

The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia

House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Community Affairs

A REPORT ON ASPECTS OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

May 1995

Australian Government Publishing Service
Canberra

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ISBN 0644 43143 1

Produced by the Australian Government Publishing Service

PREAMBLE

Any consideration of the nature and extent of youth homelessness, including its impact on individuals and families, must be viewed within a larger societal and cultural context. Whereas youth homelessness, in itself, is a symptom of the breakdown of internal and external support systems, it is influenced by lack of employment opportunities, family disharmony, shifting duties of care between parents and the State and a constellation of other factors which may contribute to the loss of security and accommodation for a young person.

Evidence presented to the Inquiry highlighted many of these contributing factors to homelessness, including family breakdown, mental illness, drug dependence, sexuality, learning difficulties and emotional, physical and sexual abuse. An extensive examination of these factors can be found in the evidence taken by the Committee and is detailed in this Report.

At the core of this Inquiry is the desire, by young people, for independence and the realisation of their full potential. The emphasis on personal development and individual achievement, which is encouraged by the prevailing culture through its institutions and reinforced by the school system and the media, may create tension between parents and young people. This tension is largely demonstrated by a young person's needs for independence, weighed against the parents desire for control.

As children move to adolescence, their level of dependency on their primary care givers changes and this creates the potential for conflict,

unless the nature of this change is understood. In the Committee's view, this process of change must be managed with increased support provided for parents and educational authorities. The role of the State is to assist families in supporting their children, providing care and protection when families are unable to provide the necessary support.

Paramount in this process is the welfare of the young person, whose interests must prevail overall. The Committee supports the recent changes within the Family Court to redefine the terms 'custody' and 'access' which characterise the legal outcomes for parents and children following divorce proceedings. The Family Court has moved away from these concepts in order to reduce the bitterness resulting from these disputes, as the terms themselves create an environment of 'winners and losers'. Furthermore, on an educative level, the Court is keen to move away from such terminology, which reinforces children as the property of parents.

The Committee endorses these changes within the legal setting and foresees that such changes may, in time, succeed in redefining the relationship between children and parents, thus creating improved parenting behaviour over time.

Throughout the Inquiry, the Committee has been concerned about the polarisation of views relating to the 'rights' of children and the 'rights' of parents. The Committee found that there still exists, within parts of Australian society, a deep seated view of children as property and some parents have considerable difficulty in providing appropriate parenting to children, as they become *autonomous young people*.

The incidence of child abuse, including physical and sexual abuse in the community, is a stark reminder of the powerlessness of children and of the potential for their exploitation and violation in our society. Thus, such changes in terminology from our legal and social institutions play an important role in redefining parent/child relationships and in educating the community.

As a means of safeguarding the best interests of young people, the Committee has, as its touchstone, used the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to assert the fundamental human rights of children and has used the provisions of the Convention to also support and strengthen the family. This is spelt out in more detail in the body of the Report.

It is important, however, to stress that the primary objective of this Report is to construct a framework of support and prevention services for young people and their families. This will alleviate the increasing damage experienced by those who, because of their relative powerlessness, do not have the emotional or psychological maturity or economic means to deal with the complexity of their lives during periods of upheaval. The absence of an effective security net for young people is an indictment both of the lack of support for parents and families in crisis and neglect by the State for the welfare of children in its care.

The gravity of the issues dealt with in this Report and the importance of ensuring follow up of its recommendations prompts the Committee to continue its investigations in this area of government policy. Therefore, the Committee will continue to monitor developments in relation to the Report's recommendations and, if considered appropriate, may present a further report to the Parliament on the issues under consideration. To this extent, this Report is the first report of the Inquiry.

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37th Parliament

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TERMS OF REFERENCE

To inquire into and report to the Parliament on the provision of assistance for homeless youth requiring income support, with particular reference to:

1. the availability of family support and welfare services (including mediation services), their role and effectiveness in reducing homelessness and in resolving differences before young people leave home;
2. the integration of income support provisions for homeless young people with services that assist with family reunion, transition to stable independent living and opportunities for education, training and employment; and
3. the appropriateness of income support arrangements for homeless young people, noting the need to not create undue incentives to leave home or school.

ABBREVIATIONS

AAP	Australian Associated Press
AAT	Administrative Appeals Tribunal
AASW	Australian Association of Social Workers
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACOSS	Australian Council of Social Service
AG's	Attorney-General's Department
AHMAC	Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council
AIFS	Australian Institute of Family Studies
ASSAF	Association of Services Supporting Australian Families
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
AYPAC	Australian Youth Policy and Action Coalition
BSL	Brotherhood of St Laurence
CAP	Crisis Accommodation Program
CES	Commonwealth Employment Service
COAG	The Council of Australian Governments
CROC	(United Nations) Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSV	Community Services Victoria
CWAV	Children's Welfare Association of Victoria
DEET	Department of Employment, Education and Training
DSS	Department of Social Security
FACS	Family and Community Services (NSW)
FECCA	Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia
FRC	Family Resource Centre
GOM	Guardian of the Minister
HRD	Department of Housing and Regional Development
HREOC	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
HSH	Department of Human Services and Health
IDC	Inter Departmental Committee

IHSY	Innovative Health Services for Homeless Youth Program
JPET	Job Placement Employment and Training
JSA	Job Search Allowance
NESB	Non-English speaking background
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
NYCH	National Youth Coalition for Housing
PCA	Parents' and Citizens' Association
PIR	Post Implementation Review
PM&C	Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
RANZCP	Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists
SA	Sickness Allowance
SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
SART	Student Assistance and Review Tribunal
SAYHN	South Australian Youth Housing Network
SB	Special Benefit
SHR	Student Homeless Rate
STAR	Students at Risk Program
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TEAS	Tertiary Education Assistance Scheme
UN	United Nations
WRC	Welfare Rights Centre
YAA	Youth Accommodation Association
YACs	Youth Access Centres
YACVIC	Youth Accommodation Coalition of Victoria
YAS	Youth Activities Services
YHA	Young Homeless Allowance
YSJS	Youth Social Justice Strategy
YSUs	Youth Service Units
YTA	Youth Training Allowance
YTI	Youth Training Initiative

RECOMMENDATIONS

CHAPTER 2

Background to and Definitions of Youth Homelessness

1. The Committee recommends that, given current arrangements, the Departments of Social Security and Employment, Education and Training establish a common client information data system to ensure better comparability and greater cohesiveness in analysing Commonwealth income support payments to young homeless people. (para 2.39)

CHAPTER 5

Current Income Support Arrangements for Young Homeless People - The Administrative Framework

2. The Committee recommends that the government undertake a review of the policy and administration of income support payments to young homeless people with the view to establishing a single integrated assessment system which can be accessed through either the Department of Social Security and/or the Department of Employment, Education and Training. (para 5.19)

3. The Committee recommends that the Department of Social Security and the Department of Employment, Education and Training conduct a Post Implementation Review on the operation and effectiveness of the common eligibility criteria for the homeless rate of payment after 12 months of implementation. Included in the PIR should be a consultation held between the two departments and peak non-

government youth and welfare organisations, parent groups and some locally based organisations to determine to extent to which the revised eligibility criteria adequately respond to the needs of young homeless people, whether they are in full time training, education or looking for work. This report is to be made available to the public. (para 5.31)

4. The Committee recommends that the Departments of Employment, Education and Training and Social Security establish the same quality client service standards for young people and their families in the assessment of applications for the homeless rate of payment. The Committee considers it essential that the Commonwealth has a common process and identical standards of service. At a minimum this should include:

- . the young person being interviewed by a social worker on the day of claim;
- . consistency in the way contact is made with the parent/guardian, taking account of privacy requirements;
- . in rural or remote communities, a mutual referral arrangement to social workers in either department, depending on the availability of social workers;
- . both departments entering into a contracting arrangement which would allow social workers from either department to undertake the assessment for the homeless rate of payment; and
- . the establishment of common training programs for social workers employed by both departments. This should include: all aspects of a common assessment procedure; guidelines relating to contact with parents and State and Territory welfare authorities;

Commonwealth/State/Territory Protocol arrangements; professional practice, standards and accountability issues. (para 5.45)

5. The Committee recommends that the Department of Social Security and the Department of Employment, Education and Training establish equivalent criteria for homeless youth payments, removing existing anomalies in conditions applying to income and assets testing. (para 5.50)

6. The Committee recommends that young people receiving AUSTUDY at the homeless rate should be eligible for an Educational Allowance to assist with the additional costs of education. (para 5.56)

7. The Committee recommends that a review be undertaken into the policy and procedures of AUSTUDY overpayments to ensure that guidelines are in place which take into account the needs and circumstances of unsupported young homeless people. (para 5.63)

8. The Committee recommends that the Department of Employment, Education and Training adopt similar exemption provisions for young people receiving AUSTUDY as is available to young people on YTA who, due to exceptional personal circumstances, are having difficulties at some point in meeting the requirements of the activity test. (The YTA exemption provisions are outlined in the Guide to the Administration of the Social Security Act Part B: Activity Test Procedures for activity test exemptions in special circumstances) (para 5.64)

9. The Committee recommends that DEET ensure that a thorough assessment of the circumstances of a young person receiving the homeless rate of payment be undertaken before a decision to suspend or cancel a payment is made. DEET must ensure that a

professional social work assessment is carried out so that additional support services are provided, if necessary. (para 5.65)

10. The Committee recommends that the current guidelines used by the Department of Social Security when considering breaches and penalties for young homeless people be applied to the Youth Training Allowance. (para 5.71)

11. The Committee recommends that the Department of Social Security undertake a Post-Implementation Review of Payments to Third Parties for young people receiving the homeless rate of YTA, Sickness Benefit or Special Benefit after 12 months. This review should include the number of nominee arrangements, details of the nominee and an assessment of the adequacy of these arrangements for the client group. (para 5.91)

12. The Committee recommends that the Departments of Social Security and Employment, Education and Training develop a review mechanism and schedule for homeless payments to young people. These reviews should be undertaken by social workers within the departments and should provide a comprehensive assessment of family and personal circumstances. (para 5.101)

13. The Committee recommends that both the Independent YTA at the Homeless Rate and AUSTUDY at the Student Homeless Rate be subject to an initial two week review and assessment followed by continuous six week assessments of personal and family circumstances. A central feature of this payment will be the development of a comprehensive case work plan which will provide the basis for the review. The case work plan, which could be undertaken in conjunction with State welfare departments and relevant community organisations, will cover the following areas:

- a) assessment of accommodation needs and referral, where appropriate;
- b) assessment of current education, training and workforce status and the development of an appropriate long term plan to access one of these options;
- c) assessment of the appropriateness of individual counselling and/or family mediation and family therapy; and
- d) referrals to relevant specialist services such as personal counselling, family mediation and therapy, health, drug and alcohol counselling.

The outcomes of this case work plan must be reviewed as part of the broader review of the continuing entitlement to the payment. (para 5.102)

14. The Committee recommends that the Departments of Social Security and Employment, Education and Training undertake a review of the current definition and operation of the continuous support criterion for eligibility of payments at the homeless rate and establish one common and equitable approach. (para 5.114)

15. The Committee recommends that the Department of Social Security and the Department of Employment, Education and Training develop methods and procedures around continuous support which build on family support and encourages reconciliation. (para 5.118)

16. The Committee recommends that the assessment for homelessness be made separately from the provision of continuous support. The extent to which continuous support provided by parents excludes payment of income support at the homeless rate will be part

of the recommendation made by the social worker following a thorough assessment of the personal and family circumstances. (para 5.119)

17. The Committee recommends that the word 'homeless' be replaced by 'supported' because of the lack of clarity and interpretation of the term 'homeless' within the community. The current definition of 'homeless' and the eligibility criteria for the supported rate of the Youth Training Allowance and for AUSTUDY will remain the same. (para 5.124)

18. The Committee recommends that the payment available to young people who are unable to live at home, following assessment of their family and personal circumstances, be called the Independent Youth Training Allowance at the 'Supported' Rate, or AUSTUDY at the 'Supported' Rate. (para 5.125)

CHAPTER 6

The Housing Needs of Homeless Youth

19. The Committee recommends that the Department of Housing and Regional Development review the appropriateness of placements of State Wards and young people under 16 years of age in SAAP services with State and Territory governments, as well as with community service providers. (para 6.25)

20. The Committee recommends that the Department of Housing and Regional Development, in conjunction with State and Territory governments, develop a new SAAP category which provides specific supported and supervised accommodation services for young people under 17 years in acknowledgment of the reality that young people of this age are being placed in crisis, medium and long term accommodation under SAAP. (para 6.27)

21. The Committee recommends that the Department of Housing and Regional Development and the State and Territory governments undertake to bring in legislative change which allows for the provision of specific accommodation services, with supervised support, for young people under 17 years of age. (para 6.28)

22. The Committee recommends that each State and Territory establish a single point of contact for all its accommodation services for young people, similar to the service operating in South Australia. (para 6.44)

23. The Committee recommends that the Department of Housing and Regional Development, together with State and Territory governments, give consideration to developing balanced levels of supply of crisis, medium and long term supported accommodation. (para 6.45)

24. The Committee recommends that accommodation services for young people be established in local communities which will allow young people to maintain their links with school and friends as well as providing a greater opportunity for family contact and reconciliation. (para 6.46)

25. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth and State/Territory governments actively work towards the establishment of an appropriate award for SAAP workers which provides for minimum standards, consistency in skills and qualifications required of people working in the field and for the establishment of adequate career paths and training programs. (para 6.67)

26. The Committee recommends that funding levels to SAAP services be set at a level which ensures that adequate training programs and staff supervision arrangements are provided as an integral part of the SAAP service structure. (para 6.68)

27. The Committee recommends that supervisory and support structures within SAAP and other youth services establish clear lines of accountability for all workers within the services. (para 6.69)

28. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth and States urgently develop appropriate training programs for SAAP workers to ensure staff in these services have the skills to undertake the broader case management tasks identified through the new SAAP agreement. (para 6.70)

29. The Committee recommends that there be a greater focus in all Commonwealth and State and Territory programs on developing integrated youth and family services so as to ensure a more multi-disciplinary approach to the issues surrounding family breakdown and youth homelessness. (para 6.71)

30. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth and States, together with the relevant non-government organisations, develop strategies to address the low morale of staff working within the non-government youth and accommodation field. (para 6.72)

31. The Committee recommends that the Department of Housing and Regional Development identify more clearly the nature and scope of case management and assessment within SAAP. (para 6.85)

32. The Committee recommends that the Department of Housing and Regional Development identify, with State and Territory governments and community service providers, the skills required by workers in SAAP youth services to undertake case management functions. (para 6.86)

33. The Committee recommends that there be a major review to determine the appropriateness of the location of JPET within the

Department of Housing and Regional Development, to ensure that duplication and fragmentation of services to homeless unemployed people is not compounded. (para 6.91)

CHAPTER 7

Family Mediation and Counselling Services within the Attorney-General's Department

34. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments immediately establish funding arrangements for the extension of Adolescent and Family Therapy and Mediation Services in a national program as a preventive measure for young people leaving home prematurely. (para 7.19)

35. The Committee recommends that targets be established for ensuring the establishment of adequate coverage of mediation and family therapy services in all States and Territories within the next 3 years. (para 7.20)

36. The Committee recommends that any additional DSS or DEET funding for mediation services, be directed to further developing the existing network of mediation services. (para 7.31)

37. The Committee recommends that adolescent and family mediation/therapy must remain a voluntary process to ensure that long term and enduring outcomes are achieved for young people and their families. (para 7.32)

38. The Committee recommends that mediation services be provided by government departments other than the Department of Social Security or the Department of Employment, Education and

Training, to ensure neutrality and credibility of the services and the independence of the workers. (para 7.33)

39. The Committee recommends that additional resources be provided to relevant community agencies with expertise in adolescent/family mediation and family therapy to develop models of practice which will be inclusive of the needs of:

- . Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families;
- . Non-English speaking background young people and their families;
- . Poorer and less articulate young people and their families; and
- . Young people and their families who live in isolated and more remote communities in Australia. (para 7.39)

40. The Committee recommends that appropriate officers of the Family Court be represented on all interdepartmental committees involved in the development of initiatives in the area of child/youth and family policy. (para 7.55)

41. The Committee recommends that the Family Court be given additional resources to extend its counselling services to parents and adolescents, where difficulties in relationships are identified and to provide educational courses for parents and adolescents, where families are being reconstituted. (para 7.56)

42. The Committee recommends that the Family Court develop protocols with other key agencies to exchange relevant information about 'at risk' families. (para 7.57)

CHAPTER 8

Linking Youth and Family Policy

43. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments develop a national family policy which includes the Family Support Services Program. (para 8.23)

