



# Our Five-Year Strategy

## 2024-2028



## About Youth Off The Streets

### Our vision

All children and young people have the support and opportunities they need to be defined by their potential, not their circumstances.

### Our purpose

To empower and equip children and young people in need to build a positive future.

### What makes us different

Our unique full-support service model covers the breadth of prevention, early intervention and longer-term responses.

These include crisis accommodation and individualised casework, youth housing support, community outreach and youth justice programs.

We also provide services that build cultural resilience and wellbeing for First Nations young people, and education pathways that engage children and young people with high school, vocational training, scholarships and mentoring.

All of our services and programs operate within trauma-informed, culturally responsive and young person-centred frameworks.

The needs, interests and goals of children and young people are at the centre of all decisions. We actively seek their views to continuously strengthen our service delivery and advocacy.

This means our responses and interventions are tailored for each child and young person based on their experiences, needs and goals.

## Acknowledgement of Country

Youth Off The Streets acknowledges the traditional custodians of the lands on which we work and recognises their connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to them and to Elders past, present and emerging.

In all our work, we celebrate the cultures, learnings and spiritual connections that have been shared across thousands of years. We are proud to continue these traditions for future generations – so that all young people who seek connection to Country at Youth Off The Streets may be empowered to find it.



## Introducing our five-year strategy

**Our strategic plan positions us to respond to the rising rates of homelessness and disadvantage experienced by children and young people, and our ability to deliver even greater social impact in the years ahead.**

Young Australians aged 12–24 make up a staggering 23% of the nation’s total homeless population<sup>1</sup>. Disconnection from school is on the rise among children and young people experiencing disadvantage<sup>2</sup>, and growing numbers of First Nations young people are in need of support<sup>3</sup>.

Through the research, in-depth analysis, discussion and consultation that informed our strategy, we identified five key priorities to respond to these needs.

At Youth Off The Streets, our central ambition is to **strengthen our impact** and **expand the reach of our services** to deliver even better outcomes for children and young people.

Our holistic, full-support service model, evidence-based programs, focus on impact measurement and our drive to develop purposeful partnerships are key to successfully supporting children and young people as they transition to independence.

I’m confident that Youth Off The Streets has the right expertise, staff, service model and strategic focus to make a positive, long-term difference to children and young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and complex disadvantage.

As an organisation, we are committed to listening to the children and young people we serve. Their best interests are at the centre of every decision we make and every action we take. As they find safety, support and a sense of belonging; as they develop life skills, get back to school or start a training course or degree;

as they rebuild connections to family and community; as they forge their own path towards independence and a positive future, we walk alongside them every step of the way.

I look forward to partnering with funders and donors, government and non-government organisations, corporate partners and other supporters in this exciting and ambitious next chapter for Youth Off The Streets.

We have an incredible legacy of impact through the work of our founder, Father Chris Riley. Now, I invite you to look ahead with us. Children and young people experiencing unprecedented levels of homelessness and disadvantage deserve the positive future we have envisioned, mapped and are committed to delivering upon through this strategy.

**Judy Barraclough**  
Chief Executive Officer



<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021 Census

<sup>2</sup> Australian Government Productivity Commission, School Education – Report on Government Services, 2024

<sup>3</sup> Australian Government Productivity Commission, Closing the Gap dashboard, Socio-economic outcome area 7: Youth engagement

# Our strategic context

Our research and analysis highlighted several key trends and insights that helped inform the development of our strategy.

## The facts

### Youth homelessness & housing

Over 38,000 unaccompanied children and young people were supported by specialist homelessness services in 2022–23, equating to nearly 14% of the total number of people accessing homelessness services in Australia<sup>1</sup>.

90% of young people assisted by Youth Off The Streets’ crisis accommodation or housing services in 2023 identified domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) as the main reason or a contributing factor to needing support.

Only 52% of 12–24-year-olds receive the short-term or emergency accommodation they need; 25% have access to medium-term housing; and only 4% are offered long-term housing options<sup>2</sup>. Zero rental properties across Australia are affordable enough for a young person relying on independent Youth Allowance or Newstart Allowance<sup>3</sup>.

