



**Lighthouse<sup>®</sup>**  
Foundation

*Ending youth homelessness together.*

# Lighting the way

DELIVERY AND  
OUTCOMES REPORT

# Our 'circle of support'

This report marks 25 years of providing live-in therapeutic care for homeless young people. We would not have been able to reach this milestone without the support of our patrons, ambassadors, partners, supporters and volunteers. We take this opportunity to express our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who has helped Lighthouse since 1991.

A complete list of supporters would take up every page of this report. As an indicator of our extensive supporter base, we have included the following names of significant donors:

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"Over my five years of living with Lighthouse, I not only had the time and space to grow up, but I also had the love and support I needed to deal with my past experiences. It's amazing what comes up when you're finally in a safe environment.

It's like your body is in survival mode and then as soon as you relax and feel safe, a memory, a flashback, a horrible feeling emerges and you're a mess once again.

*On many occasions at the beginning I just sat with disbelief; these people actually cared about me. They showed interest in my schooling, asked what I would like for dinner, wanted to take me to appointments and help me with homework. I would have a bad day at school and they would try to cheer me up. I would have a flashback and they would sit with me for hours.*

They wanted to spend time with us. Yes, they had a wage, but trust me, it wasn't what they came or stayed for. I would cry with pain and they would sit with me, hug me, and sometimes even cry with me until I fell asleep."

**Kahlia, former resident and a life-member  
of the Lighthouse family**

Kahlia lived at Lighthouse twice between the ages of 15 and 18. She was raised in a religious cult where for 10 years she was psychologically, physically and sexually abused by her parents and other adults. You can read more of her story on page 48.



**We thank those young people who have agreed to share their stories and have their photographs appear in this report.**

*We are grateful for their courage, love and support. Some of the names and details have been changed to protect their identity.*





*"I cannot begin to express what Lighthouse has done for me, for lifting me up and giving me warmth, comfort and not just a home but a family. I am safe, I am happy, I am loved and most importantly I belong."*

Henare, Lighthouse young person



*"When there's a natural disaster somewhere in the world - an earthquake, a cyclone, a flood, a fire - people and governments immediately galvanise their support and contribute billions of dollars to help the victims survive through it and rebuild their lives.*

*However, we have a pervasive natural disaster happening in our society every day: the ongoing abuse and neglect of young children inside their own homes.*

*And instead of galvanising our support to help these children find a safe place where they can live, recover and rebuild their lives, we prop up a system of institutional care that's been clearly shown, in far too many cases, to perpetuate the cycle of abuse and neglect.*

*What hope do these young people have without interventions from organisations such as the Lighthouse Foundation?"*

Peter Edwards, Lighthouse Foundation Chairman



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# Executive summary

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This report has been produced to mark Lighthouse Foundation's 25th year. It outlines the combination of compassion, community and clinical rigour that underpins our holistic, therapeutic model of care. It shares stories from some of the courageous young people we have helped over the years and presents evidence of the life-changing outcomes of our work.

## Through no fault of their own

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For 25 years, Lighthouse Foundation has been working to break the cycle of homelessness for some of Australia's most vulnerable young people, children and babies.

We currently care for up to 40 young people and infants in 10 suburban homes in Melbourne, as well as over 800 people through our Aftercare and Outreach program. Three of our homes are dedicated to supporting teenage parents and their babies.

Most of the young people in our care had the misfortune to end up in family situations where they were unsafe. Many go into the state care system, known as 'out-of-home care'. Many have experienced further neglect and abuse since being removed from or leaving their family home. They have been traumatised as children and as a result have highly complex needs and behaviours.

Lighthouse does more than provide a roof over the heads of these young people. We welcome them into a safe, family-style home and provide 24/7 trauma-informed therapeutic care. Our clinical therapy and live-in care is complemented with support from the wider Lighthouse community.

For most of these young people, Lighthouse is their family.

## Youth homelessness is a growing problem

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The rate of homelessness in Australia is growing and almost half of those affected (42%) are under the age of 25. **The number of children living in out-of-home care continues to rise.**

Those most at risk include young females, children growing up in poverty, youth from indigenous or refugee backgrounds, young people with mental illness, and those in the care of the state.

Unfortunately, out-of-home care placements offered under the state care system do not offer the intensive therapeutic care these young people need to heal and move forward with their lives however, Lighthouse provides this level of care.

**Every young person must leave state care when they turn 18**, with a high proportion ending up homeless again and often in trouble with the law.

**Lighthouse accepts people up to the age of 22** and allows each of our residents to stay until they are ready to live independently. We also provide a lifetime of support.

## Care that helps young people heal

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The main ingredients of the Lighthouse approach are compassionate, caring relationships and evidence-based therapeutic care. **Therapeutic care is simply defined as care that promotes healing.**

Our work is based on more than two decades of hands-on service delivery, reflection and improvement. Our unique Therapeutic Family Model of Care™ (TFMC™) is a highly effective method of turning around the lives of young people who have complex mental health needs due to traumatic early life experiences.

Each of our homes has two live-in carers who work with a care team of qualified therapists and a committee of community volunteers. This protective 'circle of care' creates a safe 'holding space' in which each young person can work through their past experiences, address negative behaviours and set individual goals for the future.

Our Carers, and all Lighthouse staff, give young people compassion and support from the moment they walk through the door of one of our homes or our Youth Resource Centre which, doubles as our head office, in Richmond.



## The most effective care for less

Our organisation is **almost entirely self-funded** through our generous circle of supporters, with only 6% of our operational funding in the past 25 years coming from government sources. While we intend to increase our collaboration with government to make our programs more sustainable, we also benefit from our independence and freedom to innovate.

**The average cost for a young person to spend a year in Lighthouse's live-in care program is \$158,000.** This can vary according to each individual's needs, however it is considerably less than the current cost of providing residential care within the state system.

**Funding a state residential care placement costs between \$200,000 to over \$1 million per child per year** in Victoria (see reference 21 on page 18). Many of the young people who come to Lighthouse have spent years in state-funded residential care units, receiving little or no therapeutic care. For those cases, our model can provide a holistic program of live-in care, with proven results, for much less than the current basic level of accommodation in a state-funded residential unit.



## Our outcomes literally speak for themselves

Their names are Alex, Kahlia, Gary, Amber, Asan and Emily. Their stories appear on pages 20 and 48–61. They are the reason our founder, Susan Barton AM, established Lighthouse in 1991. Susan is still in touch with many of Lighthouse's early residents. They will always be part of our family.

In addition to collecting personal stories from young people who have benefited from our programs, Lighthouse continues to obtain evidence of our performance and outcomes.

In 2011, an independent assessment by Social Ventures Australia (SVA) Consulting found our TFMCTM to be one of the **most cost-effective therapeutic programs in Australia**. The assessment found that for every dollar invested into Lighthouse programs, **more than \$12 in social value** was being created.

The study also found that eight out of 10 young people who completed a Lighthouse live-in care program did not experience homelessness again after they left our care.

Our internal Therapeutic Outcomes Assessment tool measures individual progress across eight developmental domains. Preliminary findings indicate the young people in our care are improving across a large number of these domains, particularly in terms of relational and community connections, and attachment.

## The way ahead – strategic priorities

Lighthouse is committed to ending youth homelessness by calling for a paradigm shift in the nature of services provided to young people, children and babies in Australia. We are doing this by:

**continuing to transform the lives of individual young people**



by providing specialist therapeutic care, making our services increasingly available and developing new services to meet the needs of those in our care

**strengthening the evidence base**



that underpins the delivery and outcomes of our model of therapeutic care

**promoting evidence-based, therapeutic practice**




across the out-of-home care sector, and

**ensuring that our operations are sustainable**



for the long term.





*"The investment into Lighthouse Foundation generates significant social returns for all stakeholders. The Government is a large beneficiary of the work done by Lighthouse, which decreases the future burden of chronic homelessness and creates direct benefit to Treasury in the form of decreased welfare payments and increased taxes."*

Social Ventures Australia Consulting (2011)<sup>1</sup>



## Delivery and outcomes highlights



**25 years**

developing and practising an effective model of therapeutic care



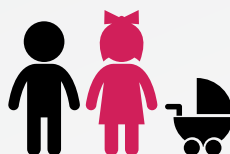
**\$12/\$1**

social return to the community on every \$1 spent through Lighthouse



**94%**

privately funded since 1991



**800+**

young people, children and babies given intensive support



**\$40.5 million**

fundraised since 1995



**8/10**

successfully transitioned into independent living



**\$0**

recurrent government program funding before 2010\*

\*Director of Housing provided \$1.85m of capital funding (not recurrent) to assist purchase and/or renovation of several properties between 2001 – 2006.



**6,000+**

people trained in trauma-informed, therapeutic care by Lighthouse Institute since 2013

*"While having a safe place to call home is incredibly important, the solution for homeless young people goes well beyond just providing a roof over their heads. They need long-term, trauma-informed therapeutic care that helps them to genuinely heal and move on from their past. Only then can they finally break free from the cycle of homelessness and abuse."*

Simon Benjamin, Lighthouse Foundation, CEO



# Introduction

## A newborn baby doesn't get to choose his or her parents.

Those who draw the short straw end up in family situations where they are unsafe. They may experience years of neglect, violence or abuse before being removed from their homes by child protection workers or taking the matter into their own hands and leaving.

The luckier ones have somewhere safe to go. The rest end up 'living rough' or in the out-of-home care system – two scenarios where research shows many are likely to experience further neglect or abuse.

For over 25 years, Lighthouse Foundation has been working to break the cycle of homelessness for some of Australia's most vulnerable young people. We welcome them into a safe, loving, family-style home and provide continual therapeutic care to help them heal and become whole again.

Our work demonstrates the practical benefits of providing trauma-informed therapeutic care for young people who, through no fault of their own, have slipped through the gaps in our society.

The Therapeutic Family Model of Care™ we have developed is based on over two decades of frontline experience and 60 years of empirical research. The evidence shows that this approach achieves long-term positive outcomes for these young people and the wider community.

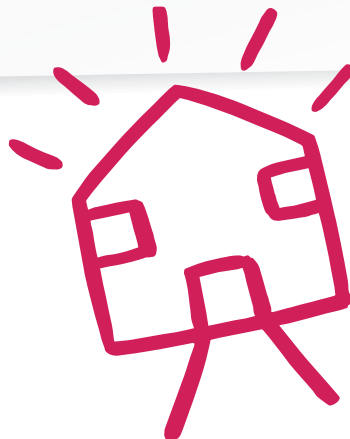
Lighthouse wants this level of intensive, transformative care to be available to as many homeless young people, children and babies as possible. We hope it will soon be the norm across the entire out-of-home care sector.

*"Not a day goes by when I am not deeply affected by the incredible courage and will to survive demonstrated by the young people who are at the heart of our Lighthouse family.*

*Through no fault of their own, most have been deprived of the happy, healthy childhoods that should be every person's birthright. They continue to fight to survive and to regain their sense of self. Their daily struggle inspires everyone who works at Lighthouse. They are the reason we keep going. They are the reason we will never stop working to bring an end to youth homelessness.*

*With their courage, our care, and a supportive community, anything is possible."*

Susan Barton AM





Susan Barton AM,  
Lighthouse Foundation Founder

# Youth homelessness and its costs

## Youth homelessness in Australia

Homelessness is a growing social and economic issue for Australia.

Over 105,000 people – about 1 in 204 Australians – were homeless in this country on Census night 2011. In the five years between the 2006 and 2011 national Census surveys, the rate of homelessness increased by 8%.

Over 42% of those experiencing homelessness are children and young people under the age of 25 (about 44,000 in 2011). In 2011–12, 229,247 Australians received support from specialist homelessness services and nearly half of those were aged between 12 and 18.

In Victoria, about half the people who are homeless or marginally housed are under 25. This age group represents around 60% of the state's homelessness service users.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that youth homelessness figures recorded in the 2011 Census (the most recent available) are likely to be underestimated due to many 'couch-surfing' young people being recorded as 'visiting' friends or extended family on Census night.<sup>2,3,4,5,6</sup>



**105,237**

Australians were homeless on Census night 2011



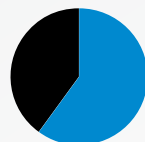
**9,000+**

of those were between 12 and 18



**44,000+**

were under 25



**60%**

of homelessness services users in Victoria are under 25







## What is homelessness?

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The Australian Bureau of Statistics defines homelessness as:

***‘When a person does not have suitable accommodation alternatives they are considered homeless if their current living arrangement:***

- is in a dwelling that is inadequate; or***
- has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable; or***
- does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations.’***

Another widely accepted definition of homelessness in Australia describes it as covering three broad categories:

**Primary homelessness** – not having conventional accommodation, such as sleeping rough in the street, a park or living in a car.

**Secondary homelessness** – when people frequently move from one place of temporary accommodation to another. This could be ‘couch surfing’ with family and friends, or staying in a refuge or other form of crisis accommodation.

**Tertiary homelessness** – when people have accommodation that is considered unstable, such as living in a boarding house, motel or caravan with no secure lease or private facilities.<sup>7,8</sup>

## Youth homelessness and its costs

### Who is most at risk?

- ! Young women aged 15–24** are the highest users of specialist homelessness services in Australia. Young women access homelessness services at almost twice the rate of young men. Many are victims of family violence or childhood sexual abuse. Many are single mothers with children.
- ! Young people who grow up in poverty** are more likely to experience homelessness. One in six Australians aged 15–24 are living in poverty, mostly due to intergenerational unemployment and high youth unemployment.
- ! Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth** have a homelessness rate of 487 per 10,000 compared to 49 per 10,000 in the Australian population.
- ! Young people with mental illness** are more likely to experience homelessness, and youth who are homeless are more likely to develop some form of mental illness.
- ! Young people from refugee backgrounds** are at least six times more likely to experience homelessness.
- ! Youth in rural and remote locations** often face limited opportunities to access education, employment, transport and services.
- ! Youth in state care**, such as foster care, residential care or in the juvenile justice system, have an increased risk of becoming homeless.<sup>9</sup> Research shows that around half the young people discharged from statutory care end up unemployed, in jail, homeless or a new parent within the first 12 months of exiting the system.<sup>10</sup>

Without successful intervention, at-risk and homeless young people are more likely to experience chronic homelessness as adults. However, there is a lack of consistent, holistic therapeutic support available for these vulnerable young people.

### Causes of youth homelessness

In the overwhelming number of cases, a child or young person experiencing homelessness is in that situation due to circumstances beyond their control and through no fault of their own.

Domestic and family violence are known to be the largest single cause of homelessness in this country. This factor mostly affects women and children. The main causes of youth homelessness are family conflict and breakdown.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reports that in 2014–15, 151,980 children received child protection services in Australia, which equates to approximately one in every 35 children aged 0–17. This was a 6% increase on 2013–14 child protection figures.<sup>11,12,13,14</sup>

#### Causes of youth homelessness in Australia include:

- family breakdown
- family conflict
- family violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual)
- long term unemployment
- drug and alcohol abuse within families
- mental health issues
- poverty
- lack of support after exiting state care at the age of 18



### Out-of-home care

More than 44,000 children and young people between the ages of <1 and 17 are living in out-of-home care in Australia.

Most are living in home-based care with relatives/kin (47%), foster carers (40%) or other home-based care (5.8%). Residential care – placement in a residential building with paid staff, known colloquially as ‘resi’ – accounts for 5.5% of out-of-home care.

The number of children in out-of-home care continues to rise. Between 2001 and 2011, the number of Victorian children and young people in out-of-home care increased by 44% – an annual growth of around 4%.

Research indicates that children and young people in out-of-home care generally have poorer life outcomes than the general population.<sup>15,16</sup>

### Lack of stable accommodation

Having a stable place to live is one of the 13 National Standards of Out-of-Home Care in Australia.

Despite this, most children and young people who enter out-of-home care experience multiple placements, often over a short period of time.

One study of 77 young people in out-of-home care in Victoria and Western Australia in 2011 found that:

**40%** had between two and five placements

**14%** had between six and 10 placements, and

**32%** had moved between placements more than 11 times<sup>17</sup>

Lighthouse has first-hand experience of teenagers arriving at our door having experienced over 30 different placements (refer to Alex’s story on page 20 for one example). Constantly changing homes, carers and locations has significant adverse effects on children, contributing to emotional and behavioural problems and poor educational, employment, social and psychological outcomes over their lifetime. Frequently relocating also limits their ability to develop and maintain supportive relationships.

### Out of the system at 18

Young people living in the state-funded out-of-home care system in Australia must leave by their 18th birthday even if they are unable to care for themselves. This happens to around 3,000 young people every year, and many end up homeless again or requiring the support of other agencies.

This legislated practice continues to occur in a society where almost half the young people aged between 18 and 24 are choosing to stay in the family home for longer because they are not yet ready or financially able to live independently.

The 2012 Protecting Victoria’s Vulnerable Children Inquiry recommended extending the eligible age for receiving out-of-home care to 21. A socioeconomic cost benefit analysis conducted by Deloitte Access Economics (DAE) for Anglicare in 2016 indicates that for every dollar spent on extending out-of-home support to 21, the community would save between \$1.40 and \$2.69. In its report, *Raising our Children: Guiding young Victorians in care into adulthood*, DAE found the biggest savings would be reductions in homelessness (cut by half), reduced hospitalisation (cut by a third) and reduced arrests (cut by 35%).<sup>18</sup>

Since its inception, Lighthouse Foundation has accepted young people up to the age of 22 into its live-in care programs. The Foundation is one of a number of organisations campaigning to have the age limit for state-funded care extended to 21.

### The economic costs of youth homelessness

The financial costs of youth homelessness are formidable and require significant government and community resources.

