Mark Jeffery

State of the Family 2004

ANGLIC∧RE
AUSTRALIA

Contents

Introduction

This fifth State of the Family Report examines the situation of young people in Australia today.

Over the past year, there has been a significant focus on the ageing of Australia's population and the likely impact this will have on tax payers in the future. As the number of older Australians increases rapidly, the number of children and youth is static or declining slightly.

Meanwhile, young Australians can face obstacles that call for our compassion and support.

As a Christian agency, Anglicare Australia is committed to building a just and fair society in Australia where all have an opportunity to contribute to the well being of the society as a whole. Consequently, Anglicare is deeply concerned about young Australians who are unemployed and troubled about their future.

Young Australians suffer an unemployment rate two and a half times the national average, and for every available job there are at least six unemployed people. If this situation is to change it is clear that there need to be more jobs for young Australians and young people need better education and skills to improve their chances. State of the Family 2004 examines how school retention rates can be improved, how the transition from school to work can be made easier, and what needs to be done to improve employment prospects.

Even those with education enter a more casualised workforce. Perhaps carrying a HECS debt, they face the added barrier of trying to enter an expensive housing market in an area of better employment prospects.

The Report also illustrates what Anglicare agencies are doing to assist young people, especially Indigenous and rural youth who face the added barrier of remoteness and young people experiencing homelessness.

Anglicare Australia hopes this report will contribute to a more compassionate focus on the situation of young Australians. We are grateful to Mark Jeffery for agreeing at short notice to write the report for us and thank all the Anglicare agencies who helped by telling their story.

With every blessing,

Bishop Philip Huggins
Chair, Anglicare Australia

Executive Summary

For over twelve years Australia has enjoyed a buoyant economy with record economic growth. Employment has increased and unemployment fallen. For young Australians, however, the outlook is not so buoyant.

Young Australians endure an unemployment rate two and a half times the national average. While governments have invested in a variety of programs to prepare young people for work, the reality is that there are not enough jobs. For every available job, there are at least six unemployed people.

The human costs of such high levels of unemployment are far reaching. Unemployment creates long-term hardship that limits the capacity to pay for rent, food, transport, clothes and other necessities. It can have a long lasting psychological impact including loss of identity, poor self-esteem, depression and

mental health problems. One of the key factors contributing to the labour market difficulties experienced by young people is that full time job growth in recent years has overwhelmingly benefited adults aged 25 years and over.

State of the Family 2004 examines the situation of young people in Australia today. How is the education system serving the needs of young people? Can more be done to help teenagers to stay connected with school and family? What support can be offered to help smooth the path for the transition from school to full time employment? What is needed to improve the employment prospects for young Australians? And for those who lose their connections with family and find themselves homeless, what can be done to help them? These and related questions are explored in State of the Family 2004.

A key starting point in looking at the prospects of young Australians is education. Education is the key to unlocking employment opportunities and consequently a critical strategy to avoid poverty. Thus the importance of achieving 12 years of education cannot be overstated.

By international standards, Australia is failing to provide an adequate educational foundation for young people. Less than 80% of young Australians are completing Year 12 or its equivalent. An estimated 50,000 young Australians are dropping out each year before completing Year 12, significantly increasing their chances of unemployment and long-term unemployment.

Many young people who leave school early have ceased to believe that education has anything to offer them, and find it difficult to obtain employment. The Australian community needs to facilitate this transition from school to further employment and to full-time work. The proposal from ACOSS, the Business Council of Australia and other organisations to establish a National Youth Transition Service deserves strong support. The submission from these organisations sets a target of 90% of young people actively participating in education, training and/or employment by 2009.

Anglicare and other community organisations assist in improving school retention rates through various education and support programs including working individually with students at risk of dropping out and helping to maintain strong connections with parents, family, community and school.

As major providers of foster care or alternative care for children and young people, Anglicare agencies are particularly concerned about what happens to young people when they leave care. This remains a very vulnerable time for young people who have already experienced disconnection from birth families and government responses to this transition period remain largely undeveloped.

For the past two decades, youth unemployment has remained consistently high with the rate for 15-19 year olds running at two and half times the national average and the rate for 20-24 year olds running at one and a half times the national average. Young Australians have borne the brunt of the 'fight inflation first' policies of successive governments.

Unlike twenty years ago, there are relatively few jobs available that require little or no skills. Consequently unskilled young people are much more likely to become and remain unemployed than was the case twenty years ago. Since the mid 1980s the Australian Public Service has been shrinking both absolutely and as a proportion of total employment, reducing the number of entry-level jobs available for young people. This has further limited prospective employment pathways for young people.

For those young people who choose further education the situation is little brighter. The overall number of apprenticeships in Australia increased by 109% in the latter half of the 1990s, however the growth in apprenticeships for 15-24 year olds was only 43%.

Young people are also finding it increasingly difficult to enter university. The 2004 tertiary admissions awarded entry to a record number of people into university but a record number wanting to attend

missed out. As with apprenticeships and traineeships a greater share of the available places went to older people.

For unemployed young people, Work for the Dole has become their default option to fulfill their 'mutual obligation'. While Work for the Dole participants gain valuable work experience and are benefiting from the program, the outcomes could be substantially improved if more training was incorporated in the projects than is currently allowed under Government guidelines.

Many participants in Work for the Dole want the opportunity to undertake formal training while participating in the program. Integrating such opportunities for formal accreditation as part of work experience is particularly important for those who 'learn by doing' and are more comfortable in a practical work environment than in a TAFE classroom.

Our community has supported the view that unemployed people have a 'mutual obligation' to society when they receive unemployment benefits. However, does the obligation of the community and government go beyond providing unemployment benefits? Should the unemployed be forever "prepared" in training programs or forced to participate in unpaid work experience for jobs that simply do not exist?

Nowhere is the "obligation" of the community and government towards the marginalized more sharply questioned than in the situation of Indigenous Australians. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are more than twice as likely to be unemployed as non-Indigenous Australians. Indigenous young people face additional barriers to accessing education and employment.

Programs that are available in the cities to help young people complete year 12 and to successfully access further education or find employment must also be made available in rural and remote communities.

State of the Family concludes by examining the plight of homeless. Around 100,000 Australians are homeless, including more than 36,000 young people in the age group 12 to 24.

The picture for young Australians is disturbing. Too many young Australians are not completing Year 12 and consequently are being 'lost in transit' as they move from school to further education or full time work. Those who want to continue their education face challenges in accessing university or apprenticeships and when they enter the labour market many of the full time jobs are going to older people with experience.

Unless young Australians gain a higher priority on the political agenda and a more comprehensive response is developed to the issues of school retention rates, school to work transition and job opportunities for young people, the future for many young Australians and indeed the whole economy looks unnecessarily gloomy.

As the Federal Treasurer pointed out in the Intergenerational Report of 2002, the ageing Australian population will place an intolerable tax burden on the next generation to pay for the social welfare services needed by ageing Australians. However, unless an appropriate investment is made now to ensure all young Australians have an opportunity to be productively engaged in our economy, this contribution may not be forthcoming.

More needs to be done to ensure all young
Australians are given the opportunity to
contribute to their own well being as well as
that of society as a whole.
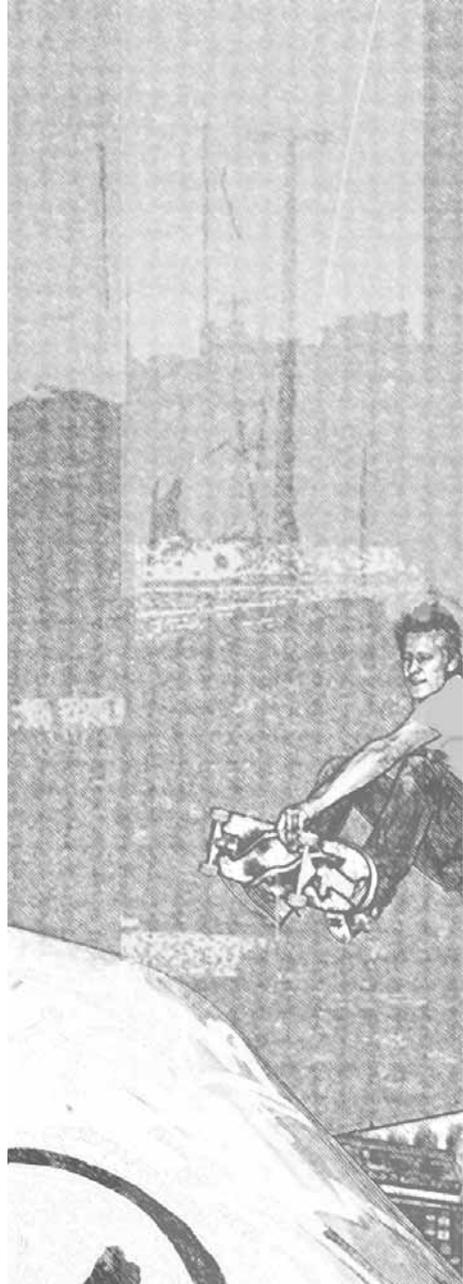
1 Missing Out:
Youth in Australia today

Australia has experienced twelve and a half years of economic growth. If current predictions prove correct, and the economy continues to grow during the next two quarters, Australia will have achieved thirteen years of sustained and continued economic growth. This is the longest period of expansion since the 1960s (OECD,2001;ABS,2003).

However, not all sectors of Australian society have benefited from this growth.

Australia's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate in February 2004 was 5.7%. Statistics released that month by the Australian Bureau of Statistics reveal 19.9% of young people are looking for full-time work. The unemployment rate for young Australians is more than three times the unemployment rate for the rest of the labour force (ABS, Feb 2004).

The official unemployment figure is only the tip of the iceberg. It underestimates the hidden unemployed (those who are available for work but are not actively seeking employment) and those who are underemployed (those who work less than 16 hours a week and want to work longer hours).

Recent comments by Mal Brough, the Minister for Employment Services, have highlighted the uncertainty surrounding the number of unemployed Australians. In January 2004, the ABS estimated there were 574,100 people unemployed. Yet the Minister told parliament in February 2004 that more than 794,000 people were part of the active case load of Job Network, the network of organisations dedicated to helping people find work (Jones, 19/2/04).

The Dusseldorp Skills Forum's annual key indicator report How Young People Are

Faring 2003 also highlights the problem. Australia is placed eighteenth out of 28 OECD countries in a ranking of the ratio of unemployed 15 to 24 year olds compared to unemployed 25 to 54 years olds. (Curtain 2003)

Australians aged 15 to 24 are more than two and a half times more likely to be unemployed than those aged 25 to 54 (Curtain 2003:22). For the 20 to 24 year old age group the figures are worse. The Dusseldorp report reveals 23% of young adults were not in full-time education or full-time employment in May 2003 (Curtain 2003: 4). In commenting on the Australian economy the OECD has noted:

International comparisons of school-to-work transition outcomes for young people also suggest that, while the employment rates for young adults are above the OECD average, and a relative high proportion of young adults obtain tertiary qualifications, teenage unemployment and early school leaving rates in Australia exceed the area wide average.

