mental illness, 19% had substance use problems, and another 5% had both a mental illness and substance use problem (FHCSIA, 2008a). These issues not only contribute to pathways into homelessness, but are also major barriers to exiting homelessness.

**Consequences of homelessness.**

It is difficult to separate the causes from the consequences of homeless. Many of the factors which are implicated in pathways into homelessness can also be outcomes of homelessness, for example drug use, or poverty. The multiple and overlapping problems experienced by homeless youth may be long-standing problems which have contributed to the reasons they are homeless, or these issues may be exacerbated by the

experience of homelessness (Lenz-Rashid, 2006). Whether these problems are causes or consequences of homelessness is unclear; what is apparent is that once homeless, young people are challenged by not only the factors which lead to them leaving home, but also suffer a range of further disadvantages as a result of homelessness (Altena et al., 2010; Lenz-Rashid, 2006; NYC, 2008).

Disadvantage stems from unstable housing. Unstable housing is a major barrier to normative social inclusion which in turn impacts upon physical and mental well being, quality of life, and educational and employment opportunities (NYC, 2008). Consequently, youth homelessness has a long-term detrimental impact on an individual's ability to function effectively and productively in the adult world (Murphy, 2011). For example, the ABS General Social Survey conducted in 2010 found that people who had experienced homelessness in the past 10 years were much more likely to be socially excluded, to have lower educational levels, to be living in a disadvantaged neighbourhood, to be experiencing economic hardship, to be unemployed, and to be supported by Government benefits - than those who have never experienced homelessness (as cited in ABS, 2012d). A range of consequences of youth homelessness are discussed in more detail below.

***Impact of homelessness on health and safety.***

It is clear that homelessness severely impacts upon health (AIHW, 2011). The World Health Organisation (1947) defines 'health' as not merely a physical phenomenon, but a state of overall wellbeing incorporating mental and social welfare (as cited in AIHW, 2011). Holistic health is impacted by the social and economic conditions of daily life including social position, educational status, occupation, income, gender, ethnicity and race. These factors dictate material circumstances, social environments, and accompanying behaviours; which in turn dictate health (AIHW,

2011). Given the socially and economically disadvantaged position of homeless young people, this population has been found to be at greater risk of a range of health issues affecting physical and mental health.

*Physical health.*

The homeless lifestyle can involve exposure to the elements, poor nutrition, high stress, drug use, and poor sleeping patterns which impact upon physical health (NYC, 2008). Subsequently, Australia's Institute of Health and Wellbeing (AIHW) (2011) reported that homeless people have higher rates of illness, disability and live shorter lives than the general population. Health issues found to be particularly high among homeless youth are sexually transmitted diseases, unplanned pregnancy, respiratory problems, and poor nutrition. Health is also impacted upon by the reduced likelihood of homeless young people getting regular health check-ups. Homeless youth may not access mainstream health services due to expenses, concerns about confidentiality, lack of transport, or difficulty making/keeping appointments (NYC, 2008).

*Mental health.*

Research has consistently identified the link between youth homelessness and an increased rate of emotional and psychological problems compared to the general youth population (AIHW, 2011; NYC, 2008). The prevalence of depression, anxiety, suicidal behaviour, self-harming behaviour, post traumatic stress disorders, and conduct disorder are significantly higher among homeless youth than their non-homeless counterparts (AIHW, 2011, Cohen & Van Houten, 1991; Homelessness Australia, 2012). The actual prevalence of mental health issues among homeless youth in Australia varies depending on the data source (NYC, 2008). For example, Project i, a study of homeless young people in Melbourne, found 26% of the homeless youth involved reported

psychological symptoms indicating a psychological disorder (Rossiter, Mallett, Myers, Rosenthal, 2003); while the Youth Homeless Outreach Team (Melbourne) reported that 89% of clients have mental illness, 53% have attempted suicide, and 73% have engaged in self-harming behaviours (Mildred, 2007 as cited in NYC, 2008). The NYC reports that “numerous” workers supporting homeless youth state mental health issues are a “common characteristics of their clients” (200, para 10.13), however no figure is provided.

Homeless youth may develop psychological symptoms for a number of reasons stemming from both their backgrounds, and factors of their current homeless lifestyles. For example, homeless youth are likely to have experienced family conflict which is often accompanied by trauma and grief (NYC, 2008); and lacking shelter and the means to access basic essentials is also thought to contribute to psychological issues (Kids Help Line, 2010). As it has been noted, mental health issues may contribute to causes of homelessness, while evidence also suggests psychological symptoms may result, or be exacerbated, from the experience of homelessness (NYC, 2008). It is recognised that the longer an individual experiences homelessness, the higher their risk of developing severe and persistent mental illnesses (Homelessness Australia, 2012).

#### *Substance abuse.*

Substance abuse is disproportionately prevalent among homeless youth (AIHW, 2011). Mallet et al. (2003) conducted the ‘Project i’ study which included the examination of drug use among homeless youth. The results indicate that there are a substantial number of homeless youth who do not use drugs, however overall the rate of drug use is significantly higher among homeless youth than their non-homeless counterparts (Mallet et al., 2003). Similar to mental health issues, substance abuse issues may lead to homelessness, or be acquired once homeless (NYC, 2008). A study

based in Melbourne found that 66% of a sample of substance abusing homeless youth had developed this issue since becoming homeless (Chamberlain, Johnson, Theobald, 2006 as cited in NYC, 2008). This finding suggests that substance abuse is more likely to be a consequence of becoming homeless. Mallett et al. (2003) explain that the combination of experiencing unstable housing, as well as associating with other homeless people, impacts upon the use of drugs and alcohol. Homeless youth with a drug or alcohol issue face difficulty obtaining and maintaining housing support. Services are largely unequipped to support young people with these issues and as a result many restrict drug-users' access to accommodation (NYC, 2008). Substance abuse therefore complicates the pathway out of homelessness and is associated with longer durations of homelessness, increased likelihood of street dwelling, and increased risk of engagement in other deviant behaviours to support drug use such as dealing, prostitution, and crime (AIHW, 2011; Thompson et al., 2002; Toro et al., 2007).

*Dual diagnosis.*

Mental illness and substance abuse often coincide (NYC, 2008). The relationship between mental illness and substance abuse is complex; the experience of one is associated with the development of the other (NYC, 2008). Substances may be used to self-medicate existing psychological problems, or may lead to the development of anxiety, depression, paranoia, and psychosis (AIHW, 2011). Estimates of the rate of homeless youth in Australia with both mental illness and a substance abuse issues vary among sources. The National Youth Mental Health Foundation estimate up to 50% of homeless youth experience both issues (Mallett et al, 2003); while supported accommodation services have estimated one third of clients present with both mental health and substance abuse issues (AIHW, 2012).

*Safety, victimisation, crime, and high risk behaviours.*

The homeless lifestyle puts young people at risk of engaging in high risk and delinquent behaviours which impact upon their health and safety. Homeless youth have disproportionately high rates of involvement in criminal and dangerous behaviour such as stealing, drug use, drug dealing, and risky sexual behaviour including unprotected sex and prostitution (Cohen & Van Houten, 1991; Lenz-Rashid, 2006; Thompson et al., 2002; Toro et al., 2007). These high risk behaviours are described as survival mechanisms for homeless youth and are often employed for economic reasons (Sanders, 2007, as cited in NYC, 2008). Involvement in these activities makes homeless youth susceptible to a number of health concerns including HIV, STI's, overdose, and can put youth in dangerous situations where they are at risk of being victimised by others (Altena et al., 2010; NYC, 2008). Although it is common for homeless youth to commit crimes, for example, fare evasion on public transport, breaking and entering, shoplifting, and failure to "move on" when instructed by police (NYC, 2008), they are also at high of risk of being victims of crime, especially violent crime (Davis, Hatty, Burke, 1995 as cited in NYC, 2008).

***Impact of homelessness on educational outcomes.***

Research indicates that housing instability and extreme poverty predict poor academic achievement and school dropout (Hyman, Aubry, & Klodawsky, 2010). Researchers have found homelessness to be associated with poor attendance, behavioural problems (Bassuk & Rosenberg, 1990 as cited in Thompson et al., 2000), untreated learning disability, higher rates of expulsions and suspensions (Murphy, 2011), lower academic success (Masten et al., 1997; Sullivan & Knutson, 2000; Yon, 1995, all as cited in Toro et al., 2007), and higher rates of having to repeat a grade (Masten et al., 1997; Rouse & Fantuzzo, 2009; Tucker, 1999; all as cited in Toro et al., 2007). Each of these factors are also associated with disengaging from the education

system completely (“dropout”) (Malliet & O’Brien, 2009; Toro et al, 2007). Homeless youth reportedly have a dropout rate four times that of their housed peers, where three quarters of homeless youth do not complete high school (Malliet & O’Brien, 2009).

It is apparent that homelessness makes it difficult for young people to consistently attend school and actively engage with the curriculum (AIHW, 2011; Hyman et al., 2010; Malliet & O’Brien, 2009). This may be because they are preoccupied with other issues such as housing, substance use, or mental health; or, they may be excluded from school as a result of attendance or behavioural issues. Another explanation for their disengagement from education is their transient lifestyle.

Transience can make attendance at the same school difficult as youth move to different regions (Popp et al., 2003). Frequent school changes have been found to correlate with poor academic achievement and an increased likelihood of having to repeat a school year (Popp et al., 2003). Australian based studies have demonstrated that it can take students more than six months to academically recover from a change in schools, and to build solid social relationships in their new setting (Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, 2004). Furthermore, as young people re-locate in new areas, they may face barriers to re-enrolment in the education system as they often lack required transcripts and records from previous schools (Cunningham et al., 2010). In addition, homeless youth often lack of privacy, space, motivation, and supervision and support which is considered detrimental to involvement in education (Hyman et al., 2010). Combine these factors with the impact of past traumas, behavioural and psychological issues, poor communication skills, and previous negative experiences with adults and/or schools, and the challenges to achieving at, or even attending school are overwhelming (AIHW, 2007; Hyman et al., 2010; Ronalds & Allen-Craig, 2008).

The lack of a high school education is a key factor which contributes to and maintains the disengagement of homeless youth from society (Hyman et al., 2010). Homeless youth who have disengaged from the education system lack not only qualifications, but also normative socialisation which impacts upon the development of social skills (Murphy, 2011). Researchers agree that the educational outcomes associated with youth homelessness have a deleterious long-term impact on a young person's ability to gain employment and function effectively in the future (FHCSIA, 2008a; MacKenzie & Chamberlain, 2008; Murphy, 2011). An outcome of school dropout is therefore increased risk of long-term unemployment and disengagement; which contributes to a cycle of social isolation, economic disadvantage, poor health, and long-term poverty, making it difficult for individuals to exit homelessness (AIHW, 2011).

***Impact of homelessness on employment.***

The outcomes of youth homelessness described above make it difficult for homeless young people to gain and maintain employment (AIHW, 2011). The educational deficits associated with youth homelessness in particular put this group at a substantial disadvantage in the labour market (Murphy, 2011). The link between education and employment is clear; people who have completed high school, or equivalent level training, have higher rates of employment compared to those who have not (ABS, 2012d). The Dusseldorp Skills Forum in their analysis of the youth labour market concluded "it is clear that in the modern Australian economy, many young people without school completion or a Certificate III qualification are likely to face long-term disadvantages in the labour market" (as cited in NYC, 2008 p. 329). Given the rate of dropout among homeless youth, as well as a lack previous experience and deficient social skills, homeless youth face substantial disadvantage entering the work

force (Lenz-Rashid, 2006). Furthermore, without stable housing and facilities, homeless youth may struggle to maintain employment even if they are able to enter the workforce (NYC, 2008). Unemployment impacts upon economic independence, experiences of poverty, financial stress, social exclusion, and mental health issues. Again, these factors contribute to a cycle of homelessness and increase the risk of prolonged homelessness (AIHW, 2011).

*Impact of homelessness on financial circumstances.*

Given the challenges to finding stable employment outlined above, it follows that another outcome of youth homelessness is economic hardship and poverty (FHCSIA, 2008a). Poverty refers to having an inadequate income and experiencing deprivation of shelter, food, health care, and education as a result (NYC, 2008). Although poverty is linked to homelessness as a structural cause; once youth are homeless they face poverty in its most extreme form as they are deprived of many, if not all, of the necessities stated above (NYC, 2008).

In Australia the Government provides income support to vulnerable people. These payments are a major source of income for homeless youth (NYC, 2008). An annual survey of Australian young people found that close to 30% of homeless youth stated a Government allowance was their main source of income, compared to 5% of housed young people (Mission Australia as cited in NYC, 2008). The survey discovered that the most common allowance among young people is the Youth Allowance, followed by the Newstart Allowance. The Youth Allowance is for full time students and unemployed young people under 21, and the Newstart Allowance is for those over 21 (NYC, 2008). However, it is reported that approximately one third of young people who present to homeless services in Australia are not receiving any financial support - and literally have no income (NYC, 2008). Homeless young people may not be able to

access financial support due to a complex benefit system. Young people are required to supply many forms of documentation (identification, bank statements, tax file number), as well as register with a job network provider, and in some cases have parental statements made to verify their situation. These requirements often prevent youth from proving they are homeless or independent for the purpose of receiving support (NYC, 2008). Homeless youth who are unable to access employment or allowances must survive off zero legitimate income.

For youth who are able to access financial welfare, this often does not end homelessness and economic strife continues to be a reality. The sum of the allowances available to youth have been criticised by most homeless services providers for failing to reflect increases in the rental market and adequately cover living costs (NYC, 2008). Different rates of income are available depending on the individual's circumstances; however the maximum level of youth allowance payable to a single youth under 21 with no dependants is \$220.00 fortnightly, and \$492.60 fortnightly to those on the Newstart allowance (Department of Human Services, 2012). It is noted that both of these sums are significantly below Henderson's poverty line, a measure of relative poverty used commonly in Australia (Poverty lines: Australia, 2012). Young people who are reliant on Government payments therefore face substantial hardship, housing stress, and poverty, making it difficult for homeless youth to secure stable housing and exit homelessness (NYC, 2008).

***Impact of homelessness on quality of life.***

Little is known about how satisfied homeless youth are with their lives (Altena et al., 2010). However there are several clues in the literature which indicate homeless youth experience poor quality of life. Those recognised in this literature review include the following findings: Disengagement from society and associated lack of socialisation

increases risk of mental health issues (AIHW, 2011); experiences of poverty, hardship, and threats to one's safety are negative influences on overall wellbeing (AIHW, 2011); and Statistics Canada (2007) found that quality of life is positively related to increased education (as cited in Hyman et al., 2010). Given that homeless youth are known to often disengage from society, to experience poverty, and drop out from school, it is suggested that an outcome of youth homelessness may also be low life satisfaction.

### **Summary.**

In summary, homeless youth are exposed to a range of risks which can lead to negative health, social and economic outcomes (NYC, 2008). The research above discusses these outcomes and paints a bleak picture of the impact of youth homelessness on the ability to function successfully in society, both presently and in the future. It appears that the conditions experienced once homeless contribute to a cycle where it becomes harder and harder to exit homelessness. Despite the significant and well-supported findings of disadvantage and risk discussed in this chapter, some homeless young people are able to overcome these factors and achieve stability in their lives (NYC, 2008). Interventions which support homeless youth in achieving this are crucial to the long-term prosperity of this population. A number of common approaches to intervention will be reviewed in the section below (interventions). First, the Australian Government's response to homelessness will be briefly summarised.

### **What is Being Done About it? The Australian Government's Response to Homelessness**

Following a nationwide debate regarding social inclusion in Australia in 2008, addressing homelessness was identified as a priority by the Australian and state territory Governments. It had become apparent that the chief action taken in response to homelessness, the Supported Accommodation Assistance Programme (SAAP)

established in 1985, was not meeting the needs of homeless people (Family, Community and Youth Committee [FCYC], 2009). This nationwide scheme sought 'to provide transitional supported accommodation and related support services, in order to help people who are homeless achieve the maximum possible degree of self-reliance and independence' (SAAP act, 1994, as cited in AIHW, 2003, p.39). However, the scheme lacked funding able to match the increasing cost of providing homeless services. The Counting the Homeless Project 2001 reported that only 14% of the homeless population were able to be provided with accommodation on any given night, and approximately 50% of people who sought accommodation were turned down due to limited space (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2003). Consequently, in 2008, Australia's Social Inclusion Agenda outlined two goals for addressing homelessness; to halve the overall rate of homelessness, and to provide accommodation for all those who seek it by 2020 (FaHCSIA 2008a). In the following year, 5 billion dollars was invested into initiatives and agreements to achieve these goals (FCYC, 2009).

