

Student Information Resource: Understanding and Empathising with Homelessness

Information package for secondary schools

Updated August 2019

About Us



Launch Housing

Launch Housing is a Melbourne based, secular and independent community agency formed in July 2015. Our mission is to end homelessness. We believe housing is a basic human right that affords people dignity. Everyone has a right to a home and it is our job to make this happen. With a combined history of over 75 years serving Melbourne's community, we provide high quality housing, support, education and employment services to over 18,000 people across 14 sites in metropolitan Melbourne. We also drive social policy change, advocacy, research and innovation.

Launch Housing provides affordable housing and homelessness support services. The housing component includes crisis accommodation, medium-term and long-term housing options, as well as access to private rental through brokerage. The support component varies from generalist to specialist, such as crisis intervention, medium-term/long-term case management, family violence assistance, access to education and employment, access to health services, and living skills support (budgeting, cooking, personal hygiene, cleaning etc.).



We recommend watching the <u>"We are Launch Housing"</u> video for a summary of our organisation and services.

- As a class, discuss whether students know of services supporting those experiencing homelessness. Highlight if the stories told by Launch Housing's clients challenged students' stereotypes of someone experiencing homelessness and why?
- To be advised: this video discusses attempted suicide and may be triggering to some viewers. If you or your students are affected by this video, please call Lifeline at 13 11 14 or message the team at <u>Beyond Blue</u>.

HomeGround Real Estate

HomeGround Real Estate, a non-profit real estate agency, was founded in 2014 and now manages hundreds of properties, with revenues going back into the Launch Housing mission. HomeGround Real Estate, a social enterprise of Launch Housing, is an innovative option to help end homelessness. There is also a HomeGround Real Estate in Sydney and Canberra.

For lower income earners the lack of affordable housing can lead to stress, with the pressure of unsustainable rental payments and the uncertainty of temporary living arrangements. There are a few ways landlords work with us to increase the availability of affordable housing in Melbourne. Landlords can list their properties at full market rent, and the property management fees go back into the Launch Housing mission. HomeGround Real Estate also gives socially conscious landlords the opportunity to offer a discount on the market rent to low income households while receiving professional property management services. People interested in learning more can contact HomeGround Real Estate at 9288 9600,

realestate@homeground.org.au or see www.homegroundrealestate.com.au.

Our Annual Reports and Newsletters provide updated information on Launch Housing's initiatives, achievements and the latest research in the homelessness sector. It has a wealth of information and is a great starting point to learning about homelessness in Australia.

Need Help?



Free call. 24 hour. Opening Doors on 1800 825 955

If you're experiencing homelessness, at risk of losing your home, or you need to escape family violence, call Opening Doors on 1800 825 955 (free call, open 24/7).

Launch Housing takes referrals from Opening Doors, a state wide program which coordinates support to people experiencing homelessness.

Domestic Violence Call 1800 015 188

If you are experiencing domestic violence call the Women's Domestic Violence Crisis Service 24/7 on (03) 9373 0123 or toll-free 1800 015 188.

Launch Housing Entry Points

Launch Housing has three homelessness entry points providing support services in the Melbourne Metropolitan area. You can drop into any of these 3 sites in person Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm.

Entry points are located at:

- 68 Oxford St, Collingwood
- 11 Chesterville Rd, Cheltenham; and
- 122 Chapel St, St Kilda.

When accessing our entry points an individual, couple or family will start an <u>Initial</u> <u>Assessment and Planning</u> (IAP) process to help us find the right support program or services.



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Teaching Resource



The Launch Housing Student Information Resource was created for use by teachers and their students to raise awareness of homelessness in Australia. Suggested tasks have been created to give teachers and students the opportunity and confidence to learn about and interact with different aspects of homelessness. We have tailored this resource for students to gain a deeper understanding and empathy for the people behind homelessness.

This resource is also intended to empower youths to take action towards preventing and ending homelessness. We encourage you to include open discussions with students about what they already know about homelessness, what they'd like to know and any questions they may have.

