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A community to call home: An analysis of the Southern Youth and Family Services' (SYFS) approaches to reducing youth homelessness and disadvantage

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A community to call home: An analysis of the Southern Youth and Family Services' (SYFS) approaches to reducing youth homelessness and disadvantage

Abstract

The NSW government's stated approach to the reduction and prevention of homelessness is focused on ensuring service approaches are evidenced-based and funding is needs-based (NSW Department of Family & Community Services, 2012). Despite the recognition of homelessness in the research and policy agenda, relatively little has been published about the practices effective in assisting young people to avoid or exit homelessness. The findings from this study build on previous research and inform this developing policy and research area by contributing to the evidence on what works well in supporting young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness

Keywords

southern, youth, family, services, analysis, syfs, disadvantage, approaches, reducing, homelessness, call, home, community

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A COMMUNITY TO CALL HOME

An analysis of the Southern Youth and Family Services'
(SYFS) approaches to reducing youth homelessness and
disadvantage



Lynne Keevers

April 2015



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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AGM	Annual General Meeting
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CHAIN	[SYFS'] Community Health for Adolescents in Need
GHSB	Going Home Staying Home – (the NSW reform of specialist homelessness services)
HAP	Homelessness Action Plan
NAHA	National Affordable Housing Agreement
NETWORK	[SYFS'] New Education, Training and Work (Program)
NPAH	National Partnership on Homelessness
MANOVA	Multivariate Analysis of Variance
PAR	Participatory Action Research
SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
SHS	Specialist Homelessness Services
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
SYFS	Southern Youth and Family Services Association Inc.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The NSW government's stated approach to the reduction and prevention of homelessness is focused on ensuring service approaches are evidenced-based and funding is needs-based (NSW Department of Family & Community Services, 2012). Despite the recognition of homelessness in the research and policy agenda, relatively little has been published about the practices effective in assisting young people to avoid or exit homelessness. The findings from this study build on previous research and inform this developing policy and research area by contributing to the evidence on what works well in supporting young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

PURPOSE AND AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

In articulating and documenting the experience of young people involved in Southern Youth and Family Services (SYFS), this study investigated the impact of SYFS practices on client outcomes including housing attained; housing sustained; employment status; education participation and attainment; overall sense of well-being and satisfaction with life; sense of belonging and connectedness; sense of hope for the future; sense of control over one's life; satisfaction with health; and, experience of respect and recognition.

The study then investigated and analysed the practices, strategies and interventions that contribute to the attainment of these outcomes.

Specifically, the aims of this study were to:

- ♦ articulate the organising practices that make up the SYFS integrated approach to reducing youth homelessness and disadvantage;
- ♦ determine indicators of SYFS contribution to health and well-being of young people at risk of homelessness and their families, and develop and implement instruments to measure the impact of SYFS practices on young people accessing the service and their families; and
- ♦ analyse practices that are effective in assisting young people avoid or exit homelessness.

The research is underpinned by a commitment to studying practice situated in the everyday work context and seeing, hearing and reading directly with and from those involved with SYFS, especially the young service users.

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Underpinned by a practice-based approach and using a two phase participatory action research (PAR) framework (Kindon, Pain, & Kesby, 2007; Reason & Bradbury, 2006) this study focused on the local, situated, embodied, spatially and temporally extended ways SYFS works to enhance the health and well-being of young people who are

homeless or at risk of homelessness, and their families. A toolkit approach employing both qualitative and quantitative data gathering methods was used including:

- ♦ observations of practices, programs, events and informal exchanges amongst young people and youth workers;
- ♦ surveys and semi-structured interviews with current and past service users of SYFS;
- ♦ group discussions with young people involved with SYFS;
- ♦ sense-making and reflective discussions with SYFS managers and workers; and
- ♦ correspondence, documentation and data collected by SYFS.

Quantitative data from the surveys of current and past service users was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Seven factors (experience of SYFS; overall sense of well-being and satisfaction with life; sense of belonging and connectedness; sense of hope for the future; sense of control over one's life; satisfaction with health; experience of respect and recognition) were identified as underlying the continuous questionnaire items. These factors were combined with housing attained, housing sustained, employment status and education participation and attainment, to form the indicators of the contribution of SYFS to young people at risk of homelessness, and their families. Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted on these factors to examine differences and commonalities between current and past service users' perceptions and experience of SYFS and its impact on their lives.

Qualitative data from interviews, group discussions, observations, and free text answers from surveys was collated and analysed to identify dominant themes, patterns and trends. The categories from the quantitative analysis were also used to inform the qualitative analysis. The early identification of themes and analysis was corroborated in sense-making, reflexive discussions conducted with managers and workers of SYFS. In this way, we incorporated the "right to co-interpretation" (Newkirk, 1996: 13) by offering our emerging interpretations and analysis of the research data to organisational members for their review and comments (Kirsch, 2005).

KEY FINDINGS

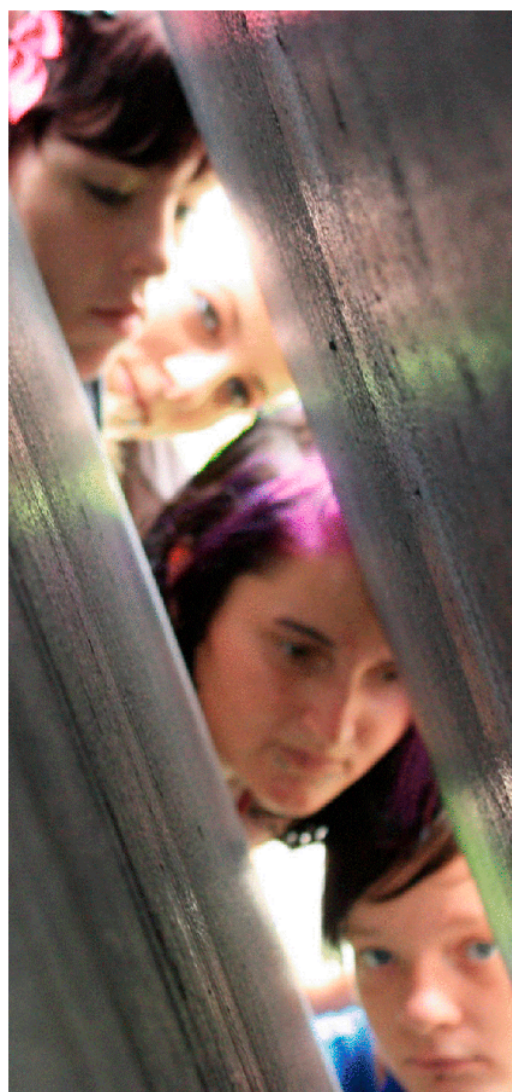
A number of key findings were generated from this research. First, the SYFS operating model, which combines hierarchical and network forms of organising, affords both horizontal and vertical interactions and connections and culminates in a seamless, integrated service system. SYFS organising practices are capable of providing multiple interventions with dispersed entry points and pathways across more than forty services. Encapsulating the SYFS operating model, are clearly defined youth specialist and family-centred practices and a philosophy and guiding principles which embed social justice, advocacy and whole-of-community-engagement through the aims, values, culture,

practices and systems of this organisation. Both current and past service users report extremely positive experiences with SYFS services and with their relationships with SYFS staff.

Second, although on entry to SYFS both current and past clients experienced considerable disadvantage and difficulty in relation to their housing, the study indicates that past SYFS clients' *current* housing circumstances are significantly better than current clients' housing circumstances. These results suggest that improvements in housing for young people through engagement with SYFS were sustained for the ex-clients that participated in the survey after they exited SYFS services and transitioned to independent housing. There is convincing evidence (Scutella et al, 2013; Chamberlain & Johnson, 2011) that people who experience homelessness when they are young are more likely to experience persistent homelessness. This study, thereby, provides some evidence that for past clients who participated in this research, the SYFS model appears to have success in reducing the likelihood of persistent homelessness. Indeed, about 68% of past SYFS clients expect to live in their current housing for more than the next three years. The SYFS model demonstrates impressive outcomes in assisting young people exit homelessness and attain secure housing.

Third, demographic analysis of past and current clients in relation to education, employment and income status, point to the structural barriers that confront this population of young people and underline the need for ongoing support and assistance. However, the analysis of past clients' experiences and perspectives suggest that a modest turnaround in relation to engagement with education and employment, gained through involvement with SYFS, is sustained and built upon into the future.

Fourth, current and past service users report similar levels of satisfaction with their health, with both groups identifying significant room for improvement. This finding



supports research such as Milburn et al (2009) and Ensign & Santelli (1998) that found that homeless young people suffer poor health status compared to the general population of young people.

Fifth, statistically significant differences between current and past service users of SYFS were found, with past service users of SYFS being more satisfied with life; having a greater sense of well-being; experiencing a greater sense of hope for the future; and a greater sense of control over their lives than current SYFS services users. In contrast, current service users of SYFS reported experiencing more respect and recognition than past service users. These results suggest that the significant improvements in well-being and satisfaction with life attained through engagement with SYFS are sustained and continue to grow. These results also suggest that experiences of respect and recognition that young service-users report are not consistently sustained in their interactions with the broader society.

Sixth, the analysis of past and current client responses to questions focused on the aspects of their involvement with SYFS that facilitated the most significant changes in their lives, identified thirteen key aspects. In descending order from the most common response category these are:

- ♦ the relationship with and the care practices of SYFS staff;
- ♦ practices that assist young people learn to look after themselves, to become independent and live the life that matters to them;
- ♦ experiencing a sense of belonging and connectedness;
- ♦ access to stable housing;
- ♦ developing a sense of control over their lives;
- ♦ developing a sense of hope for the future;
- ♦ access to education and/or employment opportunities and attainment of educational qualifications and/or employment;
- ♦ access to basic needs such as food, clothing, financial assistance and household goods;
- ♦ improvements in health;
- ♦ experience of voice, being listened to;
- ♦ safety, feeling and being safe;
- ♦ experience of respect; and
- ♦ access to activities such as community events, sport, movies etc.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Observations of situated practices combined with the survey data and the accounts of workers and service users, demonstrate that SYFS enables service users to experience inclusion, well-being and relationships, based on care, respect and persistence. The

bundles of practices, arrangements and relations that make up how care and social justice are enacted at SYFS, includes:

- ♦ practices of respect, recognition and care including recognising and harnessing young peoples' abilities, strengths, talents, achievements and life experiences to enhance their opportunities and development;
- ♦ practices of belonging and connectedness and the importance of a welcoming organisational culture for young people, staff and the broader community;
- ♦ practices of redistribution that ameliorate some of the structural barriers young people face in their pursuit of safe, stable living situations and well-being; and
- ♦ practices of representation, advocacy and listening, whereby young people are encouraged to participate, and skilled to be self-advocates and advocates for their peers. SYFS also creates the conditions in which decision-makers are offered irresistible invitations to listen to young people.

Findings from this study indicate that SYFS clients identified improvements in relation to indicators of social justice and inclusion, such as a sense of control over one's life (Marmot, 2004), a sense of belonging (Wilkinson, 2005; Wilkinson & Pikett, 2009) and, a sense of hope for the future (Berkman, 1995; CSDH, 2008). These improvements are as a result of the complex interaction of their involvements with SYFS and the specific situated context of service users as they live their lives. The impact or outcomes of involvement with SYFS appear particularly linked with the relationships established with SYFS staff.

In this study we extend the existing literature by unpacking the relationships between young people and SYFS staff to identify the organising practices that enable these trust-based and caring relationships. This research shows how organizing practices such as: allowing the young person to 'choose their worker'; offering relentless parental-style support and persistence; facilitating horizontal relationships between service users; engaging in activities that 'do not just provide a service'; and creating opportunities for young people to participate, take social action and give back; are crucial in service users experiencing care, mutual respect, recognition and a sense of belonging. The analysis provides an understanding of the diversity and subtlety of practice at SYFS.