Moreover, the employment disadvantage of early school leavers, compared to their better educated counterparts, is somewhat above the OECD average. Increasing skill demands in Australia and other OECD countries have made qualifications at the upper secondary level of education (or an apprenticeship qualification) a necessary condition for the employability of young people (OECD 2003).

The ABS figures, Dusseldorp report and OECD findings all point to the fact that young people in Australian society are missing out on the benefits of Australia's extraordinary economic performance. Adding to the concern is the fact that this group of 15 to 24 year olds are expected to help carry the future economic burden in terms of taxes and other financial support for Australia's social welfare system at a time when Australia's population is ageing.

The challenge of an ageing population

The Intergenerational Report, released at the time of the 2002 Federal Budget, highlights the economic pressure that will be placed on the diminishing younger Australian work force. The report points out that Australia will experience further ageing of its population over the next four decades. Overall, the proportion of the population that is very old (over 85 years of age) is expected to triple, while the proportion in the prime working age of 15 to 64 is expected to fall.

In 2002, according to the Intergenerational Report, the aged to working-age ratio was 19%. This ratio represents the proportion of people aged over 65 compared to people of traditional labour force age 15 to 64, and is projected to rise to almost 41% by 2042. The projections in the report suggest that, if policies are not adjusted, the current generation of taxpayers is likely to impose a higher tax burden on the next generation (Costello, 2003).

Addressing the higher unemployment rates being experienced by young Australians is critical to managing the future financial burden that will come as a result of an ageing population. Greater priority must be given to overcoming the range of barriers preventing young people from participating effectively in the economic, social and cultural life of the nation. Our coherence and well being as a nation depend on attitudes, policies and programs that ensure all have an opportunity to contribute their skills and talents to improving the quality of life in Australia and all share in the benefits

of a healthy nation. Too many young Australians, especially young Indigenous Australians are currently being left out.

The human costs of unemployment are substantial and far reaching. unemployment creates long-term financial hardship so that people have difficulty paying for rent, food, bills, transport, clothes, shoes and basic costs of schooling. There are also the costs of stress and psychological impacts including loss of identity, poor self-esteem, depression and other mental health problems. At the structural level is the fact that for every available job there are at least six unemployed people. (Nevile and Nevile 2003: 30)

The profile of Australian young people

There is approximately the same number of 15 to 19 year olds as 20 to 24 year olds in Australia with approximately 1.4 million people in each group. Almost 3 million Australians are aged 15 to 24.

In the 15 to 24 cohort, there are slightly more males than females – 51% male and 49% female. Just fewer than 85,000 people in this age group are Aboriginal or Torres Starit Islander (Gibson Madden & Steer 2003).

These nearly three million Australians face an array of challenges as they prepare for one of life's major events: the move from school to full-time work or further education. How well they make the transition depends on such factors as age, educational attainment, language skills, birthplace, ethnicity, region of residence and the presence of disabilities (ILO 1998). Too many are lost in transit resulting in unemployment, homelessness, substance abuse and mental illness.

Defining young people

Terminology used in this report follows that used by the United Nations, the International Labour Organisation and the Australian Bureau of Statistics that defines youth to cover 15 to 24 year olds. This group can be divided into two cohorts: 15 to 19 year olds and 20 to 24 year olds. The terms young people or teenagers refers to the 15-19 age group and young adults for the 20-24 aged group.

The profile of all Australian young people — ABS est 30/6/2002

	Male	Female	Total
15 – 19	702,668	672,784	1,375,452
20 – 24	682,646	664,165	1,346,811
Total	1,385,314	1,336,949	2,722,263

The profile of Indigeneous Australian young people — ABS est 30/6/2001

	Male	Female	Total
15 – 19	23,526	23,053	46,579
20 – 24	18,600	18,800	37,400
Total	42,126	41,853	83,979

Anglicare agencies around Australia along with other community sector organisations work to support and empower young people and young adults who are experiencing difficulties in making the transition. For example, in the northern suburbs of Adelaide, Anglicare SA operates a program that helps young people gain life skills so they can successfully negotiate the challenges placed before them.

Jessica is 20. From the age of 13 she avoided high school because she was teased for being fat and a different colour. "No matter what my mother tried I still refused to go to school. Mum used to practically drag me to school but I still wouldn't go to class, I just sat in the front office", explains Jessica.

"I then participated in Operation Flinders which was a confidence building course in the Flinders Ranges. We spent a week doing a leadership course in abseiling. At the age of 15 I left school and went on Youth Allowance.

"I finally started to volunteer with children at Anglicare SA and went back to Adult Entry to study for a couple of years doing Literacy and Life Focus. Then I went to TAFE to study child care. I am now a permanent part time worker at a Child Care Centre where I thoroughly enjoy myself as I love working with young children", said Jessica.

Case study provided by Anglicare SA.

Financial Stress

Major financial stresses are also part of the difficulties faced by young people and young adults. A recent Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) study revealed that low income families raising a teenager could face a "poverty gap" of between $75 and $128 a week. This is due to the shortfall between the actual costs and the income received under the family payments system.

The ACOSS report showed that family assistance fails to rise in keeping with the higher cost of caring for older children and consequently many low-income families with teenage children are at risk of deeper poverty than young families. Although caring for a 16 year old costs roughly twice as much as for a three year old, the study found that family assistance for a low-income sole parent family with a teenage child actually falls when the child reaches 16.

ACOSS concluded that the shortfall in income puts pressure on these children to leave home or leave school early to obtain work and this can be detrimental to their chances of gaining skilled work and escaping poverty in the long run (ACOSS 2003).

A study by the Brotherhood of St Laurence further illustrates the financial stress felt by families coming from a low income background. It reveals that families with low incomes are often unable to break free from financial hardship. Their children are also trapped. This has an impact not only on the child's schooling but also their life chances.

Eleven plus: life chances and family income released in 2003, is the most recent report of the Brotherhood of St Laurence's Life Chances Study. It examines the lives of 142 children aged 11 and 12 who have been part of a longitudinal study since they were infants.

A key finding is that three quarters (74%) of children who were in low-income families when they were six months old were still in low-income families aged 11 and 12. While some families were able to increase their income, many children were living their entire childhoods in financial hardship. The long-term low-income families that took part in the study included a high proportion of sole parent families, immigrant and refugee parents with limited English, parents with little formal education, and families with large numbers of children.

In this chapter we have seen the ways in which younger Australians are missing out in contemporary Australia. They are missing out in full labour market participation, economically and financially. The social ramifications of this are far reaching and will be explored in the following chapters.

Chapter Two identifies that the key to opportunity in life is education. The importance of providing young people with access to a minimum 12 years of school education cannot be overstated. Anglicare agencies around the country are rising to the challenge of assisting young people to complete twelve years of schooling – against all odds. The next chapter focuses on this challenge and some of the solutions adopted by Anglicare agencies throughout Australia.
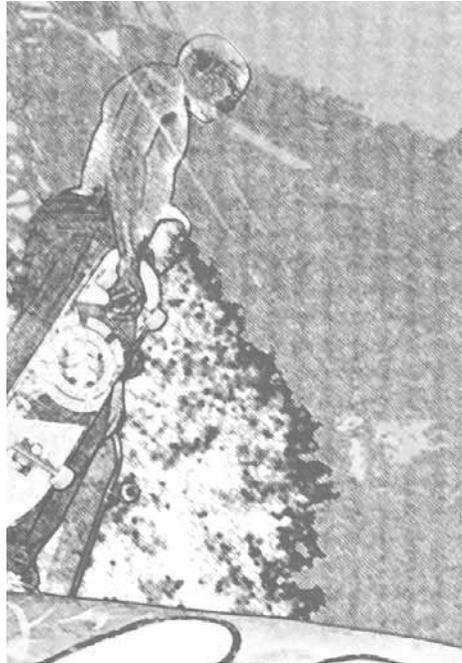
2 Education:
The foundation for life opportunities

Education is the key to unlocking employment opportunities. Consequently it is a crucial path out of poverty. At the beginning of this year, education re-emerged centre stage in Australia's economic and social debate and promises to be a major issue in the forthcoming federal election.

As a wealthy country Australia performs poorly in the school completion stakes when compared with other industrialized countries of the OECD. At present an estimated 50,000 young Australians each year are not achieving Year 12 or an equivalent qualification.

Less than 80% of young Australians are achieving the Year 12 or equivalent qualification through school or post-school vocational education and training. This compares to 84% in France, 88% in Canada and the USA, 91% in Germany and 94% in Japan. Completion rates over the past decade have plateaued in Australia. (ACOSS et al, 2003)

According to Australian Social Trends 2002, the Year 12 retention rate in 2001 was 68.1% for males and 79.1% for females (ABS 2002). Approximately 52% of all Year 11 and 12 students are female. Over the past decade, school retention rates have remained fairly static despite a substantial improvement over the previous ten years.

At the start of the 1980s, just 35% of school students were continuing on to Year 12. By 1992, this figure had more than doubled to 77%, a striking increase in school retention rates. However, since then growth has stalled and there are signs of a decline. Figure 2 shows the excellent progress made during the 1980s and underlines the challenge to again lift retention rates.

Figure 1 Trend in retention rates to Year 12
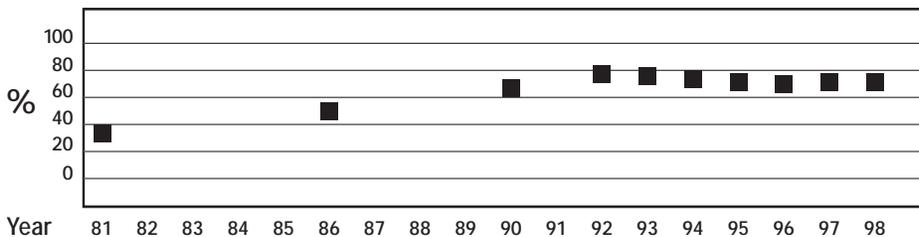
Data source: Ainley(1998 Table 1) and ABS Schools 1998, Cat. no. 4221.0.0

Completing year 12 is critical to the employment prospects of younger Australians. The Report, *Young Persons' Education, Training and Employment Outcomes with Special Reference to Early School Leavers* commissioned by the Business Council of Australia highlight this:

• Each year about 270,000 young people leave school;

• Each year about one third of these young people leave school before completing year 12 at school;

• Each year about one third of those who leave school before completing year 12 will go on to some other form of education and training; and

• Each year about two thirds of those who leave school before completing year 12 will not be in education and training. They are usually unemployed or employed in casual and short-term arrangements. Others are engaged in a range of duties including family duties.

The connection between education and unemployment is strong. Those with a low education are more likely to be unemployed and more likely to be unemployed for longer periods. In 2000, over half of 15 to 24 year olds who had been unemployed for two years or more did not finish year 12 (ABS 2000).

