

Our five-year strategy

2024–2028



About Youth Off The Streets

Youth Off The Streets is a not-for-profit youth services organisation that supports 12–24-year-olds experiencing or at risk of homelessness and complex disadvantage.

Founded over 30 years ago by the late Father Chris Riley AM, we have grown into an organisation of dedicated experts providing wraparound services to children and young people in NSW and QLD.

We walk alongside each young person as we seek to understand their needs and goals, and we offer the safety, support and education that helps them to realise their potential.

Youth Off The Streets is an inclusive, community-focussed organisation with a unique service model that is trauma-informed and culturally responsive.

We offer:

- crisis accommodation and housing services
- accredited alternative high schools
- cultural and wellbeing support for First Nations children and young people
- 1-1 casework support
- alcohol and other drugs counselling
- youth justice programs
- domestic and family violence education and support
- vocational training courses
- a national scholarship program
- life skills and capacity-building workshops
- mentoring support
- youth drop-in centres and community outreach, among other services and programs

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 population¹. Disconnection from school is on the rise among children and young people experiencing disadvantage², and growing numbers of First Nations young people are in need of support³.

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, wraparound service model, evidence-based programs, focus on impact measurement and 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, the late 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



¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021 Census
² Australian Government Productivity Commission, School Education – Report on Government Services, 2024
³ Australian Government Productivity Commission, Closing the Gap dashboard, Socio-economic outcome area 7: Youth engagement



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 experiencing or at risk of homelessness to build a positive future, and we will purposefully collaborate and advocate for better outcomes.

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

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

Our broad range of service responses are built on a holistic support model, and we work within trauma-informed, culturally responsive and young person-centred frameworks.

This means Youth Off The Streets is uniquely positioned to deliver long-term impact and better life outcomes for children and young people.

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Our ambition is to support 60% more children and young people by 2028.

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When Alex* became homeless at 17 after fleeing family violence, one of his biggest challenges was navigating a complex and disjointed support system.

“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.

“At one temporary shelter, I was surrounded by dishevelled people who looked intimidating. They were adults, a lot older than me.

“One of them tried to stab me with a needle. I stayed in my room in disbelief, thinking there was no way this was happening. I felt like I was in a movie.

“I had to decide whether to continue going to high school or find a job. I stopped going to school because it was too difficult to get there while I was dealing with other challenges.

“Eventually I was put in touch with Youth Off The Streets. They helped arrange safer accommodation for me until I could move into their refuge.

“I was on the waitlist for mental health support, which took months to receive. I eventually opened up to the youth workers at Youth Off The Streets, which helped.

“While I was living at the refuge, I received casework support and started working on some goals.

“My caseworker helped me apply for practical things like Centrelink, Medicare and an ID card. Eventually they helped me access transitional housing, which is where I’m living now.

“If I could tell politicians one thing about my experience of being homeless and what would have helped me at that time, it would be the need for more safe and accessible housing for young people in crisis.

“I’ve always been grateful that I found somewhere safe to stay and I could work towards my dreams.”

*Name changed to protect the identity of the young person

Our strategic context

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

The facts	
Youth homelessness and housing	<p>Around 38,600 unaccompanied children and young people were assisted by specialist homelessness services in 2024, equating to nearly 14% of the total number of people accessing homelessness services in Australia¹.</p> <p>90% of young people assisted by Youth Off The Streets’ crisis accommodation or housing services in 2024 identified domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) as the main reason or a contributing factor to needing support.</p> <p>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 options². Zero rental properties across Australia are affordable enough for a young person relying on independent Youth Allowance³.</p>
Experiences of disadvantage and trauma	<p>The underlying drivers of youth homelessness and complex disadvantage are intersectional. In 2024, of the young people who presented to specialist homelessness services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">47% had mental health concerns34% had experienced DFSV13% had alcohol and drug issues⁶ <p>In addition, across Australia:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">14% of young people aged 15–24 live in poverty⁷28% of young people aged 15–24 live in lower income households experiencing housing stress⁸
Alternative education and training pathways	<p>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 issues¹¹.</p> <p>Special Assistance Schools (SAS) provide alternative education pathways for children and young people with high-level social and emotional needs.</p> <p>Since 2014, the number of SAS has more than doubled, from 48 to 101 in 2024. Enrolments have grown fourfold across Australia – the highest growth rate of any type of school¹².</p> <p>Vocational Education and Training (VET) also provides a key avenue for young people disengaged from school to progress their education. It is estimated that around one-third of young people enrolled in VET are from low socio-economic backgrounds¹³.</p>
First Nations children and young people	<p>In 2024, 33% of young people seeking support from specialist homelessness services were First Nations¹⁹. First Nations children and young people make up ~28% of Youth Off The Streets’ school students, compared to ~6% in NSW.</p> <p>Closing the Gap data shows that only five out of 19 outcomes are on track to meet their targets. Outcomes have worsened for four critical targets – early development, rates of children in out-of-home care, rates of adult imprisonment and suicide²⁰.</p>



