



Father Chris Riley's

Youth Off The Streets®

7 August 2003

Mr Elton Humphrey  
Secretary  
Australian Senate  
Community Affairs  
References Committee  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600



**Patrons**

Sir William Deane AC KBE  
Lady Helen Deane

**Chief Executive Officer**

Father Chris Riley

Dear Mr Humphrey,

Ref: Inquiry into children in institutional care

On behalf of Youth Off The Streets, we wish to commend the Australian Senate Committee for undertaking this important inquiry into children in institutional care and to thank you for inviting us to provide a written submission.

We are pleased to provide the enclosed comments and recommendations which address, in particular, the issues within the Inquiry's terms of reference that relate to:

*"the extent and impact of the long-term social and economic consequences of child abuse and neglect on individuals, families and the adequacy of existing remedies and support mechanisms".*

Youth Off The Streets' Chief Executive Officer, Father Chris Riley and Senior Services Manager, Ms Jayne Power, would also be pleased to private further comment at a public hearing or in writing if required.

You may contact Ms Power directly should you require further information in relation to this submission on (02) 9721 5722, 0408 285 898 or via email at [jaynep@youthoffthestreets.com.au](mailto:jaynep@youthoffthestreets.com.au).

Yours sincerely,

Sylvia DeAngelis  
Development Manager

**NSW SERVICES**

Better Homes Farm  
Canyonleigh

Foundation House  
Canyonleigh

Mark David Farm  
Sutton Forest

McIntosh House  
Merrylands

Don Bosco House  
Marrickville

Lois House  
Marulan

Debra Benson House  
Merulan

Holborow House  
Muswellbrook

Dunlea  
Drug & Alcohol Program  
World Health Organisation Accredited  
Merrylands

Key College  
Sunny Hills

The Chapel School  
Merrylands

Matthew Hogan College  
Canyonleigh

Gordana House  
Mangrove Mountain

Mirvac House  
Sutton Forest

PIF House  
Sutton Forest

Outreach Services  
Food Van

**QLD SERVICES**

Connie's Place  
Greenbank

All Correspondence/Mail to:  
PO Box 8  
Merrylands NSW 2160

Administration Offices  
74 - 98 Kenyons Road  
Merrylands NSW 2160  
Telephone: +61 2 9721 5760  
Facsimile: +61 2 9721 0695

City Office  
C/- Murdoch Magazines  
Pier 8/9, 23 Hickson Road  
Millers Point NSW 2000  
Telephone: +61 2 8220 2489  
Facsimile: +61 2 8220 2416

Father Chris Riley's



**Youth Off The Streets®**

**Submission  
to the Australian Senate Community Affairs  
References Committee**

**Inquiry into Children in Institutional Care**

**6 August 2003**

# **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

---

<b><u>1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</u></b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b><u>2. OVERVIEW Youth Off The Streets</u></b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b><u>3. MAJOR ISSUES AND BARRIERS</u></b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b><u>4. GOOD PRACTICES &amp; EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES</u></b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b><u>5. CASE STUDIES</u></b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b><u>6. CONTACT DETAILS</u></b> .....	<b>17</b>

**APPENDIX - Program Descriptions and Outcomes**

# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

---

We believe existing remedies and support mechanisms for vulnerable youth who have been victims of child abuse and neglect often fall far short of providing real assistance and in some instances, systems failures on the part of government agencies charged with providing these remedies actually compound the abuse.

The lack of adequate permanency planning, poor case management and coordination between the Department of Community Services (DoCS) and the agencies funded to provide services for children commonly result in multiple placement changes throughout a child's care history. This is experienced by children, already damaged by their experiences within their own families, as personal failure and rejection, resulting in self-blame, low self-esteem, high insecurity and feelings of grief and loss, depression, and often anger that boils over in adolescence.

This in turn can manifest in risk taking, substance abuse and addictions, antisocial behaviour, homelessness and criminal activities. The cost to youth trapped in this cycle of systems failures and abuse, their families and Australian society as a whole cannot be underestimated.

There is an urgent need for a total review of the care system and the adequacy of residential care programs funded by the Departments of Community Services and Juvenile Justice. The perception must shift from the notion that children and young people 'fail' in placements, to "Why are placements failing them?"