Break the Cycle

Anglicare Australia's Break the Cycle campaign aims to halve the number of children in jobless families by 2008. The education brief for the campaign argues:

• Education is a crucial path out of poverty. A good education develops personal strengths and skills, self-esteem and job-related skills and life skills.

It increases a person's ability to access health and welfare services.

• The last decade has seen a significant growth in the number of students enrolled in higher education institutions. While this indicates greater access to higher education the distribution of access has remained inequitable and for some groups has become more so. From 1989 to 1999 the proportion of students from low socio-economic areas decreased as did the proportion of students from rural and isolated areas (Kertesz and Hayles 2003).

• High rates of failure among poor students, both at school and in the struggle for tertiary entrance tend to depress aspirations for university thus partly reserving higher education to upper socio-economic status groups through a process of discouragement and self-exclusion (Kertesz and Hayles 2003 and Teese 2000).

• Early school leavers are less likely to acquire both basic literacy and advanced literacy and unless they enter higher education at a later time they are forever cut off from the skills, knowledge and certificates acquired at university that confer entry to a wide range of occupations and social roles (Marginson 2002).

Increased employment success is one outcome of improved school retention. Other gains from an improvement in school and training completion rates are likely to include improved health and reduced reliance on welfare services. A reduction in crime is another effect. The NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics concludes:

elimination of long term unemployment among males 15-24 by direct job creation would result in close to a 7% reduction in property crime in NSW. Better still, if these individuals continued in

formal education to the end of senior high school (increasing school retention by an extra 7,000 individuals) the reduction in break, enter and steal over the course of a year would amount to almost 15% Chapman and Weatherburn 2002).

Barriers to education

The reasons for young people leaving school vary. They include disaffection with the system or a sense of just not fitting, limitation of skills especially literacy and numeracy, and a lack of flexibility in how the formal school system can respond to the learning needs of the individual student. Low income and location are also reasons for leaving school - many school leavers come from lower socio economic backgrounds and are located in regional and rural locations.

The *Barriers to Participation 2003* report further reveals the inequality of access for people from a lower socio-economic background. It looks at financial, educational and technological barriers as well as attitudes. A positive attitude to learning was seen to be crucial in achieving education success and there was a strong link between parents educational level and student's positive attitude towards school and learning (Zappalà 2003:12).

One of the major challenges to improving school retention rates is working with young people who have withdrawn or been excluded from secondary education. In Adelaide, Anglicare SA through a program called *Evolution* is helping adolescents in the care system to re-enter school. The day option and reintegration program specifically caters for young people under the care of the State that have either been excluded, suspended or are refusing to attend school.

The program provides an environment that is supportive, educational and active in assisting re-entry to school. The goal of *Evolution* is to work in close partnership with other agencies to identify and remove barriers at school or home that hinder attendance and success at school.

Evolution has implemented a number of participation tools and a policy framework to assist in developing avenues for listening, consulting, including, and empowering young people. It provides a raft of educational and life skill activities to achieve the program deliverables and has been running for two years providing assistance to over 120 young people.

Brian first attended Evolution in November 2002 when he was 14. After attending several secondary schools and being asked to leave each of them, Brian had run out of educational options.

When enrolling in Evolution, his social worker said Brian had demonstrated violent and sexual abuse behaviours in the past and we would like him to work on socialisation skills and to maintain basic educational skills to enable re-entry to mainstream schooling…

In mid 2003 Brian wrote,

Evolution has helped me with my learning after I pulled out of going to school. The staff have done a lot to help me over the time I have been here. They have helped me to continue my education by providing my own study room and a phone for my lessons with Open Access.

They have helped me learn more about joining the Police and I've been to Centrelink's Job Information Centre. I've also

done some work experience in community service. I'm getting really good at playing guitar and one of the teachers helps me. Evolution is good and the staff are always trying to make a difference.

After attending Evolution daily Brian enrolled in a mainstream school and commenced year 11 in January this year.

Case study provided by Anglicare SA.

The Anglicare SA experience underlines the importance of helping young people who are at risk of discontinuing education, and the value of case-by-case support. Funding for the specialist program is provided through a mixture of fees derived from the state government and a grant from the Telstra Foundation. The program has had profound results for an at risk group of young people.

Anglicare Canberra & Goulburn has also found that success comes with a case-by-case approach that empowers a young person to make decisions and take control of his/her life, education and training circumstances.

The Anglicare Canberra & Goulburn Youth Education Program (YEP) is an alternative education program that identifies and addresses the individual needs of students in a supportive environment. Students work on areas such as literacy and numeracy through to gaining accredited Year 10 and 12 Certificates.

The program is successful because it takes a holistic approach to young people and engages them in identifying educational goals and personal support needs. YEP provides in-house support to help deal with issues that arise. Discussing, finding

solutions and receiving support to deal with complex issues makes it possible for young people to concentrate on the task at hand – learning to read, improving numeracy and discovering learning skills.

The learning process within YEP is flexible and at the pace that best suits the person. Allowing them to control the outcomes and development allows them to feel responsible and understand that they control the efforts they put in and the rewards they reap.

YEP caters for young people from Indigenous, culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds by offering a supportive environment that embraces and supports any exploration they wish to undertake. It helps young people work towards the Certificate of General Education for Adults (CGEA). The CGEA has effectively been implemented into YEP and the first round of young people graduated in December 2003.

Education: the first base to employment

Nearly 20% of all young people do not even make it past the first base of completing year 12. Addressing the specific needs of this large minority is crucial to ensuring a successful educational foundation. Without getting past this first base it is increasingly difficult to proceed to further education, training and ultimately full labour force participation.

The challenge to increase year 12 completion rates has been taken up by ACOSS, the Business Council of Australia and seven other national peak associations in a submission to the Government calling for a comprehensive National Youth Transition Service to be funded for five years. (ACOSS et al 2003). The submission notes that 50,000 young Australians are not achieving Year 12 each year. Yet a

substantial body of research and experience has clearly demonstrated that for nearly all of these young people the barriers to participation are surmountable within a comparatively short time.

The ACOSS / Business Council of Australia submission sets a target of 90% of young people actively participating in education, training and/or employment by 2009. The submission concludes that the long-term macro-economic benefit in 2020 would be a boost to the GDP of about 0.28% or $1.8 billion in today's terms. The benefits stand in sharp contrast to the high costs associated with the continuing comparatively low levels of secondary school completion. (ACOSS et al 2003)

The case for Government support for the proposed National Youth Transition Service as outlined in the submission to the Federal Treasurer, Peter Costello is convincing. The submission argues that to lift youth participation in education, training and/or employment would significantly enhance Australia's economic performance in addition to any personal or social benefit. Anglicare shares the view that action on this issue is long overdue.

This chapter of State of the Family 2004 has focused on the important role school and education play in the life of a young person or young adult. Education has a life long impact determining life's opportunities and outcomes. The link between year 12 completion, training and labour force success is strong. However, there is a growing inequality between those who are able to negotiate this school-to-work transition path and those who are not.

Chapter Three explores the vital connections between parents, family, school and communities, with Chapter Four then looking in more detail at the transition path for young Australians leaving school. It will investigate the problems with the misguided assumption that successful school education will lead to full time employment. The Dusseldorp Skills Forum has identified that education is an important indicator, but not a guarantee, of an individual's capacity to compete in demanding labour markets (Curtain 2003:23). The more important factor is managing the school to work transition process.

3 Vital Connections:
Parents, family, school and community

There is one common factor in the lives of young people who successfully handle the challenges they face: their connections with parents, family, school and community.

These links are found to be vital in helping with the transition from school to work and maintaining post-secondary education or employment success. Overall, the greater number of healthy and positive links a young person or adult has, the less likely they are to fall into economic and social poverty. Their chances are remarkably improved with strong, positive and healthy connections to parents, family, school and community.

Within contemporary Australia there exists a complex variety of families and family situations. Connections with family include healthy and positive relations with one or both parents, with step-parent, parents of blended families or with foster parents.

Constructive family connections can also extend beyond the nuclear family. State of the Family 2001 highlighted the important role many grandparents play in supporting children. In many cases they have become the primary care giver. (Nevile 2001)

When families break down, young people often experience a change in their accommodation. This can sometimes be a result of their own choice. But often the change is not of their free will and is forced upon them as a consequence of decisions made by others.

When young people leave what has been their family home for many years, some will stay with friends, many will have to take up an unstable form of accommodation while others experience the most severe form of homelessness. This extreme homelessness includes living on the streets, in parks, alleyways, industrial rubbish bins and the like.

We examine homelessness in all its forms in Chapter Six. This chapter focuses on the school to work transition, focusing particularly on the specific experiences of young people under the care of the state.

Young people leaving foster care.

Children need foster care for many reasons. It can be as simple as short term parental illness or as complex as the unemployment and financial hardship facing their family. While for other children, the issue is serious abuse or neglect. There are about 20,000 children in such circumstances across the nation, unable to live at home with their own families (AIHW, 2002).

The provision of foster care or alternative care is a priority program for many Anglicare agencies around Australia. For example, in Victoria, Anglicare provides care to an average of 500 children each night while over the border in South Australia Anglicare supports around 650 children. In Southern Queensland on any one night, Anglicare assists 17 children in residential care and 252 in foster care and 4 children in intensive family based care (intensive foster care). In Western Australia, Tasmania and the ACT Anglicare member agencies provide residential care for children and young people.

Young people in care are extremely likely to experience interruption in their life on a large scale. Disruption to family links is inherent in moving into care with a foster family. Moving into foster care accommodation usually means changing location and, consequently, schools. These changes in family, location and school mean significant disruption and often the severing of strong and positive links with community and friends.

What happens when they leave care is a major concern for Anglicare. For the majority of children leaving foster or out-of-home care the reassurance of a secure base is missing. For young people leaving state care there is an extremely high risk of losing the significant support networks that are part of positive connections. Many programs run by Anglicare agencies have a particular focus in helping young people who have lost this support and connection with family and community.

For many young people leaving care, the effects of abuse and neglect as well as dislocation from family, community and peers is profound. These effects contribute to significant difficulties in functioniong positively in mainstream education, employment and training opportunities. Even specialist government programs are often unable to assist these young people effectively.

Without adequate support many young people in care fall further behind in their literacy and numeracy skills, their self-esteem diminishes and they have considerable difficulties accessing and maintaining mainstream education. (Tsingas, 2004: 12)

For example, over 50% of students in residential care have below average age levels in literacy, numeracy and social skills as well as lower emotional, personal and behavioural development. (Cavanagh 1995, de Lemos 1997). Yet less than 10% of students in residential care received additional education support (Cavanagh 1995).

In Melbourne, Anglicare Victoria's Youth Education Support Services (YESS) program is producing positive results. YESS is based in the northern suburbs and helps young people aged 15 to 25 with their pathway to employment and training. The program

engages young people on a case-by-case basis. The case management approach means young people receive a service that fits and meets their specific needs and fulfills their personal goals.

