

**Adolescent
Development:
Implications for
accommodation
and housing providers**

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1. Introduction

QYHC is the peak advocacy body in Queensland for young people's housing issues, and we have a particular focus on youth housing/homelessness and the direct correlation to educational outcomes for young people.

QYHC currently manages two areas of work, the Youth Support Coordinators Hub Facilitators Team and a Housing Policy Team. The coalition attempts, through these teams, to provide leadership, support and a voice for the community based youth housing services, Youth Support Coordinators and related sectors as well as youth people within these service systems.

QYHC is affiliated at the national level with the National Youth Coalition for Housing (NYCH) and the Australian Federation of Homelessness Organisations (AFHO).

2. Why discuss adolescent development in youth work practice

QYHC responds to the needs of young people and based on these understandings advocates for practice improvement and policy development.

QYHC is informed of the needs of young people through data collection and research projects. QYHC also consults and works with youth housing services to identify up and coming issues for young people and to reflect on the issues facing young people as identified through the data collection and research.

The renewed focus on adolescence by QYHC is due to the concern that social policy and subsequently practice development through funding guidelines is being driven from philosophical or economic drivers as opposed to a needs based framework.

Increasingly social policy has overlooked the developmental issues facing independent young people. Further social policy aimed at dependent and independent young people demonstrate the conflicting expectations of young people based on their circumstances not their age. This schism is most obvious when we reflect on the policy response to young people who are still in the family home as opposed to those young people who are no longer able to live at home and in many cases living independently.

One example is in the income support system where young people under 25 and not disengaged from their families are still seen as dependents in the income support system. However young people under 18 and not at home are expected to be able to live on a basic income support system and expected to negotiate a range of complex living situations.

The current Federal Government Policy as outlined on the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training website states that:

Determining Independence for YA

Young people are independent and exempt from the parental means test for Youth Allowance if (they):

are, or have been, self-supporting through employment (conditions apply); or,

- or a refugee;
- are in State care;
- it is unreasonable for them to live at home;
- are 18 years of age or older and have a work history but who experience education or employment disadvantage;
- are, or have been, a member of a couple (conditions apply);
- have, or have had, a dependent child,
- are aged 25 years or over;
- are orphaned; or
- have parents who cannot exercise their responsibilities because they are in prison, a psychiatric hospital, or similar.

Parental Means Test

A parental means test applies unless the young person is assessed as independent, or the parent receives income support or a payment under the exception circumstances provisions of the Farm Household Support Act 1992. The parental means test has three parts: parental income, family assets and family actual means tests (FAMT).

The income support for young people is grossly inadequate to meet their living needs. The Youth Allowance is benchmarked at an inadequate level for young people who are independently living in our community.

The current payment level for an independent single young person is \$334.70 per fortnight. Young people are also entitled to rent assistance:

Single: max \$99.20 p/f (min rent \$88.20 p/f to max rent \$220.47 p/f)

Sharer: max \$66.13p/f (min rent \$88.20 p/f to max rent \$220.47p/f)

The following table is an estimation of the after housing income for young people in Queensland.

(SOURCE: RTA website Dec 2005)	Brisbane	Rockhampton	Townsville
1 Bedroom unit/flat p/f	380	200	300
Single Youth allowance +RA	334.70 (no RA)	433.90	334.70 (no RA)
After housing income p/f	45.30	233.90	34.70
2 Bedroom unit/flat p/f	500	280	370
Single Youth allowance +RA	334.70 (no RA)	334.70 (no RA)	334.70 (no RA)
After housing income p/f	165.30	54.70	35.30
Sharer Youth Allowance +RA	334.70 (no RA)	400.83	400.83
After housing income p/f	84.70	260.83	215.83
3 bedroom house p/f	540	380	480
Sharer Youth Allowance +RA	400.83	400.83	400.83
After housing income p/f	220.83	273.83	240.83

In the best case scenario in the table above a young person would have an after housing income of \$273.83p/f or \$137p/w. The money needs to include food, electricity, transport, phone and hygiene products. While the after housing income may be higher in regional areas the cost of living is also higher. This situation is exacerbated for those young people who are homeless and/or continue to be homeless while they engage in studying.

The current level of payment forces young people to:

- share in the private rental market due to housing un-affordability
- engage in some sort of part time or casual work because no matter what their living arrangement are in the private rental market they will still need to supplement their income

The casual nature of the workforce means that:

- the hours required to work in order to obtain a adequate level of income detrimentally impact on study and therefore educational outcomes; and
- as they get older casual work is increasingly hard to find and so a focus on living can be a priority over study.