The Government has taken a range of actions to more clearly understand the homeless issue in Australia and to work towards reducing it. Two initiatives central to this scheme are the National Homeless Research Agenda, and the White Paper on homelessness. The National Homelessness Research Agenda was released in 2008. This document outlines the gaps in homeless research and prioritises areas requiring examination. This provides a framework for building an evidence base adequate to inform the Government's responses to homelessness (FHCSIA, 2008b). The gaps identified by the research agenda are: improving the quality of quantitative, longitudinal data measuring the prevalence of homelessness, recognising different issues which affect sub-groups within the homeless population, understanding the impact of early intervention in building social connections, and evaluations of long term

outcomes. The Australian Government has allocated \$11.4 million between 2009 and 2013 to conduct research into these areas in order to improve services (FHCSIA, 2008b).

The White Paper on homelessness, titled *The Road Home: A National Approach to Reducing Homelessness*, was released in 2008. This document outlines the nation's approach to accomplishing the specified goals (to halve homelessness and provide accommodation to all those who seek it) by 2020 (FHCSIA, 2008a). The White Paper delineates a three-tiered approach of prevention/early intervention, investment in services, and increasing affordable supported housing. It is outlined that prevention efforts will target both structural factors such as poverty as well as at-risk groups in society; early intervention programmes are to focus on youth and resolving the crises which have led to youth leaving home; improvements to homeless services will include the integration of holistic services; and finally, funding for long-term specialist supported accommodation is to be increased. Increasing affordable and supported housing supplies allows clients to progress through emergency services without being slowed by wait times for public housing. Long-term supported housing provides stability and supports a sustained exit from homelessness (FHCSIA, 2008a).

How effective the Governments' response to homelessness has been to date is currently unknown. A report measuring the nation's progress towards achieving the outlined goals by the 2020 deadline is set to be released later this year (2013) (FHCSIA, 2008a). A number of the specific programmes employed by the Australian Government as part of this initiative, along with interventions used outside of Australia, will be outlined in the following section.

### **Interventions**

Internationally, recognition of youth homelessness has increased over the past two decades leading to the development of a range of services which seek to meet the needs of homeless young people (Toro et al., 2007). Many authors have stated that there is a lack of literature available which empirically examines the outcomes of these programmes (Altena et al., 2010; Ferguson & Islam, 2008; Moore, 2005; Sanabria, 2006; Slesnick et al., 2007; Slesnick et al., 2009). It is suggested that the transient lifestyle of homeless youth, along with a lack of standardised outcome measures, have made outcome studies difficult to carry out (Ferguson & Islam, 2008). Furthermore, the evaluation research which has been produced has been criticised for failing to provide reliable conclusions regarding programme effectiveness (Altena et al., 2010; Sanabria, 2006). Common weaknesses of this research include a lack of control groups, and an inability to generalise results based on samples from single sites (Pollio & Thompson, 2006). Although reliable outcomes studies are lacking, the available research can be used to gain an understanding of the types of programmes available to homeless youth, and perhaps provide a preliminary indication of their success. Below are descriptions of commonly implemented interventions intended to address youth homelessness, outcomes are reported where possible. These interventions have been categorised as either *prevention and early intervention* or *in response* to youth homelessness. This section concludes that educational intervention, in combination with stable and supported housing, seem most likely to have a long-term positive impact on the lives of homeless young people.

### **Prevention and early intervention.**

It is estimated that the cost to the Australian economy of not supporting young people avoid long-term homelessness is approximately one billion dollars a year, considerably more than the cost of providing prevention services (Pinkney & Ewing,

2006, as cited in NYC, 2008). The White Paper (FHCSIA, 2008a) states that homelessness can be prevented entirely and calls for the rigorous evaluation and development of prevention services, especially those targeting young people. The examination of pathways into homelessness is important to the direction of prevention and early intervention efforts. Identifying causes allows people at risk of homelessness to be recognised and guides the delivery of appropriate support before they reach crisis point (prevention), or to overcome crisis and exit homelessness before it becomes an entrenched way of life (early intervention) (FHCSIA, 2008a). Prevention and early intervention is particularly important as it is understood that the longer young people are exposed to the risk factors associated with homelessness, the more susceptible they become to experiencing negative health, social, and economic outcomes (AIHW, 2007; Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2003). Some of the more frequently employed approaches to prevention and early intervention of youth homelessness will be outlined below.

***Family focused approach.***

Given the prominent role of family conflict in many young people's pathways into homelessness, family focused interventions targeting conflict resolution is an important avenue in addressing youth homelessness (FHCSIA, 2008a; Sanabria, 2006; Thompson et al., 2000; Toro et al., 2007). Despite family disruption and conflict having led to homelessness, it is reported that where possible it is almost always beneficial for youth to return to their families (Barker et al., 2012). For example, Thompson et al (2000) discovered a significant relationship between youth returning to their family following discharge from community services, and an increase in school attendance, and a decrease in police involvement. Teare, Furst, Peterson, and Auither (1992, as cited in Slesnick & Prestopnik, 2005) found shelter residing youth who were not able overcome conflict with their families to be at greater risk of suicidal behaviour,

increased dissatisfaction with life, and greater hopelessness than those youth who were able to reunite with their families.

Family-focused interventions provide support services for youth and their families including teaching parenting skills, conflict resolution, and family counselling. This approach is based on the understanding that improving family relations will prevent youth from leaving the home (Toro et al., 2007). Examples of family based interventions and their outcomes will be discussed below. Project SAFE, a Government initiative implemented in Washington DC, provides parents or caregivers who are concerned about a youth's behaviour with phone consultations, group workshops, and access to a resource library. Outcome data indicate parents' perceptions of their ability to cope, and the need for the young person to leave home had significantly improved (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2002 as cited in Toro et al., 2007). Positive outcomes were also found by Slesnick and Prestopnik (2005). The authors randomly assigned 124 shelter using youth aged between 12 and 17 with substance use issues to either family based multi-systemic therapy, or service as usual through a shelter. It was found that both groups improved similarly across a range of variables but that those in the experimental group demonstrated significantly greater reductions in overall substance abuse.

In Australia, the Reconnect programme is the largest nationwide early intervention programme targeting the reduction of homelessness among 12 to 18 year olds (Barker et al., 2012). Young people are referred to Reconnect by schools, health services, and youth services when they are identified as having issue with housing stability. Reconnect intervenes by addressing the issues causal to homelessness. Most often these issues involve family conflict surrounding violence, poverty, drug use, and mental health issues in the home. Reconnect strives to reconcile youth with their

families where appropriate and provides practical support and counselling to both the individual and family members (Barker et al., 2012).

The Reconnect programme was first piloted in 1999 and has demonstrated positive results. An evaluation of Reconnect in 2002 found that 79% of young people involved in the programme reported their situation had improved, 69% expressed improvements to family relationships, 90% were living in stable housing at discharge from the programme, and 50% had increased their engagement with the community through employment, education or training (Ryan, 2003). The significant decrease in youth homelessness in Australia between 2001 and 2006 has been credited to early intervention efforts, and in particular to the Reconnect programme which was developed considerably during this time (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2008).

The findings above support the use of family focused intervention, nevertheless this approach and the research supporting it has faced some criticism. First, the finding that youth who are able to return to their home have better outcomes is unsurprising. These youth presumably have less problems and greater resources/support than those who are unable to return home (Moore, 2005; Thompson et al., 2000; Toro et al., 2007). Secondly, family focused intervention is clearly not appropriate for all homeless young people. Many youth do not have a home to return to, or it is not in their best interest to return home due to neglect or abuse. For others, their parents may not be motivated to improve relations with their youth (Moore, 2005; Thompson et al., 2000; Toro et al., 2007). Thus, although family-focused interventions appear to have demonstrated some successful, they do not meet the needs of all homeless youth.

#### *Supported transitions from state care.*

Prevention of homelessness can be in the form of supporting groups in society who are known to be at high-risk. As it has been mentioned, youth aging out of foster

care have been identified as at particular risk of homelessness (The Road Home, 2006). To improve the prospects of this group, it is argued that prevention efforts must both improve the quality of care overall, better prepare youth for independence while in care, and provide long-term holistic transitional support once discharged (Mendes, 2009). Furthermore, many researchers and employees in the field have called for a change in policy which would allow youth to continue to be supported by the state past the age of 18 (Courtney et al., 2005, 2007; Mendes, 2009). This extension of support is reflective of the social trend for young people in today's society to transition into adulthood later and over a longer period of time (AIHW, 2011).

Since the '90's, post-care programmes in Australia have undergone significant development, and received a steady increase in funding. However there have been no published evaluations of these efforts. Outcome research, as well as further clarifying the needs of care leavers, is needed to guide the continued progression of post-care services in Australia (Mendes, 2009). Internationally, there have been several studies which have attempted to evaluate transitional support services. The findings from these studies are inconclusive due to the small number of studies, lack of longitudinal research, and mixed research quality (Everson-Hock et al., 2011; Jones, 2011). With these limitations in mind, the findings are described below.

Research conducted by Everson-Hock et al (2011) found that youth who receive transitional support interventions are more likely to have qualifications, be employed, and be living independently as adults (Everson-Hock et al., 2011). Jones (2008) evaluated the impact of a transitional housing programme which also included an on-site educational facility. One hundred and six former foster youth who had resided in the transitional housing (TH) were compared on eight measures of functioning and self-sufficiency to foster youth discharged to "other living arrangements" (OLA). Over a

three year follow up period it was found that the OLA group had significantly higher rates of independent living. However, youth who had resided in TH reported greater housing stability, less substance abuse, less financial stress, greater employment stability (although no difference between employment rates), and less contact with the criminal justice system than the OLA youth. Of importance, no youth in the TH group reported experiencing a night of homelessness in the three years, compared to 6% of the OLA group.

These studies indicate that providing transitional housing for care-leavers may assist these youth in developing self-sufficiency and avoiding the risks associated with homelessness. Although Jones (2008) found that youth in the transitional housing did not reach independent living as quickly, this finding is reflective of non-foster care youth who make a slower transition to adulthood. Although transitional housing is an expensive option, this service may prevent a range of problems associated with care leavers in the future, and in this way pay for itself.

### **Interventions in response to youth homelessness.**

It is also critical to provide services to youth who have already become homeless in order to facilitate their transition out of homelessness. The most common services available to homeless youth are community services such as drop in centres, refuges, and crisis accommodation. First and foremost these services aim to meet the basic and immediate needs of homeless youth. This includes providing necessities such as food, shelter, and hygiene facilities (Slesnick, 2009; Thompson et al., 2000). Many services also strive to provide a holistic response by offering more specific treatment strategies such as case management, crisis and family counselling, life skills training, and referral to other services (Slesnick et al., 2009; Thompson et al., 2000). A discussion of these services follows.

*Community based crisis accommodation services.*

Emergency youth accommodation services are typically designed to serve 12 to 18 year olds, have limited beds available (approximately 20), and restrict clients' stay to short term periods (about 2 weeks) (Thompson et al., 2002). Although rigorous evaluation studies are few (Thompson et al., 2000), the existing research indicates 12 to 18 year olds who access these services have reduced substance use at time of discharge (Steele & O'Keefe, 2001), as well as reduced days on the run, and less school/employment issues six weeks following discharge (Pollio et al., 2006; Thompson et al., 2002). Furthermore, a study conducted by Thompson et al., (2002) demonstrated that youth accessing short-term crisis accommodation made similar significant improvements in functioning and self-sufficiency as youth in a longer-term day treatment programme. However, critical research assessing the longitudinal outcomes of youth utilising shelter services found that improvements observed at six weeks were not maintained at six months (Pollio et al., 2006). These findings lead to the following conclusion: short-term crisis services may be just as effective as longer, and more expensive, programmes in supporting broad, short term improvements, but these gains tend to diminish over time.

*Accommodation services in Australia.*

A major part of the homeless services system in Australia is supported housing (FHCSIA, 2008a). Accommodation services for homeless are funded across Australia by the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) (Homelessness Australia, 2012). These services include emergency shelter, as well as medium and longer-term accommodation (AIHW, 2012). As it has been outlined in The White Paper (2008), there is a growing recognition that providing housing on its own will not end homelessness (ABS, 2012b). As a result, many accommodation services seek to provide

an integrated and responsive service which meets the housing, economic, and social needs of homeless individuals seeking support (FHCSIA, 2008a). Services accessible through accommodation providers include counselling, living skills assistance, services to avoid eviction, assistance for family violence, financial management, and legal advocacy accordingly (AIHW, 2012; Homelessness Australia, 2012).

All homeless services funded under the NAHA are required to collect data regarding their clients and submit this information to the Specialist Homeless Services Collection. This data is published quarterly by the Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing and provides key information about both the homeless population, and the outcomes of homeless services (AIHW, 2012). Findings from the most recent data collection (March quarterly) include the following points: 102, 356 clients were assisted by specialist homeless agencies in Australia during this quarter and 46% of these clients were under 25. Seventy percent of clients presented to agencies in need of needed advice or information, and in 97% of cases this service was able to be provided without referral. However, while 79% of all clients were recognised as having accommodation needs, only 34% of cases were provided with accommodation. Based on all cases where accommodation was provided, 63% were accommodated in short term or emergency accommodation, 36% in medium-term or transitional accommodation, and 7% in long term accommodation. Where a need for short term/emergency accommodation was recognised, this need was met without referral in 65% of cases. This figure dropped to 50% for cases which required medium-term accommodation, and for all clients with long term housing needs, 7% were served without referral, 39% were referred to another service, and 54% neither had their needs met by the agency nor received referral to another service (AIHW, 2012A). These findings indicate that housing

services met the needs of approximately 55% homeless who sought accommodation services in the March quarter.

The finding that 45% of accommodation seekers were not sufficiently assisted suggests that the supply of accommodation services in Australia does not reflect the rate of homelessness. Furthermore, follow up studies of the clients who were sufficiently accommodated are required in order to determine the longitudinal impact of the different levels of accommodation services. Although Australia services seek to provide a continuum of housing options; the figures above suggest that emergency and short term housing remain the most common response to homelessness. Though benefits have been associated with short term accommodation services, these improvements have been found to diminish over time.

### **Employment, education, and training.**

Another approach to intervention is targeting the involvement of homeless youth in employment, education, and training (EET). EET are considered mainstream activities which provide age-appropriate experiences for young people and pave the road to future opportunities (Grace, Gronda, & Coventry, 2009). The New South Wales Department of education reports that 50,000 Australian young people aged 15 to 19 drop out of the education system into unemployment each year (as cited in Father Chris Riley's Youth off the Streets, n.d). Homeless young people face significant challenges to participation in these activities and are consequently thought to make up a considerable proportion of those young people disengaged from both education and employment (NYC, 2008).

Grace et al. (2009) assert that homeless youth who have disconnected from education and employment have essentially disconnected from main stream life. The authors explain that this disconnection impacts not only upon educational achievement

and economic status, but also disrupts normative social and life skill development necessary for adult employment and independence. The White Paper (FHCSIA, 2008a) identifies the need to increase engagement in EET among homeless youth in order to improve their long-term opportunities. Interventions which engage homeless young people in these activities support youth in permanently exiting poverty and social exclusion through developing employable skills and linking youth to the community (Malliet & O'Brien, 2009).

A literature review conducted by Grace et al. (2009) attempted to identify outcomes of EET interventions. The authors first highlight the shortage of evaluation studies and the need for outcomes to be examined longitudinally. Second, the authors conclude that from the available research, the impact of EET interventions are best understood as providing three interlinked outcomes: 1. Personal development; for example, building confidence, self-esteem, generosity, and empathy. Personal development is thought to be fostered through skill mastery, academic achievement and relationships with staff and other students. 2. Community connectedness. EET interventions provide an avenue for creating healthy engagement with the community through constructive daily routines. As connections grow, the necessity of damaging subcultures may be reduced. This is recognised as a valuable protective factor against slipping further into the cycle of homelessness. 3. Improvements to a young person's ability to increase their economic resources. EET interventions empower young people to end their homelessness through increasing their employability. Employment leads to a steady income, which supports housing stability, and reduces risk of future homelessness (Grace et al., 2009). Lenz-Rashid (2004) reiterates the importance of this point and describes the ability to earn an income as the independent living skill most likely to have a long-term impact on homelessness. It appears that EET interventions

support homeless youth in overcoming educational and labour market disadvantage, and as a result, hinder the cycle of homelessness.

