

Homelessness Taskforce  
Housing Sector Development  
Department of Human Services  
Level 24, 50 Lonsdale Street  
MELBOURNE VIC 3000  
By email: [homelessness2020@dhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:homelessness2020@dhs.vic.gov.au)

1 December 2009

## Introduction

The Victorian Government's Discussion Paper on the *Homelessness 2020 Strategy* is of great interest to the Lighthouse Foundation, not only as an organisation wholly committed to ending youth homelessness, but because the proposed responses to homelessness in Victoria are largely consistent with the successful approach that our organization has taken over the past 34 years.

During the past 18 years particularly, we have refined our model of care, and continued to develop the expertise and the evidence that underpins the success of the Lighthouse approach in providing a pathway out of homelessness for nearly 500 young people, to become contributing members of the community.

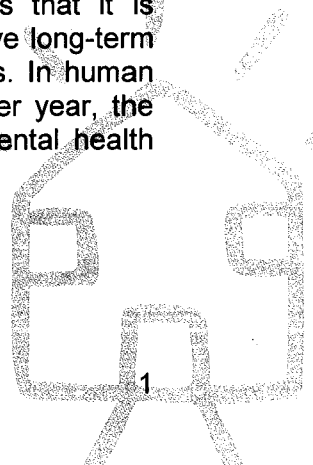
We commend the Government on this initiative, and the proposed process. Our comments follow.

### (a) Homelessness within a Social Inclusion Framework

We support a collaborative approach between government, the community sector and business to help our fellow Victorians remove the barriers to opportunities and fully participate in mainstream life. This is the basis on which our organisation has worked since inception, and we wholly support a whole-of-community response to what is, effectively, a community problem.

'Houselessness' should not be confused with 'homelessness' and we feel that simply providing a roof over the head of a rough sleeper is not the solution. To break the cycle of homelessness, we support a 'segmented' response using innovative, flexible models which offer customized solutions for individuals and families across the spectrum of the homeless sector.

The importance of cost/benefit analysis cannot be overlooked. While the provision of integrated, tailored solutions for individuals and families may appear to be an expensive option, more and more evidence from Australia and further afield confirms that it is significantly more cost effective in the long run to provide appropriate supportive long-term accommodation and support services, than whole-of-life emergency responses. In human terms, it is a much more attractive proposition, rather than continue, year after year, the practice of people accessing crisis services, hospitals, the justice system, mental health services and other social responses.



Since inception, Lighthouse has worked closely with the philanthropic community, individuals, businesses, volunteers and community groups such as Rotary to enable Lighthouse homes to continue operating. There may well be a role for Government to take the leadership in brokering new partnerships with organisations such as Lighthouse who have innovative and effective programs.

The reasons people become homeless are complex, and the solutions for each individual can be even more complex. Funding to support a dedicated research program to evaluate homelessness would, in our opinion, contribute to providing an evidence base and underpin the efficacy for programs and projects going forward.

### **(b) Prevention and Early Intervention**

The longer a young person is homeless, the bleaker their future is likely to become. Early intervention creates the foundation for faster recovery and more positive long-term prospects. For these reasons, we would support the concept of mainstream services being extended to play a key role in preventing homelessness.

The Lighthouse Therapeutic Family Model of Care is based on Attachment and Psychological Wellness Theories. Each young person coming into the Lighthouse program is supported to meet their holistic psychological wellness needs, which include: –

1. Individual Wellness
2. Relational Wellness
3. Community Wellness

In response to the need to intervene to break the cycle of homelessness as early in the lifespan as possible, Lighthouse will open a new home early in 2010 to cater specifically for homeless young women who are pregnant and/or parenting infants. The young women will access the our Therapeutic Family Model of Care, and in addition, they will be assisted with a range of education programs based on pre and post natal care, self-care, parenting skills, play and healthy attachment to the child.

Lighthouse is experienced at working in partnership with other community-based organisations, and supports the notion of collaborating to harness the combined skills and resources of organisations working in partnership. In the case of the Home for Mothers and Babies, a partnership with Connections Uniting Care will ensure support of early childhood specialists, and through our partnership with Universities an evaluation of this additional dimension to our program will be conducted.