Young people experiencing homelessness are heavy users of crisis accommodation services, hospitals and health services, homelessness assistance agencies, police resources, legal and judicial systems, correctional facilities and mental health institutions.

The Institute of Family Studies estimates that the cost to the community of a person being homeless from mid-adolescence to death is \$2 million.<sup>19</sup>



## Youth homelessness and its costs

### Out-of-home care

The costs of administering statutory child protection and out-of-home care services in Australia are significant. In 2014–15, recurrent expenditure in this area nationally was approximately \$3.6 billion, with out-of-home care services accounting for the lion's share – \$2.4 billion.<sup>20</sup>

The Victorian Commission for Children and Young People reported in 2015 that the Department of Human Services pays community service organisations over \$100 million per year to provide residential care for vulnerable children. According to the Commission, the cost of a residential care placement ranged from between \$200,000 to over \$1 million per child per year.<sup>21</sup>

In comparison, independent analysis shows that Lighthouse provides best-practice therapeutic care in a home-style residential environment for less than it costs for basic accommodation (without intensive therapeutic treatment) in the current state residential care system.<sup>22</sup>

The average cost for each young person to go through the Lighthouse live-in therapeutic program is \$158,000. Costs vary depending on each individual and the complexity of their needs.

Our treatment focuses on providing constant, trauma-informed therapeutic care through our in-house care team. This model of care has been shown to be one of the most effective ways of turning around the lives of traumatised young people and helping them to permanently break free from the cycle of homelessness.

Unfortunately, Lighthouse's level of therapeutic care is currently not available in most other out-of-home care services. Many young people arrive at Lighthouse after spending years rotating through out-of-home care placements in the state system.

### Health and justice

A study released by Swinburne University in 2016 estimates the annual cost of providing health services and the justice system for homeless youth in Australia at \$747 million per year.

This estimate was based on almost 42,000 young people aged between 15 and 24 who were clients of specialist homeless services and arrived alone rather than in a family group. It equates to an average net expenditure for health and justice services of almost \$18,000 per person per year for every homeless person aged 15–24.

The study found that homeless young people are far more likely than the general population or other disadvantaged youth (such as those who are long-term unemployed) to require health services and come into contact with the criminal justice system.<sup>23</sup> When a young person ends up in either juvenile detention or prison, the costs of keeping them there are considerable.

In 2011–12, the Western Australian Department of Corrective Services calculated the cost per day for juvenile detention was \$624 per person – almost \$230,000 per year. The comparable figure in NSW for the same year was almost \$240,000 per person per year.

Nationally, the total cost of keeping someone in an Australian prison in 2011–12 was \$305 per prisoner per day, or just over \$111,000.<sup>24</sup> The Council of Australian Governments reports the net operating cost of keeping someone in a Victorian prison in 2014–15 was \$297.34 per prisoner per day – over \$108,000.<sup>25</sup>

While the figures above relate to the direct financial costs of providing services to homeless children and young people, detainees and prisoners, they do not take into account the lifetime costs to society of having these people relying on welfare, rather than leading productive working lives, earning incomes and paying taxes. They also don't include other indirect costs of youth homelessness such as policing, social services, council services and costs to business.

*"I wish I wasn't a number or a dollar amount. I am a human being. I'm a real person. I deserve more."*

Dwayne, now a Lighthouse young person

## The most effective care for less

Figure 1: Comparative costs and services between Lighthouse programs and state care



\*Lighthouse is 94% privately funded. In presenting this cost comparison we acknowledge that our organisation operates on a smaller scale and has the opportunity to select which young people enter our program. The state government and the community organisations it funds to provide residential care are managing a high volume of residents, including high-needs cases. Many of the young people who come to Lighthouse have spent years in state-funded residential care units, receiving little or no therapeutic care. The purpose of this comparison is to demonstrate that, for those cases, our model can provide a holistic program of live-in care, which has proven therapeutic results, for much less than the current basic level of accommodation in a state-funded residential unit. Lighthouse advocates for therapeutic care to be fully deployed across all state-funded residential care systems.

\*\*Commission for Children and Young People (Victoria) "...as a good parent would..." report (2015) p6.

\*\*\*Costs based on Social Ventures Australia's Social Return on Investment report (2011) indexed at 2.5% per annum and vary depending on individual needs.

# Alex's story

Before becoming Lighthouse's CEO, Simon Benjamin was our Director of Care Services. While in that role he met Alex, a 17-year-old whose story demonstrates how timely intervention from an organisation such as ours generates major social and economic benefits to society.

## Life before Lighthouse

Alex was less than one year old when he was removed from his birth parents and placed in the care of his grandparents. He grew up calling his grandparents 'mum and dad'.

When he was 10, Alex's grandparents separated. He continued to live with his grandfather, but found it extremely difficult coming to terms with the family breakdown. He started 'acting out'. As his behaviour became increasingly difficult, Alex's grandfather was no longer able to care for him and he was placed into a foster home.

Alex ended up spending the next eight years experiencing over 30 placements with 30 different care givers in foster homes and state residential ('resi') care. One year, he was moved seven times.

In his mid-teens, Alex started hanging out with a bad crowd who were involved in drugs and crime. He stopped going to school and spent more time with his friends breaking into houses. Eventually he was caught and charged ending up in the juvenile justice system.

Alex's previous negative and unstable behaviour while in state care meant the government would not place him back into a foster home or 'resi' care. Alex's caseworker called Lighthouse in the hope we could provide the magistrate with an alternative to sending him to a juvenile detention centre. Simon attended the court to speak with the magistrate and recalls:

"After our conversation, the magistrate told the court: 'I came into the courtroom today with the firm expectation that I would have no choice but to lock Alex away for 18 months. But based on what I have heard Lighthouse can do, I now have no choice other than to give him another chance'."

*Alex's story continued on page 22.*

*"Moving young people continuously is a form of harm. They become desperate to attach to someone and they lose their sense of self and identity. This makes them even more vulnerable to negative or unsafe influences."*

Simon Benjamin, Lighthouse Foundation, CEO







### Alex's story continued

The prosecuting policeman agreed and Alex was released on bail with Lighthouse as his primary carer. In Simon's view:

"Too many young people like Alex arrive at Lighthouse's door years later than we would have liked them to. For those who come to us after being in the state care system, their out-of-home care experiences have often added further layers of trauma to their early childhood experiences.

Imagine having 30 different carers and 30 different 'homes' over a period of eight years? There's no way a young person can start to heal or create stable attachments in that situation.

The result is that a gentle, kind-hearted kid like Alex, who is a victim of his family circumstances, can easily fall in with the wrong crowd and make poor choices."

### Life during Lighthouse

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At the time this report is being written, Alex has been in care as a live-in member of the Lighthouse family for over 12 months. He initially kept up contact with his old peer group, sometimes using drugs and not coming home for 24 hours – but he kept coming back.

Over time, his carers helped him understand the likely consequences of choosing to hang out with those friends and continuing to be involved in unlawful activities. The care team also identified that Alex needed a younger carer and matched him with someone who has been able to engage him in physical fitness regimes and therapies.

Our Youth Resource and Administration Centre in Richmond has become Alex's 'safe place' – his home away from home. He has developed friendships with members of our indirect care team and now prefers to hang out with his carers and other Lighthouse community members. Lighthouse has become his family.

Alex is about to start a hospitality course and Simon believes he is now in a position to switch to a very different life trajectory from the one he was on when he first arrived at Lighthouse: "If he's willing to fully engage in therapy and continue to work through his past, he'll be able to sustain schooling, work, further education – whatever he chooses. He'll start to build a new life once he's able to address his past life through therapy."

Alex's story is one of many examples of how the Lighthouse Therapeutic Family Model of Care™ benefits the wider community by transforming the lives of individual young people. Simon explains:

"Let's look specifically at the direct and indirect cost savings Lighthouse has been able to achieve for government and society in this one example. We've stopped Alex from being incarcerated in a juvenile detention centre and, ultimately, from being transferred to prison once he turned 18. There are major direct cost savings there. If he'd been incarcerated, he would most likely have hardened and led a life of crime, generating further indirect economic and social costs to society.

We're helping him address his issues and make positive life choices. He's pursuing further study to develop skills that will make him more employable. Eventually, he'll be able to hold down a full-time job and transition into independent living. This removes the future cost burden to support agencies, health and justice services of Alex re-entering homelessness, remaining unemployed, and returning to substance abuse and crime – possibly for his entire life.

As a fully rehabilitated, productive member of society, Alex will not present a risk to public safety (or his own). Instead, he will be earning an income, paying taxes, and making a positive contribution to society.

That's the financial side of it, however that pales when you consider the human capital side of the equation – the cost of saving a young life.

One can only guess at the human potential being unlocked by picking up one young person who's fallen off the rails and helping that individual get their life back on track.

That's why I came to work at Lighthouse. That's the driving force behind everything we do."



## The individual impacts of childhood trauma

Most young people experiencing homelessness carry the physical, emotional and psychological legacies of toxic stress caused by adverse childhood experiences.

Traumatic early life experiences can have life-changing impacts on the structure and functioning of the human brain as it develops. Neuropsychological studies provide solid evidence that children who have experienced or witnessed violence, trauma, abuse or neglect tend to experience cognitive difficulties in one or more areas, compared with other children.

The main issues include:

- general cognitive and language delay
- problems with memory
- bias in processing of social/emotional information
- executive functioning (cognitive flexibility and behaviour regulation)
- metacognitive skills, and
- behavioural regulation.<sup>26</sup>

International research indicates that being caught in a constant 'fight or flight' stress response can lead to brain shrinkage and changes to the hippocampus, which regulates memory and emotions. Without appropriate therapeutic interventions, the affected child will be more at risk of lifelong problems with learning, behaviour, and physical and mental health.

The most extreme causes of childhood stress are:

- physical, sexual and emotional abuse
- physical and emotional neglect, and
- household dysfunction.<sup>27,28,29</sup>

A major study into the impacts of adverse childhood experiences in the USA found that significant adversity in childhood was strongly associated with unhealthy lifestyles and poor health decades later.

These experiences can lead to multiple outcomes across a person's lifetime including:<sup>31</sup>

Life-long impacts of adverse childhood experiences on an individual	Examples
Increased risk factors for common diseases	smoking, alcoholism, illicit drug use, promiscuity, obesity
Higher incidence of prevalent diseases	Cancer, liver disease, skeletal fractures, STDs, chronic lung disease, ischemic heart disease
Poor general health and reduced ability to function socially	Relationship problems, high perceived stress, married to an alcoholic or drug addict, difficulty performing in/ sustaining employment
Mental health problems	Depression, anxiety, sleep disturbances, panic reactions, poor anger management, memory disturbances
Poor sexual health	Early age of first intercourse, teen pregnancy or paternity, fetal death, unintended pregnancy

*"We see a middle aged person and we have normal expectations of a person that age. However, if a person has been severely traumatised in early childhood their brain may not have developed at a pace with their chronological age.*

*If a person has been so traumatised that the limbic and cortex parts of the brain are largely undeveloped, this person may be functioning in many respects as a child."*

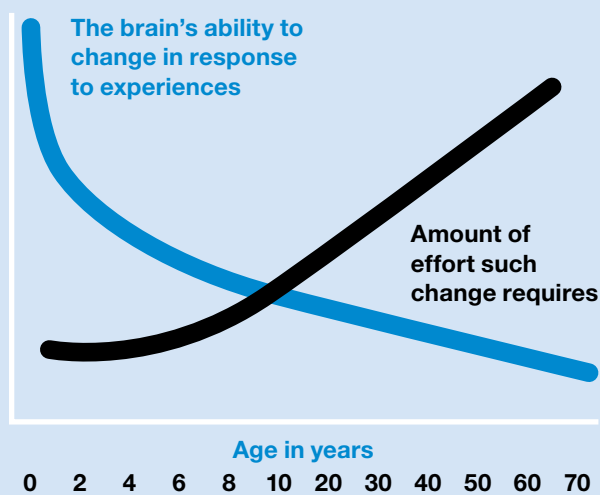
Barton, Susan; Gonzalez, Rudy & Tomlinson, Patrick (2012)<sup>30</sup>



## Youth homelessness and its costs

We work intensively with young people, children and babies to provide early intervention, giving them the best possible chance to fully recover so they can become productive members of society. The figure below illustrates, it is much easier to form strong brain circuits early in life than it is to try to 'fix' them later.

Figure 2: The malleability of the human brain



Source: [Adapted from] Levitt, Pat (2009)<sup>32</sup>

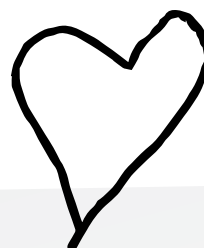
## Building resilience through relationships

A growing body of evidence indicates that every child who ends up doing well has had at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive adult.

The power of that one strong adult relationship is a key ingredient for developing resilience – the capacity to thrive in both good and difficult times.

Research has shown that resilience isn't just a gift of nature or an exercise of will; it can be cultivated through positive experiences, supportive environments and the caring intervention of others.<sup>33</sup>

Close, supportive relationships can therefore help a traumatised child or young person turn toxic stress into manageable stress, overcome past adversity and break free from negative patterns of behaviour.



## Best practice feedback

*"The Lighthouse Foundation is emerging as one of the leading service providers of therapeutic care for young people in Victoria. The organisation is highly respected for its work with young people and the compassion of the committed management and staff. The strengths of the organisation include its inclusive approach; focus on young people, professionalism, creativity, integrity, strong internal systems and processes, responsiveness, and advocacy role. The organisation shows significant investment and commitment to building a 'community' around young people and the organisation, not only in relation to each of the 10 homes, but also the organisation as a whole."*

Independent reviewer, Quality Innovation and Performance Review November 2016

*"Traumatized children tend to have overactive responses and ... these can make them aggressive, impulsive and needy. These children are difficult, they are easy to upset and hard to calm...."*

*".... these children need patterned, repetitive experiences appropriate to their developmental needs, needs that reflect the age at which they'd missed important stimuli or had been traumatized (sic), not their current chronological age."*

Perry, BD and Szalavitz, M. (2006)<sup>34</sup>









# Lighthouse Foundation

## Our vision

To end youth homelessness

## Our mission

To transform the lives of young people, children and babies in need together with the community

## Our values

Respect, Courage, Kindness

*"Each young person who walks through the doors of our homes must be offered the absolute and unconditional love that a good parent would give. I want them to feel what it's like to be held and loved – to be safe and to have a sense of belonging."*

Susan Barton AM,  
Lighthouse Foundation, Founder

*"...If it wasn't for Lighthouse I do not think I would have been able to ever have functional relationships with men..."*

Imogen, Lighthouse Outreach  
young person

## A light at the end of the tunnel

Lighthouse Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation that provides homeless young people from backgrounds of long-term neglect and abuse with the essential support they need to move from the darkness of their past into a brighter future.

Established in 1991, Lighthouse is dedicated to helping these young people to develop the confidence and skills to take responsibility for their own lives and become active members of society.

We welcome them into a caring home environment where they can feel safe – free from abuse, violence or other emotional stress. We immerse each young person in a nurturing family-style situation with trauma-informed therapeutic care available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Each of our suburban homes has two live-in carers who provide continuity of care; guidance; and reliable, predictable boundaries and routines for up to four young people. Our aim is to create a functional family unit, where the permanent carers take on a parental role within the home – often becoming the first positive adult role models in a young person's life.

Lighthouse currently cares for up to 40 young people and infants in 10 suburban homes in Melbourne, as well as over 800 people through our Aftercare and Outreach program. Three of our homes are dedicated to supporting teenage parents and their babies.

Our head office, in Richmond in inner Melbourne, also serves as a welcoming Youth Resource Centre for anyone participating in our live-in care, aftercare and outreach programs.

Our young people are free to come and go at this centre, which features open-plan workspaces for our staff as well as study desks with computers, laundry facilities, a kitchen and large dining table, and lounge areas to encourage relaxed interactions and conversations. All individual and group therapy is held at this centre, including weekly art, music and drama groups.

### Evidence-based care

The main ingredients in the Lighthouse approach are compassionate, caring relationships and evidence-based therapeutic care.

Recovering from years of traumatic childhood experiences can be a slow process. The added complexity of being a teenager only serves to make the process even more challenging for each young person and their care team. Building trusting relationships is a vital part of the healing process.

Living within the care of the extended Lighthouse family helps each young person begin the healing process. They learn how to form meaningful relationships and are empowered to take responsibility for their own destinies and gradually rebuild their lives.

Each person transitions into independent living when they are ready, often sharing private accommodation with peers they have met at Lighthouse.



## Spotlight: Lighthouse Foundation



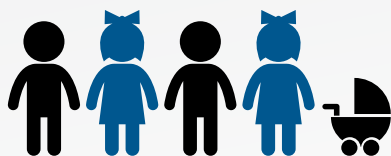
**years**

providing therapeutic live-in care for homeless youth



**8/10**

participants don't experience homelessness again



**800+**

children and young people now have access to lifetime support

## Operations during 2015–2016

**10** homes, 3 supporting young parents and their babies

**46** young people in live-in care, **65%** female and **35%** male

**19%** identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex questioning

**12** babies in care

**0 months\* to 24 years** – the age range of current residents and one baby on the way

**50%** had previous out-of-home care experiences

**10%** come from migrant or refugee backgrounds

**8 volunteer** community committees supporting the homes

**2000+** psychological sessions delivered

## A protective 'circle of care'

The African proverb: 'It takes a whole village to raise a child' sits at the heart of the Lighthouse philosophy. Our Founder Susan Barton takes this concept further: "A system can't raise a child," she says. "It takes a community of warm, loving people to do that."

