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Homelessness taking toll on young

This National Homeless Person's Week (3-9 August) the community is being reminded that almost half of all homeless Australians are under the age of 25 and most are facing significant issues.

BoysTown General Manager Wendy Protheroe said these concerning statistics reflect Kids Helpline's experience, with counsellors answering 7,147 contacts regarding homelessness between 2005 and 2008.

"Disturbingly, many of these young people also reported secondary issues such as concerns about family and partner relationships, child abuse and mental health," she said.

"Family and partner relationships significantly impact on youth homelessness, with more than half of these young people experiencing difficulties with those closest to them.

"Child abuse was an issue for 17 per cent of young people contacting our counsellors about homelessness.

"Every child who contacts us has their own story, and unique journey as to how they got to the point in their life where they believed leaving home was the only option. What they have in common is their need for a stable home, to be cared about as individuals and have reliable adults in their lives."

Kids Helpline is just one service operated by BoysTown, a youth welfare organisation that has delivered services to disadvantaged and 'at risk' young people, children and families for 47 years.

"Experience gained through our welfare services has shown that homeless young people often become invisible," said Ms Protheroe. "You cannot access employment benefits or set up a bank account without a permanent address."

"We encounter a large number of young people who are 'couch surfing', that is moving around to sleep on the couches of friends and acquaintances.

"We believe that community awareness and understanding about homelessness is critical for the development of solutions.

"An informed community is best placed to understand how easy it is to fall into homelessness and how difficult it can be to move back into mainstream employment and housing options.

"Homelessness does not exist in isolation and we need a whole of community and government approach to help improve the situation nationwide."

Kids Helpline, Australia's only national children's counselling service, provides 24 hour counselling services to young people aged 5 to 25 years – free call 1800 55 1800 or online at www.kidshelp.com.au.

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