***Pre-employment training.***

There are a number of pre-employment training programmes intended to link homeless youth with employment. Some programmes in Australia, for example the Job Placement, Employment, and Training programme, and the Job Network, target all disengaged young people (not specific to homeless). The NYC proposes that given the disadvantage faced by homeless youth, they may not be able to take advantage of mainstream employment services (2008). WHEELS is a pre-employment training and life skills programme implemented especially for homeless youth in Australia (Malliet and O'Brien, 2009). This eight week programme focuses on working with other people, healthy relationships, communication skills, conflict resolution, and provides a series of one day training courses such as first aid and food handling. Other pre-employment programmes may focus on exploring career options, job search skills, interviewing, writing resumes, basic work habits, and career mentoring (for example the 'Hire-Up' programme evaluated by Rashid, 2004); or providing short term training in specific areas such as computer graphics, or business skills (for example the 'Social Enterprise Intervention developed' by Ferguson and Xie, 2007). These interventions intend to assist young people in finding suitable employment.

However, Grace et al. (2009) argue that EET interventions able to produce the three interlinked outcomes described above, do not reduce the purpose of intervention to simply obtaining work (and a pay cheque) as soon as possible. Although the benefits of employment have been well established, the authors assert that this should be a long-term goal of EET interventions. It is argued that youth should be supported to remain in education or training, rather than rushed into employment in the interests of developing

economic independence not expected of other youth the same age. Taking smaller steps toward employment over a sustained period of time allows youth a more gradual (and normative) transition to employment and adult independence (Grace et al., 2009). It is suggested that this may reduce the likelihood of young people failing to adapt to the workplace and returning to disengagement and homelessness. Schools provide ongoing educational support and are the mainstream institutions which are most likely to have long-term contact with young people (NYC, 2008). There are many social and economic advantages to homeless youth remaining engaged in schools, these will be described below.

### ***Schools.***

Aside from gaining skills required for the work place, youth who remain engaged in school are exposed to a number of other protective factors which can contribute to ending homelessness. Attending school is an important tie to the community, and can function as a source of stability, familiarity, socialisation, support, and can refer homeless youth to other specialised homeless agencies (Berliner, 2002; Moore & McArthur, 2011). Furthermore, it has been found that homeless youth have a desire to attend school and believe their education is important (Slavin, 2001 as cited in Moore, 2005). Lindsey and Williams (2002) found that many homeless youth identified leaving school as a defining moment in their lives where their situation considerably worsened (as cited in Moore, 2005). Although these findings suggest attending school would be a positive experience for homeless youth, in 2005 one third of homeless 14-15 year olds, and over half of 16-17 year olds who access homeless services in Australia had dropped out of school (AIHW, 2006). It is recognised that the traditional school structure may not be able to meet the needs of homeless youth which can lead to their disengagement (CHEPA, 2007; Moore & McArthur, 2011). Although

schools cannot entirely fix youth homelessness, supporting youth to remain/re-engage in school can prevent further disadvantage caused by dropping out (Berliner, 2002). It is suggested that one way to achieve higher school retention among homeless youth is to adapt schools to better meet their needs. Alternative schools and education programmes have been used with at-risk youth to this effect.

### *Alternative schools.*

Globally, alternative education programmes are used to reduce the rate of school dropout and meet the needs of ‘at-risk’ students which are not typically able to be met in mainstream schools (Franklin, Streeter, Kin, Tripodi, 2007). ‘At-risk’ in this context often refers to risk of school failure and drop out. As discussed previously, homeless youth are prone to these risks and therefore it is suggested that research which applies to ‘disadvantaged’ and/or ‘at risk’ youth can be applied to the homeless youth population; although it is noted that homeless students may have a need for a wider range of services and support. Alternative education programmes have been found to improve attendance and graduation rates (Franklin et al., 2007), as well as the academic, behavioural, attitudinal, and social outcomes of disadvantaged students (Franklin et al., 2007; Ronalds & Allen, 2008). Subsequently, alternative education programmes are considered a promising strategy in meeting the educational needs of homeless youth, and in turn reducing youth homelessness (Ronalds & Allen, 2008). Several studies have successfully identified components of alternative education programmes considered fundamental to their success.

### *What makes alternative schools effective?*

The identification of best practice components of alternative school has been driven by resilience research (Kerka, 2003). Resilience research has influenced the

change in perspective from addressing deficits to building strengths and abilities, and theorizes that the effects of homelessness can be alleviated by resilience (Einspar, 2010). Programmes which develop traits associated with resilience are considered best practice when working with homeless youth (FHCSIA, 2008a). Specific environmental components of education programmes have been recognised as conducive to these traits (Einspar, 2010). Although this research remains in its early stages, the identification of best practice components has informed programme development (Barker et al., 2012), and provides a framework against which alternative education programmes can be evaluated (Einspar, 2010). Researchers have highlighted eight components of alternative education programmes which promote the development of resilience and are described as “the best hope” for at-risk and disadvantaged youth (Einspar, 2010). These eight factors are described below:

1. The presence of caring and knowledgeable adults who provide their time and attention, and have an interest in the personal welfare of the students (Franklin et al., 2007; James & Jurich, 1999 as cited in Kerka, 2003). Developing a meaningful relationship with such adults fosters a climate of trust where students are aware someone cares about them and is interested in their wellbeing and success (Einspar, 2010; Grobe et al., 2001 as cited in Kerka, 2003).

2. A small group with a low student-teacher ratio. This supports the growth of positive relationships and allows a sense of community and belonging to develop (Castellano et al., 2001; Grobe et al., 2001; McDonald, 2002; Raywid, 2001; Secada, 1999 all as cited in Kerka, 2003). A low ratio also allows teachers to work with students individually which facilitates the development of a mentoring relationship (Franklin et al., 2007), and has been associated with greater student desire to graduate (Bosworth, 1995; Murray, 2002 both cited in Franklin et al., 2007). Small schools have also been

found to have lower rates of violence and higher rates of attendance and involvement in extra-curricular activities (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1997, as cited in Franklin et al., 2007).

3. A shift in focus away from deficits to developing assets and abilities; such as, connectedness, attachments to pro social institutions, feeling valued, civic engagement, self confidence, conflict resolution skills, responsibility, and planning for the future skills (Lewis, 2003 as cited in Kerka, 2003). A strengths-based approach is thought to reduce the likelihood of youth engaging in risky behaviour (Croninger & Lee, 2001; Grobe et al, 2001 both cited in Kerka, 2003), is likely to foster positive connotations with the school and staff (Kerka, 2003), and reduces the need to address negative behaviours (James & Jurich, 1999 as cited in Kerka, 2003).

4. Demonstrating respect for youth. This involves respecting youths' intelligence, skills, decisions they have made, and existing sources of self-esteem (Kerka, 2003). Homeless youth are resilient young people who have often made rational choices to leave dangerous situations and have taken care of themselves out of home (Grace et al., 2009). Treating youth as young adults and appreciating the personal accomplishments they have already made has been associated with positive youth development (Lewis, 2003; Secada, 1999 both cited in Kerka, 2003).

5. High teacher expectations. When accompanied with appropriate support, at-risk students have been found to be capable of high levels of success, both academically and behaviourally (Sanders, 2000; Castellano et al., 2001 both cited in Kerka, 2003).

6. A comprehensive, individualised, and holistic curriculum. An array of educational options (Franklin et al., 2007), opportunities for success (Elliot et al., 2002 as cited in Franklin et al., 2007), and access to holistic services which address social,

psychological, and vocational needs are critical to programme success (Franklin et al., 2007; James & Jurich, 1999 as cited in Kerka, 2003).

7. Integrated vocational training, career development, and vocational education. The inclusion of these components encourages youth to see a connection between school and future work prospects, which supports their continued engagement in school. Understanding the link between school and a career instils optimism and enhances engagement with learning (Conchas & Clark, 2002; James & Jurich, 1999 both cited in Kerka, 2003).

8. Lastly, a long-term follow up programme offering ongoing and individualised interactions between students and teachers (Franklin et al., 2007). This relationship can offer both practical support, as well as the benefit of a continued meaningful relationship with a caring adult – further developing trust and a sense of security and self-worth (James & Jurich, 1999 as cited in Kerka, 2003).

***Summary of employment, education, and training.***

Homeless youth are at high risk of disengaging from employment and education which increases risk of prolonged homelessness. Stable employment can be a pathway out of homelessness and is a protective factor against future homelessness. However, it is argued that employment should be considered a long term goal for homeless young people. Programmes which provide education and training for homeless youth build skills required for the work place, while also facilitating normal social development and engagement with mainstream activities. These interventions aim to support youth in making a sustained exit from homelessness. The benefits of remaining in school have been identified, and it is suggested that alternative education programmes may be better equipped to prevent drop out among homeless youth than mainstream schools. The foundations of best practice alternative education programmes include a holistic

approach which meets the educational, social, psychological, and career-related needs of students; within a caring, strengths-based, relationship-based environment.

### **Integrated education and housing.**

Education programmes have the potential to produce outcomes conducive to making a sustained exit from homelessness (Grace et al., 2009). For education programmes to have this intended effect, youth must remain engaged in the programme. Hyman et al (2010) discovered that stable housing predicts engagement in education; a finding reflected in the high dropout rates among homeless. It is understood that the insecurity of lacking stable housing makes regular and consistent participation in school difficult. Meeting the material need of stable housing allows youth to focus their energy and resources on other areas of functioning, such as participation in education (Hyman et al., 2010). Hyman et al. assert that “assisting youth who are experiencing homelessness to become stably housed needs to be part of any programme intended to facilitate the re-engagement of youth into educational activities” (2010, p. 267). Interventions which integrate education and housing are developed based on the understanding that youth cannot reap the full benefits of education when their housing is unstable. A literature search located only two evaluations of interventions which combine and educational services. The outcomes of these programmes reveal the promising direction of this approach; however the inclusion of control groups in future studies would improve the quality of the evaluations.

The outcomes of a one-of-a-kind, long-term, residential education placement for youth aged between 12 and 18 have been examined by Jones (2008). Youth referred to this programme have a history of foster care and were residing in unstable housing at the time of referral. The programme’s focal point is education as opposed to treatment, and intends to provide youth with a stable home-like environment as well as access to a

comprehensive educational programme. The programme accepts approximately 40% of the young people who are referred. Although those who are accepted into the programme have had substantial pre-placement issues, these youth have lower rates of mental health and behavioural issues than those who are not accepted. Jones' (2008) study involved a sample of 106 youth who were discharged from the programme over 3 years. On average, the youth in this sample were aged 15.2 years old while attending the programme, and had spent 1.75 years in the programme. Two thirds of the youth in the sample graduated from the programme and were interviewed six months, one year, two years, and three years after discharge. The following findings were discovered: Eight percent reported at least one bout of homelessness during the three year data collection. At six months 25% of group met the specified criteria for 'independent', and 70% by the three year interview. Engagement with society was assessed based on participation in education and/or employment; 74% were engaged at six months, and 96% at three years. The rate of employment was 51% at six months and steadily increased, along with income, at each interview; however most participants were working in low skilled jobs, and job changes, bouts of unemployment, and experiences of financial stress were frequently reported. Jones concluded that ex-residents appeared to "be reporting significant challenges, but for the most part, establishing themselves as independent young adults" (2008, p.21). This study provides valuable longitudinal data; however also including a follow-up of the youth who dropped out of the programme (one third of the sample) would have provided important information for programme development.

Positive outcomes were also found in an Australian study which evaluated the Step-Up programme (Grace, Keys, Hart, Keys, 2011). Step-Up provides affordable housing for young people experiencing residential instability for up to three years. The

service also incorporates an integrated independent living programme, case work, and assistance exiting the service (aftercare). A key philosophy of the programme is the importance of education and training in securing a more stable future. Youth workers at Step-Up support youth in engaging in education or training and ensure they are progressing towards employment. Grace et al, (2011) followed-up 29 out of a possible 63 ex-residents of the Step-Up programme. On average the participants in the study had left the programme 2.7 years ago. A semi-structured questionnaire intended to measure variables associated with vulnerability to homelessness (housing, education/training, personal relationships, community connectedness, and health and wellbeing) was administered to participants. The researchers then grouped participants into three groups based on their responses - *well-protected against homelessness* ( $n = 14$ ), *protected against homelessness* ( $n = 10$ ), and *vulnerable to homelessness* ( $n = 4$ ). Comparisons were drawn between the collected data and what is known about Australia's general population of young people; and, what is known about educational success among homeless young people. The authors concluded that participants in Step-Up had higher academic qualifications than other homeless youth, but that employment was considerably lower among the sample population than same-aged Australians. This evaluation indicates the Step-Up programme supports youth in obtaining educational qualifications, and may have protected youth against future homelessness. The authors suggest that that the programme may be most successful for youth without high needs and who are motivated to engage in EET (Grace et al., 2011).

These studies indicate that integrated housing and education services may help homeless young people stabilise their lives, and reduce their risk of future homelessness by supporting a positive adaption to adulthood. Although these studies demonstrate positive findings, this approach is in its earlier stages and requires further research to

determine best practice strategies and the impact of these interventions on long-term outcomes. It is suggested here that combining supported housing and education is effectively addressing two of the major disadvantages suffered by homeless youth; and for that reason appears to be a promising avenue in overcoming youth homelessness.

### **Summary of Literature Review**

On census night in Australia in 2006 there were 32,400 homeless young people aged between 12 and 24. This figure makes up 31% of the total homeless population and 0.9% of the total youth population in Australia (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2008). The most common cause of youth homelessness is family conflict, although other often interrelated causes include housing stress caused by poverty; poor transitions out of state care; and untreated mental health and substance abuse disorders (FHCSIA, 2008a). Consequences of youth homelessness include risks to health and safety, educational disadvantage, poor employment opportunities, and unsatisfactory quality of life. Many of these consequences have a long-term impact and can contribute to a cycle of prolonged homelessness. The Australian Government made reducing homelessness a national priority in 2008. The Government aims to halve the rate of homelessness and provide accommodation for all those who seek it by 2020. The White Paper on homelessness outlines the nation's approach to achieving these goals. This document delineates a three tiered response to homelessness including prevention and early intervention, integrated and holistic homeless services, and an increase in affordable and supported housing to prevent reoccurrences of homelessness. A progress report on the effectiveness of this initiative is to be released in 2013.

Interventions which have been used in Australia and internationally include prevention and early intervention efforts targeting family relations and youth leaving state care, accommodation services, and training and education programmes. It is

suggested that educational programmes may have an enduring impact on homelessness as youth are supported in developing a range of age-appropriate skills, necessary for the long term goal of obtaining employment and adult independence. The available research regarding educational interventions is limited; however it is suggested that alternative schools which employ evidence-based practices may be the most appropriate support for homeless youth. An argument for the integration of housing and education services is made based on research which states stable housing is a prerequisite for meaningful engagement in education. More research is required before conclusions regarding the long-term impact of these interventions can be drawn.

### **The Present Study**

The present study follows up ex-students of an alternative secondary school for homeless youth called Key College. Key College takes a holistic approach to meeting the educational and broader needs of homeless youth. The individuals involved in this study are ex-students who attended Key College between 1996 and 2011. The ex-students completed an online survey and provided information regarding their current housing status, financial circumstances, involvement in education and employment, and life satisfaction. In addition, participants shared information about their time at Key College and their perspectives of the school. This study provides information regarding an alternative school specifically for homeless youth; and extends what is known about the long term socio-economic outcomes of individuals who experience homelessness during youth. Based on the literature reviewed above, it was predicted that ex-students who completed qualifications at Key College and went on to complete further training would be more likely to currently be employed; and that those who were employed would have greater financial stability, housing stability, and higher life satisfaction.

## **Methodology**

In this section the methodology is explained. The methodology will outline the research questions, the participants, the design of the study, the survey that was used, the procedure followed, and how the data were analysed.

### **Research Questions**

This research aims to answer the following ten research questions:

Research question 1: What have been the educational experiences of ex-students?

Research question 2: What is the current social engagement status of ex-students?

Research question 3: What is the current housing status of ex-students?

Research question 4: What is the current financial situation of ex-students?

Research question 5: What is the current life satisfaction status of ex-students?

Research question 6: What else would ex-students like to comment on in regards to their experience of Key College and/or their life today?

Research question 7: Which ex-students are more likely to be employed?

Research question 8: Does employment increase the housing stability, financial independence/stability, and life satisfaction of ex-students?

Research question 9: Which ex-students are more likely to have stable housing?

Research question 10: How do ex-students compare to social norms and other groups of homeless?