Lasting healing and recovery happens within a community. Building a community of support around each individual and each home is vitally important at Lighthouse. Our carers and Psychological Wellness Team form an inner circle of direct support for each individual, along with the other young people in their home, who become like siblings.

Our other staff become members of each young person's extended 'Lighthouse family', providing indirect care and contributing to a sense of belonging.

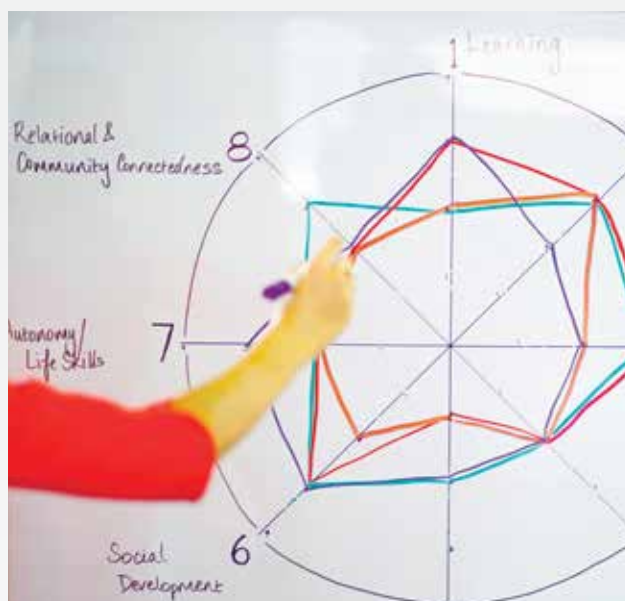
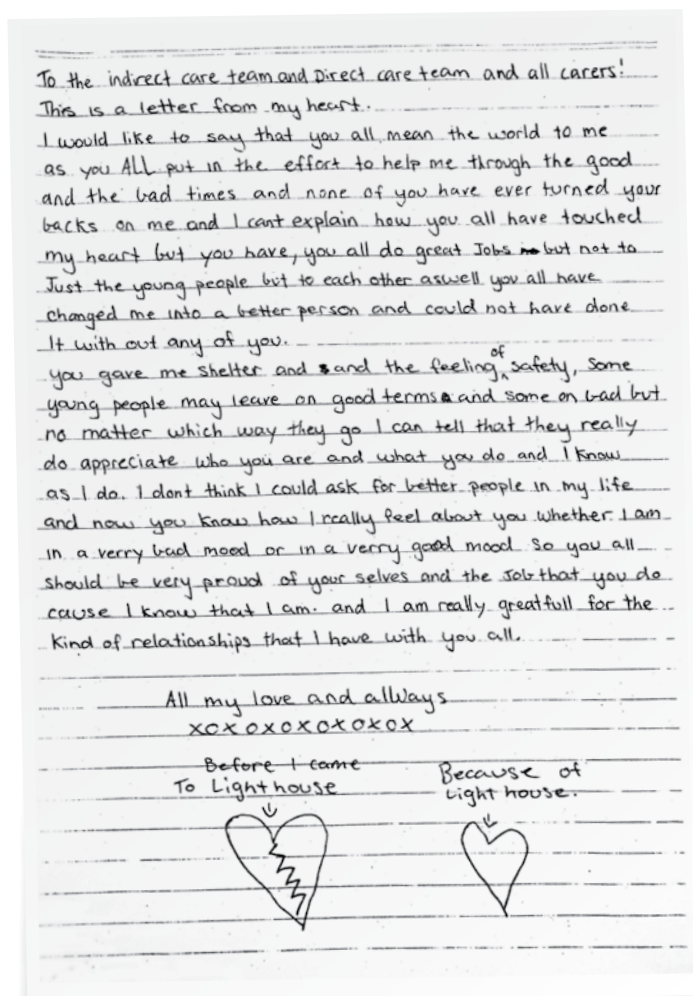
There are barbecues, outings and an annual camp to encourage positive social interaction between everyone living in our homes, forming a large circle of support for many young people who have previously felt isolated and alienated. Lifetime friendships form at Lighthouse and these relationships continue well after young people leave to live independently and take their rightful place in the community.

## Lighthouse Institute

Lighthouse Institute is our internal and external knowledge sharing, training and consultancy arm of the organisation.

The Institute was established to share Lighthouse's expertise and promote our evidence-based model of care as widely as possible, particularly among practitioners and organisations in the out-of-home care sector.

The Institute operates as a knowledge centre focussing on attachment and trauma-informed practice. It draws on Lighthouse's direct treatment experience, as well as applied research into child and adolescent psychology/psychiatry, community psychology, trauma neurobiology studies and clinical practice from around the world.





### Therapeutic residential and outreach programs

Everything we do at Lighthouse is based on more than two decades of hands-on service delivery, reflection and improvement.

Our programs are delivered by our Care Team, which comprises three specialist teams working closely together:

- the Psychological Wellness Team
- the Community Care Team, and
- the Carers Team – comprising the senior, primary, support and respite carers.

We have **five** programs that apply our Therapeutic Family Model of Care™ (TFMC™):

#### 1 The TFMC™ Live in Care Program for Young People

This is our core program and is delivered through all our suburban homes.

In a typical home, our live-in carers provide around-the-clock holistic care to three or four young people who have complex needs. Most of our young residents are aged between 15 and 22 when they arrive.

*"...I really have to stress family. I never saw it as an organisation but as a family. I still keep in touch with many of the past residents from Lighthouse. And I guess you can say they are extended family – we always check in what everyone is up to and how they are. This is because Lighthouse was really a family for us..."*

Tim, Lighthouse Outreach young person

This is a lounge room in one of our homes.



## 2 The Live in Care Program for Young Parents and Babies

Three Lighthouse homes are dedicated to supporting homeless teenage parents and their babies during the first years of parenthood.

Each home cares for up to three young mums or dads and their babies, with the live-in carers role-modelling positive parenting. The program is also supported by a specialist Infant Mental Health Clinician, who helps each young parent learn how to care for and develop a healthy attachment with their baby. Additional post and antenatal support is provided in partnership with a range of specialist community service providers.

All parents and carers in the Young Parents and Babies homes are trained in the Circle of Security framework.



## 3 The Adult Community Transition program (ACT)

This program provides a safe environment for young people who are almost ready to move into independent living. Up to five young people live in a large house, with one of them nominated as the 'Senior Resident'. The Senior Resident gains therapeutic youth work qualifications through our weekly trainings.

The ACT program is supported by our Psychological Wellness and Community Care teams.

## 4 The Lighthouse Aftercare and Outreach Program

Every young person who transitions out of a Lighthouse home into independent living has access to a lifetime of practical and long-term relational support whenever they need it.

They may come back to live with us for a while, seek help applying for jobs and preparing for interviews, or need psychological counselling during a difficult period in their lives.

This program is delivered by Lighthouse's Community Care Team with support from the Psychological Wellness Team.



## 5 The Psychological Wellness Program

The therapeutic work that takes place in each Lighthouse home is supported by our Psychological Wellness Team and other clinicians. This team of psychologists provides psycho-therapeutic and psycho-educational support to the young people through individual and group therapy.

The team also provides intensive training and supervision to our live-in carers and is responsible for supporting the psychological wellbeing of other staff and members of the Lighthouse community.

### Community committees

Each home is supported by a community committee of volunteers who add a further layer to our circle of care.

Community committees hold fundraising activities; organise excursions and special events; and connect the home with local businesses, sporting clubs and community groups. Committee members support the young residents with tutoring, mentoring, vocational guidance, work experience and jobs.

Some of our community committee members have been involved with Lighthouse for almost 20 years. Several have been recognised for their outstanding service by receiving local and state volunteering awards. Our longest-serving volunteer, Judy Nancarrow, joined the Richmond Community Committee in 1998. For many years Judy worked for Cabrini Hospital, which founded the Richmond committee and has been a pivotal supporter of Lighthouse.



*"Lighthouse practices a unique model of care that I believe will be a way of the future. In addition, we are given a tremendous amount of support here so instead of burning out quickly from stress and anxiety, we are growing and developing our professional skills on a daily basis."*

Angela, Lighthouse Carer since 2007

*"I cannot describe the extent of my personal satisfaction of being able to contribute to the work Lighthouse is doing with these young people. Lighthouse is giving these young people a chance to change their lives, to be away from abuse and to have an opportunity to be a kid."*

*"Volunteering for this cause reinforces your appreciation for the chances and opportunities we were given in life and reminds us that not everyone is as lucky. I am just doing my bit to help these young kids get an opportunity to have a good life."*

Ralph Todisco, Founding member of the Springvale Lighthouse Community Committee and major supporter since 1998



## Our people and culture

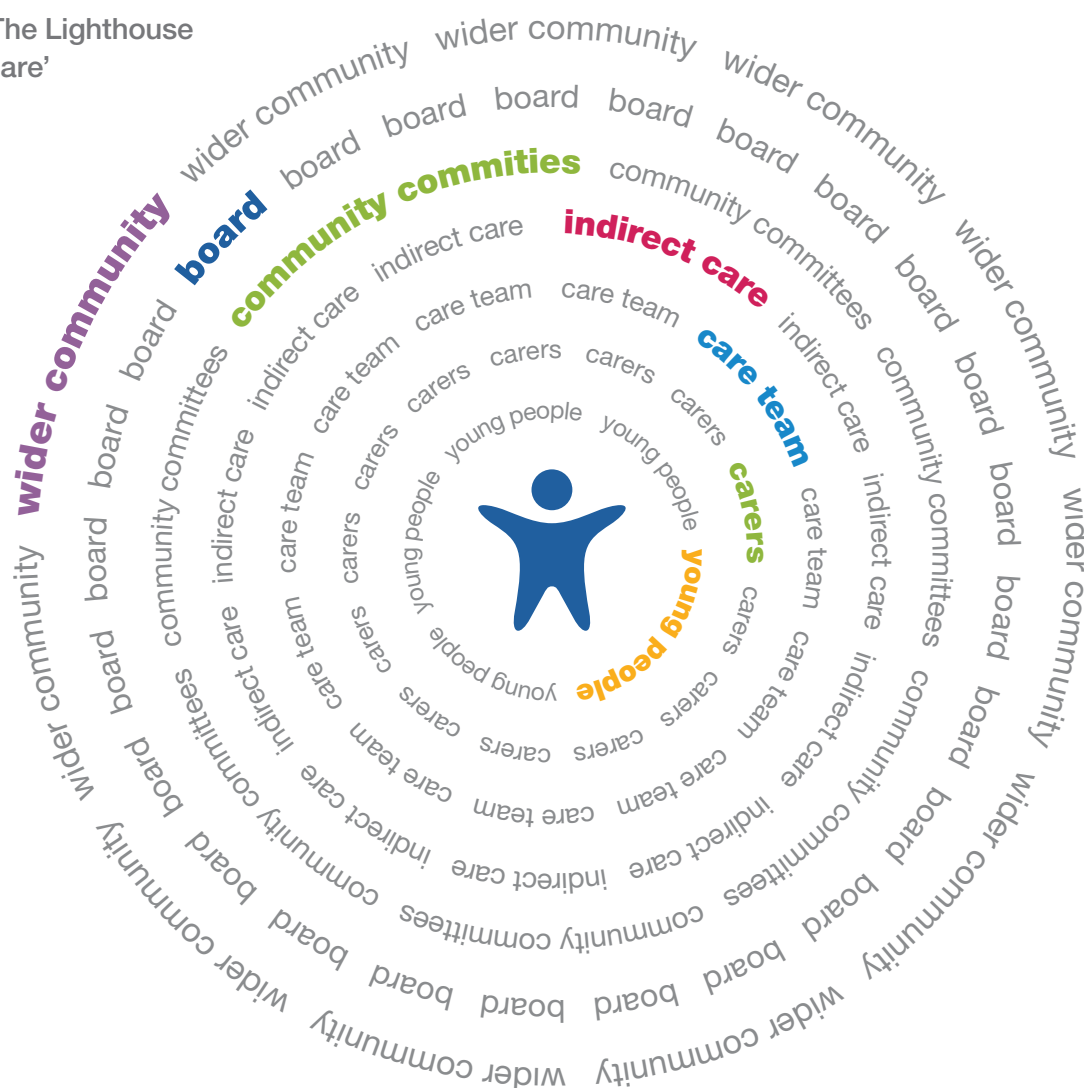
Working in any role with Lighthouse can be an emotional roller-coaster ride. Our people need to be resilient, reflective and passionate about making a positive difference in the lives of vulnerable young people, children and babies.

For this reason, we take considerable care in selecting each person who comes to work with us. Once through the initial interview process and formal Working with Children and Criminal History checks, each short-listed candidate undergoes psychosocial screening to determine their ability to embrace and thrive in our nurturing organisational culture. We apply the same psychosocial screening process before anyone enters the Lighthouse family, whether they are a senior executive, an administration officer, a young person or a volunteer.

We train all our employees how to engage with and support traumatised young people and children. All staff members are required to do regular individual and group supervision and monthly internal training. This support reduces vicarious workplace trauma and helps us maintain comparatively high retention rates among our in-home carers.

We also work hard to make sure our internal culture encourages thoughtfulness, reflection and open communication at all levels. The aim is that everyone working with Lighthouse embodies and role models the ways of relating that we are encouraging our young people to learn.

Figure 3: The Lighthouse 'circle of care'



### Life-changing results

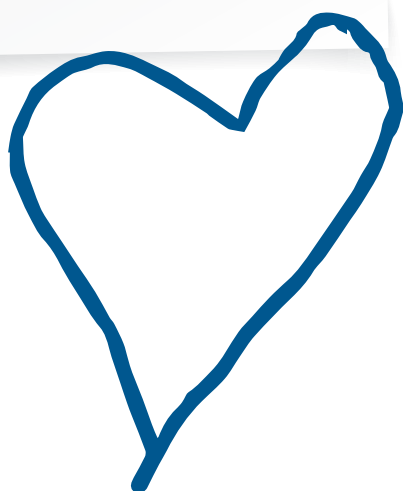
During its first 25 years, Lighthouse has cared for over 800 young people, helping the vast majority to successfully break the cycle of homelessness and re-enter society as mature, productive adults.

After leaving Lighthouse, they have moved on to live independently, seek further education, find jobs, form loving relationships, and raise their own children in the manner they would have wished for themselves.

Every young person who joins the Lighthouse family is a member of our family for life. Our door is always open to them.

*"I've been involved with a lot of different charities over the years and something that really strikes me about Lighthouse is that it's so personal; everything about this organisation is so closely connected to the community of people we work with and what we're actually trying to achieve - and we get such good results."*

**Claire Williams, Lighthouse Springvale Community Committee Chair**



### Founded on principles of good parenting

Lighthouse's Founder, Susan Barton AM, has dedicated her life to caring for homeless young people, children and babies.

Susan's commitment was cemented while volunteering in a Sri Lankan orphanage in the mid-1970s. One of the babies was suffering from severe malnutrition and passed away only a few hours after Susan held him in her arms. Susan was shocked that any child could be forgotten in the way that child had been. On returning to Australia, she began taking in foster children, vowing that no more children would die on her watch.

While raising her own six children, Susan fostered 13 homeless children before setting up Lighthouse in 1991 to expand the care beyond her own home. Lighthouse and its young family members continue to be her driving passion.

In 2002, Susan was appointed a member of the general division of the Order of Australia for services to youth in Australia. She has been a finalist for the Australian Human Rights Commission's Human Rights Medal (2012) and Community Individual Award (2011), a finalist in the Telstra Business Women's Awards (2012), and a finalist in the Victorian Senior of the Year Awards (2012), and Melburnian of the Year 2009.







# Governance and management

Lighthouse is structured to ensure that robust governance and business management supports the primary goal of achieving the best therapeutic and life outcomes for homeless young people, children and babies. The focus is on:

- sustaining and growing our funding and resources
- making sound business and financial management decisions
- delivering best practice therapeutic care, and
- having an internal culture that role models and supports our Therapeutic Family Model of Care™.

Maintaining this balance and supporting the work and wellbeing of everyone from our carers, to our administration staff, to our Board members, is something Lighthouse does extremely well.

