

## CHAPTER 4

### BEYOND THE YOUTH REFUGE

#### Introduction

Youth refuges have been able to provide very low cost (and in many cases, free) accommodation for several hundred homeless youths throughout Australia. Much of this accommodation could be described as very basic. It is crisis accommodation and at best gives young homeless people enough breathing space to enable them to move back home or, if necessary, additional time to seek more appropriate and longer term accommodation. Youth refuges have brought to the public's attention the plight of homeless young people throughout Australia, and have highlighted the need for access to low cost medium to long-term accommodation.

While the objectives and stated aims of most youth refuges go beyond the simple provision of shelter, the mere nature, funding and structure of refuges make the achievement of other aims very difficult (for example, the teaching of basic but very necessary living and work skills). However, it has become readily apparent to the Committee that one of the major obstacles faced by homeless youth is their very limited access to affordable and appropriate medium to long-term accommodation (for many young people this should still be of a supportive household type).

#### Why has the housing shortage arisen?

A combination of factors has led to the current housing shortage, not only for homeless youth but for many other disadvantaged groups within the community. First, by Australian standards, the level of unemployment has been very high in recent years. When this is translated into the payment of unemployment benefits, it is not difficult to understand why the demand for low cost housing has continued to rise sharply. In addition, there has been a very sharp rise in the number of other benefit recipients, particularly supporting parent beneficiaries, and this has also increased demand for low rental accommodation.

The demand for low-cost housing is shown quite clearly by the steady rise in the number of people seeking public housing. Table 4.1 shows that around 100 000 people were on state housing authority waiting lists for rental housing accommodation as at 31 December 1981. All states have experienced an increase in the number of people on their waiting lists in recent years. This is particularly so in New South Wales. At 31 December 1980, 37 358 people were on the Housing Commission list in that state but this number rose to 45 194 twelve months later (an increase of 20 percent). In Victoria there has been an increase of just over 10 percent in the numbers seeking public housing accommodation in the 12 months ending 31 December 1981.

**Table 4.1: State Housing Authorities Applications for Rental Accommodation—Outstanding (a)**

<i>At</i>	<i>N.S.W.</i>	<i>Vic.</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>S.A.</i>	<i>W.A.</i>	<i>Tas.</i>	<i>Total (6 States)</i>
Dec. 1973	34 748	14 336	6 033	13 500	14 010	2 910	<b>85 537</b>
June 1974	35 673	16 290	7 865	15 200	11 813	3 222	<b>90 063</b>
Dec. 1974	36 030	18 097	8 270	21 683	11 799	3 427	<b>99 306</b>
June 1975	37 373	18 262	8 193	22 906	13 500	3 876	<b>104 110</b>
Dec. 1975	35 010	19 109	8 053	23 086	13 721	3 927	<b>102 906</b>
June 1976	32 393	21 005	7 695	23 747	14 437	4 114	<b>103 391</b>
Dec. 1976	29 657	23 138	7 750	23 296	14 660	3 866	<b>102 367</b>
June 1977	27 159	21 917	7 214	23 821	16 086	3 851	<b>100 048</b>
Dec. 1977	27 040	21 181	5 383	21 620	14 731	3 490	<b>93 445</b>
June 1978	28 697	12 863	4 670	20 042	7 033	3 564	<b>76 869</b>
Dec. 1978	28 498	12 807	4 591	19 355	5 473	3 188	<b>73 912</b>
June 1979	29 915	12 836	4 141	18 539	6 292	3 468	<b>75 191</b>
Dec. 1979	30 656	12 056	4 787	17 551	5 845	3 569	<b>74 464</b>
June 1980	35 102	12 190	4 813	18 615	6 491	3 932	<b>81 143</b>
Dec. 1980	37 358	13 861	5 515	19 765	5 271	4 082	<b>85 852</b>
June 1981	41 459	16 813	6 184	20 854	6 031	4 288	<b>95 629</b>
Dec. 1981	45 194	15 345	7 469	21 400	5 503	3 972	<b>98 883</b>

(a) Figures from and including 30 June 1978 are for rental only. Earlier statistics for some states include applications for the purchase of a housing authority dwelling. Figures from New South Wales are applications received. For other states, figures are numbers admitted to the waiting list (approved).

Source: Information and statistics on Commonwealth Government Housing Schemes funded through the states. Public Housing Branch, Department of Housing and Construction.

Secondly, there has been a decline in the number of houses and flats completed by State housing authorities over recent years. Table 4.2 indicates that the number of houses and flats completed in Australia has dropped from 9622 in 1974-75 to 7490 in 1980-81. In addition, State housing authorities have been selling much of their stock and this has resulted in only a very small rise in the total number of public housing rental units available for use in 1981 (see Table 4.3 and 4.4). From 1 July 1976 to 30 June 1981 the stock of lettable dwellings has increased by 23 000. Over the same period, a further 43 000 dwellings have been completed by state housing authorities. This in effect represents a very significant number (around 50 percent) of dwellings being sold during the same period.

While the Committee would accept the sale of public housing stock at full replacement cost, it is regrettable that sales have been allowed to continue at such a high rate and that houses may have been sold at well below their market or replacement value (this was particularly so in many states up until 1978) when there remains an increasing demand for such housing. This is particularly so when funds from house sales are not immediately recommitted to the building of replacement stock.