44. The Committee recommends that this national family policy should ensure that there is specific Federal assistance to family support services. Such services should include:

- (1) relationship counselling;
- (2) adolescent and family mediation;
- (3) health and mental health specifically targeted at families with adolescent children;
- (4) information and advocacy; and
- (5) home/school liaison. (para 8.24)

45. The Committee recommends that, where the Commonwealth provides funding to State and Territory governments for family support services, monitoring processes including appropriate outcome indicators be established and annual progress reports be provided to the new Child and Youth Bureau established within the Attorney-General's Department. (para 8.25)

46. The Committee recommends that specific programs aimed at meeting the needs of young people be located, where appropriate, with mainstream family agencies. (para 8.52)

47. The Committee recommends that training courses be developed for all workers responsible for families and young people to improve skills in assessment, conflict resolution and mediation. (para 8.53)

48. The Committee recommends that the Department of Social Security resume responsibility for youth income support policy, in order to integrate it with the broader family income support responsibilities. (para 8.63)

49. The Committee recommends that the Department of Social Security urgently review the impact of a range of income support measures relating to income and assets testing, and eligibility criteria for families and young people under the age of 18 years. The review should advise the government whether there are any disincentives operating to discourage families from supporting their children. (para 8.64)

50. The Committee recommends that the Department of Social Security and the Department of Employment, Education and Training develop a unified approach to youth income support eligibility, as it relates to family income and assets testing arrangements. (para 8.65)

CHAPTER 9

The Care, Support and Protection of Young People - The Role of the Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments

51. The Committee recommends that the Department of Housing and Regional Development and State/Territory governments, together with the non-government sector, undertake an urgent review of current care options for young adolescents. This recommendation should be implemented in conjunction with recommendations 6.25, 6.27

and 6.28 relating to SAAP Pilots for under 17 year olds in Chapter 6.
(para 9.66)

52. The Committee recommends that a minimum payment to foster carers be developed based on the work done by the Institute of Family Studies on the costs of children and that all State/Territory governments move towards a common standard minimum payment.
(para 9.75)

53. The Committee recommends that relatives caring for children should not be economically discriminated against and should receive the same financial support as other carers. (para 9.77)

54. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth government, in conjunction with the States/Territories and relevant non-government agencies, examine the current practices relating to foster payments and income support payments to young people.
(para 9.78)

55. The Committee recommends that the Departments of Social Security and Employment, Education and Training, together with the States and Territories, examine the way in which Commonwealth income support payments and State/Territory foster payments relate, to ensure there are no disincentives or hardships created for foster carers. (para 9.81)

56. The Committee reiterates Recommendation 9.8 made by the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade in its report entitled *A Review of Australia's Efforts to Promote and Protect Human Rights, November 1994*, which relates to the protection of the rights of children in Australia and recommends that the Australian Government introduce legislation which incorporates the Convention on

the Rights of the Child into domestic law. A timeframe for introduction of the legislation should be provided. (para 9.104)

57. The Committee recommends that complementary legislation on the care and protection of children up to the age of 17 years be established by the Commonwealth government in cooperation with the State/Territory governments and the non-government sector. (para 9.105)

58. The Committee recommends that national practice standards and uniform administrative arrangements be established in the area of child protection and family support services. (para 9.106)

59. The Committee recommends that all Commonwealth Departments and State/Territory governments be informed of their obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to safeguard the rights of the child and that the principles of the Convention be incorporated into policy and operational guidelines. (para 9.107)

CHAPTER 10

Education and Intervention

60. The Committee recommends that the current Commonwealth and State/Territory government Protocol for the Care and Support of Young People under 16 years, include an obligation by each State and Territory to provide appropriate education services. This obligation should include a requirement to report specifically on the educational requirements of young people at risk of abuse and/or neglect. (Para 10.15)

61. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth government, in conjunction with the States and Territories, report to the Parliament by the end of 1996 on:

- 1) the number of young people who fail to progress to secondary school;
- 2) the reasons why these young people fail to enter secondary education;
- 3) the number of young people who leave school before the compulsory school leaving age;
- 4) the reasons why these young people do not complete the years of compulsory schooling; and
- 5) the alternatives provided to young people of compulsory school age who are not attending school. (para 10.23)

62. The Committee recommends that in the auditing of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, an examination should be made about whether current practices within State/Territory education departments are excluding young people from school. (para 10.44)

63. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government, in conjunction with State and Territory governments, provide a State by State summary of all the specific programs and educational facilities available for young people of school leaving age who are not able to participate in traditional forms of schooling. (para 10.45)

64. The Committee recommends that State and Territory governments provide details of the number of young people under

school leaving age who are involved in various forms of alternative education. (para 10.46)

65. The Committee recommends that the Department of Employment, Education and Training immediately take steps to include the payment of AUSTUDY to those young people under school leaving age, who have been assessed as meeting the 'homeless' criteria. This assessment will be subject to the same eligibility provisions currently applying to Special Benefit. Adequate resources should be made available to DEET, to ensure that professional assessment and follow up support services are available. Under the Protocol, these should only be cases referred back from the States and should constitute a small number of young people. (para 10.67)

66. The Committee recommends that the STAR program be broadened and adequately funded to enable greater attention to be paid to the needs of individual young people who are at risk of leaving school due to family breakdown and homelessness. Funds from the STAR program should be made available to individual schools to meet a range of needs of individual students, as well as for program initiatives within schools. (para 10.85)

67. The Committee recommends that funds be made available for schools and community organisations to develop appropriate education facilities and programs for young people of school age, who require alternative education opportunities. (para 10.86)

68. The Committee recommends that accountability mechanisms for the funds provided under the STAR program be established to require State/Territory education departments to demonstrate that the program specifically targets children identified at risk, particularly those referred to the State/Territory welfare department through the Protocol. (para 10.87)

69. The Committee recommends that schools become a focal point for early intervention and that Commonwealth and State/Territory governments undertake a full review of pastoral care and student welfare support services within primary and secondary schools with a view to:

- 1) establishing national standards for determining the ratio of counsellors to students and to schools;
- 2) identifying those schools which require substantial pastoral care and specialist counselling and resources to support disadvantaged families and young people;
- 3) establishing national qualification requirements for specialist support staff in schools;
- 4) developing a greater partnership between schools and local community services in responding to the problems identified within schools; and
- 5) ensuring primary schools are given adequate access to counselling and specialist support staff in recognition of the value of prevention. (para 10.101)

CHAPTER 11

Parental Roles and Responsibilities

70. The Committee recommends that in cases where allegations of abuse are made about a family member/s as part of an application for a payment from the Commonwealth at the homeless rate, and where these allegations are so serious that parents/guardians are not contacted, a referral must be made to the appropriate State/Territory

welfare department. This would require a full protective investigation by the relevant child protection service and would apply to all young people up to the age of 18 years. The current Protocol outlines the procedures to be followed for referrals under these circumstances. (para 11.31)

71. The Committee recommends that the National Child Protection Council address the extent to which the current child protection legislation in the States and Territories provides parents with an opportunity to address claims made against them. (para 11.32)

72. The Committee recommends that State Welfare Ministers monitor closely and report on the following aspects of the Commonwealth and State/Territory Protocol on the Care of Young People:

- 1) the number of 'at risk assessments' acted on by the State/Territory welfare departments following referrals from the Commonwealth Departments of Social Security and Employment, Education and Training; and
- 2) the outcomes of these 'at risk assessments', including parental contact, substantiation of allegations, and details of care and support provided to the family and/or the young person. (para 11.35)

73. The Committee recommends that the monitoring of the Commonwealth and State/Territory Protocol include information on the following:

- 1) the number of requests from parents for information about their children;

- 2) departmental responses to this request;
- 3) the number of disclosures made to parents where young people have given their consent;
- 4) the number of disclosures to parents made under the public interest provisions where young people had not given their consent; and
- 5) information not disclosed due to concerns about the safety of the young person. (para 11.38)

74. The Committee recommends that the auditing of the Protocol be undertaken by the Child and Youth Bureau in Attorney General's Department, following its establishment. (para 11.39)

75. The Committee recommends that the National Child Protection Council immediately initiate a national review, involving State/Territory governments and non-government welfare agencies, of the adequacy of child protection practices in Australia, in terms of the extent to which the broader family welfare responsibilities, as well as the investigatory role, are being met. (para 11.43)

76. The Committee recommends that requests for information made to the Departments of Social Security and Employment, Education and Training by parents about their children under the Disallowable Instrument be audited by the Child and Youth Bureau. This should include:

- 1) the number of requests from parents for information about their children;
- 2) departmental responses to requests;

- 3) the number of disclosures made to parents where young people have given their consent;
- 4) the number of disclosures to parents made under the public interest provisions where young people had not given their consent; and
- 5) information not disclosed due to concerns about the safety of the young person. (para 11.54)

CHAPTER 12

Mental Illness and Youth Homelessness

77. The Committee recommends that training resources be made available to all front line youth and family workers in government and non-government agencies, to improve their knowledge and skills in the area of mental illness and young people. (para 12.33)

78. The Committee recommends that national standards for competencies for all youth workers and family support workers include knowledge and skills in recognising signs of mental disturbance, as well as alcohol and drug abuse among young people. (para 12.34)

79. The Committee recommends that the National Strategy on Mental Health urgently address the mental health needs of children and young people by redressing the current inequities in mental health funding, which substantially disadvantages children and young people in their access to services and facilities. (para 12.47)

80. The Committee recommends that a separate National Strategy on Mental Health be developed for children and adolescents,

in order to clearly identify the objectives, goals and benchmarks established for this group. (para 12.48)

81. The Committee recommends that a national benchmark be established, to stipulate the percentage of the mental health budget which will be spent on mental health services and facilities specifically for children and young people by Commonwealth and State/Territory governments. (para 12.51)

82. The Committee recommends that each State and Territory report annually to the Child and Youth Bureau on achievements against the mental health objectives identified for children and adolescents. (para 12.52)

83. The Committee recommends that urgent attention be given to developing the NHMRC's work on the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention. (para 12.53)

84. The Committee recommends that all relevant Commonwealth departments address the mental health issues of youth homelessness in their policy and program development. (para 12.69)

85. The Committee recommends that the Department of Human Service and Health ensure that all other Commonwealth departments providing services to young people are represented on any National Mental Health Policy group focussing on young people. (para 12.70)

86. The Committee recommends that the Department of Housing and Regional Development and the Department of Human Services and Health urgently consider and report on:

- 1) the appropriateness of SAAP services for young people with diagnosed mental illnesses;

- 2) the development of specialist residential services for young people with mental illness and/or challenging behaviour;
- 3) the knowledge, skills and training required of staff to work with such young people;
- 4) developing appropriate skills among SAAP workers to more effectively assess and refer young people who may require mental health services; and
- 5) the appropriateness of case management for these young people within the SAAP environment. (para 12.71)

87. The Committee recommends that Commonwealth and State/Territory funds be made available to establish mental health outreach teams in rural and remote communities. (para 12.73)

88. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth, in conjunction with the States and Territories, develop a strategy to attract and retain qualified child and adolescent psychiatrists, both in urban and rural areas in Australia. (para 12.78)

89. The Committee recommends that funds be made available, from the mental health budget, for the immediate establishment of early psychosis units for young people in each capital city in the first instance. This is to be accompanied by a full evaluation of the effectiveness of such services as early intervention models. (para 12.84)

90. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth government ensure that adequate funding is provided for the Australian Adolescent Mental Health Surveillance, in order that Australia establishes a data base on the mental health of adolescents which will inform public policy and budget decisions. (para 12.90)

91. The Committee recommends that research funds be made available to explore the relationship between youth homelessness and mental illness. (para 12.91)

CHAPTER 13

Special Needs Groups

92. The Committee recommends that the major Commonwealth Departments involved in providing specific services to young people and families (the Departments of Social Security, Employment, Education and Training, Attorney-General's, Human Services and Health and Housing and Regional Development) develop an integrated model of service delivery for rural and remote communities. (para 13.19)

93. The Committee recommends that the Departments of Social Security and Employment, Education and Training take immediate steps to ensure that local offices of Social Security and the Commonwealth Employment Service in remote and rural communities are able to receive and assess all claims for income support at the homeless rate made by young people. (para 13.20)

94. The Committee recommends that the Department of Social Security ensure that all assessments of Young Homeless Allowance include an examination of existing extended family networks of young people in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. (para 13.34)

95. The Committee recommends that the Department of Social Security thoroughly review the entitlements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family members, including extended family members, who are caring for a young person, to ensure they are receiving their full income support entitlements. (para 13.35)

96. The Committee recommends that the Departments of Social Security and Employment, Education and Training work closely with local Aboriginal organisations and communities to develop appropriate models of service delivery for young Aboriginal people claiming the homeless rate of income support. (para 13.36)

97. The Committee recommends that Departments of Social Security and Employment, Education and Training ensure that all officers involved in the assessment of eligibility for the Young Homeless Allowance and AUSTUDY at the Student Homeless Rate receive adequate training, taking into account cross-cultural sensitivity, in the relevance of family structures and relationships within Aboriginal communities. (para 13.37)

98. The Committee recommends that the Departments of Social Security and Employment, Education and Training consult with ATSIC in determining the appropriateness of the definition of 'homelessness' used in determining eligibility for payments of income support for young people from within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. (para 13.38)

99. The Committee recommends that the National Mental Health Strategy specifically address the issue of increasing access of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and young people to relevant psychiatric services. (para 13.48)

100. The Committee recommends that the Attorney General's Department be allocated additional funding to develop a culturally appropriate model of adolescent and family mediation, in consultation with relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. (para 13.54)

101. The Committee recommends that additional funds be provided to the Attorney-General's Department to develop culturally appropriate models of adolescent and family mediation for families and young people from non-English speaking backgrounds. These service models are to be developed in full consultation with relevant ethnic organisations. (para 13.73)

102. The Committee recommends that Commonwealth departments ensure that all programs providing services to families and children establish models of practice which are responsive to the cultural differences of families from non-English speaking backgrounds. (para 13.76)

103. The Committee recommends that the relevant Commonwealth departments involved in providing a range of services to young people who become homeless undertake joint research into youth homelessness and family breakdown amongst young refugees. This research is to be done in consultation with the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia. (para 13.83)

104. The Committee recommends that all Commonwealth departments involved in the provision of services to young homeless people ensure that data is collected on the number of young people from non-English speaking backgrounds who are using the services. (para 13.84)

105. The Committee recommends that all Commonwealth departments identify ways in which programs and services for young people and their families are accessible and culturally appropriate to families and young people from non-English speaking backgrounds. (para 13.85)

106. The Committee recommends that relevant Commonwealth Departments allocate funds for the establishment of ethno-specific services for young people and their families. These services should be evaluated and reported on in Departmental Access and Equity Plans. (para 13.86)

107. The Committee recommends that research funds be made available to gather data on the extent to which a young person's sexuality has contributed to family breakdown and to eventual homelessness. (para 13.98)

108. The Committee recommends that at least one specialist SAAP service be established in major capital cities for young people who identify as gay or lesbian. (para 13.99)

109. The Committee recommends that all SAAP services provide training to staff on issues relating to the sexuality of young people. (para 13.107)

110. The Committee recommends that issues associated with the safety of young people who identify as gay or lesbian be addressed by SAAP services. (para 13.108)

111. The Committee recommends that adolescent mediation and family therapy services ensure that staff have the necessary training and skills to be able to work effectively with families in the area of young people's sexuality. (para 13.109)

CHAPTER 14

A Structural Analysis of Youth Policy

112. The Committee recommends that a Child and Youth Bureau be established within the Attorney-General's Department to commence the work associated with incorporating the Convention on the Rights of the Child into Commonwealth and State/Territory laws. (para 14.18)

113. The Committee recommends that this National Child and Youth Bureau monitor and audit Australia's compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. (para 14.19)

114. The Committee recommends that the National Child and Youth Bureau oversee legislative, policy and program initiatives in the area of youth and family policy across the range of relevant departments to determine the extent of their compatibility with the principles and obligations of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. (para 14.21)

115. The Committee recommends that the Attorney-General report regularly to the Prime Minister on Australia's performance in meeting its obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. This reporting should focus on the implications for the development and coordination of youth and family policy at the Commonwealth level, as well as clarifying the relationships and responsibilities between Commonwealth and State/Territory governments for children and families. (para 14.22)

116. The Committee recommends that The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) become the vehicle for consultation between Commonwealth and State/Territory governments in relation to dealing with aspects of Australia's performance identified as a result of the auditing of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. (para 14.23)

117. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government consult with State and Territory governments to determine ways of monitoring State and Territory governments' obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. (para 14.24)