To help break down stereotypes around those experiencing homelessness, we ask you to address any that arise in the classroom. Perhaps ask the student why they make those assumptions and provide them with factual information. This in turn will assist students in understanding that homelessness isn't an illness. No one chooses homelessness. Experiencing homelessness may be the result of a number of difficulties in someone's life, combined with many systemic and structural factors outside their control.

To Consider:

Some of the prevalent themes are sensitive and may be difficult to discuss. These topics include family violence, mental health challenges and substance misuse. Therefore, while discussing the connection between these topics and homelessness is encouraged, it is completely up to the teacher's discretion.

There may be students in your class who have or are experiencing homelessness or any of the other adversities discussed. Setting ground rules is an important step to create a safe space for the class to interact with the topics sensitively, and develop mutual respect and understanding between your students.

Some ground rules may include:

- Be respectful of everyone's beliefs and values.
- Listen carefully and politely to others.
- Use the 'Before you speak: T.H.I.N.K' rule.
- Value diversity.
- Be brave in sharing ideas, opinions and experiences.
- Understand people's right to privacy.

We also encourage you to allow students time after each session for personal reflection and an opportunity to speak among themselves or with you privately about the content covered.

What is Homelessness?



Homelessness affects more than 116,000 Australians every day of the year. In Victoria, more than 24,800 Victorians were found as homeless in the 2016 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census. We have seen an increase in demand on our services as rising rents and shrinking affordable and social housing stock force people into homelessness.

Only 1 in 14 people experiencing homelessness sleep rough. While rough sleepers are the most visible in our community, the vast majority of people experiencing homelessness live in rooming houses, crisis accommodation, or couch-surf with friends and family.

The ABS definition of homelessness has six operational groups:

- 1. Persons living in improvised dwellings, tents, or rough sleeping
- 2. Persons in supported accommodation for the homeless
- 3. Persons staying temporarily with other households
- 4. Persons living in boarding houses
- 5. Persons in other temporary lodgings, and
- 6. Persons living in severely crowded dwellings.

Facts and Figures

- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW):
 - 288,800 Australians sought assistance from Specialist Homelessness Services in 2017-2018. This is an increase of 34,800 people from the 2013-14 data.
 - The main causes of homelessness are domestic and family violence, unaffordable housing, and financial difficulties.
- ABS 2016 Census:
 - o On any given night in Australia, 1 in 200 people are homeless.
 - 60% of people experiencing homelessness are under 35 years old.
 - The number of older people experiencing homelessness has increased 28% in four years, making it the fastest growing demographic.
- Australian Homelessness Monitor:
 - Australia has skyrocketing housing costs and a lack of social and affordable housing.
 Over 200,000 Australians are on housing waiting lists; 24% experiencing homelessness are affected by this housing crisis.
 - 613,000 people have fallen below the poverty line due to high housing costs, 229,000 of whom are children.
 - Policy inaction on housing affordability is responsible for increasing homelessness.
 There has been a 29% increase in spending on homelessness services but a 7% drop in investment in affordable and social housing from 2011-2016.
- To end homelessness, we need more affordable housing. Full stop.

Talking About Homelessness



Do:

- ✓ Refer to 'people experiencing homelessness' not 'homeless people'
- Take into account the broader social and economic causes of homelessness
- ✓ Give a balanced view of the range of homelessness experiences, not just rough sleeping

Don't:

- Blame the individual for systematic failures
- v Use imagery that reinforces stereotypes or inaccurate opinions of homelessness
- Perpetuate fear of people who are experiencing homelessness; they are 11 times more likely to be the victim of violence than the perpetrator

Source: Council to Homeless Persons

Housing is a human right

Housing is a human right, recognised under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Every person has 'the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity', which takes into account indictors such as tenure and affordability. The ICESCR also states that forced evictions are a violation of their covenant and should not leave a person homeless.

Public housing is not free. The Victorian Department of Health and Human Services states that "rent is...25% of your total household income, for household member 18 years of age of over". Public housing is a safety net for people on low incomes who cannot afford to pay full, market-priced rent and are most in need of secure, affordable housing. In Victoria there is a chronic shortage of public housing and wait lists are long.