This study demonstrates that persistent relationships, long-term support and practices that assist young people to look after themselves and become independent were consistently identified by young people as crucial aspects that made a positive difference to their situation. These perspectives of young people challenge current policy directions that prioritise rapid re-housing and short-term support. This study shows that young people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness or disadvantaged benefit most from transitional housing coupled with long-term support.

Accordingly, this study, suggests that outcome measures used by funding bodies to assess the performance of funded youth homelessness services, do not give sufficient weight to indicators of social justice, inclusion and wellbeing or to relationships based on care, respect and persistence. The results currently expected by major funding bodies overlook what matters most from the perspective of service users and what makes the most positive impact on their lives.

Our findings also suggest that current policies over-estimate the importance of securing *permanent* housing for young people. The young people in our study identified access to *stable supported* housing that enabled them to transition to independent housing as important but did not nominate permanent housing amongst the aspects that made the most significant contribution to their health and well-being. An emphasis on stable housing supported by persistent relationships and combined with access to education, employment, health and well-being assistance and programs, is also the approach advocated in recent studies by Gaetz & Scott (2012) and the Hollywood Homeless Youth Project (2013).

Social impact of SYFS

We employed Onyx's (2014) conceptual model of social impact and the analysis of our fieldwork data, to identify some of the SYFS organizing practices pivotal to the generation of social impact beyond the objectives of particular services and programs. These organizing practices that enable the SYFS contribution to the local community and to civil society include:

- ◆ The ongoing development and reiteration of a core set of values and a complex network of relationships and practices, both within and beyond SYFS.
- ◆ At SYFS these practices and relationships begin with, and appear dependent upon, the *creation of a welcoming and belonging culture* in which young people, their families and workers experience recognition and a sense of belonging to a 'community' or 'family'. SYFS visualises itself and practices as a community rather than as an organization in the corporate sense.
- ◆ SYFS is *situated in and part of local communities*, and being a community-based organisation with the head office based in an industrial centre in Southern NSW, is a core aspect of the character and self-identity of SYFS.
- ◆ Developing the *personal skills, knowledge and ethics* of both service users and staff. At the same time staff and service users develop *networks* both within the organisation and in the wider community. Both young people and workers in this study report involvement in social action and wider networks through their involvement with SYFS. In this way the organisation, its staff, members and clients through involvement in active networks multiply the contribution and social impact of SYFS.

- ♦ The impact of this social action depends in part, on the excellent reputation of SYFS within the local community, in the community sector and with government agencies and politicians. Accordingly, contributions to the wider community are made by SYFS as an organisation as well as by the individuals involved with SYFS (Schneider, 2009; Onyx, 2014) and these impacts may be long term or sometimes not identifiable until far into the future.
- ♦ The *advocacy practices* of SYFS are pivotal to the social impact of the organisation and to the difference SYFS makes in struggles over social justice.

This study suggests that future research could use these organising practices to guide the creation and implementation of a set of indicators for measuring qualitatively and quantitatively over time, the social impact of community organisations such as SYFS. Crucially, such an approach positions social impact as processual and practice-based. It would assist governments and policy-makers recognise not only the pivotal role SYFS plays in providing essential services but also their role in ensuring the voices of homeless and marginalized young people and their families are represented and heard in the policy process. Such measures of social impact would enhance understanding of the contributions of organisations such as SYFS to the health, well-being and inclusivity of local communities, and the role of civil society organisations. Importantly, they would assist these organisations to learn and extend the practices, relations and arrangements that enhance the social impact of their work.



INTRODUCTION

There is sector-wide interest in reducing homelessness and the risk of homelessness amongst young people. Within Australia, successive federal governments have articulated a need to improve the evidence base to inform the design and delivery of high-quality services to young people vulnerable to homelessness, as there is 'limited availability of evidence-based program evaluations that assess the efficacy of different service models or the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches' (Barker et al, 2012b:7).

The value and need for this study is demonstrated in the NSW government's Going Home Staying Home (GSHS) reforms of the Specialist Homelessness Services system. The NSW government argues, "we need to ensure that funding for services is needs based, and that service approaches represent what is known to work well in preventing and reducing homelessness" (NSW Department of Family & Community Services, 2012). Despite the current prominent position of homelessness on the research and policy agenda, relatively little is known about the practices effective in assisting young people avoid or exit homelessness.

Accordingly, in articulating and documenting the experience of young people involved in Southern Youth and Family Services (SYFS), this study informs this developing policy area and contributes to the evidence base on what works well in supporting young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The research design of this study builds on previous research and literature to contribute to an understanding of the experiences of young people affected by homelessness in the areas of exiting from homelessness, health and well-being, employment, education and training and social inclusion, and what services, practices and strategies may assist them.

STUDY AIMS AND OUTCOMES

The purpose of this study is to investigate and articulate the working model of Southern Youth and Family Services (SYFS), explore young people's experience of the SYFS model and assess the outcomes it achieves. Our practice-based, participatory action research approach investigates the impact of participation in SYFS on the health and well-being of young people, their attainment of secure housing and their transition to education and employment. We investigate young people's perspectives to help us understand and articulate the practices critical to the effectiveness of the SYFS approach to reducing youth homelessness. Table 1 outlines the aims of the various aspects of the study and the corresponding products and outcomes achieved.

Aims	Products and outcomes
Identify organising practices that make up the SYFS approach to reducing youth homelessness in the context of the extant literature.	Articulation of the SYFS model and practices employed. Literature review
Identify practices that contribute towards SYFS impact and benefits for young people and families at risk of homelessness.	Indicators of contribution of SYFS to young people at risk of homelessness
Determine indicators of SYFS contribution to health and well-being of young people at risk of homelessness.	
Develop instruments to measure impact of SYFS on young people accessing the service.	Survey tool for measuring impact of SYFS on young people that are involved with or have been involved with SYFS
	Interview schedule for discussing impact of involvement with SYFS on those involved in the services
Implement tools within SYFS.	Data analysis Written report and dissemination of results

Table 1: Overview of research aims, products and outcomes

This report is structured as follows. First, we provide a brief overview of the current policy context influencing youth homelessness. Second, we describe the SYFS model. Third, we discuss our research design and methods. Fourth, we analyse the outcomes and impacts of the SYFS approach to reducing youth homelessness. Fifth, we articulate and discuss the SYFS practices that are critical to the effectiveness of the SYFS model. Sixth, we identify the practices that generate the wider social impact of SYFS. In the final section of the report we discuss the policy and practice implications of the study.

YOUTH HOMELESSNESS BACKGROUND AND POLICY CONTEXT

In 2008 the Australian Commonwealth Government released its Green Paper, and then White Paper, on homelessness, commencing new directions in homelessness policy with the vision of halving homelessness by 2020. The following year, the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) was introduced replacing all previous housing and homelessness agreements, including the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) under which homelessness services were funded, and providing the overarching funding policy framework for Australia's response to homelessness. The NAHA is an inter-governmental agreement whereby the Commonwealth Government provides funding to the State and Territory Governments to manage, in order to achieve agreed outcomes.

The NAHA includes the National Partnership Agreements for social housing, remote indigenous housing and homelessness. "The National Partnership Agreement for Homelessness is time limited and intended to promote reform of the homelessness service system. The Federal Government describes it as a down payment on achieving the vision of the White Paper." (NSW Department of Family and Community Services, 2012:13). The NPAH provides additional funding for agreed homeless activities and services and requires specific State and Territory implementation plans. The original NPAH ceased June 2013 and a transitional NPAH was negotiated until June 2014. This agreement has since been extended for a further year to allow the current Commonwealth Government time to plan for the future of homelessness and housing as part of a broader review of the roles and responsibilities of States/Territories and the Commonwealth in the areas of health, education, housing and homelessness. This is due to be completed by the end of 2015. At the time of writing this report the NPAH ends June 2015. It is unclear what the Australian homelessness service system will look like from this time on.

The translation of national homelessness policy and associated strategies for the States and Territories are found in the State's Homelessness Action Plan (HAP). NSW policy directions aim to:

- ◆ reduce the current level of high-cost crisis accommodation services and reconfigure these services into flexible support models;
- ◆ improve client assessment processes so that clients are linked to the most cost-efficient service that meets their presenting needs;
- ◆ increase involvement in early intervention and prevention strategies;
- ◆ provide better assistance to clients who have a number of support needs
- ◆ provide ongoing assistance to ensure stability for clients post crisis; and

- ♦ improve service responses for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. (NSW Department of Family and Community Services, 2012:14).

Key concepts within the new policy direction include: streamlining clients into long-term sustainable housing; the provision of client-centred supports; a system that is easy to navigate and access; and the provision of new innovative and evidence-based models. (NSW Department of Family and Community Services, 2012)

In July 2012, the NSW Government announced the Going Home Staying Home (GHS) reform of the Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) system, previously known as SAAP Services. The reform process focused on the provision of a new service delivery framework and service design: streamlining access, the introduction of new planning and resource allocation methods, the implementation of quality and continuous improvement mechanisms, and workforce development strategies. The new core service responses are articulated as prevention and early intervention, rapid re-housing, crisis and transitional responses and intensive responses for clients with complex needs in the GHS Reform Plan.

Funding and resources were re-allocated across all regions in NSW according to assessed needs, and a new service delivery framework was introduced incorporating four core service responses. Service “packages” were developed specifying target groups and their complexity of needs, as well as the service responses to be provided— usually all four responses. The “packages” were allocated via a competitive open-tender process. SYFS was successful in gaining youth “packages” in each of the areas they previously provided services for. New service package commenced late in 2014.

During this process a range of other government initiated reforms have taken place. For example:

- ♦ The way in which the Commonwealth Department of Social Services distributes funding was changed, resulting in most service responses being determined via a competitive open tender process, the outcome of which may affect SYFS capacity for early intervention and family relationship responses.
- ♦ The NSW Department of Education and Communities reconfiguring the Links to Learning Program and opening this to competitive tendering affecting the capacity of SYFS to re-engage young people disconnected from school with education.
- ♦ A number of other future reforms are expected in health, education, employment, housing and homelessness that may directly affect SYFS and its model of service provision.

In this changing and complex policy environment it is critical to identify what constitutes effective practice in preventing and responding to youth homelessness and how policy can better utilise and promote this youth-specific knowledge and practice.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SYFS MODEL

Southern Youth and Family Services (SYFS) is a not-for-profit, community-based organisation that operates an integrated organisational and service delivery model for homeless, at risk and disadvantaged young people and families. Established 37 years ago, a community-based board that volunteer their services, manages SYFS. In 1979, SYFS set up the first crisis youth refuge in the Illawarra, an industrial centre on the southeast coast of Australia. Since then SYFS has grown significantly, intentionally seeking resources and expanding to provide a range of services to comprehensively meet the needs of young people and families, and to counter the causal factors of homelessness. During this period SYFS has earned an international reputation as a provider of excellent youth services.



The SYFS model integrates mainstream and specialist government-funded programs, complemented with services that are philanthropically and self-funded. Currently SYFS operates more than forty services contracted through Government sources, responding to the policy and program directives while coalescing provision into a seamless service system. The model is held together with clearly

defined processes and practices. It provides an on-the-ground demonstration of whole-of-government, whole-of-community response to the individual and collective needs of the service users. This dynamic, evolving model reflects the collective wealth of experience, skills and knowledge of staff, board and service users. It is built on youth specialist and family-centred practices that are threaded through the aims, practices, culture and systems of the organisation.

The current model cannot be understood outside the incremental growth of the organisation. The SYFS structure combines hierarchical and network forms of organising. This combination affords dense horizontal and vertical interactions and connections, features that are well suited to an organisation that proliferates horizontally and is increasingly distributed in relation to location.

While SYFS has an organisational chart, clarity of delegations and responsibilities, a senior management team and service teams that can be used to describe or draw the organisation, its cohesiveness is reliant on an embedded philosophy, themes and knowledge that is reiterated and co-created through practice.