**Table 4.2: Commonwealth-State Housing Agreements and Grants to States for Rental Assistance to Pensioners Dwellings Completed**

<i>Financial year</i>	<i>N.S.W.</i>	<i>Vic.</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>S.A.</i>	<i>W.A.</i>	<i>Tas.</i>
1974-75 (a)	2977	2746	1359	862	723	704
(b)	30	23	172	10	16	..
1975-76 (a)	4574	2520	1069	1321	265	817
(b)	665	196	81	44	64	17
1976-77 (a)	2769	2318	696	1176	821	752
(b)	245	148	87	105	82	39
1977-78 (a)	2207	2330	897	1380	1277	862

<i>Financial year</i>	<i>N.S.W.</i>	<i>Vic.</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>S.A.</i>	<i>W.A.</i>	<i>Tas.</i>
(b)	152	146	76	87	58	14
1978-79 (a)	2920	1835	604	1857	745	810
(b)	151	67	70	..	..	..
1979-80 (a)	2983	1185	436	1392	764	790
(b)	30	10	6	..	..	..
1980-81	3089	954	647	1379	753	668

(a) Includes dwellings provided through the 1973-74 and 1978 Housing Agreements, and dwellings provided through grants under Part III of the 1978 Housing Assistance Act. (b) Includes dwellings provided under the *States Grants (Dwellings for Aged Pensioners) Act 1969*, and the *States Grants (Dwellings for Pensioners) Act 1974*.

Source: Department of Housing and Construction.

**Table 4.3: State Housing Authorities Stocks of Lettable Dwellings**

<i>As at</i>	<i>N.S.W.</i>	<i>Vic.</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>S.A.</i>	<i>W.A.</i>	<i>Tas.</i>	<i>Total</i>
30.6.76	77 092	34 367	14 858	37 852	24 090	6 023	194 282
30.6.77	79 226	33 445	15 121	39 013	24 263	6 800	197 868
30.6.78 (a)	74 386	36 263	15 940	40 129	23 387	7 762	197 867
31.12.78 (a)	75 930	36 656	16 200	40 701	23 781	8 183	201 451
30.6.79 (a)	77 211	36 463	16 355	41 048	24 307	8 517	203 901
31.12.79 (a)	78 803	36 294	16 453	41 699	24 747	8 855	206 851
30.6.80 (a)	80 119	36 431	16 693	42 115	24 960	9 258	209 576
31.12.80 (a)	81 563	36 715	16 951	43 059	25 443	9 539	213 270
30.6.81 (a)	83 328	37 663	17 278	43 652	25 642	9 807	217 370
31.12.81 (a)	84 832(p)	38 652	17 624	44 592	25 677	10 211	221 588

(a) Excludes dwellings provided for Aborigines under the Department of Aboriginal Affairs programs, Servicemen, Teacher Housing, Decentralisation dwellings, etc. In previous years, some states have included these dwellings.

(p) preliminary; subject to revision.

Source: Department of Housing and Construction.

**Table 4.4: 1945 and 1956-1966 Housing Agreements and States Grants (Housing) Act 1971-73, 1973 Housing Agreement, and 1978 Housing Assistance Act**

<i>Financial year</i>	<i>N.S.W.</i>	<i>Vic.</i>	<i>Qld</i>	<i>S.A.</i>	<i>W.A.</i>	<i>Tas.</i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>Total Sale of Dwellings</b>							
1974-75	1 283	2 083	1 304	196	608	315	5 789
1975-76	1 453	2 881	591	273	1 158	230	6 586
1976-77	1 002	3 201	781	251	779	33	6 047
1977-78	131	2 365	573	376	455	1	3 901
1978-79	260	1 779	330	143	64	67	2 643
1979-80	211	1 440	243	158	80	61	2 193
1980-81	250	527	206	178	95	56	1 312
<b>Total</b>	<b>4 590</b>	<b>14 276</b>	<b>4 028</b>	<b>1 575</b>	<b>3 239</b>	<b>763</b>	<b>28 471</b>

Source: Department of Housing and Construction.

**Table 4.5: Vacancy Rates (private residential rental dwellings)**

	<i>March 1980</i>	<i>September 1980</i>	<i>March 1981</i>	<i>September 1981</i>	<i>March 1982</i>
	%	%	%	%	%
Sydney	2.2	2.1	2.0	1.8	1.2
Melbourne	2.3	1.9	0.9	1.2	0.9
Brisbane	4.0	2.2	1.4	0.7	1.0
Adelaide	4.2	3.2	1.3	2.0	0.6
Perth	7.5	6.1	2.8	4.5	1.9
Canberra	4.0	2.0	1.3	2.8	1.1

*Source:* Real Estate and Stock Institute (Australia).

Thirdly, there has been a steady decline in the availability of low cost private accommodation. In most capital cities many of the old boarding and terrace houses are being pulled down and replaced by either office or more luxurious private accommodation. This has been accompanied by a move back to the inner city areas by many middle to high income earners. They have in effect boosted the price on existing dwellings in the area as well as stimulated developers to demolish or modernise the old low cost dwellings and replace them with more expensive rental or strata units. As a result, the traditional inner city dwellers (that is, the low income group) are finding it increasingly more difficult to compete with the new dwellers who are demanding and getting high quality, high cost accommodation.

Fourthly, there is a serious shortage of vacancies in the private rental market. Table 4.5 shows quite clearly the deterioration in the vacancy rates in each State from March 1980 to March 1982 and all are well below an optimum operational level (around five percent). Investment in private rental accommodation provides a very low rate of return. The only attraction for an investor is the long-term capital gain that can be made on the resale of the property. Therefore, the stock of private rental accommodation is unlikely to increase in the very near future while investors and property developers are able to put their money into more attractive investments, particularly in the short term.