### Experiences of disadvantage & trauma

The underlying drivers of youth homelessness and complex disadvantage are intersectional. In 2022–23, of the young people who presented to specialist homelessness services:

- 48% had mental health concerns
- 34% had experienced DFSV
- 13% had alcohol and drug issues<sup>6</sup>

In addition, across Australia:

- 14% of young people aged 15–24 live in poverty<sup>7</sup>
- 28% of young people aged 15–24 live in lower income households experiencing housing stress<sup>8</sup>

### Alternative education & training pathways

It is estimated that upwards of 50,000 young Australians of compulsory school age have become ‘detached’ from education due to a range of factors including family dysfunction and mental health issues<sup>11</sup>.

Special Assistance Schools (SAS) provide alternative education pathways for children and young people with high-level social and emotional needs.

Since 2014, the number of SAS has nearly doubled, from 48 to 96 in 2022. Enrolments have grown 18% p.a. across Australia since 2016 – the highest growth rate of any type of school<sup>12</sup>.

Vocational Education and Training (VET) also provides a key avenue for young people disengaged from school to progress their education. In 2020, 18% of young people enrolled in VET were from low socio-economic backgrounds<sup>13</sup>.

## What we know works for children and young people

Addressing homelessness among children and young people requires unique interventions that are tailored to individual needs.

Effective responses to youth homelessness must include solutions across the spectrum from prevention and early intervention to crisis responses and access to a range of age-appropriate housing options, including addressing rental affordability<sup>4</sup>.

How services work with children and young people is also critical. Evidence indicates youth homelessness services that focus on building relationships, collaboration, strengths-based approaches, flexible service delivery that meets individual needs, and ensuring young people have personal agency are the most successful in achieving positive outcomes<sup>5</sup>.

A trauma-informed approach is critical to effectively supporting children and young people to acknowledge and recover from past experiences.

Trauma-informed services report more successful collaboration with all stakeholders, enhanced skills and a greater sense of self-efficacy among service users, improved staff morale, and higher rates of positive outcomes<sup>9</sup>.

To reduce the likelihood of retraumatisation, services need to understand trauma and its impacts; promote safety; ensure cultural competence; support children and young people’s choice and autonomy; and, importantly, believe that recovery is possible<sup>10</sup>.

Education is essential to improving a young person’s ability to build a positive future. Poor educational outcomes affect young people’s life-long employment prospects, health and social connectedness. Disconnection from education and training also has a significant economic and social impact on the Australian community<sup>14</sup>.

The contribution of flexible learning programs to enable disadvantaged young people to complete high school is significant<sup>15</sup>. SAS provide another chance for young people to successfully finish their secondary education in an environment that is supportive and tailored to their individual needs<sup>16</sup>.

There is a growing body of research advocating for schools to be places of healing. This research provides evidence that such environments have a significant impact on the physical, cognitive, social, spiritual and cultural outcomes of students<sup>17</sup>.

The landscape for Registered Training Organisations is growing, with advantages including the ability to address the changing nature of the workforce by offering practical training experiences that support employability, and increased opportunities for industry partnerships. However, training must be complemented with other supports for young people to ensure learning success<sup>18</sup>.

References available on page 6.

## The facts

### First Nations children & young people

In 2021, ~30% of young people seeking support from specialist homelessness services were First Nations<sup>19</sup>. First Nations children and young people make up ~25% of Youth Off The Streets' school students, compared to ~6% in NSW.

Closing the Gap data shows that only four out of 19 outcomes are on track to meet their targets. Outcomes have worsened for four critical targets – children's early development, rates of children in out-of-home care, rates of adult imprisonment and suicide<sup>20</sup>.

### Youth Off The Streets is uniquely positioned to create better life outcomes for children & young people

Many Australian community services organisations that support young people are either focused on short term, specific interventions, or they do not have a specific focus on youth.

## What we know works for children and young people

Achieving positive outcomes for First Nations children and young people requires a culturally responsive and strengths-based approach – recognising the critical importance of family and community; recognising the protective factor of strength in culture; and services and tools that are tailored to First Nations people and have a multidimensional approach to health and wellbeing<sup>21</sup>.

Factors known to support and empower First Nations children and young people in education settings include relationships, community and a sense of belonging; schools that nurture cultural identity; the employment of First Nations educators and support staff; and cultural competence among non-First Nations educators<sup>22</sup>.

### Our sole purpose is to support children and young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness and complex disadvantage.

The breadth of our service responses within a holistic model of support, and the trauma-informed, culturally responsive and young person-centred frameworks we work within, mean we are uniquely positioned to deliver long-term impact and better life outcomes for children and young people.