118. The Committee recommends that relevant Commonwealth Departments incorporate and articulate the principles of the UN Convention of the Rights on the Child in corporate mission statements within Portfolio Budget Statements. (para 14.25)

119. The Committee recommends that relevant Commonwealth Departments, through their annual reports, report on the extent to which particular programs are meeting the obligations towards children, young people and families as identified in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. (para 14.26)

120. The Committee recommends that relevant Commonwealth Departments, through their annual reports also report on the policies and programs within their portfolio with a focus on prevention and early intervention in the areas of child and family support services, including the percentage of Departmental budgets allocated for this purpose. (para 14.27)

121. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government, in conjunction with the States and Territories and non-government agencies, develop national standards to ensure appropriate levels of accountability by government for the quality and outcome of child and family welfare services which are privatised or contracted out. (para 14.36)

122. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments ensure that joint consultative committees be established at the State level, consisting of key

departments at both levels of government who have responsibility for services for families and children. (para 14.39)

123. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments initiate the development of similar models of coordination and integration of youth services to that currently operating in the Hunter Region. (para 14.47)

124. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments allocate resources to implement and maintain effective regional coordination models in the longer term. (para 14.48)

125. The Committee recommends that an independent evaluation be undertaken of the coordination and integration strategies to establish a national model of 'best practice' for the provision of services to disadvantaged young people. This should include at least, the DSS Youth Service Units, the Youth Access Centres, relevant State/Territory and regional strategies. (para 14.57)

126. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments undertake a national consultation with the non-government sector to identify 'best practice' models for the coordination and delivery of accessible services to young people. (para 14.58)

127. The Committee recommends that the evaluation of all Commonwealth government pilot projects focussing on coordination and integration of services include an assessment of the extent to which the aims and outcomes compare with other similar projects. (para 14.59)

128. The Committee recommends that all Commonwealth departments involved in providing coordination mechanisms for service delivery to young people develop consistent objective performance criteria for evaluation. (para 14.60)

129. The Committee recommends that no further funding be allocated for pilot projects in the area of coordination of youth services until a full evaluation of current models has been undertaken. (para 14.61)

CHAPTER 1

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE INQUIRY

Introduction

1.1 On 11 December 1993, the Minister for Social Security, the Hon Peter Baldwin MP, wrote to the Chairman, Mr Allan Morris MP, referring an inquiry to the Committee. The specific terms of reference were for the Committee to inquire into and report to the Parliament on the provision of assistance for homeless youth requiring income support, with particular reference to:

- . the availability of family support and welfare services (including mediation services), their role and effectiveness in reducing homelessness and in resolving differences before young people leave home;
- . the integration of income support provisions for homeless young people with services that assist family reunion, transition to stable independent living and opportunities for education, training and employment; and
- . the appropriateness of income support arrangements for homeless young people, noting the need to not create undue incentives to leave home or school.

Conduct of the Inquiry

1.2 The Inquiry was advertised in the major metropolitan newspapers in December 1993. In addition, letters inviting submissions were sent to State Premiers, Territory Chief Ministers and relevant Commonwealth Ministers with portfolio responsibilities for aspects of youth homelessness.

1.3 In response, almost 200 submissions were received from peak welfare organisations, community based youth and family service providers, academics, social policy and research analysts, community organisations, individual parents, parent groups and all State and Territory governments and a range of Commonwealth departments.

1.4 To assist its investigations, the Committee held 18 days of public hearings which included all capital cities, as well as Campbelltown, Cairns, Newcastle and Toowoomba. These hearings generated over 2 790 pages of evidence.

1.5 Inspections were conducted across a wide range of services, including youth refuges and accommodation services, community based education programs for homeless young people and youth health programs in most capital cities. Youth forums were also held in many cities which provided young people with the opportunity to present their views informally to the Committee.

1.6 In September 1994, the Committee released a Discussion Paper focusing on three areas of government legislation and policy which had a direct relationship to the terms of reference of the Inquiry. These initiatives were introduced and implemented during the Inquiry and had the potential to impact significantly on many aspects of the Committee's deliberations. The three relevant initiatives were:

- . the policy and administrative changes surrounding income support arrangements for young people following the release of the Employment White Paper;
- . the introduction of the Commonwealth/State and Territory Protocol relating to young people under 17 years; and
- . issues around case management, training and qualifications of youth workers in the context of the re-negotiation of the Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program (SAAP) Agreement between the Commonwealth and State/Territory governments.

1.7 Following the release of this Discussion Paper, further submissions were received from government and non-government organisations. These responses formed the basis of a closer examination of these initiatives during the Inquiry.

Preliminary Observations

1.8 The emergence of homelessness amongst young people had been identified by community welfare agencies by the early 1970's. The introduction of income support payments to homeless young people has resulted from numerous Commonwealth initiatives in the youth policy field since that time, as well as the release of a number of influential government and other independent reports.

1.9 In 1983, the Commonwealth introduced the Supported Accommodation Scheme, which in 1985 became a national program to assist homeless people in crisis. The Young Homeless Allowance (YHA) was introduced in 1986 as a supplementary payment for 16 and 17

year-old people receiving Unemployment Benefits (as it was then called).

1.10 Since that time, there has been a significant growth in the number of young people receiving the homeless rate of payment and also some shift downwards in the age groups of young people receiving the benefit. The release of the report of the National Inquiry into Homeless Children by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) in 1989, played a major role in placing youth homelessness both on the public policy agenda and raising the issue in the community's consciousness. As a result of this report, an additional \$100 million over four years was provided for new accommodation facilities for young homeless people and for developing a range of support services to meet identified needs, including assistance with education, innovative health services for disadvantaged young people and family mediation.

1.11 The Commonwealth Government further responded by developing strategies to enable administrative procedures and outreach activities to improve the access and equity of young homeless people to income support.

1.12 The HREOC Report and other recent studies of youth homelessness have emphasised the importance of considering youth homelessness in a broad social and economic context, rather than focusing only on the individual circumstances of young people and their families. High levels of youth homelessness have occurred concurrently with a recessionary economy, high levels of youth unemployment, the collapse of the youth labour market, a decade or so of long term unemployment amongst many Australian families and a significant restructuring of family relationships through higher divorce rates and repartnering. These issues have influenced the relationships

of young people within families and has resulted in an increased level of dependency upon family and other supports.

1.13 Another factor in understanding the growth in the numbers of young homeless people receiving the homeless rate of payment, has been the consequences of a significant philosophical and policy shift by State and Territory welfare departments. During the 1980's there was a substantial movement away from the interventionist role of the State in child welfare, resulting in fewer children coming into the care of government departments and the closing of institutional and other residential services. At the same time, these departments experienced a growth in their protective role through the introduction in most States and Territories of the mandatory reporting of child abuse. What this has meant is that resources have been directed much more to younger children than to adolescents and also to the 'hard end' of child protection and 'dangerous families'.

1.14 The impact of the recession and the increase in unemployment within families has created pressure on the family unit both financially and emotionally. The extent to which economic pressures are contributing to family discord and ultimate breakdown is an important consideration in this Inquiry and is discussed in Chapter 8.

1.15 Another key theme to emerge during the hearings relates to the dearth of family support services in the community to assist families and children prior to young people leaving home. The failure of governments to provide appropriate or adequate services to families with adolescents is discussed and recommendations relating to improving family support, mental health services and mediation and counselling services are made. These recommendations are a response to the lack of attention to preventive and early intervention services for families and children in our community.

1.16 While the Committee heard much rhetoric about prevention and early intervention, it received very little evidence that these services operated in practice. In fact, there was evidence that preventive services have been reduced, as scarce resources are targeted even more tightly to the 'crisis end' of homelessness, leaving families and young people unsupported.

1.17 The role of our schools as sites of early intervention is another key issue explored within the Report. The Committee heard evidence and received research data indicating that a significant number of young people who are still at school, are homeless and unable to continue in education. The Committee was also alarmed at the evidence indicating that significant numbers of young people are not completing basic education and that policies of exclusion are further alienating many disadvantaged young people. The Report explores this issue and makes recommendations about ways of improving opportunities within the education system.

1.18 Another overarching theme in this Report, based on the evidence received, is that policy development and administration of youth related services is *ad hoc*, *fragmented* and *uncoordinated*. While attention must be paid to improve particular programs relating to income support, accommodation, education and training, the Committee puts forward recommendations which seek to create a structure within government to ensure more coherent policy and administration of services to young people.

1.19 Some witnesses to this Inquiry highlighted the strong link between the growth in numbers of homeless young people and the reduced resources and services of State and Territory welfare departments to adolescents and their families.

1.20 The Report discusses the development and implementation of the Protocol between the Commonwealth and the State and Territory governments to clarify roles and responsibilities for the care and support of young people who are without parental support. The adequacy of the Protocol as a mechanism for ensuring the Commonwealth and States/Territories meet their respective legislative and moral obligations to children has been examined in detail in the Committee's Discussion Paper. While the Committee expresses reservations about the adequacy of the Protocol, it is the only current mechanism which attempts to specify mutual Commonwealth/State obligations for the welfare of young people.

1.21 During its investigations, the Committee noted the concerns expressed by many community organisations and parents about the failure of State and Territory governments to provide care and support to young people who are at risk and the inappropriateness of providing income support without some form of adult supervision or support.

1.22 The extent to which the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments meet their obligations in regard to the care and protection of children, as signatories to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CROC) is a key theme of this Report. The concern is based both on the lack of clear responsibilities of the States/Territories and Commonwealth governments for the welfare of children, as well as the fragmentation and confusion within the structures and policies of government for dealing with issues around youth homelessness.

1.23 The Report discusses the adequacy of the structural framework for ensuring the rights of the child are protected. The Committee is concerned about the failure to put in place structures which assess and monitor the obligations that Australia has for the care and safety of its children. Chapter 14 details the establishment of a

proposed Child and Youth Bureau within the Attorney-General's Department, as a critical component of a new structure.

1.24 Many individual parents and parent groups expressed concerns about the lack of support they received prior to their child leaving home, as well as the lack of contact made with them in decisions relating to the granting of income support to their child. Although the anger was directed at the payment of the YHA, many of these parents also had some involvement with State/Territory welfare departments.

1.25 Evidence was received which, on the one hand, strongly supported the income support payments to young homeless people and on the other hand, criticised the practices and processes involved in this payment.

1.26 The Report discusses these differing perspectives and identifies the gaps in services and the absence of basic support systems for families and young people. It examines the adequacy of current income support systems for homeless young people and assesses the impact and worth of recent administrative and procedural changes. These include the new privacy provisions relating to increased contact with parents, as well as the recent shift in departmental responsibility for youth policy.

1.27 Evidence presented to the Committee indicates that the area of youth policy is largely without focus, allowing individual portfolio departments to create policy and programs which do not relate to each other. This occurs both between and within the two levels of government. Recommendations are made seeking an integration of youth and family policy, acknowledging that youth policy must embrace more than employment, education and training. The Committee believes that there is a mutual interaction between the issues affecting young

people and families which must be understood and incorporated at all policy levels.

1.28 In conclusion, the Committee brings together recommendations relating to a diverse range of issues raised throughout the Inquiry, giving particular emphasis to the bigger picture in which the policy response to aspects of youth homelessness needs to operate. Attention to program details is not as critical as the need to create structures in which policies and services affecting young people and their families can be more effectively addressed.

Subsequent Developments

1.29 During the conduct of the Inquiry, the following administrative developments have occurred, which have had a bearing on the Committee's work:

- . internal review of the administration of the Young Homeless Allowance by the Department of Social Security;
- . changes to privacy provisions and the guidelines for assessment of YHA including contact with parents, payments to third parties;
- . establishment of 10 Youth Service Units within the Department of Social Security;
- . implementation of Commonwealth and State/Territory Protocols outlining roles and responsibilities for at risk young people under 17 years;
- . changes in the policy framework and administrative arrangements between the two department, the Department of Social Security

and the Department of Employment, Education and Training, for the provision of income support and related services to homeless young people;

. the abolition of Job Search Allowance for young people under 18 years of age and its replacement by the Youth Training Allowance;

. following the introduction of the Youth Training Allowance, the homeless rate of payment previously known as the Young Homeless Allowance, is now referred to as Independent YTA at the homeless rate;

. budget initiatives, including the provision of Rental Assistance to homeless young people receiving the Student Homeless Rate of payment from January 1995, and the piloting of Family Mediation Services and the establishment of Youth Homelessness Pilots by the Department of Employment, Education and Training;

. the introduction of case management for unemployed young people, including young homeless people; and

. the introduction of a new Supported Accommodation Assistance Program agreement between the Commonwealth and State/Territory governments which incorporates a strong case management role for SAAP services and for the establishment and monitoring of outcome indicators for clients and service delivery.

1.30 Although the name Young Homeless Allowance, is no longer used by the Department of Social Security, it continues to be referred to as a generic term for all homeless benefits. It should be noted that in the context of this Report, Young Homeless Allowance and the

Independent YTA at the homeless rate are used interchangeably to refer to the same benefit.

1.31 These changes and developments have been encompassed within the Committee's consideration of issues as part of its Report.

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CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND TO AND DEFINITIONS OF YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Previous Reports and Inquiries

2.1 Over the last decade, many reports and inquiries have examined the relationship between employment, education and training, housing and income support and the rising incidence of youth homelessness in Australia. Some of these reports include:

- . 1982 Senate Standing Committee on Social Welfare,
Report on Homeless Youth
- . 1989 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity
Commission, *Our Homeless Children*
- . 1990 Department of Employment, Education and Training
(DEET), *CES Youth Access*
- . 1991 National Youth Social Justice Strategy Coordination
Committee, *Social Justice Strategy for Young
Australians*
- . 1992 Senate Standing Committee on Employment,
Education and Training *Wanted: Our Future*

The Changing Social Context

2.2 These earlier reports paid substantial attention to the issues of youth homelessness and made detailed recommendations relating to employment, education and training opportunities, developing accommodation options and improving access to and administration of income support payments. Some organisations questioned the need for another inquiry into youth homelessness, expressing frustration at the wealth of information already gained about youth homelessness and arguing strongly for action and implementation of previous findings.

2.3 The Committee believes it is important to see youth homelessness as part of much broader social issues. These include the changing nature of social institutions, such as the family, the nature of work and education (including unemployment), increased dependency of young people on their family for longer periods, as well as policies and practices which have reduced government intervention in the lives of young people and families.

2.4 Youth homelessness does not occur in a vacuum, but is a response to the broader social and economic trends impacting on young people, their families and their communities. The Committee's view is that it is not possible to understand, nor to respond appropriately to youth homelessness, unless this broader social context is also understood.

2.5 Young people and family structures are undergoing significant changes. These include:

- increasing numbers of parental separations and repartnering and the growth of sole parent households;

- . high levels of long term unemployment amongst families with dependent children;
- . increasing dependency of young people within families due to the contraction of the youth labour market, as well as higher levels of unemployment and greater participation in education and training;
- . increasing awareness of the levels of violence in families towards women and children, including increased reporting of sexual and physical abuse, as well as neglect, of children;
- . changing attitudes to the rights of children and the respective rights and responsibilities of families, the community and the State in regard to the control, care and protection of children; and
- . growth of global communication networks and consequential cultural influences.

2.6 One researcher examining the changing position of young people in relation to their role within the changing family commented:

"Compared with thirty years ago, 15-year-olds in 1993 are more likely to remain at school until age 18, more likely to have parents who have divorced, more likely to have spent some time in a single parent household, more likely to have a parent who is unemployed, more likely to have an employed mother... Both 15-year-olds and 24-year-olds are less likely to have been brought up in a family where the father is the only breadwinner and more likely to have experienced the separation and/or repartnering of parents."¹

¹ R Hartley & I Wolcott, National Youth Affairs Research Scheme, *The Position of Young People in Relation to the Family*, National Clearing House for Youth Studies, Hobart, 1994, pp 47-48.

2.7 The changing environment within the family and the broader society was reiterated frequently to the Committee, in evidence given by youth and family workers:

"I believe that we are in a period of our culture where young people have no legitimate place. In sociological terms, it is almost an anomie situation that we are seeing with young people. They do not want to stay at home and why should they stay at home, if you take that point of view? They are growing into adulthood and yet they are swinging between being told that they should be responsible because they are young adults and on the other hand they are told to grow up and stop acting like a child or 'You are only a child and you cannot make these decisions.' Two generations ago, young people were going off to war when they were 16." (Centacare: Transcript of evidence, p 1789)

2.8 Many submissions stressed the importance of understanding this broader social and economic context in which family breakdown is occurring. This perspective is important in moving away from "blaming" either parents or young people for the breakdown in the family which frequently results in young people leaving home prematurely:

"The complexities of youth homelessness often serve to reinforce stereotypes and generalisations which do not do justice to the young homeless or their families. Discussions concerning youth homelessness have traditionally been addressed in terms of 'who is at fault' or 'why does this happen'. The past years since the Burdekin report on youth homelessness has seen a wider emphasis being placed on the 'plight' of homeless children and to some extent, even an atmosphere of greater understanding and a higher sensitivity to the issue has ensued.