Against this background, it is not difficult to appreciate that many young people who leave home (for whatever reasons) are finding it almost impossible to obtain satisfactory and affordable accommodation. This is particularly so of young people who have not acquired appropriate living skills and are unable to obtain secure full-time employment.

## **Access to private and public rental accommodation**

At present, any gains made by young people in the area of public housing will mean that other low income groups must lose, for while the size of the public housing cake remains unchanged, any concessions by one group must always be at the expense of another.

Although the stock of public housing may not be increased in the short term, it was brought to the attention of the Committee during the course of its public hearings that some of this stock is lying idle. The Committee believes that when there is an acute housing shortage, both Commonwealth and state Governments need to adopt a more flexible approach to the allocation and usage of public housing. However, additional expenditure on public housing would be wasteful, if in fact some of the existing stock is not being used to its fullest potential. The Committee strongly believes that part of this

general housing shortage can be overcome by Governments making more efficient use of existing resources. Dwellings leased by the Defence forces from state housing authorities should not be allowed to lie idle simply because there may be a future need for such housing. In Victoria, around 4000 dwellings are presently let to the Department of Defence.<sup>1</sup> A representative from the Victorian Government told the Committee that on one occasion a number of vacant houses leased to the Defence Department in Holden Street North Fitzroy were occupied by squatters.<sup>2</sup> The state housing authorities should be able to reclaim those dwellings and accommodate people in them on six to 12 month leases. This would still enable the housing authorities to hand back these dwellings to the Defence forces when such a need arose.

Similarly, the purchase by state road authorities of houses that lie in the path of future freeway construction should not be allowed to remain idle and deteriorate if many of these freeway plans have been delayed for a substantial period of time or scrapped. (The South Australian Housing Trust does lease houses from the Highway Department for emergency accommodation.) The Committee was told that education departments, state railway authorities, state electricity commissions and other statutory authorities also have, at various times, vacant houses on their books.

The Committee is pleased with recent moves in South Australia in this regard. The South Australian Government has acknowledged that surplus accommodation is available in the metropolitan area and, should it be suitable, it will be offered, without charge, to various voluntary organisations to operate as youth shelters.<sup>3</sup> Further, the Department of the Premier and Cabinet is compiling a register of unused, or under-utilised, publicly-owned property. This register will be made available to both the Department for Community Welfare and the South Australian Housing Trust.<sup>4</sup>

The extent of unused or unoccupied dwellings, particularly in the inner city and adjacent areas, can be seen by an examination of the 1971 and 1976 census figures. The 1976 census showed that 12.5 percent of all dwellings in these areas remained unused or unoccupied. In 1971 the figure was only 9.5 percent. Not all these dwellings are publicly owned and neither are they all suitable for residential purposes. Even so, there are many premises available which could be utilised to help overcome part of the current low cost housing shortage.

As a first step, the Committee **RECOMMENDS that more flexible housing policies at both Commonwealth and state levels be implemented. This will enable more efficient use of existing housing stocks and the conversion of other government owned dwellings to suitable residential accommodation.**

### **Access to private market**

Homeless youth, in particular unemployed homeless youth, are faced with an almost insurmountable barrier to the private rental market. Table 4.6 shows that the average private rental per week by dwelling type in capital cities, even for the most modest form of accommodation, is beyond the reach of anybody who is not in full time employment. In addition, Tables 4.7 and 4.8 show that for over 60 percent of young people renting private accommodation, more than 25 percent of their income is paid out in rent. In fact, 36 percent of young people under 20 years of age pay over 50 percent of their income on rent.

**Table 4.6: Average Private Rent per Week by Dwelling Type, Capital Cities, August 1980**

<i>Dwelling type</i>	<i>Syd.</i>	<i>Melb.</i>	<i>Bris.</i>	<i>Adel.</i>	<i>Perth</i>	<i>Hob.</i>	<i>All capital cities</i>
	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
Bedsitter	34.03	..	..	..	..	..	30.53
1-Bedroom flat	52.93	34.34	31.57	..	37.11	35.83	40.72
2-Bedroom house	55.78	43.19	45.79	41.98	39.16	..	48.05
2-Bedroom flat	65.13	44.15	52.36	37.63	42.05	49.37	55.54
3-Bedroom house	75.85	56.85	52.29	49.02	50.31	46.50	59.81
3-Bedroom flat	78.31	..	..	..	..	..	67.20
4-Bedroom house	126.99	66.46	56.95	54.57	62.52	..	81.41

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, August 1980, Survey of Housing Occupancy and Costs (unpublished tables).

Transcript of Evidence, p. 181.

**Table 4.7: Rent as a Proportion of Income, Privately Renting Household Heads Aged under 20 Years, Capital Cities, June 1976 (a)**

<i>Rent as a proportion of income</i>	<i>Syd.</i>	<i>Melb.</i>	<i>Bris.</i>	<i>Adel.</i>	<i>Perth</i>	<i>Hob.</i>	<i>Dar.</i>	<i>All capital cities</i>
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
20% or less	7.7	11.2	8.2	7.6	7.2	7.7	26.5	8.7
20.1% - 25%	8.2	11.4	9.3	9.7	9.5	13.3	13.2	9.8
25.1% - 30%	11.8	13.0	10.0	12.8	12.8	9.4	8.8	12.1
30.1% - 40%	18.1	18.8	18.4	20.8	18.7	15.0	19.1	18.6
40.1% - 50%	14.7	13.3	15.5	16.5	16.0	9.9	10.3	14.6
50.1% or more	39.5	32.3	38.6	32.6	35.9	44.7	22.1	36.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

(a) Calculations exclude private renters with nil income.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1976 Census. Transcript of Evidence, p. 182.