## Our Board

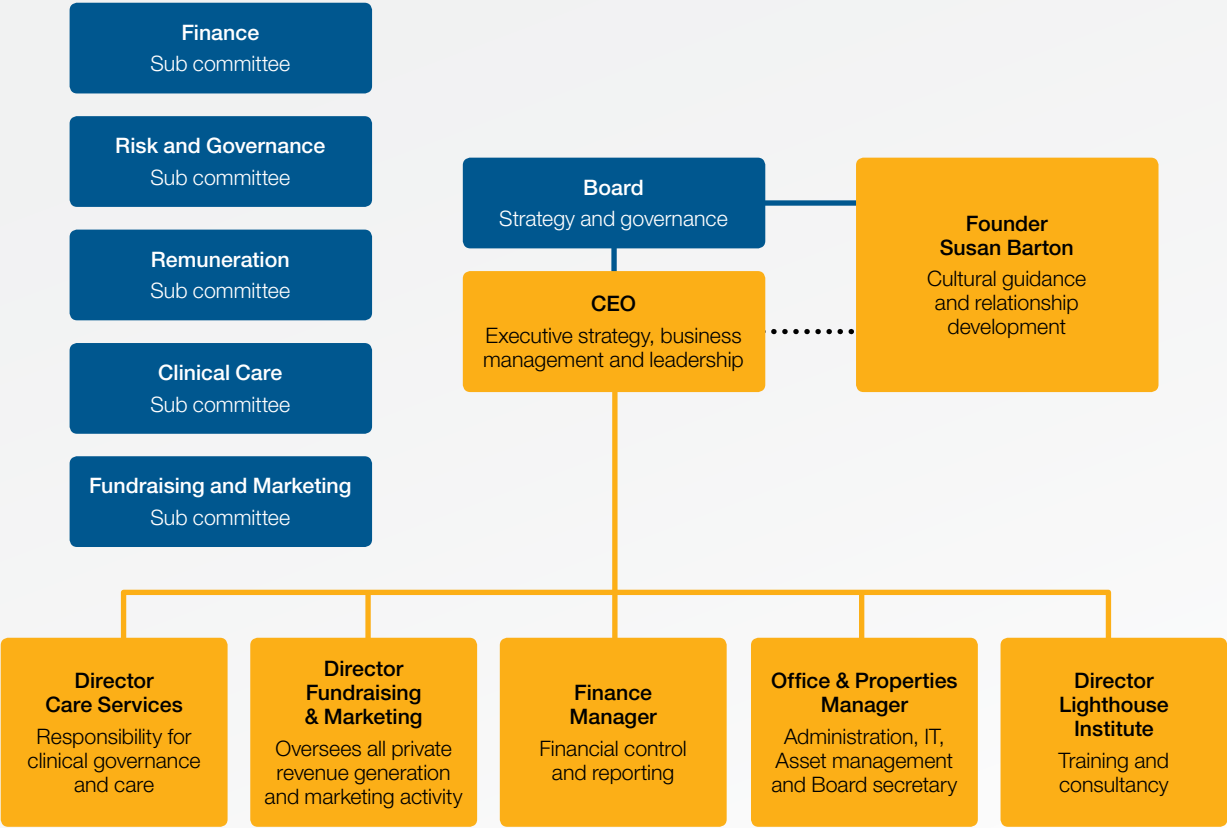
Lighthouse has an 8-member Board, which is guided by our constitution and strategic plan.

Our Board Chairman, Peter Edwards, is the Managing Director of Victor Smorgon Group. As the grandson of Loti and Victor Smorgon, Peter has grown up within a family culture of philanthropy.

Victor Smorgon Group's Chief Financial Officer, David Leeton, is also on the board. The close working relationship between Peter and David provides our supporters, particularly philanthropic donors, with confidence in our organisational governance.

Our Founder and leading light, Susan Barton AM, continues to be an active member of the Board and the senior management team.

Figure 4: Lighthouse Foundation Board and Senior Management



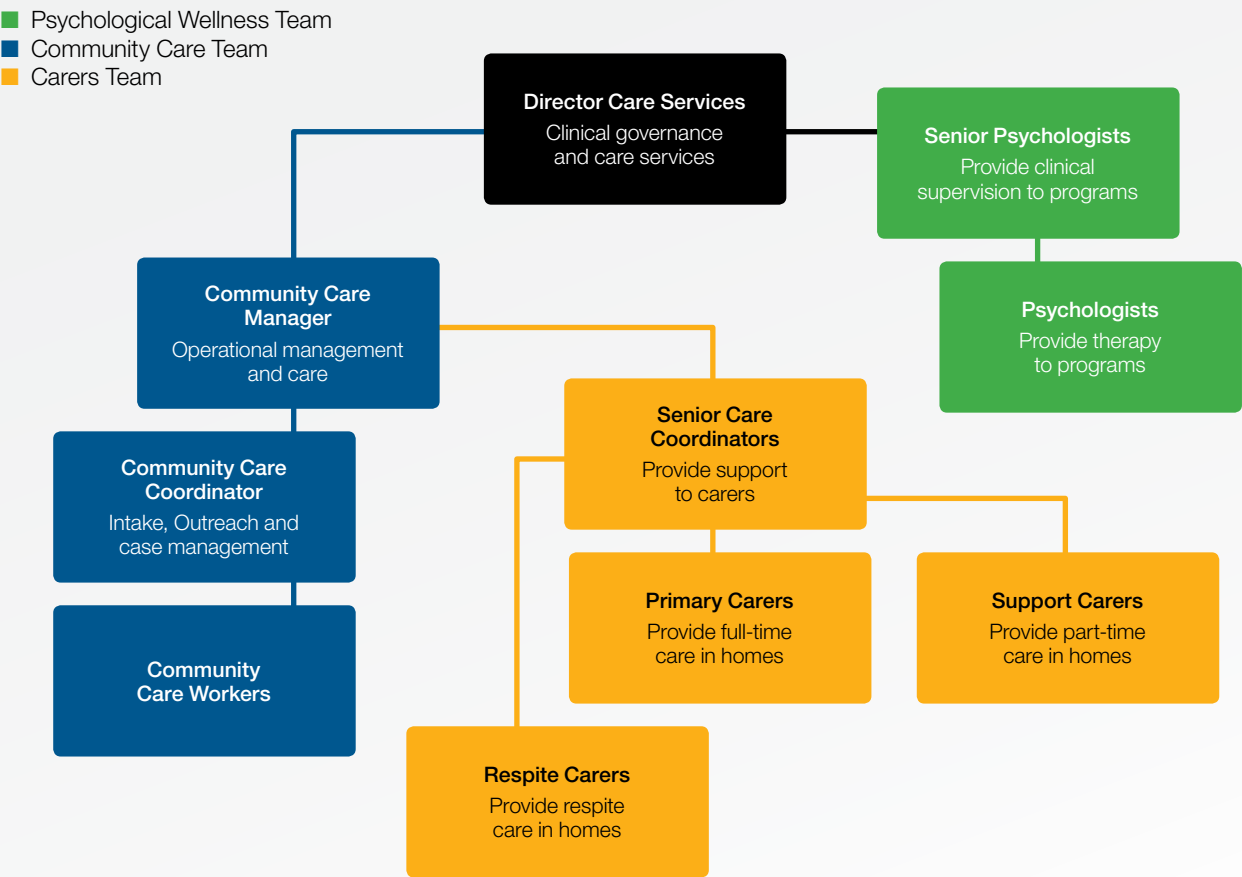
Senior management team

Lighthouse’s Chief Executive Officer, Simon Benjamin has a background in psychology and prior to his appointment as CEO, led our Care Team as Director of Care.

He has worked for over 14 years in the out-of-home care, mental health and disability sectors, and has considerable experience working with traumatised children and young people and their families.

Simon leads a team of senior specialists who manage our live-in therapeutic care and psychological wellness programs, financial operations, fundraising and marketing activities, training and consultancy services, residential property portfolio, office administration and Board secretariat functions.

Figure 5: Lighthouse Foundation Care Team



# Evidence-based therapeutic care

*"From the start, we are planting the seeds of hope in those young people. We believe in them, so they start to believe in themselves."*

Noni, Lighthouse Foundation, Carer

## A proven therapeutic model

Lighthouse's unique Therapeutic Family Model of Care™ (TFMC™) is recognised as a highly effective method of turning around the lives of young people who have complex mental health needs due to traumatic early life experiences.

This holistic therapeutic model is based on more than three decades of frontline experience working with vulnerable young people, children and babies. It also draws on 60 years of empirical research into human development across the fields of psychology, psychiatry and neurobiology.

The model is underpinned by two evidence-based clinical frameworks for working with traumatised young people: attachment and object relations.

**Attachment theory** states that a strong emotional and physical attachment to at least one primary care giver is critical to personal development, particularly for young children. This attachment behaviour appears to be universal across all cultures.

**Object relations theory** explains the innate drive among humans to form relationships with each other, in particular, within a family and especially between a mother and her child. It asserts that failing to form successful early relationships leads to problems later in life.

## Psychosocial screening

Before a young person comes to live in a Lighthouse home, we use psychosocial screens (and sometimes psychometric assessment) to assess their needs and determine whether our program is appropriate for them. The carers who live in our homes are also rigorously screened.

While there are strict house rules, there are no locks on doors as this encourages the sense of living in a normal family home.

We take great care to match young people with the most appropriate carer and home situation. Our carers are the cornerstones of the TFMC™ and become therapeutic parents to each young person in their care.



The Lighthouse Therapeutic Family Model of Care™ Guidance Manual informs our training and guides our therapeutic practice.



*"It's important to ensure there is a team approach. We create lots of space for reflecting, connecting and supporting each other and the young people. True trauma-informed practice is where there is systemic holding from managers, to the psychological wellness teams, to the carers to the young people. That's what Lighthouse does better than any other agency I am aware of."*

Laura Petrie, Lighthouse Foundation,  
Director of Care

## A 'holding space' for learning and healing

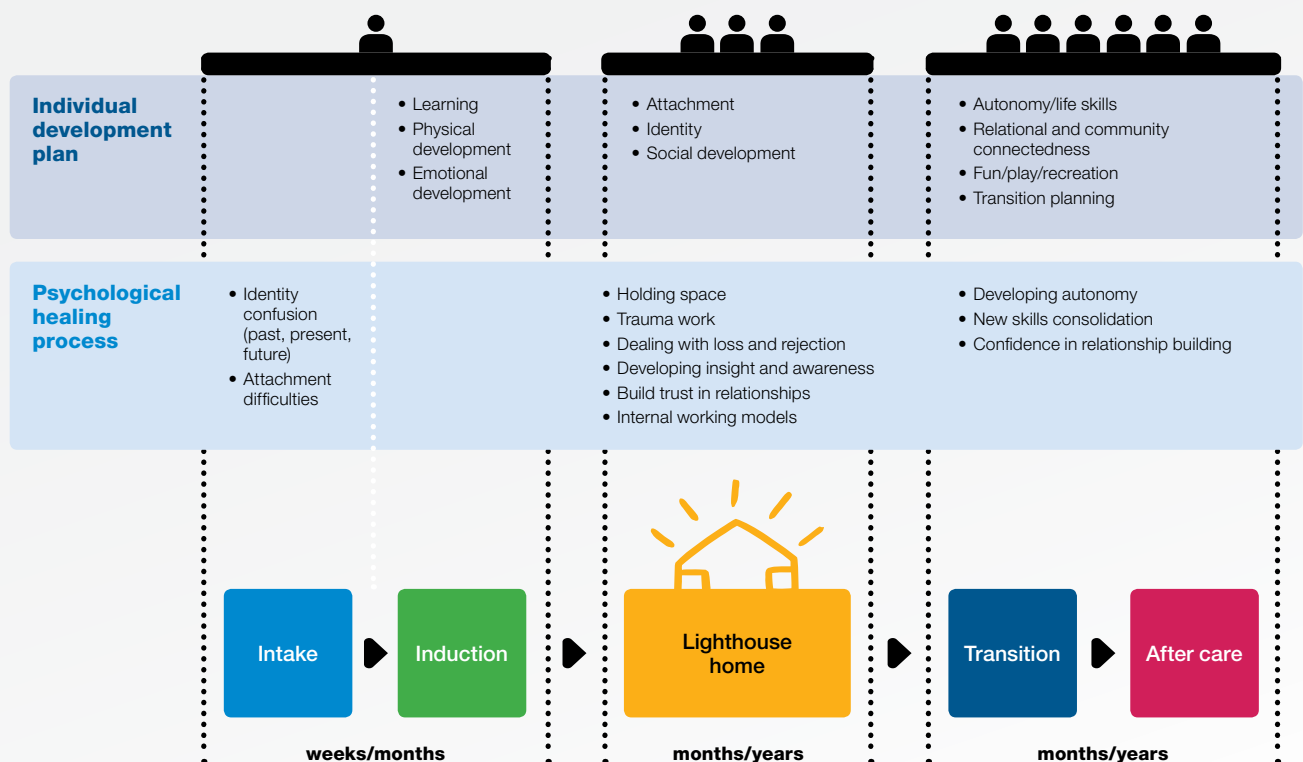
Lighthouse's TFMCTM recognises that young people can learn adaptive behaviours through a combination of therapeutic parenting and psycho-therapeutic support.

To support this learning we create a 'holding space', which is both physical (safe and secure accommodation) and psychological/emotional (clinical therapy and compassionate, supportive care). This space gives each young person a secure place to work through their past, heal and plan for their future.

Our carers, and all Lighthouse staff, give these young people compassion and support from the moment they walk through the door of one of our homes or our Richmond, Youth Resource Centre, which doubles as our head office.

Like an electric kettle holds water, our 'circle of care' holds firm while each young person bubbles away and develops inside (and yes, at times, they get close to boiling point before the temperature settles back down).

Figure 6: The Lighthouse intake and treatment process



### Addressing layers of complex needs

The young people who enter Lighthouse's care often have multiple behavioural, emotional and mental health problems. Many have experienced so much trauma, neglect, disruption and care placement breakdowns in their lives that their basic sense of identity is highly confused and fragmented.

They often have/experience:

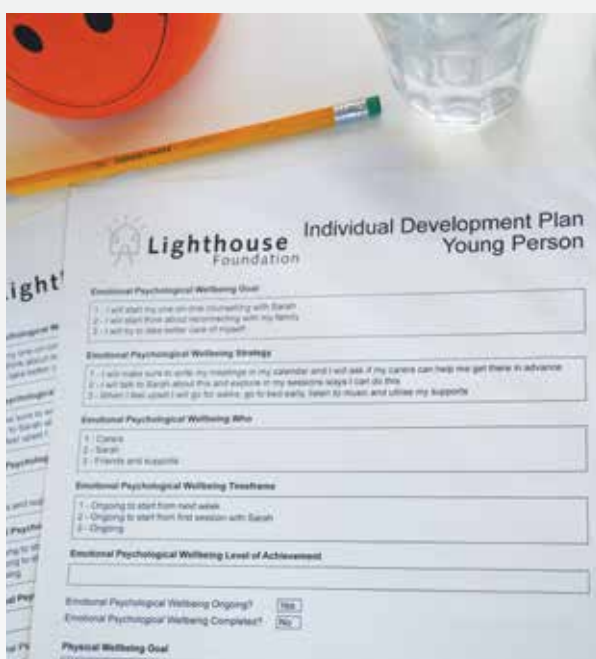
- difficulties building and maintaining any healthy relationships
- limited education and possible learning difficulties
- low self-esteem
- poor body image
- mental health issues and disorders
- physical health problems
- substance abuse
- a lack of basic life skills such as personal hygiene
- suicide risk
- self harming
- limited social skills
- anti-social or oppositional behaviour

- identity confusion/diffusion
- little or no supports in the community
- flashbacks
- instances of disassociation

Specialist support from our team of psychologists helps to manage complex needs through available treatments. In addition, young people are supported to manage stress and conflict and gain control of their mental health. This slowly helps improve their mental health and wellbeing.

This is a process of gradual and continuous change. Our initial goal is to help young people to stabilise their condition and then slowly start working towards recovery.

Full recovery might not be possible for all young people, depending on the extent of trauma or the type of mental illness. Abuse and neglect during early childhood has been shown to affect healthy brain development, resulting in some of the young people who come to us displaying cognitive abilities and behaviours much younger than their chronological age.



### Individual development plans

An important element of our model of care is that we hold an expectation that each young person will actively participate in the therapeutic process. Over time, they are expected to engage with their care team, attend therapy sessions and contribute to the wider Lighthouse community.

Each person works with a care team to develop an individual development plan (IDP). This plan outlines their existing life skills, and emotional, psychological and physical wellbeing: 'where we are now', and sets down the short and long-term personal goals they will work towards: 'where we want to go'. The IDP becomes a practical way of monitoring their progress, from four perspectives – young person, carer, community care worker and psychologist.

## Life membership

The Lighthouse model of care enables young people to stay with us **until they are truly ready** to transition into independent living.

We also provide them with 'life membership' – as you would expect in any loving family – which means they can continue to access support indefinitely through our Aftercare and Outreach Program.

Former residents can:

- stay in touch with Lighthouse carers and other staff. They are always welcome at the Lighthouse home base our Youth Resource Centre in Richmond
- contact the Lighthouse Community Care team or other staff for general support or advice
- contact the Lighthouse Psychological Wellness team for mental health support and counselling, and
- come back for a temporary stay in one of our homes during difficult times.

This offer of lifetime support from the Lighthouse community is critical to building resilience and making sure a young person doesn't re-enter the cycle of homelessness after leaving our direct care.

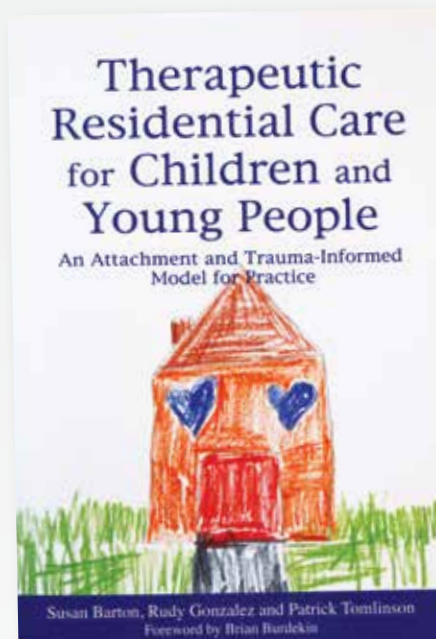
Our Outreach Team also actively engages with past residents through a private social media community.

## A manual for therapeutic residential care

In 2012, our Founder, Susan Barton AM, and two co-authors, Rudy Gonzalez and Patrick Tomlinson, published *Therapeutic Residential Care for Children: An attachment and trauma informed model for practice*.

This book serves as a detailed manual for practising Lighthouse's Therapeutic Family Model of Care™ and features case examples from over 25 years of practical application.

The book is also widely used as a reference in youth work courses and has been translated into Japanese and Portuguese.