It primarily focuses on the high needs of those young people in out-of-home care who need a significant degree of support to engage them in education or training. The support it provides is very much a first step towards stability and helps them provide a sense of the future for the young people it works with.

Gary was 14 when placed in a residential care program for adolescents who are at high risk in terms of their safety. Gary had been experiencing extensive periods with no school involvement.

After settling into his new home, the Anglicare YESS program helped Gary look for an education or training environment option which would best suit his needs. By the time he turned 15, Gary's behaviour had settled down. He was able and ready to move into a new accommodation placement living with a family.

He found a suitable training program and started a course at the local TAFE. Unfortunately the placement with the new family didn't work out. Gary moved back into a residential care unit staffed on a 24 hour basis.

The YESS program supported Gary through the move and helped him continue his TAFE course. When he moved yet again and his TAFE participation dropped off YESS provided continued support that resulted in him returning to TAFE.

At 16 Gary proudly completed his course.

Case study provided by Anglicare Victoria.

The Catering for the Community program is another Anglicare Victoria program. It operates in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne and offers accommodation and support services for young people and their families. These include general counselling, drug accommodation and family support as well employment and training services.

In this context of support, young people who are at risk of leaving the education system, or who have left school early, are given opportunities to gain work skills and experience in the hospitality industry. Training is provided in advanced food preparation, occupational health and safety, food presentation and food service. Participants are given the opportunity to display and prove their skills at local community functions.

The course positively promotes community contribution with local businesses supporting the scheme and playing a vital role in tackling youth unemployment in the region. The success of the program lies in skilled staff engaging young people and convincing them they will gain from the course. It also provides non-traditional models of learning that are tailored to the needs of the young person themselves.

Through directly catering for the public, young people are linking and reconnecting with their community, therefore effecting real and significant long term social change.

Meeting the transitional needs of young people leaving foster care is the focus of Leaving Care and After Care Support Service established by St Luke's Anglicare in Bendigo with support from the Colonial Foundation. The service targets young people (16-18 years) who are leaving out of home care and facing limited housing and support options. These young people are moving away from previous supports and

the service aims to bridge the gap to independence.

The program includes practical and material support in finding housing options and the development of independent living skills. Key principles underlying the service are that the process of leaving care should reflect normal developmental stages and needs of young people and that access to housing for young people is a right. After care planning for young people leaving care should strengthen links with family and community.

Healthy and positive links with family are vitally important if a young person is to make a successful transition when leaving care. If teenagers leaving care are to make a successful transition from school to full-time work a sustained and consistent connection is important during the later stages of care and for a significant time period after care.

Problems when leaving care

Young people leaving foster care face many additional barriers in their transition from school to employment. A recent study commissioned by The Children's Foundation (Carter, 2002) revealed that young people leaving care are burdened with:

• The harms and damage inflicted before entering care;

• Poor educational attachment and achievement;

• Further risks beyond care for those who have lost contact with their birth family, or where no attachment has been formed with foster carers or other reliable interested adult support;

• Lack of active assistance while in care to build protections against risk which are the foundations of youth resilience.

Monash University researcher Philip Mendes has highlighted the greater difficulties faced by young people leaving foster care.

Young people leaving state care are arguably one of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in society. Compared to most young people they have numerous barriers to accessing educational, employment and other developmental and transitional opportunities.

Firstly many have experienced and are still recovering from considerable physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect prior to entering care. Secondly many young people have experienced inadequacies in state care including systems abuse.

Thirdly many care leavers can call on little, if any, direct family support or other community networks to ease their movement to independent living. In addition to these major disadvantages many state wards experience a sudden and abrupt end at 16 to 18 years of age to the formal support networks of state care (Mendes 2002: 51).

Young people leaving care face a greater risk of homelessness, drug or alcohol abuse, poor mental health, lower education, employment deficits, poor social support systems, juvenile prostitution, early parenthood and crime.

In some states, care for young people is mandated only up to the age of 18. Once the young person turns 18, the

support defined in legislation is no longer available. Younger people either drift into the adult welfare system that offers minimal educational assistance and support or they find themselves further isolated from participation and access.

Sydney Anglicare has sought to fill the gap in education and training provision for teenagers experiencing foster-care placement breakdown by providing long-term accommodation and support for up to five 12 to 18 year olds.

Teenagers in the Paul Street Adolescent Program of Anglicare Sydney often have mental health problems or severe behavioural issues as a result of their traumatic and fragmented upbringings. For these young people it is difficult to find and maintain foster-care placements or for them to succeed in a mainstream school environment.

The Paul Street program has worked with a small number of youth whose behavioural issues are so severe they have been excluded not only from the mainstream high school system but the Department of Education's special schools as well. Yet, at fourteen or fifteen, these teenagers are too young to be in a post-school education program and they are also too young to find work. Anglicare's response has been to enroll the young people in distance education and provide an education support worker.

Youth workers and caseworkers work closely with schools and colleges to ensure young people with challenging behaviours continue to have education opportunities. In some instances youth-workers have provided behaviour management in the classroom. In extreme situations Anglicare has employed a teacher to implement

an individual education plan in a one to one setting.

The Paul Street team has recently developed a life skills assessment tool and program. The program gives young people a range of skills to make them more employable and more likely to be engaged in stable employment. These include self-care and hygiene, anger management, communication skills, time management and budgeting.

Sam's childhood had been marked with constant change and upheaval. From an early age he had been deprived of the loving guidance of a parental figure. At seven he was placed in out-of home care by the Department of Community Services.

As he entered his teens Sam had been with the same foster family for some years and he felt he had really found a family at last. But when 14, the relationship he had developed with his foster-parents started to break down and soon after failed.

Angry and bitter at the way he had been treated, Sam became locked in a cycle of self-harm and anti-social behaviour.

Sam was referred to the Paul Street Adolescent Program where an educational psychologist assessed him and the Anglicare workers developed a tailor-made education program. Sam spent one year with the program and has now secured an apprenticeship with a large Australian company.

Case study provided by Anglicare Sydney.

When the system breaks down

For many young Australians when their family, school or community connections break down, their self esteem is undermined and participation in school takes a dive. Reconnecting young people with school is a slow and challenging process. Anglicare agencies in Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Darwin, News South Wales Central Coast and elsewhere work with young people to rebuild and re-establish their connections with parents, families and school and community often with assistance from the Reconnect program. Further examples of Reconnect programs are included in Chapter Five.

Reconnect is an early intervention program for young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. It's a Federal Government initiative that works with young people and their families and is designed to address the problem of youth homelessness. The program works on an individual case by case basis (FaCS 2004a).

While the focus of Reconnect is primarily on addressing homelessness, the school is often used as the place for intervention. Consequently, Reconnect has had a huge impact on school retention rates for this particularly vulnerable group of young people. A recent review of Reconnect programs across the nation found that they had a 75 per cent success rate in ensuring homeless young people stayed in school (Chamberlain& Mackenzie, 2001).

In the Playford region of northern Adelaide, Anglicare SA's Reconnect program works collaboratively with local high schools, TAFE, a number of government programs and other agencies to help disengaged young people aged 16 to 18 years to re-enter the school/training system. This program has enabled students to develop skills and strategies to build their own resilience to traumatic events. Many young people have developed goals and re-entered education as a result of their participation.

Peter is 17. He and his mother approached Reconnect due to major conflict in the home. Peter was using drugs and had been in a car crash as a result. He was not attending school, had lost his job and was not attending recreational activities. There were many arguments at home which led to major tension. After attending mediation, the family decided Peter should leave home. Peter is now renting, studying year 12, playing soccer and re-establishing a relationship with his family.

Kelly is 18. She and her mother approached Anglicare SA because of conflict at home. Kelly was attending school irregularly and getting in trouble with the police. Kelly had recently disclosed sexual abuse.

Kelly and her mother attended counselling and mediation that led to the decision that Kelly should leave home. Kelly is renting and continuing to get support from Reconnect to deal with her past abuse and court issues.

Case study provided by Anglicare SA.

In the Hobart region of Tasmania, Anglicare Southern Youth Services (ASYS) provides a range of accommodation services to young people including emergency accommodation through to long term community placements. Many of the young people accessing these services are not

engaged with education and have little or no family support. Through the Compass program Anglicare Tasmania assists young people to increase their level of engagement with education, increase their literacy, numeracy and general social skills and to increase the opportunities for young people to form positive relationships with adults.

The program focuses on young people between 13 and 18 years of age. Many of those assisted have histories of poor attendance in school, behavioural problems at school and little or no family support. Volunteers are recruited and trained to establish and maintain an on-going relationship with the young person. Over time the focus of the program has concentrated on mentoring and developing relationships with adults. Young people and mentors have participated in a number of different activities, including go-karting, sport and tutoring. Compass also aims to strengthen the opportunities for young people in terms of alternative education options, future training and the development of life skills.

In Cabramatta in south-western Sydney, Anglicare Migrant Services runs a Reconnect program particularly aimed at Indochinese young people at risk of homelessness. Staff members are currently trialing a shared case management model so that Reconnect clients can also work on educational and employment needs through Anglicare Migrant Services Job Placement Employment and Training (JPET) program. This is a significant development because Anglicare workers have found that conflict between Indochinese parents and their teenage children is largely the result of the young person's disengagement from school.

For Indochinese Australian families disengagement from school is a strong factor in family conflict and breakdown. These parents place a high value on educational attainment and have often made great sacrifices to get their children an education.

Kim was 17 and living in a caravan with her boyfriend's family when that relationship began to collapse. As a young child she was removed from her father's care soon after her mother died.

After meeting with the Anglicare Reconnect worker, Kim decided that she would like to try mediation with her father with a view to moving back home. The worker contacted him to see if he would be willing to do this. He was. An appointment was made for them to come to the office. Kim and her father attended two mediation sessions.

There was a lot of good feeling between Kim and her father and they made a commitment to spend regular quality time together. It was agreed, however, that it would be unwise for them to try to live together again.

The Reconnect worker contacted Centrelink and asked for a re-assessment of Kim's failed application for Youth Allowance taking into account additional information the Reconnect worker was now able to provide. Kim was granted the allowance and the worker helped her find long-term supported accommodation.

Having secured stable accommodation and begun to re-build her relationship with her father Kim decided she was ready to work on education and employment goals. The Reconnect worker explained the JPET

program to Kim and introduced one of the JPET workers to her.

The JPET worker took over as Kim's primary worker and assisted her to enroll in a local hospitality training café run by the Salvation Army. She completed the course with flying colours.

Case study provided by Anglicare Sydney.

For young people leaving care, there are special needs. In so much as these children have been placed in care by the State, governments have a responsibility to ensure that any potential harms experienced by children before entering care and within care have been and will be minimized for young people leaving care. (Carter, 2002; 21) Most importantly, a leaving care plan needs to be developed and should be developed at entry to care and updated regularly. Anglicare calls for a more comprehensive approach by Governments in cooperation with the caring agencies to planning and care for young people leaving care.

