be supported. Vagrancy, squatting, breakins and petty stealing may also be direct effects of homelessness. Should a criminal charge result from any of these activities, the young person may be affected for the rest of his or her life.

Needs of homeless youth

The basic need of many homeless youth is a 'home', supplying all the emotional and physical supports, as well as accommodation, that that word implies. However, needs do differ according to the individual. Homeless youth were outlined to the Committee as coming under several groups:

- Those who are capable of independence but hampered in their efforts to gain accommodation by other factors, such as high rents, lack of housing, discrimination by landlords;
- those who are facing a short-term personal crisis but with short-term accommodation and assistance would be able either to return to their support networks or become independent;
- those who require consistent professional aid as well as accommodation due to long-standing (often familial) problems;[52]
- those who are socially maladjusted, or have moderate to severe emotional/psychiatric problems or are physically/intellectually handicapped. These are particularly vulnerable young people who are at risk of ending up in prisons or psychiatric institutions;[53]
- those who are emerging from institutions and because of their lack of preparation for life require on-going support as well as accommodation;
- those who have been continually rejected by society, have little chance of becoming employed and are extremely vulnerable. Consequently, they too are more than likely to end up in prisons or psychiatric institutions.[54]

Sheryl Carmody found in her study of homeless youth in Perth that human needs of a physiological nature (such as good nutrition), safety, love, self-esteem, affection and belongingness were either absent, inadequate or being threatened in the lives of the youths she surveyed.[55]

The Department of Social Security's report (unpublished) on the Youth Services Scheme saw the needs of the youth to be as follows:

- firstly, and overwhelmingly, for immediate accommodation and assistance to effect a stable living situation, either at 'home' or independently;
- frequently for a breathing space from home and for assistance to arrange independent housing;
- frequently for personal counselling of emotional problems and family relationships;
- consistently for advice and assistance on 'basic living skills', housing, employment, and income security entitlements; and
- often for an adequate income to obtain and maintain independent housing, and facilitate access to that housing.[56]

The needs of homeless youth undoubtedly differ with time. For example, immediate needs would include such necessities as food and shelter, and perhaps a sense of security and someone to talk to. Short-term needs may involve assistance such as financial, medical and legal aid, and some form of counselling. Long-term needs may also include counselling, but particularly will involve a secure and adequate income (hopefully through employment) and suitable long-term living arrangements.

As stated above, the needs of homeless youth will differ with the individual from merely assistance to find appropriate accommodation, to long-term counselling and support services as well as closely supervised long-term living arrangements. A variety of services are therefore required to meet these differing needs. These are discussed in later chapters.

Identified areas of concern

Unemployment

Perhaps one of the most disorienting effects of unemployment has been the hindering of what only a few years ago was a natural progression from school to the workforce and financial independence. With financial independence, residential independence was available to most of those who desired it.

An unemployed family member places enormous stresses on family resources and emotions, but it is particularly traumatic for the unemployed person. For the *young* unemployed person it restricts planning for the future and may affect his or her entire life.

The Committee believes that society is becoming more conscious of the problem of youth unemployment but too often the problem is denied and the young unemployed are viewed as nothing more than 'dole bludgers'. Indeed, parents themselves may be unable to understand chronic unemployment and place the blame on the individual. This creates friction within the family.

It does appear, however, that some youth have become very selective when choosing work. The Committee was told by young people on several occasions that they had resigned from a position after working for only two or three hours because it did not live up to their expectations. This type of attitude no doubt colours the employers' views of young people's willingness to accept employment.

Chronic unemployment means multiple rejection to job seeking youth resulting in a loss of self-esteem and confidence. This, in turn, makes it still more difficult for the young person to enter or re-enter the workforce. As time passes there arises the real danger that the youth will become 'unemployable'.

Average periods of unemployment have grown extensively over the last 10 years (see Chapter 6). As well, the younger the person seeking employment the higher the likelihood of unemployment. The unemployment rate for 15 to 19 year olds seeking full-time employment in April 1982 was 16.8 per cent, well over twice the national average for the population as a whole (6.3 per cent).[57] Adolescents are often employed at times of prosperity but, unfortunately, are often the first to be laid off during economic slumps.

There is a need for society to become more aware of chronic unemployment and its effects on youth, and to take a more tolerant and understanding attitude toward their plight.

