



MEDIA RELEASE: YOUTH OFF THE STREETS

13 April 2022

NB: Youth Homelessness Matters Day is recognised Australia-wide on Wednesday 20 April 2022.

(Sydney, Australia): Father Chris Riley's Youth Off The Streets is calling for greater investment in tackling Australia's youth homelessness crisis.

As young people are more likely to couch surf or seek out other forms of temporary accommodation than sleep rough on the streets, youth homelessness is a hidden social issue.

However, last year 41,700 young people aged 15 to 24 asked for help from homelessness services, according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

It is widely accepted across the homelessness sector that the actual number of young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness is much higher.

To raise awareness of youth homelessness, Youth Off The Streets has launched a world-first awareness campaign called the Great Couch Sleepout.

The campaign encourages the general public to swap their bed for the couch on Youth Homelessness Matters Day on 20 April, and share the experience on their social media.

The organisation is also shining a light on young people's lived experiences of homelessness.

Youth Off The Streets CEO, Lex Nadine Lutherborrow, says:

"While every young person's story is different, domestic and family violence continues to be the main driver of youth homelessness in Australia. Overcrowding at home, mental health issues, family conflict and trauma are often in the background as well."

"The fact that nearly 42,000 young people reached out for help from homelessness services last year should be unacceptable to the community. And these are just the young people we know about, because couch surfing is much more common among this group than rough sleeping, and it's largely hidden from view."

"This Youth Homelessness Matters Day, we're raising awareness of this issue through our Great Couch Sleepout campaign. We're also calling for a national strategy to end youth homelessness. It's a complex issue, but with greater investment in prevention and early intervention programs, we can do a much better job of tackling it. A safe and stable home is a basic human right, but it's one that far too many young people are being denied."

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 the next 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?'"

Luke* grew up in a volatile home. He was 17 when ongoing family conflict resulted in his father kicking him out of home.

Luke packed as much as he could fit into a single duffel bag and for the next two years, he moved from couch to couch – often staying with people who, he says, weren't a good influence on him.

Although Luke's couch surfing years are behind him, he still feels the effects of being without a secure home for such a long time.

"Living that way hurt my mental health," he explains. "I still suffer from anxiety, depression and a sleep disorder."

Casey* was forced to leave home as a young teen to escape from physical and emotional abuse by her parents.

For almost two and a half years, Casey – who identifies as transgender – experienced homelessness.

"I moved from refuge to refuge. Or I stayed on someone's couch. Sometimes I'd end up on the side of the road, with no other options," they say.

*Names changed for privacy reasons

If you would like more information or to arrange an interview with a spokesperson, please call Karen Penning, Marketing and Communications Manager, on 0475 989 737.

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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