There are many factors and issues that influence the degree of success a young person or young adult will experience. Much attention is placed on education, economic welfare and material resources. However, as shown in this chapter, a successful transition from school to work and higher education relies heavily on strong connections with parents, family, and the wider community. Continued and increased government support is essential to helping those young people whose connections and links with education, school, family and community have broken down.

4 The Rocky Road:
# Finding the path from school to work

The Achilles heel of the Australian labour market is youth unemployment. Australians aged 15 to 24 have over two and a half times the unemployment level recorded for adults aged 25 to 54. (Curtain, 2003) Figure 3 shows how these various rates of unemployment have persisted over the past two decades through recession and recovery. When the unemployment rate rises, the gap between youth and average unemployment rates widens.

Since the mid 1970s Australian governments have adopted a fight inflation first strategy and unemployment has been used as the key instrument in the fight against inflation (Mitchell 2001). Young Australians have borne the brunt of this Federal economic policy.

Young Australians face many challenges as they make the transition from school to further education and training or the workforce. For many the transition from school to work is increasingly difficult. The complexity of today's society, a declining youth labour market and the limited demand for unskilled workers are three issues that make the transition particularly difficult.

Figure 3 Selected unemployment Rates, Australia, August 1982-2001
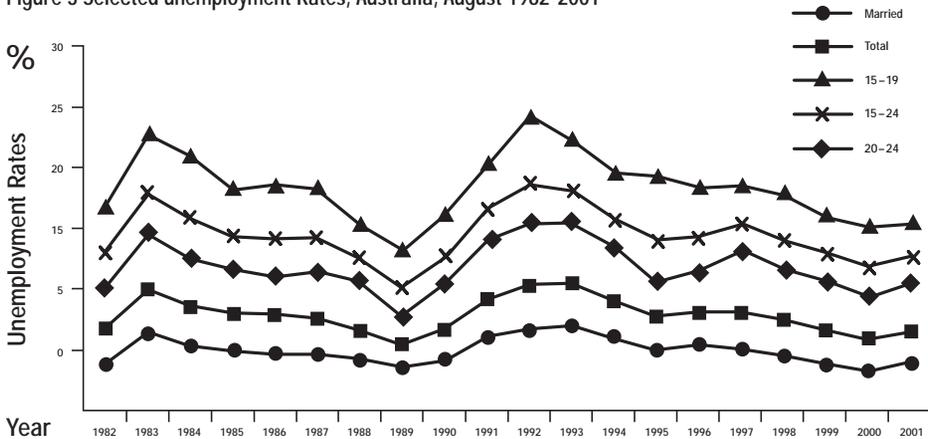
Source: ABS, The Labour Force, Cat. No. 6203.0

Yet the successful transition of young people from school to work, or to further study, is an important social and economic issue. It is a significant contributor to both improving the equitable distribution of wealth in society and reducing intergenerational poverty.

Young people leaving school early without alternative career paths face long-term disadvantages in terms of higher levels of unemployment and lower incomes. They also face an increased likelihood of ending up in low-skilled jobs with poor conditions and few opportunities for advancement.

Strengthening Transitions

The Brotherhood of St Laurence recognises the importance of achieving better transition to work outcomes for younger Australians. The organisation has been working with young people in the Melbourne South East and Mornington Peninsula areas with the Transition Project for over six years. As part of the program schools employ dedicated transition workers to provide long-term case management to young people in both school and community settings. Transition workers are based part of the week at a school, and the remainder in a community setting.

The project workers adopt an intensive and long-term case management approach. The Transition Project includes four main service components:

• Individual school-based vocational and personal support as well as counselling;

• School-based referral and support at the time of exiting;

• Post-school follow up and support for the young person;

• Post-school placement in an employment or training program.

The project highlights the lack of clear signposting for young people in transition. It demonstrates that building strong and extended relationships with vulnerable young people will help them make more informed choices. The project currently runs in nine schools and is funded through the Victorian State Government 'Managed Individual Pathways' funding.

When we compare the figures for similar schools in the region who are not part of the program the outcomes at the schools with transition workers are impressive:

• Unknown destinations of early leavers have been halved;

• The unemployment rate of early leavers has been halved;

• The percentage of early leavers going onto recognised training is three times that of other schools.

There is no doubt the transition programs result in more early leavers finding traineeships, TAFE places or employment. However, the need for better links with other stakeholders has also become apparent. Research points to the benefits of a more integrated approach that brings together support services, schools, employers, parents and local communities. (McIntyre1999)

The Transition project and research shows that parents and families are one of young people's primary sources for information on transition options:

• Parents guide decisions taken by young people in their transition pathways (Youth Pathways Taskforce 2001);

• Parents are one of the primary sources of information on transition options (Whiteley 2001);

• Parents are more likely to have discussed printed career information with their children than career teachers or advisers (Russell & Wardman 1998).

Studies in Australia and the UK also indicate widespread parental dissatisfaction with the quality of information provided. Despite this research, education policy has been slow to respond and parents are often neglected in current careers education and school to work transition projects.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence Parents as Career and Transition Supports (PACTS) program has been developed to address this. It aims to empower parents to make a positive contribution to their child's transition choices. It is based on the recognition that many parents do not have up to date information or knowledge about career or transition options.

PACTS is funded by the Department of Education, Science and Technology as one of 22 Career and Transition pilot projects throughout Australia. The program works with groups of parents to provide knowledge, information and skills through workshops. The Brotherhood's Social Action and Research Unit is evaluating the project and a report will be available later this year. Initial survey results show that:

• 100 per cent of parents think it is important to be involved in their child's transition;

• 80 per cent of young people say they would like help from their parents in making transitional decisions;

• Only 20 per cent of parents feel they currently have sufficient knowledge of options

to help their child make decisions about what to do after finishing school.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence reports a missing piece in the jigsaw of transition is employers. Research is needed to ask employers what help they need to take on the support, management and development of young workers. Generational diversity and the social divide can effect successful placement as well as impact on employer and young employee relations. (Brotherhood 2004).

We have seen examples of Anglicare projects around Australia that work to improve the school to work transitional pathways for young people and young adults. These work to improve or establish links with community, school, family, friends and other sectors within contemporary society. However improving connections, building links and strengthening the transitional process is only part of the answer.

Poor youth labour market

A successful participation in the work force relies on there being a healthy youth labour market. However the collapse in the labour market for 15 to19 year olds over the last two decades largely reflects the fact that the number of jobs available that require little or no skills has significantly declined. As a result, unskilled young people are now much more likely to be unemployed than was the case twenty years ago. (BCA 2003)

The high rates of youth unemployment can also be partially attributed to the large cuts in public service apprenticeship schemes in the mid 70s. Since the mid 1980s the Australian public service has been shrinking both absolutely and as a proportion of total employment. From 1984 to 1999 overall public sector employment declined by 11.8% with the largest fall being at the

federal level. (Mitchell 2001)
Those young people who opt to take up further education or training are facing greater difficulties. New apprenticeships expanded rapidly in the latter half of the 1990s to reach 295,620 apprentices and trainees commencing training at the end of 2000. This was an increase of 109% since 1995. However, the number of young people aged 15 to 24 in New Apprenticeships increased more modestly by only 43% over the same period. (Curtain 2001)

Thus while there was significant growth in the overall number of apprenticeships, the number of apprenticeships taken up by young people was modest in comparison. This indicates many young people are missing out on traineeships and apprenticeships because a greater number of them are being taken up by people aged over 25.

There is a similar story in regard to access to university. Young people are also finding it increasingly difficult to win entry to university. Demand is greater than available university places. The 2004 tertiary admissions awarded entry to a record number of people into university but a record number wanting to attend also failed win a place. More than 70,000 people were not able to secure a university place. As with apprenticeships and traineeships, a greater share of the available places went to older people (Australian 4/2/04 & 5/2/04).

One of the main contributors to the difficulties experienced by young people in their transition from full-time education to full time work is the absence of full time jobs for this age group. One key factor contributing to the labour market difficulties experienced by young people not in education is that full-time job growth in

recent years has gone overwhelmingly to adults aged 25 years and over. (Curtain 2001)

Overcoming these difficulties requires programs that particularly target youth and young adults. For example, in the former coal mining region of Cessnock in the New South Wales Hunter Valley, unskilled mining jobs have disappeared and young people in the area have lost a traditional transitional path into the workforce.

The average unemployment rate for the region is around 9% (significantly higher than the Australian average) with the unemployment rate for young adults and young people even higher. Anglicare agency The Samaritans Foundation and the Two Bishop's Trust work together in a program targeting two groups of people excluded from work force participation – young people and the over 40s experiencing long-term unemployment.

The specific challenge for The Samaritans is to help guide young people into areas of employment other than mining. The Cessnock Hospitality Industry Preparation Scheme (CHIPS) will help young people into work associated with the booming Hunter Valley wine industry.

The CHIPS project is a response to the problem of high youth unemployment in a region where the growing hospitality industry is being hampered by skill shortages. A three-phase program will ensure that local people have developed employable skills and have overcome some of the barriers to gaining employment in the wine growing region of the Hunter Valley.

The project includes training, mentoring and support services along with work placement for participants to help them

to develop skills and gain experience for employment in the hospitality industry.

It also includes work experience and mentoring using a buddy system; hospitality orientation training, work experience, mentoring and other resources by host employers and leading hospitality employers; career planning and job search activities; employment opportunities and placement services; and development of industry-wide protocols for employing locally.

More than 40 jobs have been identified by the representatives of the hospitality industry as available to successful participants who complete the training phase of the project. A piggy-back project, the Samaritans' Transport Development Project, is helping to solve the problem of transportation to workplaces.

The CHIPS project focuses on the specific attributes of the local community to help find a solution to the problems faced by young people in the area face in making the transition from school to work.

Young people at risk

Helping young people at risk to prepare for employment is the focus of the Job Placement Employment and Training (JPET) program. The JPET program is a Commonwealth government program that assists people 15 to 21 years of age who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. JPET helps them overcome personal and social barriers so they can engage more fully in the life of their communities to achieve greater social and economic participation. (FaCS 2004b)

The Anglicare WA JPET program specifically helps young people by assisting them as they put together resumes helping them to,

improve their presentation and interview technique, and finding out what job opportunities might be available and what sort of work they may be interested in.

The client group assisted by Anglicare WA is very diverse and the program specializes in helping people with barriers to employment or training including non-English speaking migrants and refugees.

Josie is a 19 year old Aboriginal woman. She's keen to participate in a business course but has limited educational achievement. The JPET program and Anglicare WA help Josie as she works towards completing her Certificate II and III in business studies. Child care assistance is particularly important. After a period of post placement support she is linked with an Aboriginal Public Service Traineeship Program.