RATIONALE FOR THE MODEL

The common themes in the development of the model include:

- ♦ commitment to social justice and to advocacy with, and on behalf of young people and their families to address the structural causes of barriers they face in their pursuit of safe, secure living situations and well-being;
- ♦ organic growth that is not ad-hoc, but responsive to the young people's needs and to the opportunities created in the funding and social policy contexts;
- ♦ a consistent approach to layering services and enmeshing them into the organisation so that the core purposes, visions and practices are replicated across all facets of the organisation; and
- ♦ a consistent approach to the young clients and families as whole human beings so that services are not provided as separate entities, but are fused together enabling 'clients' to receive multiple services through an experience that masks transition from one service to another.

ORGANISATIONAL BINDING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

SYFS has two primary aims:

- ♦ to provide support and assistance to young people who are disadvantaged, homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless, and their families; and
- ♦ to act as an advocate for, and facilitator of, structural change that achieves improved living situations for young people and their families.

Principles

- ♦ **Relationships that are built on respect, trust and persistence** underpin service delivery. Young people/families are able to be 'held' in the organisation as their needs change, sustaining therapeutic support and peer relationships.
- ♦ **Recognition and celebration of young people's abilities, strengths, talents, achievements and life experiences** and harnessing them to enhance their opportunities and development.
- ♦ **Young people and family centred**; the specific aspirations and characteristics of young people and their families, as well as the systemic issues that restrain their life opportunities are recognised.
- ♦ **Multiple, timely interventions** can be triggered based on individual need, choice and self-determination. All elements of the service system can act as entry points and progression is not linear or pre-defined.
- ♦ **Flexible delivery methods**; support is provided through outreach, centre-based, in residences, in schools, other community facilities or mutually agreed safe, neutral locations.

- ♦ **High-quality housing** and accommodation provided with a diversity of support structures to suit levels of living skills, independence, age and developmental stages of young residents.
- ♦ **Integration of a suite of services** to comprehensively meet the needs of the young people and families and supplemented by extensive partnership arrangements with external service providers, business, government agencies and community groups.
- ♦ **Advocacy and empowerment stance**; young people are encouraged to articulate their own needs and to take a broader interest in their context, society and environment. They are supported to participate in their own case plans and daily plans, tasks and activities.

Common systems across all services and programs

The ability to provide multiple interventions with dispersed entry points and pathways within the range of services delivered by SYFS is predicated on binding practices. Across all services and programs, SYFS implements common assessment, case management, client feedback and complaints mechanisms, outcome measurement and data collection systems.

The staff skill sets required to work within this model are developed through practices of: staff rotations within and between teams; whole of organisation fortnightly staff meetings; supervision; training plans and formal induction; regular team meetings and professional development. The SYFS psychologists provide professional supervision and case management support to teams. Client satisfaction surveys and cycles of action research are conducted across all services.

SERVICE DELIVERY AND METHODS

Within the SYFS model a complex and comprehensive range of services are offered and delivered. The organisational binding practices discussed in the previous section, integrate what could otherwise be represented as discrete service types. Structurally, these services are grouped into teams. The services and teams¹ include:

- supported and independent accommodation and housing options
- health
- family services
- education, training and pre-employment support
- assisting people in and exiting out of home care
- outreach services

¹ An outline of the programs and activities of these services and teams is contained in Appendix 2.

The service delivery methods used by these teams include: case management and casework, case co-ordination, early intervention, crisis intervention, transitional support, behaviour management programs including living and social skills, group work, telephone contact, drop-in, outreach work, role modeling, mentoring, supervision and encouragement, informal and contextualised training, formal education sessions, workshops, information provision, advocacy, and liaison with other agencies and schools.

Multiple entry points

Young people are able to enter SYFS from any point of service delivery or any program. For example, a young person may access SYFS by seeking assistance with debts (financial counselling and emergency relief programs) and through this access point, be guided into other services. Individually tailored services are provided by specialised staff and case managers who also ensure that the young person is able to access the full range of available programs and services.

BEYOND SERVICE DELIVERY

Whole of community engagement (partnerships)

The SYFS model engages the community as a whole in endeavours to improve the lives and opportunities of young people and families. SYFS maintains over sixty partnerships with Government, community and business. Examples of partnerships include: social housing providers; specialist and generalist employment service providers; local health district mental health, sexual health and drug and alcohol services; early education and childcare services, Centrelink, Legal Aid, community legal services, Aboriginal specific services, tenancy advice services, local neighbourhood centres, sporting groups, women's domestic violence services, multicultural services, schools and businesses.



Advocacy

Beyond delivering services, SYFS enacts its aims, principles and commitment to social justice through advocacy in the public policy arena. Young people are encouraged and skilled to be self-advocates and advocates for their peer group. Young people have held media conferences on youth homelessness, led delegations to Parliament House, spoken at public meetings and met with local, state and federal members of parliament.

Sector support

For the model to be sustained into the future, SYFS invests time in supporting the growth and development of the community services sector through: conducting student placement programs; providing keynote addresses and workshops at national and international conferences; conducting joint training programs; providing training to other services; participating in inter-agencies and networks; participating on boards and management committees of community service agencies; and through representation on national, state and regional peak organisations.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

In this section, we situate our study, describe the research methodology, outline the specific methods used, the data collected and how it was analysed.

THEORETICAL APPROACH

This research was guided by practice-based approaches to organisations. In practice theory, the primary unit of analysis is practice, described by Schatzki (2002) as the complex interactions of sayings, doings and relatings between people, other beings and material artefacts. Practice theories view knowledge of youth homelessness and youth work practice not as a capability of an individual practitioner but as an ongoing, collective, sociomaterial accomplishment, constituted and reconstituted as practitioners engage the world of practice (Hager, Lee, and Reich 2012). A practice-based approach suggests for this study a focus on the local, situated, embodied, spatially and temporally extended ways, that all involved with SYFS do things to enhance the health and well-being of young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and their families. In this way, attention is directed to investigating the practices that SYFS employs that contribute to positive outcomes for all involved in the organisation rather than focusing effort only on reporting the outcomes for young people and their families/carers.

METHODOLOGY

A practice-based approach using a participatory action research (PAR) framework (Kindon, Pain, and Kesby 2007; Reason and Bradbury 2006) was used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. The study was designed in two phases and motivated by what Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) refer to as a pragmatist interest in both narrative and numeric data to inform the research. Participatory action research (PAR) is positioned as a practice-changing approach that not only has the capability to change people's practices, but also to change their understanding of these practices and the conditions in which they are enacted (Kemmis 2009).

Phase 1

Within this participatory action research (PAR) framework, during the first phase we investigated and articulated the practices and practice knowledge situated in the everyday work of SYFS that contributes to the health and well-being of young people at risk of homelessness and their families. Accordingly, we negotiated with the management and staff of SYFS to follow and observe mundane practices in a range of their services and programs and to talk with service users. PAR cycles also included observing and noting organisational events and activities and talking with workers and young people the day

after events, followed by reflective discussions with managers, residential care workers and youth workers.

Phase 2

Based on the qualitative data gathered and the conceptual framework developed in the first phase, in the second phase we focused on: investigating young people's experience of various aspects of the SYFS model; what made a difference in their lives and their perceptions of the impact of participation in SYFS on the health and well-being of young people, their attainment of stable housing, and their transition to education and employment. So as part of this phase we designed a survey tool to gather an overview of the perceptions of current and past clients in relation to their experience with the SYFS approach and its impact on their lives. We also talked with them about their views on the critical aspects of the SYFS approach and the most significant changes that involvement in SYFS has had on their lives.

DATA GATHERING METHODS

Because practice is difficult to capture with a single method we used a toolkit approach as proposed by Nicolini (2013). Within the PAR cycles, multiple, mixed methods were incorporated for accessing a variety of data including:

- ♦ written ethnographic accounts of observations of residential youth work practices, workshop programs, health drop-in programs, employment and training assessment interviews with young people, refuge house-meetings, organisation events, staff meetings, Annual General Meetings (AGMs) and informal exchanges amongst young people and youth workers at SYFS;

The survey employed a forty-four item questionnaire developed by the research team, as no identified scale in the literature could be adopted in its entirety. Items were adapted and used from surveys and instruments such as European Social Survey (2008), Chipeur & Pretty (2010) Cicognani et al (2008) and Cummins (2000, 2010). The survey was piloted with SYFS service users and their feedback was incorporated into the questionnaire, which was distributed in person, by post and electronically, using 'Survey Monkey'. The survey comprised demographic items including diversity, current housing, employment and SYFS services used, 28 scale items and one open-ended question. Two hundred and one surveys were collected from both current and past clients.

Following the recommendations of Minichiello et al (2008) semi-structured interviews and group discussions were adopted as they offer a good fit to the PAR tradition of flexibility and responsiveness and encourage a conversational style. Twenty current and past clients participated in interviews and group discussions. Twenty-two SYFS staff

from across the organisation participated in sense-making discussions with the researchers.

DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative data from the surveys of current and past service users were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). To investigate the underlying structure of the continuous questionnaire items, the data collected was subjected to principal component analysis with varimax rotation. Seven factors (with Eigenvalues exceeding 1) were identified as underlying the continuous questionnaire items. These factors or sub-scales were labelled:

- ◆ Experience of SYFS
- ◆ Overall sense of well-being and satisfaction with life
- ◆ Sense of belonging and connectedness
- ◆ Sense of hope for the future
- ◆ Sense of control over one's life
- ◆ Satisfaction with health
- ◆ Experience of respect and recognition

These sub-scales were combined with housing attained, housing sustained, employment status and education participation and attainment, to form the indicators of the contribution of SYFS to young people at risk of homelessness and their families.

To examine differences and commonalities between current and past service users' perceptions and experience of SYFS and its impact on their lives Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted on these sub-scales.

Interactions and main effects were then examined using the Roy Bargmann Stepdown F-tests. A conceptual model was used, developed from the literature and the qualitative data, to order the dependent variables (Tabachnick and Fidell 2007). In this way the Roy Bargmann Stepdown F-tests enabled the qualitative data to inform the quantitative analysis. The variable of current and past service user was analysed in association with the categorical dependent variables using Pearson's Chi Square test of contingencies.

Qualitative data from interviews, group discussions, observations, and surveys were collated and analysed to identify dominant themes, patterns and trends. The categories from the quantitative analysis were also used to inform the qualitative analysis. The researchers initially coded the data using words from the texts, and then developed more 'abstract' codes to arrive at the themes (Hesse-Biber 2007). This early identification of themes and analysis was corroborated in sense-making, reflexive discussions conducted with managers and workers of SYFS. In this way, we incorporated the "right to co-interpretation" (Newkirk, 1996: 13) by offering our emerging interpretations and analysis

of the research data to organisational members for their review and comments (Kirsch, 2005).

TECHNIQUES INCORPORATED TO ENSURE TRUSTWORTHINESS IN THE RESEARCH

Member checks (Guba & Lincoln, 1981) were used throughout the research process. For instance participants checked and co-produced the written ethnographic accounts of observations and checked and made changes to transcripts. Research participants were also invited to discuss the researcher's reading of the data accessed during the fieldwork for the purpose of co-theorising and validation. This process of 'giving back' to participants a picture of how data is viewed, allowed the researchers to "both return something to research participants and check descriptive and interpretive/analytical validity" (Lather, 1991: 57).

A limitation of the data gathering methods is that although the respondents of the survey were representative of the total SYFS population of service users, the past service users that participated in the survey were those that were able to be contacted. Accordingly, it is likely that the past SYFS service users that self-selected to participate in both the survey and the interview data may report more positive outcomes than those who were unable to be contacted or chose not to participate.

This limitation was partly mitigated and trustworthiness in the research enhanced through the combination of multiple methods and variety in data sources. SYFS staff perspectives', service users' perspectives, researchers' observations and literature perspectives were compared to assist authenticity.

