

On the Upside

By **Nada Vindis, STREAT, General Manager Social Support**

Quite logically, the immediate response to homelessness is to ensure that people who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness are found safe secure housing or interventions are placed to maintain stable accommodation.

Once this has been achieved then what? Putting a roof over someone's head, who may have high and or complex needs, has only addressed one factor that has contributed to a person who has experienced episodes of homelessness. Quite often, placing someone in accommodation without continued support can lead to a person not finding security within the four walls that they are now able to call home. Without further support to address issues and without finding a meaningful way to utilise a person's time, these same four walls can become a prison that can be too difficult to maintain.

Logic can also be applied when addressing a person's need to find a meaningful way to utilise their time by placing people in training programs. Recently, the CEO of Apprenticeships Plus commented to me that providing people with training without this leading or achieving an employment outcome can be a hollow response.

STREAT is a hybrid social enterprise that has been designed to respond to young people who are homeless or experiencing homelessness to participate in a traineeship that can lead them into future long term employment options.

STREAT has specifically targeted young people who have complex needs and who have barriers that have excluded them from employment and training options.

STREAT offers young people a traineeship consisting of formal training through William Angliss Institute and paid work shifts on one of STREAT's café style food or coffee carts totaling a minimum of 21 hours per week and additional five hours per week of living skills, professional development and case management provided by the STREAT Social Support team.

All components of the traineeship have been developed to cater to the young people that STREAT have been recruited to the program. Through STREAT's partnership with Apprenticeships Plus STREAT is able to transition young people who have successfully completed the STREAT traineeship into longer term full time employment options. STREAT remains in contact with all graduating trainees through STREAT's alumni activities and additional transitional support in a bid to ensure that outcomes that have been achieved can be sustained.

STREAT has at least two traineeship intakes per year and has the capacity to support 12 young people at a time. In late 2010 STREAT will look at offering Coffee Cadetships to a further 12 young people with at least three coffee cadetships offered per year. This will be a shorter program offering formal training through William Angliss and work experience at the STREAT coffee carts to young people who are early school leavers who may also be at risk of homelessness. Young people participating in this program will be transitioned into employment outcomes after attaining Certificate I qualifications.

STREAT has found it difficult to recruit and attract young people who are currently within the homelessness service system into its programs despite sending out extensive information packs on what the STREAT program has to offer.

STREAT has therefore relied on Job Services Agencies to provide referrals for young people and we have particularly encouraged referrals from young people who have been assessed by Centrelink as being a Stream 3 or 4 client.

STREAT has an extensive and comprehensive application and interview process. STREAT application forms are filled in by young people themselves identifying a number of support domains. It is only at this point that we are able to determine who young people are that have experienced

homelessness or have been at risk of homelessness due to the direct question asked in the application form.

At STREAT, we are clear that we are not interested in setting up young people to fail and it is our responsibility and want to connect young people to appropriate services so that they can enjoy and focus on their traineeships.

Through the first intake of STREAT trainees in March 2010 all of the nine young people recruited had experienced homelessness or had been at risk of homelessness. The issues that the first intake of trainees faced ranged from mental health, drug and alcohol issues, involvement with the justice system, past involvement with the protective and foster care system and disability. Most of the trainees were facing more than one of these issues.

Only half of the original intake had had any contact with the homelessness service system despite the issues that they had experienced. Even fewer young people had any contact with mental health or general health services again despite their identified issues. More than half of the trainees were not connected to any ongoing support for any of the issues that they were facing.

Throughout the traineeship for the first intake six young people experienced an episode of homelessness whilst in the STREAT program at least once. All were referred to the homelessness service system for

accommodation, three received an accommodation response. The other three young people found accommodation through family reconnection and private shared housing options with the assistance of the social support team.

In relation to the response received through the homelessness service system the interventions that worked well was when the services involved communicated with the STREAT social support team. These services have been the Young Women's Crisis Service and Melbourne Youth Support Service.

STREAT has a strong relationship with the Young People's Health Service operating out of Frontyard Youth Services and also Youthlaw. The same two young people who received co case managed responses through STREAT, Young Women's Crisis Service and Melbourne Youth Support also received strong responses and support from both Young People's Health Service, in particular the mental health support worker and Youthlaw.

It is of no surprise that these two young people, who had specific high and complex needs have not only graduated successfully from the STREAT traineeship but have also transitioned into full time apprenticeships. An additional important factor is that these two young people have been able to access an employment and training option in another supported social enterprise as the needs of these young people still remain high and for them to continue to succeed, a continuity of support is crucial for them to be able to sustain future options.

It has been the experience of STREAT to acknowledge that co case management and integrated responses for individual young people work best when these arrangements are being done amongst team leaders and direct service delivery workers rather than being addressed at higher

management levels where the direct service delivery responses and practices are a bit more removed.