Nineteen year old Mike hasn't completed high school and has experienced periods of homelessness. The JPET program helps Mike to access a bridging course so he can work towards university entry. The positive progress also helps Mike stabilise a relationship and his accommodation.

Case study provided by Anglicare WA.

The Anglicare WA and CHIPS programs are two examples of Anglicare agencies working to increase the transitional success of young people as the move from school to work. Anglicare Victoria's Catering for the Community project similarly helps young people along the pathway to workforce participation.

We have seen examples of where Anglicare agencies around Australia are working towards improving the transitional pathway

for young Australians as they negotiate the rocky road from school to further education and work.

Work for the Dole

One federal government program that aims to smooth the path from school to work is Work for the Dole. While the program received widespread criticisms when it was first introduced five years ago, research reveals it has had a positive effect in increasing work force participation for those young people who have been involved in it.

About 40% of the unemployed in Australia are under 25 years old. In 1997, in response to the high levels of youth unemployment the Federal Government established the Work for the Dole pilot project to help about 10,000 young people. The aims of the project were to:

• develop work habits in young people;

• involve the local community in quality projects that provide work for young people and help unemployed young people at the end of the project;

• provide communities with quality projects that are of value to the community (DEWRSB, 1999:1).

While formally these objectives have remained unchanged, the program has grown in size and in the range of its target group. It has also changed substantially in the way it operates and has become increasingly more integrated with Job Network, through which the Federal Government provides services to the unemployed with the specific aim of assisting them to find employment (Nevile & Nevile 2003).

In 2002/03, the Federal Government budgeted for 55,500 Work for the Dole places. After starting as a voluntary pilot program, it has become the default option for satisfying the Government's mutual obligation requirements for young people. The program has come under criticism both from within Australia and from such overseas organisations as the OECD. But it does seem to be having a positive effect in helping some young people. About three quarters of those participating in Work for the Dole projects are long-term unemployed, or at least have been on unemployment benefits for over a year (DEWR 2003a:9).

In 2003 Anglicare Australia co-sponsored an independent study into the program. *Work for the Dole: Obligation or Opportunity* is based on interviews with 101 participants and a similar number of program staff around Australia. It concluded that the impact of the program is unequivocally positive but called for a greater investment in training combined with work experience to increase the chances the unemployed finding a job.

On balance the study concluded that Work for the Dole does help participants find jobs. In recent years, around one quarter of Work for the Dole participants were employed three months after leaving the program. Probably between 60% to 70% of those who find jobs would have done so regardless of their participation in Work for the Dole. However, the study concluded that helping the remainder find jobs is a valuable contribution and a successful outcome by international standards.

The core of Work for the Dole is work experience. But as the study found, work relevance and learning are important in terms of providing participants with

'valued' work experience. The desire for a job can be a powerful motivating factor if participants see the connection between what they are being asked to do and future employment. For example, when Anglicare WA was running a Work for the Dole project with Anglican Homes…

Paul Wilmot the Chief Executive [of Anglican Homes] said to participants, look if you guys work hard and want to make a go of it, I've got traineeships coming up in the carer's area and you can go straight from here to become one of those trainees. And the people who ran the program said you could see the change in posture among participants - how they were slouching back in their chair thinking, whatever and the suddenly someone said, there's a traineeship at the end of this if you pull your finger out and they were all sitting up in the chair and there was a different attitude. Participants could see an end point other than just mutual obligation or endless going to courses. It was about traineeships, job, connection to the labour market (Carter, 2002).

While participants in the Work for the Dole are benefiting from the program, the outcomes could be substantially improved if more training was incorporated in the projects than is currently allowed under the Government's guidelines. Many participants want the opportunity to undertake formal training while participating in Work for the Dole. Integrating opportunities for formal accreditation as part of work experience is particularly important for those participants who 'learn by doing' and are more comfortable learning in a practical work environment than in a TAFE classroom.

The study called for better integration of training credits and work experience to enable participants to gain necessary qualifications and increase their chance of getting a job. Ninety five percent of the Community Work Coordinators surveyed (the organisations contracted by the Government to find and select projects) said they would like to incorporate more training in their projects than is allowed under Departmental guidelines.

Therefore greater flexibility should be allowed as to how available training is allocated. Removing current restrictions on the use of training credits, particularly in rural and remote areas where few appropriate courses may be available, and increasing the funding provided for training are important steps the Government needs to take to improve the outcomes for Work for the Dole participants.

The importance of providing young people with access to 12 years of education and training has been emphasized earlier in this report. The call for a comprehensive National Youth Transition Service deserves community support and Government funding. Without a stronger Government commitment to ensuring a successful transition from education to employment, too many young Australians will continue to be 'lost in transit'.

Young Australians have borne the brunt of economic policy over the past two decades (Mitchell 2001). These policies must change if young Australians are to be able to contribute to the social and economic development of Australia and the well being of an ageing population for which their their generation will bear significant responsibility.

5 Barriers for Indigenous and rural young Australians

Young people in rural and regional Australia face additional barriers in accessing education and employment opportunities. The difficulties faced increase as we move further away from major cities and affect Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike. However Indigenous youth are more severely disadvantaged and the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people increases with remoteness.

The Dusseldorp Skills Forum report *How Young People are Faring* 2003 uses the term at risk to identify those who are either not in full-time work or education. They are unlikely to be accumulating the necessary skills and work experience that will lead to ongoing connections with the labour force and are at risk of long term unemployment and its consequences.

Table 3 highlights the regional pattern of those at risk. We can see it varies between Indigenous and non-Indigenous teenagers. There is a consistent increase in the proportion of Indigenous teenagers at risk as we move away from major cities. The percentage of young people at risk increases from 38% in the major cities to 70% in very remote areas. In comparison, while there is a similar trend for non-Indigenous teenagers, the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous teenagers increases with remoteness.

Level of *at risk* teenagers aged 15-19 by remoteness, 2001

2001 At risk aged 15-19	Major Cities	Inner Regional	Outer Regional	Remote	Very Remote	TOTAL
Indigenous %	38	37	39	52	70	**44**
Non-Indigenous %	14	17	18	21	21	**15**

Source: Dusseldorp Skills Forum 2003

There are large employment inequalities between Indigenous and other Australians. While general unemployment rates decreased between the time of the 1996 and the 2001 national census, there was little change in the Indigenous unemployment rates. Indigenous unemployment rates are well over twice that of non-Indigenous people in cities and regional centres and are much higher in remote areas. The proportion of Indigenous teenagers (aged15-19) not fully engaged in work or education is three times that of non-Indigenous people. For Indigenous young adults (20-24) close to 70% are not fully engaged with work or education. (ATSIC, 2003:9-10)

The 2001 census also shows Indigenous populations increased from 2.1 % in 1996 to 2.4 % in 2001, with 40 % of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders aged under 15.

Indigenous labour force inequality

Findings released in January this year show labour inequality is not only a matter of higher unemployment rates but also related to the nature of the job. A study by the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) at the Australian National University reveals work undertaken by Indigenous Australians is more likely to be concentrated around low skilled occupations.

The CAEPR study also found that labour market discrimination is more important than previously thought. Furthermore, labour market discrimination is more likely to be manifest in the inability of Indigenous individuals to secure a job, rather than being paid low wages.

Poor educational achievement was the major cause of the employment differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous

Australians. Improving secondary school retention rates and the level of educational qualifications among Indigenous Australians are important factors in reducing Indigenous labour market inequality. (ABS 20/1/4)

The CAEPR findings reveal the need for a substantial injection of educational resources directed towards young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Given that 40% of Indigenous people are under 15 (compared to 18% of non-Indigenous Australians) state, territory and federal governments have an immediate and urgent need to support the education needs of the 200,000 Indigenous young people.

This factor is particularly encouraging given the low school retention rates for Indigenous Australians. ABS 2001 census figures show Indigenous Australians aged 15 years and over who had left school were half as likely (18%) as non-Indigenous Australians to have completed year 12 (41%) (ABS 30/10/3). *How Young People Are Faring* 2003 gives particular attention to Indigenous young people and young adults. It highlights several areas of educational disadvantage:

• 45% of Indigenous teenagers were not in full-time learning or work in 2001

• Nearly 70% of Indigenous young adults were not in full-time learning or work in 2001 (52% unemployed or not in the labour force)

• Indigenous young people in urban, regional and remote locations face a level of risk of disconnection from learning and work that is three times greater than for non-Indigenous people (Curtain 2003:4)

In the Tennant Creek region of the Northern Territory almost half of the regional population of 3,386 people is Aboriginal and half of the 400 who fall into the 15-24 year old age bracket are Aboriginal. The town has a fairly transient population with a core body of people who are long term residents. There are considerable social problems in the town including those associated with poverty, regional isolation, lack of employment, early school leaving, substance abuse and domestic violence. Two Aboriginal Councils operating in the town run a mixture of Community Development and Employment Program (the Indigenous equivalent of the Work for the Dole program), health and other support services.

In response to the social problems of the region Anglicare NT is piloting a personal support program for unemployed Indigenous youth with support from the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services.

Key issues that have been identified for Indigenous youth in Tennant Creek in relation to barriers to employment include:

• low levels of education;

• lack of employment opportunity;

• lack of skills to engage in available employment opportunities;

• involvement in antisocial behaviour;

• lack of community supports;

• limited capacity for the provision of family support due to family stresses such substance abuse.

A cornerstone of the program is relationship building within the local community. This is achieved through working closely with the Indigenous community and working with the active Aboriginal councils. Many of the social problems occurring among the young people in Tennant Creek have, in part, been fostered by the break down of family relationships. Alcohol abuse leading to neglect of young people in their formative years is often part of family break down. In such cases the program seeks to encourage mentoring to help keep young people engaged or to develop substitute family support from among peers.

The program hopes to provide training and support so Aboriginal young people can re-enter education. It recognises that a key to success will be attracting and keeping young people engaged, and Go-Kart racing has been considered as a possible activity option to keep teenagers connected to education programs. It would build on the success of the annual Tennant Creek Go-Kart Street Race.

The Occupational Psychologist working at Centrelink makes referrals to the personal support program. The program works collaboratively with other services and encourages Aboriginal young people to access appropriate services according to their needs. Some individuals are referred to other locally offered services such as the drug and alcohol rehabilitation service. Locally based training is also offered with re-engagement in schooling if appropriate.

In the former gold mining town of Mt Morgan in Central Queensland, some 40 minutes drive from Rockhampton, Anglicare Central Queensland is working with Indigenous young people. The Calliungul Youth Program is a response to the needs of predominantly Indigenous young people in the area. In partnership with the Mt Morgan High School, Calliungal provides an alternative school environment for a group of young people who do not attend school.

Lauren is a 17 year old Indigenous woman from Mt Morgan. She used to drop into the youth centre run by the Calliungal Youth Program a few times week. Building trust between a young person and worker always takes time and especially so with Lauren as she is quiet, shy and reserved.

