

Rural Youth Homelessness: Has the Bough Broken

Presentation will examine:

- Background issues (rural, youth and indigenous)
- Model of Homelessness
- Aims of the PhD
- Methodology
- Outline of the research
- Results from Stage 1 and 2



Background Issues

- Few studies have investigated the concept of homelessness in rural communities
- Fewer still have examined rural Indigenous homelessness issues
- Research suggests that the concerns and needs of rural youth differ to those of city youth ie higher youth suicide, D & A abuse, DV, and socio-economic disadvantage (Griffiths, 1996).
- Rural youth concerns may be of greater severity

Youth Homelessness Issues

Definitions of Youth and Homelessness

- Youth can vary between ages 12 to 25
- Homelessness has a diversity of definitions
 - ◆ lacking access to affordable safe and secure housing
 - ◆ no accommodation whatsoever and regularly live on the streets
 - ◆ Definitions can be multifaceted
 - ◆ Cultural differences can also exist



Rural Youth Homelessness

- There is growing evidence that homelessness in rural communities is growing much faster than in city centres
- while the causes of homelessness in the country might be similar to those of the city the experience of homelessness and the consequences of homelessness are much different
- (Streich Havell & Spafford 2002)



Rural vs Metropolitan Differences

- Fewer specialist services, especially in outlying areas
- Access and availability of services lacking
- Higher unemployment rates
- Difficulties of distance and isolation
- Identified concerns of higher rates of youth suicide
- Definitions of rurality



Indigenous Homelessness

- Under-researched and little is known about rates, risk factors and areas of concern
- Aboriginal young people may be able to access accommodation through networks of extended friends and kinship systems
- This may not provide stable and secure housing
- Often no consistent or stable caregiver
- Often in transit - uncertain and unchanging caregiving environments.

Indigenous Homelessness

- Many families often reside together often hiding the true extent of homelessness
- Such living arrangements often impact on tenancy and can result in evictions
- When evicted multiple families are seeking accommodation which perpetuates overcrowding in households
- Indigenous Australians have proportionately much lower home ownership therefore are more dependent on public and private rental housing

Indigenous Youth Homelessness

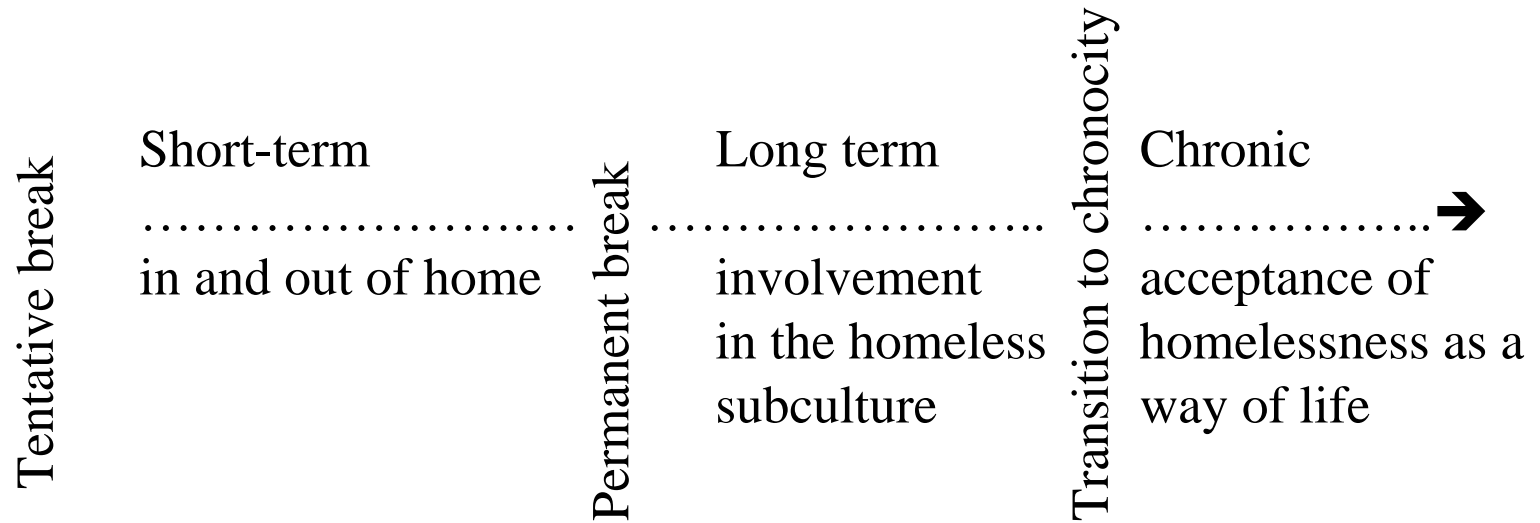
- Lack of research in rural/remote communities
- Metropolitan research indicates that young people's homelessness was preceded by lengthy histories of high mobility, multiple care givers and abuse (DHS, 2001)
- Sub-standard housing, overcrowding and the ill-health of care givers are more significant as triggering factors
- Overall, there is evidence that the level of disadvantage of homeless Aboriginal youth is greater than their non-Indigenous counterparts
- “Moving Yarns” Aboriginal Youth Homelessness in Metropolitan Adelaide (Department of Human Services, 2001).

