

Question on Notice

No. 185

Asked on 10 March 2021

MS A CAMM asked the Minister for Children and Youth Justice and Minister for Multicultural Affairs (HON L LINARD)—

QUESTION

Will the Minister advise, between 2018 and 2021 to date (reported separately) the number of children known to child safety that are or were homeless (including residing in temporary shelters and sleeping rough)?

ANSWER

In the year to June 2020, more than 94,000 children were known to Child Safety. For the vast majority of these children, allegations of harm were unsubstantiated, and initial Child Concern Reports have not led to continuing intervention from the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs.

Where a young person who is in the care of the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs (DCYJMA) makes a choice to not accept their placement option, the department does all it can to not only encourage a placement option being taken but also continues to provide support to the young person.

To prevent children leaving approved placements, the department takes actions to support children and carers to build trusting relationships. There is a focus on ensuring children have a sense of safety and belonging, which includes involving members of the young person's safety and support network. This includes family members, previous carers, service providers and health professionals among other trusted people. These people encourage young people to stay where they are safest. When young people do make the choice to leave their placement, carers and care providers commence a number of pre-agreed actions to both locate and communicate about the circumstances of the young person.

While everyone is rightly concerned when children are not living in a suitable care environment, force cannot be used to maintain them at a particular residence. Intervention must be voluntary and relationship-based, or there is a risk they will just run away again and prove even harder to find and help in the future.

Data is not captured on how many young people in out-of-home care are homeless, as this is not an acceptable option for the department. All children in care have a care arrangement made available to them, even when they are choosing not to reside in this place. Departmental officers work with children and young people to encourage them to reside in approved living arrangements and address issues where they are identified.

DCYJMA and the Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy (DCHDE) work closely to support young people with a care experience and young people at risk of homelessness. This can include priority access to housing services up to the age of 21 for young people with a care experience.

The Palaszczuk Government also funds a number of services and programs for youth at risk of homelessness outside of the formal child protection system. These services include:

- Allocation of \$36.1 million (GST exclusive) in Homelessness Program funding to 39 non-government-organisations to deliver 61 specialist homelessness services across Queensland to deliver temporary supported accommodation and other support services specifically for young people including services such as:
 - the Sustaining Young Tenancies program, which provides intensive support to young people to help identify the housing pathways available to them and work towards their achieving long-term sustainable housing
 - services at the Logan Youth Foyer
- the Homelessness Social Benefit Bond (Youth CONNECT program) in Logan, Ipswich and Townsville for 15 to 25-year-olds exiting statutory care or custody, and at risk of homelessness. Help to access housing and build skills to live independently.

Where a young person in care is aged 15 or older and planning for their transition to adulthood has commenced, a referral may also be sent DCHDE to assist in planning for the young person's future housing needs.

Through funding from the Commonwealth Government, DCYJMA funds six Youth Housing and Reintegration, including After Care Services (YHARS) located in Mount Isa, Townsville, Rockhampton, Hervey Bay/Maryborough, Toowoomba and Brisbane.

YHARS supports young people aged 12-21 who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, to access and maintain safe and stable accommodation. This includes support to young people who have exited or are exiting from care after being subject to a Child Protection Order, or who are transitioning to the community following a period of sentence or remand in a Youth Detention Centre.