All written data has been kept in its original form. Individual interviews, group discussions and sense-making discussions were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. A research assistant entered the survey data into SPSS. These data management and recording processes that seek to preserve the original data holistically, enhance the dependability of the research.

OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS OF THE SYFS APPROACH TO REDUCING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

In this section, we provide an overview of the survey data in relation to the respondents' demographic profile, their housing situation and their employment, education and income status. We then present an analysis of their perception of their health, well-being and in relation to indicators of social inclusion and justice. We conclude our analysis of the survey data with a discussion of the aspects of involvement with SYFS that research participants reported as facilitating the most significant changes in their lives.

DEMOGRAPHICS AND DIVERSITY

The survey respondents were generally representative of the total population of SYFS service users in relation to age, gender, and Indigenous family background. However, they were not representative in relation to English not being a first language, as services users from non-English speaking backgrounds were under-represented in the survey data compared to the total SYFS population.

Demographic Variables	Current Client		Ex-client Client		Pearson's chi Square
<i>Gender</i>	No.	%	No.	%	.308
Female	105	64	25	73	
Male	59	36	9	27	
<i>Age</i>	No.	%	No.	%	.000**
Under20 years	90	54.9	6	17.6	
Over20 years	74	45.1	28	82.4	
<i>ATSI descent</i>	No.	%	No.	%	.868
ATSI	33	20.2	6	17.7	
Non-ATSI	130	79.8	28	82.3	
<i>First language</i>					.865
English	160	97.6	33	97.1	
Other-than-English	4	2.4	1	2.9	
<i>Country of birth</i>	No.	%	No.	%	.808
Australia	156	95.1	32	94.1	
Other-than-Australia	8	4.9	2	5.9	

*p < 0.05. **p < 0.01.

Table 2: Demographic and categorical information for current and past service users

As indicated in Table 1, the only statistically significant demographic difference between the current and past service users was in relation to age. Unsurprisingly, most of the past client group were older than the current client group.

HOUSING

One of the main aims of SYFS is to “provide support and assistance to young people who are disadvantaged, homeless or at risk of becoming homeless and their families”(SYFS Annual report 2013/2014: 5). Services designed to support young people’s exit from homelessness and entry into stable housing are a pivotal aspect of the work of SYFS. The following table provides a snapshot of the housing and accommodation situation for both current and past SYFS service users.

Housing Variables	Current client		Ex-client		Pearson’s chi square
<i>Housing on entry to SYFS</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	.971
Sleeping rough/no housing	6	3.7	2	5.9	
Couch surfing	5	3	1	2.9	
Crisis accomm/refuge	19	11.6	6	17.6	
Foster care	12	7.3	2	5.9	
With family/relatives	91	55.5	17	50	
Partner/boyfriend/girlfriend	9	5.5	2	5.9	
With friends	19	11.6	3	8.8	
Alone, renting	3	1.8	1	2.9	
<i>Current housing</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	.019*
Sleeping rough/no housing	0	0	0	0	
Crisis accom/refuge	22	13.4	0	0	
Other supported accommodation	19	11.6	2	5.9	
Specialised community housing	24	14.6	1	2.9	
In family home	38	23.2	10	29.4	
Private rental	19	11.6	9	26.5	
Hostel	1	.6	0	0	
Public Housing	21	12.8	10	29.4	
Boarding house	2	1.2	0	0	
Sleeping rough/no housing	2	1.2	0	0	
Other	16	9.8	2	5.9	
<i>How long living in current housing?</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	.029*
Less than 6 months	77	47	7	20.6	

6-12 months	28	17.1	7	20.6	
1-2 years	15	9.1	7	20.6	
2-3 years	9	5.5	1	2.9	
More than 3 years	35	21.3	12	35.3	
<i>How long do you expect to live there?</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>.001**</i>
Less than 6 months	41	25	4	11.8	
6-12 months	30	18.3	0	0	
1-2 years	25	15.2	2	5.9	
2-3 years	16	9.8	5	14.7	
More than 3 years	51	31.1	23	67.6	
<i>Who do you live with?</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>.005**</i>
Alone	45	27.4	6	17.6	
With partner	22	13.4	14	41.2	
With parents	36	22	6	17.6	
With siblings without parents	4	2.4	3	8.8	
With other relatives	9	5.5	0	0	
With others	48	29.3	5	14.7	

*p < 0.05. **p < 0.01.

Table 3: Housing variables for current and past SYFS service users

Although on entry to SYFS, both current and past clients who participated in the survey, experienced considerable disadvantage and difficulty in relation to their housing, Table 3 indicates that past SYFS clients' *current* housing circumstances are significantly better than current clients' housing circumstances. Past clients also report increased satisfaction with their current living circumstances and with feeling safe in their current housing arrangements. These results suggest that improvements in housing for young people through engagement with SYFS were sustained for the ex-clients that participated in the survey after they exited SYFS services and transitioned to independent housing.

There is convincing evidence (Scutella et al, 2013; Chamberlain & Johnson, 2011) that people who experience homelessness when they are young are more likely to experience persistent homelessness. This study, thereby, provides some evidence that for the past clients who participated in the survey, the SYFS model appears to have succeeded in reducing the likelihood of persistent homelessness. Indeed, about 68% of past SYFS clients expect to live in their current housing for more the next three years.

EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND INCOME

Homeless young people and those at risk of homelessness have higher levels of unemployment, lower levels of educational qualifications and income than the general population of young people (Grace, Keys, Hart & Keys, 2011). The following table outlines the employment, income and educational qualification status of current and past SYFS service users.

Categorical Variables	Current client		Ex-client		Pearson's chi square
<i>Employment status</i>	No	%	No	%	.032*
In paid employment	20	12.2	9	26.5	
Not in paid employment	144	87.8	25	73.5	
<i>Educational qualifications</i>	No.	%	No.	%	.000**
Primary	1	.6	0	0	
Year 7-9	59	36	3	8.8	
Year 10-11	75	45.7	12	35.3	
Year 12	15	9.1	10	29.4	
TAFE	14	8.5	8	23.5	
University	0	0	1	2.9	
<i>Education participation</i>	No.	%	No.	%	.007**
Enrolled in education	95	57.9	11	32.4	
Not enrolled in education	69	42.1	34	67.6	
<i>Income support</i>					.987
Receiving of income support payments	116	70.7	24	70.6	
Not receiving income support payments	48	29.3	10	29.4	

* $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

Table 4: Employment, Education and Income variables for current and past SYFS service users

As this table indicates many of the young people who use or have used SYFS, experience considerable disadvantage in relation to their economic circumstances. Although the unemployment levels for both current and past clients are high, they are significantly higher ($p = .03$) for current service users than those who have been involved with SYFS

in the past. The rates of those reliant on income support payments is correspondingly high. The major source of income for current SYFS clients not in paid employment is Independent Youth Allowance whereas for past clients it is Parenting Payment. Past service users were also more satisfied with their standard of living than current service users.

In relation to educational qualifications 56% of past SYFS users have attained Year 12 or above whereas only 17.6% of current service users have attained a year 12 qualification or above. Although the age difference between the two groups accounts for much of this difference in educational attainment, ex-SYFS clients still have higher levels of qualifications when age is taken into account.

While the survey results in relation to education, employment and income status, point to the structural barriers that confront this population of young people and underline the need for ongoing support and assistance, overall they suggest the turnaround in relation to engagement with education and employment gained through involvement with SYFS is sustained and built upon into the future by the past-clients that participated in the survey.

HEALTH, WELL-BEING, SOCIAL JUSTICE AND INCLUSION INDICATORS

The survey data were analysed to investigate if there were statistically significant differences between how current and past service users of SYFS perceived their:

- ◆ experience of SYFS
- ◆ overall sense of well-being and satisfaction with life
- ◆ sense of belonging and connectedness
- ◆ sense of hope for the future
- ◆ sense of control over their lives
- ◆ satisfaction with their health
- ◆ experiences of respect and recognition

MANOVA indicated a statistically significant difference between the two groups of SYFS service users ($Wilks = F(7,188) = 3.63, p < 0.001$). Roy-Bargman Stepdown F-tests were used to assess to which dependent variables this effect referred. F-values for stepdown tests, univariate analysis of variance, means and standard deviations are listed in Table 4.

IV	DVs	Univariate		Stepdown					
		F	df	F	df	Sig	Means		SD
Client status	Experience of SYFS	.016	7/188	.016	1/194	.899	Past	76.77	1.08
							Current	78.97	2.37
	Satisfaction with life and well-being	3.33	7/188	3.95*	1/193	.048	Past	53.23	2.24
							Current	48.73	1.02
	Sense of belonging	3.13	7/188	1.54	1/192	.291	Past	65.97	1.21
							Current	61.66	1.01
	Sense of control	5.64*	7/188	.249	1/191	.083	Past	38.85	1.61
							Current	34.59	.74
	Sense of hope	13.69*	7/188	9.63*	1/190	.002	Past	21.44	.80
							Current	18.16	.37
	Exp. of respect and recognition	2.50	7/188	6.54*	1/189	.016	Past	37.56	1.43
							Current	40.05	.65
	Satisfaction with health	.397	7/188	.236	1/188	.336	Past	14.73	.67
							Current	14.27	.30

* $p < .05$.

Table 5: *F*-values for stepdown tests. univariate analysis of variance, means and standard deviations

Roy–Bargman Stepdown *F*-tests indicate that the significant effect pertains to the SYFS users' overall sense of well-being and satisfaction with life, their sense of hope for the future, and their experience of respect and recognition. Univariate *F*-tests indicate that past service users of SYFS are significantly more satisfied with life and have a greater sense of well-being than current service users. They also experience a greater sense of hope for the future than current SYFS service users as well as a greater sense of control over their lives. In contrast, current service users of SYFS report experiencing more respect and recognition than past service users of SYFS. The sense of belonging and connectedness is stronger for past service users, although the difference in means is not statistically significant.

The perceptions of current and past service users in relation to their experience of SYFS were quite similar, as indicated in the closeness in the means. Both groups report extremely positive experiences with SYFS.

Both groups also report similar levels of satisfaction with their health, with both groups identifying significant room for improvement. The poor levels of satisfaction with health

supports research such as Milburn et al (2009) and Ensign & Santelli (1998) that report homeless young people suffering poor health status compared to the general population of young people.

MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGES FROM INVOLVEMENT WITH SYFS

In both the survey and in interviews and group discussions, young people were asked to nominate the aspects of their involvement with SYFS that had facilitated the most significant changes in their lives. A summary that categorises the research participants' responses is listed in Table 6 in descending order from the most common response category.

Rank	Aspect of SYFS that made the most significant change	No	%
1	Care practices/relationship with SYFS staff – helpful, responsive, reliable, caring workers providing unrelenting parental-like support and guidance	51	26.2
2	Self-care and improved well-being – learning to look after one's self, learning to be independent, turning life around, greater sense of well-being	33	16.9
3	Sense of belonging and connectedness – including improved connections to own family	23	11.7
4	Housing – access to supported accommodation and/or stable housing	22	11.2
5	Sense of control over one's own life	15	7.7
6	Sense of hope for the future	12	6.2
7	Education and employment – access to employment or education, attainment of qualifications and/or employment	11	5.6
8	Access to basics – food, clothing, financial assistance, household goods	8	4.1
9	Health – improved physical and mental health	6	3.1
10	Experience of voice, being listened to	5	2.6
11	Safety – feeling and being safe	5	2.6
12	Experience of respect – (for themselves and for others)	3	1.5
13	Access to activities – such as community events, sport, movies etc	1	0.5

Table 6: Most significant change from involvement with SYFS

In this section we restrict our discussion to the five most commonly nominated aspects of involvement with SYFS that facilitated significant positive change for young people.