In the recent NSW Ombudsman's final report on the Inquiry into Individual Funding Arrangements in Out of Home Care (June 2003) one of the recommendations in the report concluded that "DoCS should identify the extent of need and appropriate models and costings for residential care services as part of the out of home care system in NSW. One outcome of this work should be the development of a policy and funding framework to guide the planning and provision of residential care." (5.5.3).

Short term funding contracts for agencies such as ourselves, (limited to 3 months) leave young people who are settling into a program in a constant state of insecurity about their long term prospects.

The youth referred to Youth Off The Streets under the Department of Community Services' Individual Funding Arrangements who are aged 13 and upwards are often so damaged by their experiences of life and the care system, that their lack of trust of all adults makes the task of engaging, educating and helping them to begin to turn their lives around difficult and sometimes almost impossible.

It is our view that the scope of this Senate Inquiry should be expanded to take account of any government or non-government programs established under relevant legislation within the Juvenile Justice system. The difficulties encountered by children and youth placed within the child protection system (often shared clients with Juvenile Justice involvement) are mirrored within the Juvenile Justice system. Community placement and support options, and sentences in detention often do not adequately take account of the young person's history of abuse and the emotional problems driving their criminal behaviour.

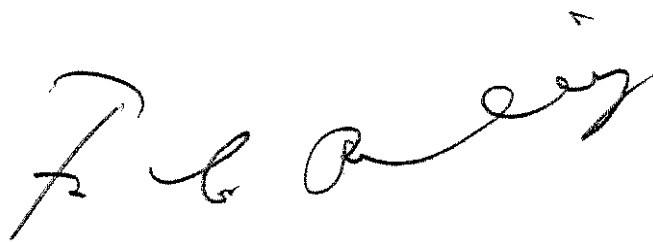
Agencies such as Youth Off The Streets are often used as a last resort especially by DoCS and often from services funded by Juvenile Justice to provide community support programs and bail options, because they are unable to manage the young person's behaviour.

However, despite an estimated number of more than 45,000 young people having used our services since our establishment in 1991, we have yet to receive core funding from the government.

All young people who come into our care are provided with access to education and Youth Off The Streets is one of the only organisations of its kind who make education a part of its core business.

We do this because we know that going to school will provide the children with the stability and continuity they need but also we have seen that children who have suffered terrible abuse are still hungry to learn. For some, our schools are the first safe and stable places they have experienced in their lives.

We also believe that given enough time and the long-term support required these children can still have a chance for a normal happy life.



**Father Chris Riley**  
Founder and Chief Executive Officer



**Jayne Power**  
Senior Services Manager

6 August 2003

## **2. OVERVIEW - Youth Off The Streets**

---

Youth Off The Streets is a non-denominational registered charity which assists young people who are 13-18 years of age to overcome immense traumas such as neglect and physical, psychological and emotional abuse.

From its early beginnings as a single food van, Youth Off The Streets has grown to provide a wide range of services offering a full continuum of care. We estimate that more than 45,000 young people have been through our programs and services. We employ a team of more than 100 staff, have over 700 volunteers and 18,000 supporters.

We provide crisis care for young people still living on the streets with our food van, youth refuge and outreach program as well as running one of Sydney's only residential alcohol and other drugs treatment programs specifically designed for adolescents. Key College, our accredited high school in Surry Hills, provides educational opportunities and support for young people living on the streets. Many of these youth go on to successfully achieve their School Certificate and, in increasing numbers, their Higher School Certificate.

Our farms, located in both the Southern Highlands and the Hunter Valley, provide long term residential rehabilitation opportunities for young people who have made a commitment to living a drug and crime free lifestyle. While they are in our care these young people attend school as well as receiving counselling, life skills and vocational training.

Wherever possible, we support young people to re-connect with their families and communities. When this is impossible, we assist them to live independently.

Our services and programs also include Australia's only residential program for adolescents charged with sexual offences based on the highly effective Positive Peer Culture model.

We are now producing and distributing teaching resources and also run an annual Youth Conference on our highly successful intervention strategies.

Please refer to the attached Appendix for more detailed descriptions of our individual

### **3. MAJOR ISSUES AND BARRIERS**

---

#### **Personal barriers**

These include illiteracy, low socio-economic background, academic failure, substance abuse, physical, social and intellectual disability, social rejection and physical and/or emotional abuse and extremely challenging behaviours which require time, patience and a great deal of resources if we are to help young people recover from abuse. Teachers and youth workers become the most significant adults in their lives and with core funding we could also provide the young people with mentors and have more outreach and family workers to support their recovery both while in our programs as well as when they have exited a service.