## Our strategic ambition

Over the five years to 2028, we will strengthen our holistic and evidence-based homelessness, housing, education and First Nations services, **supporting 60% more children and young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness to build a positive future**, and we will purposefully collaborate and advocate for better outcomes.

### Strategic context: table references

<sup>1</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2022–23

<sup>2</sup> NSW Ombudsman, More than shelter: Outstanding actions to improve the response to children presenting alone for homelessness services, 2023

<sup>3</sup> Rental Affordability Snapshot 2023, Anglicare Australia

<sup>4</sup> Australian Government, Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Literature Review: Effective interventions for working with young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness; MacKenzie, D. et al, Redesign of a homelessness service system for young people, AHURI Final Report No. 327, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Limited, 2020

<sup>5</sup> MacKenzie, D. et al, Redesign of a homelessness service system for young people, AHURI Final Report No. 327, Australian Housing & Urban Research Institute Ltd, 2020

<sup>6</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2022–23

<sup>7</sup> Australian Council of Social Service, Poverty in Australia, 2023

<sup>8</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Australia's youth: Housing stress, 2021

<sup>9</sup> Mental Health Australia and Blue Knot Foundation, Trauma informed practice, 2021

<sup>10</sup> Yfoundations, Good practice guidelines for working with unaccompanied children 12-15 years accessing specialist homelessness services

<sup>11</sup> Watterston, J. and O'Connell, M., Those who disappear: The Australian education problem nobody wants to talk about, Faculty of Education: Industry reports, University of Melbourne, 2019

<sup>12</sup> Independent Schools Australia, Our sector: Special Assistance Schools, 2022

<sup>13</sup> Student equity in VET: Participation, achievement and outcomes, NCVET, 2022

<sup>14</sup> CEDA, New evidence to break the cycle of educational disadvantage, 2018

<sup>15</sup> te Riele, K., Putting the jigsaw together: Flexible learning programs in Australia, 2014

<sup>16</sup> Independent Schools Australia (ISA), Special Assistance Schools Showcase, ISA Research Report 2023

<sup>17</sup> Bashant, J., Building a trauma-informed, compassionate classroom: Strategies and activities to reduce challenging behaviour, improve learning outcomes, and increase student engagement, PESI, 2020

<sup>18</sup> Hargreaves, J., Vocational training and social inclusion at a glance, NCVET, 2011

<sup>19</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2022–23

<sup>20</sup> Australian Government, Closing the Gap 2023 Annual Report

<sup>21</sup> Healing Foundation, Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and their families: Fact sheet

<sup>22</sup> Shay, M. and Heck, H., Alternative education engaging Indigenous young people: Flexi schooling in Queensland, The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education, 2015



## Our full-support service model

Our service model places children and young people at the centre of a unique support ecosystem, framed by our expertise in trauma-informed and culturally responsive practices.

There is growing evidence that holistic approaches to support services can lead to better outcomes and improved cost efficiencies<sup>1</sup>. Over the next five years, our model will be enhanced and replicated across our sites, with an unwavering focus on quality of services through data, evaluation and continual improvement.

We will partner with others in the community to ensure Youth Off The Streets does what we are best placed to do, while collaborating with others for maximum positive impact on young people's lives.



<sup>1</sup> The Health Foundation, Person-centred care made simple: What everyone should know about person-centred care, 2016

## Our strategic priorities

In this strategy, we have identified five priorities to meet the most significant challenges facing children and young people at risk. These priorities give us a clear direction for our overarching goal to strengthen our impact and expand the reach of our services and programs between 2024 and 2028.

### Priority 1: Strengthen our response

We will refine and embed our evidence-based, full-support service model to maximise positive life outcomes for children and young people.

Our holistic model will be consistent and repeatable, with an ongoing focus on service quality through impact measurement and continual improvement, and effective partnering with others in the community.

#### By 2028 we will:

1. Support 60% more children and young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness to build a positive future.

2. Establish strategic and operational partnerships in each service expansion area to ensure a full-support, child- and young person-centred model is delivered in every Youth Off The Streets location.
3. Build an impact measurement model that captures support interactions with children and young people accessing our full-support service model, and which facilitates evaluation and continual improvement.

### Priority 2: Expand our reach in homelessness

We will expand our reach in child and youth homelessness through prevention and early intervention measures that address key drivers and intersections including domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV); substance misuse; contact with the youth justice system; and underlying experiences of trauma.