Where STREAT continues to struggle is the lack of integrated responses between Centrelink, Job Services Agencies, the homelessness service system and mainstream services. This means that all negotiations and responses are being coordinated through STREAT social support. As STREAT is a not for profit organisation in its own right and is not attached to a larger organisation or agency of any type that may have access to greater resources negotiating between systems is onerous and time consuming.

Lack of clarity or cohesion of the Access Point system through the Opening Doors platform within the homelessness service system has meant having to contact accommodation services directly as little to no response has been received through established Access Points.

Job capacity assessment processes from Centrelink to Job Services Agencies could be improved to identify young people with complex needs in order to access appropriate training and employment options where activity tests are relaxed so that issues can be addressed. This could be difficult as it is STREAT's experience that young people will not always identify issues to what they see as being government departments.

While Job Services contracts have replaced the previous programs of Job Placement and Employment Training (JPET) and Personal Support Programs (PSP) the ability for current Job Services Agencies to be able to provide the same level of support to people with complex needs has been greatly diminished.

The strong relationship between the mental health counsellor at the Young People's Health Service and young people involved in STREAT allowed for timely responses to

address young people's mental health needs. Whereas timely responses for drug and alcohol support and counseling have been less adequate with drug and alcohol services being stretched with the need to set up waiting lists.

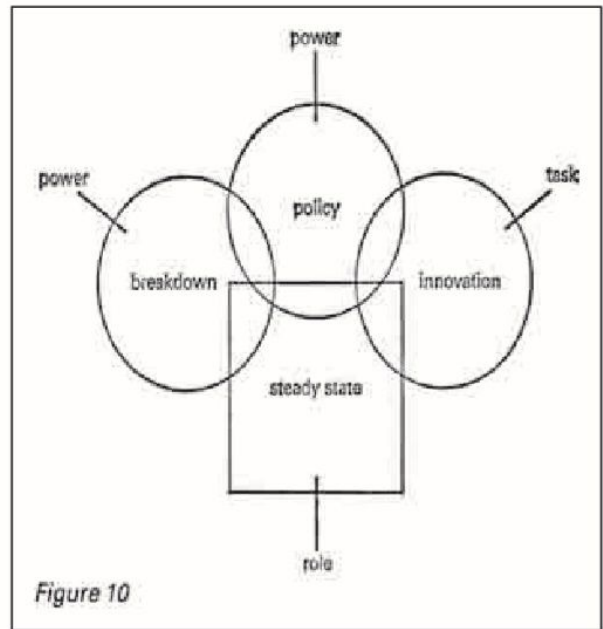
For programs such as STREAT where the social support issues for young people in addressing complex needs are to be balanced with young people attending the program need to work around the employment and training outcomes that young people need to fulfill. Many of the young people had legal concerns with having to complete community based orders in and around their program requirements and financial debts that needed to be addressed.

The commitment on behalf of the young people to complete the STREAT traineeship is huge. Particularly considering that the vast majority of young people attending the STREAT program have been disengaged from any support to address any of their issues nor had they undergone any employment or training since leaving school.

STREAT's first intake of trainees graduated in September 2010. Out of the nine trainees who started, eight have successfully graduated. Seven of these young people have been offered full-time long term apprenticeships and traineeships working towards higher qualifications.

Social enterprises, particularly hybrid models such as is being demonstrated by STREAT, where the business component is merged with the social support component, add value to the homelessness service system and the training and employment environment and need to be seriously considered in any integrated response addressing homelessness into the future. ■

Further information, updates, information packs and application forms can be accessed via our website www.streat.com.au



PESP Monthly Update

By **Cassandra Bawden, PESP Project Worker**

This month the CHP Peer Education Support Program (PESP) members have been involved in a wide range of projects:

- Three team members attended the National Homelessness Conference in Brisbane and two of those members presented a workshop on 'Understanding Homelessness'.
- One team member continued as a consumer representative on the CBD Health and Homelessness Steering Group.
- One PESP member was interviewed by an RMIT student for Radio Docco, focused on raising awareness.

- One of the PESP members continued attending the Melbourne Metropolitan Rooming House Group.
- PESP members attended a DHS integrated standards briefing.
- PESP was involved with the launch of the 'It takes a home' election campaign, doing various media interviews.
- PESP attended a debriefing at Sacred Heart Mission, regarding the client surveys.
- One PESP member did an interview with Maribymong Weekly, focused on homelessness awareness.
- Two PESP members attended the DHS sector and consumer

- integrated standards working group meeting.
- Several PESP members attended the Think Innovation 2010 Summit, by the Department of Planning and Community Development.
- PESP was involved in a briefing for Young Victims of Crime Strategy, with the Department of Justice.
- PESP attended an information session on the Victorian Homelessness 2020 strategy.
- A PESP member did a presentation at the Hume/Moreland Health and Homelessness forum.
- PESP will be doing a consultation with ANEX. ■