Relationships with SYFS staff and care practices: ranked 1

The table indicates that the relationship with SYFS staff and their care practices are the aspects of involvement with SYFS that have the most positive impact on the lives of both current and past service users. The importance of rapport and relationship building between workers and young people has also been identified as the crucial element in the success of homelessness programs in recent reviews of homelessness programs by Baulderstone and Button (2011) and Barker et al (2012a). An ex-client comments on these aspects and provides evidence of the impact on his life:

The support from the workers is my fondest memory of SYFS... just their attitude and understanding really. I think it just comes down to their care. They're just always willing to listen. Since their help, I haven't been in a psychiatric ward for four years.

A young adult who was living on the streets before becoming involved with SYFS expresses a view common to many who participated in this study:

I have been involved with SYFS for about 10 years and they really care. They have helped me through my struggling times, and when I need someone to talk too they are always there or just a phone call away.

The sense that SYFS offers care and support when others don't, and at the same time offers practical assistance is evident in the comment of another ex-client:

The staff came to visit me when I was locked up, when no one else came to visit me. The staff care, they helped me get my own accommodation through Housing NSW.

Self-care and improved well-being: ranked 2

Practices that assist young people learn to look after themselves, and to become independent, contributed to a greater sense of well-being and were identified as significant for both current and ex-clients. The following comment from Kylie, a young person currently involved with SYFS is representative:

Being with SYFS has changed many things within my life. I have learnt how to look after myself, be safe, respect and care for others and have made many new friends.

Becoming safe and improved social connectedness: two other aspects reported by young people as significant are also evident in Kylie's brief statement.

Sense of belonging and connectedness: ranked 3

Developing a sense of belonging and connectedness are also valued by those that participated in the study. In the following comment from Randall, a past service user, the sense of belonging and the care practices of the workers are woven together:

The family atmosphere - workers made it feel like a family. The staff would always be there - even if you mucked up - they would drop everything for the kids. Best service I've used in my whole life.

The strong sense of belonging is well expressed in the following comment by a young woman, who was homeless and sleeping rough before becoming involved with SYFS:

The most significant change in my life that SYFS has helped make is the sense of people wanting me around and caring about my opinions. SYFS is my family and I love them.

Access to stable housing: ranked 4

Despite SYFS being an organisation that provides a range of housing options to young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, more service users identified the factors discussed above as enabling the most significant changes, than nominated access to housing. Nevertheless, as is indicated in Table 5, access to housing was ranked 4 with more than 11% of participants in our study nominating assistance with housing as a critical change factor. For instance, Jacob, a young parent commented:

Housing was the biggest and best change in my life. Without the help of being placed in a house with my partner and one-year-old daughter, we would be homeless and really stressed.

Sense of control over one's life: ranked 5

Developing a sense of control over one's life was identified by young people as critical to their sense of well-being and satisfaction with life. The links between developing a sense of control over one's life and experiencing a sense of hope for the future is evident in Derek, a young man living in supported medium term accommodation:

It's completely changed my life so much. I got a life here.... Now I've got control, I have a sense of control in my life. I can see things getting better.

This view is echoed by a female client of SYFS, who wrote in response to the question about the aspects of SYFS that made the most significant change:

Through being involved with SYFS I made changes in my life. Like I don't have to worry about other people e.g. my dad. Now I can make my own decisions and do everything for me. I can now move on with my life and hopefully get where I want to get.

Perhaps surprisingly, access to basic needs such as food, clothing, financial assistance and household goods, although nominated by some current and past clients, are well down the list of factors nominated by young people as most significant.



UNPACKING THE OUTCOMES: PRACTICES CRITICAL TO THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SYFS MODEL

The aspects of SYFS nominated by young people as making a positive difference in their lives, encompass indicators of well-being, care and social justice. SYFS nominates social justice as a driving force behind their work. A SYFS worker explains:

SYFS is underpinned by very strong structure and the core values of everyone in SYFS from the board to the way our policies and procedures are all structured, are the core values of social justice, human rights and empowerment for young people and their rights. That's really strong and that's like the vein I think, that runs throughout all of SYFS.

Social justice is an amorphous concept that refers to a range of theoretical positions, values and ideals. Contemporary discourses (see for example Fraser, 2007; Fraser & Honneth, 2003, Honneth, 2003; Lister, 2007) conceptualise four dimensions of social justice: economic (redistribution and the materials aspects of poverty and inequality); social (social inclusion, belonging and connectedness); political (representation and participation); and cultural (respect and recognition).

In this section, we use a framework of social justice practices (Keevers et al, 2010) to analyse our qualitative data in order to articulate *the practices* that SYFS enacts to facilitate young people's experiences of, and struggles over, homelessness, hardship, humiliation, belonging, representation, respect, well-being, personal and social change. Accordingly, these practices encompass the four dimensions of social justice and constitute a politics of redistribution, recognition, representation and social inclusion. Specifically, we investigate the question: What are the practices critical to enabling SYFS to facilitate the positive outcomes and changes for young people and their families outlined in the survey data and discussed in the previous section?

INTRODUCING ORGANISING PRACTICES OF SOCIAL JUSTICE AND CARE AT SYFS

Observations of situated practices combined with the survey data and the accounts of workers and service users demonstrate that SYFS facilitates service users' struggles over social justice and their experience of care. These local organising practices of social justice and care make distinctive contributions to what Sennett (2003) and Lovell (2007) argue is an urgent need in our society, practices that enact respect across the boundaries of inequality, difference and dependency.

There is overwhelming evidence demonstrating the centrality of social connectedness and social support for well-being (Berkman, 1995; Wilkinson, 2005). The international research on the social determinants of health, demonstrates that indicators of social justice and inclusion: a sense of control over your life (Marmot, 2004); a sense of belonging (Wilkinson, 2005; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009); and, a sense of hope for the future that is especially important for young people (Berkman, 1995; CSDH, 2008); are key risk/protective factors in relation to well-being, health and ‘success’ in life.

The views of the participants in this study are in agreement with this research evidence. They identify improvements in these factors through their involvement with SYFS and especially through the relationships established with SYFS staff, as having the most significant positive impact on their lives.

In the following sections, we analyse the bundles of practices, arrangements and relations that make up how care and social justice is enacted at SYFS. First, we discuss practices of respect, recognition and care that build the sorts of relationships pivotal to the effectiveness of the SYFS approach. Next, we articulate practices of belonging and connectedness and the importance of a welcoming organisational culture for young people, staff and the social impact of SYFS in the broader community. Then, we outline practices of redistribution that ameliorate some of the structural barriers young people face in their pursuit of safe, stable living situations and well-being. Finally, we investigate the practices of representation, listening and advocacy, whereby young people are encouraged to participate and skilled to be self-advocates and advocates for their peers.

PRACTICES OF RESPECT, RECOGNITION AND BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships between young people and SYFS staff in which young people experience respect, recognition, trust and care, is the dominant theme expressed by research participants in this study. The relationship between young people and their case workers is also the common factor identified as of primary importance in much of the literature on the effective of youth homelessness services (Allen, 2012; Barker et al, 2012a; Baulderstone & Button, 2011; Brusa, 2012; Gronda, Ware & Vitis, 2011). In this study we extend the existing literature by unpacking the relationships between young people and SYFS staff to identify the organising practices that enable these trust-based and caring relationships. How the organising practices of social justice and care at SYFS contribute to overcoming the kinds of oppressions, humiliations and sufferings that concern young people’s sense of well-being, esteem and recognition is, however, complex and hard to capture. For the acts that convey care and respect – the acts of acknowledging others – are demanding and obscure (Sennett 2003: 59).

The crucial importance of relationships in the ongoing performance of care, respect and recognition, we observed in the practices of crisis refuge workers:

During the morning it was clear in the way the young people related to the workers that they really trusted them. The workers in their body language, in their use of humour and in the way they ‘held’ a very non-loaded emotional response themselves, contributed to a calm, relaxed atmosphere where the young people felt free to ‘be themselves’ (fieldnotes).

The young people were willing to take the challenges from the workers, over their use of language or their behaviour:

Tina who had been sitting at the table examining her face with a hand mirror and eating chocolate biscuits, suddenly said angrily: “Where’s Tom [youth worker]? He promised to take me shopping after I’d been to court.” Kate explained he was away and reassured her it would happen. Tina got even angrier, shouting, “Why would I believe that? People have been saying that they’ll do stuff all my life but they never do, why will he be any different?” Kate listened calmly and when she tried talking to Tina about the clothes she was wearing Tina snapped, “They are not mine. They’re a friends.” Kate asked with genuine curiosity “What’s it like to have friends that will lend you their clothes?” This lead to a conversation about how Tina was feeling left out because another resident was getting to go shopping that day and also about what had turned around in her life over the last few years. When Tina had settled down and seemed less volatile, Kate asked: “What could you do, that might make you feel like you’re not missing out?” Tina said: “I’m going to ring my DOCS worker and get him to get me some money for some clothes” With that she jumped up, borrowed my pen, wrote down the number and starting making a call on the phone. Kate didn’t say anything but looked quite pleased that the young woman was making phone calls and acting for herself (fieldnotes).

The youth worker, who verbally challenges the behaviour of a homeless young person without turning them off, performs respect. Their practices entail finding the words, the gestures, the time, the tone, the listening and the physical space that makes respect felt and persuasive (Sennett 2003).

‘My worker’ – young people choosing their own worker throughout and beyond their Involvement with SYFS

In contrast to case management models common amongst service providers in the adult homelessness and foster care sectors, and positively evaluated in some studies (Gronda, 2009; Altena et al, 2010), SYFS does not routinely assign a case manager or key caseworker to young people involved with its services. Paradoxically, almost without exception the young people involved in this study, report having ‘their own worker’ and

believe that it is a routine practice at SYFS for all young people to have a particular worker. A young woman currently living in SYFS supported accommodation explained:

I reckon everyone has like, not a favourite, but a more preferred one. I have a preferred worker. Everyone has their own worker at SYFS.

Jackson who has been living in SYFS housing for a number of years and now lives independently with minimal support agreed, commenting:

I really get on with my worker. He is always willing and wants to talk. He does practical stuff for me ... For example, I rang up, cause my stove blew up, the next day I had an electric pan and after that a new stove. He's really responsible.

This organising practice at SYFS enables young people to 'choose' their worker and allows the relationship to develop organically, over time. This freedom to informally choose their worker seems to strengthen the trust between young people and SYFS staff as a comment from Bianca, an ex-client of SYFS, illustrates:

She's someone I trust completely. She has always been absolutely spectacular with me. I can always go in and have a chat with her, even now. I can just go in and, she listened a lot when I was pregnant and going through issues. She was very, very helpful with just listening and supporting me... She's always been there and is very - she's definitely the face that I look for.

Often the worker that young people describe as 'my worker' is a person they met when they first became involved with SYFS. Sally's comment is representative:

My older workers ... the ones that are still here, I feel close to them. If I have a problem I would always go to them and there is one in particular that I always talk to.

The comments from the young people in this study demonstrate that not mandating a case manager to young people enhances the young person's agency and sense of control over their life and strengthens relationships of trust, respect and recognition between young people and particular SYFS workers. Employing practices that enhance independence and a sense of control in the lives of homeless young people and recognising practices that open possibilities for agency and choice is identified in the literature (Barker et al, 2012a; Kidd, 2003; Thompson et al, 2006) as important in designing effective interventions.

Interestingly, these sustained, trust-based relationships were also identified by the research participants in this study as vital in contributing to the health and well-being of young people and to enhancing their successful exit from homelessness. Sam describes the impact of involvement with SYFS:

Well, I was a bit of a rough head when I was younger and like I did some pretty bad things and Crisis [youth refuge], no matter what I done, they always sat there and said to me, look you're better than this. Well, I got off pot, got off everything, stopped drinking, doing all the stupid shit and then I ended up being actually empowered like through all this other stuff and got me my own place. SYFS sort of helped me clean up my whole life pretty much.

Sam's comment reflects a common experience of young people involved with SYFS, relationships that demonstrate persistent faith in and express high expectations of the young person.