This will result in an additional 600 children and young people supported each year by 2028.

#### By 2028, we will:

1. Increase access to early intervention services for children and young people and their families by 50%.

2. Decrease by 20% the proportion of children and young people transitioning into homelessness crisis services from our other support services.
3. Ensure the majority of children and young people accessing individual casework achieve an improved Personal Wellbeing Index score.
4. Ensure the satisfaction of the children and young people accessing our services exceeds industry benchmarks.

### Priority 3: Increase education participation

We will expand our registered and accredited Special Assistance Schools (SAS), deepening our positive impact in local communities through the provision of proactive, holistic and trauma-informed educational opportunities.

We will increase participation in our Registered Training Organisation (RTO) courses and grow our successful National Scholarships Program.

#### By 2028, we will:

1. Establish two additional registered and accredited SAS.
2. Increase student enrolments in our schools by 25%.
3. Increase the number of students participating in the National Scholarship Program by 20%.
4. Double the number of young people accessing our RTO.

### Priority 4: Grow our impact with First Nations young people

We will expand the delivery of First Nations-specific programs and services, including education pathways, youth justice responses and mental health services. Across Youth Off The Streets' services, we will align with best-practice culturally responsive approaches to deepen the effectiveness of engagement with children and young people, their families and communities.

#### By 2028, we will:

1. Increase by 70% the number of First Nations children and young people supported by Youth Off The Streets in education, employment or training.
2. Improve mental health and wellbeing for First Nations children and young people supported by Youth Off The Streets, as measured by the Westerman Aboriginal Symptoms Checklist-Youth.
3. Decrease the number of First Nations children and young people supported by Youth Off The Streets who become engaged with the youth justice system by 30%.
4. Decrease the number of First Nations children and young people supported by Youth Off The Streets who transition into homelessness crisis services by 20%.

### Priority 5: Grow our housing options

We will grow our safe and affordable housing options for young people through the establishment of one scalable Education First Youth Foyer, increasing our housing stock by a minimum of 60% and setting the foundation for long-term growth in youth-specific housing.

#### By 2028, we will:

1. Develop a repeatable Education First Youth Foyer development blueprint.
2. Increase Youth Off The Streets' safe and affordable housing options by providing housing for an additional 20 young people.
3. Meet our target of 80% of our Education First Youth Foyer residents achieving their housing, education and employment exit goals.
4. Develop a youth housing strategy that identifies post-2028 pipeline opportunities and initiatives.

## A snapshot of the life-changing impact we'll make by 2028

**60%**

more young people have access to safe and affordable housing.

**50%**

increase in education and training participation through our alternative high schools and RTO.

**1,800**

children and young people access our full-support homelessness services each year.

### Improved Personal Wellbeing

for the majority of the children and young people we support.



## Our strategic enablers

In order to strengthen our impact, expand our reach and positively impact the lives of even more at-risk children and young people, there are five key enablers underpinning our strategic priorities.

### Enabler 1: Grow sustainable funding

Over the next five years we will significantly increase our funding through growth in diversified and sustainable funding sources, including philanthropy and government.

By 2028, we must:

- increase total income by ~\$20m to ~\$46m
- increase philanthropic income by 1.6 times
- secure ≥ 60% of total income via multi-year committed funding

#### Key strategic objectives

1. Grow philanthropic income by identifying funding sources with potential for growth and enhancing our 'shared value' partnership model, including engagement opportunities.

2. Secure strategic government funding by refining our government relations activities and proactively identifying opportunities to pitch evidence-based programs to government for funding.
3. Increase fundraising income by developing innovative products and engagement activities to enhance supporter acquisition, retention and lifetime value; and optimising the use of data to identify and capture fundraising opportunities.

### Enabler 2: Strengthen our people and culture

We want our people to thrive in a healthy and inclusive culture that fosters enhanced performance through cross-functional team collaboration, strong engagement with our purpose and values, and career satisfaction.

#### Key strategic objectives

1. Attract talented people to Youth Off The Streets by offering an exceptional workplace and team member experience.

2. Retain staff by creating a culture that connects our people and aligns them to our purpose, strategy and values.
3. Develop our staff by investing in their learning and professional development, and in doing so build a high-performing and diverse workforce.

### Enabler 3: Build impact measurement

Over the next five years, we will systematise our approach to research and impact measurement. We will develop and implement a framework for more robust and comprehensive collection, analysis, evaluation and utilisation of data related to the outcomes of our programs and services.