**Table 4.8: Rent as a Proportion of Income, Privately Renting Household Heads Aged 20-24 Years, Capital Cities, June 1976 (a)**

<i>Rent as a proportion of income</i>	<i>Syd.</i>	<i>Melb.</i>	<i>Bris.</i>	<i>Adel.</i>	<i>Perth</i>	<i>Hob.</i>	<i>Dar.</i>	<i>All capital cities</i>
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
20% or less	16.4	25.5	20.6	24.6	26.5	26.3	35.3	21.9
20.1%-25%	19.3	22.9	19.1	21.6	21.2	20.1	14.4	20.8
25.1%-30%	15.3	13.7	16.9	16.3	16.1	13.7	11.8	15.1
30.1%-40%	23.1	18.4	21.6	17.6	15.9	15.4	20.4	20.0
40.1%-50%	8.0	5.1	7.9	6.2	5.9	6.1	5.6	6.7
50.1% or more	17.7	14.4	13.9	13.6	14.4	18.3	12.6	15.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

(a) Calculations exclude private renters with nil income.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1976 Census. Transcript of Evidence, p. 182.

The payment of rent, however, is not the major obstacle for homeless youth. Before a person can avail himself of a dwelling, bond money, rent in advance, leasing fees, stamp duty, electricity connection fees, etc. must be paid. Appendix 2 gives a listing of the rental conventions in each capital city as at March 1981. Tables 4.9 and 4.10 show the estimated establishment costs for different dwelling types in each capital city as at

August 1980. Even within the cheapest 20 percent of the market, establishment costs in the major eastern state capital cities can still range from \$300 to \$400. The overall average market establishment costs for the same cities range from \$400 to \$550. Given these establishment costs and average weekly rentals, it is not surprising that private rental accommodation is beyond the reach of all unemployed and most low income youth, even if they are sharing accommodation.

**Table 4.9: Estimates of Establishment Costs (estimated establishment costs for different dwelling types in the cheapest 20 per cent of the market, capital cities, August 1980)**

<i>Dwelling Type</i>	<i>Syd.</i>	<i>Melb.</i>	<i>Bris.</i>	<i>Adel.</i>	<i>Perth</i>	<i>Hob.</i>
	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
1-Bedroom flat	321	303	139	..	161	163
2-Bedroom house	316	339	173	192	159	..
2-Bedroom flat	368	356	198	182	175	212
3-Bedroom house	384	400	183	208	189	185

*Source:* Estimates by the Department of Housing and Construction on the basis of data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics August 1980 Survey of Housing Occupancy and Costs (unpublished tables), and information provided by estate agents and electricity authorities in each capital city (see Appendix D).

Transcript of Evidence, p. 185.

**Table 4.10: Estimated Establishment Costs for Different Dwelling Types of Average Market Rental, Capital Cities, August 1980**

<i>Dwelling type</i>	<i>Syd.</i>	<i>Melb.</i>	<i>Bris.</i>	<i>Adel.</i>	<i>Perth</i>	<i>Hob.</i>
	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
1-Bedroom flat	397	370	169	..	206	207
2-Bedroom house	415	443	227	256	217	..
2-Bedroom flat	472	450	254	233	231	280
3-Bedroom house	537	554	254	293	273	266

*Source:* Estimates by the Department of Housing and Construction on the basis of data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics August 1980 Survey of Housing Occupancy and Costs (unpublished tables), and information provided by estate agents and electricity authorities in each capital city (see Appendix D).

Transcript of Evidence, p. 185.

It has been suggested by several witnesses that the housing needs of young people could be improved by the establishment of bond and rental assistance schemes. For example, in Tasmania, part of the Youth Services Scheme funding (\$16 500) has been used to set up a bond and rental assistance subsidy scheme (BRASS).<sup>5</sup> This money is used to help establish young people who could not otherwise afford to do so in private rental accommodation.

The Committee cannot stress too strongly that the establishment of any youth housing policies by either the Commonwealth or states must not isolate young people from the rest of the community. Consequently, the Committee sees a need to enable more young people to have access to the private rental market. The Committee **RECOMMENDS that all state governments should seriously study the establishment of a universal bond insurance scheme.** Such a scheme would lower the costs of access to private market housing for young people by avoiding the payment of very high bonds. The scheme would be of more benefit to landlords than is the current bond system because landlords would be able to claim larger sums, where necessary, for actual damage sustained. If landlords have a guarantee of full cost recovery for damage that may occur, it is feasible that such a scheme will encourage more people to make properties available for rental.

While the insurance money is not refundable to the tenant, the payment of around \$15.00 per agreement would be far more within a young person's means than trying to raise an initial amount of \$200 to \$400 for a bond.<sup>6</sup> In any case, there is no certainty that all or part of any bond money will be returned to a tenant if he moves from one rental dwelling to another. The Committee was told that young people are sometimes treated unfairly and made to pay for damages that occurred prior to their tenancy. Regardless of whether a bond and rental assistance scheme or a universal bond insurance scheme is introduced, there is still the very real problem in all states of trying to find affordable private rental accommodation.

### **Access to public housing**

Access to public housing by young people differs considerably from state to state. In New South Wales, the Housing Commission does not admit to its waiting list single persons other than pensioners (as defined in Section 2 of the Housing Assistance Act 1978).<sup>7</sup> Under the Youth Services Scheme the Housing Commission has provided six dwellings to be used as refuges or emergency accommodation for young people.