Education and the school system

Undoubtedly to-day it is the school which is one of the major points of contact with the young. Consequently, the Committee believes that the school has an important role to play in identifying children in unsatisfactory home situations who require some form of assistance. The Committee recognises the argument that the school is an educative institution, not a substitute family, and should not be called upon to act as such. On the

other hand, the Committee also recognises that a child attends school during his crucial years of development and the school system cannot help but play a part in this.

Dr John Morris (physician and counsellor) and Mrs Mollie Campbell-Smith (teacher and counsellor) also believe that it is largely through schools that unsatisfactory home situations can be recognised. Indeed, they believe that the school may provide the only opportunity for children from difficult backgrounds to receive special care and support. In evidence to the Committee, they pointed to a need for trainee teachers to be helped in their own process of maturation and in developing an understanding of the emotional difficulties of children. They feel that teachers need to be more aware of the role they can play and when more qualified help is necessary.[58]

The Wesley Central Mission sees a need to pay greater attention to personal development within high school education. The Mission believes that most teachers currently involved in personal development courses, such as they exist, are not conveying all that they should.

Dr R. F. Morland (Ph.D., M.Ed., D.P.E., Dip.Soc.Sc.), in evidence to the Committee, questioned the effectiveness of our primary and secondary schools:

> 'It is not appreciated that, for our children, our primary school teachers are the most important social change agents in the community after the parents. Yet they have a low social status, their training second class, and they are recruited from frustrated university students.'[59]

The Committee believes that Dr Morland is rather harsh in his assessment of teachers, but agrees that whilst their training may equip them adequately academically, it falls far short of preparing them for their function at a more individual and personal level. Dr Morland believes that preparation for primary school teachers needs to be reconsidered because of the changing social structure of society. He says the same, to a lesser extent, can be said of secondary teachers' training. These social changes are subtle and difficult to understand. However, teachers need to understand their influences, their effect on the developing personality and how to counter them.[60]

The Committee believes, however, that not only do we need to consider a revision of teacher training, but also the school curriculum needs to be refurbished. It would appear that only a small number of our youngsters are being served effectively by the current education system. Too many are being written off as under-achievers because they are unable to benefit from standard courses. Indeed, the Committee received much evidence suggesting that the current education system tends to demotivate students from further study. This may, to a large extent, explain why so many students leave school as soon as they are legally able to do so, or prior to entering years 11 and 12. Our approach to instructing young people must be flexible if we are to tap their potential.

A constant complaint made of the present system is that it is primarily geared to the minority of students seeking tertiary qualifications, that those young people who leave to enter the workforce possess few work and living skills. As stated above, increased technology has resulted in less unskilled jobs on the labour market and, consequently, young people leaving school in either year 10 or 12 are increasingly subject to unemployment. The Wesley Central Mission pointed out a need for school programs on surviving in Australia in the 1980s, considering such matters as coping with threatened long term unemployment.

Social work education is also seen by Dr Morland to be lacking. Currently, too much emphasis is given to the causative factors of a problem situation, at the risk of losing sight of the individual. Dr Morland believes that many graduates of social work today are not trained in how to go about helping the individual and that this is a major stumbling block. He sees a need to review the training of both primary and secondary

teachers and students of social work, because he maintains that the two most important 'change agents' dealing with potential homeless youth are inadequately trained.[61]

The Committee realises that teachers are presently taxed sufficiently with their academic demands without the added burden of a social welfare role. However, the Committee believes that the function of teachers would be largely to recognise the child with a problem and refer that child to social welfare workers who would be attached to each primary or secondary school district. Nonetheless, schools would need to recognise the added role of the teacher by employing more resources. It would be important that the welfare workers maintain close contact and communication with their schools and attain familiarity, trust and respect from both staff and students. The welfare workers would also need to work closely with the family and the community. Dr Morland suggests that a family specialist should intervene where it was found that a family situation required adjustment.[62]

Conclusion

The education system has the potential to be a great support to children with difficult backgrounds through identifying those children and arranging for appropriate assistance to be made available to them. Individual teachers, to whom students (particularly primary school students) often relate, should also be capable of making an input into the lives of their 'problem' students. This will require additional training to that already offered by teacher training courses and extra resources within the school to enable the teacher to devote the necessary time to his added function.

The Committee is aware that the school is being turned to more and more as a means of dealing with issues that might justifiably be considered responsibilities of parents. Sex and drug education are examples. However, apart from family members it is teachers who spend the most time with the majority of children. Should an early intervention program be introduced the school is undoubtedly in the best position to institute it.