Homelessness Model

Model of Homelessness as a “Career Path” (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 1998).

- Views homelessness as a process rather than an event
- Young people go through a number of stages before developing a personal identity as a homeless person
- Early, Middle and Late phases
- Progression through these stages results in self identification as a homeless person

Ideal-Typical Model of the Homeless Career



Chamberlain, C., & MacKenzie, D. (1998). Youth Homelessness. Early Intervention and Prevention. RMIT: NSW page 71.



Homelessness Model

- This model has not been examined within Indigenous youth or Rural youth
- Examination of this model within these groups will add to the knowledge and understanding of the progression to homelessness for rural and Indigenous youth

Aims of the PhD

- To identify the characteristics, needs and resources of youth who are homeless in rural areas.
- To develop a definition of homelessness that is pertinent to a rural homeless youth population.
- To examine by what chain of events rural young people become homeless.
- To explore the patterns of movement of homeless rural youth.

Aims (continued)

- To ascertain what services are available to and used by homeless youth in rural SA



Methodology

Participatory Action Research

- “Instead of a linear model, participatory action research thus proceeds through cycles, ‘starting’ with reflection on action, and proceeding round to new action which is then further researched”.
- “Essentially participatory action research is research which involves all relevant parties in actively examining together current action (which they experience as problematic) in order to change and improve it”.

(Wadsworth, 1998, p 5 and 13)



Results

- Stage 1 Interviews with Experts in the field of Homelessness

- Stage 2
 - ◆ Part 1 Focus groups in Whyalla
 - ◆ Part 2 Focus Groups in Rural Communities

- Stage 3 Interviews with Young Homeless or at Risk of Homelessness People

Stage 1 Expert Interviews

Interviews with Experts

- 5 Interviews completed (3M and 2 F)
- 3 Australia (research manager at a welfare/community agency; academic in the area of housing and urban research conducting research widely in the area of youth homelessness; and an academic with research background in Aboriginal housing issues especially in rural and remote locations)
- 2 UK (A British youth researcher and and Reader in Sociology)

Summary of Interview Questions

- 1. What does homelessness mean to you?
- 2. What does having a home mean to you?
- 3. What issues do you view as being relevant to homelessness in rural youth?
- 4. What early intervention strategies do you see as most helpful in reducing youth homelessness?

Interview Questions (cont)

- 5. What strategies do you think should be developed to link schools and youth/family support services?
- 6. What additional support mechanisms/programs are most needed to address the prevention of and/or early intervention into youth homelessness?
- 7. How do you view the transition to homelessness in a young person?

Results - Definitions

- All 5 agreed that definitions need to be broad and along the continuum
- Number of definitions were mentioned
- Australia – UK differences were noted
- *“I mentioned the 1977 Housing Act and I said that if you are homeless and in priority need then the housing department or the state is required to give you a house. Now priority generally means having children under 16, so there is a big split in the country between services for homeless families and for single young people and single older people”*

Results - Definitions

- Lifestyle factors and exclusion from social participation while homeless was raised
- A home was accepted to be a minimum standard of housing
- A home was also identified as a place of safety, security, privacy and allowing access to social participation in the community

Results – Rural Issues

Issues

- Lack of services
- Drug and Alcohol abuse
- Transient families
- Cultural differences in Indigenous communities
- Hidden homelessness in rural towns