Periodically the New South Wales Housing Commission does make available rental dwellings to voluntary organisations for emergency housing purposes.<sup>8</sup> Some groups have made use of this scheme. Each group, however, must be able to recover 80 percent of the market rent that could be obtained from that dwelling.<sup>9</sup> This in effect means that, given the present levels of market rents, most organisations need to have access to additional funds to supplement the very limited finances of the prospective young co-tenants.

In Victoria, the Ministry of Housing has developed a Youth Housing Program which will provide independent and long-term accommodation for young people aged 16 years and over. First, the Victorians have the Singles and Sharing Scheme.<sup>10</sup> Those allocated accommodation sign a joint tenancy agreement with the Ministry and the flats involved are managed in the normal way. Single applicants or groups of two or three people are allocated two bedroom and three bedroom flats respectively. Only high rise and top floor walk up flats have been made available under this Scheme, and therefore it is restricted to three inner metropolitan districts. The commitment to date is to make available 200 flats.<sup>11</sup>

Because of the location and nature of the dwellings, however, the scheme has not been successful. Indeed, the flats tend to further isolate youth and compound their problems.<sup>12</sup> Vandalism, violence and lack of security were cited by many witnesses as being of major concern to all tenants of these buildings.<sup>13</sup>

Secondly, the Victorian Housing Ministry has recently announced a scheme whereby up to 25 flats and houses (to be managed by community groups) will be made available throughout the state for medium and longer term housing for young people.<sup>14</sup> Some funds will also be made available for small boarding houses. The Committee will be watching with interest the progress of this particular youth housing scheme. If successful, it will complement the Committee's recommendations (outlined below in this chapter) concerning medium to long term accommodation.

At the time of writing this report, the Committee was aware that allocations were being made under the scheme to several locally based community groups. The Committee understands that a further five houses have been made available through the scheme. There is little information at this stage, however, on which the scheme may be evaluated.

In Queensland, the Housing Commission does not specifically allocate housing either directly or through community bodies to young single persons.<sup>15</sup> The Commission



claims that it is a question of priorities, and that its limited resources dictate that it provide housing for the aged and invalid pensioners.<sup>16</sup>

The South Australian Housing Trust believes that the needs of homeless youth must be seen within the context of the aggregate public housing demand from various disadvantaged groups. These include the aged, lone parents, other low income working households, the handicapped, etc., whose housing problems are generally no less urgent than those of young people.<sup>17</sup> The Trust has various leasing arrangements with voluntary organisations and community groups, who provide a minimally supervised housing service to youth under 18 years of age.<sup>18</sup> Such assistance is provided in conjunction with support from various Government funded programs and is conditional upon the group or organisation paying an economic rent for the Trust's accommodation and satisfying any local government requirements.<sup>19</sup>

On 4 April 1981, the South Australian State Government announced its plans to ease the youth housing problem. The central point of the announcement was the creation of a special pool of 50 Housing Trust houses for needy young people. The plans also include an expansion of the role and resources of the Emergency Housing Office to process applications for those houses and to provide general help, previously outside its charter, to the needy young.<sup>20</sup> In addition, as outlined above, the South Australian Government will investigate the suitability of making any unused or under-utilised public dwellings available for use by voluntary organisations for youth shelters. As at 30 June 1982, 24 houses had been leased under this scheme.<sup>21</sup> The Committee understands that the slowness in allocating these houses to youth housing schemes is due to many groups not receiving recurrent funding, and also to an opposition by local municipal councils to group housing schemes. As also mentioned above, a register of unused or under-utilised state-owned properties has been compiled in South Australia. These properties are being considered in terms of their potential for accommodating youth and other needy groups.<sup>22</sup>

The State Housing Commission of Western Australia is not involved in the provision of housing assistance to homeless youth.<sup>23</sup> The Commission claims that it is not aware of a demand for assistance to homeless youth in Western Australia.<sup>24</sup>

The Housing Division of the Tasmanian Department of Housing and Construction has not rented any dwellings to young single persons without children.<sup>25</sup> The Division has been able to provide only one house to be used by single young women for short term crisis accommodation.<sup>26</sup> Other dwellings which have been made available to voluntary organisations have mainly been used as crisis or refuge centres for older age groups.<sup>27</sup>

The Northern Territory Housing Commission does not currently allocate public accommodation to any category of single persons without dependants, except single pensioners.<sup>28</sup> The Commission does operate an Industry Housing Assistance Scheme whereby under the Northern Territory Housing Act community/welfare organisations such as those concerned with youth accommodation are eligible for housing assistance.<sup>29</sup> To date, no accommodation has been allocated under the Scheme for youth accommodation purposes.<sup>30</sup>

The Australian Capital Territory Housing Commission has allocated 20 houses for tenancy by groups of young people on low incomes.<sup>31</sup> However, each household must include a person over the age of 18 years in order that the legal requirement to sign a lease can be met. In addition, an old Commonwealth hostel, Ainslie Village, has been handed over to a community group to be run as a co-operative for young people and other persons who are on low incomes or are unemployed.<sup>32</sup> A charge of \$7 per week for a room has brought this accommodation within the reach of young unemployed

people.<sup>33</sup> Because of the wide range of clientele who use this facility, however, the Committee was told that it is not suitable for young girls, and in many cases young men.<sup>34</sup>

Australia-wide, it would appear that young people have a varied access to public housing. In those states where young people are eligible for such housing, eligibility has only been recognised in very recent times. The Committee would see that while young people are just as much a part of the community as any other group, and that their rights to public housing should be recognised, this recognition must be seen in the context of the needs and priorities of all other disadvantaged groups.