The importance of support in resolving homelessness

Support needs to be tailored as experiences of homelessness are diverse, but housing, safety, health and income are paramount. Once we engage with a person for a while, we may work with them more on long-term goals like engagement with education or employment, community participation, and relationships.

We recommend taking a look at some of the blog posts from our website. The stories are shared by people who have accessed our services. They can be quite revealing and offer a unique perspective on what it's like to be at risk of or experience homelessness:

https://www.launchhousing.org.au/blog/

Length of time experiencing homelessness

It really depends on the person and the challenges they are facing. Some people experience chronic homelessness, and may cycle in and out of the homelessness service sector for some years due to complex histories of trauma, family violence, challenging behaviours, social isolation and/or poverty. In other cases, a person or household may need a short period of support and/or funding (such as first month's rent) to transition into private rental, where they can live independently.

Homelessness throughout Australia

As we are still expanding our national reach, most of our research is founded in metropolitan Melbourne, Victoria. Our Australian Homelessness Monitor provides an in-depth analysis of homelessness on a national scale with state and territory breakdown of statistics.

We do know that across Australia, homelessness in increasingly concentrated in our capital cities, where nearly two in every three people experiencing homelessness are now found. You can read more about how this is driven by rising inequality since 2001 in an <u>article</u> authored by our own Deb Batterham.

The University of New South Wales, in association with the Homelessness Monitor, has also created a map visualisation that allows users to zoom into specific areas of Australia to view local statistics:

https://cityfutures.be.unsw.edu.au/cityviz/australian-homelessness-monitor/

The changing geography of homelessness: a spatial analysis from 2001 to 2016 found in the 'Publications on Homelessness' of this resource outlines the extent to which homelessness has become more spatially concentrated over time; where it has risen and fallen; and the importance that housing affordability, poverty and labour market opportunities play in reshaping its distribution.

Homelessness can happen to anyone



No-one chooses homelessness but it can happen to anyone. As demonstrated in the Australian Homelessness Monitor, those in low income, vulnerable households are the most at risk of experiencing homelessness. Launch Housing supports thousands of people of all genders, all ages, individuals and families every year, from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, age groups and living situations.

Many people who experience homelessness have had serious disadvantages throughout their lives, including long-term unemployment, poor education, violence, mental health problems, disability and substance use problems. Homelessness can also occur due to a specific event, such as losing a job, domestic violence, being evicted from stable accommodation, suffering a major health condition or experiencing a high level of financial stress. Perhaps most important to note, is homelessness is not an individual failing. Government policies, housing affordability and other systemic factors all influence the dire state of homelessness in Australia.

Youth Homelessness

Youth homelessness matters. According to the 2016 ABS Census figures of the 116,000, 42% of Australians experiencing homelessness are under 25 years old and 70% of young people experiencing homelessness were escaping violence, abuse or family breakdown.

Visibility and support for young people at risk of or experiencing homelessness is more important than ever. We give a special focus to youth homelessness in April during Victorian Youth Week, and Youth Homelessness Matters Day (#YHMD). The national #YHMD campaign has been held by the National Youth Coalition for Housing (NYCH) annually since 1990 and is aimed at raising awareness of youth homelessness amongst decision makers and the wider community.

To show your support in Youth Week, you can support the #YHMD campaign by liking their <u>Facebook page</u>, sharing stories of youth homelessness from the page or even holding an awareness event in your community. For more information on this national campaign search for their main website which is updated annually.

Launch Housing's Services for Young People

Launch Housing continuously seeks to provide innovative responses to youth homelessness by increasing the reach and quality of our services for young people, as well as making improvements based on what works.

South Yarra Young Adult Services

Launch Housing's youth-specific site in South Yarra offers support to young people aged 16-25 who are either unable to live at home or are experiencing difficulties maintaining housing.

In 2016-17, we supported 231 people, a majority of whom were aged 18-24 years.

The site provides a Life and Living Skills program facilitating activities which focus on building health, wellbeing and independent living skills. The program enables young people to learn a range of practical skills, explore new interests and engage positively with one another.

We've had incredibly positive feedback from the young people engaging with the program who talk about building their confidence, making friends and learning important skills to maintain balanced healthy lives.

