

**THE EMPLOYMENT  
ACTION CENTRE**

**HOUSING RESOURCE UNIT**

**APRIL 1993**

# BACKGROUND

## THE EMPLOYMENT ACTION CENTRE

"The Employment Action Centre enables disadvantaged job seekers in the community to live and work independently by providing effective employment training and support programs, whilst advocating for appropriate community responses to employment issues". 1993 EAC Mission Statement.

The Employment Action Centre was established in 1987 and has in that time assisted over 1,000 clients. The centre has grown dramatically in the last three years due to its ability to meet client needs and to successfully place disadvantaged people into full open market employment.

## YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Although, it is difficult to determine the exact number of homeless young people in Australia, it was estimated by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission "that on any one night, it was likely to be between 20,000 and 25,000 but could be as high as 70,000".

Young homeless people may experience one or many of the following:

- \* Lack of shelter
- \* Inadequate nutrition
- \* Lack of education
- \* Lack of income
- \* Lack of recreation
- \* Health problems
- \* Lack of employment, due often to a lack of fixed address and lack of suitable background
- \* Frustration and a sense of powerlessness
- \* Possible psychological problems
- \* Isolation from others and from the community
- \* Pressure to engage in crime in order to survive.

# **PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

## **UNIT AIMS**

1. To provide constructive, medium term solutions to housing young people who have the dual disadvantage of being both homeless and unemployed.
2. To provide on going support and training where clients can move to become independent and valued members of our community.

## **TARGET GROUP**

Disadvantaged unemployed young people aged 15-20 who:

- \* Have a need for secure, safe and affordable accommodation
- \* Are a client of EAC's , Active Placement Unit, Youth Units, Traineeship Access Course, Linked Access Program, Job Placement, Employment and Training Program and Scheme for Training and Educating People

## **RESOURCES**

The unit's resources are:

- \* 1 full time Youth Counsellor
- \* 1 full time Co-ordinator ( funded through another program but responsible for supervision and consultation)
- \* Access to a team of support workers (funded through another program)
- \* Access to utility truck (purchased by the Brotherhood of St Laurence to assist clients with relocation)
- \* A budget of \$75,000 per year for two years
- \* A paging service for clients to access a worker after hours or in an emergency situation
- \* Office equipment and space at the EAC
- \* Administrative backup

## **SERVICE PROVISION**

The unit provides the following client services through direct work with clients:

### **INFORMATION AND ADVICE**

This could include information on :

- \* Emergency accommodation
- \* Supported accommodation
- \* Medium to long term options
- \* Ministry of housing
- \* Rights and responsibilities as a tenant
- \* Share notice boards
- \* Material aid
- \* Benefits assistance
- \* Vocational options
- \* Life skills

### **REFERRAL**

This would include:

- \* Accessing other services which appear more appropriate to client needs

These services might include:

- \* Emergency accommodation (refuge referral)
- \* Community Health Centres
- \* Supported Accommodation Services
- \* Services in a more appropriate location

## **FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

Five parts of the budget refer to financial assistance

- \* Payment of bond in advance
- \* Payment of rental arrears
- \* Provision of linen ( this will include doonas, linen, sheets, towels etc)
- \* Provision of general aid ( this will include payment for items required for relocation expenses, client travel, incidentals, and emergency relief)
- \* Rental subsidies

## **HOUSE SEARCHING SERVICE**

A step by step client program of assistance to access the private rental market. This may include the following activities:

- \* Resourcing client on where to look for housing
- \* Worker to accompany client to Real Estate Agent, provide the key deposit money and advocate for client
- \* Travel with client to prospective properties
- \* Identify to client the possible housing pitfalls, ie; safety features, electricity versus gas, proximity to public transport
- \* Negotiate price and leasing arrangements with client and agent.
- \* Arrange client to see Ministry of Housing for Bond Assistance
- \* Assist and seek out affordable removalist
- \* Transport small items for client
- \* Organise with client a budget
- \* Clarify to client their rights and responsibilities as a tenant
- \* Resource client on connection/disconnection fees
- \* Follow up