Yet, at times, it seems that young people are still being blamed, or are seen as the reason why youth homelessness exists. That youth homelessness exists *in correlation to* the rise in unemployment, family breakdown, general financial difficulties and economic stresses can sometimes be

overlooked. Youth homelessness is commonly seen *to contribute to* these greater societal issues rather than result from them." (St Vincent de Paul: Submission, p 223)

2.9 Young people have always left home as part of the normal transition towards independence. The relationship between leaving home and youth homelessness, therefore, is a complex one. Leaving home does not necessarily lead to being homeless. However, there are a number of circumstances under which certain young people leave home and become vulnerable to homelessness.

2.10 It is important to place in perspective the extent to which young people leave home. While there is a view that increasing numbers of young people are leaving home, other evidence suggests that the majority of young people continue to remain at home for longer periods of time. Hartley and Wolcott analysed recent ABS data and drew the following conclusions:

- . The overwhelming majority of 15- to 19- year-olds live with their parents. In June 1992... an estimated 91% of males (65% of whom were full-time students) and 86% of females (74% of whom were full-time students) in this age group lived with parents.
- . there has been a noticeable change in the percentage of 20-to 24-year olds living with parents in the past decade or so, increasing from 45.5% in 1979 to 54.8% in 1992 for males, and from 24.8% to 39.8% in the corresponding period for females.²

This is summarised in the following table:

² *ibid.*, p 32.

**Percentage of 15 - 19 years olds and 20 - 24 year olds
living with their parents, 1979 - 1992**

15 - 19			20 - 24	
Year	Males per cent	Females per cent	Males per cent	Females per cent
1979	88.7	80.0	45.5	24.8
1983	91.9	84.9	50.6	29.3
1987	92.6	85.8	53.0	31.9
1992	91.2	86.3	54.8	39.8

* These percentages exclude a small number of 15 to 24 year olds living with their parents who were husbands, wives, sole parents or "other" family heads. Source: ABS, Labour Force Status and Other Characteristics of Families, 1979, 1983, 1987 and 1992 (6224.0)

2.11 While a bleak picture is painted about the extent of family breakdown in Australia, other research quoted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) concludes that the period of adolescence is not necessarily marked by trauma and conflict for children and their parents. The vast majority of young people recorded high levels of positive relationships with their families:

"The accumulated literature suggests that the vast majority of adolescents have positive feelings towards their parents and in fact adopt beliefs compatible with those of their parents." (AIFS: Submission, p 6)

Prolonged Dependency

2.12 The shortage of jobs for young people and the introduction of policies designed to prolong the time that young people spend in education and training, has resulted in increased financial dependency by young people on their families. Evidence indicates that this

prolonged financial dependency has contributed significantly to increased stress within families.

2.13 In a recent paper, "Families for the Future: the place of young people", Peter McDonald of the Australian Urban and Regional Development Review stated:

"The dominant trend in education and parenting for today's young people has been the encouragement of intellectual and social independence. These trends run completely counter to the increasing financial dependence of young people on their parents. The potential for conflict is great."³

2.14 Government policies have shaped this dependency in recent years through policy initiatives designed to keep young people in education and training, and out of the labour market, with the expectation that families will support these young people financially.

2.15 Financial dependency occurs at the same time as young people are developing increasing independence as they move towards adult status. Yet for many families, this continued dependency comes at a considerable cost, not only financially but also in terms of relationships within families.

"Studies of young people and their families (Hartley 1989a; Human Rights & Equal Opportunity Commission 1989; Wilson 1992) indicate that many families do not have an income adequate to support unemployed young people."⁴

³ P McDonald, Australian Urban and Regional Development Review, Address to the ANZAAS 94, Summit on Education and Adolescent Health, Deakin University, Geelong, 29 September 1994, p 4.

⁴ R Hartley & I Wolcott, op. cit., p 77.

2.16 Researchers claim that the continued dependency of young people in low to middle income families, creates financial strains which can be the source of major conflict.

"Homeless young people are more likely to have come out of families experiencing financial difficulty. Unemployed young people are less likely to live at home than other young people."⁵

2.17 The importance of understanding this interaction between youth policy and family policy, and the extent to which it impacts on youth homelessness, is explored in greater depth in Chapter 8.

Age Range Determinants for Services for Young People

2.18 For the purposes of this Inquiry, the Committee has confined itself to examining issues relating to youth homelessness in the age group 12-18 years. This emphasis is not ignoring the fact that there are issues of family breakdown and support, adequacy of income levels and access to affordable housing affecting older groups of young people who become homeless. Indeed, the issue of continuing dependency of young people into their twenties is imposing significant strains on families and young people and is an area of family policy that requires considerable attention. However, the Committee believes that younger people who are without traditional family support, and who do not have secure housing and whose legal status is disputed in relation to care and protection by the State, require particular consideration.

2.19 Factors which have influenced the Committee's decision to focus on the younger end of the youth population include evidence of increasing numbers of young people under the age of 15 years, without

⁵ P McDonald, op. cit., p 5.

family support, either being referred to or presenting at Social Security offices, youth refuges and community agencies and the existence of a degree of community consensus around 18 years being the age of independence.

2.20 However, within the age range 12 - 18 years there is an enormous range of diversity in terms of the needs of young people, as well as their ability to make decisions about their lives and to live without some form of adult support and supervision.

2.21 The issue of age, as it relates to children's rights within families and the general community, is increasingly blurred. The United Nations adopts the age range 12 to 25 years to describe 'youth' or 'young people'. There is no common age definition by either the Commonwealth or State and Territory governments to determine eligibility or access to different programs and services. As a result, various age ranges exist - 15 to 24 year-olds (SAAP services), 12 to 24 year-olds (Youth Social Justice Strategy projects), and 16 to 22 year olds (AUSTUDY). The ambiguous legal position of 14-16-year olds is extensively outlined in the recent work of the Australian Institute of Family Studies.⁶

2.22 The Committee is concerned about the proliferation and arbitrariness of age range categories used within policy areas to target services. Further examination of the increasing complexity and inconsistencies within this area is discussed in Chapter 9.

2.23 The Committee believes the failure to clearly articulate a consistent view of age through a range of Commonwealth and State policies and programs, has contributed greatly to the situation whereby increasing numbers of young people are falling outside government support structures, with the result that some vulnerable young people

⁶ R Hartley & I Wolcott, *op. cit.*, pp 78-80.

are not receiving any official support or care. It is not surprising that parents and the community generally are confused by the lack of a clear and consistent definition of a young person. However, as previous stated, this Report confines itself to the age range 12-18.

Defining Youth Homelessness

2.24 The definition of homelessness is an important issue, because it sets the parameters for understanding both the nature and the extent of the problem. In Australia, a number of definitions have informed policy and service responses at the government and community levels. The absence of an agreed definition partly explains the confusion about 'homelessness' in the community, as well as the divergence of views about the number of homeless young people reported by various researchers.

2.25 The definition contained in the HREOC Report, *Our Homeless Children*, is probably the most widely quoted definition of homelessness:

"Homelessness' describes a lifestyle which includes insecurity and transiency of shelter. It is not confined to a total lack of shelter. For many children and young people it signifies a state of detachment from family and vulnerability to dangers, including exploitation and abuse broadly defined, from which the family normally protects a child. However, the Inquiry also found that there is a growing number of children who are 'homeless' because the whole family cannot obtain adequate shelter."⁷

⁷ B Burdekin, et al., The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Our Homeless Children*, Report of the National Inquiry into Homeless Children, AGPS, Canberra, 1989, p 7.

2.26 The Salvation Army's submission to the Inquiry, uses the definition of homelessness adopted by the National Youth Coalition for Housing. Youth homelessness in these terms is:

"... 'the absence of secure, adequate and satisfactory shelter as perceived by the young person.'... For homelessness to exist at least one of the following conditions or any combinations of conditions should be operative.

An absence of shelter.

The threat of loss of shelter.

Very high mobility between places of abode.

Existing accommodation considered inadequate by the resident for such reasons as over crowding, the physical state of the residence, lack of security of occupancy, or lack of emotion support and stability in the place of residents." (Salvation Army: Submission, p 137)

2.27 Neil and Fopp have defined homelessness in terms of the basic requirements of a home, as that "state in which people have no access to safe and secure shelter of a standards that does not damage their health, threaten their personal safety, or further marginalise them through failing to provide either cooking facilities or facilities that permit adequate personal hygiene." (Salvation Army: Submission, p 137)

2.28 Chamberlain and Mackenzie, who gave evidence to the Inquiry, point out that homelessness is a culturally relative concept which only acquires meaning in terms of how people live in a particular society. They conclude that in Australia young people are homeless if they have:

- a) no accommodation at all (eg. streets, squat, car, tent etc);

- b) only temporary accommodation (with friends, relatives or moving around between various forms of temporary shelter);
- c) emergency accommodation (refuge or crisis accommodation etc);
- d) other long term supported accommodation for homeless people (eg. hostels, youth housing programs, transitional accommodation); and
- e) a single room in a boarding house.⁸

2.29 It is evident that the definition of youth homelessness must be more than the mere absence of a roof over one's head. The Commonwealth Government's Supported Accommodation Assistance Act, which obliges States and Territories to provide accommodation for young people, defines homelessness more broadly than the literal absence of shelter. A person is homeless if he or she has "inadequate access to safe and secure" shelter. A research document from the Brotherhood of St. Laurence also notes that homelessness is "... living without the financial support of the family as well as a lack of emotional and supportive contact with the family."⁹

2.30 It is important to recognise that these definitions of homelessness bear little similarity to the definitions of homelessness used by the Department of Social Security (DSS) and the Department of Employment, Education and Training, to determine eligibility for their respective income support programs. Furthermore, prior to the

⁸ C Chamberlain, D MacKenzie & H Brown, *Understanding Contemporary Homelessness: Issues of Definition and Meaning*, Australian Journal of Social Issues, Vol 27, No 4, 1992, pp 274-297.

⁹ H Morris & B Blaskett, The Brotherhood of St Laurence, *Learning to Survive*, Melbourne, 1992, p 1.

Youth Training Initiative in January 1995, these two key departments responsible for income support at the homeless rate had different definitions and criteria for eligibility. Witnesses before the Inquiry told of homeless young people who could not gain benefits at the homeless rate.

2.31 Many witnesses stressed the importance of understanding homelessness as more than 'street kids'. Young people who are 'homeless' do not live on the street most of the time. They may be accommodated for varying lengths of time with other family members and friends before they wear out their welcome and move on. This was particularly mentioned as a common occurrence in small country towns. In this sense, homelessness is 'hidden' from public view much of the time.

2.32 Researchers Chamberlain and MacKenzie describe homelessness as a 'career process', in that people pass through various stages of homelessness before they develop a self-identity as a 'homeless person'. This concept is particularly valuable for understanding the way young people progress towards chronic homelessness. They have distinguished two major biographical transitions: the 'permanent break' from family and the 'transition to chronic homelessness'. However, there also exists an opportunity for intervention, particularly 'early intervention' if this occurs within the first month or so of young people leaving home.

2.33 The narrow definition of 'literal homelessness' is therefore very misleading, because it includes only young people with no accommodation or those in supported accommodation (SAAP). The reality of homelessness is that many homeless young people move through various forms of temporary accommodation, including some nights on the street, temporary stays with relatives or friends, crisis accommodation, periods in longer term accommodation, and single

rooms in private boarding houses or hotels. Moving around is common. There is evidently a high degree of 'recycling' around the system as the Committee was told of significant numbers of young people who continue to return to crisis accommodation.

2.34 The Committee concludes that although there are various definitions in use, in this Report the following definition of homelessness is used to frame recommendations relating to public policy initiatives:

Young people are homeless if they are living without any family assistance in the following circumstances:

- a) no accommodation at all (eg. streets, squat, car, tent etc);
- b) only temporary accommodation (with friends, relatives or moving around between various forms of temporary shelter);
- c) emergency accommodation (refuge or crisis accommodation etc); and
- d) other long term supported accommodation for homeless people (eg. hostels, youth housing programs, transitional accommodation).

This definition is not necessarily appropriate for targeting benefits and programs but does reflect an emerging community consensus.

The Extent of Youth Homelessness

2.35 The extent of homelessness has been a contentious issue for many years. The Senate Standing Committee on Social Welfare conducted an inquiry on youth homelessness in 1982 and noted that:

"...so unreliable are the statistics available on the extent of youth homelessness that the committee was hesitant to refer to them at all... until such as a properly conducted survey is undertaken, with adequate supervision and controls there will continue to be conjecture as to the extent of the problem and whether or not the problem is increasing."¹⁰

2.36 Seven years later, the HREOC stated:

"The Inquiry notes with particular concern the almost total lack of data concerning the numbers of homeless children which has been compiled by Federal and State Governments... This is certainly not an easy task - but it must be urgently addressed, so that Governments and community responses to this extremely serious problem are adequate."¹¹

2.37 The Committee appreciates the importance of gaining a more accurate estimate of the homeless population, in order to assess the dimensions of youth homelessness and family breakdown in Australia, as well as to assess the level of resources required to provide appropriate public policy responses. In addition, there has been a strong media position prior to the Inquiry, that there has been a considerable growth in the number of young people gaining income support at the homeless rate, with the suggestion that this support is too easily obtained. The Committee is concerned to examine these claims on the basis of objective evidence.

¹⁰ Senate Standing Committee on Social Welfare, *Report on Homeless Youth*, Parliamentary Paper No 231/1982, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1982, p 30.

¹¹ B Burdekin, *op. cit.*, p 69.

2.38 The Committee concurs with views expressed in both the 1989 HREOC Report and by the earlier Senate Committee. There has been little useful common data collected by either the Department of Social Security or the Department of Employment, Education and Training on recipients of their respective benefits at the homeless rate. They have been using somewhat different criteria and reporting figures in different ways. It is also important that common regional boundaries are used.

2.39 The Committee recommends that, given current arrangements, the Departments of Social Security and Employment, Education and Training establish a common client information data system to ensure better comparability and greater cohesiveness in analysing Commonwealth income support payments to young homeless people.

2.40 The Department of Housing and Regional Development, which is responsible for SAAP, has planned an extensive national data collection to begin in 1996, but this information will not provide a comprehensive measure of the extent of the problem, since only a minority of homeless youth are accommodated in or supported by SAAP at any time. The Committee is concerned that the data collected by these government departments cannot readily be integrated into a more complete overview of the problem. Better data remains an urgent issue, though the Committee is encouraged by the Australian Bureau of Statistics' strategy for enumerating homeless people in the 1996 Census of Population and Housing.

2.41 According to DSS, there were 9 640 clients receiving the Young Homeless Allowance in May 1994. DEET reports that there were 10 638 AUSTUDY recipients at the homeless rate in April 1994, of which 5 092 were secondary school students.

2.42 Because of the different ways statistics are kept and analysed at different points in time it is difficult to consolidate and compare figures between the two departments. The following table on the number of homeless beneficiaries was compiled using data from both DSS and DEET at one point in time in 1994.

HOMELESS BENEFICIARIES AS AT MAY 1994

	NSW & ACT	VIC	QLD & NT	SA	WA	TAS	AUST
YHA	3 123	1 965	2 160	1 138	892	362	9 640
AUSTUDY (SHR)	4 215	3 554	1 468	970	724	275	11 206
TOTAL	7 338	5 519	3 628	2 108	1 616	637	20 846

2.43 The annual number of all AUSTUDY (SHR) beneficiaries during 1994 was 16 039. DSS estimate that over a year the number of young people receiving the Young Homeless Allowance would be approximately 20 000.

2.44 The Department of Social Security provided a breakdown of YHA recipients by age, State and benefit type. This is illustrated in the following tables:

**DSS YOUNG HOMELESS ALLOWANCE (YHA) RECIPIENTS
AS AT 23 MAY 1994**

State	12 yrs	13 yrs	14 yrs	15 yrs	16 yrs	17 yrs	18 yrs	Total
NSW & ACT	3	16	129	409	1 004	1 512	50	3 123
VIC	-	3	37	231	626	1 028	40	1 965
QLD & NT	-	2	48	333	684	1 042	51	2 160
SA	-	-	13	126	406	569	24	1 138
WA	-	1	45	173	299	357	17	892
TAS	-	-	5	41	126	180	10	362
AUST	3	22	277	1 313	3 145	4 688	192	9 640

Note: those aged 18 years are included as a result of their being granted just prior to turning 18 and receiving their first JSA payment as 18 year olds.