Education First Youth Foyers

Launch Housing in partnership with the Brotherhood of St Laurence established two Education First Youth Foyers (EFYF) in 2014. The first of their kind in Victoria, EFYFs provide young people aged 15 to 26 with access to accommodation, education, training and employment.

The Foyers are based on an innovative model that originated in the UK, resulting in more than 75% of people who leave the program becoming engaged in employment or further education, or both.

Our foyers are based at Holmesglen Institute's Glen Waverley campus and the Kangan Institute, Broadmeadows.

Since 2014 the Foyers have led to improved education, housing and employment outcomes:

- 81% of participants have completed a Certificate I course
- Year 12 completions increased from 33% at baseline to 43% at exit
- Reduction in those in crisis accommodation from 32% to 1%
- Substantial increase in those living in their own home from 5% to 41%



Students from the Education First Youth Foyers

Participants engaged in full-time employment increased from 1% to 11%

We're proud of the progress we have made in innovating services to support young people experiencing homelessness.

The Causes



According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW 2017), the top three reasons for clients seeking assistance across Victoria are:

- 1. Domestic and family violence (44%)
- 2. Housing crisis (40%)
- 3. Financial difficulties (39%)

The causes of homelessness are complex, with no single trigger. Individual, interpersonal and structural factors all play a role – and interact with each other. The Australian Homelessness Monitor shows the overall changing level of homelessness is an outcome of socio-economic and housing market trends.

Domestic Violence

There are significant links between homelessness and domestic violence. At the same time, there has been an increase in the reported incidences of domestic violence in recent years, as evident in the graph below.

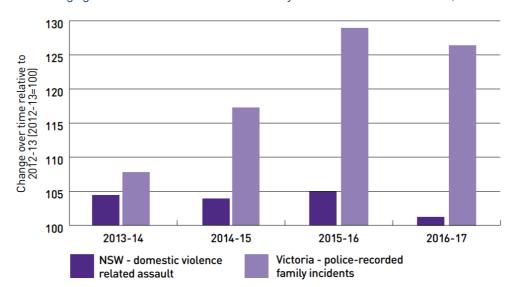


Figure 1: The changing incidence of recorded domestic/family violence in NSW and Victoria, 2012-2017

Sources: NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics Analysis and Research (2017); Victoria Crime Statistics Agency (2017)

Housing demand outstrips supply

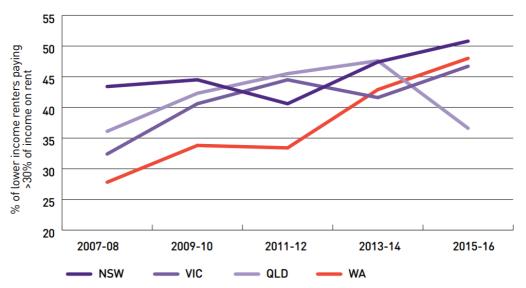
Changes in housing market conditions are liable to have a stronger and more immediate impact on homelessness rates than other economic trends. Lower income renters have experienced increased pressure in the past decade. Housing affordability stress among lower income renters has tended to increase much more substantially in capital cities than in regional Australia – although this may be to some extent a Sydney/Melbourne effect. A particularly notable trend is the steep, continuing rise in the incidence of rental stress among lower-income renters in Western Australia.

There are ongoing changes in the structure of Australia's private rental market as lower rent housing supply continues to dwindle. There is a shrinking supply of lower price rental

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properties for lower income groups, which places many at risk of homelessness and erodes the capacities of already-homeless people to recover from their situation.

Figure 2: Lower income renters paying unaffordable rents – selected states, 2007-2016



Source: ABS Survey of Housing Occupancy and Costs, Cat 4130.0

Poverty is a key contributor

Poverty underpins the risk of homelessness and can lead to an increase in factors that influence pathways into homelessness. Housing costs can impact poverty levels for low income households, and exacerbate the risk of becoming homeless. In particular, there are substantial poverty rate differences (after housing costs) between those mainly reliant on a social security payment due to the type of payment received, as shown in the following graph.

