



### **Case studies of Queensland children and young people who are homeless**

The Queensland Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian's Community Visitor Program<sup>1</sup> plays an essential role in monitoring the safety and wellbeing of children living in alternative care in Queensland.

Community Visitors regularly visit children and young people in foster homes and other kinds of alternative care including residential facilities, youth detention centres, and authorised mental health facilities across Queensland. Visits by the Commission's Community Visitors provide a reliable avenue for the safety and wellbeing of these vulnerable children to be monitored and for them to raise any issues or concerns which they may have to someone independent of the child safety system.

Between 1 January 2007 and 28 February 2008 Community Visitors conducted survey interviews with young people who had left the child protection system without approval and were homeless.

These case studies have been provided as anecdotal information from young people about their perceptions and understandings of homelessness. The responses from these young people provide a rare insight into their experience of homelessness and give a voice to their reasons for leaving approved placements.

#### **Young Person A**

(26/02/2007)

A (age unrecorded) had come from another country and had been in Australia since he was 12.

A advised the Community Visitor that he:

- used to live with his uncle but that did not work out so he ended up in this youth shelter
- sometimes was not so lucky to find a place to sleep and had slept on the streets, and
- did have access to Centrelink benefits.

<sup>1</sup> Under Part 4 of the *Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian Act 2000* (Qld) Community Visitors are required to visit children and young people, regularly and frequently, in the custody or guardianship of the chief executive (child safety) under the *Child Protection Act 1999* (Qld), and who reside in a residential facility, detention centre, or at an authorised mental health service under the *Mental Health Act 2000* (Qld).

### **Young Person B**

(26/02/2007)

B was 15 and advised the Community Visitor that he would leave the shelter soon to go to juvenile detention. He also advised that he was on bail for 12 charges and that the Police had told him he would be going to jail.

B advised that he was intending to go on the run and the Community Visitor encouraged him to talk to the Youth Advocacy Centre in order to obtain legal advice before making the decision to run.

B told the Community Visitor that he:

- was a criminal but not by choice
- had no money and Centrelink would not pay him because he was 15
- had left home because of violence from his father (included hitting him and threatening him to never return to the house), and
- did not want to press charges against his father.

### **Young Person C**

(2/04/2007)

C was 17 years old and had been readmitted to the youth shelter on the understanding that he would (this time) abide by the house rules. This did not occur and C was directed to leave the youth shelter five days after arriving.

C advised the Community Visitor that he:

- planned to travel from Rockhampton to Brisbane by train with a friend in order to find another youth shelter, and
- had also been asked to leave another facility in Rockhampton due to breaking the house rules and alcohol abuse.

### **Young Person D**

(19/04/2007)

D was sixteen and had self-placed herself at a youth shelter as a result of her:

- brother allegedly molesting her, and
- desire to continue school in the same town as the youth shelter.

D advised the Community Visitor that she planned to save money while at the shelter for a place of her own.

Staff at the youth shelter advised the Community Visitor that they were providing her with support for her depression and following up with her doctor about an increased prescription for anti-depressants.

**Young Person E**

(3/05/2007)

E lived at a youth shelter and she is 14 years old.

E advised the Community Visitor that she:

- was not eligible for any financial support from Centrelink as she was considered to be too young for living away from home allowances, and
- did not feel safe returning to her mother as her mother was very abusive.

The Community Visitor followed this information up with the Department of Child Safety who advised that there was not enough information to suggest that it was unsafe for the Young Person to return home.

**Young Person F**

(23/05/2007)

F was 13 years old and was not under a Child Protection Order. F had been at the youth shelter for approximately 2 months and had previously been in the care of the Department of Child Safety but had been returned to his mother two years ago.

Immediately prior to attending the youth shelter F was in family respite care through the Department of Child Safety but this broke down. F then ran away from home and ended up on the street.

Staff at the site advised that the Young Person had not attended school since he had been at the site.

