

MEDIA RELEASE: YOUTH OFF THE STREETS

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World-first awareness campaign shines a light on youth homelessness in Australia

(Sydney, Australia): Father Chris Riley's Youth Off The Streets has launched a world-first awareness campaign to shine a light on young people's experiences of homelessness.

Chelsea was kicked out of home at just 13 years old after a family breakdown.

She shifted between people's houses and various refuges for four years.

"I can't even remember all of the places I stayed – there were so many," she says.

Sometimes Chelsea would share a room, or sleep in a spare room if one was available. Often the only option was a couch.

"For years, it was like I was missing a foundation. The floor beneath me was constantly moving, and I didn't know when it might collapse."

"I had to dodge so many obstacles to survive. It should be simple, but I had to think, 'Do I have a roof over my head tonight?'"

Last year, nearly 42,000 young people across Australia experienced or were at risk of homelessness, according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

It is widely accepted by the homelessness sector that the scale of youth homelessness is underestimated. Couch surfing is one of the most common – and least visible – forms of homelessness for young people in Australia.

Youth Off The Streets' new campaign, The Great Couch Sleepout, calls on the general public to sign up to use their social media platforms to help educate friends and family about youth homelessness in Australia.

Participants are also encouraged to sleep on their couch for one night – Youth Homelessness Matters Day on 20 April 2022 – to highlight the prevalence of couching surfing among homeless young people.

Youth Off The Streets CEO, Lex Nadine Lutherborrow, says, "Our goal is to 'unhide' youth homelessness because increasing the public's understanding of this issue is an important part of creating change for young people. Our vision is for individuals,

families, friends and workplaces alike to take part in The Great Couch Sleepout and kick-start conversations about youth homelessness in Australia. “

To learn more about The Great Couch Sleepout and sign up, visit the Youth Off The Streets website at youthoffthestreets.com.au/greatcouchsleepout.

If you would like more information or to arrange an interview with a spokesperson, please call:

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About Youth Off The Streets

Youth Off The Streets is a leading not-for-profit youth services organisation. We work with young people, their families and communities to create safety, offer support and provide pathways to a positive future.

Since being founded by Father Chris Riley in 1991, we have grown to deliver a range of wraparound supports for young people in need. These include homelessness and housing services, independent high schools, alcohol and other drugs counselling, youth justice support, life skills programs, cultural support and community outreach, among other services.

We focus on strengths-based strategies that empower young people and strengthen our communities.

Donations to support the work of Youth Off The Streets can be made at www.youthoffthestreets.com.au

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