The transfer of the following states and the first of the

Figure 3: Incidence of income poverty (after housing costs), 2013-14 - selected groups

Source Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) 2016 Table 4

Notes: 1. Percentages of individuals in households below poverty lines set at 50% of median before housing costs (BHC) and after housing costs (AHC) income, 2007-8 basis. 2. Identified groups not mutually exclusive.

Changes in income support measures



There has been a sharp rise in the numbers of people receiving Newstart Allowance (NSA).

This is due, in part, to successive government policies that have tightened eligibility for Disability Support Pension (DSP) and some changes in conditions for (Single) Parenting Payments. Many recipients have been transferred to a lower payment (and more stringent participation requirements) associated with the Newstart Allowance. Newstart recipients receive \$341 per fortnight less than the equivalent DSP payment, a rate inadequate when private rents are increasing.

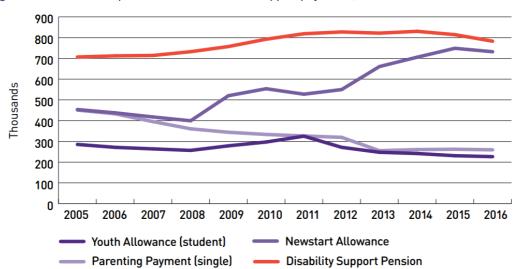


Figure 4: Number of recipients of selected income support payments, 2005-2016

Source: 2005-2013 Department of Social Services (DSS 2013) Statistical Paper No 12 Income support customers: a statistical overview 2013. Table 1 Summary of income support recipients by payment type, 2003 to 2013. DSS Demographics June 2014, June 2015, and June 2016 from totals column in table: Payment recipients by payment type by State and territory by sex. Accessed [21/08/17]

Income payment penalties

Governments have imposed increasingly restrictive compliance conditions to those on Newstart Allowance. This means recipients are at greater risk of being penalised for things like missing appointments or activities, meaning they are more likely to have their income support cut or restricted. This puts them at risk of homelessness. There has been a fivefold increase in the number of benefit sanctions recorded between 2011 and 2016; these can involve complete cessation of payments when a claimant breaches Centrelink conditions. For people on low incomes, such penalties are likely to have a significant negative impact on their overall financial circumstances.



Figure 5: Number of quarterly payment suspensions, 2012-2017



Source: Job seeker compliance data, Department of Employment, data.gov.au website. March 2012 to March 2017

The Impact



Homelessness is a traumatic experience. It puts extra strain on people's relationships and on their mental and emotional health. Many who experience homelessness have already endured significant stress in addition to their homelessness – this may be long running financial hardship, domestic violence, the loss of a job or the breakdown of a relationship.

For many people the first point of call is family or friends. They move in with a family member who wants to help but may be struggling themselves. Overcrowding and relationship breakdowns can often result, leading to further trauma and heartache.

To gain understanding of the impact of homelessness on young people, please read through the handouts provided with this resource.

The Solutions

Homelessness is not inevitable, and we believe it can be solved. The solutions are common sense, practical and cost effective. Trauma can be averted and lives can be transformed with the right combination of housing and support.

The best solution to homelessness is to address its causes and prevent people from experiencing homelessness in the first place. This involves ensuring sufficient affordable housing, providing people with access to education, training and employment opportunities, preventing ill health and ensuring everyone has someone they can turn to in times of need.

We must see a shared effort from the Australian Government, the states and territories to address housing affordability. The Australian Homelessness Monitor shows us there has been a period of inaction that has led to increasing numbers of people experiencing homelessness.

Housing, welfare and employment support policy and homelessness programs represent significant opportunities to demonstrably reduce homelessness, and improve the housing and life outcomes of people who are at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness.

The Australian Homelessness Monitor found in the 'Publications on Homelessness' of this resource provides a holistic picture of the changes in scale and nature of homelessness in Australia and is a great resource for information and statistics.