The school curriculum would appear to be unsatisfactory for many of our young people. Because the school plays such a significant part in young people's lives, it is important that it broadens its approach to cater for *all* students. It should enable those not academically inclined to acquire other skills which are more suited to their capabilities, and which will benefit them in the workforce.

Institutional background

No overall statistics are available on the number of homeless youth who have institutional backgrounds, but the Committee is particularly concerned that seemingly significant numbers of the young people at refuges have at some stage spent time under institutional care. The Committee was told that a large number of the chronically homeless come from this type of background. It was also told that a major factor contributing to homelessness in these cases is that being institutionalised dislocates the young person from their family and place of origin and alienates them from society. These youth generally suffer from inadequate educational and social skills.[63]

There is now a movement away from large institutions. Instead, alternatives such as family placements and cottage care are being turned to. The Committee is anxious to see that, in the light of past experience, the alternatives sought to conventional institutional care receive deep consideration to ensure that the mistakes made in the past are not repeated in the future, and that the alternatives do not create a new set of problems.

The Committee views the subject of children and youth under institutional care as one requiring considerable attention. Consequently it has undertaken to examine this matter in its next inquiry.

Aboriginals

In evidence to the Committee, the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs made the following statement:

> 'Aboriginal extended families, through kinship systems and networks of friends, do much to assist young people who are away from their nuclear families. For this reason, the extent of homelessness among young Aboriginal people is not as great as it could be. Families who assist youth in such circumstances are usually already faced with serious difficulties such as over-crowding, poor living conditions and low income; their problems are increased when they shelter unattached youth.'[64]

The Committee feels that it is important to recognise that homelessness amongst Aboriginal youth does vary from homelessness amongst the rest of the population. Kin networks are such amongst the Aboriginal people that a young Aboriginal person can almost always find somewhere where he or she will be accepted.[65] Also, homeless Aboriginal people are not isolates. A homeless Aboriginal youth would be able to attach himself to a homeless Aboriginal group and avoid the usual places frequented by homeless youth such as shelters and soup kitchens.[66] Further, it is widely accepted that homeless Aboriginal youth are generally loathe to approach non-Aboriginal services for assistance.

Aboriginal youth homelessness is camouflaged in two main ways:

- as mentioned above, through the support given by relatives
- through inappropriate residential and institutional care, prolonged due to a lack of suitable alternatives.[67]

Welfare intervention has been described to the Committee as one of the most disruptive elements in Aboriginal family life:

> 'The problem of homeless Aboriginal youth must be seen against a background of family disruption, wardship, foster care and residential care.'[68]

Indeed, statistical evidence shows that a disproportionate number of Aboriginal children are in some form of care. For example, although the Aboriginal population in Western Australia is only two per cent of that State's total population, just under 50 per cent of children in foster care and residential child care establishments (primarily in care for welfare, not educational reasons) at 30 June 1980 were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders (1599 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders, 1632 other).[69] Also, in New South Wales during 1980-81, over 16 per cent of Aboriginal children were in substitute care, though Aboriginal people comprise less than one per cent of the total New South Wales population.[70]

The Committee was told that during 1981 Aboriginal children were over 12 times more likely than white children to be taken from their families and put into substitute care. The majority of these youngsters are placed in white run institutions or with white families and not with their own people. This has destructive effects on the child's identity and on the Aboriginal community.

The lack of Aboriginal alternatives to white facilities is particularly noticeable with regard to Aboriginal children, who are being committed to corrective institutions because there are no Aboriginal alternatives for the courts to consider.

> 'Aboriginal workers are placed in the impossible situation of trying to find accommodation for children where no options exist. As a consequence, Aboriginal children are more readily committed.'[71]

Many of these children, particularly at adolescence, reject the white care they have grown up with and often run away to live with Aboriginal families. They may not, however, fit readily into the Aboriginal extended family network available to other children. Some of these children are unable to trace their families and others, because of identity problems, may not try.[72]

> 'It may be conjectured that the process of care, particularly wardship, has a momentum of its own that carries a child through a series of placements and through a series of officers, so that family and kin ties are weakened, personal identity is confused, and self esteem is low, to the point where anti-social behaviour makes correctional care necessary.'[73]

The Committee was told that the young people who tend to be reported as homeless are those with backgrounds of disrupted family life, of non-Aboriginal substitute care and of institutionalisation.