### **Participants**

The participants in this research were ex-students of Key College. Students who come to Key College have high needs in the areas of homelessness, addiction, and abuse. All students who attend Key College are considered homeless based on the ABS definition of homelessness when they are enrolled at the school. Ex-students eligible to participate in the survey were those enrolled at the College between 1996 and 2011 who attended for at least one term. Current students of Key College were not included in the sample. The participants in this study were those ex-students who volunteered their involvement. Participants responded to an anonymous online survey which asked them for demographic information, about their time at Key College, and about aspects of their current lifestyle. These data are explained in the results.

Of a possible 150 (approximate) ex Key College students eligible to participate in this study, 30 responded to the survey. Of this population, 16 were female and 12 were male (two did not indicate their gender), 14 were 22 years or older and 15 were 21 and under (one did not indicate their age). Twelve participants had children, and of these 11 had their children in their care. The median year of attendance was 2003, 9 attended in 2003 or before, and 11 attended after 2003. Eighteen participants identified as Anglo-Australian, one as Aboriginal, three as Pacific Islanders, and six as 'other' (two did not indicate their ethnicity). This information is illustrated in the Table 1.

Table 1.

*Demographics*

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Age		
16-18	7	24
19-21	8	28
22-24	5	17

*(Table continues)*

25+	9	31
Total	29	100
Year attended		
1997	2	10
1998	2	10
1999	1	5
2000	1	5
2002	2	10
2003	1	5
2004	1	5
2005	1	5
2006	1	5
2009	3	15
2010	1	5
2011	4	20
Total	20	100.0
Ethnicity		
<sup>a</sup> ATSI	1	4
Pacific Islanders	3	11
Anglo-Australian	18	64
other	6	21
Total	28	100
Gender		
Male	12	43
Female	16	57
Total	28	100
Children		
Yes	12	41
No	17	59
Total	29	100

<sup>a</sup> ATSI is an abbreviation for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders.

## **Design of the Study**

The study used an online self-report survey to collect information regarding ex-students' experiences while at Key College and since leaving the school. The survey was created and made available online using *Survey Monkey*, a website based survey development tool. Survey Monkey provides a base template to create, administer and analyse on-line surveys.

An online survey was selected for the following reasons. Firstly, this method allowed for participants who had moved from the area to be included in the study. Given the small sample size, it was important to obtain as many respondents as possible. Secondly, an on-line survey has the advantage of ease and convenience for participants, and enabled respondents to be anonymous. Lastly, YOTS advised that addresses and telephone numbers frequently change among their clients and recommended online contact as the most reliable method. It was noted that youth who are without stable housing are often able to use internet facilities at drop in centres.

This study did not include a control group. Survey data collected in this study is compared to three sets of comparison data. Data set 1 is intake data collected from students' enrolment forms when they first begin at Key College. This form supplies information about the individual's situation at intake to Key College. Data from 20 randomly selected intake forms completed between 2008 and 2011 were compiled by YOTS. These data serve as a snapshot of Key College students at intake. The intakes forms selected were not those specifically of the individuals involved in the present study; however it is possible there is some overlap. These data are included to give an indication of the characteristics of the sample population before they participated in

Key College. Data set 2 is national social norms reported by the ABS. These data are included to gauge how ex Key College student compare to a nationally representative sample. Lastly, data set 3 is outcomes of homeless services in Australia compiled by the Specialist Homeless Services Collection. This data set was included in order to compare ex-students to a group of homeless who have not accessed educational services at Key College.

### **Measures**

The survey included 41 items and covered six domains (see Appendix 1 for the full survey)

1. Demographic information.
2. Time at Key College.
3. Current housing status and stability.
4. Engagement with society (education/employment).
5. Financial status, independence, and experiences of financial hardship.
6. Life satisfaction.

The section regarding time at Key College was reflective of the participants' experiences and perspectives of Key College. Survey items in this section were developed by the researcher in collaboration with YOTS staff. Domains 3-6 were selected to gauge the everyday functioning of participants (Cohen & Van Houten 1991; Jones, 2011). There was not an appropriate instrument available to measure these domains so survey items were created by combining and adapting a range of measures used in previous studies. Effort was made to select measures which were brief in order

to avoid participant fatigue, and which were suited to the self-report format. The survey items, how they have been adapted, and what they intend to measure will be described below.

### **Demographic information.**

Participants were asked to indicate their age, gender, ethnicity, whether they have children, and whether their children are in their care.

### **Time at Key College.**

The experiences and perspectives of ex-students' regarding their time at Key College were accessed by asking participants to indicate:

- The year they attended key College.
- How many terms they attended.
- If they attended more than once.
- Their attendance pattern during this time.
- Whether qualifications were obtained.
- The subjects they took and grades achieved.
- How influential they believe their time at Key College is on their lives today.
- What they perceive to be the best things about Key College.
- What else they think Key College could have done for them.

### **Current housing status and stability.**

The survey intended to measure participants' current housing status and stability. Housing status was determined based on categories of homelessness defined by the ABS (2012a). Participants selected the type of accommodation they were currently residing in from the following list:

- Public places: e.g. Train stations, places that stay open all night.
- Refuge.
- Half-way house.
- Living at home with parents.
- Crashing at my partner's place.
- Crashing at a family member's place.
- Crashing at a friend's place.
- Renting (own place or shared with others).
- I have a mortgage on my own home.
- Out of home care.
- Rehabilitation facility.
- Foster care placement.

Responses were categorised into the four categories of housing status: Primary Homelessness (public places); Secondary Homelessness (refuge, half-way house, "crashing" with someone else); Tertiary Homelessness (out of home care, rehabilitation

facility, foster care placement); or Stable Housing (renting, have a mortgage, living with family) (ABS, 2012a)

Participants were asked to indicate how long they had been residing in their current accommodation, and whether they had intentions of moving in the next six months. This information was used to clarify whether some situations were considered temporary or stable. For example, if a participant indicated they were living with their family, but had only been there two weeks and intended on moving out within six months, this was considered temporary accommodation instead of stable. This method was taken from the Time Line Follow Back (TLFB) method of measuring homelessness (Tesemberis, McHugo, William, Hanrahan, & Stefancic, 2007).

Housing instability has been found to be strongly correlated to homelessness (Jones, 2011). Housing stability was gauged by number of moves in the past 12 months, where more moves indicates greater instability.

### **Social engagement.**

An individual's level of engagement with society is based on their extent of involvement in mainstream activities such as education, training and/or employment (ABS, 2010; Courtney & Dworsky, 2005). Survey items intended to measure level of social engagement asked participants to indicate their extent of involvement in these activities. Participants were then grouped in three categories: Not Engaged; Partially Engaged (either part time employment or part time education/training); or Fully Engaged (either full time employment, full time education/training, or a combination of part time employment and education/training). These categories have also been used by the ABS and Courtney and Dworsky (2005) to report levels of social engagement.

Additional information regarding participants' educational and employment status was also sought. Participants were asked whether they had completed any other education or training programmes since leaving Key College, and employed participants were asked for details regarding their employment (type of contract, length of employment, and intentions of leaving their current job). This information was used to establish how commonly Key College students went on to further education, and to shed light on the stability of participants' employment.

### **Finances - poverty, independence, and hardship.**

A number of items were included regarding participants' sources of income, amount of income, and number of dependants (see full survey in Appendix 1). This information was used to calculate the proportion of participants who were currently living under Henderson's poverty line (Henderson Poverty Inquiry, 1973 as cited in Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research [MIAESR], 2012). Henderson's poverty line is a standardised measure of relative poverty used frequently in social welfare policy in Australia. Henderson's poverty line is updated quarterly by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research to reflect changes in the price of living and the average Australian income (MIAESR, 2012). The poverty line describes the minimum level of income required to avoid poverty for a range of different family units. The poverty line is different for individuals/households who are employed, as opposed to those which rely exclusively on welfare. The index is calculated based on estimates of income and population provided by the ABS, and is also therefore an estimate. The updated version which was used to analyse the data in the current study was released in June 2012 (MIAESR, 2012).

Items were also included to determine whether respondents were financially independent. Ex-students were asked to indicate whether they received any financial assistance from the Government, their family, friends, or partner to meet their major financial costs. The proportion of participants who were financially independent was then calculated.

To measure financial hardship an adapted version of Cobb-Clark & Ribar's (2009) measure of financial stress was included. This scale has been found to have high reliability (.72) for young people. Adaptations to this scale were made based on collaboration with YOTS staff who made suggestions of common financial stresses experienced by young people in their service. These suggestions were swapped with items in Cobb-Clark & Ribar's version which were considered non-applicable to the sample. Participants were asked to select each statement which was true for them in the past six months:

- I could not pay electricity, gas or telephone bills on time.
- I could not pay the rent or mortgage on time.
- I pawned or sold something.
- I went without a meal.
- I was unable to heat my house.
- I have gone into debt.
- I had to ask for money from friends or family.
- I had to ask for financial help from welfare/community.

Participants were categorised based on the number of financial hardships they had experienced in the past six months.

### **Life satisfaction.**

The Brief Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (BMSLSS) (Huebner, 1994) was included to measure perceived quality of life. This 5-item scale uses a 7-point likert scale to measure satisfaction across the following domains: family, friends, school, self, and living environment. An overall measure of life satisfaction is the sum of responses across these domains (referred to as the global life satisfaction score). The BMSLSS has displayed acceptable reliability with alpha coefficients of .85 for high school students (Funk et al., in press; Seligson et al., 2003, both cited in Huebner et al., 2006). However, this measure was developed and tested on current school students up to age 18 (Huebner, 1994). The participants in this study in many cases do not fit this description. Reliability therefore cannot be assumed to be the same with the population of the present study. Results will be analysed with this limitation in mind. In addition, the wording of the likert scale was adapted after discussions with YOTS staff who suggested alternative terms they believed would be more easily understood by the sample population.

### **Pilot Trialling of the Survey**

The survey was piloted to ensure it was comprehensible, and to gauge how long it would take participants to complete. The survey was completed by three current students at Key College, and three young people currently residing in out-of-home care who had experienced similar disadvantaged and inconsistent schooling experiences. These young people were timed while completing the survey and reported any words/items which were not easily understood. The survey took approximately 15

minutes to complete; and any words or items misunderstood were re-worded and re-administered to ensure comprehension.

### **Ethics Approvals**

The research was granted ethical approval by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern on 31 July 2012, reference number MUHECN 12/026. To meet the requirements of the Ethics Committee, Aboriginal cultural advice was sought to ensure the survey was culturally appropriate for potential Aboriginal participants. In addition, information directing participants to a counselling service should they require it following participation was provided in the information sheet. Consent procedures were followed whereby participants, school staff, and the YOTS chairperson were provided with information sheets and made aware of the voluntary nature of the research. Lastly, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between Massey University and YOTS as part of YOTS's requirements for external research.

### **Procedure**

The researcher has an interest in the homeless youth population and initially approached Key College to discuss research opportunities. Key College management expressed their approval for research to take place at the school and identified a need for a follow-up study of their past students. The researcher worked in collaboration with Key College management to develop a survey which met their needs and interests.

#### **Recruitment process.**

In order to preserve the confidentiality of potential participants the researcher did not have access to any information regarding the identity of ex-students during the following recruitment process. Key College staff members accessed the school roll

from 1996 to 2011. The ex-students who had made contact details available were contacted by staff using the means of communication the young person had provided (primarily email). Staff made an initial request for the young persons' participation in the research project and directed potential participants to where they could find out more information and complete the survey.

Attempts were also made to recruit ex-students who were not able to be contacted directly by staff through the YOTS Facebook page. The Facebook page is accessible to all past and present students of Key College. Posts on this page were made weekly during the six week data collection phase to inform ex-students of the study and provided a link to where they could find out more information.

#### **Online information sheet and access to the survey.**

Either via Key College staff or the Facebook page, participants were directed to the YOTS web page where a link to an information sheet could be found. The information sheet further described the study and requested participation. Participants were made aware of the confidential and voluntary nature of the research, and were informed that submitting their survey was an indication of their consent to be involved in the study.

Below the information sheet on the YOTS website, a link to the survey was provided. Those young people who chose to participate could access the survey via this link. On completion of the survey the participant was instructed to click "done." This action submitted the survey which was then instantly sent electronically via the Survey Monkey platform to the researcher and the Manager of Research and Evaluations at YOTS. Survey data were kept secure and confidential in both sites. The survey was available online for ex-students to complete for six weeks. On completion of the

project, a research summary was posted on the YOTS website for participants to access if they chose.

### **Payment for participants.**

The information sheet informed participants they could access a \$15 supermarket voucher as compensation for their time taken to complete the survey. The Massey University Post Graduate Research Fund provided funding for these vouchers. As direct contact with participants was required to administer the vouchers, Key College staff agreed to facilitate this process to ensure the participants' anonymity.

The following process was used to this effect:

- When completed surveys were submitted by clicking “done”, the time and date of submission appeared on the screen and participants were instructed to record this information. This information was also automatically sent to the researcher with the completed survey via the Survey Monkey platform.
- Participants were instructed to contact Key College staff either by coming into the college, by phone, or by email, and to reference the time/date they submitted their survey.
- Key College staff would then check with the researcher that a survey had been submitted at the time/date reported by the ex-student to ensure participation had occurred. Key College staff would also confirm at this stage that the participant had met the criteria of being an ex-student of Key College between 1996 and 2011.

- Given participation had occurred, Key College staff obtained a postal address to send participants their vouchers, or put them aside for participants to collect from the school.

### **Analysis of Data**

Before statistical analysis of the data took place, a number of decisions were made regarding how some of the data were to be grouped.

Where participants indicated they were employed on a casual contract, this was classified as *part time* when calculating level of engagement. This decision was made based on casual work not usually being consistently full time hours.

- Where participants indicated they were living with their parents (usually classified as stable), but had only been there 2-4 weeks and had plans to move, the situation was considered temporary and the participants were grouped into the secondary homelessness category.
- All participants in the primary, secondary, or tertiary homeless categories were also combined into one group referred to as “unstable.” This allowed for two groups, stable and unstable, in order to conduct specific statistical tests.
- Likewise, the year participants attended Key College was grouped into two groups. Participants were grouped based on those who attended before the median year of attendance (2003), and those attended after.
- Two groups were also required for analyses including participants’ weekly incomes. Participants were divided into two groups based on who was above or below the median income (\$400).
- When calculating whether participants were above or below Henderson’s poverty line, three participants were excluded from analysis. These

participants had incomes which would put them below the poverty line, however they also indicated their major financial costs were provided by someone else (family/partner). These respondents did not indicate the total weekly income of their households (presumably because they are not responsible for the finances); therefore experiences of poverty could not be determined.

The researcher entered the quantitative data from the surveys into SPSS for analysis. Descriptive data were produced and converted into a number of tables. Next, the data were analysed for relationships between variables. Chi square tests of independence were used to determine these relationships. The qualitative data were analysed using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach. This approach is a “bottom up” theory where categories are identified within the data instead of using a pre-existing theory to apply categories to the data (Smith & Osborn, 2007). To verify the identified categories this analysis was also conducted by a colleague. Any differences of opinion were worked out by discussion.

### **Summary of the Methodology**

This study involved ex-students of Key College completing an online survey. The survey was designed to access information on the following domains: demographics, time at key college, housing status, social engagement, financial circumstances, and life satisfaction. The survey collected quantitative and qualitative data which was analysed using SPSS and the IPA approach respectively. These data will be described in the following chapter.

## Results

The following section reports the findings collected from the surveys and is divided into three sections. The data in the first section are presented according to first six research questions. In this section the quantitative data are expressed as raw scores and percentages, and the qualitative data are grouped into themes to reflect common topics. Actual quotes from the surveys are included to illustrate the themes. The data in section two are presented according to research questions seven to nine. In this section the results of statistical tests used to examine the relationships between variables are reported. An alpha level of .05 is used for all statistical tests. The data in section three are presented according to research question 10. This section compares the data from the current study to three sets of comparison data. 1: The intake data of 20 students collected by Key College. 2: National social norms as reported by the ABS; and 3: Data collected by homeless services in Australia. First, the flow of participants and missing data will be outlined.

### Participant flow

Of a possible (approximate) 150 ex-students of Key College who were eligible to participate in the study, 27 were able to be contacted directly by staff. Four of these individuals did not complete the survey - of the four, one individual was ill, one could not access internet, and two were too busy. Thirty one participants submitted a survey, 23 were recruited through Key College staff, 8 through either word of mouth or the advertising on the Facebook page. One survey was not included in the data set as it included very little data. In total, data from 30 participants, approximately 20% of the overall total of 150 ex-students, participated in this study.

### Missing data

Of the 30 surveys included in the data set, not all of them were complete. Participants were able to skip questions they did not want to answer. The percentages reported in this section are calculated based on how many responses were collected for each question.