Relentless parental-like support

A related organising practice is that SYFS often maintains contact with young people through to adulthood offering meaningful and lasting relationships. For many of these young people, their younger years at SYFS are a foundation for their future, independent lives. A SYFS worker explains:

We all try and keep in contact with these young people even when they've moved on and grown up a bit. We're still interested in what they're doing and they feel that connection too. Even though they've technically left our service, we are still here, wanting to know how they're going; we want to have those chats with them. So it's never like, that's it. We always hold that connection with them.

Persistent relationships and long-term support have been identified in both national and international literature as pivotal to effective support for vulnerable young people (Barker, et al, 2012a; Lemmon, 2008). Lemmon (2008) argues that many young people participating in his study only 'achieved adulthood' because of the multi-layered, long-term support provided until their mid-twenties.

This relentless parental-like support and persistence that characterises the relationship between a young person and SYFS staff, is evident in the following comment by Daniel, a current SYFS client:

It's completely changed my life so much. I got a life here... it was really bad, I was really bad, really violent. But Julia wouldn't let me go. Even when I was really horrible and said terrible things to her. SYFS helped me manage all that. Now I've got control, I have a sense of control in my life. I can see things getting better.

These persistent parental-like relationships involve boundary-making and unmaking practices, which are constantly changing and being calibrated to match the young person's development and circumstances. Joshua, a 17-year-old parent explains:

How can I best explain it, except - they've thrown me in the deep end, but they are sitting on the sidelines with a rope in case I need help. So I'm - so I can obviously swim or die, but I have got them on the sideline ready to pull me out, if I need help. So to put to put that into how it works is they've thrown me into a house with my girlfriend and my daughter to pay rent, to buy food, to live on our own and if a problem does come up where we can't have food, or can't pay rent, they're there to help... Yeah, if we need help and we don't have it in our power to do it, they're there to help. They're the lifeline. But, they don't take control ... I still have the peace of mind to know that if I ever am in doubt of drowning, they're there to pull me out and bring me to safety.

Joshua's comments show that the unrelenting parental-like support combined with boundary-making practices contribute to young people having the confidence to pioneer new ways of living for themselves and to develop a sense of control over their lives. Joshua's views are echoed by a conversation between SYFS workers:

Alison: They've got the room to move but you're still there on the outer, watching, monitoring, holding, supporting encouraging... It's about giving them a sense of ownership, that control to realise they're the only one that can change all that. We're only here to give you a few nudges along the way but when it comes down to it it's up to you.

Christopher: Some of them want control, some of them want to be - they need a lot of prompting like 'come on get up and go to school'. But we're always letting them know that no matter what happens in their life, they're not disappointing us, it's all about them. So we will keep doing whatever we need to do to help them get to where they want to be.

Reciprocity, care and respect

The care practices at SYFS are underpinned by the practice conviction that "reciprocity is the foundation of mutual respect" (Sennett, 2003: 219) and that the quality of the relationship is central. This practice conviction means that creating opportunities for young people to participate and give back are distinguishing features of SYFS's practices of mutual respect and recognition. Service participants experience their contributions as being genuinely needed and their expertise on homelessness recognised. For instance, a routine organising practice is to invite young service users to participate as representatives of the organisation at the AGM, in government consultations and in the media.

At SYFS, creating possibilities for experiencing respect, recognition and care are seen as a joint responsibility that includes service users. In viewing care and respect as collective performances, practitioners focus attention on the horizontal relationships between peers,

not just on the worker/client relationship. The possibilities and the impossibilities for respect and recognition are constantly becoming ‘for another first time’ (Garfinkel 1967). Respect, care and trust are not outcomes or achievements but moment-by-moment practices that are situated, precarious and ongoing.



We observed that the youth workers rely on these horizontal networks and relationships between young people to ensure swift and effective communication with service users who may be living in unstable housing situations that can make reliable contact difficult. On several occasions, we witnessed youth workers asking service users

to get messages to other young people. These messages resulted in the young person presenting themselves at SYFS often within a few hours.

The emphasis on facilitating horizontal relationships between peers is linked to another key aspect of practicing of social justice and inclusion at SYFS – practices of belonging and connectedness.

PRACTICES OF BELONGING AND CONNECTEDNESS

The SYFS model embodies a form of community through which young people, families, staff, volunteers and the Board experience a sense of belonging and connectedness. A welcoming, belonging culture is integral to both the positive outcomes that SYFS facilitates in the lives of young people and their families and on the social impacts that SYFS has on the broader community. An ex-client of SYFS comments:

My family they didn't really pay me much attention at all, so with SYFS they gave me - they made me feel like I was a part of something... They had all the extra activities to do at CHAIN and they took us out to - once they took us to the Easter Show They actually made us feel welcome and part of a group rather than, a lot of other organisations that make you feel like an outsider too, not just to the organisation but to society... Whereas yeah, SYFS kind of incorporate you into everything.

For vulnerable young people, social events and activities are important strategies for learning social skills, feeling part of the community and importantly, having fun. Regular activities are organised for clients in all the SYFS services and include visits to local events and facilities, the Royal Easter Show, and attending stage performances, concerts and sporting events.

Practices of belonging: ‘not just providing a service’

The sense of belonging and inclusion, evident in the ex-client’s words above, is a theme strongly expressed by young people and other service users of SYFS. Workers’ accounts also stress this issue. Workers not only recognise the centrality of building strong relationships and connections with service users but also emphasise the importance of facilitating connections and relationships *between* service users themselves.

Young people use statements like “we are family here” and “SYFS is my family and I love them” to convey a newfound sense of belonging they experience through their involvement with SYFS and its importance in their lives. Although the metaphors of family and home dominate young service users’ accounts of their experiences, workers tend not to use this discourse. The significance of the sense of belonging facilitated by the relentless parental like support that marks the worker–young person relationship at SYFS and the workers’ ambivalence towards the allusions to family are well illustrated by Julia:

Jimmy was a young person here some 15 years ago. He moved to Queensland, got a job, and has a partner and he’s just gone on his first big trip overseas. He spent his last night in Australia with us. He said he wanted to come to Wollongong before he caught the flight the next day and he wanted to know about where the other young people were that he’d sort of grown up with here. We went out to dinner with him and it was kind of like – it’s very interesting. So we don’t present as a family but there was a very strong connection for someone to come back from Queensland to spend their last night before they go overseas with us. So that makes us feel good too and I don’t know if that’s bad [laughter] (reflective discussion).

Here we see Julia’s wonder at the depth of Jimmy’s connection and belonging generated by being part of SYFS, her acknowledgement of the importance of the relationships for



workers—we went out to dinner with him... So that makes us feel good too—as well as her concern—I don’t know if that’s bad—about how Jimmy’s experience of belonging and its significance in his life may be perceived by others.

Similarly, we witnessed ex-residents returning to SYFS, in order to introduce their new baby to staff, to announce, “I am clean” and to show a friend their photograph on the photo boards (fieldnotes).

This sense of belonging is facilitated by worker recognition of, and attention to, ‘not

just delivering the service'. The commitment to reciprocity and 'not only delivering a service' is threaded throughout SYFS' organising practices. For example, at the AGM, which has been transformed into a ritual of belonging, a celebratory reunion for ex-residents, service participants, workers and bureaucrats alike, we witnessed a young former resident giving a speech to a large audience about his experience of homelessness and advocating for the needs of other homeless young people.

We visited the crisis refuge the morning after they had been on a trip to the Sydney Royal Easter Show. Although this trip does not ostensibly 'provide a service', it does provide access to activities, experiences and fun that the young people would not otherwise have often had because of lack of finances. The author noted:

I sat around the dining room table with two workers and some very tired young people. The previous day they had a 20-hour trip going to the Easter Show and back with a convoy of four mini buses. ... Some of them had never been to the Easter Show before. They all spoke in detail about the actual amounts of money they were given. One young woman proudly said, "It costs at least \$200 per kid". Collin (worker) explained, "We fund-raise for the young people to be able to go." Having this money spent on them, for something like the Easter Show was clearly important to all these young people... Dan, a 13-year-old boy, went to his bedroom and brought back things he'd bought to show us (fieldnotes).

Later the same day, two of the experienced managers discussed the value of activities like the Easter Show that do not provide services as such, and are not counted in accountability reporting to funding bodies. Interestingly, unlike the young people, they did not frame these activities as economic benefits but as something that enables young people to feel valued and participate in the community like other young people. Collin talked about how activities like the Easter Show and the partnership that SYFS has with the Dragons [local football club]—where the young people act as helpers at coaching clinics with younger children—are not considered useful by funding bodies. Kate agreed:

They think we should spend our money on counselling sessions for Dan but look at him this morning. He's relaxed and happy. Trips like the Easter Show are really important ... they might not be a casework service but they are really important (fieldnotes).

Collin talked about how these kinds of activities "enable the young people to feel valued, feel part of something" (fieldnotes).

Feeling part of something, and encouraging a sense of belonging is also strengthened by the way SYFS staff, from across the network of services collaborate with one another. A SYFS worker explains:

I think they get a sense that it is like a community that they're coming into as well. It's a very caring environment where everybody is collaboratively working together. They can see the different kind of - not just a service but a sense of community, a sense of they feel like they belong ... because we do communicate and connect with each other and we communicate that to the client as well.

These collaborative relationships and dense networks extend well beyond SYFS. The benefits for young people of being involved in a service that is active in the local community and continually creates broader networks and relationships outside the immediate organisation is discussed in the following section.

Building connections and networks beyond the service

A number of the young people that participated in this study discussed how SYFS connected them with other services and with networks and opportunities in the broader community. For example, Mark describes how SYFS used both formal and informal networks to enable him to gain qualifications, skills and work experience:

Yeah, I'm doing temporary work, all because - yeah, since leaving school NETWORK [a SYFS education and employment focused service] they offered me opportunities to get into courses and I've been doing course after course, because it's what I enjoy and what I look forward to ... the worker up there at NETWORK, he came to me asking me if I was interested in a job and said one of his mates is looking for a labourer. Yeah, it all started from there really. So I was working in Sydney five days a week with his friend and just getting a first-hand look at the industry where I want to get into. It made the passion and wanting for that job just greater and greater. Yeah, after that I got my full Certificate II. So yeah, the trainer there offered me a chance to do some work experience and earn a couple of extra modules. I was doing that and a couple of days later -he came to me with the CEO. The CEO's son was looking for the three best students to go do some temporary work at the harbour front, so here I am.

Here we see that facilitating the connections and networks beyond SYFS for Mark, not only supports his transition to employment but also enhances his sense of recognition and hope for the future.

PRACTICES OF REDISTRIBUTION

At SYFS, redistribution and distributive justice plays a central role in the practices of the organisation. For example, SYFS aims to act in a way that will increase accessibility for young people and families to:

- ◆ secure, affordable and individual housing

- ◆ employment, education and training
- ◆ secure and adequate income
- ◆ health support and services
- ◆ appropriate support services
- ◆ clothing, food and other practical assistance (Annual Report, 2014: 5)

Accordingly, SYFS engages in practices and provides services and programs that contribute to remedying distributive injustices (Fraser, 1997) that are socio-economic in character and rooted in the political-economic organisation of society.

For instance, in 2013/2014 SYFS provided accommodation and support to six hundred and sixty-six (666) young people, and two thousand and fifty-one (2051) young people received a full range of support services. Additionally, one thousand seven hundred and thirty-one (1731) families received a full range of support services. (2014:15).

The harms and needs related to distributive injustices experienced by young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, are complex and intertwined. The young service users in this study often need access to accommodation, money, food, health care, household goods, education and training, employment, and affordable activities. One of the distinguishing features of the SYFS model is its ability to address these multiple, material needs holistically, together with service users' needs to build and re-build connections with family members and friends, enhance their well-being and satisfaction with life, their sense of agency and hope for the future. The research evidence supports such an integrated approach. For example, Slesnick et al (2009) argue that interventions that address particular areas in isolation from other needs are unlikely to be effective.

