

Policy for Youth at Risk Centres

Purpose

This policy provides the principles for operating accommodation under the Youth at Risk Centre program. The program provides unaccompanied children with short-term accommodation and support to access safe and secure long-term housing.

Policy context

Youth at Risk Centres are specialist homelessness services that provide crisis accommodation and support for unaccompanied children aged between 12 and 15 years.

Youth at Risk Centres provide short-term supported accommodation for children who are in immediate housing need. The Youth at Risk Centre provider will work with the child to transition them to a safe and stable place to live. Where appropriate, Youth at Risk Centres will work toward family reunification.

Children exiting institutional care settings, including youth detention and Out of Home Care, face significantly elevated risks of homelessness and poor education and employment outcomes. These children often experience abrupt transitions from highly supported environments to independent living without the stability, skills, or social networks needed to sustain housing.

Prioritising placements for these children into a Youth at Risk Centre – wherever it is safe and appropriate to do so – provides a structured, supported transition that mitigates homelessness risk, and supports continuity of care between youth justice, child safety, and housing systems.

The *Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework* (the Framework) recognises the need to work in partnership with families, community services and the broader community to improve the wellbeing of all children and young people in Tasmania. Wellbeing is defined in the framework and by Homes Tasmania as when a child or young person feels loved and safe; has access to material basics; has their physical, mental and emotional health needs met; is learning; is participating; and has a positive sense of culture and identity. The critical principles underlying Youth at Risk Centres are:

- the safety and wellbeing of the child is always the primary consideration
- alternative options for safe, appropriate accommodation and care for the child should be fully investigated before crisis accommodation in specialist homelessness services is provided
- if safe and possible, the child should return to the care of parents and/or family as soon as possible; where this is not achievable, they will be helped to transition to a safe and stable place to live.

Presentation and intake

The *Strong Families, Safe Kids Advice and Referral Line* (ARL) is the first contact point for child and wellbeing in Tasmania. The ARL aims to strengthen families, keep children safe and deliver early intervention and integrated services without the need for statutory interventions wherever possible.

Youth at Risk Centre providers will work closely with the ARL to ensure the effective assessment and intake of children, prioritising those who are exiting institutional care including youth detention and Out of Home Care.

Eligibility

To be eligible for accommodation at a Youth at Risk Centre, children must:

- live in Tasmania
- be an Australian citizen, or a permanent resident, including refugee visa subclasses 200, 201, 202, 203 and 204
- be aged 12 to 15 years
- be experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness
- be found suitable for placement.

Pending their suitability, children who are exiting institutional care settings, including youth detention and statutory care, will be prioritised for placement into a Youth at Risk Centre.

Suitability and placement

Youth at Risk Centre providers are responsible for reviewing referrals, determining suitability, and managing placements in their services.

When determining suitability, consideration will be given to:

- the child's safety and that of other residents and staff
- their capacity and willingness to engage with the care team and support providers
- their ability to live safely and cooperatively in a shared or communal environment
- any health or mobility needs that may affect accommodation options.

Children exiting institutional care settings, including youth detention and Out of Home Care, will be prioritised for placement into a Youth at Risk Centre wherever it is suitable and safe to do so.

Where safety concerns arise, Youth at Risk Centre providers will use a trauma-informed approach to manage and minimise risk, enabling children to access or remain in the program wherever possible.

Examples of risk factors requiring further consideration include:

- recent involvement in serious offending or justice processes where safety planning is required
- unmanaged or emerging mental health conditions
- substance use that significantly affects wellbeing or safety.

These factors do not automatically exclude placement in a Youth at Risk Centre. Instead, they inform collaborative risk assessment and planning to ensure appropriate supports are in place to promote a successful and safe placement.

The ARL is responsible for working in collaboration with specialist homelessness services and others involved with the child (such as family), for exploring alternative options to secure alternative accommodation if a placement at a Youth at Risk Centre is unavailable, unsafe, or unsuitable.

Where a special allocation is made directly to a Youth at Risk Centre by Homes Tasmania, the provider will assume responsibility for assessing suitability and confirming placement.

Case coordination

The ARL is the principal referral point for children aged under 16 who is alone and needs crisis accommodation.

A Youth at Risk Centre must contact the ARL on 1800 000 123 when a child presents on their own or is referred by an allied service, such as another specialist homelessness service.

As a mandatory reporter¹, a Youth at Risk Centre must share relevant information about the child's presentation/stay with the ARL. This may include gaining consent to share information with the ARL² and other appropriate services.

If presentation occurs outside of business hours, the Youth at Risk Centre should contact the ARL immediately if:

- the child is under the age of 12
- accommodation at the Youth at Risk Centre is not suitable or available
- there are acute concerns for the safety and wellbeing of the child that require action outside of business hours

or otherwise, the ARL should be contacted on the next available working day.

¹ Part 3 of the *Children Young Persons and their Families Act 1997* outlines the legislative provisions for informing of concern about abuse or neglect.

² Part 5A of the *Children Young Persons and their Families Act 1997* outlines the legislative provisions that enable information sharing between CYF and SHS.

Accommodation services

Youth at Risk Centres are designed to provide safe, inclusive and appropriate short-term accommodation for children in housing need.

Accommodation features of a Youth at Risk Centre include:

- a private single bedroom with access to an ensuite or shared gender-neutral bathroom
- at least one accessible bedroom and bathroom for residents with mobility needs
- Wi-Fi access in all rooms.