This approach is an example of an early intervention strategy that directly addresses the inter-generational cycle of homelessness, family violence, child abuse and maltreatment.

### **(d) Focus on the Individual**

The potential strategy to focus on the individual is fully consistent with the Lighthouse approach of placing the individual at the centre, and tailoring the support around that individual's needs, whatever they may be, **and for as long as it takes.**

An outcome of this approach is that, ultimately, the individual re-enters mainstream life and becomes a contributing member of the community.

## **In Conclusion**

In *Children Australia*<sup>1</sup>, Dr Howard Bath, Children's Commissioner in the NT, outlines service trends, the young people in care and needs-based responses. His research project commissioned by Marist Youth Care in NSW, is part of a growing body of evidence that discusses the *emerging awareness of the need for residential programs with a treatment of therapeutic focus*.

He concludes that *there is a need to move beyond a simplistic focus on care and accommodation to adopt a broader 'treatment' or therapeutic perspective that considers and endeavours to address the multiple needs of (such) young people*.

This encapsulates the Lighthouse solution, delivered over the past 18 years.

Again, we commend the Government on taking the leadership on this issue, and would be pleased to continue to be involved as the process moves forward.

Yours sincerely,

**Kane Bowden**  
CEO  
Lighthouse Foundation

Att:

---

<sup>1</sup> *Children Australia* 2008, vol. 33, No. 2: Special Edition – The future of residential care in Australia, pp. 6-17

## About Lighthouse Foundation

Lighthouse founder and 2009 Melburnian of the Year, Susan Barton AM, started caring for traumatised homeless young people in her own home 34 years ago. In 1991, with support from the business community, Lighthouse Foundation was formed to support and expand this work.

Over the years, Susan and the Lighthouse team have developed a *Therapeutic Family Model of Care*<sup>2</sup> which provides integrated care and therapeutic support for homeless young people who come predominantly from a background of long-term neglect and abuse.

Lighthouse offers long-term 24-hour, seven days a week physical and emotional support for young people typically aged 15 – 22 years of age and with a history of homelessness. They are accommodated in a safe, stable, close-knit family environment in a suburban home, where they can access intensive psychological support, and a range of educational opportunities to re-engage them and create a pathway to independence. A full-time live-in Carer and support Carer provide the leadership and all the usual supports that a parent would do.

Within the Lighthouse framework, emphasis is placed on relationships and community, providing young people with an environment where belonging is encouraged and they are trusted, challenges and can thrive intellectually, physically, socially, spiritually and emotionally. A feature of the Lighthouse model is a local volunteer Community Committee, who supports each home with volunteering, e.g. informal mentoring, makes connections with the local community, undertakes maintenance tasks and raises funds.

Lighthouse assessed its impact formally in 2006 through an evidence-based research evaluation conducted by Professor Marie Joyce PhD FAPS, Australian Catholic University. The report is available on the website: [www.lighthousefoundation.org.au](http://www.lighthousefoundation.org.au)

Over 450 young people have successfully transitioned through Lighthouse homes. A feature of the model is 'lifetime membership', whereby a young person who has successfully completed the transition to fully participate in the community, can be confident that, should they meet some unexpected challenges, they can return at any time to access the Outreach program

The Lighthouse Therapeutic Family Model of Care incorporates comprehensive theories on human development and empirically-supported practices from a range of disciplines, notably those that focus on:

- The psycho/social and emotional development of children, adolescents and young adults, which include Attachment Theory and Object Relations.
- Studies of family systems and dynamics and the effect of stable/unstable family life on shaping the child and the future adult
- The efficacy of different therapeutic interventions in assisting disadvantaged young people to reach mature, productive and autonomous adulthood
- The integration of individual, organizational and community approaches to promoting and maintaining the wellbeing of young people.

---

<sup>2</sup> The *Lighthouse Foundation therapeutic Family Model of Care* is a robust, replicable, evidence-based integrated model of therapeutic care. Each young person is encouraged to be active in school, work or self-advancement while undertaking programs to address individual difficulties. The continuing support and access to these programs from within a Lighthouse home and beyond – sometimes over many years – ensures that a sense of belonging within the community is maintained and strengthened.