Staff at the site also advised that the Department of Child Safety had told them that it had made a decision that F could return home.

F advised the Community Visitor that he:

- would like to go to school but has no books
- had not been to school for four months
- had recently had contact with his father but could not stay with him as he lives in a boarding house
- would like to live in a large house with a butler if he had a choice, and
- did not want to return home to his mother and her partner because the partner:
  - did not want to know him
  - did not talk to him
  - did not make eye contact with the him, and
  - had hit F a few times.

F had told the police everything but the police took him home because his mother's partner made up lies and his mother supported her partner.

**Young Person G**

(14/09/2007)

G (age unrecorded) said that he thought that if it were not for the staff at the youth shelter then he would have had problems getting work and accommodation.

G also advised the Community Visitor that he:

- had previously spent some time on the streets and that this had been hard
- had left home because of family problems relating to his decision to not join the army
- was now starting to have regular contact with his family but did not feel that he could go home to live, and
- was doing a traineeship with Greencorps and hoped to get full time employment when this is finished.

**Young Person H**

(27/09/2007)

H was on a Child Protection Order but had self placed herself onto the street prior to arriving at the youth shelter.

H advised the Community Visitor that she:

- had \$700 taken off her when she was on the street
- had got into a fight and hurt her knuckle when she was on the street
- had a priority of finding a place to live
- had no other clothes apart from what she was wearing, and
- did not want to return to the Gold Coast (where she had been placed by the Department of Child Safety) because she had been involved in a physical fight and feared retaliation.

H was moved on from the youth shelter after three days (which was the policy of the youth shelter for all clients who were on a Child Protection Order) and placed with a youth worker in a hotel.

**Young Person I**

(22/11/2007)

I was three months off turning 18 and had been living on the streets for 10 months before coming to a youth shelter.

I told the Community Visitor that he:

- had been in rehabilitation and hospital for the last two months and after this he felt that he did not need to drink anymore, and
- wanted to 'sort his life out' and go back to TAFE and study nursing.

### **Young Person J**

(22/11/2007)

J (age unrecorded) advised that she had left home two months ago and had been on and off the streets.

J further advised the Community Visitor that she:

- had issues with the relationship with her mother and that they were often fighting
- cannot receive an independent allowance from Centrelink because of her age, and because her mother has said that she can return home
- was being assisted by the Youth Advocacy Centre to lodge an appeal against Centrelink's decision, and
- had to drop out of school five weeks ago as she had no money for public transport.

### **Young Person K**

(5/12/2007)

K was at a youth shelter and due to turn 18 soon. K had not had contact with his Child Safety Officer for two months and he did not have a Transition from Care plan.

K told the Community Visitor he had:

- been allegedly assaulted and abducted on 2 December 2007, and
- his Centrelink payments cut off due to not having appropriate identification.

### **Young Person L**

(6/02/08)

L (age unrecorded) advised that he had been at two different youth shelters over four months.

L also advised the Community Visitor that he:

- had been working for two weeks but was out of work again
- was unable to get a living away from home allowance (reason unspecified)
- needed to have time out from his mum and step-father as it is best for him not to live at home
- got on with his mother better when he wasn't living with her
- had recently written a letter to his father (who he had not seen for 12 years) in the hope that they could have some contact
- was going in for surgery on his leg and expected to be in a brace for 8 weeks after this surgery
- left school after completing grade 11 and he won't return to school as he needs to work, and
- was planning to stay at the youth shelter for three months and move into more permanent accommodation after this.

### **Young Person M**

(12/02/2008)

M was 16 years old and advised that he had been living on the street and between shelters for two years.

M advised the Community Visitor that he:

- was used to the lifestyle but was tired of using drugs and being dependant on other people to obtain drugs
- had no interest in returning to school
- had done some work at times but it was difficult to get work if you weren't in stable accommodation
- did not have contact with family members because he did not get along with them, and

was very independent and used to looking after himself on the street.