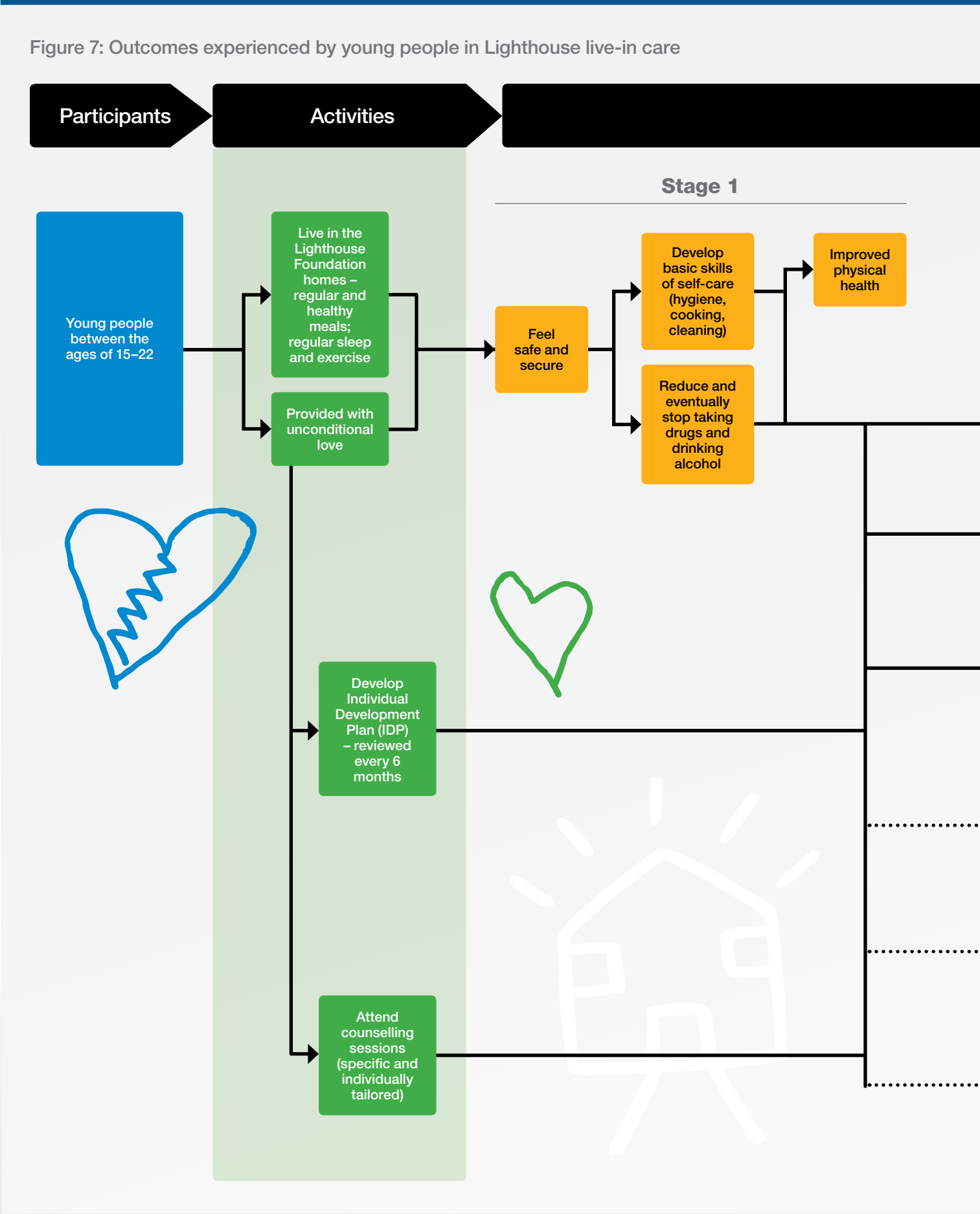


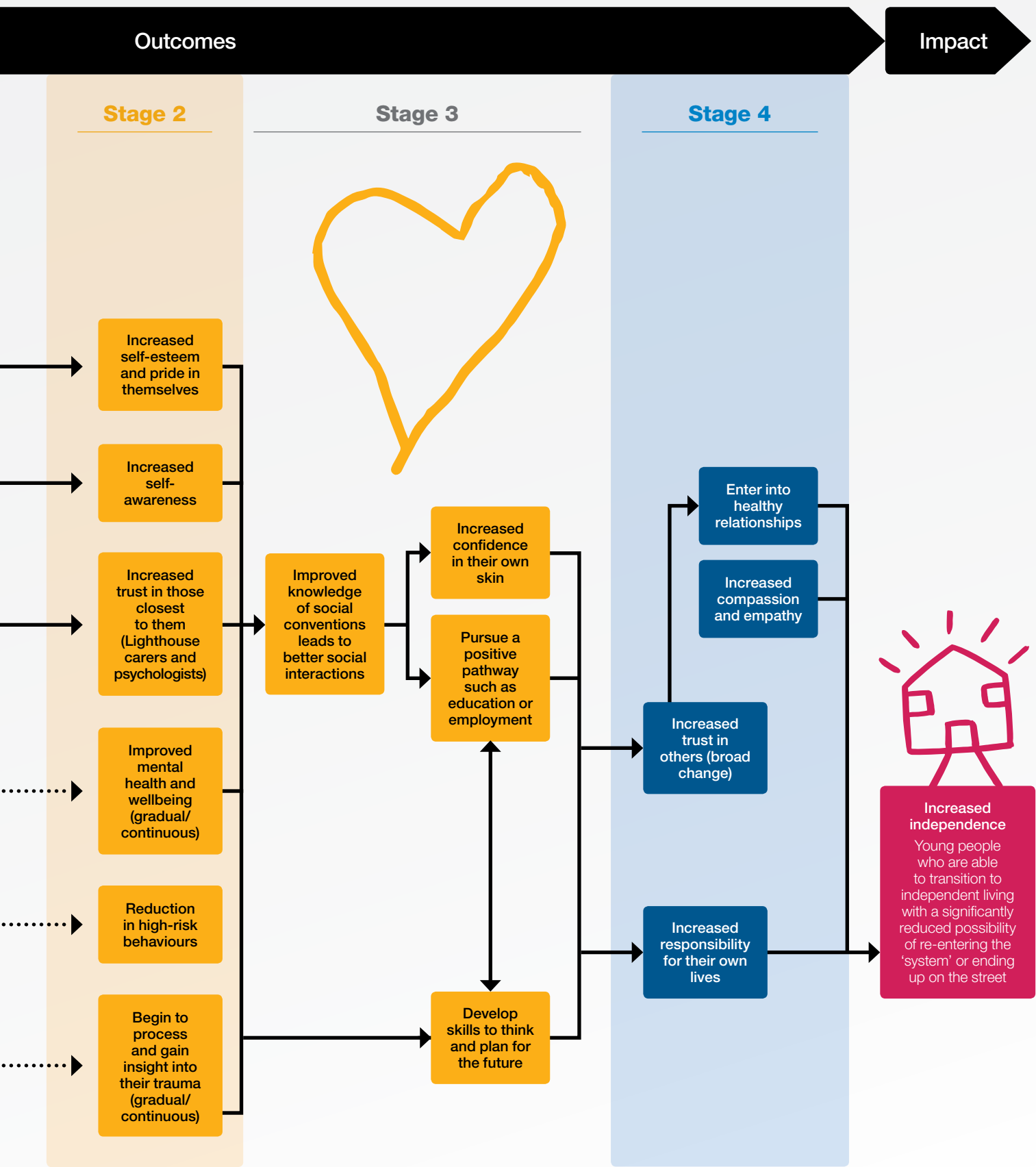
*"Before I came to Lighthouse I was in resi care where I stayed for a couple of nights but it was so scary there. There were girls throwing knives at each other and no-one there to stop them. I was ready to run away again but then I was told there might be a place for me at Lighthouse. The first impression I had when I went there was that everyone was just so friendly, the carers would really try to engage with you and would really listen and try to help you."*

Lucy, Lighthouse Outreach young person



Figure 7: Outcomes experienced by young people in Lighthouse live-in care



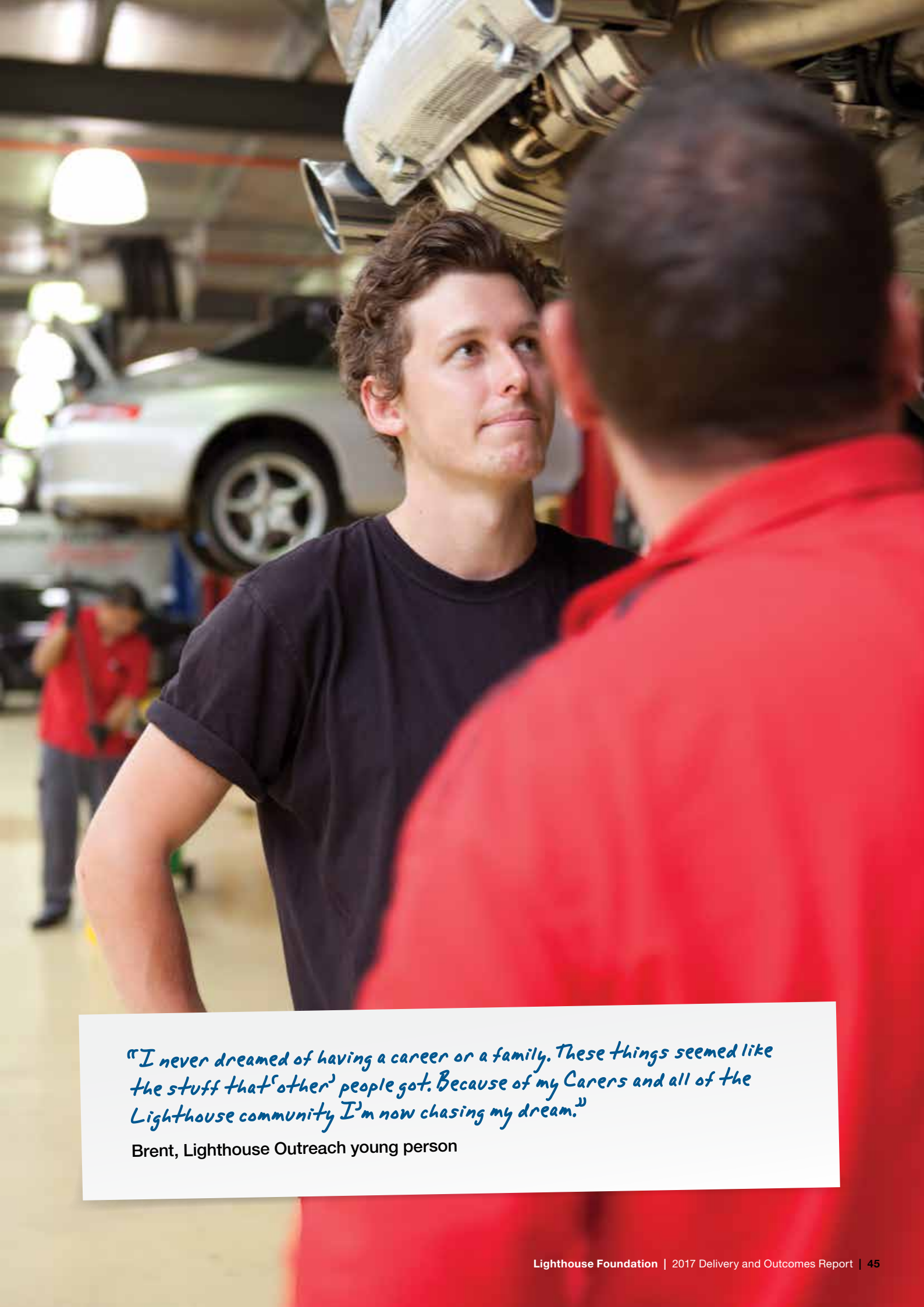


# What makes Lighthouse different

Lighthouse Foundation is unlike any other service provider in Australia's out-of-home care sector. Here are just a few examples of what sets us apart.

No-one has to leave when they turn 18	Instead of turning young people out of our homes when they turn 18, as is the current practice in Australia's mainstream out-of-home care system, Lighthouse cares for them until they are genuinely ready to transition into independent living.
Life membership	We provide 'life membership' for every young person who goes through a Lighthouse program, which means they have our support whenever they need it after leaving our direct care. This is what you would usually expect from a caring extended family.
Overwhelmingly self-funded	Our organisation is almost entirely self-funded through our generous circle of supporters, with only 6% of operational funding in the past 25 years coming from government sources. While we intend to increase our collaboration with government to make our programs more sustainable, we also benefit from our independence and freedom to innovate.
Embedded therapeutic care and outcomes	Our entire organisation is focussed on achieving permanent therapeutic outcomes for each child and young person in our care, not just providing them with somewhere to live.
Unique, proven model of care	Our Therapeutic Family Model of Care™ draws on over 25 years of practical experience and proven results in providing trauma-informed residential care.
Matching young people and carers	The young people and carers in each of our homes are carefully matched using psychosocial and psychometric assessments to ensure the greatest chances of compatibility and success.
Internal culture	No-one at Lighthouse merely 'clocks on' and 'clocks off' each workday. Our internal culture revolves around providing caring, family-style support to our young people and to each other. Every Lighthouse employee and volunteer is considered a member of our extended family.
Encouraging appropriate physical affection	Sharing familial hugs or having someone hold their hand when they're upset is something many of our young people missed out on in their early lives. They desperately need non-threatening gestures of physical affection to help them heal and learn to trust adults again. We encourage this, and make sure everyone we employ is someone they can trust in this respect and is trained appropriately.
No security locks, surveillance cameras or bars on windows	While there are clear house guidelines, our homes feel and operate like normal family homes. There are none of the internal security doors; surveillance cameras in bedrooms; outside locks on bedroom doors; barred windows, one-way viewing windows into living areas; or locked cupboards or drawers that young people regularly encounter in some residential care units.
"I feel like saying..."	The practice of "I feel like saying..." permeates the entire culture at Lighthouse. We begin weekly family meetings in our homes by giving each person at the table a chance to speak, starting with this phrase. We begin our staff and management team meetings the same way. Even our Board begins its meetings with each board member sharing what they feel like saying at that point in time. That way everyone has a voice and feels valued. Meetings also finish with acknowledgments which furthers the healing process. Young people who have suffered trauma are not used to hearing positive things about themselves.





*"I never dreamed of having a career or a family. These things seemed like the stuff that 'other' people got. Because of my Carers and all of the Lighthouse community I'm now chasing my dream."*

Brent, Lighthouse Outreach young person



# Our young people

The children and young people Lighthouse supports have complex needs and deep psychological wounds. Most have experienced family breakdowns, violence, abuse or deprivation, often from a very early age.

Many have been rotating through foster and residential care for most of their lives. One of our recent residents, a 17-year-old, had experienced over 40 different out-of-home care placements since he was six years old.

A damning report from the Victorian Commission for Children and Young People in 2015 revealed that many of these already traumatised children become victims of further abuse while in state-funded residential care.<sup>35</sup>

It is not surprising that many of these young people leave state care at the mandated cut-off age of 18 only to end up homeless once more, and vulnerable to falling back into the cycle of abuse, drug and alcohol addiction, or criminal activity.

*"The young people are often unable to trust adults. So rather than seek adults for comfort and soothing they act out from a position of fear. Our young people are incredibly fragile and our hope is to support them to become more trusting and therefore resilient."*

**Laura Petrie, Lighthouse Foundation,  
Director of Care**





# Kahlia's story

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## Life before Lighthouse

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Kahlia was raised in a religious cult during the 1990s. For more than 10 years she was subjected to repeated physical and sexual abuse, psychological punishments and deprivations by her parents and other cult elders. In her own words:

"I was brought up in quite a strict religious environment and as part of this a lot of my independent thoughts and beliefs were crushed. My emotional development was stunted. The religious group had told me what to do ... They also had my life planned out for the future. At a young age I had a husband picked out for me. I was to leave school at the age of 15, become a housewife and child bearer.

Throughout my childhood I was also physically and sexually assaulted. My parents being the main perpetrators, but the elders of the church also played a role in this abuse."

Kahlia describes her experience of moving out of her abusive home into the state out-of-home care system as 'a nightmare': "I was being removed from everything I'd known and my whole life was turned upside down. I was moved into a strange house with none of my belongings except for the clothes I was wearing ... I was safe from abuse, but not happy.

My time in care was brief but substantial enough to leave an impression. Yes, I was safe now from physical, sexual and emotional abuse, but I was constantly moved from house to house. This in itself is a form of emotional abuse. Foster care to residential care, to hospital, to secure welfare. I even stayed with some of my extended family for a stint, but this just led to more abuse.

One time, I had to wait at the police station till 9pm because DHS had nowhere to place me ... on many occasions I sat waiting in the DHS office in my school uniform wondering when and who I would be staying with that night, and if they would be nice to me. At last count, I had moved 15 times in two years while in government care. Unfortunately for some children in government care this is a small number of moves and it has a massive impact on their lives.

After some time, I was coming to the age where DHS couldn't look after me any more. I was going to be old enough in state terms to look after myself. This really wasn't the case ... emotionally, socially or financially. I was still completing high school. At this point in my life I was introduced to Lighthouse."

## Life with Lighthouse

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Kahlia arrived at Lighthouse in her late teens. She stayed for five years overall, on two separate occasions. Several years later, she recalled some of her experiences in our care:

"While living at Lighthouse I had to deal with the reoccurrence of past traumas. These occurred in the form of flashbacks and disassociation. If it wasn't for the patience and care I received during these times, I know for a fact that I wouldn't be alive today to tell this story."

Dissociation is a survival mechanism that kicks in when a child's brain is unable to deal with or comprehend what is happening to them; it can switch off to numb them to what they are experiencing. It's the brain's way of saying it's had enough. Kahlia's flashbacks often led to disassociation and then to instances of self-harm.

