

## Youth homeless hell: not enough beds for local kids

Mitchell Crawley | 6th Jun 2017 3:40 PM



SOS: The Family Centre is calling on the NSW Government to restore the number of Tweed beds available for homeless young people from four to 16.

**Cade Mooney**

THE Tweed has only four crisis accommodation beds for homeless children and teenagers - the worst in the state, according to a local provider.

The organisation claims the crisis was forcing vulnerable young people into unsafe situations while pushing support services to breaking point.

"In the past year, over 290 young people between 15 and 24 years of age presented to the Family Centre in Tweed Shire as homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness," Family Centre executive director David Boutkan said.

"Of those 290 young people, 70 were between the ages of 15 to 17. We're seeing a sharp increase in the number of young Aboriginal people presenting as homeless, up from 19% to 28% in the last year.

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"There's also been an increase in the number of young parents with children presenting as homeless."

He said the shire lost 12 Housing NSW beds previously allocated to homeless young people as part of a 2014 reform of the NSW Specialist Homelessness Services program and called on the NSW Government to return the beds to Tweed youth.

Gerina Appo, the Family Centre Senior Coordinator of the Connecting Home program, said she was "seeing the devastating effects caused by the lack of accommodation options for young people" and claimed recent floods had made the problem worse.

A Department of Family and Community Services spokeswoman confirmed the number of beds specifically for youth but said there were 25 for all ages as well as other options for vulnerable young people.

"All FACS Housing properties committed to crisis and transitional housing were reallocated to new service packages in 2013, and there was no reduction in the total number of bedrooms available," she said.

"The reallocation of bedrooms against different service packages in Northern NSW was designed to ensure consistent and equitable access to specialist homelessness services across the district. FACS Housing has also established a ... specialist homelessness support service system in Northern NSW, contracting with Social Futures and Third Sector Australia, which work with a range of sector partners."

She said the NSW Government had responded to increased demand for housing support following the floods by committing \$2 million for local services to lease properties to those who have lost or cannot safely return to their homes.

The Family Centre and Social Futures will host a Youth Homelessness Matters Day event to raise awareness on June 8, from 10.30am at The Family Centre, 15-17 Frances St, Tweed Heads South.

The group plans to launch a new community initiative with the Murwillumbah CWA to support local homeless young people.

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