Placement for the duration of need

The length of stay is flexible to support the child's progress against goals set under a care team approach. It is intended that placements will be for a short term (less than six weeks) up to medium term (less than 12 months).

Provision of meals

Residents will receive three nutritious meals per day as well as supplementary foods eg morning tea and healthy snacks. This includes consideration of special dietary requirements, both preferred and required (in the case of allergies/intolerance).

Meals will be provided in a communal environment and will meet Australian Dietary Guidelines.

Laundry service

Residents will have access to communal laundry facilities, including washing machines and dryers to launder their own clothing. Residents will receive a weekly laundry service to launder bed linen and towels.

Affordable

Residents with an independent income are required to pay an affordable rent or board based on 25 per cent of their income plus any Commonwealth Rent Assistance. A security deposit (bond) of up to two weeks' rent may be required and paid in instalments if needed.

Provision of support

Care team approach

On placement of a child at a Youth at Risk Centre, the ARL will establish a care team that will include a key worker based at the centre.

A care team is an ongoing collaborative group of key people identified by a child as being important in their life. This could include the child (dependent on their age and ability to participate), their family members, caregivers, professionals and others.

The care team should meet as soon as practicable. Depending on the individual circumstances, the lead coordination and case management role may vary. The Youth at Risk Centre and the ARL will work collaboratively to support the care team approach throughout the duration of accommodation.

Youth support plan

The lead coordinator (designated under the care team approach) will develop a youth support plan to record the model of care and goals for the child against the six domains of the Framework.

Responding to the specific needs of the child, a youth support plan will:

- agree shared goals and outcomes, to make decisions and carry out actions in the best interests of the child
- agree on decision making authority based on the legal status and developmental maturity of the child; to include issues such as:
 - managing requests to spend night/s away from a Youth at Risk Centre
 - what to do if a child fails to return to a Youth at Risk Centre by curfew (and either is or is not subject to a statutory order)
 - who to contact in the event of sickness (both emergency and day to day)
 - managing permission/consent for school excursions or similar
- document outcomes and progress
- agree on escalation strategies should issues arise (including breach of Youth at Risk Centre rules, situations that could lead to exclusion, when to call emergency services, etc)
- include strategies and arrange, where necessary, safe stable accommodation on exit as appropriate.

The youth support plan will be regularly reviewed and monitored by the care team.

Support

As well as providing accommodation services, Youth at Risk Centres will work in partnership with the child's care team to deliver tailored support.

Support provided at a Youth at Risk Centre will be:

- **Tailored to strengths:** applying a trauma-informed, capabilities-based approach known as *Advantaged Thinking*, focusing on potential rather than deficits.
- **Coordinated:** working collaboratively with other providers to deliver a connected, integrated response with clear roles, responsibilities and shared outcomes.
- **Community-based:** building strong community connections to promote inclusion and civic participation.

- **Person-centred:** empowering children people to participate in decisions about their lives, with their voices heard and valued.
- **Inclusive:** recognising and valuing the cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and children from diverse cultural, linguistic, religious, ability and gender backgrounds.

Exiting from a Youth at Risk Centre

The care team shares responsibility for developing agreed strategies to support children's safe and appropriate exit from a Youth at Risk Centre. This could include:

- returning to the care of parents or other family members where safe and possible
- exiting into a suitable Youth2Independence program, or independent living (social housing or private rental) with the necessary supports if the child is approaching the age of 16.

Exclusion from a Youth at Risk Centre should be a last resort, and only after discussion with the ARL as part of the care team approach.

Where exclusion is unavoidable, alternative accommodation should be in place before a child is excluded so they do not exit into homelessness.

Reporting abuse or neglect

In Tasmania, mandatory reporting requires any person with reasonable grounds to believe a child is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse, neglect or exposure to family violence to report it.

Reports must be made to the **Strong Families, Safe Kids Advice and Referral Line** on **1800 000 123** or via the online form at strongfamiliesafekids.tas.gov.au.

If a child is in immediate danger, call **000** or the **Police Assistance Line** on **131 444**.

Mandatory reporting applies to all people working with children and young people, including service providers and Homes Tasmania staff. It is a legal obligation to report concerns when:

- a child is, or is likely to be, experiencing physical, emotional or sexual abuse, neglect or exposure to family violence
- a child's parents or guardians are unwilling or unable to care for, supervise or protect them
- a person under 16 is not attending school without a valid reason.

Relevant documents

This Policy should be read in conjunction with relevant documents, including:

- Tasmanian Child and Youth Wellbeing Framework - www.strongfamiliesafekids.tas.gov.au/child-and-youth-wellbeing-framework/

- Policy Framework for U16 Homelessness
- Practice Guidelines for U16 Homelessness
- Youth at Risk Centre Support and Assistance Procedure
- Youth at Risk Centre Exit Planning Procedure
- Youth at Risk Centre Intake and Assessment Procedure
- Head lease rent arrangements - Rent setting policy and annual rent adjustments - www.homestasmania.com.au/engage/Information-for-Partners/contract-management-framework/head-lease-arrangements
- Australian Dietary Guidelines - www.eatforhealth.gov.au/guidelines/australian-dietary-guidelines-1-5
- Advantaged Thinking practice www.efyfoyers.org.au/background/theoretical-framework
- National Principles for Child Safe Organisations - childsafefhumanrights.gov.au/national-principles

Our contact details



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www.homestasmania.com.au