

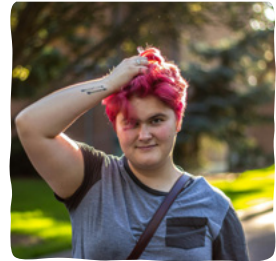
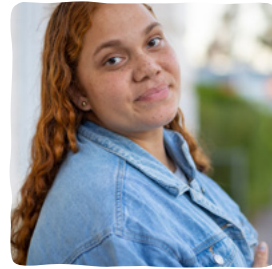
# Giving them a chance

Studio accommodation and service responses for at-risk and justice involved young people

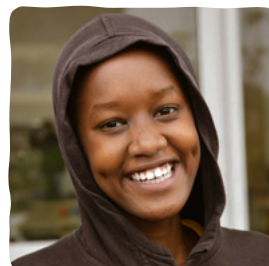
## Findings in Brief

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## Acknowledgement of Country

The authors gratefully acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands on which we live, learn, research, and write this report – the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. We pay our respects to elders past and present and future, and recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are Australia’s first storytellers, artists, communities and creators of culture. We recognise the continuing connection to the land and waters of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded. We recognise the continual harm the justice system has caused to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and hope the continuation of this research will go some way to address the inequalities and improve Aboriginal justice outcomes.

## Acknowledgements

We extend our thanks and appreciation to the young people, carers and practitioners who generously contributed their time, insights, and experiences to this research. Your willingness to share your perspectives has been invaluable, providing a richer understanding of the challenges and strengths you face. We hope, that due to your openness and willingness to share, this report will inform the growth of this program and inspire future initiatives to better support you. Thank you for your invaluable contribution.

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# Key Summary



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What We Found

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Recommendations

# What We Found

**The findings from this research support what practitioners, carers, and young people have observed: stable, youth-appropriate housing is an important foundation for positive change.** For young people involved in or at risk of entering the Youth Justice system, the Kids Under Cover Studio Program offers an environment that can support safety, connection, and development.

The studio can offer young people space to reflect, re-engage with education and employment, and strengthen relationships with family. This summary highlights key insights from the research and the studio's contribution to reducing risk behaviours and encouraging positive pathways.

**For young people involved with, or at high risk of contact with, the Youth Justice system, the Kids Under Cover Studio:**



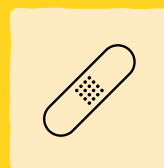
Provides the young person with a **space where they feel safe.**



Provides young people with a **space where they feel they belong.**



**Facilitates aspirational change** in the areas of employment, education, and independent living.



**It enables the repair of family relationships and assists in addressing mental health.**

In doing so, the studio program has the potential to decrease risk behaviours and in turn reduce further engagement in the Youth Justice system.

## The key findings from this research can be summarised as:

The most significant and positive finding was that the studio environment facilitated the space for a decrease in risk behaviours.

The studio offered a stable space where young people felt safe and felt they belonged.

The studios enabled young people to reflect on their future aspirations, engage in education, address mental health issues, and rebuild family relationships, essentially decreasing their risk behaviours.

The studio facilitated a space where young people could focus on their future aspirations, such as pursuing education and work.

By offering stable housing, the project directly contributed to reducing the economic vulnerability of these young individuals, who are often at risk of poverty due to their backgrounds in the justice and welfare systems.

The ability to plan for independent living and gain financial stability is a critical step towards breaking the cycle of poverty and or complex disadvantage and trauma experienced by some of the young people needing studio accommodation.

The studio facilitated the opportunity to address mental health and support the rebuilding of family relationships, which also plays a part in alleviating the broader socio-economic challenges that can lead to poverty.

The findings highlight the importance of the studio as well as the need for tailored wrap-around interventions that are adaptable to address the diverse needs of this vulnerable population.

Recommendations arising from this research (see page 9) indicate positive, achievable ways that the coordination of studio accommodation and service supports can be enhanced, to support better futures young people at risk of homelessness or re-offending.