#### **Emotional and Social Barriers**

We do not condone defeatist attitudes which say that we must lower our educational expectations and teach only life skills as we have found our young people have had much success in studying the mainstream curriculum when provided with appropriate personal support. With core funding we could offer more specialised counselling and personal development support to assist them in their recovery.

#### **Cultural Barriers**

It is commonly recognised that young people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds are over represented in national statistics on school dropout rates and within the care and criminal justice systems. Both the Redfern Police and Redfern Aboriginal Legal Service have discussed with us the need for placements in our programs for youth who cannot be engaged successfully within existing community support and bail option programs funded by Juvenile Justice. Without exception, these youth have histories of significant abuse, serious criminal behaviour and often substance abuse and family breakdown. They have run the gamut of programs available to Magistrates as alternatives to detention. Some are as young as thirteen and they continue to commit serious crimes. Without immediate and appropriate intervention, many are undoubtedly facing significant time in detention centres. This is an expensive and inappropriate response to youth who continue to commit crimes because the system cannot meet their real needs.

There is an urgent need for Juvenile Justice to fund alternative programs, better suited to meet the needs of these so-called "hard core" youth. With core funding we could offer education, therapy as required, personal development support and vocational training opportunities in residential farm based programs, with family worker support to assist them in their journey of healing and reintegration into mainstream society. Working in partnership with other community agencies, we could also offer community based street outreach, develop mentoring programs, wilderness camps and a host of other such early intervention strategies aimed at empowering young people and their families.

### **Government Funding Barriers**

Getting support from Government funding departments under the current tendering processes is costly and requires resources that would be better spent in the program area. Some Government departments such as the Department of Juvenile Justice refer young people to us but do not provide us with funding for these placements. We do not receive the maximum funding levels available for our schools commensurate with their status as 'special schools' from the Department of Education and Training because we need to provide detailed psychological reports on each child, which we cannot provide because of the lack of administrative resources and because pathologising children is inimical to our organisational philosophy. Also, there is the difficulty of locating student files and records especially when they have moved from school to school in the past or have been living for many years within the out of home care system.

### **Reintegration Barriers**

Mainstream schools actually create or at least inadvertently have in place many barriers for abused children. It is not helpful to place young people back into mainstream schooling when there is no safety net for them in crisis situations and when schools, knowing their history, are quick to expel these kids if there is the slightest problem. Many school counselors have had little success with the young people in our programs and because of the length of time that some of these young people may have spent away from mainstream school they are not adequately supported in their attempt to make a return.



## **4. GOOD PRACTICES & EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES**

The following are only some of the strategies that our organisation has found to be effective in helping children who are recovering from abuse. Please refer to the detailed program descriptions and Outcomes Report in the Appendix.

### **A supportive and stable environment with access to school**

Our residential programs assist them to access school and to become part of a loving and nurturing community. For example, Mathew Hogan High School and our farm accommodation programs have proven to be a success and there are more and more young people on our waiting lists. All young people in our programs demonstrate a willingness to learn and are extremely grateful for the opportunity to resume their formal education.

### **Educational Strategies**

We employ a one-on-one approach, which accounts for each child's ability and builds on their strengths. Each child has an individual learning plan and we organise success-based curriculums so that no student will be set up to fail. We use strategies such as character education, anger management, social skills training, equip programs teaching, moral reasoning and PPC (positive peer culture). These programs improve the student's ability to get on with each other and the teachers in a community environment.

We have initiated a new educational model called Service Learning, a values education program which builds character, empathy and skills by encouraging the young people to be productive in the wider community.

Service Learning involves students providing a service to the community, which directly relates to curriculum taught in the classroom. It develops their self-esteem by involving them in communities where they can make a positive contribution. The young people design and develop community service experiences that meet the needs of the group they visit. This has already been a very successful program as some students from Mathew Hogan raised enough money to travel to East Timor and assist an orphanage there.

## 5. CASE STUDIES

---

Many of the young people write down their personal story as the first stage in their recovery process.

All of the stories that follow have been reproduced with their permission.

## Personal Story

### Child Abuse, not Child Prostitution

'Summer'\* turns 17 this year. Her experiences with prostitution, beginning at the age of 13 on the streets of the Central Coast, have turned her off men and sex and although she hopes to have a normal relationship one day, she can't imagine it. For now, she is heavily medicated with anti-psychotics and anti-depressants and is trying to put her life back together by studying and talking to people. Her life was complicated by family breakdown and related difficulties. Like many in similar circumstances who come to Youth Off The Streets, homelessness is what led to her involvement in prostitution.