## **ADVOCACY**

Speaking on behalf of client to local, community and government organisations. These might include:

- \* Department of Social Security
- \* Real Estate Agents
- \* Tradespeople
- \* Supported Accommodation Programs

EAC also recognise that individual advocacy must be linked into ongoing public advocacy. Our Housing Resource worker therefore seeks out appropriate networks to:

- \* Advocate client needs
- \* Help initiate change
- \* Encourage a community response to a community issue

## **PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT**

### **1991**

James Boyce was commissioned by EAC to work on an Action Research Project into Homelessness and Youth Unemployment. In summary Boyce recommended that we;

- \* Develop the capacity to meet housing needs of homeless young people
- \* Provide a more diverse range of training options
- \* Increase the capacity to place homeless people in Traineeships
- \* Develop the capacity to meet other needs

Essential to his findings was the need for a Housing/Support worker to be employed by the Centre. He indicated that "this funding source should be one that doesn't encourage the development of a separate housing programs, but enables the worker to be an integrated part of the Employment Action Centre".

### **1992**

Funds acquired and a Housing/Support worker is employed on a full time capacity to support clients in existing EAC programs, whilst continuing to develop housing options for young homeless people.

The unit in 1992 assisted the following programs, by providing the services detailed on page 2-4, but also including subletting to clients as a means of access.

## **ACTIVE PLACEMENT UNIT**

Funded by DEET, under Skillshare's Disadvantaged Young People's Program, the unit has been operating since 1990. In that time it has aimed at providing intensive individual support to disadvantaged youth to access and maintain employment, education and training. In 1992 the unit saw 65 clients, 40% of whom were homeless.

## **TRAINEESHIP ACCESS COURSE**

A ten week preparatory program targeting 15-19 year olds, who are homeless or especially disadvantaged and aiming to access employment within The Australian Traineeship System. Two courses were run in 1992, assisting 24 participants, with a 50% homeless rate.

## **LINKED ACCESS PROGRAM**

This program aims to achieve full open market employment for young homeless people through the provision of employment and work placement programs which are linked to and enhanced by appropriate accommodation, support and related services. Employer, 'The Bodyshop' worked in conjunction with EAC, to provide work placements and training. The course had two intakes for 1992, assisting 16 participants. The intake included a target of 100% homeless. (This program required intensive on going assistance and support from our Housing unit as participants had been transient for some time)

## **1993**

Subletting option becomes less significant. Clients are encouraged to take on the responsibility of a lease.

The project continues to develop stronger links with other relevant agencies, advocating for client access. Especially targeted are local Real Estate Agents. EAC acquires extra training programs to meet Boyce's recommendation of the provision of a more diverse range of training options. Our Housing Unit is a support for the following programs.

**ACTIVE PLACEMENT UNIT** (as detailed above)

**TRAINEESHIP ACCESS COURSE** (as detailed above)

**LINKED ACCESS PROGRAM** (as detailed above)



## **YOUTH SERVICES UNIT**

A three week course targeting long term unemployed youth. The program commences at a camp site out of Melbourne where life skills are taught (emphasis on self esteem, housing, health and nutrition and communication skills) Our Housing Worker facilitates the group training for this course. The next two weeks are back at our centre where participants learn job searching skills. The unit is funded to see at least 55 participants throughout the year, many of whom will be homeless, or have unstable domestic situations.

## **JPET (JOB PLACEMENT, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING)**

The success of the Linked Access Program was demonstrated in the Federal initiative of this program. It works in a similar manner to LAP, but it is based at Chadstone shopping centre with several employers. The homeless rate is 100%. Two programs per year of 12 participants are scheduled.

## **STEP(SCHEME FOR TRAINING AND EDUCATING PEOPLE)**

A group employer of trainees, the scheme recruits, employs and places trainees with Host Trainers. The scheme aims to employ 26 trainees in 1993, targeting disadvantaged young people.