Needs of Aboriginal Youth

According to the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs, there is little available accommodation specifically for homeless Aboriginal youth. At the same time, the Department acknowledges that for various reasons, Aboriginal youth are often reluctant to approach non-Aboriginal hostels and refuges.[74] Other evidence received by the Committee supports this statement. The Committee was told that youth with welfare backgrounds or from country areas without relatives they can turn to in the city are particularly unlikely to approach non-Aboriginal services, through preference and due to a distrust of white facilities.[75] Aboriginal Hostels Ltd. run 103 hostels and many of these do accommodate homeless people when vacancies occur. The hostels, however, are not in general intended to cater for homeless people. The Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs told the Committee that it is not possible to determine the extent to which Aboriginal Hostels Ltd. cater for homeless Aboriginal youth.[76]

One point that the evidence received by the Committee stressed was the need for special accommodation for Aboriginals, supervised largely by Aboriginal workers. This would meet the problem of the present lack of suitable accommodation after discharge from correctional institutions or other forms of welfare intervention, or after the breakdown of 'family' due mainly to overcrowding. Often, when children released from care return to their family or kin, they return to a very unsatisfactory family situation. This in turn may lead to further contact with the law and a history of imprisonment and court appearances.[77]

The Committee was told by the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs that there is a shortage of housing for Aboriginals generally. Some forms of alternative accommodation have been developed, such as Aboriginal Hostels Ltd., but these are not equipped to handle homeless and problem children.[78]

Evidence received from the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Co-operative Limited stated that most of its youth clients require non-structured but supportive private accommodation for periods varying between one week and several months to enable them to

(a) re-group their personal resources and future direction after a court hearing, family or social disruption, or personal loss and disorientation;

(b) settle into an environment after institutional experience with minimum outside intervention and pressure (whether that be from family, kin or peer group) whilst experimenting with employment, further educational training or basically learning to take care of oneself.[79]

Many of the young people seeking assistance from the Legal Service only require the initial support and opportunity to enable them to start out. The Legal Service believes

that a community based short term accommodation program for young single adults would facilitate their transition to adulthood and self-management.[80]

The Committee believes that the needs of homeless Aboriginal youth do not differ from those of white homeless youth. Indeed, the needs of Aboriginal youth as set out in the Legal Service's submission apply to almost all homeless youth regardless of race:

(i) the opportunity to experience, understand and manage the responsibilities of living in private accommodation;

(ii) the necessary time in which to learn to cope with independent living and gain the necessary survival skills;

(iii) the support and advice from counsellors which are their own people able to establish realistic and relevant goals with our young adults and assist them in achieving these goals;

(iv) a secure base from which to gain and maintain employment.[81]

Rather, what must be recognised and accommodated is the varying cultural background and life experiences of the young people concerned.

Where alternative accommodation for Aboriginal youth is considered desirable, it should be largely under the direction and supervision of Aboriginal people. This is recognised by the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs, which pointed out to the Committee that support services which could be of value to Aboriginal youth include crisis, information and recreation centres and 'would require significant Aboriginal input and involvement to be effective'.[82] In its Report on the Youth Services Scheme, the Department of Social Security stated that the higher proportion of Aboriginal youths using the Scheme's services than represented in the general Aboriginal population suggests a problem of homelessness among Aboriginal youth. This is particularly so, the Report states, because it is known that Aboriginals prefer to seek assistance from their own communities. The Report points out that its data suggests a need for the provision of resources to Aboriginal communities to develop services for homeless Aboriginals.[83]

Preventive measures to minimise the number of homeless youth of any race in our society are viewed by the Committee as fundamental to dealing with the problem of homelessness. It was put to the Committee that a long-term preventive measure where Aboriginal homeless youth are concerned is to drastically reduce the rate at which Aboriginal children are removed from their homes by more intensive help at the time of crisis.[84] There needs also to be a vast improvement in Aboriginal housing, employment and family support services.

Where removal from the family becomes necessary, however, it would seem that because of poor success rates in fostering or institutional care, preference should be given to cottage care, which appears to have a number of advantages over the other systems. The Committee was told that parents see cottage care, particularly from religious organisations, as a safe place for their children while they are temporarily away from home. It enables close contact with family, allows the children of one family to remain together and does not create the degree of competition between natural parents and cottage parents that occurs with foster care.[85] Wardship, on the other hand, often isolates children both physically and psychologically from their family. Fostering often breaks down and leads to multiple fostering placements and multiple rejections, with adverse psychological effects on the children. The Committee was told that cottage care should be under non-government control and cottage parents should be Aboriginal.