Young people are our future and that includes them all not just those wealthy enough to be able to afford a secondary or tertiary education. Further let's not go to the lowest common denominator in the payment of young people, the payment structure must to be based on the cost of living.

The cost of living for a young person under 25 who is living independently is no different to a person over 25 who is living independently. Young people do no pay junior rates for food at a major supermarket, rent at the real estate agency, clothes or any other costs associated with living in our community. In fact for some young people especially young men we must also remember that young men do go through a number of growth spurts at this time and their food intake requirement can be are higher than an adult at this stage of their lives.

There is also an expectation that young people who are independent need to have a high level of negotiation skill in order to meet their housing needs (negotiation with real estates and other housemates) and to be able to manage their budgets (decisions about which items are of more importance at any one given moment).

Another example where social policy is divergent is in the area of prevention and early intervention in comparison to crisis accommodation. There has been an increased understanding that families/parents undertake a vital nurturing role of young people. Research and program funding has been increased in this areas as can be seen by funding for the Reconnect services at national level and youth workers in schools throughout the States and Territories of Australia however there has been no increase in funding for crisis services.

Funding for youth SAAP services of the course of the last two agreements have not acknowledged the need for significant increases in funding for youth accommodation at either the bed number level or for the ongoing viability of services.

Unfortunately it has not been so politically popular to acknowledge that for some young people they are not able to live in the family home and that these services do not assist young people who have to make their own way in the world. It is interesting to note that the increased focus on early intervention and prevention is also seen as a mechanism(s) to address youth homelessness.

While there expectation that in the longer term there will less young people homeless due to the early intervention and prevention focus it must be acknowledged that not all young people will be able to remain in the family home.

Certainly for young people under 18 years of age it could be said that the care and protection of these children and young people is the responsibility of the State Child Welfare departments. Unfortunately both the data and anecdotal experience from the SAAP youth sector services is that there are a significant number of young people 12 -18 years who are not taken into care or if they are in care do not have adequate support.

There are also a number of young people who are currently not captured in the formal service system and are 'couchsurfing' either with friends or extended families. Again there are limited policy responses that explore the need for these young people to be housed while family mediation and support is conducted.

The current responses to independent young people can be seen to be limiting their equity of opportunity either due to:

- lack of state welfare response
- lack of adequate income support in relation to current living costs
- increasing punitive responses to young people breaching their income support

It is a concern for QYHC that there is no equity, in terms policy development, of the expectation of young people who can remain at home and for young people who are living independently.

In order to provide equitable outcomes for young people it is therefore essential to explore what the young people's needs are. Underpinning the individual needs of young people is the common element of adolescent development.

3. What is adolescent development?

It is essential that social welfare programs supporting young people are aware of the adolescent development issues.

Program and program guidelines must have built into them flexibility that acknowledges the nature of adolescent development and does not request outcomes that neither young people nor services can attain.

Adolescent development is generally seen to be in three stages:

- Early adolescence: 12-14 years
- Middle adolescence: 15 -16 years
- Late adolescence: 17 – 19 years

Adolescence is a time for great change for young people and their families. In the main these changes occur between the ages of 12-15 years and generally young women mature earlier than young men.

These changes for young people are at a number of levels:

- Biological – physical
- Psychological – thinking and feeling
- Social – how they relate to the world around them

At a biological level there are growth spurts and gangly looks due to the growth of the extremities before the growth of the trunk/torso and for some young people this can be a more awkward times than others. There is also the increase in body hair and sexual development (visible through the growth of organs but also invisible with an increase in oestrogen for girls and testosterone for boys). A major sexual development is menstruation for young women and ejaculation for young men also occurs at this stage. Glands in the skin become more active creating more body odour and acne. While they make look larger the capacity for the lungs and heart is not in sync so young people may not have the amount of stamina as their physical size may project – some young people may require more sleep than others.

At a psychological level young people are more aware of the world around them and can think more critically. Young people do tend to think of themselves as invincible and believe that they can influence the world and that their experiences are new and different to others therefore reacting to others when they challenge their ideas. Young people tend to be more in the moment and at this time it is important to provide guidance to young people about the possible long term consequences for their behaviour.

Young people are also trying to work out who they are, what they value and where they want to be in the world. There is an intense self consciousness and critical evaluation of self and others.

At the end of the day young people are striving to be more independent. Again this is a process of negotiating the levels of freedoms for young people and requires the need for both parties to move boundaries and to negotiate this change.

Sector definition in relation to adolescent development

Young people are generally defined as being between the ages of 12 to 25 and therefore is inclusive of the adolescent development age range.