## **HOSPITALITY PROGRAM**

An accredited training course of ten weeks, preparing young disadvantaged people for the hospitality industry.

# OUTCOMES

## BUDGET BREAKDOWN - EXPENDITURE TO DATE

|   |                                 |   |               |
|---|---------------------------------|---|---------------|
| • | Staff salary costs              | = | \$ 40, 950.00 |
| • | Rental subsidies                | = | 9, 196.00     |
| * | Payment of bond/rent in advance | = | 4, 109.00     |
| * | Provision of general aid        | = | 2, 132.00     |
| * | Payment of rental arrears       | = | 375.00        |
| * | Provision of linen              | = | 158.00        |

**TOTAL EXPENDITURE TO DATE** = \$ 56, 920.00

Please note that the above expenditure does not include administrative costs, paging service, travelling costs, account/management costs, and other worker costs as these have been funded by the Brotherhood and not by the Trust Funds.

### CLIENTS ASSISTED

#### 1992

Clients given primary assistance (information, advice and referral) = 63

Clients given intensive support (on-going support, subletting arrangements, continued rental subsidy) = 9

#### 1993 - year to date

Clients given primary assistance (information, advice and referral) = 24

Clients given intensive support (on going support, rental subsidy) = 5

## **FURTHER COMMENTS**

The Employment Action Centre's Housing Resource Unit uniquely provides an integrated service to young homeless people.

Having a Housing Worker has meant that:

- \* All clients have immediate access to information and advice
- \* Client work and training placements are not in jeopardy because of insecure housing - our response can be immediate
- \* Centre staff are resourced by an expert in the area
- \* On going program development is possible, tailoring the service to meet client needs and conditions

## CASE STUDY

Fifteen year old Melissa Smith, was initially referred to the Active Placement Unit, to discuss vocational options. Melissa was an early school leaver and homeless. Her accommodation in a youth hostel was stable but causing her some discontent.

After identifying her needs and interests an action plan was developed that initially addressed her lack of skills and motivation. She was placed into EAC's Traineeship Access Course because she displayed an interest in the clerical field.

Whilst attending TAC, APU workers were in daily contact with Melissa, offering strategies and encouragement to continue the course, to be on time and to manage money. Melissa responded well to this and though not always acting on our advice she returned for further ideas.

On course completion and with the help of the TAC trainers, Melissa was successful in obtaining full time work under the Traineeship System. This gave her an increased income, the opportunity to be trained on-the-job and attend TAFE.

Melissa continued, however, to feel distressed about her housing, finding the house dynamics difficult and wanting to make the transition into independent housing. This often forced her to escape by returning to the family home where she would encounter unresolvable conflicts. Her current housing workers agreed to release her with the option of returning should she find independent living too difficult.

Our Housing worker spoke to Melissa providing her with information and advice on her options. It was decided that a one bedroom flat would be acquired in close proximity to her place of work. On application to the Real Estate Agent, Melissa was considered too young to sign a lease and consequently EAC offered to go as Guarantor to secure the property.

Melissa had limited furniture and no savings, so bond and rent in advance were provided through the Housing Unit budget. An on going subsidy was also allocated and a fridge bought. A worker from EAC had some unwanted furniture so kindly donated this for her new home. It was transported by our housing worker.

A budget was formulated with Melissa and arrangements made for a direct debit system to occur so that monies to pay her rent and other fixed items of expenditure would happen automatically.

Melissa has now been involved in her Traineeship for eight months. She enjoys the time at work and at TAFE. She loves her flat and is eternally grateful for the assistance provided by our centre.

Although Melissa is much more content, motivated and independent, she continues to see us regarding her health, her budget, relationships, and the loneliness that she sometimes feels in living independently. After the Traineeship our Housing worker in consultation with Melissa will review her accommodation and assess any further assistance that she may need.