This will enable us to better assess and continually improve efficacy, provide evidence that our work is positively impacting the lives of children and young people, and contribute to the collection of sector data at national and state levels.

#### Key strategic objectives

1. Refine, implement and systematise our impact measurement framework, continually improving through evidence-based principles.
2. Ensure all internal and external data collection, analysis and evaluation processes are culturally responsive and reflect the diversity and specific needs of children and young people and their communities.
3. Through our research initiatives and growing evidence base, position Youth Off The Streets as a subject matter expert to influence policies that impact at-risk young people.

### Enabler 4: Grow our influence through brand and advocacy

We will promote our sector expertise and impact through a compelling brand and value proposition, leveraging our evidence base to advocate for children and young people and influence public policy.

#### Key strategic objectives

1. Evolve the Youth Off The Streets brand into a compelling and contemporary representation of our strategic ambition.

2. Work with the Research and Evaluation team to provide the Board, executive and other Youth Off The Streets leaders with evidence-based insights and recommendations to influence systemic and individual outcomes for children and young people.
3. Develop and test new opportunities to build Youth Off The Streets' profile as the face of youth homelessness services in Australia.

### Enabler 5: Optimise our organisational capability

We will align Youth Off The Streets' resources and capabilities to enhance financial and operational performance and support our people to achieve our shared purpose and ambition.

#### Key strategic objectives

1. Create a culture of learning, continuous improvement and innovation that encourages professional development, feedback, collaboration and experimentation.

2. Ensure our digital technologies, controls and equipment are fit for purpose and support enhanced business performance.
3. Optimise the effectiveness of Youth Off The Streets' assets through the development of a fit-for-purpose asset management strategy.



## Our implementation roadmap

### We have developed an indicative roadmap for the implementation of our strategic priorities and enablers.

In the first and second years of the strategy, we will strengthen the foundations of our organisation-wide full-support service model. From 2025, we will ramp up our expansion programs and focus on organisational growth to deliver even better outcomes for the children and young people we serve.

#### Years 1-2

Our key initiatives include the following:

- Complete detailed plans for the implementation of our holistic full-support service model and build the corporate foundations that will enable the expansion program.
- Deepen our quality of service by embedding the Sanctuary Model in operations, implementing a quality management framework and strengthening organisational compliance.
- Develop and implement a fit-for-purpose impact measurement strategy and framework, based on the principles of evidence-based continuous improvement.
- Expand the way we listen to young people by establishing youth leadership and advisory groups.
- Develop people capability through training, talent development, and the implementation of culturally responsive and trauma-informed practices in every area of the organisation.
- Refresh our brand to position Youth Off The Streets for advocacy and influence.
- Build an evidenced-based value proposition for enhanced fundraising capability.

#### Years 2-5

Our key initiatives include the following:

- Commence our expansion program, starting with infill of existing sites, and delivering our first full-support service site.
- Build strategic and operational partnerships with aligned services where required to deliver the expansion program.
- Systemise our impact measurement framework, seamlessly incorporating First Nations sovereign data and supporting a collaborative culture that respects cultural nuances.
- Expand our Registered Training Organisation (RTO), student enrolments and cross-curricular learning programs to build engagement with education.
- Develop a repeatable Youth Off The Streets Education First Foyer model and develop an expansion program for additional Foyer operations.
- Drive income growth across our diversified range of channels and sources, and enhance supporter acquisition, retention and lifetime value.

"Navigating the homelessness system as a young person was hard. At first, it felt like I had no options. I struggled to find somewhere to stay because I was underage. And there's a time limit to crisis accommodation, so you're constantly moving from place to place – all while you're at rock bottom.

"It was only when I got in touch with Youth Off The Streets that I received casework support and could start achieving some of my goals. My caseworker helped me apply for practical things like Centrelink, Medicare and an ID card. Eventually they helped me access transitional housing, where I am now.

"I've always been grateful that I had somewhere safe to stay, and I could work towards my dreams."

Alex\*, 17

\*Name changed to protect the identity of the young person





*Father Chris Riley's*

**youth  
off the streets®**

Youth Off The Streets maintains policies and procedures that comply with the benchmark standards of the Office of the Children's Guardian.

All donations over \$2.00 are tax deductible.

Charitable Fundraising No. 12611

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