Source: Correspondence to the Committee from the Department of Social Security, April 1995.

YHA RECIPIENTS BY PAYMENT TYPE AS AT 23 MAY 1994

	under 14	14 yrs	15 yrs	16 yrs	17 yrs	18 yrs	Total
JSA	-	1	319	3 016	4 587	154	8 077
Sickness Allowance	-	-	-	14	35	2	51
Special Benefit	25	270	514	95	61	3	968
Special (JSA conds)	-	6	479	20	5	-	510
NSA	-	-	-	-	-	34	34
Total	25	277	1 312	3 145	4 688	193	9 640

Source: Correspondence to the Committee from the Department of Social Security, April 1995.

2.45 Official data on recipients of income support at the homeless rate cannot be related in a simple way to the work of other researchers because:

- . different definitions of homelessness are used;
- . a significant number of income support recipients achieve independent accommodation and are no longer homeless; and
- . there are homeless young people who do not meet the eligibility criteria for income support at the homeless rate.

2.46 When assessing figures for the number of homeless, it is important to keep in mind whether the figure is taken over a year (annual prevalence of homelessness) or at a particular point in time (point prevalence). There is a high degree of turnover in the homeless

population and the annual figure can be substantially larger than a point in time estimate. MacKenzie and Chamberlain argue that in terms of public policy, it is the point in time figure which provides the better indicator of the level of resources needed to support homeless young people. But, they also caution that both annual and point in time figures need to be examined when making sense of the overall extent of homelessness.

2.47 In 1989, the HREOC report was the first serious attempt to estimate the extent of youth homelessness in Australia. Dr Rodney Fopp was commissioned to examine all the available data and prepare an estimate of the number of homeless children and young people. Fopp concluded that there were 'approximately 50 000 homeless young people' aged 12 to 24 in Australia each night, that this was an 'absolute minimum' figure and that the number could be as high as 70 000.¹² The Report, in the end, proposed a figure of between 20 000 and 25 000. However, it was not always clear whether figures were point in time or annual and as Fopp has pointed out, some figures may have referred to under 18 year olds, whereas his figure of 50 000 to 70 000 included 12 to 24 year olds.

2.48 MacKenzie and Chamberlain have raised questions about the accuracy of the higher 50 000 to 70 000 estimate on methodological grounds. They point out that 60 000 of the young people in Fopp's estimate were classified by the ABS as 'usual residents of private dwellings' (flats and shared houses). Thus none of these young people were actually homeless. MacKenzie and Chamberlain have developed an alternative method for estimating the extent of youth homelessness based on inferences about the proportion of homeless young people 12 to 24 years old, accommodated in SAAP. They estimated that there were between 15 000 and 19 000 homeless youth aged 12 to 24 years across Australia in May 1991. About 8 000 to 10 000 of these young

¹² B Burdekin, *op cit*, p 365.

people were aged 12 to 18 years.¹³ This is the age group of primary concern to this Inquiry.

2.49 In the last week of May 1994, MacKenzie and Chamberlain carried out a national census of homeless school students.¹⁴ They contacted every government and Catholic secondary school in Australia and asked schools to record the number of homeless students in census week. Altogether, 99% of schools responded, and they identified 11 000 homeless students. There were 7 700 young people who were in temporary accommodation and 3 300 who had been recently homeless and were still supported by their school. Welfare staff think of these young people as homeless because they need continuing support and assistance.

2.50 Over a year Mackenzie and Chamberlain estimated that 25 000 to 30 000 students experience homelessness, and they found that most homeless school students do not complete their secondary schooling. Apart from homeless school students, the Committee understands that the total homeless youth population also includes a large number of unemployed young people outside the education system.

2.51 The National Census of Homeless School Students was carried out in the same week as the official census of people using supported accommodation in SAAP. MacKenzie and Chamberlain propose that by combining information from these two sources it is possible to estimate the extent of youth homelessness at this point. They conclude that there were 21 000 homeless young people aged 12 to 18 years in May 1994, comprising 7 700 homeless school students, about 1 200 other students (mainly TAFE), and 12 000 young people

¹³ D MacKenzie & C Chamberlain, *How Many Homeless Youth?*, Youth Studies Australia, 1992, Vol 11, No 4, pp 14-22.

¹⁴ D Mackenzie & C Chamberlain, *The National Census of Homeless School Students*, Youth Studies Australia, 1995, Vol 14, No 1, pp 22-28.

who were mainly unemployed or outside the labour force. In addition, they point out that there were a further 9 000 young people (about 4 000 students and 5 000 unemployed) who had recently achieved independent accommodation, but required continuing support.

2.52 Most statistics relating to the number of homeless young people indicate considerable growth over the years up to 1993. This is illustrated in the following table which shows the growth in the number of young people receiving Young Homeless Allowance, in addition to Job Search Allowance, Sickness Benefit Allowance or Special Benefit. The 1994 figures show, for the first time, a decline in the number of young people receiving Young Homeless Allowance.

June Monthly Average Number	Job Search Allowance	Sickness Benefit/ Allowance	Special Benefit	Total Young Homeless Allowance	Increase As A Percentage Of Previous Year's Total
1987	668	30	245	942	
1988	1 190	61	381	1 632	73.3
1989	1 487	60	449	1 996	22.3
1990	1 987	52	591	2 630	31.8
1991	3 787	34	159	4 880	85.6
1992	6 132	31	1 902	8 065	65.3
1993	8 836	52	1 592	10 480	29.9
1994*	8 621	51	968	9 640	-8.02

Source: DSS: Submission, p 284.

* 1994 Figures provided by the Department of Social Security, April 1995. They are based on May 1994 figures.

2.53 MacKenzie and Chamberlain also identify a significant increase in the number of homeless after comparing their 1994 estimate of 21 000 with the earlier estimate of 8 000 to 10 000 in May 1991. These figures suggests that youth homelessness has doubled between 1991 and 1994.

2.54 MacKenzie and Chamberlain conclude that :

"This evidence suggests that the increased number of young people receiving income support at the homeless rate is not the result of easy access to benefits."¹⁵

2.55 The Committee concludes that there are more beneficiaries because the number of homeless youth has increased.

2.56 The National Youth Coalition for Housing, referring to SAAP national Client Census data, questions any link between the growth in the number of young people leaving home and the availability of income support:

"The important point to make in relation to these figures and current claims that increased uptake of government income benefits are encouraging young people to leave the parental home, is that despite significant increases in young people's access to income support, the percentage of young people leaving the parental home to stay in crisis services has remained virtually unchanged over time (a maximum variation of + 2%)... Despite the fact that the number of YHA recipients has increased significantly in the past 5 years, the percentage of young people leaving the family home has remained virtually unchanged." (NYCH: Submission, pp 95-96)

¹⁵ D Mackenzie & C Chamberlain, Correspondence to the Committee, March 1995.

2.57 Findings from the National Census of Homeless School Students also indicate that many young people who become homeless drop out of school before getting onto AUSTUDY at the homeless rate. Information provided by DEET suggests that those who get the benefit have a much better chance of staying on at school than those who do not. However, it is clear that many young people who experience homelessness have difficulty obtaining income support at the homeless rate. MacKenzie and Chamberlain concluded that:

"Under the current eligibility criteria and administrative procedures, it seems likely that only 30% to 50% gain access to AUSTUDY at the homeless rate. The drop out rate for homeless students overall is high."¹⁶

2.58 The Committee concludes that the available evidence on the extent of youth homelessness does not support the proposition that allowances are easy to obtain.

Characteristics of Young People who are Homeless

2.59 As a result of research and inquiries conducted over the last decade, there has been a significant body of knowledge developed on the characteristics of young people who are homeless. There is common agreement about the profile of youth homelessness in Australia:

"The peak age of homeless youth is 16-17 years. All known samples taken from the homeless youth population have suggested this - homeless school students, chronically homeless youth... and the SAAP data." (MacKenzie and Chamberlain: Transcript of evidence, p 2715)

¹⁶ *ibid.*

DSS figures indicate a slightly higher number of young women were granted YHA (53 per cent) compared to young males (47 per cent). This is supported by other research which indicates young women are more vulnerable to homelessness. Young women tend to leave home at a younger age than males, for serious reasons that result in them staying away; (DSS: Submission, p 290)

Further DSS figures show that 63 per cent of all YHA clients under the age of 15 years, and 59 per cent under the age of 16 years, are female. (DSS: Submission, p 290)

A file review carried out by the Department of Social Security in 1994 showed that 30.7 percent of the claimants came from single parent families, and 28.7 per cent came from families with one natural parent and one step parent. (DSS: Submission, p 287)

DSS figures show that more females were granted YHA under 'unreasonable to live at home' for reasons of physical or sexual abuse or other exceptional circumstances compared to young males where the reason was more likely to be 'not allowed to live at home'. (DSS: Submission, p 290)

Factors Contributing to Homelessness

2.60 There is general consensus about the factors contributing to youth homelessness. Throughout the Inquiry, the Committee received similar evidence from a wide range of community organisations and State and Commonwealth departments.

2.61 Factors cited include family conflict, including family violence and abuse, family poverty and resulting stress, high incidence of youth unemployment and increased dependency of young people

within families, a history of State intervention and wardship, substance abuse and mental illness.

2.62 Availability of income support for young people as an incentive to leave home will be discussed further in Chapter 5, in the context of examining administrative procedures of income support assessment and payment to young people.

2.63 It is clear, however, that there is some disagreement between government and community groups, given the evidence presented to the Inquiry, about the extent to which the availability of income support to young people acts as an incentive for young people to leave home. While some parents hold this position strongly, the Committee received evidence from practitioners in the field that many young homeless people are severely disadvantaged and damaged, and had little choice about their personal circumstances.

2.64 Some State government submissions also supported the existence of the allowance, providing appropriate safeguards are built into the system. The Victorian Government outlined its position as follows:

"The Victorian Government supports the retention of the Young Homeless Allowance as a form of income support for homeless young people where:

- . proper assessments have been made and young people are assessed as being in genuine need;
- . attempts at family reconciliation or mediation have been made where appropriate;
- . cases of abuse have been referred to State Government Protective Services under agreed protocols between Commonwealth and State Ministers; and

young people deemed to be in need of income support are subject to ongoing case management by DSS and DEET in conjunction with non-government service providers to ensure integrated and co-ordinated service delivery is available for young people and their families." (Victorian Government: Submission, p 1026)

2.65 There are a number of other factors identified as contributing to youth homelessness which the Committee believes needs to be carefully examined, as they have significant implications for the standard of care and protection the Australian community provides for its children. One of these is the relationship between mental illness and homelessness amongst young people. The Committee is concerned that this relationship has not received sufficient attention or priority by government or the community, and, as a result, there are few services provided for families and adolescents in this area. The evidence received by the Committee and recommendations for attending to the current deficiencies are discussed in Chapter 12.

Extent of Child Abuse

2.66 The incidence of child abuse as a factor contributing to youth homelessness is a very confronting reality for the Australian community.

2.67 Submissions from peak welfare organisations such as Centacare, the Salvation Army and St Vincent de Paul support and confirm a high level of violence and abuse in the families of many people who seek emergency accommodation.

2.68 The recent HREOC report into Human Rights and Mental Illness states that abuse of children in the community is higher than the community acknowledges.

"It is only relatively recently that health and welfare services and the courts acknowledged that many adults seriously harm or neglect their babies, children and adolescents."¹⁷

2.69 In evidence given to the HREOC Inquiry into Homeless Children, it was suggested that one in four girls and one in six to nine boys were subjected to sexual abuse at some time before reaching adulthood.¹⁸ The Report commented that:

"The substantial link between child abuse and ultimate homelessness is, in many cases, beyond question."¹⁹

2.70 The HREOC Report into Human Rights and Mental Illness goes further and states:

"The fact that childhood neglect and abuse can substantially contribute to the development of mental illness and behavioural and emotional disturbance was confirmed by many witnesses to the Inquiry, particularly clinicians working with children. The effects are appalling - and the gravity of the problem is not recognised by Australian society, or, indeed, by our governments."²⁰

2.71 Figures provided by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, which compiles statistics from the State and Territory welfare departments, give some indication of the extent of abuse within our community. In summary:

¹⁷ B Burdekin, et al., *Human Rights and Mental Illness*, Report of The National Inquiry into the Human Rights of People with Mental Illness, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Vol 2, AGPS, Canberra, 1993, pp 610-611.

¹⁸ B Burdekin, et al., *op. cit.*, Vol 1.

¹⁹ B Burdekin, *op cit*, p 91.

²⁰ B Burdekin, *op. cit.*, p 611.

- " State and Territory welfare departments received 59,122 reports of child abuse and neglect during 1992-93 - an increase of 10.9% over 1991-92. Of these, the assessment of 55,895 cases was finalised.
- . Of the 55,895 cases of child abuse and neglect finalised during the year, 25,630 cases were substantiated (46% of finalised cases). A further 2,543 cases (5%), were not substantiated but the child was assessed as being at risk. There were 25,483 cases (46%) in which no abuse or neglect was found, and a further 2,239 cases (4%) where no action was possible.
- . The 25,630 cases of child abuse and neglect substantiated during 1992-93 involved 22,379 children and represents an increase of 19.9% from 1991-92. This increase has been influenced by a change in the reporting procedures in Victoria.
- . Children of both sexes were represented almost equally in substantiated cases of neglect, physical abuse and emotional abuse, while females were the victims in the majority (77%) of sexual abuse cases.
- . The largest numbers of children in substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect were those aged 13 and 14 years, (1,628 and 1,734 respectively) - a rate of 6.6 and 7.0 children per 1,000 respectively.
- . A natural parent was believed responsible in 69% of substantiated cases, a step parent in 6% and a de facto parent in 5%. Friends and neighbours were believed responsible for 7% of cases.
- . The highest number of cases of child abuse and neglect were reported by friends and neighbours (17% of finalised cases), parents (15%), school personnel (15%) and policy (15%).
- . Reports of abuse and neglect from medical workers other than a medial practitioner had the highest rate

of substantiation (64%), followed by cases reported by the subject child (60%), the police (59%) and department officers (58%). Reports from anonymous person (18%), and friends and neighbours (30%), showed the lowest rate of substantiation."²¹

2.72 Child abuse and neglect, along with family conflict, have been established as key risk factors in youth homelessness. A major research project by the Salvation Army, titled 'Forced Exit' in 1989 identified a population of young people cut off from family and community supports, and at severe risk.

"Many of the young people interviewed by the project had been sexually abused. Almost 50% had been or were current Wards of the State." (Salvation Army: Submission, p 136)

2.73 Contrasted with this evidence is the concern expressed by parent groups to the Inquiry that many false accusations of child abuse are being made by young people when claiming the homeless rate of income support. The process by which allegations of abuse are investigated and the extent to which parents are advised and given opportunities to defend themselves will be explored as part of Chapter 11.

²¹ G Angus et al., *Child abuse and neglect in Australia 1992-93*, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Child Welfare Series No 9, AGPS, Canberra, 1994, pp 1, 47.

Note: All States and Territories except Western Australia and the ACT have systems of compulsory reporting of child abuse.

Note: A case is given an outcome of 'Substantiated' where there is reasonable cause to believe that the child has been or is being abused or neglected substantiation does not necessarily require sufficient evidence for a successful prosecution and does not imply that treatment or case management was, or is to be, provided.

International Obligations - UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

2.74 The significance of the Convention on the Rights of the Child for the Inquiry comes from two directions. One involves the responsibility of the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments to ensure that the rights of children are protected. The other revolves around the extent to which the Convention balances the respective rights of young people in the context of the family. These two issues are central to the Inquiry and have been explored with witnesses during the hearings.

2.75 The Committee is in no doubt that the payment of income support to young people under 18 years and as young as 13 years of age cannot be conducted in the absence of understanding and appreciating the relationship of young people to their parent/s and guardians. At the same time, children and young people in our society have the same human rights as any other Australian citizen, which the Australian government is bound to respect and enforce, in law, if necessary.

2.76 Throughout the Inquiry, expressions of support and opposition to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child were put to the Committee. It is not proposed in this Report to explore Australia's international role and commitment to United Nations Treaties. However, the Committee believes it is appropriate to give a picture of the context in which Australia came to be a signatory to this Convention and what its subsequent obligations are in regard to the rights of children in Australia.