"After one incident of disassociation I had two quite deep 10cm cuts under each breast. I was bleeding and in shock. I felt such shame and fear from this incident that I didn't tell anyone. I took myself to the doctor ... He gave me a letter and sent me to Emergency across the road. I walked in the hospital in a daze. Still numb, I gave the lady at the counter the letter and they put me on a bed and stitched me up. I remember Violet, my [Lighthouse] carer coming into the room; she hugged me, kissed me, kissed my head and told me it was going to be OK. I was safe and it was OK for me to feel the pain.

I have scars on my body that will never go away. I was hurt so much inside; the pain from cutting took it away. For that split second when the knife pierced the skin, all I could feel was that sensation, not the pain in my heart."

Like many of our young people, Kahlia's first stay with Lighthouse was merely the primer for her second stay, during which she was finally ready to heal:

"The second time I moved into Lighthouse was life changing. The first time I didn't know what Lighthouse could do for me. I just moved in and went on with my own little patterns. I continued with self-harm and addiction, and denial of my past.

If I didn't come the first time, I wouldn't have realised what a special place it was and had the trust and confidence to come the second time. But the trust was there ... that was what got me back ... the trust in people there, the relationships I had and that I knew people really cared about me, loved me and valued me. And I knew that this was the place to be if I wanted my life to move forward.

I worked with Julie and Kate, my psychologist and next carer. They had enormous influence on me through their care, education and role modelling. I could talk with them about the negative behaviours without being judged and as I did this, they helped me to learn different ways of dealing with my pain ...

Talking to Kate regularly and seeing Julie a lot more than weekly was the catalyst. It took me a long time though. They hung in with me. They cared. I believe they knew that I was more than my behaviours, but it took a long time to find the strength to see that in myself."

## Life beyond Lighthouse

Several years after leaving the Lighthouse home, Kahlia, then 28, wrote:

"... even though it is still habitual in me to want to self harm, I now have inner strength to make more positive choices and to express and experience my feelings positively and without harming myself ... now I can externalise those feelings, memories and flashbacks – and I know I can get through these moments using my skills of singing, theatre, creative arts and creative writing. To realise that these crisis times of most intensity are transient and I can get through them – I have the skills and I have the strength to reach out if I need to."

Kahlia is now in her mid thirties and still keeps in touch with Lighthouse. After leaving our in-home care, she studied to be a youth worker, became a carer with Lighthouse and then went on to do a teaching degree. She has now completed three degrees and is working as a clinical psychologist overseas.









# Gary's story

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## Life before Lighthouse

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Gary was the first young person to officially be taken into a Lighthouse home after Susan Barton established the Foundation in 1991. He had been made a ward of the state when he was about six years old.

Now an adult and parent himself, Gary is still uncertain about his early family circumstances, other than knowing that his mother left his father when he was a young boy.

"I did go to live with my mother, and she put us back in the home a couple of times. She couldn't cope. I was never in a proper school and moved homes so often I never learned to read and my attention span was short and I got confused. My primary school experience was one of always getting into trouble.

I needed a place and Sue wanted to take someone in. She dragged me out of the (institution) system into a proper family. I was accepted even though it wasn't always easy, and it was good to have that stability."

## Life with Lighthouse

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When he arrived at Lighthouse, Gary had lost contact with his siblings and extended family. His carer helped him re-establish connections with them in a safe way.

"We didn't know how it would work but we had a few goes at it. I had to leave and then come back. I think in that respect Sue hadn't (at that time) dealt with anyone with so many different problems.

On and off, I stayed about a year before moving out, by mutual arrangement. I remember I came back after spending time at a refuge and lived here again for a while. When I needed Lighthouse it was always there. When you have been institutionalised then that is how you end up. Lighthouse broke that cycle. It was very different, not rigid like the institutions ..."

## Life beyond Lighthouse

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"I had to go out and work, be a taxpayer in society. I didn't really want to but felt I had to. I couldn't survive on the dole even though I would have liked to. Like you wake up one day and think: 'I've got to get on with it'. It was hard to find jobs because I couldn't read. Over the years I've learned to read a little, especially about cars and car parts, with the help of mentors from Lighthouse.

I feel like I was a criminal when I was younger and then I was let out. I have the rest of my life now. It's what the personal development programs at Lighthouse did for me – being able to accept other people and trying not to judge. I would not have been able to make the changes without Lighthouse. It has been interesting to watch myself develop and now I am excited for the future and what it holds for my life ...

I consider myself the first official Lighthouse young person. I feel that, I suppose for all the other kids, I have to make it. I see myself – even though I don't want to be – an example or role model ... I think it is really special to see the support and dedication of the community in helping Lighthouse and Sue.

It's like a racehorse – someone has to open the gates for you. Then you have to run your own race as nobody can run it for you."

Despite very shaky beginnings before he arrived at Lighthouse, Gary has pursued a successful career as a welder working in the mining industry. He is now a millionaire and owns six properties. Most importantly, Gary has been in a committed long-term relationship, and has raised two beautiful children. He still visits Susan twice a year and his kids know her as 'Nanny Susan'.

# Amber's story

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## Life before Lighthouse

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Amber grew up in a single parent home in Western Australia. She didn't feel close to her three sisters and in her mid-teens she started acting up and having difficulties at home.

"I began to fail school and eventually stopped attending completely. In October 2012, I was sent to live with my father in Victoria. My mother thought she made the decision that was best for me – more one-on-one time with a parent and more opportunities for me to be acknowledged.

Unfortunately there were circumstances unforeseen. I struggled with the move, I struggled to adapt to everything that I was presented with in Melbourne. On top of these struggles, my father was sexually abusing me. He made me feel trapped and fear for my life. He was controlling and even tried to kill me. In 2014, I finally disclosed to a school counsellor and they assisted my move into a youth refuge, then the youth refuge referred me to Lighthouse."

## Life with Lighthouse

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When Amber arrived at Lighthouse in 2014 she was matched with our carers and other young people living in the Bonbeach home.

"Lighthouse scared me at first, but then I got to know my carers and housemates – other young people who, like me, had issues at home. And most of the time we got along; we were a family.

Everything was so new to me. Different rules and different ways of approaching situations. Mandatory day programs, meetings and family dinners. Initially, I hated my care team meetings; it was so strange having people there who cared about my progress and success.

I had some of my darkest times in the early days of Lighthouse. I was going through court and I began to face severe mental illness. Within my first month of being within the home I ended up having a complete emotional break down and stopped talking, which led to me going into an adolescent psychiatric unit for treatment.

At the time, I didn't realise why I had a breakdown or why it happened so soon after moving in. I felt like something was wrong with me, but now I realise it was because I was finally safe. My Lighthouse carers helped me through my problems and were always great shoulders to cry on."

## Life beyond Lighthouse

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After 14 months living in the Bonbeach home, Amber was able to transition into independent living in 2016. She regularly continues her relationship with her Lighthouse family through our Outreach program.

In 2016, she summoned the courage to speak at a gathering of over 400 business women to help raise awareness about Lighthouse.

"Now, I'm living in my own house, successfully running my own household. It's tough sometimes, but Lighthouse taught me that I can do anything if I set my mind to it. I honestly can't imagine where I would have ended up without Lighthouse.

And even today, I underestimate a safe home. The safety of a home meant that I could finally relax, I could finally put doors in my walls and let people in, and that was what Lighthouse allowed me to do. They reminded me that I was special every time I felt worthless, they sat by me when I was in so much psychological pain and couldn't bear to move, and my carers let me scream out loud when they knew I really needed to. Lighthouse also provided so much more. There was always food on the table; I always had clean clothing and a warm bed. I had everything a person needs. I had a family that loved me, supported me and cared through thick and thin. And they still do. The love that started with Susan Barton is still to this day being passed down to every carer and young person past and present. My future is only possible because of the Lighthouse Foundation. And that is why it is so special to me."

Amber has blossomed into a confident, resilient young woman and is still very connected into Lighthouse through our Outreach program. She is living independently and enjoys playing rugby with a local club.










## Childhood experiences most people take for granted

Most of the children and young people who join the Lighthouse family have missed out on receiving many of the basic nurturing experiences all children deserve during early childhood.

A teenager who has experienced early trauma, abuse and neglect will at times need to be treated as if he or she were younger. Sometimes the recovery process requires our carers to return to providing what was not offered during their infancy, to help rebuild some of the childhood these young people have never had. Here are just a few examples.

Normal experience	Lighthouse family member's experience	Our carers' response
<b>Being read bedtime stories</b> 	<p>Jon, 15, was living in a Lighthouse home with our founder Susan and her children.</p> <p>One evening, after Susan had put her own children to bed and read her daughter a bedtime story, Jon ran out into the backyard yelling profanities, saying he wanted to die and that the pain was too hard to bear.</p> <p>A two-hour conversation revealed that Jon had never been tucked into bed by his own mother and had never been read a bedtime story.</p> <p>During the first few years of his life, Jon had been repeatedly exposed to his mother's working life as a prostitute. She put him into an orphanage when he was 5 or 6 years old.</p>	<p>Susan asked the 15-year-old if he would like to be tucked into bed and read a story.</p> <p>Jon agreed that he would love this.</p> <p>"I got the doona and tucked it all around his body so it was like he was in a cocoon and I sat down and read him a couple of fairytales," says Susan. "It calmed him down and he cried a little bit. That was all he was asking for. He had missed out on some of the basic primary experiences every child has a right to. And he wanted to be read a bedtime story, just so simple."</p> <p>This experience, repeated over time, had a huge impact on Jon's development, as he was provided with a need that had not been met in his early childhood.</p> <p>Jon and Susan still keep in touch, 24 years later.</p>
<b>Feeling safe in your bed at night</b> 	<p>Twelve-year-old Sarah ran away from a sexually abusive home situation and lived on Melbourne streets for five years before coming to Lighthouse.</p> <p>She became so fearful during her first year of sleeping rough that she always slept with her shoes on. This meant she could be ready to be on her feet and running in a matter of seconds.</p>	<p>When Sarah, 17, arrived at Lighthouse she slept with her shoes on for the first two months.</p> <p>While the carers in her house reassured Sarah that she was now safe and didn't need to wear her shoes to bed any longer, they allowed her to wear them until she felt secure enough in the house to fall asleep without shoes on.</p>
<b>Having a bath or shower</b> 	<p>A young child recently arrived at Lighthouse after an intensely traumatic experience in which she had witnessed her mother being brutally abused.</p> <p>This child had never had a bath or slept in anything other than a pram.</p>	<p>Every day for almost three weeks, our carer put on bathers and climbed into the bath to encourage this child to get into the water with her. The child was initially terrified and wouldn't go near the bath or the water.</p> <p>It was after almost three weeks of this daily routine before the child finally climbed into the bath for the first time and happily played with the soap, bubbles and toys.</p>

## Our young people

Normal experience	Lighthouse family member's experience	Our carers' response
<b>Being bottle-fed as a baby</b> 	<p>Alex was abandoned by his mother when he was a young baby. Family members took him in, however they weren't equipped to raise a small baby or provide adequate loving care.</p> <p>Over the next 10 years, Alex experienced over 40 foster and residential care placements.</p> <p>Later in life and desperate for a sense of belonging, he turned to negative peer groups and had several stints in the juvenile justice system.</p>	<p>Every night, our carers in this young person's home gave him warm milk and cookies before he went to bed. This replicated the nurturing he missed out on as a child and he loved this ritual.</p> <p>On first meeting, Alex presented as a tough kid who swore and seemed angry at the world a lot of the time.</p> <p>At Lighthouse, we knew there was a softer side to this otherwise tough cookie, especially when he wandered into the kitchen at our central youth resource centre and asked for some milk and biscuits!</p>
<b>Being baked a birthday cake</b> 	<p>One teenage mum, Shay, lived in Lighthouse's first home for mothers and babies for 10 months.</p> <p>Before coming to Lighthouse, she had given birth to her baby girl alone in a hospital room with no idea where they both were going to live.</p> <p>Shay had no positive role modelling from her own parents to draw on as a new mum, and no reliable extended family to call on for help. Her only option was couch-surfing with friends, however, with a baby in tow this rarely works out.</p>	<p>One of the carers in the Mothers and Babies Home baked Shay a cake for her birthday.</p> <p>The young mother was overwhelmed by the gesture, as she realised it was the first time in her life somebody had made her a birthday cake.</p> <p>It helped her realise how important celebrations like this were and she told her carer she intended to help her daughter celebrate every birthday.</p>
<b>Being given a birthday present</b> 	<p>Members of the Community Committee for one of our homes pitched in to buy teenage resident, Raheed a gift voucher for his birthday.</p> <p>He was incredibly excited about receiving the gift, and immediately decided that he wanted to use it to buy himself one significant present, rather than a number of smaller items.</p>	<p>"I'd never seen Raheed so stoked; he was just so excited and jumping up and down with joy that he got this gift," recalls Claire, the Chair of the house's Community Committee.</p> <p>"It's so wonderful when you can do something for these young people that you'd usually take for granted yourself. They're just so appreciative, because they've come from an environment where they've never been given anything and where it's never been about them.</p> <p>Their expectations of humans and human interactions are unfortunately so much lower than ours, because of what they've experienced before arriving here."</p>
<b>A goodnight hug</b> 	<p>Kahlia arrived at Lighthouse during her late teens. Due to the traumatic experiences of abuse and neglect she experienced as a child, she suffered from instances of dissociation – a survival mechanism by which her brain switched itself off because it couldn't cope with the memories of what had happened to her as a child.</p> <p>During some of these dissociative moments Kahlia would 'black out' and sometimes self-harm.</p>	<p>In Kahlia's own words many years later:</p> <p>"I still remember the first day I moved into Lighthouse, I was a young girl, scared, nervous and also insecure because my life was being upheaved again. I remember my carer Vicki. As I was heading to bed for the first time in my new environment and saying goodnight, Vicki asked me if I would like a goodnight hug. This was such a foreign concept to me, so many thoughts and emotions ran through my head ..."</p>



Normal experience	Lighthouse family member's experience	Our carers' response
<b>Having photos of family and friends in your home</b> 	<p>Adam had been living in one of our homes for almost a year. Before coming to Lighthouse he had been in over 20 different care homes.</p> <p>He joined a group of other Lighthouse residents on a visit to a theme park. After the outing, he asked one of his carers if he could put some photos taken of himself with the other kids up on the wall of his room.</p>	<p>The carer was delighted that Adam had asked to put some photos of his Lighthouse family on the wall.</p> <p>It signalled a major breakthrough in that he was finally starting to trust and behave as though this house is really his home. It demonstrated that he was finally starting to feel safe and secure in a home for perhaps the first time in his life.</p>
<b>Celebrating your 18th birthday</b> 	<p>Turning 18 is a cause for celebration for most young people. However, when you are living in state-funded out-of-home care in Australia, your birthday present is being told to leave, as that is when the funding stops.</p> <p>A number of our young residents arrive at Lighthouse after having had this experience.</p>	<p>Lighthouse accepts young people up to the age of 22 and once they have been through our programs they have life membership and can access continual support.</p> <p>We also help our residents celebrate their 18th birthdays.</p>
<b>Having someone looking out for their best interests</b> 	<p>One teenage boy had never experienced kind, loving gestures from a parent figure.</p>	<p>Every day the carers in his Lighthouse home would put an extra meal in the fridge for him, in case he got hungry and went to the fridge for a snack during the night. They would always label the meal with his name on it, so he knew it had been left there for him.</p> <p>This simple gesture showed him that someone cared enough to prepare some extra food, just for him.</p>
<b>Having family there to share milestones in life</b> 	<p>With support from her Lighthouse live-in carers, Jodie graduated from Year 12. It was something she had never believed she would achieve.</p> <p>She was excited about the approaching graduation ceremony, to which many of her school friends were bringing their families.</p>	<p>Jodie invited her two Lighthouse carers, Vicki and Barry, to be her surrogate parents on graduation night and help her celebrate this important achievement.</p> <p>Jodie recalls: "We walked in as a family and sat on a table with my friends and their families and it was like normal. I spent the night dancing with family and friends, it was such a special night."</p>



# Asan's story

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## Life before Lighthouse

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When Asan's parents were killed in a war raging in his country of birth, he joined the growing ranks of other war orphans searching for a place to call home. Like many others, he ended up on his own in a refugee camp.

Eventually, Asan arrived in Australia as an asylum seeker and endured another long wait to be placed in out-of-home care. When that didn't happen, he ended up homeless and living rough in Melbourne. When he was referred to Lighthouse by another agency in 2014, he was 17 and carrying an extremely large suitcase.

## Life with Lighthouse

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Asan had been living in our Bonbeach home for about a week when his carers noted the impeccable way he made his bed each day, carefully placing the cushions in their original positions, without a wrinkle in the bedding. The truth eventually came out: he had been sleeping on the floor.

"This floor, this warm carpet, this room that has a door I can close ... is all I need," Asan told the carers. "This is the best I have ever known. You can put another person in that bed."

It took many hours of counselling to help him understand that he was worthy of sleeping in the bed – and worthy of making the best of his true potential. The large suitcase, which Asan had apparently found abandoned just before entering the home, also proved to be nothing more than a container for the usual small plastic bag of possessions.

Over time, he developed a close and trusting relationship with the full-time male carer in the home. One of Asan's ongoing issues was dealing with anxiety. He also had to overcome severe insomnia and frequently woke in panic, covered with sweat. The traumas of his past needed to be worked through with the help of the experienced psychology team at Lighthouse.