According to Summer, "I started real homelessness in Gosford, and Gosford was a tough town in those days. When you live on the streets it takes a week or so before you use drugs and a month or so before you are raped," she said. "It's the same whether you are a girl or a boy. Once you have a drug habit the prostitution seems to follow."

Her first acts of prostitution were sexual favours traded to drug dealers in return for heroin or speed. "You don't think of it as prostitution when it happens like that," she said.

When the need for money became greater, at the age of 13 ("I looked a fair bit older.") she started tentatively working the streets.

"The older streetwalkers don't want you on their turf and they hunt you away. If you are young you will take their business. There are a lot of lessons you have to learn."

"Like with customers: you have to ask to see the money before you get in the car. You have to lay down the law. You have to say where you are going to go and you have to stop them making any phone calls once you are on the way."

"The first time I got in a car it was a guy in a blue Ford. I just assumed he would pay but after we did it he kicked me out of the car and called me a slut. There was nothing I could do."

"Once after I did it with a man I went to a refuge and scrubbed myself raw. I felt so dirty and disgusting. I know girls and boys too who have suicided after doing it once or twice. It's a bad feeling."

"I swore that I wouldn't do it again but the money is so easy. I used to switch off and pretend it was happening to someone one else. By then I was using heroin six times a day and I needed the money."

"I know one boy who used to sell his body at The Wall. One weekend he went to visit his mum and she showed him a photo of his father. He recognised the guy. It was one of his regular customers at The Wall. He was too far gone to care."

After she left Gosford Summer fell inexorably into Kings Cross where she said many brothels welcomed under-aged girls.

"Some of them asked for ID but a lot just ask your age and don't care. They want young girls because the customers want young girls. The older girls pick on you but the owners shut them up."

"The youngest girl I saw in a brothel was 11. It broke my heart to see her. She never frowned and never smiled. Her face was empty as if there was no one inside."

"My sister was working in a brothel when the police came. They arrested her for underage prostitution but they didn't do anything to the brothel. It's still operating and it's still got underage girls in it. The brothels usually put the young girls in a separate part of the building with its own exit in case somebody comes to check."

"Once in a brothel this guy came in. He was good looking but I found out why he didn't have a girlfriend. He started hitting me and asking me to strangle him. I didn't like it but he was a regular customer and you must do what the regulars want."

Summer said a young prostitute could earn as much as \$1000 a night. "I was sleeping in the park during the day, working nights in a brothel."

We need to see a change in language when talking about 'child prostitution', for it is not 'prostitution' but 'child abuse'. If we keep labels such as 'child prostitution' alive then we can all too easily 'blame' the children for what is happening rather than recognising the adults as abusers.

## Personal Story

### Written by a young woman when she entered Youth Off The Streets' Dunlea Drug and Alcohol Program

When I was born my mum and dad were married for five years until they were separated in 1988. A year later mum and us kids moved when I was six years old.

My mother had chronic back pain due to a car crash mum and dad had when they first got married. She saw this stupid doctor who put her on a drug, which should only be given to cancer patients. She got addicted to it and was on it for about three and a half years before she went to rehab in 1993. But between 1989 to 1993 she used to go into hospital a lot, which meant me and my sister and brother had to go into foster care and they separated us from seeing each other. I found out my sister was molested by some father of a so-called stable family. My sister was only ten years old. Meanwhile I was with another family who used to take pleasure in taking turns at physically beating the s\*\*\* out of me. I stayed there for a month before I could go back home.

In 1990 mum got sick again so we went back into care for two months, that's when I was first molested by a woman. On top of that I was going to school and getting rammed into walls by a teacher for mucking up in class. When I finally got back home with mum I tried to hang myself but my sister walked in and called triple zero. Mum took me to counselling in 1994. The doctor diagnosed me with ADD and severe depression. He prescribed me with anti-depressants. I saw him for two years.

When I was twelve I started using pot with my sister and her friends. Then I started hanging out with the wrong crowd. I started drinking heavily when I was fourteen with all my mates. One night me and a friend broke into eighteen houses together. We got busted by the police, we went to court and got twelve months good behaviour bond and court fines. I didn't get busted again until me and two friends broke into a bottle shop in 1999. I nearly got put away but I did a pre-employment programme that ran for three weeks for people that had the same problem with the law.