### **Research Question 1: What Have Been the Educational Experiences of Ex-Students?**

#### **Attendance at Key College.**

Of the 30 ex-students who completed surveys, 20 indicated what year they attended Key College. Of this 20, 9 (45%) said they attended Key College between 1996 and 2003, and 11 (55%) said they attended between 2004 and 2011. Twenty four ex-students indicated the number of terms they attended Key College; 15 (63%) attended for a full year or more, and 9 (37%) attended for 2 or 3 terms. Out of 24 responses, 22 (92%) reported their daily attendance was either “pretty good” or “excellent.”

#### **Qualifications achieved at Key College.**

Twenty four ex-students indicated whether they obtained a qualification while at Key College. Out of the 24, 19 (79%) completed a high school certificate. Two (8%) obtained year 12, and 17 (71%) obtained year 10. Five participants (21%) did not complete a high school certificate. Seven (23%) indicated they completed one or more alternative certificates while at Key College (6 of these participants had also completed a high school certificate). The areas the certificates were achieved in were hospitality, music, first aid, and business/computer studies.

#### **Subjects and grades at Key College.**

Sixteen participants provided details of the subjects they took and grades they achieved while at Key College. This information was collected qualitatively and was grouped into subject areas. Out of the 16, 13 (81%) indicated they had passed English, 11 (69%) indicated they had passed maths, 4 (25%) referred to passing one or more other academic subject/s, 6 (38%) indicated they had participated in a vocational or life skill course, and 3 (18%) stated more generally they had passed the year.

### **Education and training since Key College.**

Twenty two participants responded to the item “have you completed any other qualifications or training since leaving Key College?” Out of the 22, 14 (63%) had completed additional training since leaving. Of this group, six (43%) had completed two or more qualifications/courses. A list of the training and qualifications ex-students have completed are in Table 2.

Table 2.

#### *Further Education and Training Completed Since Key College*

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#### Qualifications and Training

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A two year TAFE course in youth drug and alcohol counselling.

Floristry course

Year 10

Year 11

Cert IV Small Business Management

Cert IV Workplace Training and Assessment

Cert IV Community Services – Alcohol and other Drugs

Diploma of Nursing

Diploma in Events Management.

Award for outstanding achievements in the youth community

Traineeship in Hospitality Management

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*(Table continues)*

Certificate III in Horticulture - Parks & Gardens

Music and acting courses

Certificate III in Aged Care,

Bachelor of Education

Certificate III in Fitness

Diploma in grooming and spray tanning

Diploma of youth work

A handy man course

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### **Influence of Key College.**

Twenty four ex-students expressed their perspective of the impact of their experiences at Key College on their lives today. The majority (21 of 24, 88%) said their time at Key College has had either a “pretty strong” or “very strong” influence on their lives today. Table 3 illustrates the distribution of responses to this item.

Table 3.

*Ex-students’ Perspectives of the Influence of Key College on Their Current Lives*

Level of Influence	Frequency	Percent
Zero	1	4
Very mild	0	0
Small	0	0
unsure	1	4
Somewhat	1	4
Pretty strong	2	8
Very Strong	19	80
Total	24	100

### **Best things about Key College.**

Twenty three participants gave their opinions on the best things about Key College. These data were collected qualitatively and grouped into themes. Some ex-students mentioned more than one theme in a single response; percentages therefore do not add up to 100. The largest proportion (19 of 23, 83%) described positive interactions with teachers as the best thing about Key College. The other main themes identified were: characteristics of the school environment/culture, aspects of the educational programme, individualised support, and opportunities for self-improvements. Table 4 depicts the proportion of ex-students who referred to each of these themes in their response. The table also includes a selection of direct quotes to illustrate the themes. All qualitative data can be found in Appendix 2.

Table 4.

*Ex-students' Perspectives of the Best Things About Key College*

Themes	Frequency	Percent	Example
Teacher interactions	19	83	<p>“The staff were always involved and have a genuine caring for children.”</p> <p>“The constant support from all the staff was very important to me.”</p> <p>There was trust and respect between student and teacher..... [Staff] taking care of us like we've hoped an adult would and being there as a friend was fantastic.”</p> <p>“If you needed a friend to laugh or cry with they [staff] too were there.”</p>
School environment/culture	11	48	<p>“It was very laid back and I felt comfortable in the environment.”</p> <p>“Key College was my home. It was the one place I felt safe.”</p> <p>“Tight nit community, feeling wanted.”</p>

*(Table continues)*

			<p>“Key College was a stable and constant environment where judgments were not made about your life outside school.”</p> <p>“Key College both students and teachers accepted me for who I am, I got along with everybody there... I believe we were like a family.”</p>
The educational Programme	10	44	<p>“Would definitely be the music! I also loved the involvement in art! Community volunteering and outings were also a good experience.”</p> <p>“The best things were going on excursions as a school, going to different places to help out. Going on camps and down to Victoria to help with bush fires and up to surfer’s paradise for the charity bike ride.”</p> <p>“The best place for me to get my education at the time.”</p>
Individualised support	5	22	<p>“One-on-one learning.”</p> <p>“Attending a school that understands my needs and the environment I was living in helped a lot...they were able to tailor lessons to suit the needs of someone in my situation”</p> <p>“A school that was flexible and considerate of my circumstances.”</p>
Opportunities for improvement	8	35	<p>“Helped me to get clean [from drugs].”</p> <p>“A chance to make a better life for me.”</p> <p>“I really enjoyed learning which was different for me.”</p>
Other:	6	26	

(Table continues)

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Friends	3	“Friends made at Key College are still in my life today.”
Free food	1	
Thanks	2	“Breakfast and lunch being provided.” “I really thank <sup>a</sup> Min and YOTS for all the opportunities they gave me.”

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*Note:* Quotes are taken directly from the survey responses and have not been edited for spelling or grammatical errors.

<sup>a</sup>Min Bonwick is the Head Teacher at Key College.

### **Improvements to Key College**

Twenty participants responded to the question, “What else do you think Key College could have done to help you?” These answers were grouped into themes. The largest proportion (12 of 20, 60%) praised Key College and indicated there was nothing more the school could have done to help them. Other themes identified were: changes to the educational programme, inclusion of an aftercare programme, and adjustments to the behaviour management techniques used. Table 5 depicts the proportion of ex-students who referred to each of these themes in their response, and includes a selection of quotes. All qualitative data can be found in Appendix 2.

Table 5.

#### *What Ex-Students Think Could be Improved on at Key College*

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Themes	Frequency	Percent	Example
Nothing to improve	12	60	“Not much, they provided me with everything I needed to take the steps on my own and become independent and successful.” “Nothing they have done more than enough, <sup>6</sup> the real question is how I can ever repay

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*(Table continues)*

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			<p>them for turning my life around.”</p> <p>“Due to the circumstances I believe they helped me the best they could.”</p> <p>There was nothing more Key College could have done for me; it was the best support I’ve ever received, especially from <sup>a</sup> Min Bonwick.”</p> <p>“I honestly can’t think of anything else Key College could have done, they have gone above and beyond for me and I couldn’t be happier with the school and the teachers that work there.”</p>
Changes to the programme	6	30	<p>“I think parenting programmes and healthy relationship sessions would be wonderful.”</p> <p>“Maybe the classes could’ve been a little more advanced.”</p>
Aftercare	2	10	<p>“Key College did so much and I would only say that when I left there was no aftercare programme.”</p> <p>“I had to leave because of bad things happening in my life....I’ve always wished there was some sort of set up where if things like that happen that you are able to take a break and come back or that they somehow keep in contact with you and push you a little to come back.”</p>
Behaviour Management Strategy	1	3	<p>“Key College could have spent more time developing moral and social boundaries for myself and other students as well as being more consistent with the way they dealt with young people.”</p>

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*(Table continues)*

*Note:* Quotes are taken directly from the survey responses and have not been edited for spelling or grammatical errors.

<sup>a</sup>Min Bonwick is the Head Teacher at Key College.

### **Summary.**

About half of the participants attended Key College Before 2003 and half after. All but two participants said they attended regularly and approximately two thirds attended for a full year. Ex-students reported high pass rates in English and slightly lower in maths. Almost 80% achieved a high school qualification, for most it was year 10, but two completed year 12. Some students also completed alternative certificates in hospitality, music, and first aid. Since leaving Key College, 63% of respondents had gone on to complete other qualifications. The majority of ex-students felt Key College had a very strong influence on their current lives. The most commonly reported 'best thing' about Key College was interactions with teachers, and most stated that Key College could not have done anything more to help them. However suggestions were made regarding changes to the educational programme, aftercare services, and behaviour management strategies.

### **Research Question 2: What is the Current Social Engagement Status of Ex-Students?**

#### **Current involvement in education.**

Twenty four participants responded to this question. Out of the 24, 10 ex-students (42%) were currently engaged in education or training. Six (25%) were full time students, and 4 (17%) were part time. Fourteen respondents (58%) were not currently engaged in education or training.

#### **Current involvement in employment.**

Twenty five participants responded to a question regarding their employment. Nine of out the 25 (36%) were currently employed; 6 (24%) were working full time, and 3 (12%) were working part time. Sixteen of the 25 ex-students (64%) were currently not working. Table 5 lists the areas of labour force the 9 employed ex-students were working in.

Table 6.

*Ex-Students' Employment*

Job Title or Field of Employment
Owner & Manager of the garden maintenance company - The Horticulture Xpress Horticulture
Self Employed - Children's Entertainer, Magician, Balloon Artist.
Bar attendant
Hospitality management
President and organiser for the Workshops Division in the Rail, Tram and Bus Union
School teacher
Owner of mobile spray tanning business.

**Employment stability.**

Of the 9 participants who were employed, 4 (44%) were employed on casual or temporary contracts, and 5 (56%) on permanent contracts. Two participants indicated they had plans to leave their current job. Of the 9 employed respondents, 8 responded to the question on how long they had had their current employment; 100% had been in their current position six months or longer.

**Overall level of social engagement.**

Overall level of social engagement refers to the extent individuals are involved in education and/or employment (full time, part time, or not at all). A total of 25 ex-

students indicated their involvement in these activities. Out of the 25, 10 ex-students (40%) were not involved in either employment or education; 5 (20%) were involved in either part time education or part time employment; and 10 (40%) were involved in education and/or employment on a full time basis. Some were full time students who also had part time jobs, or vice versa; and others ( $N = 2$ ) reported being involved in full time education and full time employment.

### **Summary.**

Sixty percent of ex-students were involved in education or employment to some extent, part time, full time, or more than full time. The remaining 40% were disengaged from both activities.

### **Research Question 3: What is the Current Housing Status of Ex-Students?**

#### **Housing status.**

Housing status was able to be calculated for 26 participants. Out of the 26, 16 (62%) were in stable housing, and 10 (38%) were in unstable housing. Based on the ABS definition of homelessness, those in unstable housing can be categorised into groups of homelessness depending on the type of unstable accommodation they are residing in. Table 7 illustrates the distribution of this sample in stable housing and across the categories of homelessness.

Table 7.

#### *Housing Status of Ex-students*

Housing Status Category	Frequency	Percent
Stable	16	62
Primary homelessness	1	4

*(table continues)*

Secondary homelessness	6	23
Tertiary homelessness	3	12
Total	26	100

*Note:* The categories of housing status have been defined by Chamberlain and MacKenzie (2003) and are used by the ABS when describing homeless (ABS, 2012a)

### **Housing stability.**

Twenty five participants indicated the number of times they had moved over the past 12 months. Greater number of moves is thought to reflect more instability.

Eighteen of the 25 (73%) had moved 2 times or less, 3 (12%) have moved between 3-6 times, and 4 (16%) had moved more than 9 times.

### **Summary.**

Nearly two thirds of ex-students were currently living in stable housing and most had moved less than twice in the past year. However over one third were living in unstable housing; these individuals mostly met the criteria for secondary homelessness.

## **Research Question 4: What is the Current Financial Status of Ex-Students?**

### **Receipt of financial assistance.**

Out of 23 responses, 18 (78%) said they received a Government allowance. The Youth Allowance was the most common benefit with 45% (10 out of 23) receiving this benefit; followed by 23% (5 out of 23) receiving the New Start Allowance. Other benefits being received by only one or two participants were: The Partner Allowance, the Parenting Payment, the Disability Support Pension, the Family Tax Benefit, Career Allowance, and the Single Parent Pension. Out of the 23 responses, 4 (17%) reported their major living costs were covered by someone else (partner or family), 5 (22%) reported receiving regular financial assistance from either their parents or their partner,

and 14 (61%) indicated they do not receive any financial help from their friends, family, or partner.

### **Main source of income.**

Sixteen out of 23 respondents (70%) identified their Government benefit as their main source of income. Six (26%) stated their own wages were their main source of income, and one person (4%) said their partner's wages were their main source of income.

### **Weekly income.**

Table 8 illustrates the range of weekly incomes received by the 23 participants who provided this information. The median weekly income was \$300 - \$400, and the mode was \$100 - \$300.

Table 8.

*Ex-students' Total Weekly Incomes*

\$ per week	Frequency	Percent
0	0	0
0 – 100	1	4
100 - 200	5	22
200 - 300	5	22
300 - 400	1	4
400 - 500	2	9
500 - 600	0	0
600 - 700	2	9

*(Table continues)*

700 - 800	0	0
800 - 900	1	4
900 - 1000	1	4
1000 - 1500	3	13
1500 +	2	9
<hr/>		
Total	23	100
<hr/>		

### **Standard of living.**

Participants were also asked to indicate how many people were supported by their weekly income. Twenty three ex-students responded to this question. The largest proportion (11 of 23, 48%) supported themselves only on their income, the rest supported between 2 and 5 people. Number of dependents, along with weekly income, was used to calculate whether participants were currently living above or below the poverty line. Twenty ex-students provided sufficient financial information for this to be determined (three participants were excluded from this analysis; the reasons are explained in the methodology section (p. 66). Eleven out of the 20 (55%) were living below Henderson's poverty line, and 9 (45%) were above.

### **Experiences of hardship.**

Eighteen out of the 30 respondents (60%) reported they had experienced financial hardship in the past six months. Out of the 18, 9 (50%) had experienced one or two hardships, 5 (27%) had experienced 3 - 4, and 4 (22%) had experienced five or more hardships. The average number of hardships experienced was 2.70 ( $SD = 1.90$ ).

### **Summary.**

The majority of ex-students (78%) reported relying on the Government for financial assistance; however few received assistance from their family, partner, or friends. The median income was \$300-400 and mode was \$100 - \$300. Over half experienced financial hardship in the previous six months, and a similar figure was found to be living below Henderson's poverty line.

### **Research Question 5: What is the Current Life Satisfaction of Ex-Students?**

Twenty three participants responded to five items about life satisfaction. Participants rated their satisfaction (on a 7-point likert scale) with each of the following five life domains: friendships, living arrangements, school experiences, family, and themselves. The means and standard deviations for each of these variables are presented in Table 9. Means scores of 5 indicate ex-students were *mostly satisfied*, and means scores of 4 reflect *mixed* satisfaction.

The five item ratings for each of the 23 respondents were averaged to give a global life satisfaction score. Global scores reflect overall satisfaction with life; the average global life satisfaction score indicated ex-students were *mostly satisfied* with their lives overall (see Table 9). However, while 13 out of 23 respondents (56.4%) scored within the mean category for global life satisfaction (*mostly satisfied*), 10 ex-students scored outside of this category. Six out of the 10 (60%) were less satisfied than the mean, and 4 (40%) were more satisfied.

Table 9.

*Average Life Satisfaction Scores: Sub-Scores and Global score*

Domains	Frequency	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Family	23	4.5	1.53
Friendships	23	5.4	1.44

*(Table continues)*

Living arrangements	24	5.0	1.56
Myself	23	5.5	1.38
<sup>a</sup> School	23	5.4	1.65
Global total	23	5.2	.91
Total	23		

<sup>a</sup> Participants were asked how satisfied they were with their schooling experiences overall, not specifically their satisfaction with Key College.

### **Summary.**

Participants were mostly satisfied with their friendships, living arrangements, schools experiences, themselves, and their lives overall; however they were less satisfied specifically with their family lives.

### **Research Question 6: What Else Would Ex-Students Like to Comment on in Regards to Their Experiences at Key College and/or Their Lives Today?**

#### **Hobbies and pursuits.**

Nineteen participants responded to a question regarding leisure activities and responses were grouped into themes. The most popular hobby was sports/exercise, 63% (12 out of 19) reported this was an activity they enjoyed in spare time. Fifty five percent (11 of 19) mentioned music/arts/cultural activities; 30% (6 of 19) reported outdoor activities such as fishing, walking, or gardening; 15% (3 of 19) stated community activities; and 26% (5 of 19) mentioned activities which were categorised as other, these included spending time with their children, travel, and friends.