“Another point is that homelessness in rural areas is much more likely in Britain I think to be hidden homeless, hidden homelessness being the insecurity of living in someone else’s household”

Results – Rural Issues

- Structural factors
- Violence and abuse
- Lack of accommodation services (scattered homelessness)
- Regional and major city drift
- Lack of parenting role models for Indigenous parents who had been removed from their families

Results –Strategies to Overcome YH

■ Strategies

- ◆ Working closely with school welfare workers
- ◆ Making parenting courses and counselling more available and accessible
- ◆ Greater employment and training options
- ◆ Family counselling available as soon as a crisis erupts
- ◆ Enhanced supports in the community
- ◆ More structured and coordinated approach to accessing innovative and successful intervention programs across the country
- ◆ Offering peer support programs, employment options to youth at risk



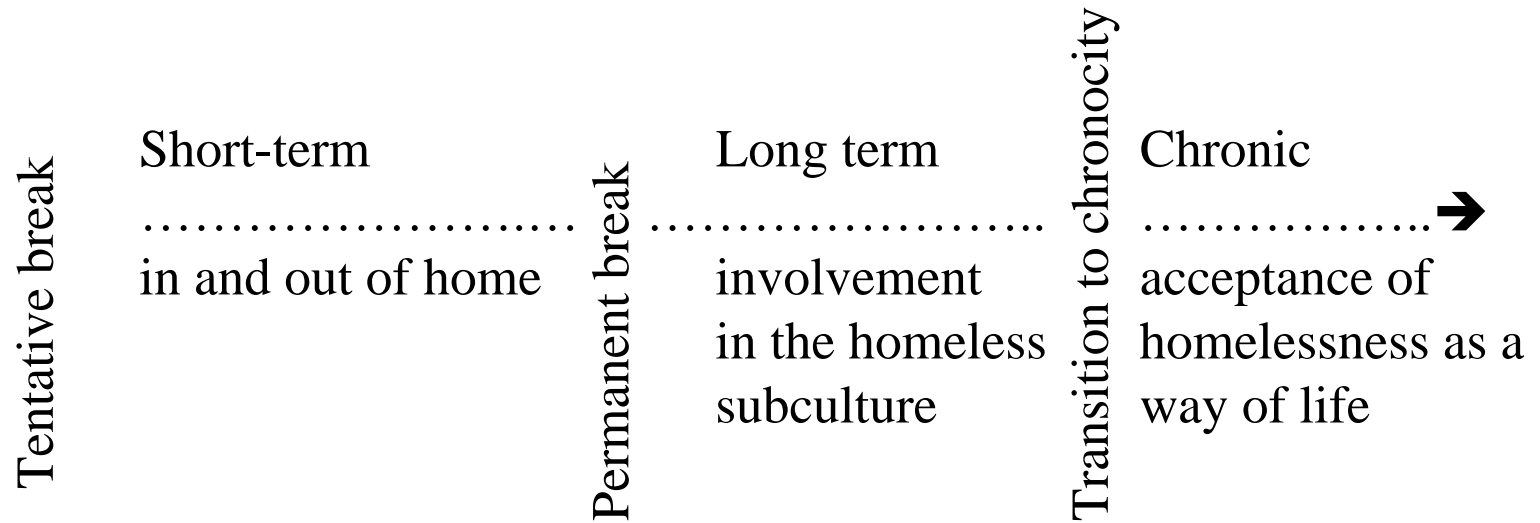
Foyers

- Foyers originated in the 1800's with the founders of the trade union movement in France.
- They established a job centre which also provided accommodation for travelling workers together with education and training opportunities
- In the United Kingdom there are 114 Foyer's operating