I finished the programme, got my certificate, went to court and got twelve months good behaviour and an eight hundred dollar fine. Then I moved into dad's house and started working in a club/restaurant washing dishes. I quit that after four months and then worked in a pie factory for two months. After about eleven months I started hanging round with the wrong crowd (drug users). I had my first line of speed in early 2000 just after my seventeenth birthday. I eventually turned into a bludger on the dole with no ambitions for the future. On most weekends me and a few mates would get on ecstasy to make us feel better. Eventually dad kicked me out leaving me no option but to go back to T-- and live with mum and her new boyfriend.

I kept using for about seven months until I decided to come to Dunlea to get clean and to go to the farm for long term rehabilitation.

## Personal Story

### **A Personal Statement written by a former student of Matthew Hogan High School and resident of Lois House**

My life before I came to Youth Off The Streets was very quickly taking me one way - death. I almost hit rock bottom before I realised that the life of a heroin addict was no longer the life that I wanted to lead. I am so very grateful that at the time I made this decision I had the support of Youth Off The Streets. I believe that Youth Off The Streets offered the best available service to equip me with the tools I needed to rebuild my life.

I came to Youth Off The Streets at the age of 16. At this time, I was in a very bad way. I was heavily addicted to heroin, was in a co-dependent and abusive relationship and was living on and off the streets of the Kings Cross area. I had come to the end of the line; Youth Off The Streets was my last hope.

As soon as I arrived at Lois House a friendly and caring staff greeted me. I was assigned a caseworker that I could talk to any time I needed help. Every day I attended alcohol and other drug groups and PPC groups (positive peer culture). These groups were based upon the issues that the other girls in the program and I were facing, These groups helped me to deal with my drug, crime, low self esteem, and anger management issues. There was also a family worker who helped me to retie the broken bonds between my family and me. I went to school every day and achieved my year 10 certificate and my HSC. I broke away from drugs and my abusive drug -using boy friend and most of all I began to believe in myself and love myself. Father Riley and his youth workers helped me to realise that I was worth so much more than a life of drugs, abuse and crime.

I have been clean for two and a half years. I have a steady job and will be starting university soon. There's no looking back now – Life's too good and I have too much to achieve!!!

## Personal Story

### Written by a graduate of Key College, Youth Off The Streets accredited high school located in Sydney

Before I was introduced to Youth Off The Streets I was a heroin addict. I also liked to have other drugs on the side but heroin was what I craved for the most.

At the beginning of March 2001 I moved into a Youth Off The Streets crisis refuge in Marrickville, Don Bosco House. At this time I was one month clean off heroin but still smoking pot like it was going out of fashion.

My caseworker at Don Bosco asked me what my aim in life was and I said to complete Year Ten. I guess that was the easiest option I could think of at the time. I'd done two years at mainstream school but I left just before exams or just before the end of the year. At this time me and my friends thought going and having cones was better then doing our year ten. So my caseworker introduced me to Key College, another Youth Off The Streets service, a high school.

I could sense this school was going to be different. The reason I knew this was because I knew I could talk to the teacher about anything. She knew and understood all my problems and worries. I didn't have to hide the fact that I smoked cigarettes; it just seemed to good to be true. I settled in really well and my goal was to pass the Year Ten exams. I was doing what I was told and it didn't take me very long to pick up on the work.

A month later I moved into an independent living refuge in Burwood but that didn't work out. So there I was going to school everyday but having nowhere to go home to, except my sister's car or a friend's house. So I felt as though I was back at square one, but Key College kept me believing that everything would be okay I continued to stay everywhere for a while until I couldn't handle it anymore. So I rang up the last place I could think of that would help me, Don Bosco House. I spoke to a Youth Off The Streets worker, who I got along with very well; I could talk to him about anything. He told me not to worry; he'd fix everything up. I took his word for it and a couple of days later I was moving back into Don Bosco House. I was put on very strict conditions; I didn't want to go back to the streets so I obeyed by the rules.

Weeks passed and I knew I was ready to look for my own rented house. I had saved \$400 and was doing really well for myself. I looked everywhere but I didn't find anything available to a seventeen-year-old student. My time at Don Bosco House was almost up and I was thinking I would of had to move into another crisis refuge. The only thing that kept me motivated was school. By this stage I had been attending Key College for five months. It was just great going to school everyday and to be doing the right thing. I'd achieved more then I thought was possible. I'd started to complete the Duke of Edinburgh Award and I completed work experience at Murdoch Magazines. I had also completed a course called, *Interviewing Your Future with Lend Lease*, which was a course teaching me that I was a success and I could do anything I wanted to, if I put my mind to it.