2.77 The Convention was ratified by Australia on 17 December 1990. States and Territories were consulted and briefed of the requirements of the Convention throughout the 10-year drafting process. The Committee understands, from advice received from the Attorney-General's Department, that all States, with the exception of

NSW, agreed to Australia being a party to the Convention. This does not mean that NSW is less obliged than the other States and Territories to abide by the agreed terms of the Convention. However, lack of adherence to the provisions of the Convention would require Commonwealth legislation to enforce its effect.

2.78 A recent decision by the High Court (*Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs v Ah Hin Teoh*) upheld that while the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child has not been incorporated into Australian law, Australia's ratification of the Convention creates a legitimate expectation that administrative decision-makers will act in accordance with the Convention. This decision may lead to a considerable reassessment of Australia's obligations under all of its international treaties. This could have wide ranging domestic implications.

2.79 The rights of the child and the role of the family are spelt out in the Convention of the Rights of the Child, which the Australian government has committed itself to fulfilling. The key elements of this convention include:

- . the meaning and content of the declaration of the rights of the child;
- . role of the family;
- . right of the child to 'special protection';
- . right to social security;
- . right to adequate housing, medical services and nutrition; and
- . protection against neglect, cruelty and exploitation.

2.80 A number of articles under the Convention oblige governments to provide young people with a range of services which ensure their care and protection. Article 3(3) stipulates that:

States Parties shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, in the number of suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision.

2.81 Article 20 of the Convention also specifies that:

1. A child temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment, or in whose own best interests cannot be allowed to remain in that environment, shall be entitled to special protection and assistance provided by the State.
2. States Parties shall in accordance with their national laws ensure alternative care for such a child.

2.82 Article 27 (1) reinforces the needs for appropriate living conditions for the development of the child:

States Parties recognise the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.

2.83 Under Article 28, the Convention has placed specific emphasis on the right of all children to a full and free education. Article 28 reads:

States Parties recognise the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall in particular:

- (a) Make primary education compulsory and free to all:

- (b) Encourage the development of different forms of secondary education, including general and vocational education, make them available and accessible to every child, and take appropriate measures such as the introduction of free education and offering financial assistance in case of need:
- (c) Make higher education accessible to all on the basis of capacity by every appropriate means:
- (d) Make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children:
- (e) Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates.

2.84 Article 19 of the Convention imposes the following obligations on countries which have ratified the Convention:

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.
2. Such protective measures should, as appropriate, include effective procedures for the establishment of social programmes to provide necessary support for the child and for those who have the care of the child, as well as for other forms of prevention and for identification, reporting, referral, investigation, treatment and follow-up of instances

of child maltreatment described heretofore, and, as appropriate, for judicial involvement.

2.85 The Convention also acknowledges the rights, duties and responsibilities of parents and families in Article 5. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 11.

2.86 As previously discussed, there has been criticism levelled at the payment of the Young Homeless Allowance, suggesting that such an allowance encourages children to leave home. It is important to note, however, that as a States Party to the Convention, Australia (including its States and Territories) is obliged to ensure that children who have become homeless are entitled to care and shelter provided by the State as well as income security.

2.87 Article 26 of the Convention specifies that:

1. States Parties shall recognise for every child the right to benefit from social security, including social insurance, and shall take the necessary measures to achieve the full realisation of this right in accordance with their natural law.
2. The benefits should, where appropriate, be granted, taking into account the resources and the circumstance of the child and persons having responsibility for the maintenance of the child, as well as any other consideration relevant to an application for benefits made by or on behalf of the child.

2.88 A copy of the Convention is attached at Appendix 3.

2.89 Despite Australia's adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, there has also been criticism about the failure of Australia to comply with the requirements of the Convention and for the failure

of either Commonwealth or State/Territory laws to be enacted to incorporate the provisions of the Convention. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Report into Homeless Children, in 1989, commented about Australia's failure to meet its obligation to homeless youth.

2.90 This was illustrated by the comments of a spokesperson from DEET, when commenting on how Australia meets its obligations to children under the Convention, who said:

"My understanding is that international conventions are the responsibility of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Obviously, we have a role which has changed over time and it is continuing to evolve." (DEET: Transcript of evidence, p 2767)

2.91 The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission commented:

"The Inquiry found that homelessness represents a personal tragedy for many thousands of Australia's children. It also represents a failure by governments to fulfil our international commitment to protect the rights of children. This commitment has been made at the international level in the Declaration of the Rights of the Child and other international instruments, and at the national level by means of the incorporation of these international agreements in Federal law."²²

2.92 The extent to which the Commonwealth and the State and Territory governments adequately provide for the care and protection of children has been seriously questioned in evidence. The Committee was particularly struck by the lack of clarity between different levels of government and between government departments about their respective responsibilities. The Inquiry revealed that there has been a

²² B Burdekin, op. cit., p 33.

considerable amount of shifting of responsibility in the area of child and family welfare, both between departments and between Commonwealth and State governments. This is both in relation to the level of obligation for services and for policy coordination.

2.93 The Committee is concerned that, at a Commonwealth level, there is little appreciation of the importance of the Convention in providing the philosophical, moral and legal basis to policy and program delivery for children and families. The Family Court of Australia is perhaps the one exception, as it appears to have incorporated the concept of 'the best interests of the child' into its policy development and decision making.

2.94 At present, the various laws in Australia relating to children lack uniformity. This situation was the source of criticism by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Children, Mr Viti Muntarbhorn when he visited Australia in 1993. He believed inconsistencies in Australian laws could be addressed by the Commonwealth providing a national standard on children's services.²³

2.95 The Rapporteur's Report goes on to state that the responsibility for the care of children and the protection of their rights rests primarily with the family. In doing so, the Declaration recognises that it is in the interests of the child to grow up in the family environment wherever possible.

2.96 The Committee believes that the responsibility for young people involves the State, the community, families and individuals themselves. It requires establishing an effective balance between these institutions and interests. It is not a matter of moving this

²³ Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, *A Review of Australia's Efforts to Promote and Protect Human Rights*, The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, AGPS, Canberra, November 1994, p 153.

responsibility towards the family alone, nor one of trying to delineate which level of government bears full responsibility.

2.97 The Committee understands that Australia was particularly active in the drafting process of the Convention, especially in the inclusion and wording of the importance of family in the lives of children. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 11.

2.98 The position of younger adolescents is particularly difficult, however, as families and governments together have clear responsibilities for ensuring the protection of children. It is of considerable concern that too many children, particularly those aged between 12-15 years are not receiving adequate support from either their family or from government services:

"There is abundant evidence that enormous social injustices concerning children and young people are occurring in Australia. In the face of these, the current situation whereby some unsupported 15-year-olds fall between the stools of Commonwealth and State government responsibilities, and younger adolescents fall through the various "safety nets" is untenable."²⁴

2.99 This interface between the rights of the child and the respective responsibilities of government, the community and individual families lies in ensuring the care and protection of children. This forms a centrepiece for the Committee's deliberations on how best to develop structures which may more adequately respond to the needs of young people who are homeless or at risk of being homeless and is explored in detail during the remaining Chapters of the Report.

²⁴ R Hartley & I Wolcott, *op. cit.*, p 94.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF INCOME SUPPORT AND OTHER SERVICES FOR YOUNG HOMELESS PEOPLE

3.1 Direct Commonwealth involvement in paying income support to young people assessed as being homeless, occurred after a period of providing funding to community organisations to provide accommodation, support and counselling for these young people.

3.2 The response of the Commonwealth government indicates how the payment developed:

During the 1970's, there was considerable emphasis given to the labour market disadvantage of young people. Throughout this decade, Commonwealth government initiatives included the Special Youth Employment Program, the Community Youth Support Scheme, and the Education Program for Unemployed Youth.

In 1978, the Conference of Welfare Ministers urged the Commonwealth Government to provide funds for emergency accommodation for homeless youth. The Government established the Youth Services Scheme in July 1979 and by June 1982, there were 75 agencies funded to provide short-term accommodation and support services to young people in crisis. (DSS: Submission, p 273)

The Senate Standing Committee on Social Welfare published a report on Homeless Youth in 1982. It was critical of the focus of the Youth Services Scheme on youth refuges and recommended a higher rate of benefit to unemployed young people under 18 years who were homeless or at risk of homelessness, and direct payments to suppliers of accommodation to homeless students.

In 1983, the Commonwealth introduced the Supported Accommodation Scheme as an alternative to paying rent assistance to homeless youth. This was followed by the introduction of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) in all States in 1985. It was the first national program designed to assist homeless people in crisis and women and children escaping domestic violence. SAAP was funded by the Federal and State governments.

The Young Homeless Allowance (YHA) was introduced in 1986 as a supplementary payment for homeless 16 and 17 year olds receiving Unemployment Benefits (as it was then called).

"The rate set meant that independence measures in the Departments of Education and Social Security became correlated, resulting in a maximum rate of payment being set that was equal to the maximum rate of the then Tertiary Education Assistance Scheme (TEAS) allowance for 16 and 17 year olds living away from home." (DSS: Submission, p 274)

3.3 Another influential development occurred as a result of a test case going to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal:

"The introduction of the [Young Homeless] Allowance followed an Administrative Appeals Tribunal decision (Spooner and Secretary, Department of Social Security, 1985). The AAT decision resulted in some students being

eligible to receive TEAS as well as Special Benefit from DSS whilst making no similar provision for unemployed homeless 16 or 17 year olds." (DSS: Submission, p 274)

3.4 Following the introduction of the Young Homeless Allowance in 1986, the 'junior' rate of Unemployment Benefit was abolished to be replaced by Job Search Allowance (JSA) for unemployed young people aged 16 to 17 years, subject to a parental income test. In addition AUSTUDY at the Homeless Rate was introduced in 1987.

3.5 The independent rate of JSA, defined as having lived away from home for at least 6 months and having been employed for 13 weeks or more and not having received any support from parents/guardians during that time, was introduced in January 1990.

3.6 In March 1992, Independent/homeless 16 and 17 year olds became eligible for Rent Assistance after an 18 week waiting period. (AUSTUDY Student Homeless Rate clients were not eligible.)

3.7 In the 1991-92 Budget, the Commonwealth Government announced that the Department of Social Security would undertake a series of Youth Pilot Projects:

"The projects were designed to test different methods of delivering services to young homeless people, and in the process to collect demographic and other data on homelessness, to assist with the assessment of how to improve take up of payments and related services." (DSS: Submission, p 276)

"Project models and locations were determined by factors including client numbers and concerns about the needs of particular client groups. Eleven pilot projects were established in 1992 across five States: one each in Adelaide

and Brisbane, Cairns and Shepparton; two in Perth and Melbourne; and three in Sydney."¹

3.8 As a result of the evaluation, the Commonwealth approved the establishment of 10 permanent Youth Service Units in the 1993 Budget. They began operating in 1994.

Impact of the National Inquiry into Homeless Children by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission

3.9 The National Inquiry into Homeless Children by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), released in 1989, marked a watershed in the public policy approach and response to young homeless children in Australia. It identified the lack of adequate services and policies at the Commonwealth, State/Territory and community levels and made wide ranging recommendations to prevent or ameliorate the disadvantaged and marginalised circumstances of young homeless people.

3.10 The HREOC Report expressed concern about accessibility and adequacy of income support through the Department of Social Security.

3.11 In its submission to the current Inquiry, the Department of Social Security commented on the HREOC Report's criticism of the income support programs for young homeless people administered by DSS:

"The report recommended the Department adopt service delivery models that would encourage and support homeless young people applying for income support, including

¹ Department of Social Security, *Working With Homeless Youth*, A report of the findings of the Department of Social Security Youth Pilot Projects, April 1994.

outreach to community agencies and refuges, and training for DSS staff regarding the needs of homeless young people." (DSS: Submission, pp 274-275)

3.12 The Department responded to these criticisms and put in place improved procedures to increase access by young homeless people to income support payments. This appears, in part, to explain the increase in the numbers of young people who have become eligible for the payment since that time.

3.13 One of the major responses to the HREOC Report was the Commonwealth Government's Youth Social Justice Strategy, released in 1989. The 1989-90 budget statement provided a \$100 million package of initiatives for disadvantaged young people over four years. Homeless youth were accorded priority and more than half of this expenditure was directed towards assisting homeless young people or those at risk of homelessness.

3.14 The Youth Social Justice package included:

- . additional assistance for SAAP services, increases in income support rates and reductions in waiting periods, labour market assistance, education, counselling and innovative health programs, and access to information services; and
- . \$5.5 million was provided for adolescent-parent mediation services to assist families resolve conflicts that could lead to young people leaving home inappropriately.

3.15 A further 400 separate initiatives were funded under the Youth Social Justice Strategy (YSJS) to approximately 270 services. This increased the amount of medium and long term accommodation available to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Many of these initiatives are still recurrently funded and form part of the network of services for young homeless people.

3.16 The HREOC Report was also extremely critical of the role of the State as a parent, the large number of State Wards who were homeless or in detention and the increasing failure of the States to provide assistance to families in need and to take responsibility for young people who were without family support.

"This evidence is a serious indictment of the State - which has not only the power to provide for these children but an obligation, and the resources, to do so."²

3.17 The extent of this continuing withdrawal of support by the States and Territories and its consequences for family support has emerged as a central issue in this Inquiry and will be further explored in Chapter 9.

3.18 Submissions to the HREOC Inquiry into Homeless Children, including several from State governments, pointed out that young people could leave school at 15 in most States and were legally able to work but did not have access to employment training programs or income support while looking for work.

3.19 It is probably fair to say that the Commonwealth did not foresee the impact that the introduction of this Allowance would have on the number of young people becoming eligible for the payment. The introduction of the Allowance, when combined with the changing philosophy of State and Territory welfare departments regarding guardianship, wardship and State intervention, has contributed significantly to the blurring of responsibilities for young people by the

² B Burdekin, et al, *Our Homeless Children*, Report of the National Inquiry into Homeless Children, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, AGPS, Canberra, 1989, p 110.

two levels of government over time. As well, this shifting in responsibilities has created substantial gaps in care and support services to young people:

"The Young Homeless Allowance, which came into operation in 1986, was an acknowledgment of Commonwealth government responsibility for a limited number of young people under 18 years who were living independently of their families."³

3.20 The Committee is strongly of the view that the changes in the philosophy and practices of State welfare authorities to reduce State involvement in the lives of young people has contributed significantly to the overall increase in the numbers of young people claiming income support. In addition, the Committee has heard evidence from the Department of Social Security that there has been an increase in the number of quite young children (12 years to 14) who have been claiming YHA in recent years, often with the support and advocacy of State government welfare authorities:

"There is significant concern both within and outside the Department over the number, and circumstances, of very young children who are approaching the Department for income support. Of greatest concern are those young people under the age of fifteen years. Typically these young people are aged thirteen or fourteen years, however claims for YHA have been received from children as young as eleven years of age.

The proportion of YHA grants to young people under the age of fifteen years has remained steady at between three and four per cent of all YHA claims granted since July 1991. Thirteen and fourteen year olds are not a large proportion of the total YHA population, but are of particular concern

³ R Hartley & I Wolcott, National Youth Affairs Research Scheme, *The Position of Young People in Relation to the Family*, Australian Institute of Family Studies, National Clearing House for Youth Studies, Hobart, 1994, p 72.

because they may be especially vulnerable to risk, or exploitation, and are less able to take care of themselves than older homeless people. In the absence of a supportive family these young people need care and stability in their lives, secure accommodation, and encouragement to continue with their education, so that their long term life chances are not compromised." (DSS: Submission, pp 294-295)

3.21 This is graphically illustrated by the following case studies provided to the Inquiry:

"David, a 13 year old boy, was placed in a youth refuge, after being released on bail from the Children's Court charged with the offences of 'attempt to steal' and 'goods in custody'. A condition of the bail was that David accept the supervision of the State Welfare Department. The State Welfare Department advised the youth refuge that, as David was not a State Ward, financial responsibility for his upkeep lay with the Department of Social Security. David was accompanied to the Department by refuge staff to claim Special Benefit and YHA. Departmental staff negotiated with refuge staff to assume the role of nominee for David's payments.

Adam was 14 years old, living 'on the streets', and surviving by selling drugs and stealing. It was considered unreasonable for Adam to live at home, as his mother used heroin and worked as a prostitute, and his father was physically violent towards his wife. Adam was referred to the State Welfare Department before assessment of his entitlement to YHA was finalised. The State Welfare Department advised that Adam would be inappropriate for foster placement or an intensive neighbourhood care placement, as he had been living on the streets for some time, and probably would not stay in placement. As Adam had no other form of income or support, he was granted Special Benefit and YHA." (DSS: Submission, pp 295, 298)

Introduction of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)

3.22 As already outlined, the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) was designed to assist young people who were homeless, before income support through the Commonwealth became available. The Commonwealth government has been providing some form of support to young people not living at home since the late 1970's, although it was not until 1985 that the Program was introduced in its current form and was jointly funded by the Commonwealth and State/Territory governments.