SYFS employs a wide range of practices aimed at remedying these harms of distributive injustice and it is beyond the scope of this study to discuss them all. The aspects that featured most strongly in discussions with young people and in observations of practice include: a) access to secure, affordable housing, b) enabling engagement with education, training and employment, c) access to clothing, food, household goods and other practical assistance and d) access to new opportunities, activities and events in the community. In the following section we discuss access to secure, affordable supported housing and to education, training and employment.

Secure, affordable supported housing

Young people experience specific, structural barriers that reduce their access to private rental housing, including low youth wages, the low rate of Independent Youth Allowance, the high competition for properties in the lower end of rental costs, and age discrimination (West, Warth & Scott, 2013).



SYFS offers a holistic range of services including a diversity of supported accommodation options. The SYFS approach to housing provision does not fit neatly within dominant housing models such as Housing First or linear housing models (Johnsen & Teixeira, 2010).

For instance, the housing first model prioritises the provision of permanent housing whereas SYFS emphasises transitional, supported, longer-term housing that promotes stability, safety and encourages the development of trusted long-term relationships between young people and SYFS workers.

Linear housing approaches are perhaps the most common models and includes a range of services based on the idea of homeless people progress through separate residential services involving emergency accommodation, transitional housing, supportive housing and independent living (Johnsen & Teixeira, 2010). Although SYFS provides this range of housing options for young people, its organising practices are not linear. As Dave, a young person living in medium- term supported accommodation succinctly explained:

With SYFS, there is no beginning or end; you are always in the middle.

This way of organising means that there are multiple entry points and young people can access different forms of supported housing depending on their situation. There is no predetermined linear progression from assessment, to crisis accommodation, supported accommodation to independent living. Although some young people may follow such a continuum-of-care housing path, others access supported independent housing upon their initial engagement with SYFS. Danika, a young resident, commented:

SYFS is like an umbrella – you can see where you want to go, you can see yourself progress. It's really good because there are all these sorts of services in the one place, you don't have to keep going to different places and you don't have to keep telling your story.

Within this holistic approach SYFS delivers a Youth Foyer, a model defined by Anderson and Quilgars (1995) as an 'integrated approach to meeting the needs of young people during their transition from dependence to independence by linking affordable accommodation to training and employment' (Anderson and Quilgars, 1995 cited in Barker et al, 2012b: 22). Although SYFS delivers a Foyer service, their suite of services

extend well beyond housing, training and employment. A conversation between a couple of workers described the approach:

Tanja: Holistic approach in all different areas of their needs. With our services we've got so many different areas that we can cover ...

Kate: Yep, a holistic approach on mental and physical , their family

Tanja: Everything. Their whole well-being rather than just being a bed for the night, it's the whole person.

The value of supported accommodation combined with other support services tailored to the situation of the young person is supported in studies such as Kisley et al, (2008) They report improved health and lower levels of substance abuse, and better outcomes amongst young people receiving supported accommodation (Kisley, et al, 2008).

This study demonstrates that supported, transitional housing that is sustained and enables the development of long-term trust-based relationships are critical to SYFS successfully enhancing the health and well-being of young homeless people and their families.

Employment, education and training

There are significant structural barriers that confront the young people involved with SYFS in relation to access to, and sustaining engagement with, education and employment. For example, in 2014, 18.4 per cent of Illawarra young people aged 15 to 24 were unemployed, which was well above the national average of 12.6 per cent and indeed the region has amongst the highest levels of unemployment nationally (National Economics, 2014). These structural barriers underline the need for ongoing support and assistance. Accordingly, SYFS provides a range of employment, education and training programs. These include:

- ◆ a Foyer service that provides medium to long term housing combined with employment, education and training support for young homeless people;
- ◆ Links to Learning programs designed for school-aged young people to re-engage young people with learning, education and training;
- ◆ NETWORK programs that provide young people with the resources, intensive assistance and access to services to enable them to enhance access to and maintenance of education, training and employment;
- ◆ CONNECT-ED program that provides accredited training and support through partnership arrangements and assists young people to overcome the barriers to participation in education and training (Annual Report, 2013-2014); and
- ◆ personal, social and living skills education.

Recognition of the value of learning is threaded through SYFS programs as CEO explains:

Julia: We hold very dear the notion of the importance of mastery, being able to learn something, being able to do it, accomplishing something.

Two hundred and eighteen homeless or 'at risk' young people and children received individual and group work support in relation to employment, education and training in 2013-2014. The majority of them began, maintained, or returned to education, training or employment (SYFS, Annual report 2013/2014: 21-22). We noted the high demand, during observations at SYFS employment, education and training services:

Margaret provides assistance to young people in relation to getting into courses. She helps them put their resume together and with job seeking skills. She also provides young people with study backpacks, pays for textbooks and for short courses that interest the young person

The importance of working alongside young people to overcome the barriers that are stopping them engage with education and employment is evident in Rodney, an ex-client's comments:

Being involved with SYFS has taken away a lot of issues and now I can concentrate on important things like getting qualifications, looking for work, getting a license, building a good life... I recently got a Cert III in Digital and Information Technology and I'm probably going to be doing a degree in literature next year.

Both the support required to assist homeless young people gain employment and the benefits of securing work is evident in a young woman's comment in relation to her involvement with SYFS:

I had a really good experience - I was very quiet when I became involved and they helped me come out of my shell - I made friends. They "forced" me to get a job - but I'm glad they pushed me because it was the best decision ever.

Living, social and personal skills education

Both current and past service users identify practices that assist young people to care for themselves and become independent as critical to their well-being, health and satisfaction with life. The living, social and personal skills of young people involved with SYFS are enhanced through both informal and formal learning. These learning approaches include: everyday role modeling and mentoring in relation to cooking, cleaning, hygiene and managing money; one-to-one support and guidance in relation to handling life challenges, difficult situations, emotions and relationships; individual and group-based pregnancy and parenting support and education; and facilitated personal and living skills programs.

The importance of living skills in enhancing independence is well illustrated in a comment by a young parent currently living in the SYFS Foyer service:

Jacob: Just learning to live as a family, learning to live on my own with my girlfriend and daughter. Yeah, to be an adult pretty much. I'm still only 17... but I just feel without Foyers I wouldn't be as independent and as grown up as I am today.

The usefulness of drop-in, prevention and early intervention approach in relation to pregnancy and parenting was emphasised by many young parents. For example, the following comment from a young mother and past service user is representative:

CHAIN supported me throughout all 3 of my pregnancies. Being a teenage parent, the services CHAIN offered definitely impacted me at that time and I believe they continue to aid me in becoming a better parent to this day.

In this comment the continuing impact and sustainability of the antenatal and parenting programs is evident.

The links between living and personal skills education and enabling a sense of control over one's life, is illustrated in the following comments from a young man responding to the survey question inquiring about the most significant change experienced through involvement with SYFS:

SYFS showed me how to be hygienic and clean and showed me how cool it is to have nice new clothes. How it feels to be in a family, taught me how and what it feels like to be disciplined.

Developing a greater sense of control through learning and practising strategies and skills for dealing with feelings and relationships is also highlighted in the following comment, from a young male SYFS resident:

When I first ever joined SYFS, I was in and out of placements and not well behaved. When I got angry I would break things, harm myself and potentially others. Now when I get angry, I walk away and have some time out. These methods were taught to me by SYFS staff and I am so grateful for their continued support.

This study shows that the active participation of young people in the self-care and well-being programs and services offered at SYFS is critical in reducing dependency on SYFS staff and other professionals and facilitating capacity and sustainability of young people's change efforts.

PRACTICES OF REPRESENTATION, PARTICIPATION AND ADVOCACY

Practices of representation, participation and advocacy, constitute the political dimension of social justice (Fraser, 2007) and their centrality to SYFS' self-understanding is well illustrated in these comments from Andrea, one of the out-of-home care workers:

I would say as an organisation we're a fighting organisation in the sense that no matter what challenges we face within the community or funding, no matter what we'll push the boundaries and we will fight to the end to get the best for the young people that we work with. I think that's one of the things that the clients pick up because they see how much we do go out in the community. We don't just support our own organisation. If something's going on in the Illawarra all of us will band together as an organisation and we will assist anyone that comes up against a fight that might lose something that is going to help someone else in the community. We are a strong advocate not only for the young people but also for other people.

In this section we discuss some of the practices that SYFS employs to support struggles over representation and participation including advocacy, standing alongside, pursuing rights, and encouraging participation.

Advocacy, standing alongside, and pursuing rights

Advocacy carries multiple connotations. Code's description encompasses the advocacy practices evident in everyday working life at SYFS:

it has to do with defending or espousing a cause by arguing in its favour; speaking on behalf of, supporting, vindicating, recommending someone, some project, some policy, in respect to a particular issue or point of view; representing someone/some group in order to counter patterns of silencing, discounting, incredulity, and other egregious harms. It can take place in individual and communal practices: someone may advocate on her own behalf or on behalf of (an)other person(s), may advocate in favour of the significance, cogency, validity, credibility of another person's testimony, of the testimony of several people, a group, institution, or society (Code, 2006: 165).

This definition emphasises both systemic advocacy, which aims to change the institutional conditions that contribute to producing youth homelessness, and individual advocacy that concentrates on "ameliorating its effects in a particular case" (Onyx, et al., 2008: 633). SYFS practises advocacy and lobbying to advance both individual and collective struggles over social justice. Julia, a senior manager, describes SYFS approach to advocacy:

In terms of the individual advocacy I think we also have a view that we – our job is to help them be able to stand up for themselves and you can only be doing that if you're getting your needs and basic requirements met. So you have to look after them and be kind to them. You can only learn in an environment where you're supported and encouraged and looked after. And also you know, we don't think lots of mainstream parts of society are particularly youth-friendly. So sometimes disputes at the Centrelink office

where the kid's telling the Centrelink person to 'get fucked' or they're stomping out of the casualty ward because they're not being seen quick enough; all those things we try and teach them about how to manage that so they're not going to miss out. Because at the end of the day that sort of behaviour does make you miss out on things. But we also want to encourage the Centrelink worker and the casualty ward to respond differently.

In Julia's comment—*our job is to help them be able to stand up for themselves*—we see the ambivalent relationship with advocacy practices in situations where the advocate speaks for the other, that was evident in many workers' accounts. Deleuze & Foucault warn of the "indignity of speaking for others" and argue that when those usually spoken for and about by others begin to speak for themselves, they produce a "counter discourse", that constitutes a practical engagement in political struggles (Deleuze & Foucault, 1977: 209).

This engagement in political struggles means SYFS encourages and creates opportunities for young to lobby and advocate for themselves as Collin, one of the service managers explained:

We had an example just recently where a young boy actually met the Minister and he was sitting down talking to him and during the conversation this young, gay boy was talking about the problems he was experiencing through the education system. The Minister rang one of his mates on his mobile phone and was talking to him and then he gave it to the kid to talk to on his personal phone. The connection was formed and he is going to get some support through his problems and it was just an amazing experience that happened so naturally. And that'll linger on this kid's mind for the rest of his life I reckon. He actually spoke to the Minister and the Minister actually took notice and did something.

In both Collin and Julia's comments we see the emphasis on self-advocacy and voice accompanied by a recognition of the importance of *listening*, by those with decision-making power such as Centrelink bureaucrats or politicians. SYFS recognises that marginalized young people are often not only denied 'a voice' but also an *audience* (Dreher, 2008; Calder, 2011). SYFS works politically to ensure young people are able to speak and participate in exchanges in which they have an audience that is willing to listen. SYFS provides young people with the opportunity to learn and participate in political action to ensure that their voices are represented and heard in the policy process (Onyx, et al., 2008). Accordingly, the explicit advocacy role of SYFS contributes to robust and deliberative democracy (Hamilton & Maddison, 2007; Onyx, et al., 2008; Staples, 2007).

