

A NEW PLACE TO CALL HOME

KIDS UNDER COVER
LONG-TERM STUDIO IMPACT REPORT



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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Early intervention to prevent risk of homelessness, particularly for young people, has been an area of discussion for the last three decades. According to Mackenzie (2017) this has not translated into effective policy and program development. However, one response to these discussions was developed by Kids Under Cover in the form of an accommodation program for young people.

Kids Under Cover has provided an early intervention and prevention program for young people during this same period. Until the research on which this report is based, this programme has not been examined in depth as to its efficacy in reducing the risk of homelessness for young people.

This study sought to investigate the long-term impact the Kids Under Cover Studio Program has on young people and their families. The research sought to clarify whether the long-term impact on social and educational development, future aspiration, physical and mental health and employment possibilities align with the claimed benefits of the resource. In doing so the research clarified how effective the program is for prevention of risk to homelessness for young people.

The research was undertaken on behalf of Kids Under Cover by researchers based at Swinburne University. The research used a qualitative approach. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 35 young people and/or their families who had received a Kids Under Cover Studio. Four different cohorts were identified for interview. These included:

- Those having received a studio for less than six months
- Those having received a studio for greater than six months and up to two years
- Those at the point of exiting the studio program
- Those who had exited the program for longer than two years.

The main findings of the research are:

1. YOUTH HOMELESSNESS IN AUSTRALIA

- Youth homelessness remains a problem in Australia despite significant media and policy attention over almost three decades.
- Homelessness does not necessarily mean rooflessness.
- Symptomatic circumstances of homelessness can be experienced within the boundaries of home.
- Addressing these symptomatic circumstances can have an impact on young peoples' lives.
- While difficult to predict with certainty who will become homeless, risk factors can be identified and minimised by early intervention strategies

2. IMPACT ON FAMILY RELATIONS

- The predominant discourse regarding the impact the provision of a studio had on family relations across the entire cohort was overwhelmingly positive.
- More stable family relations increased the sense of belonging and of being at home and increased the desire to remain at home.
- Risk of homelessness was ameliorated in families who participated in the research where there was risk of premature departure from home for the young person due to family relational discord.
- In the participant families where the studio had been provided for a young mother, the stability and family support this afforded should be understood as critical for identity development for mother and child.
- The loosening of familial bonds, while being difficult for a close-knit family, provides a graduated process allowing for a smoother transition to better family relations and independence.



3. IMPACT ON PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

- It is sometimes difficult to separate mental and physical health when assessing the impact of the studio provision
- The impact of the studio had been beneficial in providing health safety where a crowded household endangered medication maintenance for the young person.
- Reducing transmission of infection in crowded households can be better managed when more space is available with a studio.
- Relief from the visceral experience of crowding can be had from the allocation of a studio. This has better mental health impacts for the whole family.
- Young people with mental health issues, particularly depression, can experience dramatic improvement from studio provision.
- More insight into carers needs regarding physical and mental health pre- and post- studio installation may be required to better understand these impacts.
- ASD is a complex challenge that may require a more complex long-term response than additional space.

4. SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- The home is where the foundation can be laid for safe transition from the private to public for young people.
- Interviewees reflected a KUC studio has the potential to change a house to a home for young people and families.
- Young people and families who participated in the research consistently remarked on the studio providing a renewed sense of home leading to greater social and educational development.
- Gradual independence is encouraged by the separation of the studio from the main house.
- The space of the studio provides for privacy and a quiet place that aids study and educational achievement.
- Reducing crowding in the main residence through a studio can assist in more regular sleep and life patterns. This serves to promote social independence and educational achievement.
- Young people interviewed consistently credited the KUC studio for their developing maturity and educational re-engagement and/or progress.

5. EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND ASPIRATION

- The impact of the provision of a studio has for employment aspiration and opportunity is significant.
- This aspiration is built on the re-establishment of the relational and symbolic aspects of home that include security, safety, privacy.
- Safe entry into the public sphere of education, employment and independence is premised on the symbolic elements of home being foundational and positive.
- The additional space of the KUC studio can provide these foundational elements of home that allows development and aspiration to flourish for young people.
- Acquisition of employment for young people, who may be excluded from the labour market due to social and economic limitations, can be facilitated by the development of these foundational elements of home.
- Personal, social and community benefit is significant for those young people enabled to enter the workforce and become independent in their own 'home'.

CONCLUSION

The consensus among interviewees was that the studios provided to them by Kids Under Cover had had a significant positive effect. Those young people faced with immediate risk to homelessness or actual homelessness credited the amelioration of risk of homelessness with the provision of the studio.

The claims made by Kids Under Cover regarding the benefits of the Studio Program were generally confirmed by the research findings. Given the findings of this research project, the researchers believe this is a program with substantial beneficial outcomes to young people at risk of homelessness.

Further expansion of this programme through funding support would be an efficient and effective employment of funds.

The report is succinct and contains the words and feelings of those who participated. It is a heartening and worthwhile read.



Phone (03) 9429 7444
Freecall 1800 801 633



kuc@kuc.org.au
kuc.org.au



PO Box 5141
Burnley VIC 3121



@KidsUnderCover



kidsundercover



@KidsUnderCover



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