The field also defines young people in this way for eg the Queensland Youth Housing Coalition defines young people as being between the ages of 12 to 25 years. However this does not imply that the Coalition is of the opinion that the accommodation and housing responses will be the same for all young people in this age cohort. Consideration should be given to age, support needs and skill levels when developing responses to young people's accommodation and housing needs.

It must also be noted that there are a number of legislative frameworks that guide accommodation and housing responses to young people. In response to this the QYHC has broken down the age group of young people into three sub groups: 12–15, 16-18, and 19-25 years.

In examining the chart below it must be noted that SAAP services do stretch out the age brackets (ie they cover a number of developmental stages) of young people in terms of the service delivery. However it must be remembered that young people who are in SAAP services are:

- (a) dealing with a range of trauma issues relating to the fact that they are no longer able to live in the family home and we can reflect here on the work that Catherine Robinson mentioned yesterday in her paper *“Responding to Long term homelessness: the Challenges of Qualitative Research”*; and
- (b) have no capacity to move “back home” should their private rental or other accommodation break down so there is a greater need to ensure that young people have the independent social and living skills prior to moving out of SAAP accommodation

	Developmental age	SAAP	Cultural, legal social milestones * (there are state variations)
Early adolescence	12	12	Young person can have their say before you are adopted and cannot be adopted without consent Young person must agree before their parents can change and register a different surname
	13	13	
	14	14	
Middle adolescence	15	15	Obtain Medicare Card Access to independent Youth Allowance Sign a lease if contract of necessity
	16	16	Age of consent Learners Permit for driving
Late adolescence	17	17	School leaving age [†] Treated as an adult in the justice system [‡] Get a drivers licence
	18	18	Right to vote Buy alcohol and go to a public bar Buy cigarettes Get a tattoo or body piercing Get married Make a will
	19	19	

There is an acknowledge that there are variations between cultures as to when cultures define when young people reach adulthood. Fundamentally the physical and psychological maturing of young people occurs at these year levels.

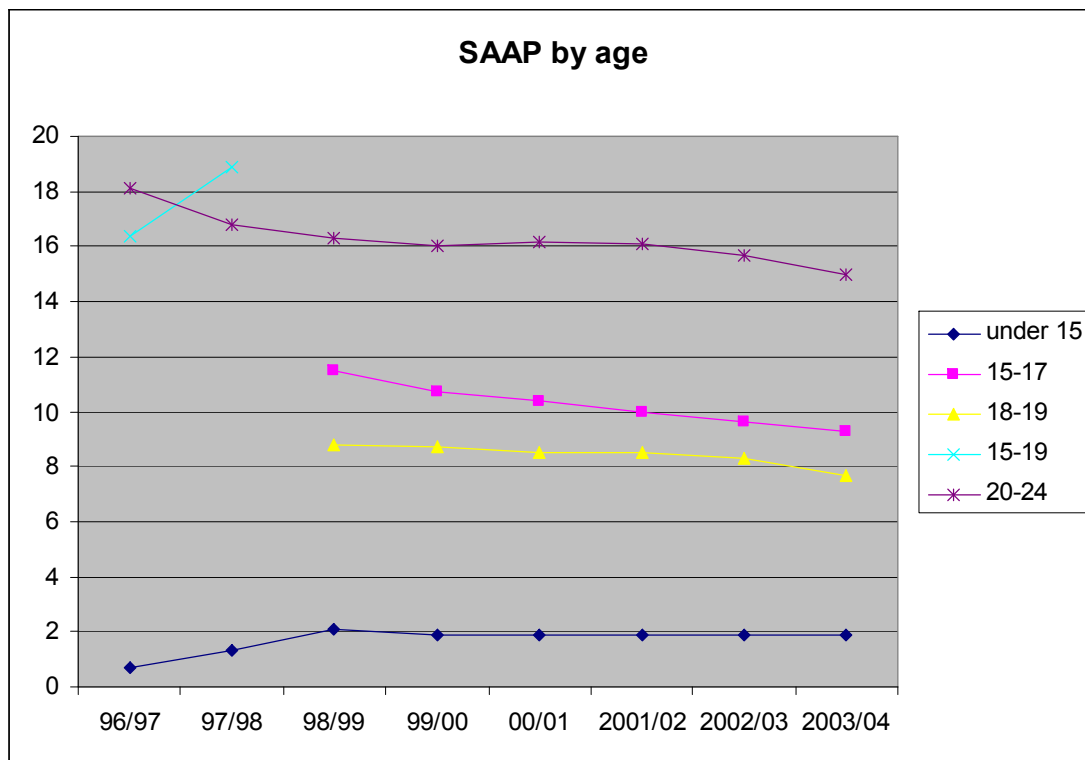
4. Implications for SAAP funded services

The SAAP service system has increasing found that the age group of young people entering services have decreased in the last number of years.