So while I was busy succeeding at school I still had my accommodation crisis happening back home at Don Bosco House. I finally decided to look for share

to school but it was my only option left. So I looked in the Campbelltown area near my sister, I found a nice unit in Campbelltown. It was very nice, but I would of had to live with an older man, which I wasn't too keen on doing but it was the only application I got a reply to so I accepted and was going to move in on the weekend. But then my sister and her boyfriend organised for me to move back in with them. By this stage I felt sad to leave Don Bosco House, it had become my home, the workers were my friends. I knew I had to do what was right for my future; I couldn't live in a crisis refuge forever.

At this stage I had permanent accommodation and an almost completed Year 10 certificate, plus several courses completed. I was so amazed with myself.

By the end of the year I was nine months clean off heroin, I achieved 72% in my year 10 Maths exam and 64% in my year 10 English exam. I had completed different courses and gained my Duke of Edinburgh Award. I had also gained more confidence in myself. I now believed I could be who I wanted to be and that I could do anything if I put my mind to it. As well as completing all that, to make my year the most achievement filled and wonderful year ever I was offered a part time job as an Administration Assistant. A few weeks of part time and I was offered a full time position and have commenced a part time computer course at TAFE.

So I went through a lot last year. On top of what happened the years before that, but it's all in the past now, I'm a different person. Drugs are out of the question and all I want to do is teach kids how bad drugs really are before they have to find out like I did. I want to tell them that there is no such thing as one cone or just one shot, because that's what I thought until I got addicted.

Thanks to Key College, Don Bosco House and myself, I achieved my major goal. I successfully completed Year 10 and many more achievements followed that. Being addicted to heroin was probably the most unintelligent thing I've ever done. Without the opportunities offered by Key College I believe I wouldn't have achieved such good marks in my exams at mainstream school for year 10 and I wouldn't of completed any of the extra courses.

So the way I see it is, being a heroin addict was an experience in my life, and having come through it with the help of Youth Off The Streets, I now understand more about how precious life really is. It helped me to achieve even more than I would of because I had the will power to say I don't want drugs as a part of my life and I was willing to let people help me.



## Personal Story

### Written by a young man when he entered Youth Off The Streets' Dunlea Drug and Alcohol Program

Well, how do you start to explain your life when you don't even wish to be involved in it yourself? It seems that through all the hardships in my life I have managed to keep a smile on my face no matter how hard or depressing.

All my problems started at birth, born addicted to heroin to a mother who tried so hard to keep me from becoming her worst fear, an image of herself. I went through withdrawal, had fits and even had an operation as my bowels were twisted, all this in my first year. I grew to resent my mother for this, even to hate her to some extent. At four the abuse started with having my arm broken by my step-father, at six it grew to sexual abuse as well as physical and mental. Because of this I hated myself for many years believing I was worth nothing more than to be a man's sexual tool. It has taken me years to accept that I was not to blame and had done nothing to seduce or provoke my step-father.

At the tender age of eight I started smoking pot and ciggies. At eleven I was snorting speed, cocaine and smoking gear. Bt thirteen I was a junkie, trapped in a vicious circle. I did not know where to turn. Now at fourteen I have spent time in Yasmar Detention Centre, shot up, stripped and even considered prostitution to support my cocaine habit. I have made this a short version as I do not wish to go into detail as it is quite painful to remember.

I am starting afresh, forgetting my past and moving on with my life. A junkie's life is no life for anyone.



## New pastures for boy system failed

ASK 13-year-old Andrew why he has lived in five youth refuges and two foster homes in two years, and he immediately takes the blame.

"It's because I run amok," he says. "Sometimes I can't control myself."

But Andrew's supervisors at the farm where he now lives — set up in 1990 to educate and house "chronically homeless" children — will tell you it's because his parents kicked him out of home when he was just 10 — then the system failed him.

Andrew (not his real name) is a classic refugee from a dysfunctional family who until now would have slipped through society's safety net. His first foster care placement lasted only three weeks. Most of that time he was left to amuse himself in front of the family's Nintendo.