The worker found Lauren to be quite a mature person with a strong love of dance and music. She was completing year 12 when she first visited Calluingal and wasn't sure what she wants to do when she finished school.

The Anglicare worker saw an advertisement calling for people who wanted to audition for the Aboriginal Centre for Performing Arts in Brisbane and suggested to Lauren she apply. He encouraged her to do so as a way of building her self-esteem and confidence.

Lauren applied and was successful in winning an audition. She travelled to Brisbane with her sister. After a second audition, Lauren was offered a place to study for a Certificate IV in performing arts. When she finishes this course Lauren is considering taking up a diploma in performing arts.

The Anglicare Calliungal Youth Program played a key role in fostering Lauren's talents and self-esteem and helped her get to where she is now.

Case study provided by Anglicare CQ.

Anglicare Central Queensland provides services across one third of Queensland and is familiar with the problems experienced by young people and young adults in rural and regional Australia. When looking at the problems specific to rural and regional Australia, Anglicare CQ stresses the effect of the drought. Many young people have been pulled out of school to go back and work on the family property, forcing schools in some centres such as Blackall to close. Farmers and station managers have laid off staff and the older children have had to leave school and go back home to work.

Drought has also affected mental health and appears to have contributed to an increase in family violence. Some families living in towns that rely on the farm economy have had to uproot and move. The drought has caused a great deal of displacement of families. Anglicare Central Queensland operates a number of housing programs throughout central western Queensland and has been responding to the growing demand for emergency accommodation as a result of the drought. The lack of vacancies for short-term housing has left many younger people caught up in the shortage.

Leaving their families to go to the cities whether for university or work is a significant problem for many young people. Efforts are being made to link businesses with schools to help young people stay in the area. Public transport is also a major barrier in rural areas. Buses that used to operate fairly regularly have now stopped. This all adds to the isolation being felt by younger people in the region.

Perhaps the most significant issue for young people is substance abuse, particularly for young Aboriginal people. There is a sense of disenchantment and a lack of real opportunities to inspire young people, so the attraction to substance abuse is high. The high rate of substance abuse needs to be addressed urgently. (Stevenson 2004)

At Emerald, half way between the coast and Longreach, Anglicare CQ, with support from the Queensland, Government, has appointed a youth worker to support young people who have become disengaged from the education and training system. The program focuses on self-esteem and life skills with a view to helping those involved participate in new education and training initiatives.

In the southern highlands of NSW, as in other regions of rural NSW, teenagers face barriers to staying connected with school or other training options when their families go through a crisis.

The predicament of young men in the NSW Southern Highlands received significant media attention in the 1990s after media reports of suicides in the region. A major problem in the region is the high rate of unemployment rate for young men (13.9%).

Lack of services and infrastructure in the region is a major issue. As in Central Queensland, the lack of public transport, makes travel between towns in the district difficult without access to a car. It is especially an issue for teenagers who need to access support services, training programs, work opportunities or even recreational activities.

Anglicare's counselling team in the NSW Southern Highlands also believe the lack of community facilities means there are few healthy outlets for teenagers. This impacts hardest on boys struggling through a personal crisis. There are no indoor recreational facilities in the region of the kind city young people take for granted – ten pin bowling, rock climbing centres or indoor pools. This is a major oversight in a district that endures cold and rainy winters.

Anglicare's youth counsellors have developed close links with the local schools in the region and receive many referrals from teachers. Only about 8 % of the children have 'school-related' behavioural problems as the presenting issue for counselling. Nevertheless three quarters of the children have either relational problems with family members, personal issues such as grief or have suffered abuse. All these issues inevitably impact on a child's studies and their likelihood to continue with their schooling.

In rural Victoria, St Luke's Anglicare seeks to help young people who are at risk of disconnecting from family or school through a Reconnect program. Reconnect works closely with several secondary colleges in central Victoria and is based on an early intervention model using a case management approach to working with young people and their families. This may involve counselling, mediation, general youth support and recreational based work. Referrals to the program are primarily through school support staff and Centrelink.

A recent evaluation of the programs by St Luke's Youth and Family Connections Team discovered that 85% of young people experience an overall improvement in their situation as a result of involvement with Reconnect.

The evaluation of St Luke's Reconnect program revealed what makes it special:

"Listen, take time, just hang in there with them through tough and good times. Don't have any preconceived ideas about how the interaction will go, take it as you see it and change your style or pace to suit the situation. Get a feel for how they relate to you and to each other. Explain everything to the family at first, so they know what

you're all about. Let them know they don't have to tell me the whole story of their life if they don't want to," explains one case worker.

"Reconnect helped to go between my daughter and the school. It created less stress for our daughter, there were no more ugly meetings at school," reflects a parent.

"When I was in trouble the worker was someone to listen, to take me out, talk to. A pair of ears when there was no-one else," says one young person.

"Reconnect persists, where others might give up. There is a strong element of consultation, discussion of ideas, strategies and approaches", reports the school.

We opened this chapter by highlighting the compounding effect on young people who are disadvantaged by the locality in which they live. For a large number of Indigenous people not only do they live in non-urban areas but more than one quarter (27%) are living in remote or very remote parts – this compares with 2% of non-Indigenous Australians. (ABS 30/10/3)

Anglicare shares the concern of the Australian Government to improve the health, housing, education and employment opportunities for Indigenous Australians and rural young people. More needs to be done in all of these areas and it must be done quickly and in full partnership with Indigenous people and communities. Without a concerted effort to address these issues the only possible result is a further compounding of the difficulties and hurt being experienced by rural and Indigenous young Australians.

6 Homeless:
The search for stability and security

The 2001 Census revealed that seven in 1000 Australians were living in impoverished homes, tents or sleeping out. This confirmed there has been a rapid rise in homelessness over the past decade. In the minds of many people homelessness is often equated with the concept of street people. It is often thought that homelessness means absolute homelessness where the only place of abode a person has is in parks, alleyways, industrial rubbish bins or other public spaces.
However there are varying degrees of homelessness. The impact on the people experiencing other forms of homelessness can be just as great as for those in absolute homelessness. Living in a car provides little more security from crime or any more access to bathroom, kitchen, laundry and other resources essential for life.

Living on a friend's living room floor or couch also presents significant obstacles when it comes to education, work or training. Temporary accommodation brings stress and insecurity that also impacts negatively on successful living. Homelessness should not be considered a problem only if a person is in a situation of extreme homelessness. (Jope 2003:1)
The Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness has adopted a definition of homelessness which identifies three categories:

• **Primary homelessness** is experienced by people without conventional accommodation (i.e. sleeping rough and in impoverished dwellings)

• **Secondary homelessness** is experienced by people who frequently move from one temporary shelter to another (i.e. emergency accommodation, youth refuges, friends' places)

• **Tertiary homelessness** is people staying in accommodation that falls below the minimum community standards (i.e. some boarding houses and caravan parks) (CACH 2003)

Late last year the ABS released data from the 2001 census which showed that there were an estimated 99,900 homeless people in Australia on census night 2001.

Almost half of these were under the age of 25 and included:

• 10,000 children under 12 years of age;

• 26,000 young people aged between 12 and 18 years, with more females in the 10-18 year age affected than males;

• Approximately 10,000 young people aged between 19 and 24 years (ABS Dec 03).

In December 2003 the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) released its annual report for the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). SAAP is a joint state and federally funded program that provides transitional supported accommodation and related support services. SAAP helps people who are homeless to achieve the maximum possible degree of self-reliance and independence. (FaCS 2004c)

The AIHW report outlines the age, gender, cultural and linguistic diversity of clients who accessed SAAP services (AIHW 2003). It identified the following patterns amongst SAAP clients:

• 42% male, average age 30 years

• 58% female, average age 33 years

• Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders make up 18% of SAAP clients, although they form less than 2% of the population

• 21% of female clients and 13% of male clients are Indigenous Australians

• This is especially so in the Northern Territory where 70% of all female clients are Indigenous Australians

• 20 to 24 year olds are the largest group for both genders (16% of all clients are in this age group)

• Those aged between 15 and 24 are more likely to use SAAP services than any other age group.

While the number of people experiencing long-term homelessness is relatively small, more people experience episodes of homelessness as their income, mental and physical health or ability to maintain social networks vary.

During 2001-02, an estimated 95,600 people – of which young people between the age of 15-24 years were the majority – were supported by agencies funded to provide services to people experiencing homelessness (AIHW, 2003).

In the same period, a further 73,300 requests for support were not addressed and 31 per cent of these were for housing and accommodation. Those whose needs were most likely not to be met were males with children, couples without children and single females under 25 years of age (AIHW, 2003).

Factors causing homelessness

Family breakdown and domestic situations are substantial factors in a young person's path to homelessness. Lack of permanent accommodation options, insufficient access to housing support and low-income levels combined with vulnerability means it is hard for young people to break out of the homelessness cycle.

The impact of homelessness on young people is significant – both in terms of individual hardship, poor physical and mental health and difficulties in reintegrating into community life. For those who are chronically homeless this impact has long-term social ramifications. Homelessness is closely linked with poverty, lack of educational opportunity and unemployment. Lack of adequate shelter, insecurity and dire poverty contribute to a number of health and welfare problems.

Last year's State of the Family Report showed homeless young people are more likely to experience poor health, low educational outcomes and behavioural problems (Nevile 2003). Moving accommodation and changing schools and friends makes it difficult to establish peer

and support networks. These impacts are further exacerbated by the way homeless people are viewed by society - often seen as potential criminals, troublemakers and a public nuisance.

The alienation, isolation and poverty associated with homelessness decreases the possibility of maintaining ties that form a healthy connection with society. Additionally, young homeless people themselves are exploited and harassed. They are often victims of criminal violence, abuse and assault. Sometimes this abuse is by their peers but often it comes from adults. (Sykes 1993: 116-8)

Assisting the Homeless

The three main Federal Government programs aimed at assisting the homeless are the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), the Job Placement Employment and Training (JPET) program and Reconnect.

The Job Placement, Employment and Training (JPET) program is aimed at assisting students and unemployed young people aged 15-21 years. A priority is given to those aged 15 to 19. JPET helps those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless or facing similar severe problems. It helps not only with their income and personal support needs but also ensures they secure career paths and sustainable futures.

Similarly the Reconnect program works mainly to reconnect young people with their families. Overcoming problems that prevent maintaining stable accommodation and entering full-time education, training or employment is a key.

Engaging Indigenous young people and families in the Reconnect program has

been a priority for Anglicare NT. This is mostly because of the cultural diversity and demographic complexity of the region. In 2003, after successfully operating the program in Darwin and Palmerston for three years, Anglicare NT established offices in the East Arnhem region.

The regional office works with the communities of Nhulunbuy, Yirrkala and Ski Beach. It periodically undertakes joint project work and is involved with other communities as negotiated. The Reconnect project has established productive referral links with Indigenous and non Indigenous organizations and health services through networking, workshops and involvement in the project reference group.