The gap between the supply and demand for low cost public rental accommodation in Australia has been growing in recent years. That gap is affecting not only homeless youth but all other disadvantaged groups within the community. Compounding this problem is the diminishing reality for many young people to own their own home. The recently announced new housing assistance program by the Commonwealth Government, which includes an additional \$65 million grant for welfare housing during 1982-83, may help reverse this trend. However, this inability or delay in being able to purchase has meant that many people are staying in the private rental market for longer periods. This has led to an acute shortage of private rental accommodation in many states. In the meantime, the demands on both the limited public and private rental accommodation will not be eased while funds for public housing continue to fall.

The plight of homeless youth is being recognised by some housing authorities. There is an immediate need, however, for Commonwealth and state housing bodies to meet with the view to reassessing public housing policies in an effort to achieve equilibrium in the general supply and demand for low cost housing. Once this is achieved the needs of newly emerging groups requiring support in and from the community, such as homeless youth, can be expected to receive more favourable treatment from the various state housing authorities.

## Specific youth housing schemes

If changes which are designed to increase the stock of lettable dwellings are to be made to public housing policy, it will be necessary to consider the needs of all disadvantaged groups. The Committee has considered a number of schemes which, if implemented, would specifically cater for homeless young people. In particular, the Committee has concentrated on housing proposals which would be eligible for funding under the \$10 million Homeless Persons Assistance Program special capital grant.

On 30 September 1980 the Commonwealth Government made a commitment to make \$10 million available, over three years, to provide additional capital funds under the Homeless Persons Assistance Program. The Committee is concerned that many worthwhile homeless youth housing schemes will not be able to make use of these funds under the existing guidelines. In evidence to the Committee, a representative of the Department of Social Security stated the following:

'the Homeless Persons Assistance Act, as many members will know, is geared specifically to chronically homeless people who have traditionally been catered for by very well established organisations which by and large have had firstly, considerable managerial experience, and secondly, some very real fund raising capacity in the community'.<sup>35</sup>

Despite the fact that the commitment of September 1980 made special reference to homeless young people,<sup>36</sup> the Committee is concerned that the guidelines under the

Homeless Persons Assistance Program may make it very difficult for many organisations or community groups to avail themselves of this money for programs specifically catering for homeless youth.

The Committee consequently believes that it is necessary to change or modify the guidelines so that the Homeless Persons Assistance Act is geared not only to cater for the chronically homeless, but is able to help meet the needs of homeless young people. In addition, the Committee believes it will be necessary to broaden the interpretation of the meaning of the words 'temporary accommodation' in the Homeless Persons Assistance Act 1974 to enable funding to go to youth housing projects that will provide supportive medium to long-term accommodation but not permanent accommodation. (In the past the traditional skid row shelters have offered very temporary accommodation by insisting that people stay only overnight. They have had to re-register for accommodation if they wished to stay the following night.)

The Committee would also point out that any programs for homeless youth initiated under the Homeless Persons Assistance Program should be developed separately from the traditional skid row programs. The Committee is concerned that there could be a conflict of interests with an organisation or group that endeavours to run two different homeless persons programs in shared facilities or facilities that are in close proximity to one another. It is important that homeless youth programs are developed independently of the chronically homeless persons' programs. The needs, aspirations and supervision are so different from the older skid row homeless that placing both groups together suggests, in the Committee's view, that these homeless young people cannot be helped and will automatically drift into a skid row existence.

If the guidelines under the Homeless Persons Assistance Act cannot be modified in such a way as to assist homeless youth housing schemes, the Committee would **RECOMMEND that part of the \$10 million special capital grant be transferred to another area where youth housing schemes will be given more favourable treatment.** Further, the Committee **RECOMMENDS that money available under the \$10 million capital grants program be made available to fund medium to long-term supportive households. No funds should be made available from this grant to provide additional youth refuges such as those established under the Youth Services Scheme.** The Committee strongly believes that a proliferation of youth refuges is not going to be of long-term assistance to homeless youth.

Regardless of from where the money is made available, the Committee **RECOMMENDS that funding for homeless youth under the \$10 million special capital grant program should give priority to community groups who put up medium to long-term supportive household proposals.** The development of this type of housing program within the community will take pressure off the youth refuges. At present, there are very few options for homeless youth. This has led to a situation where many of these young people move from one refuge to another or continually return to the same refuge after unsuccessfully trying to find more permanent accommodation. The Committee believes that if regionally based medium to long-term supportive housing programs for homeless youth are established, and if the existing youth refuge program undergoes a certain degree of rationalisation (as outlined in Chapter 3), there will be little or no justification for the introduction of more youth refuges.

The Committee is particularly attracted to proposals that aim to renovate existing dwellings or to convert non-residential dwellings to suitable youth accommodation facilities. The Committee **RECOMMENDS that all youth housing proposals should seek a commitment to both the conversion of non-residential properties and the renovation of vacant dwellings in order to provide as much accommodation as possible and**

**to offer a range of housing alternatives for homeless youth. In this way the contribution of Commonwealth funding to housing projects will result in the mobilisation of housing resources many times greater in value than the contribution made.**

The success of such a scheme depends on such dwellings being made available to regionally based community management committees. The Committee believes that there are many dwellings lying idle in various regions which could form the basis of supportive youth housing schemes. Local government bodies could make available vacant properties, and, as well, many former children's homes and other institutions could be released for youth housing.<sup>37</sup> Not all vacant dwellings would be suitable for youth housing programs. The Committee believes, however, that there are sufficient existing dwellings which, once converted or updated, would meet the varied needs of homeless youth.