3.23 The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program funds approximately 500 services for young people. The range of services includes:

- . day care centres providing meals;
- . training and recreational activities;
- . outreach services assisting them to cope with living in a range of mainly unstable and unsuitable living arrangements;
- . intensive support services;
- . refuges providing emergency accommodation and support; and
- . information and referral services.

3.24 The 1989 HREOC Report was particularly critical of the lack of medium to long term accommodation options for young people and there has been a considerable emphasis on developing alternative forms of accommodation for young people in recent years. However, there continue to be major concerns about the refuge and crisis accommodation focus of SAAP.

3.25 The role and operation of SAAP services has emerged as a key issue for this Inquiry. Some of the areas that will be explored

throughout the Report include: the inappropriateness of refuges for young people who have just left home and who may be trying to continue in education; the placement and acceptance of younger adolescents (those under 16 years) into refuges; the lack of longer term secure accommodation options for young people who are ready for independent living; the 'revolving door' experience of youth refuges; the capacity of youth refuges to provide family mediation and counselling; and the training and skill levels of SAAP workers. SAAP services form an integral component of the government and community's response to youth homelessness.

3.26 The national evaluation of SAAP, conducted during 1992-93, emphasised achieving better outcomes "... including a case management approach; a greater focus on early intervention; improving linkages with related services and programs; strategic planning; and staff training." (Departments of Human Services & Health (HSH) and Housing & Regional Development (HRD): Joint Submission, p 203)

3.27 The new SAAP Agreement, which comes into operation in 1995, is based on strategies identified in the evaluation. The Committee in its Discussion Paper has already outlined some of its concerns relating to case management within SAAP, the broadening of service provision and the unresolved issue of training, qualifications and industrial awards for SAAP workers. This Report will analyse further some of these directions and the extent to which they improve services for homeless young people and their families.

3.28 As well as providing direct services to young people, the Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP) provides capital funding for SAAP.

"Wholly funded by the Commonwealth, CAP complements SAAP funding by providing funds through State/Territory governments to community groups to buy, build, lease,

renovate or convert dwellings in which SAAP services are provided and SAAP clients are housed." (HSH & HRD: Joint Submission, p 204)

3.29 The Job Placement Employment and Training (JPET) Program has recently been introduced as an adjunct to the services provided as part of SAAP. It is a program designed to provide employment and training assistance specifically designed to increase the opportunities, skills and independence of young people aged 15-19 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. To date, 43 projects have been established nationally. The relationship of JPET to other employment and training programs and the appropriateness of its location within this area is explored further in Chapter 6 of the Report.

CHAPTER 4

THE EXISTING STRUCTURE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR YOUTH SERVICES AT THE COMMONWEALTH LEVEL

4.1 Responsibility for youth policy is dispersed across various Commonwealth and State government departments. While there continues to be a certain number of discrete areas of policy responsibility within these departments, there is an increasing tendency for cross-portfolio responsibilities for youth and, the Committee would argue, an increasing blurring of portfolio specific policy and programs. A brief description of the policy and program responsibilities within the Commonwealth government is provided in this Chapter of the Report which outlines specific responsibilities as well as identifying the patchwork approach to youth policy in the Commonwealth due to the fragmentation of functions and service.

4.2 Chapter 5 will explore in more detail the specific policy and program areas of each department, as well as the way programs and services operate, *their effectiveness in meeting the needs of young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness*, initiatives occurring in the area and future directions.

The Department of Social Security

a) Income Support Provisions

4.3 The Department of Social Security has prime responsibility, within the Commonwealth, for the provision of income support to families and young people. Income support payments include Youth Training Allowance, Newstart Allowance, Sole Parent Pension, Young Homeless Allowance and Family Allowance.

4.4 While the focus of this Chapter is on the provision of income support to young people, there is an obvious link between the income support provisions for families and for young people. The implications of the continuing separation of youth income support policy from family policy is an issue which is dealt with in later chapters dealing with the new administrative arrangements between DSS and DEET in the operation of the Youth Training Allowance.

4.5 Young Homeless Allowance (YHA) is paid to young people under the age of 18 years who have no parental home, are not allowed to live at home, or for whom it is considered unreasonable to expect them to live at home. Eligibility must first be established for a basic payment, either Job Search Allowance (now the Youth Training Allowance), Sickness Allowance (SA), or Special Benefit as at 1 January 1995.

4.6 The introduction of the Youth Training Allowance resulted in changes to some of the eligibility requirements. This has already been canvassed in the Committee's Discussion Paper. The implications for young people without parental support will be analysed further in Chapter 5.

4.7 It is important to recognise that the independent homeless rate of YTA (previously known as the Young Homeless Allowance) is not a payment in its own right. It is an allowance at a higher rate paid to young people who meet eligibility criteria if they already qualify for one of the above basic payments. This is particularly relevant in the light of the criticisms made about the amount of money available through YHA. This is illustrated in the following way:

- a minimum benefit of \$62.90 per fortnight is paid to all young people under 18 years, living at home, who are registered with the CES and looking for work. This is not means tested. Depending on parental income and assets, they may be further eligible for the basic payment of JSA (now the Youth Training Allowance), which is currently up to \$134.50 per fortnight.

- young people under 18 years, living at home in low income households, are eligible for the maximum basic payment of \$134.50 per fortnight; and

- an independent rate of \$222.10 per fortnight is paid to young people under 18 who are refugees, married, whose parents are unable to exercise their responsibilities or if it is unreasonable for the young person to live at home. This independent rate applies to the Youth Training Allowance, Sickness Benefit and Special Benefit.

4.8 Therefore, a young person who is receiving YTA at the homeless rate, is not necessarily receiving a more substantial amount of money than that received by young people living at home. These payment levels are indexed every six months in accordance with changes in the Consumer Price Index.

4.9 As well, Rent Assistance of up to \$70.20 per fortnight may be payable where the young person is paying board and lodgings or private rental. (The actual amount of Rent Assistance payable varies, depending on the amount the young person is spending on accommodation. To receive the maximum amount of Rent Assistance a young person must be paying at least \$152.40 a fortnight in rent.)

**b) Young People Under School Leaving Age
- Payment of Special Benefit**

4.10 One area of concern to the Committee, which has been highlighted in the Committee's Discussion Paper, is the payment of Special Benefit and YHA to young people who are not of school leaving age. The Department of Social Security estimates that there were 404 young people receiving Special Benefit who were under 15 at February 1994 (DSS: Submission, p 283). As well, a number of those receiving Special Benefit include young people aged 15 years who are not of school leaving age because the school leaving age may be 16 years (in Tasmania), or the end of the year in which they turn 15 (in Western Australia).

4.11 It is worth noting that Special Benefit is a discretionary payment based on individual circumstances. Not all young people receiving Special Benefit at the independent homeless rate would receive the maximum amount of payment.

4.12 Recommendations to ensure that the educational and income support needs of all young homeless people, particularly those who are under school leaving age, are integrated into the education portfolio at the Commonwealth level are mentioned in Chapters 5 and 10.

c) **Services to Young People within DSS**

4.13 One of the key elements of the procedures for the assessment and granting of Young Homeless Allowance in the Department of Social Security, is the involvement of social work staff in the assessment and verification of all claims for the Allowance.

DSS employs about 500 professionally qualified social workers who (amongst other responsibilities) play a major role in assessing YHA claims. Clients who identify themselves, or whom staff identify, as homeless are referred to Departmental social workers;

"In the process of assessing and verifying the young person's circumstances, social workers encourage moves towards reconciliation between the young person and their family where this is considered by the social worker to be appropriate. Social workers also address other needs the young person may have for help with accommodation, legal matters, health problems and long term counselling by referral to relevant community agencies." (DSS: Submission, p 267)

4.14 While there has been criticism of "social workers" during the Inquiry, the Committee also received positive feedback from many community and welfare organisations about the significant contribution DSS social workers make to the assessment process for young homeless people. Evidence given to the Committee supports the involvement of qualified professional staff in an assessment process which includes evaluation of complex family relationships and an understanding of appropriate responses.

4.15 The Committee is aware that the Minister for Social Security, since the commencement of the Committee's Inquiry, has initiated some significant changes to the way the Young Homeless

Allowance is administered. These changes include revision of the privacy provisions which have:

- . removed certain barriers to making contact with parents and State government authorities;
- . ensured a more rigorous approach to verification of allegations since the commencement of the Inquiry; and
- . allowed the payment of income support to third parties.

4.16 It is hoped that these changes will allow for greater exchange of appropriate information to relevant parties, particularly parents, by professional staff, in a way that balances a respect for parental responsibility and at the same time protects the safety and well being of the young person.

4.17 Many of these initiatives, however, remain controversial. While they allow a greater exchange of information about young people to parents and to other authorities, some organisations have argued to the Committee that they also have the potential to dissuade young people from disclosing family and personal information necessary for their eligibility to be properly assessed.

d) Youth Service Units

4.18 In May 1994, the Department established ten permanent Youth Service Units (YSUs) to provide a comprehensive approach to delivering services to young people. These were built on the experience and evaluation of the Youth Pilot Projects, which focused on particular

groups of young homeless people who were most likely to experience problems in accessing DSS services. These were set up in the following areas:

- . **New South Wales** - Shellharbour, Darlinghurst and Blacktown;
- . **Victoria** - Frankston, Knox and Geelong;
- . **South Australia** - Adelaide;
- . **Western Australia** - Victoria Park;
- . **Tasmania** - Glenorchy; and
- . **North Queensland** - Westcourt, Cairns

The Youth Service Units:

- " use a case management approach, working co-operatively with other community agencies servicing youth, to provide a comprehensive service;
- provide the full range of income support services offered by a mainstream DSS Regional Office, with a strong focus on facilitating the young person's access to education, training and employment opportunities to facilitate independence;
- have a special focus on homeless youth by providing outreach services visiting hostels and refuges" (DSS: Submission, pp 268-269); and
- . employ professional social work staff as well as administrative staff.¹

¹ Department of Social Security, Correspondence to the Committee, p 2.

e) Implementation of the Commonwealth and State/Territory Protocol for the Case Management of Young Homeless Clients

4.19 The implementation of this Protocol has been a major development and touches on issues central to this Inquiry. It is a Protocol involving the Department of Social Security and the Department of Employment, Education and Training and all State and Territory community welfare departments. Its role and function, operational details, monitoring procedures as well as community responses to it, will be explored in more detail in Chapter 9.

The Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET)

4.20 DEET is the major department providing employment, education and training assistance to young people. The introduction of the Youth Training Initiative, announced in the White Paper on Employment, strengthens DEET's policy and administrative role in the youth area. Details of these changes were widely canvassed in the Discussion Paper and will be outlined further in Chapter 5, where attention is given to the implications of the policy and administrative changes and the degree to which the needs of disadvantaged young people are addressed.

4.21 The extent of DEET's involvement in and carriage of much of the Commonwealth's youth policy, including services for young homeless people, is not well known in the community. Given that this role will increase through the Youth Training Initiative, the Committee strongly believes that there is a need for greater transparency in the functions and operations of this Department in its provision of services to young homeless people.

4.22 The payment of the Young Homeless Allowance, through the Department of Social Security, has received considerable public exposure. The Committee found on several occasions that parents, when outlining their experiences with departments following their child claiming a homeless allowance, frequently confused the income support payments to young homeless people by the two departments, or had no idea that the Department of Employment, Education and Training actually operated within this field at all.

4.23 The following details outline the scope of the income support payments and programs and services to young homeless students and youth at risk.

a) **AUSTUDY/ABSTUDY Student Homeless Rate (SHR)**

This is the main assistance from DEET for young homeless people. The payment is administered through Student Assistance Centres. There are 29 of these throughout the country:

"The maximum rate of the AUSTUDY Student Homeless Rate in 1994 is \$109.20 a week [the same as the basic payment for the YHA] for students who have met the minimum school leaving age in their State or Territory, and \$120.75 a week from the age of 18 years. For ABSTUDY, the same rates apply to under 21 year olds. The maximum rate for students 21 years and over is \$176.70 a week in 1994. Because the age of independence for AUSTUDY/ABSTUDY is 23 (22 in 1995), SHR is paid only to those under that age." (DEET, Submission, p 245)²

4.24 The current practice for young people applying for the Student Homeless Rate of AUSTUDY is that they are required to

² Different payment levels may now apply due to updating of rates.

provide a statement outlining the circumstances of their case and statements from third parties to verify the claims. Those aged less than 16 or those who are considered to be at a continuous risk, are interviewed by a contracted DEET social worker. As outlined in the Discussion Paper, there has been major criticism of the DEET process, particularly the lack of access to social work staff and the perceived 'harshness' of the AUSTUDY criteria for homelessness.

4.25 The importance of establishing a common eligibility requirement for all young people claiming the homeless rate of payment has been discussed with both departments during the Inquiry and it is the Committee's understanding that a common definition now exists.

b) Students at Risk (STAR)

4.26 A description of this program was provided by DEET:

"This program is a component of the National Equity Program for Schools which targets students who are educationally disadvantaged. The objective of STAR is to identify those students most at risk of not completing secondary school, and to encourage their continued participation by supporting a range of school-based projects at, or in connection with, government and non-government secondary schools. STAR identifies homelessness as one of a number of possible factors which contributes to students being at risk of not completing secondary school." (DEET, Submission, p 247)

4.27 The profile of young people included in the target group for STAR is students up to 19 years, who are at risk of leaving school, or have already left school before completing Year 12 or equivalent, or where their level of achievement or behaviour at school is adversely

affected by circumstances such as family breakdown, violence, truancy or other abuse.

4.28 In 1993, some 800 schools nationally benefited from STAR funding through projects carried out in connection with these schools. In 1994, a total of \$7.25m was allocated nationally under STAR, \$5.18m to the government sector and \$2.07m to the non-government sector.

4.29 The Committee will consider the potential of the STAR program in Chapter 10, which will focus on the role of schools and the Department of Employment, Education and Training in providing for the needs of disadvantaged young people and their families.

c) Youth Access Centres (YACs)

4.30 The YAC network comprises some 120 outlets, including five mobile YACs, one Koori YAC and several outposted YACs. They provide local information, advice, referral and counselling services and give young people a range of information, particularly about education, training and employment opportunities but also income support, accommodation and legal matters.

d) Student Assistance Centres

4.31 There are 29 Student Assistance Centres located throughout the country providing students with information about education and income support, including AUSTUDY/ABSTUDY and the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme. Every Student Assistance Centre has access to social workers who are employed on a contract basis. The social workers currently undertake assessments for the AUSTUDY Student Homeless Rate.

e) Grants

4.32 DEET provides a range of grants to government and community organisations at the local level to assist disadvantaged young people to access employment, education and training opportunities. These include the Australian Youth Initiative Grants, Youth Strategy Action Grants and the National Youth Grants.

f) Disadvantaged Young People Services Programs

4.33 This program assists young people, currently outside mainstream labour market programs, to gain access to and remain in education and training and to secure and maintain employment. There are 45 Australia wide outlets, 35 of which are administered by SkillShare sponsors. The funding allocation for 1993-94 was \$2.83m.

g) Labour Market Programs

4.34 The Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) provides disadvantaged young people with access to a range of labour market programs designed to improve their participation in employment and training. The Youth Training Initiative contains a range of measures which impact directly on the way labour market programs are delivered to young people, including those who are homeless. Many of these issues were identified in the Discussion Paper, in particular the impact of case management as a primary tool of client service. Aspects of the Youth Training Initiative which affect the lives of young homeless people will be addressed directly in Chapter 5.

h) SkillShare

4.35 "SkillShare projects assist participants into jobs or further training through the provision of skills training, employment related assistance... and enterprise activities. Projects are managed by incorporated community based organisations known as sponsors." (DEET: Submission, p 250)

i) The Youth Bureau

4.36 The Youth Bureau is located within the Department of Employment, Education and Training. However, details outlining its role and function within the Department were only revealed during the hearings. The absence of detail about this program provided by the Department reinforces the view, formed by the Committee, that the Youth Bureau operates as a basic internal unit within the Department for coordinating the range of departmental functions and services targeted at young people but has no broader youth policy role across portfolios.