The findings show that the Kids Under Cover Studio Program can have a positive impact in several areas. The studio space helps young people stabilise, develop positive routines, and consider possibilities for their future. It provides a degree of physical and emotional distance that can assist young people to grow, while maintaining connections with family and community. The research suggests that, if combined with tailored support, the studio can contribute to reducing risk behaviours and improving long-term wellbeing.



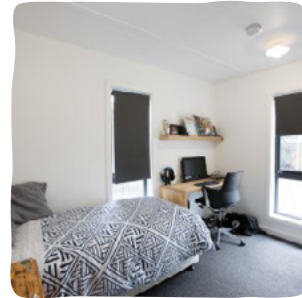
# Recommendations

Below are key summary recommendations, for a fuller outline of the recommendations please refer to Chapter 5.

## Studio design improvements

Consideration should be given to trialling some self-contained studios.

Future improvements to studio layout and space will benefit from input from young people.



## Service enhancement

Findings indicate the need for a centrally funded case coordinator, to ensure that when young people and their carers receive studio accommodation, all necessary support services are also in place, and that these are monitored and maintained to support young people to thrive.

Findings also suggest the need for additional or tailored support for those who continued to struggle.

## Program development and investment

The range of positive impacts that young people and their carers report once studios are installed are overwhelmingly positive.

Increased and ongoing evaluation of such future investment will form a critical component of any future funding.

The inclusion of lived experiences of young people and their families/carers, should inform future improvements to the studio program.

Combined with the data from the RFI Global Carers Survey data the findings indicate that ongoing investment and growth of a studio-accommodation pathway for young people at risk of ongoing or increased contact with justice systems, is warranted.



# How this Study was Conducted



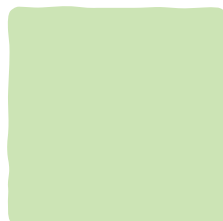
## Methodology

**In order for a comprehensive research design, we employed a mixed-methods approach for researching the impact on justice-involved youth and those at risk of future offending.**

First, a scoping review was conducted to explore existing literature on housing as a diversion or intervention for justice-involved youth. This scoping review was conducted to guide our data collection process, ensuring that our approach was well-informed by existing research and relevant frameworks. This review allowed us to identify key themes, concepts, and methodological considerations that shaped our data collection strategy and informed our understanding of the topic.

Second, surveys were administered to young people housed in a Kids Under Cover studio (n=5). Third, in-depth interviews were conducted with young people (n=3), carers (n=7), and stakeholders (n=8). While there are only a small number of interviews, which is not uncommon for research with hard-to-reach populations, the interviews offer deep, nuanced perspectives. Further details on the survey and in interview method can be found in the following sub-sections.

Given the vulnerability of those involved with the KUC program, survey and interview participants (studio occupants and carers) were first contacted by KUC representatives, who introduced the research. Those interested in participating were then contacted by the researchers. Over half of the studio occupants were reached out to by KUC, of whom 60 agreed to participate, leading to 10 interviews with carers and studio occupants and 5 survey responses. Each survey participant received a \$20 voucher as a thank you, and those who completed an interview received a \$30 voucher. Stakeholders were contacted directly by the researchers.



## Survey Method

**The survey was designed to capture quantitative data on the impact of the Kids Under Cover program from the perspective of the studio occupants. The survey aimed to capture key outcomes related to:**

01

The application process for the studio

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02

Satisfaction with the studio

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03

How the studio contributes to various aspects of participants' lives (e.g. health and wellbeing, education, employment, relationships)

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04

Their socio-demographic information

The survey questions were developed through a collaborative process that involved reviewing existing surveys and incorporating input from representatives of the Department of Justice and Community Safety Victoria and Kids Under Cover. The questions were structured to be straightforward and accessible to the target demographic, taking into account literacy levels and potential sensitivities related to justice involvement. The survey was administered online and took 10-15 minutes to complete.