#### **Comments on their experiences at Key College.**

Participants were asked “is there anything else you would like to add about your experience of Key College or your life today?” The qualitative data collected from the

16 respondents was grouped into themes. The most common theme, cited by 10 out of 16 ex-students (62%), was the positive difference Key College had made to their life. The other identified themes are: the positive impact of staff/relationships with staff/general praise for staff; and gratitude/praise for the service. Table 10 depicts the proportion of ex-students who mentioned each theme in their response. A selection of direct quotes is included to illustrate the themes. All qualitative answers can be found in Appendix 2.

Table 10.

*Ex-students' Comments Regarding Their Lives and Experiences at Key College*

Themes	Frequency	Percent	Examples
Positive difference made to their life.	10	62	<p>“I started with nothing Key College has made me the man I am today I am engaged with three lovely kids.”</p> <p>“I believe that without the supported educational opportunities presented to me by YOTS I would not have gone on to lead the successful life that I have.”</p> <p>“My life is a rollercoaster but with all the things people taught be at Key I know I can always turn it around... to make everything stable and great for my kids. The cycle will not re visit my family.”</p> <p>“I am doing really well I don't take drugs I live day to day a normal life we work hard to give my kids a childhood I was robbed of.”</p> <p>“Father Riley and his services saved my life; I have no doubt that without</p>

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(Table continues)

			YOTS I would not be alive today.”
Gratitude/praise for the service.	9	56	<p>“YOTS is heaven sent to our community. Thank you forever in my heart.”</p> <p>“I have recommended YOTS to many youth and will continue to tell others about their service, as I believe YOTS &amp; Key College help many people”</p> <p>“Just that I appreciate the fact there is such a service as Key College and well YOTS in general it is one of the greatest things I have come across in terms of support.”</p> <p>“Thanks Key College! Thanks YOTS!”</p> <p>“Thank you all so much!!!”</p>
Impact of staff/relationship with staff/praise for staff	6	38	<p>“I was surrounded by staff that loved me and helped me change my destructive ways. Eventually I learned to stand on my own two feet and now I teach and support young people in similar circumstances. It only makes sense that I pass on what was given to me.”</p> <p>“Some of my fondest memories of Key College are from <sup>a</sup> Min Bonwick, who I <sup>11</sup>believe is still strongly involved in the service.”</p> <p>“Min has always been there to support me all the way even now I am 30 thanks so much she is someone I that I would like to be like.”</p> <p>“All the teacher including volunteers</p>

(Table continues)

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have been just great to me...they are all people in my life who have supported me since I left Key College all those years ago. All of these people have helped me emotionally and have been there for me at anytime I need them. Especially Min Bonwick who is like a mother to me and great friend.”

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*Note:* Quotes are taken directly from the survey responses and have not been edited for spelling or grammatical errors.

<sup>a</sup> Min Bonwick is the Head Teacher at Key College.

### **Summary.**

Ex-students were involved in a range of positive leisure time activities and had positive things to say about their current lives and experiences at Key College.

### **Research Question 7: Which Ex-Students are More Likely to be Employed?**

Chi square tests of independence were performed to examine the relationship between ex-students who were employed and following variables: whether they had children, whether they had completed a qualification at Key College, whether they had completed any additional training since leaving the school, and age.

The relation between employment status and having children was not significant  $X^2(1, N = 25) = 1.42, p = .23$ . Ex-students with children were no more likely to be employed than those who did not have children.

The relation between being employed and having completed qualifications at Key College was not significant  $X^2(1, N = 24) = 0.17, p = .90$ . Ex-students who completed a

high school qualification while at Key College were no more likely to be employed than those who did not complete a qualification.

The relation between employment status and age was not significant  $X^2(3, N = 24) = 7.06, p = .070$ . Neither older age nor younger age was found to be associated with higher rates of employment among ex-students. However, this result was approaching significance.

The relation between having completed additional training since Key College and being currently employed was significant  $X^2(1, N = 22) = 5.87, p = .015$ . Ex-students who went on to complete additional training after leaving Key College were more likely to be working than those who did not.

### **Research Question 8: Does Employment Increase the Housing Stability, Financial Independence/Stability, and Life Satisfaction of Ex-Students?**

Chi square tests of independence were performed to examine the relationship between employment status (employed or unemployed) and the following variables: housing status, poverty, financial dependence, life satisfaction, and whether or not they had an income \$400 or over (based on median income).

The relation between stable housing and employment was not significant  $X^2(1, N = 25) = 1.85, p = .17$ . Of the 9 employed ex-students, 7 were in stable housing and 2 were in unstable; of the 16 unemployed ex-students, 8 were in stable housing and 8 in unstable. Employed ex-students were statistically no more likely to have secured stable housing than those who were unemployed.

The relation between experiences of poverty and employment was significant  $X^2(1, N = 20) = 4.85, p = .028$ . Poverty is less likely to be experienced by individuals who are employed.

The relation between receipt of financial assistance from others and/or the Government and employment status was significant  $X^2(1, N = 24) = 9.60, p = .002$ . Employment decreased the likelihood of ex-students depending on others or Government for financial resources.

The relation between being employed and having a weekly income \$400 or above was significant  $X^2(1, N = 23) = 7.74, p = .005$ . Ex-students who were employed were more likely to have a weekly income \$400 or higher than unemployed participants.

The relation between global life satisfaction and employment was not significant  $X^2(11, N = 23) = 9.63, p = .56$ . Those who were working were equally as satisfied with their lives overall as those who were unemployed.

### **Research Question 9: Which Ex-Students are More Likely to Have Stable Housing?**

Chi square tests were conducted to examine the relationship between ex-students who had secured stable housing and the following variables: whether they had children, gender, experiences of poverty, receipt of welfare, age, life satisfaction, whether they attended Key College before or after 2003 (based on median year of attendance), and whether they had a high income \$400 or over.

The relation between stable housing and having children was significant  $X^2(1, N = 25) = 11.11, p = .001$ . Ex-students who have children were more likely to be living in stable housing.

The relation between gender and stable housing was not significant  $X^2(1, N = 24) = .91, p = .34$ . Males and females are equally likely to be living in stable or unstable housing.

The relation between poverty and stable housing was significant  $X^2(1, N = 20) = 7.01, p = .008$ . Ex-students who were above the poverty line were all living in stable housing.

The relation between receiving a welfare payment and stable housing was not significant, however was approaching significance  $X^2(1, N = 23) = 3.41, p = .065$ . Ex-students who were receiving welfare payments were equally likely to be living in stable or unstable housing as those who were not. However, ex-students who were not receiving welfare were all living in stable housing.

The relation between stable housing and age was significant  $X^2(3, N = 25) = 11.11, p = .011$ . Ex-students living in unstable housing were younger, and all respondents who were over 25 were living in stable housing.

The relation between receiving a weekly income \$400 or over and having stable housing was significant  $X^2(1, N = 23) = 9.45, p = .002$ . Ex-students who had incomes of at least \$400 had higher rates of stable housing. None of the ex-students who had incomes \$400 or over were living in unstable housing.

The relation between stable housing and global life satisfaction was not significant  $X^2(11, N = 23) = 12.13, p = .35$ . This finding suggests those in stable housing were no

more satisfied with their lives than those in unstable housing. However, when the variable “global life satisfaction” was swapped for a likert scale measurement of overall life satisfaction, this relation was significant  $X^2(4, N = 23) = 10.66, p = .03$ . This test indicates ex-students in stable housing were more likely to rate their overall life satisfaction higher than those in unstable housing.

The relation between when ex-students attended Key College (either before or after 2003) and current housing status was significant  $X^2(1, N = 19) = 4.87, p = .027$ . Only one ex-student who attended Key College before 2003 was living in unstable housing, compared to 6 living in unstable housing who had attended after 2003.

### **Summary.**

The chi tests of independence indicated a number of relationships between the variables. In relation to employment, ex-students who had completed additional training since leaving Key College were more likely to be currently employed. Employed participants were more likely to be in a financially stable situation; they had higher incomes, were less reliant on others and welfare, and were more likely to be above the poverty line. However, employed ex-students were not found to have higher life satisfaction, or more stable housing, than unemployed participants. In relation to housing, stable housing was found to be associated with older age, having children, attendance at Key College before 2003, and higher incomes. Those in stable housing were also less likely to be experiencing poverty, and had higher self-rated overall life satisfaction.

### **Research Question 10: How do Ex-Students Compare to Social Norms and Other Groups of Homeless?**

Given the follow-up nature of this study, it was not possible to randomly assign a control group in order to evaluate the outcomes of Key College. Instead, the data are compared to three comparison groups. The comparisons drawn between the data sets are able to give a tentative indication of the impact of Key College; however the findings are inconclusive due to un-controlled conditions. A summary of the main findings from this comparison are presented in Table 10.

### **Data set 1: Key College intake data.**

An enrolment form is completed for each new student at Key College. This form supplies information about the individual's situation at intake to Key College. Data from 20 randomly selected intake forms completed between 2008 and 2011 were compiled by YOTS. These data serve as a snapshot of Key College students at intake. The intakes forms selected were not those specifically of the individuals involved in the present study; however it is possible there is some overlap. These data are included to give an indication of the characteristics of the sample population before they participated in Key College.

These data indicate that at intake 100% of Key College students were living in unstable housing, and 20% fit the primary homeless category. Comparatively, 38% of the ex-students involved in the present study were found to have unstable housing, and 4% fitted the primary homelessness category. At intake, 55% of Key College students were not engaged in either employment or education, 20% were partially engaged, and 25% were engaged on a full time basis. This compares the sample population of whom 40% were disengaged, 20% partially engaged, and 40% were engaged in education and/or employment full time. At intake, 94% of Key College students were receiving a Government payment, compared to 78% of the sample population.

The ex-students of Key College who participated in this study had improved rates of stable housing, increased engagement with education and/or employment, and decreased financial reliance on welfare compared with Key College students at intake.

### **Data set 2: social norms.**

Data collected by the ABS illustrate social norms of the general Australian population. This information is used to gauge how ex-students of Key College compare to a 'normative' population.

The ABS census data show that in 2006 there were 3.7 million young people aged between 12 and 24 years old. The estimated rate of homelessness among this population is 0.9% (AIHW, 2007). The rate of homelessness within the sample of ex-students in this study is 38%. In regards to engagement, the ABS (2010) conducted a nationwide survey of Australian young people aged between 15 and 24 in 2009; it was found that 81% of this group were engaged in full time education and/or employment. This finding compares to the 40% of ex-students who were engaged on a full time basis. Ex-students also had much higher rates of reliance on welfare; in 2010, 23% of the total Australian population were receiving a Government payment (ABS, 2011b), which compares to 79% of the sample population. Lastly, the Australian Council of Social Service (2012) estimated one in eight Australians to be living below the poverty line. Comparatively, approximately one in two ex-students was living below the poverty line in the current study.

The participants in this study appear to be considerably disadvantaged in terms of rate of homelessness, involvement in education/employment, reliance on welfare, and rate of poverty when compared to national norms in Australia.

### **Data set 3: outcomes of homeless accommodation services in Australia.**

Data collated in the Specialist Homeless Services Collection (published in AIHW, 2012) provides a comparison to a “treatment as usual” group – homeless people who have been in contact with homeless services, but have not participated in the Key College programme.

The Specialist Homeless Services Collection found that at discharge from supported accommodation provided through homeless services, 50% of clients returned to homelessness. This rate of homelessness compares to the 38% of ex-students in the present study who reported unstable housing. Ninety Percent of homeless service clients were unemployed at discharge; this is comparable to the 64% unemployment rate found in the present study. Seventy percent of homeless service clients reported a Government allowance was their main source of income, and the remaining 30% did not report their main source of income. Comparatively, 68% of the ex-students reported a Government allowance was their main source of income.

This comparison indicates the ex-students of Key College had lower rates of homelessness and unemployment than individuals who had accessed mainstream homeless services. Reliance on welfare is also lower for the participants in the present study, but only marginally.

Table 11.

#### *Comparisons Between Ex-students and Comparable Groups*

Variables				
Comparisons	Homelessness	Social Disengagement	Receipt of	Rate Below
Groups		(employment/education)	Welfare	Poverty Line

---

Present study	38%	40%	78%	Approximately 1 in 2
Intake to Key College	100%	55%	94%	
National Norms	0.9% of young people	19%	23% of the general population	1 in 8 in the general population
Homeless Services Clients	50%	90% (unemployed)	70% <sup>a</sup>	

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<sup>a</sup>70% of homeless services clients reported a Government allowance was their *main* source of income. The remaining 30% did not report their main source of income. Significantly more than 70% of homeless services clients may be receiving welfare.

### Summary of Results

The survey findings showed that the ex-students who participated in this study attended Key College regularly, most obtained a qualification, about half had gone on to gain further qualifications, and 36% had either full time or part time work. Ex-students had almost all positive comments about their experiences at Key College, and few negatives. Many had improved their living situation considerably; however over a third remained in unstable housing, and 40% were disengaged from both education and employment. An examination of the ex-students' financial situations revealed that over half (55%) were living below the poverty line, and the majority were receiving an allowance from the Government. Despite these findings, most ex-students were satisfied with their lives overall. Qualitative data indicated ex-students had positive

perspectives of Key College, especially the teachers, and most believed their time at Key College had positively influenced their life today.

The statistical analysis indicated that ex-students who had completed additional training were more likely to be employed. Furthermore, those who were employed were found to have higher incomes, greater financial independence, and were less likely to be experiencing poverty. Employment status (that is, either working or not working) was not significantly related to stable housing or life satisfaction. Having children, being older, attending Key College before 2003, and having a higher income were the variables found to be related to stable housing. Ex-students who were living in stable housing had higher life satisfaction, and none were below the poverty line.

Ex-students of Key College appeared to be better off than students at intake to the school and clients of mainstream homeless services across Australia. However, ex-students appeared to have remained disadvantaged when compared to national norms; especially in terms of rate of homelessness, engagement in employment and education, and receipt of welfare.

## **Discussion**

This section includes a brief summary of the study, summary of main findings, discussion of the findings, limitations and strengths, recommendations for further research, and conclusions.

The aim of this study was to follow up ex-students of Key College and find out about their experiences at the school, and their current situations in regards to housing, financial circumstances, involvement in education and employment, and life satisfaction. An online survey was used to collect these data. The qualitative responses were analysed using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis approach to identify categories within the data. These data have been presented in tables and illustrated with quotes from the participants. Quantitative findings were entered into SPSS for analysis. Descriptive data have been reported as well as results from chi square tests of independence. Lastly, comparisons have been drawn between the key findings and data regarding other comparable groups.

### **Summary of the Main Findings**

#### **Educational experiences of ex-students.**

- Half of the participants attended Key College before 2003 and half after.
- Approximately 80% obtained a high school certificate during their time at Key College.
- Almost two thirds had completed additional training since leaving Key College.
- Almost 90% stated that they believe their experiences at Key College have had a very strong influence on their lives today.

- Comments about Key College were almost all positive: Over 80% referred to the teachers when describing the “best thing” about the school.

#### **Social engagement status of ex students.**

- Forty two percent (10 out of 24 respondents) were involved in education or training to some extent (either part time or full time).
- Twenty four percent (9 out of 25 respondents) were employed (either part time or full time).
- Approximately 40% were engaged in education and/or employment on a full time basis (some were involved in both), 40% were disengaged from both employment and education, and the remaining 20% were engaged in either education or employment on a part time basis.

#### **Housing status of ex-students.**

- Stable housing had been obtained by 62% of ex-students, while 38% were living in unstable conditions. Of those who were unstably housed, the largest proportion was classified as experiencing secondary homelessness.

#### **Financial situation of ex-students.**

- The majority of ex-students reported receiving a Government allowance.
- The median weekly income was between \$300 and 400 per week, and the mode was between \$100 and \$300.
- Just over half of the ex-students were living below the poverty line and 60% had experienced financial hardship in the previous six months.

#### **Life satisfaction of ex-students.**

- Mean scores indicated ex-students were *mostly satisfied* with their friendships, living arrangements, school experiences, selves, and overall lives; while satisfaction was *mixed* in regards to family life.

#### **Ex- comments' on their lives and experiences at Key College.**

- Ex-students made positive comments about their lives and their experiences at Key College. Many ex-students expressed gratitude for the service and indicated their belief that the school, and in particular the teachers, had impacted positively on their lives.