In evidence to the Committee, the Executive Director of the New South Wales Association of Child Caring Agencies, Mr Quirk, stated:

'Much of the accommodation they have provided in the past is inappropriate for present day use because it was often built as special purpose accommodation for large groups of children. But the agencies that control those assets find that they would like the opportunity to remodel and keep the assets alive as a service to children. Government policies often prevent that. So at a time when accommodation, per se, and buildings, are supposedly in short supply, our members find that they have often large quantities of inappropriate accommodation available and it is not used.'<sup>38</sup>

The Committee **RECOMMENDS that Commonwealth funds be made available for youth housing proposals which require the purchase of a dwelling if, and only if, there are no existing dwellings which could be made available to a particular community group within a specified region.** The Committee would prefer to see money being spent on renovating existing dwellings. At the same time, it would not want to exclude a proposal from a region simply because it did not have such dwellings at its disposal. Uppermost in the Committee's mind is to ensure that the Homeless Persons Assistance Program special capital grant can be used to provide accommodation for as many homeless youth as possible. It is envisaged that organisations seeking capital grant assistance from the Commonwealth will have access to funds from various sources (both community and government) to meet the ongoing expenses that inevitably will be incurred by each housing program.

Bearing in mind the need to make full use of existing resources, the Committee has drawn up a broad outline of the way in which funds should be made available for specific youth housing programs. First, it is becoming readily apparent that many of the traditional voluntary agencies are finding it more and more difficult to meet the varied demands for assistance from within the community. This is placing undue pressure on their resources and in many cases some of these resources have had to be withdrawn because of limited funds. While the Committee fully appreciates the desire for each organisation to maintain its own identity and style of welfare delivery, more effective use of resources will be achieved by the establishment of regionally based community management committees. The Committee envisages that legal title to properties owned by individual organisations would remain with the organisation but the management, programming, staffing and funding could come from a wide range of interests within a particular region. This style of community managed project is already in operation in some regions and it enables each organisation to avail itself of a resource which would have been beyond its individual means.

The Committee believes that it is this type of broadly based community structure which will have a greater chance of success in establishing and maintaining viable youth housing projects. The Committee believes that the Minister for Social Security should

request the formation of community based management committees within various regions. These committees should then be asked to put forward proposals for youth housing schemes, stating clearly their aims and objectives. In this way there will be greater utilisation of existing resources and less likelihood of duplication and waste, which can occur when welfare agencies are fiercely competing against one another to secure resources.

Secondly, the Committee believes that preference should be given to housing proposals which go beyond the provision of accommodation only. Preliminary data from the Youth Services Scheme indicates that the type of youth who approaches youth refuges is likely to be under 18 years of age, without family and community support, to have no income (or to be in receipt of unemployment benefits) and be lacking in living and work skills. If this is the target group, then the Committee maintains that any housing proposals that receive Commonwealth Government funding under the \$10 million grant should be of a supportive household type.

In Melbourne, the Brotherhood of St. Laurence submitted a detailed proposal for the establishment of a supportive boarding house scheme. This scheme embraces the following factors:<sup>39</sup>

- long-term accommodation
- the opportunity to develop survival skills through skill transference methods
- the opportunity to participate in the management process
- the opportunity to become part of a group through which personal relationship skills can be developed
- the opportunity to develop local linkages which might provide support after leaving the accommodation
- the opportunity to choose permanent accommodation from a range of options
- the opportunity to be supported in the early stages of living in permanent accommodation.

The Brotherhood of St. Laurence believes that due to a lack of time and security, short-term accommodation and non-residential skills learning programs do not make up for the deficit experienced by many disadvantaged homeless youth during their childhood. It believes that the living and work skills programs will be more effective in a residential environment where there is a continuous daily input. A full outline of their proposal is contained in Appendix 3.

At the Committee's public hearings in Melbourne, Canon Barry Smith, Chairman of the Northcote Accommodation Project for Unemployed Homeless Youth, told the Committee that this project had commenced as a result of funding from the Church of England Diocese of Melbourne (\$50 000), the Brotherhood of St. Laurence (\$20 000) and the Northcote City Council (\$11 000).<sup>40</sup> In addition, the Ministry of Housing in Victoria responded positively to the proposal and purchased, on their behalf, a five bedroom house in Thornbury.<sup>41</sup> The house has a detached flat which will accommodate a residential worker. This housing project has been able to draw on the resources, expertise, skills and enthusiasm of the people within the local community. Canon Smith told the Committee that there are 50 members of the Northcote community that have become involved in the project and monthly meetings are attended regularly by 20 to 25 people.<sup>42</sup> The Committee sees a great deal of merit in the way in which this particular project has evolved, and believes it could become a blue print for further community based schemes specifically designed to assist homeless youth.

Homeless youth programs should not be confined to urban areas. The Committee is aware that there are many properties lying idle in rural areas, including former children's homes, other institutions, boarding schools, etc. While the Committee does not want to isolate homeless youth from mainstream society, these rural establishments

could fulfil a number of services. They could be used for medium-term youth housing and, at the same time, provide a non-threatening and relaxing environment in which occupants could undertake a school to work transition course. This alternative would enable those homeless youth who are not coping satisfactorily with city life to have a period away from it, which may provide the necessary breathing space to enable them to overcome many of their problems.

A youth refuge in Hobart (McIntyre House) has recently acquired a rural property, including a house, which it proposes to use as a medium to long-term supportive household for up to 15 young people. It is proposed that a number of skills associated with farming and market gardening will be taught to the residents to enable them to improve their prospects of securing permanent and satisfying long-term employment. The Committee believes that this scheme meets the Committee's guidelines regarding medium to long-term supportive households, and that it should therefore receive financial assistance to help bring the existing accommodation up to an acceptable standard.