According to Andrew, the second home was much better. "I was allowed to ride motorbikes and drive a car," he says. "I wanted it to last, I liked it so much."

But that broke down as well. He stayed with his uncle until that got too much. It was then that Department of Community Services staff told him, "No one wants to take you" — and so began a series of stays at five emergency youth refuges.

Finally he ran out of options and DOCS brought him to the farm. For 18 months, he has been living and attending school at Better Homes, a rural facility for severely at-risk youth in NSW, run by Youth Off The Streets.

Riley says the foster care system is in trouble. "The foster care system is under-resourced because it's only volunteer based. It's not set up for the really trying kids that come through the system," he says.

"There is a lack of training for kids who



**Difficult:** Foster care failed Andrew, who has made a fresh start

Picture: Andy Baker

are often so dangerous that normal families can't take care of them."

Often DOCS is painted as the baddie in the social welfare equation. But Riley is adamant that its staff rate among Australia's most courageous care workers.

"They go into a house and take kids when they are in really dangerous circumstances," he says, admitting he has received death threats from disgruntled, often drug-addicted, parents.

"I blame it on the Government. They don't put money into welfare. They put it

anywhere else but welfare." He says the problems in the foster care system were sown the minute institutions were closed down.

The manager of Mark Davies Lodge, where Andrew lives, Stewart Willey, says foster carers didn't stand a chance with a child such as Andrew.

"Foster carers don't have the networks in the community. But a place like this has the staff, the counsellors, the infrastructure to help someone like him."

Vanessa Walker

## 6. CONTACT DETAILS

---

Father Chris Riley  
Chief Executive Officer  
Youth Off The Streets  
PO Box 8  
MERRYLANDS NSW 2160  
Phone No: (02) 9721 5700  
Fax No: (02) 8721 0695  
Email: fr.riley@youthoffthestreets.com.au

Ms Jayne Power  
Senior Services Manager  
Youth Off The Streets  
PO Box 8  
MERRYLANDS NSW 2160  
Phone No: (02) 9721 5722  
Fax No: (02) 8721 0695  
Email: jaynep@youthoffthestreets.com.au

Ms Sylvia DeAngelis  
Development Manager  
Youth Off The Streets City Office  
PO Box 6025  
ALEXANDRIA NSW 2015  
Phone No: (02) 8332 5009  
Fax No: (02) 8332 5050  
Email: sylviad@youthoffthestreets.com.au

Website: [www.youthoffthestreets.com.au](http://www.youthoffthestreets.com.au)

# APPENDIX

## Youth Off The Streets Program Outcomes and Descriptions



Father Chris Riley's  
Youth Off The Streets®

Youth Off The Streets is a registered charity working with chronically homeless and drug addicted young people. We support these youth as they work to turn their lives around and overcome immense traumas such as neglect and physical, psychological and emotional abuse.

Since we opened in 1991, Youth Off The Streets has grown to provide a wide range of services offering a full continuum of care.

We provide crisis care for young people still living on the streets with our food van, youth refuge and outreach program as well as running Sydney's only non-medicated detox centre specifically designed for adolescents. Key College, our accredited high school in Surry Hills, provides educational opportunities and support for young people living on the streets. Many of these youth go on to successfully achieve their School Certificate and, in increasing numbers, their Higher School Certificate.

Our farms, located in both the Southern Highlands and the Hunter Valley, provide long term residential rehabilitation opportunities for young people who have made a commitment to living a drug and crime free lifestyle. While they are in our care these young people attend school as well as receiving counselling, life skills and vocational training.

Once they feel ready to leave the farm we offer a semi-independent living and mentoring program, we assist them to engage in further study or to find employment, and we support both the employer and our youth through their first year of working together.

A decade of experience has taught us that education is the most effective way to break the cycles of abuse that can trap young people. Our new National Schools Program now delivers innovative drug prevention and early intervention programs to schools Australia-wide.

We are very honoured to have as our patrons, the former Governor General of Australia, Sir William Deane and Lady Helen Deane.

Youth Off The Streets is a registered charity and as such, operates as a non-profit organisation. Our ABN number is 29 100 388 412.

**For more information, please contact Tracey Clarke on (02) 8220 2489**

Email: [info@youthoffthestreets.com.au](mailto:info@youthoffthestreets.com.au)

Youth Off The Streets  
PO Box 8, MERRYLANDS NSW 2160

**[www.youthoffthestreets.com.au](http://www.youthoffthestreets.com.au)**