* Varies from State to State and for same sex couples

† Varies from State to State

‡ Varies from State to State



The table above demonstrates that in 1998/1999 that the numbers of young people under 15 peaked at 2.1% of all clients in SAAP services. Since that time the % of clients in that age group has been stable however the age groups 15-17 and 18-19 have decreased as a proportion of the total client group. It could be asserted that young people under 15 requires more support and so in turn less clients are accessing the service at the higher age group.

Supportive family relationships are critical for many young people. For young people who are independent the role of the 'caring' adult is often undertaken by a key support person. In many cases the key support person for a homeless young person is a youth worker located in a SAAP service.

In recent times the nature of the professional relationship between the youth worker and the young person has changed. In the past young people were older and the work with young people was based on a relationship model of practice. This acknowledged that young people were in the middle to late stage of adolescent development and the role of the youth worker focussed on the need to assist young people to set boundaries, experiment with their values, sexuality and view on life, and to find their place in the world. Issues for caregivers in relational practice are that:

- they provide a wide range of care giving;
- are the caring and responsible adult;
- provide appropriate support in times of crisis;
- know their peers through the service; and
- provide role models for young people.

The work of youth workers needs to acknowledge that in practice young people are seeking to find themselves and that behaviour is related to the need to find identity.

In terms of young peoples desire to be more independent they seek to have more independent relationships and having a greater relationship to their peer group. Peer groups tend to provide young people with a 'self-help' system – reflecting their new thoughts and ideas. Peer groups may fracture and change as young people become more individualised. Peer groups as the Mission Australia survey demonstrated yesterday can play a large part in providing young people with information and support. This demonstrates the importance of youth workers of working in group work and with peer group about essential information.

The importance of young people negotiating their independence is a vital part of young people learning to negotiate their environment - this should start to dissipate when young people reach 16 years of age.

As the age of young people have decreased in SAAP the relational practice has needed to give way to the need for youth workers to provide duty of care. In essence this has meant a slippage from "equal" relationship to more formalised care arrangements. The changing role of the youth worker has also meant a change in the skill set, training and professional development in the field.

It is essential that there is an exploration of the possible policy and practice responses that would best meet the needs of young people taking into account their developmental needs and growth within a continuum of care framework.

There needs to be consideration with regard to curfew and freedoms within an accommodation service related to age and development of the young people in the service.

One of the challenges to the youth workers in being significant adults for young people is the issue that:

- young people are developing values and we need to be tolerant about how we support young people in developing these values esp when they conflict with the organisation values of the service
- providing guidelines on the legality of issues – especially around drug taking
- duty of care issues - assisting young people to make informed decisions – risk taking behaviour

Young people should also be allowed to make mistakes and exclusions need to be considered within this framework.

Harm minimisation must also be a critical principle that guides the work with young people around sex education as it only deals with the physical disease.

Another item that needs consideration when exploring the role and function of youth service for young people is the size of the service. If the role and function of youth workers is to be a key support person and to have a relational practice should we not also consider what impact the service size and “intimacy” of the service means for young people. For some young people a service may be the only place that they will call “home” for many years, where people accept them for who they are and who are significant adults that assist them to leap into their adulthood.

5. Implications of an adolescent development for policy development

In terms of the Supported Accommodation and Assistance Program and its capital arm project the Crisis Accommodation Program the discussion on the needs of young people from a developmental framework becomes critical in program logic.

In particular there needs to be an understanding of when and how support and housing can be separated. If we explore the role that SAAP/CAP services undertake in terms of young people who are homeless it is essential that adolescent development is considered. Further it would be impossible to conceive a SAAP/CAP program without support and housing being tied.

If we consider that youth services funded out of the SAAP program are the “homes” for young people it is then essential to consider what the funding needs are to enable service to be able to undertake their roles. This includes the need for:

- Adequate staffing
- Adequate grocery bills to deal with growing bodies
- Adequate operational income to provide educational tools such as computers and software
- Accommodation that is well resourced – painted, good furniture and other goods and chattels.

Conclusion

There needs to be more work in this area in terms of data analysis and research. For example one of the outcomes of the data during the last SAAP agreement was that there was a return rate of 25% of people back into the SAAP service system. By some this was seen as a flaw of the SAAP service system, however for young people the return to a service may be a positive outcome. This process is no different to young people who leave the family home to go to tertiary training and go into student sharehousing and then find that maybe living at home was not so bad – clean house, food supplied and minimal board.