What we know works for children and young people	
<p>Addressing homelessness among children and young people requires unique interventions that are tailored to individual needs.</p> <p>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 affordability⁴.</p> <p>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 outcomes⁵.</p>	
<p>A trauma-informed approach is critical to effectively supporting children and young people to acknowledge and recover from past experiences.</p> <p>Trauma-informed services report more successful collaboration with stakeholders, enhanced skills and a greater sense of self-efficacy among service users, improved staff morale and increased positive outcomes⁹.</p> <p>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 possible¹⁰.</p>	
<p>Education is essential to improving a young person’s ability to build a positive future. Poor educational outcomes affect their life-long employment prospects, health and social connectedness. Disconnection from education and training also has a significant economic and social impact on the Australian community¹⁴.</p> <p>The contribution of flexible learning programs to enable disadvantaged young people to complete high school is significant¹⁵. SAS provide another chance for young people to successfully finish their secondary education in an environment that is supportive and tailored to their individual needs¹⁶.</p> <p>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 students¹⁷.</p> <p>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 success¹⁸.</p>	
<p>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 wellbeing²¹.</p> <p>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 educators²².</p>	

References available on page 14.

Our full-service support model

Our support model places children and young people at the centre of a unique service 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 efficiencies¹. 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.



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

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 holistic homelessness services each year.

Improved personal wellbeing

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



Our strategic priorities

In this strategy, we have identified five priorities to meet the most significant challenges facing at-risk children and young people. 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-service support 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 that a full-service, child- and young person-centred support model is delivered in every Youth Off The Streets location.
3. Build an impact measurement model that captures the interactions children and young people have with our full-service support model, and which facilitates evaluation and continual improvement.

Priority 2: Expand our reach in homelessness

We will expand our reach in 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, 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 community impact by providing proactive, holistic and trauma-informed educational opportunities.

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

By 2028, we will:

1. Establish two additional registered and accredited Special Assistance Schools (SAS).
2. Increase our student enrolments 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 services.

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 by 30% the number of First Nations children and young people we support who become engaged with the youth justice system.
4. Decrease by 20% the number of First Nations children and young people we support who transition into homelessness crisis services.

Priority 5: Grow our housing options

We will grow our safe and affordable housing options for young people, 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. Increase Youth Off The Streets' safe and affordable housing options by providing housing for an additional 20 young people.

2. Meet our target of 80% of our youth housing residents achieving their housing, education and employment exit goals.
3. Develop a youth housing strategy that identifies post-2028 pipeline opportunities and initiatives.



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

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 growth potential 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 teams to thrive in a healthy and inclusive culture that fosters enhanced performance through cross-functional collaboration, strong engagement with our purpose and values, and career satisfaction.

Key strategic objectives

1. Attract talented people 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

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 state and national 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 needs of children, 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 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 strategic context: table references

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

³ Rental Affordability Snapshot 2024, Anglicare Australia

⁴ 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

⁵ 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

⁶ AIHW, Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2022–23

⁷ Australian Council of Social Service, Poverty in Australia, 2023

⁸ AIHW, Australia's youth: Housing stress, 2021

⁹ Mental Health Australia and Blue Knot Foundation, Trauma informed practice, 2021

¹⁰ Yfoundations, Good practice guidelines for working with unaccompanied children 12–15 years accessing specialist homelessness services

¹¹ 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

¹² Independent Schools Australia, Our sector: Special Assistance Schools, 2025

¹³ Student equity in VET: Participation, achievement and outcomes, NCVET, 2022

¹⁴ CEDA, New evidence to break the cycle of educational disadvantage, 2018

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

¹⁶ Independent Schools Australia (ISA), Special Assistance Schools Showcase, ISA Research Report 2023

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

¹⁸ Hargreaves, J., Vocational training and social inclusion at a glance, NCVET, 2011

¹⁹ AIHW, Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2023–24

²⁰ Australian Government, Closing the Gap 2024 Annual Data Compilation Report

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

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Our strategy on a page

We will strengthen our impact and expand our reach to deliver even better outcomes for children and young people.

Our vision	All children and young people are defined by their potential, not their circumstances.
Our purpose	To empower children and young people in need by providing them with safety, support and education for a positive future.
Our ambition	<p>To support 60% more children and young people by 2028.</p> <p>We will strengthen our holistic and evidence-based homelessness, housing, education and First Nations services and programs, supporting more children and young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness to build a positive future.</p> <p>We will purposefully collaborate and advocate for better outcomes.</p>

Our priorities		Strengthen our response	Enhance our unique service model and strengthen the quality of our programs through data, evaluation and partnerships.
		Expand our reach in homelessness	Build our prevention and early intervention programs to reduce the number of young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness.
		Increase education participation	Expand our schools, increase vocational training and grow our scholarships program.
		Grow our impact with First Nations children and young people	Increase the reach of our First Nations services and embed culturally responsive practices.
		Grow our housing options	Provide safe, affordable housing and a path to independence for more young people experiencing homelessness.

Our enablers					
	Grow sustainable funding	Strengthen our people and culture	Build impact measurement	Grow our influence through brand and advocacy	Optimise organisational capability



Youth Off The Streets Limited
ABN 29 100 388 412
Charitable fundraising no. 12611

Youth Off The Streets is a registered Public Benevolent Institution (PBI) and complies with the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations. Our policies and procedures are designed to uphold the highest standards of safety and care for young people.

As a PBI, Youth Off The Streets receives certain ATO tax concessions and exemptions which relate to goods and services tax, fringe benefits tax and income tax.

All donations over \$2.00 are tax deductible.

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