



press clip

Tweed youth homelessness growing

THE NUMBER of vulnerable children sleeping rough across the Tweed Shire has increased during the past 12 months and local support services are reaching breaking point, according to The Family Centre at Tweed Heads.

The Family Centre Executive Director David Boutkan sent information to the media this week that paints a shocking picture of youth homelessness across the Tweed with 290 youths now homeless or at imminent risk and it's increasing every year.

"In the past year more than 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," he said.

"Of those 290 young people, 70 were between the ages of 15 to 17."

Those youths have even tougher challenges ahead as Tweed Heads is now considered the 8th least affordable housing market on the planet, according to the 13th Annual Demographia International Housing Affordability Survey.

The recent Anglicare Rental Affordability Snapshot reported that housing in the Tweed Shire "is realistically only affordable to those earning above the minimum wage".

Mr Boutkan said The Family Centre was also seeing a sharp increase in the number of young Indigenous people presenting as homeless, up from 19 per cent to 28 per cent in the past 12 months.

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

Mr Boutkan said the disturbing trends were leaving vulnerable young people and children in unsafe situations and pushing support services to "breaking point trying to meet increasing demand to keep vulnerable young people and children safe".

During the 2014 reform of the NSW Specialist Homelessness Services program, Tweed Shire lost 12 Housing NSW beds previously allocated to homeless young people.

"Tweed Shire has the lowest number of supported accommodation options for homeless young people in NSW," he said.

"There are only two houses with two bedrooms in each property allocated by Housing NSW as supported transitional accommodation for young people in the Tweed Shire

"This means just four beds are available to meet the needs of almost 300 homeless young people and children."

The Family Centre is calling on the NSW Government to immediately restore the number of beds available for homeless young people from 4 to 16.

"This will bring the number of beds in line with other comparable regions in the state," Mr Boutkan said.

He said The Family Centre and other local services are committed to an integrated early intervention approach that includes family and youth support services and targeted

programs in schools to identify young people at risk of homelessness early.

"These programs work on building relationship skills and strengthening family relationships. The programs are successful in keeping young people at home and attending school," he said.

"But for some young people staying at home is not an option. Home is not a safe and stable place to live and they require transitional accommodation supported by skilled youth housing workers, so they don't drop out of school and vocational training, remain connected to their community and keep their jobs and not fall into unemployment.

"The Family Centre's - Connecting Home team, are working against the tide of increasing youth homelessness with few options to offer young people in desperate need of safe and stable accommodation."

Gerina Appo, Senior Coordinator of the Connecting Home program at The Family Centre said the need for more

transitional accommodation is urgent.

"On a day-to-day basis I'm seeing the devastating effects caused by the lack of accommodation options for young people. We urgently need an increase of transitional accommodation options," she said

"The Tweed Shire has a population of over 90,000 people and one of the highest homelessness rates in NSW. It is only fair that we have the same resources to work with the young people affected by homelessness to help them to stabilise their lives and quickly transition to independence.

"Recent floods in the region have only intensified the already dire situation for hundreds of homeless young people in the Tweed Shire."

Shay who is now 21 was at high school completing Year 12 when she became homeless because of family violence. Shay was supported in one of the four beds in transitional housing by the Connecting Home team.

"A safe home has helped me get away from an unsafe environment as well as get my license and keep a job which now means I have the opportunity to be able to study at university," she said.

The Family Centre will host a Youth Homelessness Matters Day Event today, Thursday, June 8, that will lift the lid on youth homelessness and point towards solutions that will make a real difference.

The centre will also officially reopen the newly refurbished community hub that is shared with their partners at Social Futures.

"Join us as we lift the lid on youth homelessness in our community and point us toward solutions that will make a real difference," a statement from The Family Centre said.

"We'll be launching a new community initiative with the Murwillumbah CWA to support homeless young people in our community.

"Plus, we're officially reopening our newly refurbished



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community hub that we share with our partners at Social Futures.”

The event will start at 10.30am to 12noon (with light lunch at noon). The Family Centre is located at 15-17 Frances Street, Tweed Heads. Please phone: (07) 5524 8711 or email info@thefamilycentre.org.au