Anglicare Sydney Youth Services has several programs that operate as intervention for youth in crisis. One of these programs, *Early Interventions*, provides the resources needed for the high level of care needed for young mothers and pregnant young women experiencing homelessness. Intensive support provided by such programs is a key to breaking the cycle of homelessness. This helps ensure young women find employment and are able to provide their own children with a stable family environment.

These young women are isolated, fearful and overwhelmed by being alone. Many of the young women are fleeing from abusive relationships, living in a refuge for the homeless or moving on from one friend's house to the next. These young women found a 'community family' through the Anglicare program.

Five years ago Cherie was 17, homeless and five months pregnant. She had been sexually abused at home from a young age

and had been living on the streets and in squats since she was 13. Cherie was well known to Anglicare Sydney street workers who often found her in states of self-harm. She used drugs to numb her emotional pain and would prostitute herself to pay for her addiction.

Cherie was referred to Anglicare's Early Intervention Carramar Cottages. The cottages offer long-term housing to single homeless young mothers and receive very limited government funding. These accommodation units became Cherie's home for the remainder of her pregnancy.

The staff supported her through the birth of her son and first year of motherhood. The aggressive side of her personality has diminished. She has been able to live in one place for longer than a few months and has maintained a job for two years.

Cherie has also begun studying to be a professional carer at TAFE and has given her son a stable environment. She now plans to give back to other young women, some of what she has been given.

Case study provided by Anglicare Sydney.

The services provided by the Anglicare Early Interventions program include individual support work, childbirth preparation, early childhood education training and group-work for the young mothers.

Due to funding restrictions Anglicare could only provide long-term housing for twelve of these young women in 2003. Last year there were 135 new client referrals to Early Interventions. Almost all of them stated accommodation as the primary reason for referral.

Homeless and unemployed

Homelessness and unemployment are closely linked. Without access to permanent employment young people and young adults do not have a secure base to sleep, do their laundry, care for personal hygiene and attend to the other physical elements essential to support a person who is working.

South of Brisbane on the way to the Gold Coast, the Anglicare Beenleigh Youth Accommodation and Support Service (AYBASS) receives more than 1200 requests each year for help with accommodation, information, support and family counselling. They serve people in the northern Gold Coast, Logan, Albert Shire and Beenleigh areas.

Some of the young people they provide accommodation for will return to their families. Family counselling and support for the young person and their whole family is crucial to secure this outcome. However returning home is not an option for some of the young people and young adults who come into their care.

Wherever possible AYBASS works with families and young people to provide counselling services, improve communications within the family, and help with resolving issues and through family reconciliation. For AYBASS, the emphasis on working with the family and young person has led to a marked improvement in success by preventing youth homelessness and helping family preservation.

The provision of early intervention programs is a key to reducing future demand associated with homelessness. The Samaritan Foundation reports receiving 70 referrals a month for their five bed SAAP facility serving the NSW central

coast region. They express frustration that their limited resources aren't able to be used to help serve more people at risk or on the edge of homelessness rather than when their lives are in crisis. The housing needs of young workers at the beginning of their careers who are struggling to get a foothold in the local housing market demands greater attention. At present they are competing with low income households for low cost stock and in such a competitive market, prices only go up (Jope, 2003).

The private market is failing to supply enough low-cost housing to meet the housing needs of low-income households and current government interventions are proving to be inadequate.

Public and Private Housing

The primary funding vehicle to assist low-income earners into public and community housing is the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA), a jointly funded program with the Commonwealth providing the majority of the funds and the States and Territories providing matching funding at a lower rate. This funding has declined in real and nominal terms since 1991-92. (Jope, 2003)

Despite an apparent decrease in the size of the waiting lists since 1996, in June 2001, there were 221,313 applicants waiting for public housing in Australia. Most public housing in most states is housing fewer people every year. (Jope, 2003)

Many households are unable to access public housing because it now only houses the most disadvantaged. Public housing was originally housing working families, but over the last 20 years it has become increasingly targeted to the most disadvantaged. Most new tenants are now on some form of Centrelink payment or benefit: in particular the Age Pension, Disability Support Pension, Parenting Payment and Newstart Allowance. Many also have high, complex health needs. (Jope, 2003)

What can be done?

To improve housing affordability, a large increase in the supply of low cost housing is necessary. In spite of the current housing boom, the extent and effects of homelessness and housing stress show clearly that the market and existing public policies are failing low-income families. To improve their housing situations the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments must develop a housing policy framework to promote:

• The expanded provision through the CSHA of public housing that is both well located and of good quality.

• The expansion of rent assistance and housing assistance through the income support system to assist low-income house-holds who are renting or buying their own home.

• Financial instruments regulated by public policy that direct private sector investment into affordable housing. This may include government bonds or some form of targeted taxation concession.

• The participation of all levels of govern-ment in response to this crisis.

The causes of youth homelessness are complex and the effects are broad. Preventing, and decreasing the rate of homelessness requires a multi-disciplin approach. No one state or federal government program will meet all the needs of people who are at risk, facing or experiencing homelessness. However, the

state an federal governments must make the critical contribution of expanding the supply of safe, affordable housing.
A broad-based approach is needed that takes into consideration the young person's family, community and educational background. Other factors such as abuse, mental health, emotional factors and social interaction also need to be taken into consideration. To successfully address the issue of youth homelessness requires a case-by-case assessment and individual case management.

An adequate response to this issue requires a whole of government approach that interacts with many departments and portfolios. It also requires flexible funding to allow non-government providers to offer support that falls outside of restrictive funding criteria.

7 Conclusion

State of the Family 2004 reveals that many young Australians have missed out on the benefits of Australia's rapidly growing economy. Employment has increased and unemployment fallen, but young Australians have continued to endure an unemployment rate nearly three times the national average.

Despite government investment in a variety of programs to prepare young people for work, the reality is that there are not enough jobs. For every available job, there are at least six unemployed people.

The human cost to young people is hardship that limits their capacity to pay for rent, food, transport, clothes and other necessities. It can also have a long lasting psychological impact including loss of identity, poor self-esteem, depression and mental health problems.

Full time job growth in recent years has gone overwhelmingly to adults aged 25 years and over. Education is the key to unlocking employment opportunities and the importance of achieving 12 years of education cannot be overstated. However, less than 80% of young Australians are completing Year 12 or its equivalent.

The process of making the transition from full-time school to full-time work and further education and training is problematic and too many young Australians are "lost in transit". In the late 1990s, there was a rapid expansion of new apprenticeships with over 295,600 apprentice and trainees commencing in training at the end of 2000. However, the growth of new apprenticeship places for young people aged 15 to 24 was very modest.

Similarly, the number of university places has grown significantly but the demand for University entry has outstripped the places available. Seventy thousand students missed out on gaining a university place this year.

State of the Family 2004 reveals an education, training and transition system that is not serving the needs of all young people. More needs to be done to improve school retention rates, increase apprenticeships, improve access to tertiary education and ensure a successful transition from school to work and/or further education or training.

Renewed national action is urgently needed to increase the participation of young people in education, training and employment. ACOSS, the Business Council of Australia and other organisations have proposed that a National Youth Transition Service be established with a target of 90% of young people actively participating in education, training and/or employment by 2009.

Without such a national system Australia will only continue to have a patchwork of programs and assistance schemes but no comprehensive and effective transitional structure.

Of particular concern is what happens to young people when they leave foster care. This is a very vulnerable time for young people who have already felt disconnection from birth families. Government responses to this transition are largely undeveloped. A leaving care plan needs to be developed and should be developed at entry to care and updated regularly. Anglicare calls for a more comprehensive approach by governments in cooperation with the caring agencies to planning and care for young people leaving care.

Indigenous young Australians face even greater barriers. While general unemployment rates fell between the 1996 and the 2001 national census, there was little change in Indigenous unemployment rates.The proportion of Indigenous teenagers (aged 15-19) not fully engaged in work or education is three times that of non-Indigenous people. For Indigenous young adults (20-24) close to 70% are not fully engaged with work of education.

Indigenous young Australians need greater access to labour market programs that provide personalized assistance and more must be done to create worthwhile jobs for Indigenous Australians in rural areas.

Similarly young people living in rural and remote areas also have greater obstacles to surmount on the rocky road to full labour force participation. State of the Family 2004 highlights the need for targeted programs to address the barriers faced by Indigenous and rural young people face when accessing education and employment.

For unemployed young people, Work for the Dole has become their default option to fulfill their mutual obligation. While Work for the Dole participants gain valuable work experience and are benefiting from the program, the outcomes could be substantially improved if more training was incorporated in the projects than is currently allowed under Government guidelines.

Many participants in Work for the Dole want the opportunity to undertake formal training while participating in the program. Integrating such opportunities for formal accreditation as part of work experience is particularly important for those who 'learn by doing' and are more comfortable in a practical work environment than in a TAFE classroom.

There are 36,000 Australians aged between 12 and 24 who are homeless. While the number of people experiencing long-term homelessness is relatively small, more people experience episodes of homelessness as their income, mental and physical health or ability to maintain social networks vary.

Expansion of programs such as SAAP, Reconnect and JPET that target assistance to the homeless are urgently needed. But the longer term solution must include increased provision through the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement of public housing that is both well located and of good quality and the expansion of rent assistance and housing assistance through the income support system to assist low-income households.

State of the Family 2004 makes the case for young Australians to have a higher priority on the political agenda. A more comprehensive response is needed to the issues of school retention rates, school to work transition and job opportunities for young people. Without a more concerted effort, the future for many young Australians and indeed the whole economy looks unnecessarily gloomy.

Anglicare agencies around Australia provide a range of programs aimed at assisting young Australians. Anglicare agencies work closely with the federal and state governments in delivering many of these programs. The examples reveal the progress being made in addressing these issues.

Many young Australians overcome the barriers described and many negotiate a successful path to adulthood and work. However, a sizable minority of Australia's three million young people does experience substantial challenges that have a high emotional, social and economic impact.

There are also many instances where demand for programs outstrips need and where resources are extremely limited. Greater support and funding for these highly successful youth assistance projects is needed. But what is needed even more is a far greater effort to focus attention on the plight of younger Australians.

As well as a concerted political and social welfare focus, key changes are needed in the way young people move from school to further training or education and then full time work. More needs to be done to ensure all young Australians are given the opportunity to contribute to their own well being and that of our society as a whole.

The Federal Treasurer has highlighted the need to address the intolerable tax burden that an ageing Australian population will place on the next generation. Without a more concerted effort to ensure the productive engagement of young Australians in the social and economic life of the nation, the capacity of future generations to contribute to the well being of the nation may be severely limited.

School retention rates, systemic problems in our school to work transition processes, high youth unemployment and homelessness as well as the other issues highlighted in State of the Family 2004 must be urgently addressed to improve life chances for all Australians, young and old.

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Information Supplied by Anglicare Member Agencies

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