Surveys, including information statement and consent forms, were distributed through the Qualtrics platform. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and consent was obtained from the parent or carer prior to obtaining separate consent from the studio occupant. Respondents were assured of the confidentiality of their responses, and no identifying information was collected to maintain privacy.

Descriptive statistics from the survey responses were analysed using the Qualtrics platform, and the data was visualised with MS Excel.





## Interview Method

The interview component of the study was designed to gather in-depth qualitative data from studio occupants, carers, and stakeholders. The interviews aimed to explore the impact of the program beyond what could be captured through surveys, delving into personal experiences, perceived benefits, and areas for program improvement. Semi-structured interview guides were developed for each group of participants, allowing for flexibility in probing specific topics while ensuring consistency across interviews.

### The interview guides with studio occupants were structured around the following themes:

Initial introduction to the studio and transition process

Experience since moving into the studio

Studio setup and personalisation

Positive aspects of the studio

Challenges faced in the studio

Autonomy and control over living conditions

Concept of home

Perceptions of the studio by others

Impact of the studio on future outlook

Future planning and aspirations

Alternative living arrangements

Neighbourhood and location suitability



The carer and stakeholder interview schedules adhered to a very similar process, ensuring consistency in approach and alignment in the exploration of relevant themes across both groups. This parallel structure facilitated a comprehensive understanding of perspectives from both carers and stakeholders, allowing for a more integrated analysis of the data.

Studio occupants were invited to participate in an interview once they had completed the survey. Carers were invited to participate separately. There were some minor deviations from this recruitment strategy.

In addition, interviews were conducted with the CEO of KUC, the KUC Head of Programs, and the KUC Studio Program Manager. This was a valuable component of this research, providing critical insight into the program's development, strategic direction, operational challenges, and implementation. These interviews provided insights into challenges faced in service delivery including logistical and administrative issues, what adaptations have been necessary, and how those affected outcomes.

Interviews were conducted over the phone. Each interview lasted between 15 to 60 minutes, with the conversation recorded and transcribed for analysis. Interviews with studio occupants were conducted in a youth-friendly manner, with language and tone adjusted to ensure comfort and understanding.

**The interview data was analysed using thematic analysis, to identify, analyse, and report on patterns within the data. The process involved the following steps:**

01

Transcripts were read and re-read to gain an initial understanding of the data.

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02

Key phrases, ideas, and concepts were coded systematically across the entire data set.

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03

Codes were grouped into broader themes that reflected the key findings of the interviews.

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04

Themes were reviewed to ensure they accurately captured the data and were relevant to the research objectives. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved through consultation with the research team.

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05

The final themes were interpreted in the context of the research questions, and connections were made between the qualitative findings and the quantitative survey data.

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06

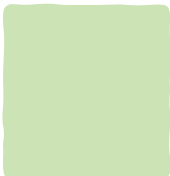
This project was approved by the Department of Justice and Community Safety, Justice Human Research Ethics Committee, CF/23/19191.

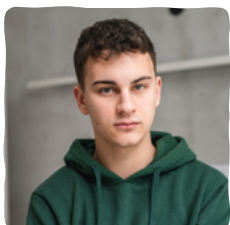
## Additional data insights

Throughout the report, additional data insights that are directly relevant to KUC Youth Justice studios, provided to the authors by KUC are included as 'pop out boxes'. This data was gathered and analysed by RFI Global – a global data and insight company for KUC, and undertaken separately from the current research, and provided to the authors in a collated form. The insights are based on 16 short survey responses provided by families/carers representing 20 young people to whom a KUC Justice studio had been provided.

Carers were asked about young people's experiences, and about their own perceptions of outcomes for young people in receipt of a studio, using both closed and open option responses shown per 'pop out'. Overall findings of the independent analysis indicate significant progress and improvement for young people's health, wellbeing, social relationships, family engagement, and safety.







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