During the 18 months he lived with us, Asan found somewhere he could heal, pursue an education, and begin thinking about his future career. He made friendships, improved his English, and found mentors within the Lighthouse community.

Over time, his brilliant smile and his natural, sunny personality began to emerge. His English improved rapidly and he loved to chat. He taught the carers and his housemates how to cook dishes from his homeland and led several fishing trips to the nearby river.

One of Lighthouse's corporate supporters offered him an apprenticeship in an auto workshop, which he enthusiastically accepted. Unfortunately, he only lasted one month in the position. He began to be late to work, was tired and lethargic, and found the technical systems difficult to manage.

Asan felt that he had let everybody down and fell into a depression. After more counselling from his care team, he agreed to enroll in a professional barista course at TAFE. He excelled in the course and its practical work experience placements. As a chatty 'people person', he was ideally suited to working in hospitality and customer service, rather than being in a technical workshop.

Once a qualified barista, Asan found work in a café and grew in confidence to the point where he successfully transitioned to independent living.

## Life beyond Lighthouse

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Asan's uncle, one of his few living relatives, immigrated to Australia and established himself in Sydney. Asan moved there to live with him and soon found a permanent full-time job in a café.

He still keeps in touch with his old household at our Bonbeach house and has regular phone catch-ups with the Lighthouse Outreach team. During some of his early outreach conversations he shared his dreams about one day running his own business with a coffee cart or café. We are delighted to report that Asan's latest news is that he has just launched his own small hospitality business.







# Emily's story

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## Life before Lighthouse

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Emily never knew her father. She grew up living at home with her mother and two brothers. Her mother has serious mental health issues and was violent on and off throughout Emily's life.

When Emily was in her mid-teens, her mother kicked her brothers out of the house and was going to do the same to her daughter. However, Emily was pregnant and her mother agreed to let her stay for the duration of the pregnancy. While her mother tried to be supportive during the pregnancy, she turned on her daughter again shortly after little Aidan was born and Emily knew she had to leave home to keep him safe.

As if parenting isn't difficult enough, the homelessness system is complex and there are very few services available for young mothers and their babies. When Emily told her midwife about the unsafe situation at home, she was referred to Lighthouse and moved in immediately. Aidan was just one month old.

## Life during Lighthouse

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"When I moved into Lighthouse I felt happy, safe and secure for the first time in ages. We lived at the mums 'n' bubs home with two other girls and their children. It was mostly calm, quiet and relaxing. There were plenty of books and toys for the babies and I got along really well with the main carer there, Barb.

I had no idea what I was doing with Aidan! Barb helped me adjust to being a mum. She was like a mother to me and we are still good friends now.

I'd never really celebrated my birthday before but Barb made me a cake and everyone at the [Lighthouse] office made me feel special, even though I didn't know all of the workers that well. I was pretty happy that day.

I also had counselling with one of the Lighthouse psychologists, which I enjoyed. It's really good to have someone to talk to. Me and my partner saw her once too, before we moved in together, which was good."

## Life beyond Lighthouse

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"Lighthouse helped me find another path in life. I never grew up with a dad and neither did my partner and we really wanted to raise Aidan together, as a family. Lighthouse helped us get to the point where we could move in together and live independently.

Finding a rental property is hard, especially when it's your first one, and they gave me a reference, which helped us get accepted. They also connected us with other services who helped us get second hand furniture as well as a brand new washing machine, a fridge, everything we needed for our home. Lighthouse gave us food as well once we moved in, I was very grateful for that.

My oldest, Aidan, has just turned five, and his little brother Archie was born last year. I like thinking about the future now. I'd like to get married, own a house, travel overseas one day. I've never been on a plane before. I'd love to take the boys to Disneyland when they're older. When we do travel, I'd like the boys to be old enough to remember it.

I was able to finish Year 12 and get a certificate to work in aged care. I've now got a disability certificate as well and I want to do more study and, once the boys are a bit older, work in allied health services.

I really like Lighthouse Foundation and I wish more people knew about it. If I ever win Tattsлото I'd donate heaps to Lighthouse because I'd know it's going to a great cause and I feel bad thinking about other young kids who are homeless.

Money comes and goes; it's happiness that's important."

# Our care team

Lighthouse carers have the most difficult and the most rewarding jobs in our organisation. They focus on building compassionate, trusting relationships with and between the young people in their care, helping them to feel like they belong in the home and within the wider Lighthouse community.

Because of the live-in nature of their role, our carers usually do not have children of their own or have grown-up children who have left home.

The continuity and conduct of our carers is pivotal to the success of our therapeutic model.

They are the living embodiment of the values and beliefs of Lighthouse. We are committed to ensuring their wellbeing and keeping each of them with us for as long as possible. We therefore provide a similar level of clinical supervision and support for each of our carers as we provide for each young person in our care.

## Mikaela

### Support Carer, Richmond Lighthouse Young Parents and Babies home

Mikaela has been the support carer in our Richmond home for two and a half years.

The home has recently transitioned into housing young mothers and their babies – referred to internally as a ‘mums ‘n’ bubs home’. So Mikaela and the home’s primary carer, Ron, are now tripping over toys and learning to adapt to regularly broken sleep.



### Q: How did you come to be working as a carer with Lighthouse?

“I came to Lighthouse three and a half years ago to work as a receptionist. At the time, I wasn’t particularly committed to the idea of working with anyone long-term, but then I fell totally in love with the space and the people and the way everyone works here.

I eventually applied for the role of respite carer and started doing that as well as the receptionist job, and then dropped reception so I could become a full-time carer.

Lighthouse has been revelatory for me. It’s totally unique. For the first time in my life, it feels like all the things that I believed in my gut have been given a name and a practice.

This is an organisation devoted to teaching human connection and demonstrating how consistent love and care are so important for healing people.”







### **Q ■ What is it like working for Lighthouse?**

“I feel incredibly well supported. A lot of organisations just talk about how they support their employees, but Lighthouse actually does it really well.

They understand that, as carers, we can’t give to the kids in the way that we need to if we’re not in a good space ourselves. So we have access to constant clinical, peer and moral support.”

### **Q ■ What are the most rewarding aspects of your job?**

“When one of the kids starts to open up and chat with us for the first time; or when a young person smiles at you, when they would have found that too scary to do before; or when someone voluntarily clears away their plate after dinner without you having to ask them to do it for the 77th time.

Those subtle gestures are when you know they’re finally starting to accept this place as their home and respect you as part of that. Suddenly these positive little things start to happen and they build up. That’s when someone’s ready to begin the healing process.

I get so much from this work; it’s not just a selfless act – there is so much love and joy from coming to work every day. It’s totally humbling and inspiring and I’m so lucky to do what I do.”

### **Q ■ How do young people react when they first arrive?**

“Coming here can be a real culture shock for some of them and it’s often not a welcome one, because having people offer them love and support is so unfamiliar; it feels uncomfortable.

The young people push really hard against it a lot of the time. Half the battle is that they want so desperately to be loved, but they don’t know how to be because they haven’t been loved in the past.

They are much more at ease in the chaos and the madness that they’ve lived in before, so they often re-create that, which is when you get violent outbursts of throwing stuff and verbal abuse.

In the moments when they’re yelling and screaming, throwing things at me and calling me every name under the sun, I have to sit with that and try to remember that it’s not about me ... so much of what we do is about being the ‘safe person’ they can project their difficult pasts onto.

The young people in our home have two consistent carers and one of us is always available, 24 hours a day. There is total predictability and consistency and so they start to feel safe; they can finally breathe out and relax, and that’s when some of their trauma will start to bubble to the surface.

Hopefully, by then they will feel safe enough to deal with it here. It’s that feeling of safety that we really get right.”

## Our care team

### Q ■ What's the most difficult aspect of your job?

"The hardest thing is how personal this feels, because we're encouraged to relate and to have the kids attach to us. It's not just a job; it's a really connected experience. We're not scared of connection and attachment at Lighthouse – that's our driving force. In a lot of organisations you're not allowed to hug kids, and yet this is so vital for helping them to learn to trust and re-connect with other human beings in safe and appropriate ways.

And we don't duck the hard conversations; we're encouraged to go pretty deep and to sit with the kids while they wrestle with their feelings and memories.

It's never about avoiding anything; it's about 'holding' them in a safe space so they can work through whatever they need to in any given moment. You also have to recognise that their chronological age and their developmental age might be completely different, so instead of having a 17-year-old in your home, you have a 17-year-old with the mind and the behaviours of a 10-year-old or a 5-year-old. So it's recognising that and being really gentle and patient.

We're here with these young people for 48 or 72 hours at a time and it can be really hard. There's so much joy and love, and there's also these little people who were really hurt by their earliest attachment figures; they were taught at the beginning of their lives not to trust and they've been taught by 'the system' again and again ever since not to trust. And they come to us and we go, "Hey, you should probably trust us. And they go, What? Are you mad? Why on earth would I trust you or anyone else?"

### Q ■ So what helps these young people to start trusting you?

"It's all about consistency and making sure they are totally surrounded by love and care from people who are on the same page. When you have time for them, repeatedly, they start to maybe consider that they are worth that time. It's almost like they've had 50 experiences of people letting them down. So maybe once we've met their needs here 50 times, it will be the 51st time that makes the difference."

### Q ■ What experience have you been most affected by since working here?

"I recently had the opportunity to work with an extremely traumatised toddler and it was the most powerful example of the benefits of therapeutic care.

I've never known such terror in a little person and such an extraordinary capacity to trust despite having experienced an incredibly traumatic betrayal due to her family situation.

Working with this little girl made me realise the impact we could have if we could get to them all this early. I see so much of her in the young people who come to live in this home – it's like I got to see where it starts.

So when a young person yells at me, I don't see that any more; I see this little girl who would just cling to me in terror at night time and who would only go to sleep in the arms of our other carer. That's where they start; that's where many young people are still at when they come to us.

They are angry and they hate everyone and they are so upset with the world, as they should be. But before that they were just terrified little kids. It's horribly sad to think about what they go through before they get to us."

### Q ■ Do you have a favourite activity in the house?

"Our Sunday night family meetings are my favourite things! We use the meetings to check-in and learn more about each other, and as a mechanism for stability, predictability and routine, which is really important.

The whole idea is that we create a sense of family here. You walk into this house and you feel like people live here together. Sure, they fight about whose washing is in the stupid washing machine again, but they still care about each other..."



*"I feel more alive now than I was my entire life and I feel that I get as much out of it as the young people do ... This job is changing the person that I am. I'm becoming much more thoughtful and reflective, and I've gained a new perspective on life."*

**Maria, Lighthouse Foundation, Carer**

*"I am proud that, despite the daily challenges, we are able to provide all of our young people with a truly nurturing home and genuine care and commitment from our dedicated carers, who often remain with us long-term."*

**Susan Barton AM, Lighthouse Foundation, Founder**





# Our family homes

## What makes a house a home?

A house alone is not a home. Our houses are designed to be typical family homes in every sense of the word.

From the outside, a Lighthouse home looks like any other house in an ordinary suburban street. We follow a similar philosophy inside.

The difference between Lighthouse homes and other residential care services can be felt from the moment you walk through the front door – there is a real sense of family life. Furnishings are typical of any family home and are carefully selected to ensure a warm, inviting feel. Donations of furniture, homewares and clothing are accepted on the condition that they must be new or in excellent condition. This demonstrates to the young people that they are valued and worthy of new possessions.

Framed photos of Lighthouse family and friends are plentiful; fridges are covered with notes, certificates and appointment reminders; there's always a fruit bowl on the kitchen bench; and computers and televisions are readily accessible in communal areas.

There is always a large dining table, which serves as the central hub of the home. Meals are shared together around the table, encouraging young people to have conversations so they can learn how to be part of a family. Weekly family meetings, and meetings of the home's community committee, are also held around this table.

## No locks, bars or cameras

There are no locks on doors or bars on windows. The fridge and food cupboards are always well stocked and accessible. The young people live in the house (respecting their housemates' privacy) just as they would be able to do in a normal family home.

Each young person has their own bedroom, which they can arrange how they choose. They can put posters on the walls and add other personal touches.

This relaxed environment can be disconcerting for many new residents, who are more familiar with the constraints imposed in many other residential care settings.

Until they truly feel safe, many young people keep their belongings packed and ready for what they anticipate will be their next relocation. Our carers know when someone has finally started to settle in is when they see the first pictures going up in the room and clothes unpacked into drawers.

## Celebrating special occasions

Many of the young people at Lighthouse have never had the opportunity to celebrate their birthdays or other important occasions.

Receiving a simple birthday cake, card or present may be a first-time experience. We take great care to choose gifts that show our young people that we genuinely care about them. Celebrating academic or sporting achievements, coming together to celebrate festive rituals, and even having name labels attached to their school supplies, are important practices in a Lighthouse.

*"The other day I asked one of the young people in my house to vacuum the lounge and he looked at me with this most confused look and said that he never actually used the vacuum cleaner before. So I went through the process of showing him how to use the vacuum cleaner.*

*We go through these kinds of processes slowly with all of them, sharing basic skills like brushing teeth, or teaching them not to throw a wet towel on top of clean clothes, or that they need to wash their clothes on a regular basis and so on."*

**Priyesha, Lighthouse Foundation, Carer**



# State residential care conditions – a recent review

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## **Excerpt from the Victorian Department of Human Services standards for provision of residential care:**

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‘Services of the highest quality are required to provide children with their safety, stability and healthy development ...

CSOs [community service organisations] must ensure wherever possible, a home-like environment is created to ensure children receive nurturing and a positive care experience. The physical environment where a child resides and the material goods they are provided with have a significant impact on their physical, emotional and psychological development and wellbeing ...

The physical living environment will reflect community expectations of a ‘home’. It will be a place where children feel safe and supported.’<sup>36</sup>

## **Summary of findings after the Commission for Children and Young People visited 21 government-funded residential care units in metropolitan Melbourne and rural Victoria in February 2015:**

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‘The home environment of some residential care units visited by the Commission was deplorable, they were stark and derelict and some punitive practices were observed. Such environments do not reflect community expectations of a ‘home’, nor do they create an atmosphere where children feel safe and supported. There seems little incentive for children to stay.

Such factors are likely to contribute to children being absent from the residential care unit. Absence ... facilitates the risk of sexual abuse occurring, as children may place themselves in unsafe situations where they are at risk of sexual exploitation.

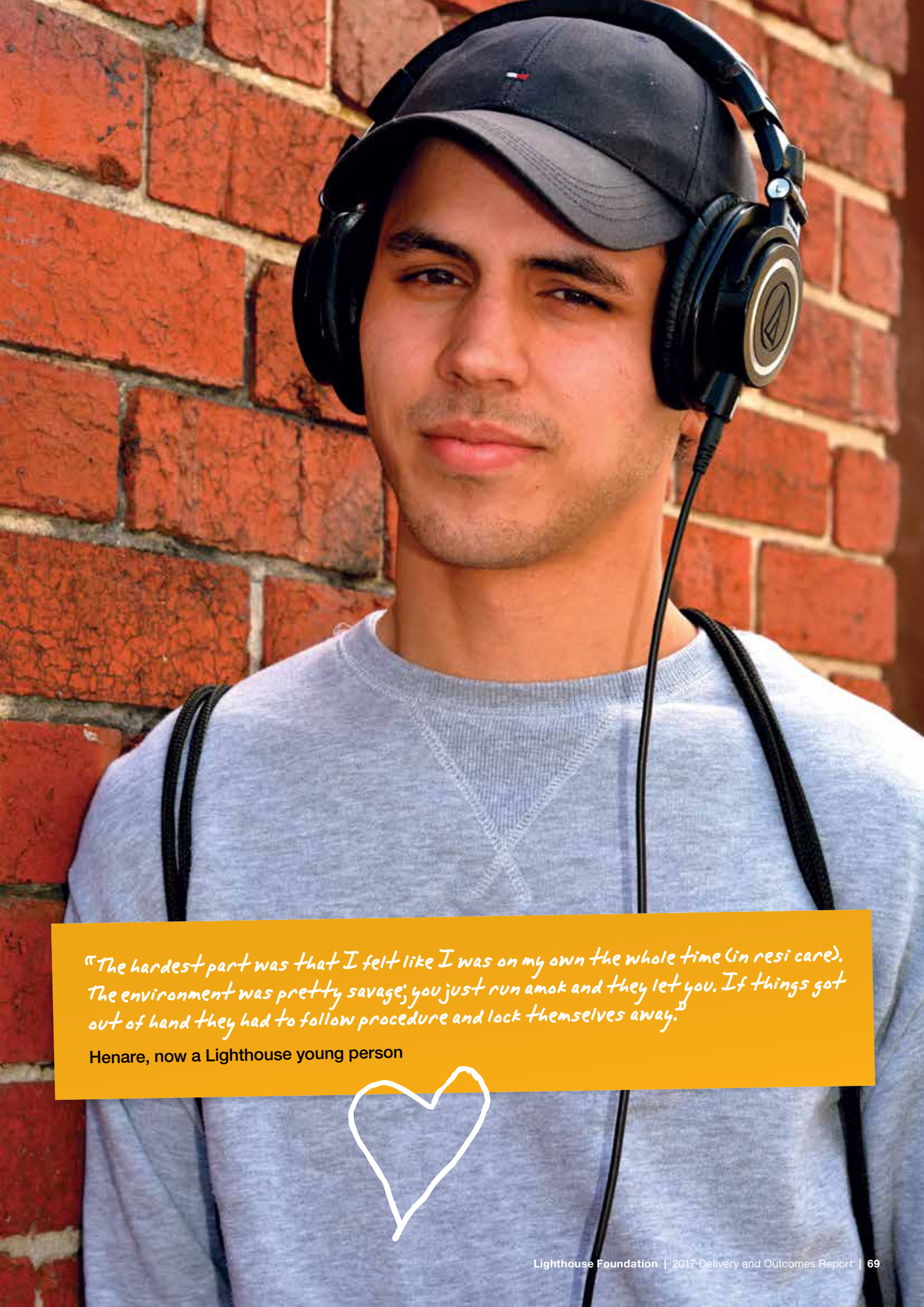
It was difficult to understand how the Department, in its role as a good parent, could allow children in its legal care to be cared for in such circumstances.