4.37 When asked about the role and responsibilities of the Youth Bureau within DEET, the Committee was told that the Youth Bureau plays a monitoring and coordinating role in the youth field. It also funds action grants which are then evaluated and used to develop policy:

"We fund a lot of action grants and a certain amount of research to do with young people. We assess what the outcomes of those activities are and what the implications are for policy for young people into the future. And, of course, in recent times, one of our big efforts and roles has been in relation to the implementation of the Youth Training Initiative." (DEET: Transcript of evidence, p 2767)

4.38 However, the Youth Bureau, does not have a responsibility across portfolio departments for ensuring coordinated and cohesive youth policy, although this was the case when there was an Office of Youth Affairs within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, in the late 1980's. When commenting about the extent of the Youth Bureau's coordination role, a witness from DEET commented:

"It is fair to say that you could have expected that, when the youth bureau, or the office of youth affairs, as it was then, was located in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. But the youth bureau is an element of DEET at the present time, so its focus, almost by definition, is on employment, education and training issues." (DEET: Transcript of evidence, p 2767)

Other DEET Initiatives Since the Commencement of the Inquiry -

Family Mediation Pilots

4.39 In the May 1994 Budget, DEET announced the establishment of family mediation pilots as part of improving its services to young people who are claiming AUSTUDY/ABSTUDY at the homeless rate. The intention of the pilots is to determine the extent to which family mediation reduces the need for young people to leave home and if successful, to determine the additional funding required. These services are to commence in 1995.

4.40 A spokesperson for DEET outlined the intention of the pilot projects:

"The intention is that we will employ additional social workers who will review the targeted student homeless rate beneficiaries and assess whether there is any likelihood that

they may benefit from participation in family mediation services. So the intention is that our staff will not do family mediation.

... we will refer, if possible, cases to existing family mediation services, such as those funded by the Attorney-General's Department, for example. Part of the role of our staff will be to identify people who may gain from participation in those family mediation services and also to provide some support to them..." (DEET: Transcript of evidence, p 984)

4.41 The Committee understands that the family mediation pilots will not be run by DEET, but rather that additional resources are being provided to allow for extra social workers to undertake further assessment and make appropriate referral to mediation services:

"The purpose of the initiative is to allow the department extra resources to enable a more comprehensive system of referrals to agencies which have appropriate services." (DEET: Transcript of evidence, p 84)

4.42 The role of family mediation, its effectiveness in preventing youth homelessness and its availability in the community will be explored further in other chapters, particularly Chapter 7.

Youth Homeless Pilots

4.43 During the course of the Inquiry, DEET informed the Committee that it had identified four locations for the establishment of local taskforces to address the particular needs of the young homeless in their areas. The areas are Dandenong, Surry Hills, Newcastle and Adelaide. In correspondence sent to the Committee, the Department outlined the following details:

- . the target group should be homeless young people and the model for the pilot should grow out of an expression of local need; and
- . an evaluation strategy has been developed which will identify examples of best practice which can be disseminated so that service to homeless young people is improved.

Department of Housing and Regional Development

4.44 The Department of Housing and Regional Development plays a central role in the provision of services to young homeless people primarily through the operation of the well established Supported Accommodation Assistance Program. More recently, the Department has extended this accommodation and support role to encompass education, training and employment opportunities for young homeless people through the Job Placement Employment and Training program.

a) SAAP

4.45 SAAP funds community organisations and local government authorities to provide a wide range of support and supported accommodation options for homeless people.

"Of the 1 600 services funded through SAAP, approximately 500 provide services for youth." (HSH & HRD: Joint Submission, p 203).

4.46 In their submission, the Departments identified the following characteristics of SAAP services for young people:

- . day centres providing meals, training and recreational activities;
- . outreach services assisting them to cope with living in a range of

mainly unstable and unsuitable living arrangements;
intensive support services;
refuges providing emergency accommodation and support;
medium and long term accommodation and support; and
information and referral services. (HSH & HRD: Joint Submission, p 203)

4.47 While this Inquiry is not an evaluation or a review of the SAAP services, there are several elements of the current operation and directions of SAAP which the Committee will explore more thoroughly in Chapter 6 of this Report.

b) Crisis Accommodation Program

4.48 "The Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP) provides capital funding for SAAP... Some 1 130 accommodation projects have been funded under CAP from 1984-85 to 1992-93, approximately one third of which provide crisis, medium and longer term accommodation for homeless young people [12-24 year olds]." (HSH & HRD: Joint Submission, p 204)

4.49 The 1994-95 Commonwealth allocation for CAP totalled \$49.477m which included \$9.792m rolled over from 1993-94.³

c) Youth Social Justice Strategy, Accommodation and Support Initiatives

4.50 Under the Youth Social Justice Strategy, established by the Commonwealth following the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity

³ Department of Housing and Regional Development, Correspondence to the Committee, April 1994.

Report in 1989, a range of accommodation and support initiatives were established which focused on providing more stable long term accommodation and promoting better links between youth agencies for the coordination of services. The target group for these initiatives were those under 18 years of age, those who were chronically homeless and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth.

4.51 Some 124 of these projects are recurrently funded for \$10.924m.

"These include outreach services for young people, services for especially disadvantaged groups of young people, life skills development projects and brokerage services." (HSH & HRD: Joint Submission, p 205)

d) Job Placement Employment and Training (JPET)

4.52 A description of this program was provided by the then Department of Health, Housing and Community Services:

"The Job Placement Employment and Training (JPET) program is a two year pilot program which funds projects to provide employment and training assistance specifically designed to increase the opportunities, skills and independence of young people aged 15-19 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness." (HSH & HRD: Joint Submission, p 210)

4.53 43 projects have been established nationally at a cost of \$10.2 million to assist upwards of 1 000 homeless young people.

Department of Human Services and Health

4.54 Since the separation of the Department of Health, Housing, Local Government and Community Services in 1994, the policy and program areas relevant to the scope of this Inquiry which now come under the portfolio responsibilities of the Department of Human Services and Health include:

- . Health Programs for young homeless people;
- . Mental Health Strategy;
- . National Child Protection Strategy;
- . Family Support Services; and
- . International Year of the Family Project

a) Health Programs for Young Homeless People

4.55 The Innovative Health Services for Homeless Youth Program was established as part of the range of initiatives established under the Youth Social Justice Strategy following the HREOC Inquiry into Homeless Children.

4.56 That inquiry "found that homeless young people exhibit chronic health problems but are reluctant to seek treatment through mainstream services which they regard as judgmental and unsympathetic to their needs and life situations." (HSH & HRD: Joint Submission, p 194)

4.57 The Innovative Health Services for Homeless Youth Program (IHSHY) provides matching Commonwealth/State funding to develop and implement innovative primary health care services for homeless and otherwise at risk youth.

"Funding of \$7m was provided by the Commonwealth between 1989-90 and 1992-93 for the pilot phase of the IHSY program and ongoing Commonwealth funding of \$2.2m per annum was announced in the 1993 Commonwealth budget." (HSH & HRD: Joint Submission, p 207)

4.58 An independent evaluation of the Program was conducted in 1992-93 and, as well as providing more detailed understanding of the health needs of young homeless people, also found that the targeted services established through the IHSY program are proving successful in attracting and involving marginalised youth in personal health care.

b) National Mental Health Strategy

4.59 In 1992, the Commonwealth committed \$135 million over 6 years to assist with the implementation of the National Mental Health Strategy endorsed by the Commonwealth and all States and Territories;

"Funds are provided under the Strategy to promote better services for all people with a mental illness, including young people who are at risk of becoming, or are homeless." (HSH & HRD: Joint Submission, p 209)

4.60 The incidence of mental illness amongst young people and its relationship to youth homelessness and family breakdown has emerged as an important issue for this Inquiry. The Committee called for special evidence in this area from a noted child psychiatrist. This is detailed in Chapter 12 of the Report.

4.61 The relevance of the National Mental Health Strategy to the needs of young people and their families and the adequacy of the resources provided is an area which is of concern to the Committee and will also be fully explored in Chapter 12.

c) National Policy for the Health of Children and Young People

4.62 In 1993, the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council (AHMAC) established a working party to develop a national approach to health issues for children and young people. The Working Party includes representatives from Commonwealth and State governments, consumer organisations, the National Health and Medical Research Council and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission. The Committee was told that outcomes of this consultation process would be incorporated into a final policy document to be presented to AHMAC in 1995.

4.63 Homeless youth have been recognised as a disadvantaged group requiring special attention in the development of this national policy.

**d) National Child Protection Council and the
National Prevention Strategy for Child Abuse and Neglect**

4.64 The National Child Protection Council was established by the Commonwealth in 1991. The Council includes representatives of Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments, and community members. The Committee was told that the Commonwealth is taking a leadership role in the prevention of child abuse and neglect.

"All Australian Governments have agreed to implement and fund the National Prevention Strategy for Child Abuse and Neglect, developed by the Council. Commonwealth funding of \$12 million over four years was provided in the 1994-95 Budget, and States and Territories have provided complementary funding for this joint Strategy in their respective Budgets."⁴

⁴ Human Services and Health, Correspondence to the Committee, 1 December, 1994, p 5.

4.65 Aspects of the strategy include:

- . a community education campaign on the prevention of child abuse and neglect, expected to be launched in 1995;
- . funding of a National Research Program relating to the prevention of child abuse and neglect; and
- . States and Territories developing complementary components of the Strategy which include State wide community support networks and local initiatives, telephone help lines, parent education, and education for children.⁵

e) Youth Activities Services (YAS)

4.66 This was established in 1990 with the following features:

- . YAS provides outside school hour care to adolescents living in socially and economically disadvantaged areas;
- . its main target group is young people aged 11 and 16 years who still live at home but are unsupervised after school. "These young people are at risk of falling into patterns of anti-social behaviour because there is an inadequate supervision or a lack of suitable alternatives"⁶; and
- . \$9m was approved for YAS for the period 1990-93. There are 94 recurrently funded services nationally.

⁵ ibid.

⁶ ibid., p 6.

f) Family Resource Centres

4.67 The role of the Commonwealth government in the establishment of national family policy and funding and monitoring of family support services programs has been raised as a key issue. Although the Commonwealth no longer has a direct role in the area of family support services, it has retained some involvement through the funding and monitoring of Family Resource Centres.

4.68 This has the following features:

- . A program to establish FRCs was announced in the 1990/91 budget. The Commonwealth's objective in funding Family Resource Centres is to support local agencies in improving the effectiveness, accessibility and quality of services to families.⁷
- . 11 FRCs are located in selected disadvantaged areas and provide support and resources to a range of existing family-related services. The level of funding for each FRC is approximately \$400 000. The total 1994/95 allocation is \$4.5 million.

4.69 There are 11 FRCs located in five States servicing the following areas. These are:

- . **Queensland** - Ipswich and West Moreton, Logan and North Albert region and Cairns and Far North Queensland;
- . **Victoria** - Whittlesea, Latrobe Valley, Shires of Pakenham and Cranbourne, Dandenong and Berwick;
- . **New South Wales** - Fairfield, Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury, Penrith and Wyong;

⁷ *ibid.*

. **South Australia** - Salisbury, Elizabeth, Munno Para and Gawler;
and

. **Northern Territory** - Alice Springs.

4.70 The Family Resource Centres may have a role in fostering the development of new services.

. The services are provided and/or funded by Federal, State and Local governments and the non-government sector. They can include: housing, employment, education and training, health, legal services, family support, and services for children and youth.

. A review was completed in 1994 and concluded that the FRCs had improved access of families to services by increasing the number of services or expanding existing services.

Attorney-General's Department

4.71 The Legal Aid and Family Services Division, which represented the Attorney-General's Department before the Inquiry, is responsible for funding organisations that provide approved family support across Australia. These include marriage counselling, marriage education, family mediation, adolescent mediation and family therapy and family skills training.

4.72 The Adolescent and Family Mediation program was funded through the Attorney-General's Department as part of the broader Youth Social Justice Strategy in the 1989 Budget, following the findings of the HREOC Inquiry into Homeless Children.

4.73 11 pilot projects were established in 1990. There is one service in each capital city of every State and Territory with three in Victoria (Noble Park, Watsonia and Wodonga) and two in Queensland (Brisbane). Following an evaluation of the program by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, recurrent funding was granted in 1993. The outcomes of the evaluation will be covered in Chapter 7, where the role of mediation as a possible approach in preventing youth homelessness is thoroughly explored.

4.74 The Mediation Program is relatively small, receiving a total of \$1.5m in recurrent funding:

"The primary aim of the Program is the prevention of premature homelessness among young people by providing mediation and family therapy services to adolescents and their parents or caregivers." (AG's: Submission, p 172)

4.75 Mediation and family therapy are seen as two inter-related components of the Program and, in reality, the family therapy approach has become the dominant technique used, due to the nature of the family conflict identified.

4.76 Another complementary program, the Family Skills Training Program, receives \$1.5 million to provide recurrent funding for 17 programs for parenting skills and support to families. It targets the parents of 0-12 year olds, parents of adolescents and adolescent parents from disadvantaged families and aims to meet the specific needs of low income families, children with disabilities, sole parents and geographically disadvantaged families. The Program also has a focus on the need to be accessible to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and families from non-English speaking backgrounds.

The Family Court of Australia

4.77 The Family Court deals with legal matters and problems which follow from family breakdown/divorce, the custody and welfare of children, access arrangements and property disputes. It has a free and confidential counselling service available for personal and family problems arising from separation and divorce.

4.78 While the Family Court is within the Attorney-General's portfolio, there appear to be few linkages between its work with families and children and the Legal and Family Services Division of the same Department. Given the figures available on the family profile of homeless youth, which show a high percentage coming from single parent and step-family households, the Committee considers the Family Court should be a key player in this field. The services and skills of the Family Court need to be brought into the preventive framework of family breakdown and child care arrangements, as well as providing a more proactive role in working with reconstituted families involving children. The Committee will explore this further in Chapter 7.

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

4.79 The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet emerged as another key player in the patchwork of youth policy and coordination. As the Committee sought to explore where the locus of responsibility for youth policy development and review resides within the Commonwealth in respect to young homeless people, reference was made by other Commonwealth department witnesses to the Inter Departmental Committee (IDC) on Homelessness being chaired by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Inter Departmental Committee on Homelessness

4.80 An IDC on arrangements for meeting the needs of homeless people (not only young homeless people) was established as a result of the 1993 Budget. The Committee was told that it developed as a result of government concerns about the existing range of programs at the Commonwealth level not being adequately coordinated, leading to overlap and conflict, as well as resulting in poor linkages between programs.

4.81 The IDC was asked to report on:

- . the Commonwealth's objectives for providing assistance to homeless people;
- . options for improving the effectiveness of assistance, with particular emphasis on improved planning and coordination and integration of services for homeless people;
- . identification of the most effective measures for meeting the needs of homeless people; and
- . eliminating gaps and overlaps and inconsistencies in the services that are provided through Commonwealth programs to homeless people. (PM&C: Transcript of evidence, p 2672)

4.82 The Committee was told that the measure to provide rent assistance to homeless recipients of AUSTUDY, announced in the 1994-95 Budget, was one outcome of this process.

4.83 Another development to come from the IDC was the decision to establish a protocol involving all Commonwealth agencies which

assist homeless people, and which could be extended by consultation through States and other agencies, including non-government agencies:

"The aim of the protocol would be to improve coordination of policy and delivery approaches of services for homeless people to clarify responsibilities for various agencies, to strengthen local service networks and improve cross-program linkages and, thereby, to improve the continuity of support that homeless people get from these various programs." (PM&C: Transcript of evidence, p 2673)

4.84 This proposal is still being developed as part of COAG negotiations.

4.85 In evidence to the Committee, a witness outlined the role of the Department in the policy coordination of homelessness:

"Our involvement has been through chairing the IDC, which has been responsible for developing a framework for ensuring better policy coordination across the relevant departments and better links between the programs that they have responsibility for. It has been focused on the development of such a framework rather than evaluating the existing policies and programs in this area.

That role is very much in keeping with the role we play from time to time across a wide range of social policy issues, which involves brokering between departments to develop structures and arrangements to achieve better integration of effort. Importantly, that does not involve the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet setting itself up as the policy experts or assuming responsibility in the relevant area. We rely on departments for that." (PM&C: Transcript of evidence, p 2671)

4.86 The Committee's approach to improved coordination will be detailed in Chapter 14.

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG)

4.87 The Committee notes the current discussions between the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments through the COAG process. COAG has, as one of its functions, the task of deciding on new roles, responsibilities and structures for the delivery of human services programs throughout Australia. While the Committee understands that there is no agenda for dealing specifically with issues of youth homelessness within this process, any structural or functional decisions affecting the administration and delivery of health and community services will impact significantly on the provision of services to homeless young people and their families. Given that the Committee has identified structural arrangements in the human services area, and Commonwealth/State responsibilities for children as a key issue in this Inquiry, the processes and the outcomes of COAG have the potential to impact significantly on the whole issue of youth homelessness. This is dealt with in Chapter 14.