Foyers

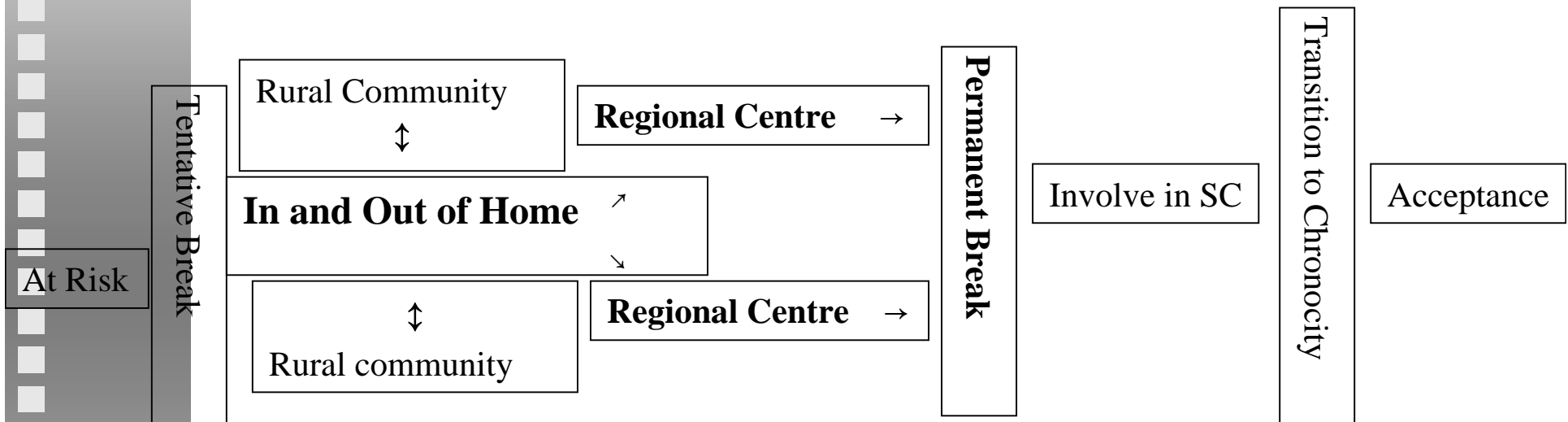
- *“ The Foyer model in France and England that hasn’t really been tested here in Australia certainly works, seems to work pretty well for a proportion of people That link of a stable housing base with some access to mentor or pseudo parental support the sort of landlady option in a more modern form and other peer support mechanisms plus access, ready access, to employment, vocational training and apprenticeships ”*

Ideal-Typical Model of the Homeless Career



Chamberlain, C., & MacKenzie, D. (1998). Youth Homelessness. Early Intervention and Prevention. RMIT: NSW page 71.

Rural Homelessness 'Career Path' Model



Rural Youth tend to remain in the “in and out of home” phase for a longer period of time as there are often fewer accommodation options available in the country towns and young people regularly find it easier to survive in their own home area. Rural youth continuing to reside in rural communities remain in the “in and out of home” phase for a longer period of time. However, those young people who move to regional centres or inter city locations are more likely to initiate a “permanent break” in the model.

Stage 2 Part 1

Whyalla Focus Groups

- 5 Focus Groups run in Whyalla (March 2002)
 - ◆ Young people (5 attended)
 - ◆ Indigenous Young people (14 attended)
 - ◆ Parents (4 attended)
 - ◆ Indigenous Parents (14 attended)
 - ◆ Agency Representatives (9 attended)
 - Participants were given questions prior to group and were selected for their experience or contact with homeless youth.

Results – Definitions (Whyalla)

- The Indigenous definitions clearly view homelessness outside the transience of housing that other groups identified in their responses. (ie “not really a problem in Indigenous families (homelessness), having somewhere to stay means you are not homeless, we know everyone and there are lots of family and friends who help each other out” etc).



Results – Rural Issues (Whyalla)

- Limited accommodation options
- Difficulties with foster placements
- High visibility of youth
- Lack of appropriate Indigenous services, especially trained Indigenous workers
- Need for after hours service
- Multitude of problems associated with high unemployment rates
- Boredom and lack of activities

Results – Strategies (Whyalla)