#### **Relationships between key variables in the study.**

- Statistical analyses of the data suggest the following findings: ex-students were more likely to be employed if they had completed additional training after Key College; those who were employed were more likely to be financially stable; and those living in stable housing were more likely to be older, to have children, to have graduated from Key College longer ago, to be more satisfied with their lives, and to be in a more financially stable situation.

#### **Comparisons to other groups.**

- Ex-students remain considerably disadvantaged when compared to national norms in terms of housing, welfare reliance, and social engagement. However, ex-students appear to be faring considerably better across these domains than students at intake to Key College and homeless people accessing mainstream services.

### **Discussion of Findings**

### **Qualifications and employment.**

The ABS highlights the necessity of qualifications in today's labour market and the disadvantage associated with lacking a high school education (2012b). Previous research has emphasised that supporting homeless youth to remain in education, both to complete qualifications and gain positive socialisation, is an important component in developing the means to leave poverty and break the cycle of homelessness (Grace et al., 2009; Lenz-Rashid, 2006; Murphy, 2011). It was expected that ex-students who completed a qualification at Key College would have higher rates of employment compared to those who did not. However it was found that this relationship was not significant. Given the majority of ex-students completed the year 10 qualification while at Key College, it is suggested that this level qualification (equivalent to NCEA level 1 in New Zealand) does not improve employability in the present labour market. However, it was found that ex-students who continued their education past Key College were significantly more likely to be working than those who did not complete any further education or training. This finding supports the connection between higher level education (school completion or equivalent) and improved rates of employment (ABS, 2010).

### **Outcomes of employment.**

Based on literature which describes employment as a critical protective factor against poverty, social exclusion, and homelessness (Grace et al., 2009; Lenz-Rashid, 2004), it was predicted that employed ex-students would have more stable housing, greater financial independence and stability, and higher life satisfaction. While employed ex-students were significantly more likely to have higher incomes, lower

rates of poverty, and greater financial independence: housing status and life satisfaction were not found to be related to employment in this study.

The non-significant relationship between housing and employment indicates some ex-students who are employed still struggle with stable housing. This finding leads to a number of suggestions. First, although the financial circumstances of employed ex-students were improved compared to the unemployed participants, many of their incomes were still relatively low (the median weekly income in this study \$300-400 whereas the median in New South Wales is more than \$1,200 per week). It is likely that this finding is a reflection of almost half (4 out of 9) of the employed participants only working on a part time basis. It appears the cost of stable housing is still likely to be unobtainable for some of these individuals – especially since this group were less likely to be receiving income support. Second, the finding that unemployed ex-students were equally likely to be in stable or unstable housing may have been influenced by the number of unemployed participants ( $n = 3$ ) who were living in stable housing supported by their families or partner. Lastly, this finding may be linked to the discovery that ex-students who have children were significantly more likely to have higher incomes and were all in stable housing; however were no more likely to be employed. These results may reflect the additional income support available for people with children (ABS, 2011). It is possible that some ex-students with children have been able to secure stable housing for themselves and their children using their increased allowance sum, without being employed.

The non-significant relationship between life satisfaction and employment is also unexpected. This study's finding that employed ex-students were not significantly more satisfied with their lives contradicts suggestions made in previous research regarding the impact of social exclusion (ABS, 2010; AIHW, 2011). This discovery

may have been impacted upon by the small sample size in the study. It is also possible that employed ex-students are currently working in unsatisfying jobs; or that unemployed ex-students have developed high life satisfaction through other domains of their lives.

### **Living in stable housing.**

Research suggests that the conditions youth experience while homeless contribute to a cycle where it becomes increasingly difficult for young people to secure stable housing (AIHW, 2011; Murphy, 2011). Nearly two thirds of the ex-students in this study had managed to leave homelessness and obtain stable housing. Although it was expected that employment would be associated with stable housing, this relation was non-significant. Instead, statistical analyses indicated a number of other variables were associated with stable housing. It was found that ex-students who were older, had children, higher incomes, and attended Key College longer ago were more likely to be living in stable housing. None of the ex-students in stable housing were living below the poverty line, and they were also found to have significantly higher self-rated life satisfaction than those in unstable housing. These relationships suggest that as time passes and youth transition into adulthood their lives are more likely to stabilise. The finding that those in stable housing are more likely to have children suggests that child bearing may contribute to stability. Two explanations for this are suggested: first, having children may have provided individuals with the motivation to secure a more stable life for the wellbeing of their children. Second, the welfare entitlements for individuals with children, as previously mentioned, are considerably higher which may support those with children into more stable housing.

### **How ex-students compare to other groups.**

When compared to national social norms, the findings from this study indicate that ex-students remain considerably disadvantaged. Over one third were homeless, 10 out of 25 (40%) were disengaged from both education and employment, 16 out of 25 (64%) were unemployed, over half were living below the poverty line, and nearly 80% relied on financial assistance from the Government. However, given the devastating impact of youth homelessness across a range of factors, it is arguably unrealistic to expect similar socio-economic outcomes to populations who have not experienced homelessness. Although national norms serve as an interesting point of reference, comparisons to this population minimise significant accomplishments made by individuals who have experienced homelessness. Comparisons drawn to groups who are/have been homeless may be a more useful gauge of the life improvements made by ex-students of Key College. When compared to both a sample of Key College students at intake, and collated outcomes of homeless service across Australia, the ex-Key College students surveyed for this research appeared to have made significant improvements to their lives: particularly in terms of obtaining stable housing, completing the year 10 certificate, and engaging to some degree in further education and employment.

**Conclusion: where are ex-students today and how have they progressed towards independence and adulthood?**

Although outcomes differ substantially among respondents, the overall findings from this study reflect the long-term disadvantage associated with experiences of youth homelessness (AIHW, 2011; FHCSAI, 2008a; Murphy, 2011). As it has been discussed, a disproportionate number of the ex-students were found to be in a disadvantaged economic and social position. Despite these findings, the majority of ex-students were found to be mostly satisfied with their lives overall; and when compared to other groups

of homeless, the positive gains and achievements accomplished by this group were highlighted. Thus, this research suggests that many of the ex-Key College students involved in the study have been able to make significant progress towards achieving a stable and positive lifestyle: however, a proportion appears to remain challenged by on-going homelessness.

The finding that ex-students who were homeless were more likely to be younger, and to be more recent graduates of Key College, suggests that following intervention (such as Key College), young people may overcome the crises contributing to their homelessness. This finding was also reflected in Jones' (2008) study which reported that although many ex-clients of an integrated residential and educational facility continued to face challenges, their independence and stability increased steadily over a three year follow-up period. Grace et al. (2009) also found that a proportion of their study's sample (15%) remained 'vulnerable to homelessness' two to three years after participating in the Step-Up programme. These findings in combination with the results of the present study indicate that making a sustained exit from homelessness is a long-standing process.

#### **Positive feedback from ex-students.**

The other important discovery this research has made is the positive perspectives of Key College held by ex-students. When ex-students were asked for their opinion on the best things about Key College, participants most commonly expressed their positive memories of staff, aspects of the educational programme, and characteristics of the school culture. Participants had very few criticisms of Key College, with most indicating there was nothing more Key College could have done to assist them. It is interesting to note that almost 9 out of 10 respondents indicated on a likert scale that they

believed Key College had had a *very strong influence* on their lives today. Furthermore, when ex-students were asked broadly whether there was anything else they would like to add, over 60% of respondents described positive changes in their lives and credited these too Key College. For example one participant stated, “I started with nothing, Key College has made me the man I am today. I am engaged with three lovely kids” (see Table 10). Based on the survey responses which reflect the ex-students positive perspectives, it appears that Key College has high social validity among its students.

### **Overlap with best practice.**

The review of the literature for this thesis noted that a number of components have been identified as best practice in alternative education for homeless and disadvantaged youth. The recognition of these factors has arisen in response to resilience research which focuses on building strengths and abilities to alleviate the impact of disadvantage (Einspar, 2010). Specific components of educational programmes have been recognised as conducive to resilience and are considered best practice (Einspar, 2010). These components are listed below (a detailed description can be found in the literature review). Caring adults with whom youth can develop a meaningful relationship (Franklin et al., 2007; James & Jurich, 1999 cited in Kerka, 2003); a sense of community and belonging fostered through small groups and low student to teacher ratio (Castellano et al., 2001; Grobe et al., 2001; McDonald, 2002; Raywid, 2001; Secada, 1999 all cited in Kerka, 2003); a focus on supporting the development of assets and abilities (Lewis, 2003 cited in Kerka, 2003); an environment where youth are shown respect and treated as adults (Lewis, 2003; Secada, 1999 both cited in Kerka, 2003); high teacher expectations (Castellano et al., 2001; Sanders, 2000; both cited in Kerka, 2003); a comprehensive, individualised, and holistic curriculum (Elliot et al., 2002; Franklin et al., 2007; James & Jurich, 1999 cited in Kerka, 2003);

integrated vocational training, career development, and vocational education (Conchas & Clark, 2002; James & Jurich, 1999 both cited in Kerka, 2003), and a long-term follow up programme (Franklin et al., 2007; James & Jurich, 1999 as cited in Kerka, 2003).

It is evident that the philosophy and programme employed by Key College (described in the introduction) incorporate many of these best practice components. In particular, the philosophy emphasises the development of responsibility and independence, generosity, skill mastery, and a sense of belonging. In addition, Key College has long term, supportive, and well-received staff who work closely with a small group of youth, supporting their achievement of individualised learning goals. A range of education options are offered, including vocation training and alternative certificates. Furthermore, Key College is run by YOTS, an organisation which offers a full continuum of holistic services for homeless youth. Based on the research above, it appears Key College has effectively employed a best practice approach.

Further support for this is found in the qualitative data. Of interest, the themes identified in the ex-students' responses also appear to have overlap with best practice. For example, when asked about the best things about Key College, nearly half described aspects of the school culture, using words like "stable", "home", "family", "safe", and "community" to describe the environment. Also, two thirds either mentioned aspects of the curriculum - mostly highlighting school trips, cultural activities, and community involvement - or the individualised nature of the support they received. The largest proportion of ex-students stated the best thing about Key College was their interaction with the teachers. Many described the impact of the positive relationships they had with staff and the support they received. Moreover, when ex-students were asked if there was anything more they would like to add, again, the

majority highlighted the influence the teachers at Key College had made on their lives. These themes in the ex-students' responses indicate that Key College has caring and supportive staff, a comprehensive and individualised curriculum, and a small learning community. Not only do these findings support the suggestion that Key College has been effective in applying best practice, they also indicate that these best practice components are well-received by students. Based on the ex-students' opinions, this study advocates that caring and supportive staff who provide the context for a meaningful and trusting relationship, are the component of educational programmes most important to homeless students.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The lack of a randomised control group limits the ability to determine cause and effect. It was not possible to use random assignment due to the follow-up nature of the study.

A small sample size affects the ability of this study to demonstrate significant relationships between variables. A small sample was inevitable due to the nature of Key College, a very small school with only one classroom. In addition, homeless youth have been recognised as a population difficult to locate and engage in follow-up research, therefore response rates are often low (Rashid, 2004). On a positive note, many of the ex-students who were contacted via email did complete the survey; this suggests that email may be an effective way to reach this population and conduct studies such as this one.

There may be fundamental differences between ex-students who were involved in the study, and those who were not. It is quite possible that those individuals who completed the survey were in a better social and economic position and therefore more

likely to be contactable, and perhaps more likely to have a desire to share their situation. Similarly, it may be that those ex-students who had more positive experiences at Key College were more likely to respond. This limitation affects the ability to generalise the data to all ex-students of Key College.

The sample was drawn from a single site (Key College) which also limits the ability to generalise results.

The use of a self-report measure may impact upon the reliability of the results as responses may reflect social desirability.

### **Strengths of the Study**

The follow-up design where approximately half of the respondents attended Key College before 2003, and some attended up to 14 years ago, provides much needed longitudinal data. These participants provide a valuable indication of where homeless youth end up in the long term.

Researchers have acknowledged there is a particular lack of studies regarding 19 - 24 year olds and how this age group transition to adulthood after/while experiencing homelessness (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2008). Forty three percent of the participants in the present study fall between this age range; this research therefore contributes to the field by providing data on this population.

The inclusion of a life satisfaction measurement extends the homeless youth literature which has otherwise focused on socio-economic, health, and family-based factors. Although a small number of other studies have examined life satisfaction (Courtney et al., 2005, 2007; Thompson et al., 2000), the present research is the first to do so in an Australia-based study. Measuring life satisfaction is an important addition as

this variable provides insight into how this population perceives their day to day life experiences. Previously, assumptions have been made based on the measurement of tangible variables, for example housing or income.

A theme in the criticisms of past research has been the reliance on data collected from homeless services. In Australia in particular, homeless service providers have almost entirely made up what is known about homeless young people. The current study addresses this by collecting first hand data from individuals who are/have experienced homelessness, and makes a particular effort to access the perspectives of these individuals.

### **Recommendations for Future Development**

Interpreting the findings from the present study in light of previous research leads to the identification of two major areas for future development of Key College. First, a greater focus on meeting the housing needs of homeless students is suggested. Research suggests that stable housing may be a prerequisite for homeless young people before improvements in other areas of functioning can take place (Hyman et al., 2010). The YOTS service does provide crisis accommodation where Key College students may spend between one night to 3 months in a refuge style placement. It should also be noted that Key College provides support and resources to assist students in finding and obtaining housing outside of YOTS housing services. It is however suggested that a greater collaboration with housing services, able to house students in at least tertiary level housing, would provide increased stability for students allowing them to better engage with the curriculum during their time at Key College.

Secondly, the results of this study indicate ex-students may require continued support to remain engaged in employment and/or training once they have left the

College. While at Key College, students have access to a comprehensive and holistic education programme and are provided with academic, vocational, and living skills training. Most students complete an academic and/or vocational certificate, and many go on to complete additional certificates after graduating. Despite these positive findings, 40% of ex-students were disengaged completely from employment and training at follow up. This finding suggests that although students are supported effectively while attending the school, and may also develop the skills and motivation to continue their education for some time following Key College; ex-students remain at risk of disengagement further down the track. It is suggested that perhaps the positive effects of Key College diminish with time, or that without the specialised support received at Key College, ex-students eventually disengage from mainstream educational services and work places. To improve long term engagement, future research could look at the impact of an intensive, individualised, and ongoing aftercare service which specifically supports graduates to remain engaged in employment or further education after Key College. In particular, support to remain engaged in further training is suggested based on the finding that the year 10 qualification obtained by most of the respondents did not affect employment; and that those who had completed additional training were more likely to be employed. Continued support, reflecting that which was received while attending Key College, may assist young people in remaining connected to mainstream institutions, and impact positively upon long term engagement levels.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The aim of this study was to contact ex-students of Key College to find out about their experience of the school and how their lives had progressed since leaving. The strengths of this research have made it a valuable contribution to the literature on homeless youth. The study offers insight into the present circumstances of individuals

who have engaged in a specialised education programme for homeless youth; and the findings extend what is known about both the longitudinal outcomes of youth homelessness, and how educational programmes targeting this population are perceived by the students.

The findings revealed a number of mixed results. Unemployment, poverty, and reliance on welfare were common - and some ex-students remained homeless. These findings reflect the continued disadvantage associated with youth homelessness. Despite these struggles, the majority had high life satisfaction and appeared to have positive attitudes towards their lives in general. Most ex-students had obtained at least a year 10 qualification while at Key College, and about two thirds had continued their education since leaving the school. Furthermore, when the ex-students were compared to homeless students at intake to Key College, and clients of mainstream homeless services, ex-students demonstrated considerable progress towards stability – particularly in terms of obtaining stable housing and engaging in education and/or employment to some extent.

Further analyses highlighted a number of relationships between variables. It was found that obtaining a school qualification at Key College did not translate to improved rates of employment; however, completing further training after Key College was significantly related to increased employment. This finding suggests that basic level school qualifications may not be sufficient in the current labour market, and supports the relationship between higher qualifications and employment. Employed participants reported greater financial stability than those who were unemployed, however were not significantly more likely to have stable housing. Approximately two thirds of the ex-students had improved their housing situations and were living in stable housing. These

ex-students were more likely to have children, to be older, to have attended Key College longer ago, and to have higher incomes.

Based on these findings it is suggested that following Key College, ex-students gradually transition to stability. This study has provided a snapshot of this process and demonstrates the lengthy pathway out of youth homelessness. It is also suggested that the inclusion of integrated housing services able to provide longer-term accommodation may support students in remaining engaged with school; and that an ongoing follow-up service, specific to supporting ex-students remain motivated and engaged in further education or employment, may have a long term impact on levels of social engagement among ex-students.