Conclusion

It would seem that the problem of homeless Aboriginal youth is largely hidden through supportive family networks and the reluctance of Aboriginal youth to approach non-Aboriginal services. Consequently, the relatively high number of Aboriginal youth appearing in available statistics is of grave concern to the Committee as the figures are largely derived from the type of services Aboriginal youth are not, in the main, approaching. There appears to be a real need for alternative accommodation for homeless Aboriginal youth directed by Aboriginals. The Committee urges the Government to give immediate attention to this issue, particularly in relation to the Committee's recommendations concerning crisis accommodation and medium to long term supportive household programs (see Chapters 4 and 5).

The Committee also urges the relevant governments to reconsider their policies with regard to Aboriginals and welfare intervention. The current approach seems to have led to many Aboriginal youth becoming disoriented as well as homeless. Again, services catering solely for Aboriginals and directed by Aboriginals, such as cottage care, appear to be necessary.

Indo-Chinese refugees

The Committee is limited in the remarks it is able to make on Indo-Chinese refugee youth as it received evidence on the matter from one organisation only—the Ethnic Communities Council of New South Wales. The Committee's information is confined in the main to the Sydney region and hence its comments are largely based on the situation in that area. To what extent these comments apply to other areas the Committee is unable to say. It would seem, however, that the experience (as outlined below) of that region would not differ significantly from other areas —particularly major cities.

The Committee did not hear of any youth with close family ties in Australia becoming homeless and it would seem that this is due to the strong family relationships which typify the Indo-Chinese people. Those young people who do require residential care tend to stem from two groups —unattached, and detached, refugee youth. Unattached refugee youth are those who arrive in Australia without relatives.[86] Detached refugee youth are those who have entered the country either with relatives, or with families they have attached themselves to in the refugee camps and to whom, for purposes of resettlement, they claim to be a part of.[87] Should either of these arrangements break down, the youth may become homeless.

The Committee was surprised to hear of arrangements between a youth and his relatives causing difficulties because of the close nature of Indo-Chinese families. It was told, however, that this might occur for various reasons. The relative may be a very distant one, and, faced by economic hardship, might be finding it extremely difficult to maintain the 'extra' family member. Problems may also arise due to tradition. For example, it is not considered the duty of a married female relative to take responsibility for male relatives:

> '. . . if a brother attached himself to a married sister, then the married sister's husband usually feels that it is not his responsibility to look after that boy, sooner or later there is some conflict between her and her husband.'[88]

It is estimated that there are over 600[89] young Indo-Chinese refugees without parents or close relatives in Australia, with about 160 of these being in Sydney.[90] The majority of these are males, and it seems that this is due to two reasons. First, the attempt to escape Indo-China is particularly hazardous and hence mainly attempted by males. Secondly, where a family may be able to afford for one or two of its members to make the escape, it is usually the young men who are sent out ahead. Not all of these

young people require emergency accommodation. There are a small number of young Indo-Chinese girls who require such services, but the Committee was told that the girls seem better able to cope with their situations in Australia:

> 'They live with the family they came with and no matter how hard the situation may be, they tend to cope with it longer than the boys.'[91]

Accommodation specifically for homeless refugee youth is currently available in Sydney (though the Committee was told that this was being fully taxed),[92] and at the time evidence was taken, 40 boys were being housed. The Committee received evidence mainly on the Francis Street Centre in East Sydney and gained the impression that this type of accommodation plays a very significant supportive role for its occupants.

The Committee is aware of the argument that if special accommodation is provided for one group then other groups will expect similar treatment and the consequent cost would be exorbitant. What needs to be remembered in the case of homeless Indo-Chinese youth is the dramatic and often personally tragic circumstances from which they come:

> 'Many of these children and youth have experienced traumatic and dangerous situations in their country of origin, in the refugee camps, and in the process of flight. They have experienced general disruption in their educational and social development. Many have witnessed the deaths of relatives and friends. The emotional and psychological impact and manifestations of these experiences, particularly in the older children, have yet to be fully explored and documented.'[93]