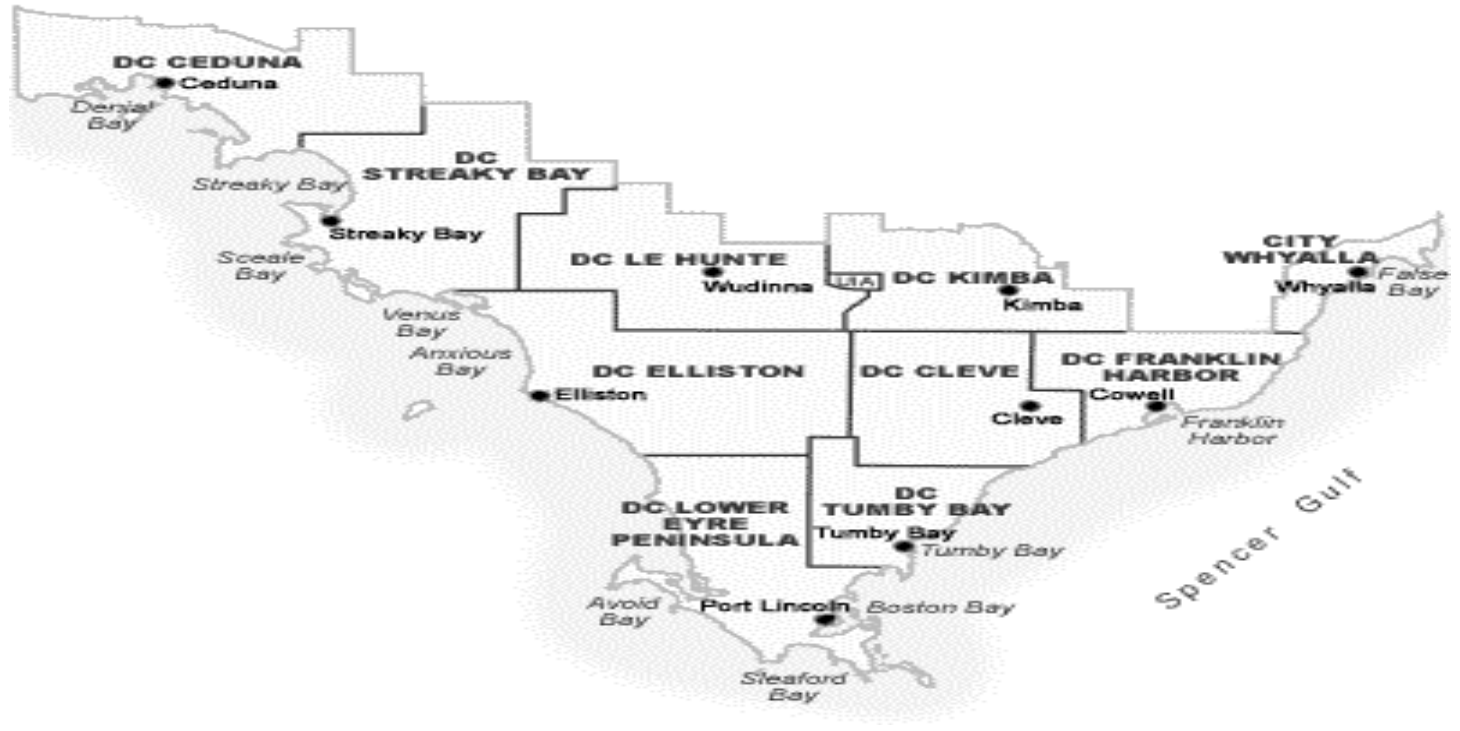
- Primary focus around schools
- Introducing services for families more strongly based at schools
- Greater communication between families, schools and agencies through home and phone contact and the introduction of a regular newsletter
- More incentive and support for at risk students for them to attend school
- More appropriate services for Indigenous families and greater use of AEW
- Young people identified increased use of internet, online chat rooms, email contact, web pages and internet access

Stage 2 Part 2

Rural Focus Groups

- Focus Groups conducted with youth, agencies and parents in Kimba, Cummins, Cleve, Cowell, Elliston, Wuddina, Streaky Bay and Ceduna
- Overall rural focus groups indicated that homelessness was rare and most issues surrounded unstable living arrangements or transition to regional centres or cities for young people
- Other issues included: need for drug and alcohol workshops for young people, peer education programs, youth centres, one stop shops for youth services and addressing of gambling problems for parents in these communities

REGION 1



Stage 3 Interviews with young People

- N = 16 (Whyalla and Ceduna)
- Interviewed 3 times over 6 months
- Age range 13 to 25 years
- Male = 8; Female = 8
- Indigenous = 10, non-Indigenous = 6
- Currently 2 of the 3 sets of interviews have been completed

Questions and Comments

■ Jane.farrin@unisa.edu.au

Thank You