Lastly, the positive qualitative feedback from ex-students provides support for the approach employed by Key College, and indicates its social validity among its students. The most encouraging aspect discovered in this study is that although many ex-students were struggling with the basics of living, the qualitative data revealed they had positive attitudes towards their time at Key College and regarding their lives in general. It is proposed that perhaps the real success of Key College has been instilling hope and optimism in the lives of these homeless young people.

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**A little about you...**

Participation in the survey is your choice, no questions are compulsory but please answer as many as you can. Vouchers will be given when reasonable information has been provided. Please make sure you go through the whole survey and click done at the end.

**1. How old are you?**

16 - 18

22 - 24

19 - 21

25 and over

**2. Are you male or female?**

Male

Female

**3. What is your cultural/ethnic background?**

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

Pacific Islander

Anglo-Australian

Some other background

**4. Do you have a child/children?**

Yes

No

**5. Are your children in your care?**

Yes

No, in their other parent's care

No, they have been removed from my care

**Your time at Key College**

**6. What year did you attend Key College?**

**7. Have you attended Key College more than once? (left and then gone back)**

Yes

No

**8. How many terms in total did you attend?**

1

2

3

4

More than 4

**9. How would you describe your attendance at Key College**

Great

Not very good

Pretty Good

I didn't go very much at all

I would turn up about half of the time

**10. Did you Complete a certificate at Key College?**

School Certificate (Year 10)

Higher School Certificate (Year 12)

Neither

**11. If you remember what subjects you did and the grades you got, list them here**

**12. If you completed any other qualification/s while at Key College please list them here.**

**13. Looking back, what were the best things about Key College for you?**

**14. Looking back, what else could Key College have done for you?**

**15. Do you think your time at Key College has had a positive influence on how you live your life today?**

Not at all Very much  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

**Further Education**

**16. Are you involved in an educational or vocational training program at the moment?**

Yes, Full-time Yes, part time No

**17. Have you completed any other educational/vocational training programs since leaving Key College?**

No Yes

If yes, please give some details

**Housing**

**18. How many times have you moved in the past 12 months**

0	5 - 6	10 or more
1 - 2	7 - 8	
3 - 4	9 - 10	

**19. What type of housing do you live in at the moment?**

- Public places: e.g. train stations, places that stay open all night
- Crashing at a friends place
- Refuge
- I have a mortgage on my own home.
- Half-way house
- Out of home care
- Living at home with parents
- Rehabilitation facility
- Crashing at my partner's place
- Foster care placement
- Crashing at a family members place

Other (please specify)

**20. How long have you been living there?**

2 weeks or less

3 - 6 months

2 - 4 weeks

6 - 12 months

1 - 3 months

Longer then 12 months

**21. Do you have any plans to move in the next 6 months?**

No

Yes

If yes, where do you plan to move to?

**Life satisfaction**

These six questions ask about your satisfaction with different areas of your life. Please check the box with the answer most relevant to you.

**22. I would describe my satisfaction with my FAMILY LIFE as:**

Terrible

Mostly satisfied

Unhappy

Pleased

Mostly dissatisfied

Couldn't be happier

Mixed (about equally satisfied and dissatisfied)

**23. I would describe my satisfaction with my FRIENDSHIPS as:**

Terrible

Mostly satisfied

Unhappy

Pleased

Mostly dissatisfied

Couldn't be happier

Mixed (about equally satisfied and dissatisfied)

**24. I would describe my satisfaction with WHERE I LIVE as:**

Terrible

Mostly satisfied

Unhappy

Pleased

Mostly dissatisfied

Couldn't be happier

Mixed (about equally satisfied and dissatisfied)

**25. I would describe my satisfaction with MYSELF as:**

- |  |                     |
|--|---------------------|
| Terrible   | Mostly satisfied    |
| Unhappy  | Pleased             |
| Mostly dissatisfied                              | Couldn't be happier |
| Mixed (about equally satisfied and dissatisfied) |                     |

**26. I would describe my satisfaction with my SCHOOL EXPERIENCE overall as:**

- |                     |                     |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| Terrible            | Mostly satisfied    |
| Unhappy             | Pleased             |
| Mostly dissatisfied | Couldn't be happier |
| Mixed               |                     |

**27. I would describe my satisfaction with my OVERALL LIFE as:**

- |  |                     |
|--|---------------------|
| Terrible   | Mostly satisfied    |
| Unhappy  | Pleased             |
| Mostly dissatisfied                              | Couldn't be happier |
| Mixed (about equally satisfied and dissatisfied) |                     |

**Employment**

**28. Are you working at the moment?**

- |     |    |
|-----|----|
| Yes | No |
|-----|----|

**Employment**

**29. What is your Job?**

**30. Is your employment contract**

- |                               |                               |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Full-time, temporary contract | Part-time, permanent contract |
| Full-time, permanent contract | Casual                        |
| Part-time, temporary contract |                               |

How long have you had this job for?

**31. Do you have plans to leave this job in the next six months?**

No

Yes

If yes, what do you think you will do then?

**Finance**

**32. Does somebody else pay for all, or most of, your living costs? (Accommodation, food, electricity).**

No

Yes, a friend

Yes, my partner

Yes, a family member

Yes, I live in a service which provides this

**Finance**

**33. Do you get any other regular financial support from people you know?**

Yes, my parent/guardian

Yes, a friend

Yes, another family member

No

Yes, my partner

Other (please specify)

**34. Do you receive a government payment?**

No

Career allowance

Youth allowance

Sickness allowance

Partner allowance

Disability support pension

Parenting payment

Other (please specify)

**35. If you have a partner, do you combine incomes?**

Yes

No

I don't have a partner

**Finance**

**36. What is your total weekly income? This means the total amount of money you get each week. If you answered yes to the last question, this will include your partner's income too.**

- |                         |                 |
|-------------------------|-----------------|
| I do not have an income | 0 - \$100       |
| \$100 - \$200           | \$200 - \$300   |
| \$300 - \$400           | \$400 - \$500   |
| \$500 - \$600           | \$600 - \$700   |
| \$700 - \$800           | \$800 - \$900   |
| \$900 - \$1000          | \$1000 - \$1500 |
| More than \$1500        |                 |

**37. How many people are supported by this income?**

- |         |   |   |   |    |
|---------|---|---|---|----|
| Just me | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5+ |
|---------|---|---|---|----|

**38. What is the main way you are financially supported?**

- My wages      Support from my friends      My partner's wages
- Government payments      Support from my family
- Other (please specify)

**39. Please tick each box below if the statement applies to you. In the past 6 months, due to a shortage of money I:**

- Could not pay electricity, gas or telephone bills on time
- Couldn't heat my house
- Could not pay rent or mortgage on time
- Have gone into debt
- Pawned or sold something
- Had to ask for money from friends or family
- Went without a meal
- Had to ask for financial help from welfare/community organizations

**Hobbies**

**40. Do you have any hobbies or fun activities you like to do? What are they?**

**41. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience of Key College or your life today?**



Once complete please now click on this “done” button so your survey is fully saved! Thank you for your participation.

## Appendix 2

*Qualitative data collected from the on-line survey*

These qualitative data are presented according to the survey item they correspond to. The responses have been taken directly from the surveys and have not been editing for spelling or grammar.

**Looking back, what were the best things about Key College for you?**

“Looking back i rember that i love my teachers Bernie & min &i enjoyed science with patsy . I also enjoyed going out on excursions to interesting places & meeting people aswell. I particulary remeber going abseiling with the class which was awesome. Most of all i the people i had met trough key such as friends that i have made from my work experience at murdochmagazines , who i am in contact with even today.”

“one on one lerning with min. Drama clases. sport and rec days. being in a comfortable lerning envierment”

“The constant support of the staff was very important to me.”

“Key college was an important tool in helping me recieve the education i so desperatley wanted. Whilst attending Key College i was accomodated in Crisis Accomodation by the Salvation Army. With Homelessness affecting my life in such a strong way, Key College was a stable and constant environment where judgements were not made about your life outside school. Friends made at Key college (almost 15 years ago) are still in my life today. ALL of my class have gone on to lead stable and successful lives. An outcome that would have been considered unlikely without the service provided by Y.O.T.S Key College.”

“nice relaxed school best place for me to get my education at the time the teachers were awesome”

“the people who supported you and wanted you to do well they way the staff where always involved and have a genuine caring for children...they provided housing education and work after care also still involved just love min and Bernie”

“Would definitely be the music! I also loved the involvement in Art! Community volunteering and outings were also a good experience.”

“How helpful the staff where and the supports and the things I achieved throughout the year”

“Min and Bernie”

“fun friendly. really helpful in getting my year 10 completed , and helped me through personal matters too.”

“Key college was my home . It was the one place I always felt safe. It didn't matter if u were poor black white or Asian we were loved for who we are .if you needed food the staff were there if you needed a friend to laugh or cry with they too were there. In 03-04 I had two wonderful teaches that made a difference in my life Peter and Bernie you two were my rock thank you so much. they were their”

“The best thingys were going on excursions as a school, going to different places to help out (Events, etc...). Hanging out with Min and Ben and all the other wonderful volunteers. Going on camps and down to Victoria to help with the bush fires and up the Surfers Paradise for the charity bike ride. It was awesome Ben, Min and volunteers made the

learn a load of fun, Music and Drama were great subjects which I really enjoyed.”

“It was having routine I think that assisted me the most. I was living at Don Bosco House at the time and had a drug problem, having a stable routine helped me get clean. I also feel that attending a school that understood my needs and the environment I was living in helped a lot, I did not feel ashamed about my life and did not feel the need to lie about where I was going home to at night. The educators were also fantastic in that sense, they were able to taylor the lessons to suit the needs of someone in my situation.”

“Looking back the best things at key College for me were the support from all of the staff, breakfast and lunch being provided, the excursions, how we went for a trip to the snow, the way in which the teachers taught was fun and I'd like to add that I enjoyed it so much that I only missed a few days in that year of school than I ever had in the rest of my school years.”

“A school that was flexible and considerate of my circumstances. They helped me a lot more than a mainstream school could but I didn't trend for long.”

“the support they gave you, the tight nit community, feeling wanted”

“It was very laid back & I felt comfortable in the environment. I really enjoyed learning which was different for me, since I had left mainstream school three years before, because I hated school. I really thank Min Bonwick & youth off the streets for all the opportunities they gave me.”

“Teachers”

“gaining self confidence, education, friendship, support”

“Min bonwick. She was and still is my best memory. Her presence in the school and in my life brought calm and security in to my life.”

“the support, freinds and a chance to make a better life for me”

“the support of the teachers and the fact that they were able to focus on each of us individually aswell as a class which meant not only were we more successful but there was trust & respect between student & teacher making us want to go more than anywhere else.. They also got to know about our personal lives, trying to be supprotive& taking it into consideration.. Music was fun, the teacher was great n being able to access the piano n other instruments was great.. Getting praised for the good and not harrassed was great.. Being treated like we were adults at the same time taking care of us like we've all always hoped an adult would and being there as a friend was fantastic.. Having breaks when needed was brilliant.. The smoko area & the kitchen/dining was awesome and going on excursions was fun..the Best school i've ever been to”

### **Looking back, what else could Key College have done for you?**

“In my opinion there was nothing that key college didnt provide for me . I was very happy with the services they provided”

“they did a lot and thay still do helped me with everthing i needed”

“Key College could have spent more time developing moral and social boundaries for myself and other students as well as being more consistent with the way they dealt with young people.”

“I Obtained my Year 10 Certificate as a result of my attendance at Key College. Unfortunately due to staff numbers, student intakes and funding at the time, i was not

able to attend the following year and complete me year 12 Certificate as i would have liked to have done. Fortunately i returned to mainstream education to complete my goal. an impossible feat had it not been for my education at Key College.”

“more selective classes”

“not much they provided me with everything i needed to take the steps on my own and become independent and sucessful in what i do”

“Maybe the classes couldve been a little more advanced.”

“Done a year 11”

“Nothing they where great to us”

“nothing it was perfect”

“Due to the circumstances at that time I believe they had helped me the best they could.”

”I'm trying to think what else Key College could of done for me but honestly I can't think of anything else they could of done. Key College has done everything above and beyond for me and I couldn't be more happier with the school and the teachers that work there.”

“I think they did all that they could.”

“Looking back there was nothing more Key College could have done for me, it was the best support I had ever recieved, especially from Min Bonwick who has been there for me through thick and thin.”

”not much else they did as much as they could for me.”

“One thing I didn't get to do at Key College was get my Licence & continue with my singing career.”

“nothing”

“Key college did so much and I would only say that when I left there was no aftercare programme so its great to here this. I think parenting programmes and healthy relationship sessions would be wonderful .”

“nothing they have done more then enough for me the real question is how can i ever repay the for turning my life around for the better”

“i had to leave because of bad things happening in my life at the time of doing my yr10 .. I've always wished there was some sort of set up where if things like that happen you are able to take a break and come back or that they somehow keep in contact with you and push you a little to come back the year after or something.. I never completed any certificates there or anywhere else and i think i would of if i went back there but other that icant think of anything to improve on”

**Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience of Key College or your life today?**

“All the teachers including & volunteers habe just been grwat to me although i havent been to key college in years now. Min,ben,bernie& volunteers patsy armarti & anna ainsworth are all. people in my life that have supported me since i.left key college all those years ago. All of these people have helped me emotionally during my life &habe been there for me at any time that i needed them .Especially min bonwick. who.is.like a mother to.me & a great friend. Ben cook i must give a special mention as he has helped me with advice &also. picking me uo& taking me ti hospital appointment

&visitingmenin hospital over the last few years .Also. anna ainsworth who then was a volunter who later gave me a traineeship at eeden gardens where i worked twice for a period of 4.5 years.”

“i would of not got my year ten certificate with out key college.and not cume as far as i have.”

“Key College was successful because of the hard work of Min and Ben”

“Key College was, and always will be an important memory in my life. I believe that without the supported Educational oppertunities presented to me by Y.O.T.S i would not have gone on to lead the successful life that i have. My life was in crisis when i was studying. Homelessnes, Drug Addiction and petty criminal activities were not judged by staff and students within the service. Some of my fondest memories of Key College are from Min Bonwick, who i believe is still strongly involved with the service. Thanks Key College! Thanks Y.O.T.S!”

“no”

“my life is a rollercoaster but with all the things people at key taught me i know i can always turn it around to be a goal and mission to make everything stable and great for my kids...the cycle will not re visit in my family,,,”

“Very supported and good with youth.”

“I am doing really well I don't take drugs I live from day to day a nomal life we work hard to give a my kids a childhood that I was robbed but min has always been there to souppert me all the way even know I am 30 thanks so much she someone that I would like to be”

“great teachers and students I wouldn't b me today with out them thank you all so much!!!”

“Music programme at Key College had help me so much to where I am today with my music ability. Also the Drama/Plays that Key College hold are great fun and experience for me .”

“Father Riley and his services saved my life, I have no doubt that with out YOTS I would not be alive today.”

“Just that I appreciate the fact that there is such a service as Key College and well YOTS in general it is one of the greates things that I have come accross in terms of supoort :D.”

“I attended key college when i lived at don <sup>a</sup>bosco house. After that I went to <sup>b</sup>Mathew Hogan whilst i stayed at <sup>c</sup>lois house. Whilst I did not gain any formal qualification at these school I was able to discover my strengths and talents. I was surrounded by staff that loved me and helped me change my destructive ways. Eventually I learned to stand on my own two feet and now I teach and support young people in similar circumstance. It only makes sense that I pass on what was given to me. Thank you”

“I really enjoyed all the support I received at Key College & I have recommended Youth off the streets to many youth & will continue to tell others about their services, as I believe Youth off the streets & Key College help many people.”

“Yots is heaven sent a true gift to our community .Thankyou forever in my heart.”

“i started with nothing before key collage and has made me the man i am today im engaged with three lovely kids thank you key collage”

“i have 3 kids .. 7yrs,4yrs& almost 3yrs.. Things might not of worked out when it comes to school and careers but i am always complimented on my kids and praised for my job as a full time mother who takes no breaks.. The rest of my life might not have turned out very well and theres been alot of pain and struggle but i learnt some lessons at key college and all the refuges ive been to and people ive been around and experiancesi've had and i pass alot and will pass alot on to my kids and hopefully one day become 1 of the best youth workers & volunteer workers around and so will my kids =)”

*Note:* <sup>a</sup> Bon Bosco House is an accommodation service run by YOTS.

<sup>b</sup> Mathew Hogan is another specialised school run by YOTS.

<sup>c</sup> Lois house is an accommodation service run by YOTS.