As well, the homeless refugee youth has no family he can turn to for support. Should other groups face similar circumstances, it may also be found that special accommodation is warranted. Where Indo-Chinese refugee youth are concerned, it seems to the Committee that the availability of specific supportive accommodation plays a very valuable role in preparing the youth for independence. The Committee was told that the period over which supportive housing would be needed would be about three years, or until the youth was familiar enough with the English language to cope independently.[94]

The overwhelming need of homeless Indo-Chinese refugee youth would seem to be for complementary services, particularly English tuition. It was stressed to the Committee that difficulties with the English language are proving a significant hindrance to the youths' education, social interaction with non-Indo-Chinese youth and employment opportunities. The refugee youth receive only limited tutoring in the English language on arrival in this country before being placed in a normal school situation. The problem was explained to the Committee by the manager of Francis Street Centre for Vietnamese Refugees, as follows:

> 'Most of the boys after a short time in Australia had a brief introductory course in English and were placed in a high school either at year 10 or 11 level. Year 10 is the school certificate year, essential for apprenticeships and year 11 is the key year for higher school certificate preparation. At both levels the boys are confronted with the usual tasks allocated to native speakers of English, demanding not only sophisticated skills and knowledge of English, but also complex arrays of concepts which provide the key to making sense of life in this society. Needless to say, the boys are thoroughly stranded and baffled but they make valiant efforts. Unfortunately, they are tested and assessed like anyone else and even their most earnest efforts fail to score. Their high regard for top achievement generates much pressure, especially with regard to homework, pressure on both boys and staff. Many a night I have spent working intensely for three hours at a time, translating text-book pages, to see the boy then have to go and spend another couple of hours writing it up. This is one boy; and I know that at the same time there are about 10 others struggling with the same sort of task. The boys are at a level only a little better than that of the foreign phrase book but they are required to write large sections of text-books in their own words, words which they do not

have. So commonly, they set to with a Vietnamese-English dictionary or a Chinese-English dictionary. Anyone who has tried to sort out the array of meanings in a dictionary knowing English well will appreciate the dimensions of this task.'[95]

In its Report, 'Indo-Chinese Refugee Resettlement —Australia's Involvement', the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence stated that many of its witnesses had considered that the English course provided at Migrant Centres was inadequate. The Report stated that in the view of the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, the course was intended as a survival course only, with a very basic level of competence being aimed for. English as a Second Language (ESL) courses are offered at schools and there are also English courses available to refugees once they leave the Migrant Centres.[96]

This Committee believes that there are difficulties in both these areas. Refugee youth who are attending school would find little benefit from these classes whilst at the same time attempting to apply their grossly inadequate and slowly developing English language skills to other subjects. Far better that they receive adequate English training prior to being placed in the school environment.

Those refugee youth who are not at school but are working (many at laborious tasks) often are involved in jobs requiring shift work or are too tired to attend English night classes on top of maintaining full-time work. It was suggested to the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence that employers should consider allowing refugees time off to attend English classes.[97] This Committee believes that where able, employers should do so.

The Committee's emphasis on the need for the youth to have an adequate grasp of the English language is not to suggest that this would provide a solution to all the problems of these young people. It would, however, remove a major barrier to their successful assimilation in the Australian community.

Homeless Indo-Chinese youth have problems quite different from those of other homeless youth. The Committee believes that existing refuges would not be able to provide the special assistance required by these young people with their vastly different cultural background, their inadequacy with the English language and their unfamiliarity with our society's values. Their greatest support would seem to come from young people with similar backgrounds and experiences, and from special housing provisions which, through staffing, counselling, etc., are specifically geared to deal with their particular problems.

Conclusion

A large proportion of our homeless youth are coming from broken families or families facing crisis. Statistics suggest that the rate of family breakdown is increasing. This seriously concerns the Committee. Is it that the stresses and demands of modern society coupled with economic hardship are placing unprecedented pressures on the family unit, or rather that the family unit today is not coping with pressures as well as it did in the past? It seems to the Committee that the answer may be a combination of both these factors.

Homeless youth, we are told, are coming from all backgrounds and are becoming homeless for a variety of reasons —no two cases are the same. The Committee acknowledges that this is undoubtedly so, but nonetheless finds it striking that so many of our homeless young people have a number of factors in common. Family conflict and

breakdown, unemployment, low socio-economic background, little education, lack of skills, emotional problems, social inadequacy . . . all these factors do seem to typify the majority of homeless youth using the available services. It was not the average, well adjusted teenager that the Committee was meeting in its numerous visits to homeless youth refuges. It seems to the Committee that it is more likely to be the youths who have already been socially disadvantaged, who have 'missed out' throughout most of their lives, who will end up homeless, not the young people who have enjoyed a fairly stable family life and a fair share of life's benefits.