During the site visits the Commission observed:

- significant and unrepaired property damage
- widespread graffiti in bedrooms and living areas and on external walls
- properties devoid of personal touches (for example, photographs, wall art)
- unacceptably poor standards of hygiene and cleanliness in bedrooms
- violent and sexually explicit video games in bedrooms
- dirty showering and bathing areas
- staff offices sectioned away from the living areas with observation windows<sup>37</sup>

.... Of the 21 residential units visited by the Commission, only three were considered to provide an acceptable and home-like environment. The remaining 18 units could best be described as unsuitable for children to reside in.’





*"The hardest part was that I felt like I was on my own the whole time (in resi care). The environment was pretty savage; you just run amok and they let you. If things got out of hand they had to follow procedure and lock themselves away."*

Henare, now a Lighthouse young person



# Our outcomes



## Spotlight: Lighthouse outcomes at a glance



**25** years

developing and practising an effective model of therapeutic care



**\$12/\$1**

social return to the community on every \$1 spent through Lighthouse



**18-24**

average months each young person stays in one of our homes



**800+**

young people, children and babies given intensive support since 1991



**\$3.2 million**

spent on programs and services in 2016 = at least \$38.4 million value returned across participants, government, stakeholders, Lighthouse and the wider community



**8/10**

successfully transitioned into independent living



**6,000+**

people trained in trauma-informed, therapeutic care across Australia since 2013



longest period of service among our current live-in carers



Young people improving in 8 developmental outcome areas

*"Consultation with young people and other stakeholders confirmed that the intensive therapeutic model of care, practiced by Lighthouse Foundation, results in holistic and sustainable changes for young people who would otherwise be trapped in a cycle of chronic homelessness."*

SVA Consulting (2011)<sup>38</sup>



## Delivering high social return on investment

Independent analysis has shown that the Lighthouse Therapeutic Family Model of Care™ is one of the most cost-effective therapeutic programs in Australia. Leading social return on investment (SROI) consultants, Social Ventures Australia (SVA) Consulting conducted a comprehensive assessment and found that the social and economic benefits delivered by Lighthouse Foundation are significant.

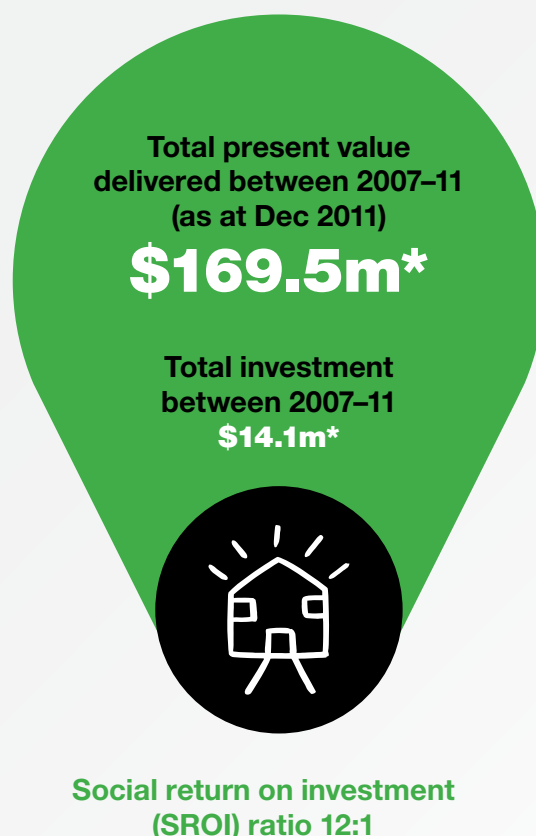
The assessment found that for every dollar invested into Lighthouse programs, more than \$12 in social value was being created.

SVA Consulting reviewed the investment made and actual outcomes achieved over 5 years, from 2007–11. It found that the 5-year investment of \$14 million created almost \$170 million of value for stakeholders, including participating young people, federal and state governments, and the wider community. In its *Lighthouse Foundation: Baseline Social Return on Investment Report (December 2011)*, SVA Consulting also states that its finding of an SROI ratio of 12:1 is a conservative one and the benefits of young people completing Lighthouse programs are likely to increase even further over time:

'Lighthouse takes young people off the path where they would end up as long-term homeless, an outcome which was highly likely in the absence of this intervention. As a result, the government is benefiting through decreased burden on homelessness services associated with these young people.'

This is a conservative measure as it does not explicitly value the costs associated with long-term prison or mental institution stays, nor the broader effect on society as a result of a lower number of young people ending up on the streets. Due to the increase in employment, there is a direct impact on the reduction in welfare payments as young people move from being tax takers to tax payers ... Lighthouse provides young people in care with the time and support they need to go back to school, or to start training or pursue another educational pathway, which in the future would result in their ability to earn higher income. As a result of higher educational attainment, the government would receive a direct benefit in the form of increased tax revenue.'<sup>39</sup>

Figure 8: Lighthouse SROI overview



Source: Adapted from SVA Consulting (2011), page 5<sup>40</sup>

\*To calculate the present value at the time the report was written, the costs and benefits incurred or generated in different time periods needed to be aggregated. For these costs and benefits to be comparable, a process called discounting was used. A discount rate of 4.25% was used, which was the Reserve Bank of Australia's cash rate as at December 2011. The figures shown here were calculated after the discount rate was applied.

### What is SROI?

SROI is an internationally recognised methodology that measures the value created for stakeholders. It provides a cost-benefit analysis that takes into account the value of social, economic, cultural and environmental outcomes created by an activity and the costs of creating them.



## Our outcomes

*"Our evidence and extensive longitudinal data collection proves that the program helps stabilise young people's lives and gradually rebuilds their skills, confidence and social supports until they are ready for healthy, independent living.*

*Over 800 young people have now moved through the program and the positive outcomes provide strong evidence that the strategy works both cost-effectively, and over the long term.*

*Independent comparative research shows that our Therapeutic Family Model of Care™ is proven to provide a significantly higher level of positive outcomes for homeless young people than state-run residential programs or non-therapeutic care programs run by other organisations."*

Simon Benjamin, Lighthouse Foundation, CEO

### Breaking the cycle of homelessness

The SVA Consulting analysis confirmed that Lighthouse's intensive support model leads to a holistic transformation of young people's lives.

It found that the vast majority of young people who complete Lighthouse programs successfully transition into independent living:

**'The changes experienced by young people at [Lighthouse] are sustainable and result in permanent exit from homelessness for 8 out of 10 young people that complete the program.'**

SVA Consulting also found that the investment was justified even if Lighthouse were to be successful with only 1 in 10 young people, which would result in an SRIO ratio of 1.90:1.<sup>41</sup>

### Measuring real outcomes

Lighthouse continually monitors the effectiveness of our therapeutic programs and practices.

We have developed the Therapeutic Outcomes Assessment (TOA) tool to measure outcomes for the young people in our care and support the creation of individual development plans.

The TOA is based on Lighthouse's therapeutic model of care and enables us to monitor outcomes across eight developmental domains:

- learning
- physical development
- emotional development
- attachment
- identity
- social development
- autonomy/life skills, and
- relational and community connectedness.

Separate TOA forms are completed at regular intervals by members of the care team, as well as by each young person, to obtain a combination of objective and subjective data. This provides vital information about the outcomes achieved for each young person as a result of participating in our programs.

The combined TOA results help Lighthouse measure how effective our therapeutic care model is in supporting the recovery process of children and young people in our care.

## Transforming individuals

An analysis of preliminary TOA data conducted in 2016 suggests that young people are improving across a large number of developmental domains as a result of participating in Lighthouse programs.

Dr Erin Holloway, a clinical psychologist and member of the Lighthouse Institute consulting team, undertook the analysis to gain a deeper insight into program outcomes and areas for improvement. Dr Holloway reviewed the overall mean scores (out of a possible 4 points) on TOA assessments completed by each young person, their carer, community care worker and psychologist.

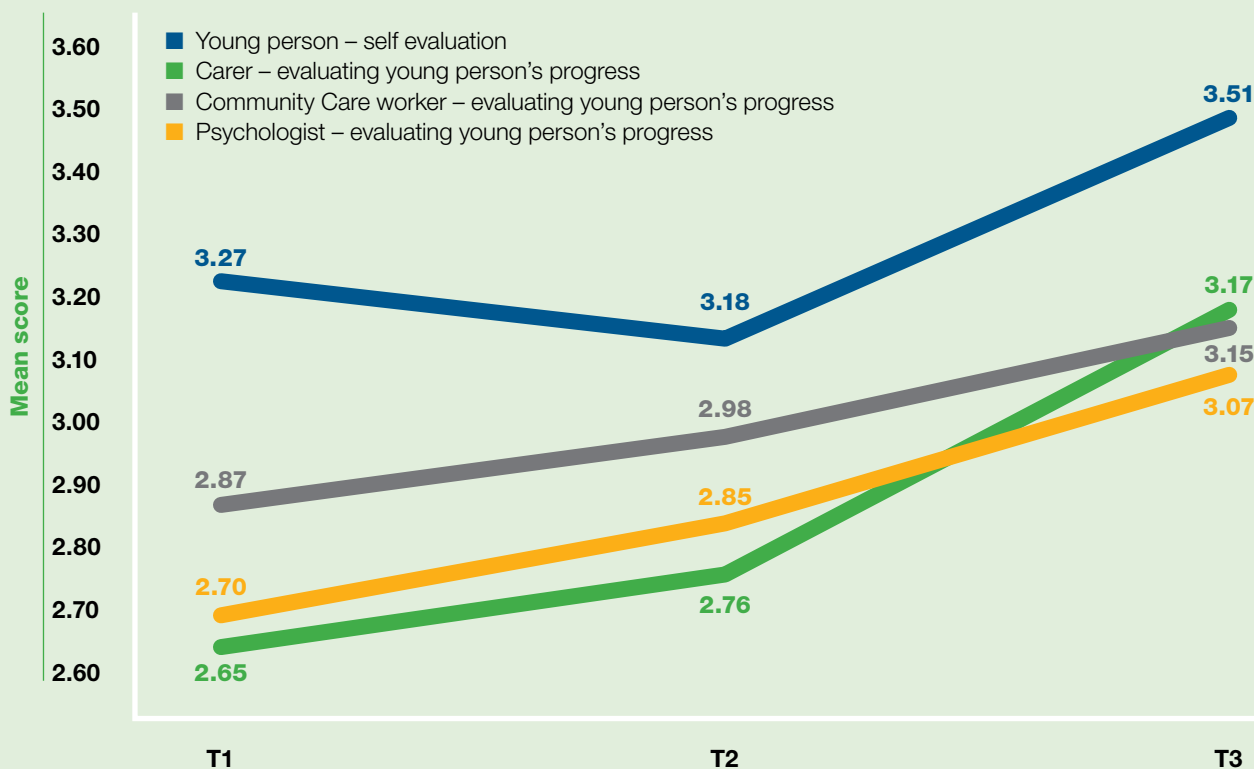
TOA forms are usually completed when a young person has been in Lighthouse's care for three months (Time 1), and then at 6-monthly intervals from then on.

TOA (Time 2) is therefore 9 months and (Time 3) is 15 months after arriving at Lighthouse.

The preliminary data (as shown in Figure 9) indicate that young people in Lighthouse's care are improving across all of the eight developmental areas. The greatest areas of improvement were for relational and community connections, and attachment.

The relatively small sample size means an in-depth analysis is not possible until further TOA records are available. Dr Holloway reported that: 'As more data is collated, it is expected that the outcomes for these young people will continue to become more pronounced.'<sup>42</sup>

Figure 9: Comparative total TOA scores across 8 developmental domains over 3–15 months



Source: Holloway, E (2016)<sup>43</sup>



## Our outcomes

### Sharing our model of therapeutic care

Interest in the practice and benefits of embedded therapeutic care is growing within the out-of-home care sector, including within government agencies.

Lighthouse has been training other organisations in trauma-informed, therapeutic care for many years. The training and consultancy side of our work continues to grow steadily as knowledge of our model of care and its effectiveness spreads throughout the sector.

Since 2013, Lighthouse Institute has provided training to approximately 6,000 practitioners across Australia. This includes being funded by the Australian Government's Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse to deliver training in every state and territory to better equip professionals working with at-risk youth. Our Institute was one of only four organisations funded by the Royal Commission to provide specialist training.

Our training sessions covered the following topics:

- preventing vicarious trauma in the workplace
- understanding grief and loss
- understanding complex trauma
- understanding psychosocial development
- understanding and working with trauma based behaviour, and
- therapeutic group processes.

We conducted 235 training sessions for the Royal Commission during 2014, reaching almost 3,000 participants from over 280 organisations across Australia. Post-training evaluation recorded a satisfaction rate of over 90% among participants.

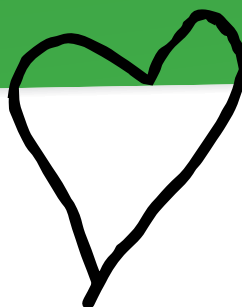
### Independent Quality Accreditation

Lighthouse is committed to continuous quality improvement (CQI). Our programs and systems management have been independently assessed and accredited by Quality Innovation Performance (QIP).

The accreditation process measures whether an organisation actively encourages and resources CQI and has formal and informal mechanisms in place to reflect on, evaluate and improve current work practices.

*"Independent quality assessment shows significant investment and commitment to building a 'community' around young people and the organisation, not only in relation to each of the 10 homes, but as the organisation as a whole."*

Quality Innovation Performance (QIP) Report (2016)





# Our funding and resources

A large number of individual donors, philanthropic trusts, corporate partners and volunteers have made it possible for Lighthouse Foundation to operate – and innovate – for the past 25 years.

One of these incredible benefactors is our life member Vicki Vidor, OAM.

Vicki was one of the first people to support Susan Barton when she decided to establish the Foundation in 1991. As well as providing generous financial support, Vicki served on the Lighthouse Board in a voluntary capacity between 1994 and 2013.

Her support and passion for Lighthouse continues to this day.

Many of our supporters have been with us for the long haul and remain deeply committed to helping us turn around the lives of homeless young people, children and babies.

With only 6% of our revenue since 1991 coming from government sources, and no direct government funding before 2010, Lighthouse has been able to develop and deliver our own model of care, featuring a fully embedded therapeutic approach.



## Spotlight: Financial performance 1997-2016



**\$47.5 million**

total revenue since 1995\*

**\$40.5 million** fundraised since 1995\*\*

**\$4.4 million** other revenue since 1995\*\*\*

**\$2.6 million (6%)** government funding since 1995



**\$3 million**

fundraised annually, on average,  
over past five years



**\$158,000**

average cost for each young  
person per year to receive live-in  
therapeutic care at Lighthouse

\*Complete financial records not available between 1991-1994.

\*\*Includes donations, fundraising events and distributions from philanthropic trusts.

\*\*\*Includes bank interest, profit from sale of assets, training and other income, licence fees and lodgings.



# Lighting the way – strategic priorities

Lighthouse is committed to ending youth homelessness by calling for a paradigm shift in the nature of services provided to young people, children and babies in Australia. We are doing this by:

## Transforming the lives of young people

- Continuing to provide specialist therapeutic care to young people, children and babies who are homeless or in need of out-of-home care.
- Making services increasingly available to more young people, children and babies who are in out-of-home care.
- Developing new services to meet the needs of young people, children and babies in our care.

## Strengthening the evidence base that underpins the delivery and outcomes of our model of therapeutic care

- Continuing to obtain independent assessments of the outcomes for young people, to improve our clinical practice and demonstrate its impact.
- Using evidence to continually drive improvements in service delivery across our organisation and others.



## Promoting evidence-based, therapeutic practice across the out-of-home care sector

- Providing research, training and consultancy services to increase the capacity of the sector.
- Advocating for improved services for young people, children and babies who require out-of-home care or homelessness services.
- Partnering with other organisations that have similar values and are pursuing therapeutic models of care, to expand the availability and quality of intensive care across the sector.

## Ensuring that Lighthouse's operations are financially stable for the long-term

- Systematising and improving our existing practices to secure greater ongoing support from the philanthropic and corporate sectors.
- Increasing Lighthouse's level of government funding while maintaining our existing high standard of therapeutic care.
- Promoting the outcomes of Lighthouse's work to secure additional resources to expand and sustain our services.
- Improving our engagement with organisations and individuals who want to make a significant difference in the lives of young Australians.

The success of our proven family-oriented therapeutic approach is lighting the way for others to follow.

**Australia's most vulnerable young people deserve nothing less.**



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A person is walking away from the camera on a mosaic path. They are wearing a white t-shirt, dark jeans, a dark beanie, and a brown messenger bag. The path is made of white tiles with colorful geometric patterns. To the left is a green wall and some plants. To the right is a yellow wall and some trees.

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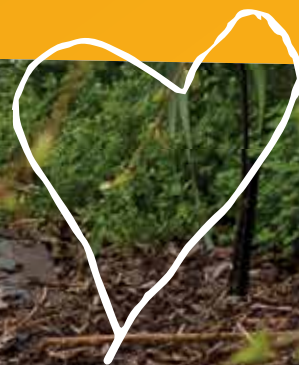
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