The Committee believes that the actual disbursement of Commonwealth funds could be by way of a non-repayable grant, a concessional low interest loan or a combination of the two. The supplementary financial resources associated with each community proposal should be fully investigated by the Minister before the actual type of financial assistance is determined. Although the \$10 million capital grant must be viewed as a one-off Government initiative, the Committee believes it is necessary that scope for continuous funding is available if it can be demonstrated that these innovative youth housing schemes do meet their stated aims and objectives. This Committee has already made clear its attitude towards the need for on-going evaluation of government assisted programs ('Through a Glass, Darkly', Evaluation in Australian Health and Welfare Services, A.G.P.S., Canberra, 1979). The Committee therefore **RECOMMENDS that further funding from both Commonwealth and state governments be made available under the Housing Assistance Act 1981, only upon it being clearly demonstrated that the medium to long term supportive households are providing a necessary and beneficial service to homeless youth.**

## Conclusion

The long-term housing needs of young people cannot be ignored. They must, however, be considered in the context of the needs of all other disadvantaged groups.

The Committee has outlined a number of recommendations and suggestions which it believes will help alleviate the medium to long-term housing needs of homeless youth. As a first step, the Committee has recommended that part of the general low cost housing shortage could be alleviated by more effective utilisation of existing stocks of Commonwealth and state dwellings. Too many government owned dwellings are lying idle at a time when there is a growing demand for low cost accommodation. The Committee believes that both Commonwealth and state governments need to monitor closely the utilisation of all public housing stocks and adopt a more flexible approach to the leasing and renting of such dwellings.

While the above recommendation is applicable to the general need for low cost housing, the Committee has made a number of specific recommendations covering homeless youth. In particular, the Committee has outlined a proposal which it believes should be used by the Commonwealth Government when it determines how the remainder of the \$10 million under the Homeless Persons Assistance Program special

capital grant is to be allocated. The Committee has recommended that the Minister for Social Security encourages voluntary organisations and other interested groups to form community based project management committees throughout various regions. These committees would be asked to devise housing proposals for homeless youth suited to each particular region. Existing resources, talents, expertise and other financial resources within the region should be employed by the committees to ensure that the allocated Commonwealth funds will, in effect, provide assets many times greater in value than the contribution made. The Committee strongly recommends that this money be made available to renovate, refurbish and modernise existing dwellings that are currently lying idle within a number of regions. While the ownership of these dwellings would remain with the individual organisation, the planning, management and staffing would come under the control of the community based management committee.

The Committee believes that this approach, rather than general advertising for housing proposals, will result in a greater utilisation of resources and less likelihood of duplication of facilities within regions. Preference for Commonwealth funding should be given to those proposals which aim to provide more than basic shelter for their clients. Such proposals would best cater for the target group that has been identified by the Youth Services Scheme data. The Committee also believes that if such schemes can demonstrate that they are able to provide a supportive household environment, then both Commonwealth and state governments should give further consideration to providing additional funds for such schemes under the Housing Assistance Act 1981.

Finally, the Committee is conscious of the need to ensure that homeless youth do not become isolated from the rest of the community. Consequently, the Committee sees a great deal of merit in the introduction of a universal bond insurance scheme and/or a bond and rental assistance scheme. Such schemes would help homeless youth whose only barrier to successful independent living is one of limited financial resources. They would also be of assistance to youth who are ready to move from a supportive household to full independent living.

## Endnotes

1. Transcript of evidence, p. 1808.
2. Transcript of evidence, p. 1809.
3. Transcript of evidence, p. 3198.
4. Transcript of evidence, p. 3198.
5. Transcript of evidence, p. 2388.
6. Transcript of evidence, p. 665.
7. Transcript of evidence, p. 171.
8. Transcript of evidence, p. 1109.
9. Supplementary evidence from NSW Government.
10. Transcript of evidence, p. 1714.
11. Transcript of evidence, p. 1714.
12. Transcript of evidence, p. 1714.
13. Transcript of evidence, pp. 661, 1795.
14. Transcript of evidence, p. 1714.
15. Transcript of evidence, p. 171.
16. Transcript of evidence, p. 171.
17. Transcript of evidence, p. 171.
18. Transcript of evidence, p. 171.
19. Transcript of evidence, p. 171.
20. Transcript of evidence, pp. 171, 3208-9.
21. Supplementary evidence from South Australian Government.
22. Transcript of evidence, p. 3210.
23. Transcript of evidence, p. 172.
24. Transcript of evidence, p. 172.

25. Transcript of evidence, p. 172.
26. Transcript of evidence, p. 173.
27. Transcript of evidence, p. 173.
28. Transcript of evidence, p. 173.
29. Transcript of evidence, p. 173.
30. Transcript of evidence, p. 173.
31. Transcript of evidence, pp. 352-3.
32. Transcript of evidence, p. 341.
33. Transcript of evidence, p. 341.
34. Transcript of evidence, p. 339.
35. Transcript of evidence, p. 60.
36. Prime Minister's Policy Speech, 30 September 1980
37. In New South Wales alone, 21 children's homes have reportedly closed since January 1979 and many of these are apparently still lying idle.
38. Transcript of evidence, p. 1378.
39. Submission by the Brotherhood of St. Laurence.
40. Transcript of evidence, p. 1919.
41. Transcript of evidence, p. 192.
42. Transcript of evidence, p. 1921.