If this is the case the Committee feels it is important to try to identify these youths before they become homeless, to adopt as far as possible a preventative approach. The school is perhaps the best place to perform this role because of its wideranging yet relatively personal contact with young people. Before the school can take on such a function, however, various changes need to be made. Teachers will require appropriate training and schools will need additional resources (including the attachment of social welfare workers) to enable the teachers to fulfil their new function. Close contact will need to be maintained between the school and the welfare worker attached to it.

Aboriginal and refugee homeless youth to a large extent need to be regarded as having special problems which require special solutions. Neither group is being catered for sufficiently by present refuge services. Aboriginal youth seem to have an inherent distrust of white services through the negative experience of Aboriginal people with the welfare system. Rufugee youth find particular difficulties with available services due to differences in cultural values, but appear to be benefiting substantially from special accommodation arrangements. Neither group will benefit from the presently available refuge services to the extent one could consider satisfactory. Therefore, it is important that they be provided with services they will accept, can relate to and from which they will benefit substantially.

The plight of homeless youth is a difficult issue. It is the end result of a multitude of factors but more than that, it is a reflection on the very nature of society itself.

Endnotes

1. Transcript of evidence, p. 1703.
2. Transcript of evidence, p. 1703.
3. Submission from The Westernport Youth Refuge Group, Victoria, p. 24.
4. Transcript of evidence, p. 1704.
5. Transcript of evidence, p. 3452.
6. Transcript of evidence, p. 1704.
7. Submission from The Westernport Youth Refuge Group, Victoria, p. 24.
8. Submission from the Australian Greek Welfare Society, Victoria.
9. Transcript of evidence, p. 3459.
10. Submission from Dr Barnardo's, A.C.T.
11. Youth Services Scheme Report, p. 12.
12. Victorian Consultative Committee on Social Development, Youth Accommodation Report, pp. 3-4.
13. Victorian Consultative Committee on Social Development, Youth Accommodation Report, p. 8.
14. Victorian Consultative Committee on Social Development, Youth Accommodation Report, p. 6.
15. Victorian Consultative Committee on Social Development, Youth Accommodation Report, p. 8.
16. North West Youth Accommodation Working Group, (Hope Street Shelter), pp. 1-3.
17. South Australian Council of Social Services, Youth Housing, p. 12.
18. South Australian Council of Social Services, Youth Housing, p. 13.
19. Victorian Consultative Committee on Social Development, Youth Accommodation Report, p. 7; South Australian Council of Social Services, Youth Housing, p. 14.
20. Michael Cummins and Jenny Wilson, Accommodation Needs of Adolescents, Tasmania, pp. 39-40.
21. Michael Cummins and Jenny Wilson, Accommodation Needs of Adolescents, Tasmania, p. 40.
22. Michael Cummins and Jenny Wilson, Accommodation Needs of Adolescents, Tasmania, pp. 40-42.
23. Michael Cummins and Jenny Wilson, Accommodation Needs of Adolescents, Tasmania, p. 45.
24. Transcript of evidence, p. 312.
25. Transcript of evidence, pp. 311-313.

26. Transcript of evidence, p. 309.
27. Submission from the Wayside Chapel, The Shepherd of the Streets Program, pp. 18-19.
28. Submission from the Australian Greek Welfare Society, Victoria.
29. Transcript of evidence, p. 3745.
30. Transcript of evidence, p. 3789.
31. Transcript of evidence, pp. 3728, 3730.
32. Transcript of evidence, p. 3747.
33. Transcript of evidence, pp. 3750-3751.
34. Transcript of evidence, p. 3752.
35. Transcript of evidence, p. 3753.
36. Transcript of evidence, p. 3754.
37. Transcript of evidence, pp. 3755-3756.
38. Transcript of evidence, p. 3757.
39. Transcript of evidence, p. 3760.
40. Transcript of evidence, p. 3761.
41. Transcript of evidence, p. 3766.
42. Transcript of evidence, p. 3770.
43. Transcript of evidence, p. 3798.
44. Transcript of evidence, p. 3799.
45. Transcript of evidence, p. 3644.
46. Transcript of evidence, p. 3644.
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