The impacts of participating in social action are multi-faceted. For instance, many of the young people involved with SYFS are dealing with the effects of childhood trauma in

their lives. Herman (1992, 1997) in her seminal work argues that developing meaningful social connections and involvement in social action are critical to recovery from complex trauma. SYFS practices of representation, participation and advocacy combined with their practices of belonging and social connectedness provide the critical pillars of effective trauma-informed care.

Encouraging participation

The literature identifies that positive outcomes and development for young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, is only fully realised when young people are given opportunities to genuinely participate in their own care and in decisions that effect their lives in ways that are meaningful for them (Barker et al, 2012a; Bell, Vromen, & Collin, 2008; Kirby et al, 2003; Mason & Urquhart, 2001). Facilitating participation at SYFS involves multi-layered organising practices.



A distinguishing feature of SYFS is its' local governance. SYFS is community-managed by a board democratically elected by the membership of the organisation. This way of organising means that it is by no means unusual for a young service user to become a member of the board of management of SYFS. Such a governance structure offers the possibility of participation. Not every young person involved in SYFS participates on the board but inclusion as a possibility signals to young people that the value of their voice and participation is welcome, listened to and recognised. The local governance of SYFS affords a particular opportunity to build young people's leadership experience and enables a greater sense of control over their lives and future.

Developing a greater sense of agency and control over one's life is also enhanced by SYFS participative and engaged approach to case planning. Laura, a residential care worker explains:

I think SYFS is very good at incorporating the young person's wants and needs into the case plan. So we're good at getting the young person involved in their case plan rather than us directing it. It is very client focused. So they have the opportunity to let us know. To tell us what their goals are. We just assist and just sort of take that rather than directing them where they should go. So it's very client based. It's the young person in the driver's seat

PRACTICES CONTRIBUTING TO THE BROADER SOCIAL IMPACT OF SYFS

Thus far, the analysis presented in this paper, has focused on the impact of SYFS practices on young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and their families. In this section, we discuss the social impact of SYFS practices on its local community and on civil society more broadly. The social impact of SYFS goes beyond particular services, programs or individuals, to the impacts of the whole organisation.

Onyx describes the core principles of social impact as:

- ♦ the wider social effects beyond the immediate program objectives of an organisation and beyond any short term effects;
- ♦ effects on the wider community of the organisation as a whole over an extended time period, including intended and unintended or spillover effects; and
- ♦ the material benefits but more importantly impacts of social connectedness, cohesion and levels of well-being within the community (2014: 4).

She characterizes social impact as “a complex, developmental process, one that is important for both the individual and the organisation. Much of it concerns the development and enactment of social relationships, both for the overt intention of achieving the organisation’s mission, but more importantly for the development and enactment of community for itself” (Onyx, 2014: 5).

By employing Onyx’s conceptual model of social impact combined with the preceding analysis of the fieldwork data and workers’ accounts of what they do, some of the SYFS organising practices that facilitate the generation of social impact are discernable.

The generation of social impact at SYFS is enabled by the *ongoing development and reiteration of a core set of values and complex network of relationships and practices*, both within and beyond SYFS (Both these underpinning values and networks were outlined earlier in the description of the SYFS model).

At SYFS these practices and relationships begin with and appear dependent upon the *creation of a welcoming and belonging culture* in which young people, their families and workers experience recognition and a sense of belonging to a ‘community’ or ‘family’. According to Edwards and Onyx (2007), to the extent that this belonging culture occurs, then wider impacts become possible, extending out from the immediate local organisation into the wider community. SYFS visualizes itself and practices as a community rather than as an organization in the corporate sense.

SYFS *is situated in and part of the local community* and being a community organisation based in an industrial centre in Southern NSW is a core aspect of the character and self-

identity of SYFS. The findings of this study support Onyx's view that "the extent that the organisation is embedded within the local community (and probably ONLY to the extent that it is so embedded) then the social impact will continue to strengthen, and indeed may reverberate back into the organisation, thus strengthening its internal impact in an iterative fashion" (2014:15).



Organizing practices at SYFS are designed to develop the *personal skills, knowledge and ethics* of both service users and staff. Simultaneously, both staff and service users develop *networks* both within the organisation and in the wider community. SYFS' contribution to both the local community and to civil society is directly related to these

organizing practices. Both young people and workers in this study report involvement in social action and wider networks through their involvement with SYFS. In this way the organisation, its staff, members and clients through participation in active networks multiply the contribution and social impact of SYFS. The impact of the social action depends in part, on the excellent reputation of SYFS within the local community, in the community sector and with government agencies and politicians. Accordingly, contributions to the wider community are made by SYFS as an organisation as well as by the individuals involved with SYFS (Schneider, 2009; Onyx, 2014) and these impacts may be long-term or sometimes not identifiable until far into the future.

The advocacy practices of SYFS are pivotal to the social impact of the organisation. SYFS practices of both individual and systemic advocacy ensure that the voices of disadvantaged young people and their families are heard in the policy process and contribute to robust conversations in which contested ideas are debated to formulate public policy.

CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Observations of situated practices combined with the survey data and the accounts of workers and service users, demonstrate that SYFS enables service users to experience inclusion, well-being and relationships based on care, respect and persistence. The bundles of practices, arrangements and relations that make up how care and social justice are enacted at SYFS, include:

- ♦ practices of respect, recognition and care including recognising, and harnessing young people's abilities, strengths, talents, achievements and life experiences to enhance their opportunities and development;
- ♦ practices of belonging and connectedness and the importance of a welcoming organisational culture for young people, staff and the broader community;
- ♦ practices of redistribution that ameliorate some of the structural barriers young people face in their pursuit of safe, stable living situations and well-being; and
- ♦ practices of representation, advocacy and listening, whereby young people are encouraged to participate, and skilled to be self-advocates and advocates for their peers. SYFS also creates the conditions in which decision-makers are offered irresistible invitations to listen to young people.

Findings from this study indicate that SYFS clients identified improvements in relation to indicators of social justice and inclusion, such as a sense of control over one's life (Marmot, 2004), a sense of belonging (Wilkinson, 2005; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009), and a sense of hope for the future (Berkman, 1995; CSDH, 2008). These improvements are as a result of the complex interaction of their involvements with SYFS and the specific situated context of service users as they live their lives. The impact or outcomes of involvement with SYFS appear particularly linked with the relationships established with SYFS staff.

In this study we extended the existing literature by unpacking the relationships between young people and SYFS staff to identify the organising practices that enable these trust-based and caring relationships. This research shows how organising practices such as: allowing the young person to 'choose their worker'; offering relentless parental-style support and persistence; facilitating horizontal relationships between service users; engaging in activities that 'do not just provide a service'; and creating opportunities for young people to participate, take social action and give back; are crucial in service users experiencing care, mutual respect, recognition and a sense of belonging. The analysis provides an understanding of the diversity and subtleties of practice at SYFS that are effective in assisting young people avoid or exit homelessness.

Accordingly, this study, suggests that outcome measures used by funding bodies to assess the performance of funded youth homelessness services, do not give sufficient weight to key indicators of social justice, inclusion and well-being, or to relationships based on care, respect and persistence. The results currently expected by major funding bodies overlook what matters most from the perspective of service users and what makes the most positive impact on their lives.

Consequently, the practices that this study demonstrates are critical to effectively responding to youth homelessness and disadvantage, are currently outside of calculation (of what counts) in funding bodies' assessment of funded youth homelessness services.

Our findings also suggest that current policies over-estimate the importance of securing *permanent* housing for young people. The young people in our study identified access to *stable, supported* housing that enabled them to transition to independent housing as important but did not nominate permanent housing amongst the aspects that made the most significant contribution to their health and well being. An emphasis on stable housing supported by persistent relationships and combined with access to education, employment, health and well-being assistance and programs is also the approach advocated in recent studies by Gaetz & Scott (2012) and the Hollywood Homeless Youth Project (2013).

This study suggests that future research could use the organising practices that generate the broader social impact of SYFS to guide the creation and implementation of a set of indicators for measuring qualitatively and quantitatively the social impact of community organisations such as SYFS. Crucially, such an approach positions social impact as processual and practice-based. It would assist governments and policy-makers recognise not only the pivotal role SYFS plays in providing essential services but also their role in ensuring the voices of homeless and marginalized young people and their families are represented and heard in the policy process. Such measures of social impact would enhance understanding of the contributions of organisations such as SYFS to the health, well-being and inclusivity of local communities and the distinctive practices of civil society organisations. Importantly, they would assist these organisations to learn and extend the practices, relations and arrangements that enhance the social impact of their work.

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APPENDIX: RANGE OF SYFS SERVICES

Supported and Independent Accommodation and Housing Options

The supported accommodation team and the housing team are primarily responsible for providing a range of models of housing and accommodation services including supported medium-term residential facilities, a Youth Foyer, community housing, transitional housing, crisis accommodation, independent youth housing programs, a family housing/homelessness service, a specialist Koori young men's housing project and outreach support programs for young people and families in private rentals and other independent situations. Specific units of housing/supported accommodation are adapted and support provided to meet the needs of diverse age and developmental stages, young parents, pregnant women, young people with disabilities and young people with specific cultural needs. Brokerage services that provide or purchase services and resources complement the service system. Living and social skills education programs run across all services.

SYFS works strategically to expand the housing and accommodation options for young people and, as an example, is currently developing a site purchased in the Shellharbour LGA as an innovative Community Hub and youth housing facility.

Health

The Health team is primarily responsible for delivering the following services.

A drop in health service centre/hub (Community Health for Adolescents in Need - CHAIN) that provides primary health services such as the provision of showers, laundry and personal hygiene resources, health promotion programs, a breakfast program, cooking and nutrition programs, information and referral, access to a small gym and storage facilities. Baby CHAIN provides maternal health programs for young mothers and their children, information, referral, parenting support and child development, education and mentoring and home visiting. This SYFS team also provides drug and alcohol supports, sexual health clinics, dental, dietician services, youth friendly ante-natal care, general medical and mental health services and clinics, physical fitness programs, health and parenting information and referral.

Family Services

The *families team* is primarily responsible for the provision of a range family relationship supports, family reconnection services, counselling, mediation and case management. Specialist programs for families/family members experiencing mental health, drug and alcohol, family and domestic violence and/or dual diagnosis issues. Specialist programs for newly arrived migrants, families of young people in and exiting the Juvenile Justice

System, young parents and single parent families. Practical support programs include financial counselling, tenancy support and emergency relief. Group activities and training programs include the Resourceful Adolescent Program (for the prevention of depression); Partners in Depression program; Managing Anger Differently (anger management, empathy and impulse control); Mind, Body and Soul Workshops (self esteem, mental health).

Education, Training, Pre-Employment Support

The *education, employment and training team* deliver accredited and non-accredited courses, living and social skills education, personal development courses and activities, career advice, homework support and computer labs, pre-vocational and work preparation programs, contextualised on-site training (construction) as part of a Social Procurement program, Board of Studies endorsed Alternative Education Programs, foundation skills courses, programs in schools and Links to Learning programs. Individualised learning plans are developed alongside case plans. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) provides credits for completion of many SYFS courses/programs towards units of a Certificate II in Work Skills. The EET Programs also utilise a range of varied creative and fun group activities, exercises and outings that facilitate the identification, and further development of the employability skills, personal attributes, protective factors and resilience of participants. Employment and pre- and post-employment supports include resume development, career planning work experience programs, partnership arrangements with employers, transport training and job seeking skills.

Assisting People in and Exiting Out of Home Care

The Out-of-Home Care team provides case management and case co-ordination, 24-hour supported accommodation, semi-independent living situations, independent housing options and support services for young people in State Care (Out of Home Care) and when they are exiting care.

Outreach Services

The Outreach team is primarily responsible for the provision of practical and specialist non-housing services including for example: financial assistance and skills development programs; financial counsellor, Emergency Relief Program; Work Development Orders program; outreach accommodation and housing supports; brokerage services for young people (and one specifically for young people exiting State Care); case co-ordination and support services for young people exiting Juvenile Justice; and a court assistance scheme.