The Australian Homelessness Monitor

Watch the "Homelessness Monitor" video

- This clip highlights the major statistics, causes and consequences of homelessness in Australia, and provides examples of how people can help combat homelessness
- Have students take down key points and statistics throughout the video and discuss as a class what these were and why they stood out to the student

Education First Youth Foyer

Ask students to search online for https://www.launchhousing.org.au/service/education-first-youth-foyer/ and take notes on:

- What the program is,
- · Who is eligible, and
- What services it provides to those experiencing homelessness.

Encourage the students to share the information they have learnt and their opinions on the program with the class.



Incorporating a Lived Experience

Read Kristy, Trent and/or Tomasi's Story handout.

- Discuss as a class the challenges Kristy, Trent and/or Tomasi faced and how they were able to seek help.
- Identify some of the key themes that are seen across all experiences.
- Discuss whether the reasons for young Australians experiencing homelessness would differ in other areas of Australia and why.
- Ask students if they were able to see themselves in any of the stories how would they respond to the situations Kristy, Trent and Tomasi were in?

Task students with writing a short story or a series of diary entries where they 'step into the shoes' of either themselves or someone else experiencing homelessness. Explain to students they should focus on what they would do, where would they go and how would they seek help with the situation.

Extra Resources



Act like an Activist!

Below is a list of examples in which staff, students and entire schools can get involved in raising awareness and encouraging action towards ending homelessness.

Launch Housing's Donation Drives

Launch Housing hold three donation drives a year; one for Easter, winter and the festive season in December. Our Easter drive collects chocolate donations to give to families and children experiencing homelessness who would otherwise miss out. Our winter drive is focused on delivering blankets and other warm provisions to those experiencing homelessness on the cold winter nights in Melbourne. Our festive drive aims to deliver toys to the children who are experiencing homelessness and their parents are unable to provide gifts from 'Santa'.

If your school is interested in getting involved in one or all of these drives, contact us for more information. You can call the Fundraising and Business Development team on 1800 720 660 or email supporters@launchhousing.org.au.

Write to your local Member of Parliament

Encourage your school and/or class to write a letter to a local MP. Activism is the best way to create change and by having mass groups of people highlighting homelessness as a concern, politicians will need to respond. The Council to Homeless Persons (CHP) provides resources for contacting your state MP and an example letter at http://chp.org.au/take-action/resources-for-visiting-your-state-mp/

Create a Petition

Similar to writing to a local MP, a petition is a simple way that a community can come together to raise their concern towards homelessness and demand the government help those experiencing homelessness. If you would instead prefer to sign one already created, the 'Everybody's Home' petition can be found at https://everybodyshome.com.au/petition/

National Days of Awareness

Get involved in national awareness events such as Youth Homelessness Matters Day (April) and Homelessness Week (August). As homelessness is particularly relevant during these times, it may be the best time for your school to raise awareness and become an activist in ending homelessness.

A Day in Their Shoes

Organise a day at school where the students give up something in solidarity with those experiencing homelessness. This allows students to empathise and understand the meaning of losing something dear to them. An example of what they could give up include:

- Furniture and technology such as desks, chairs and computers
- Food (with exceptions),
- Indoor activities (i.e. the school day spent outside the classroom)

Publications on Homelessness



Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)

The AIHW has provided several reports and publications on the situation of homelessness in Australia and the services which support these communities. They can be found here:

https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/health-welfare-services/homelessness-services/overview

Australian Homelessness Monitor

Launch Housing has commissioned the Australian Homelessness Monitor 2018, for this first-of-its-kind authoritative insight into the current state of homelessness in Australia. The monitor is an in-depth, independent longitudinal analysis examining the changes in the scale and nature of homelessness in Australia, as well as how social, economic and policy drivers influence these changes

https://www.launchhousing.org.au/australianhomelessnessmonitor/

Empty Lunchbox Report

This exploratory study is the first time that the point of view of primary schools and their day-to-day experiences of dealing with student homelessness have been investigated. The findings make an important contribution to the broader evidence base on the detrimental impact of homelessness on children's education. Engagement and wellbeing are fundamental to learning. Given that homelessness can interfere with school engagement and wellbeing, it poses a major obstacle to learning.

https://www.launchhousing.org.au/site/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Research_The-Empty-Lunchbox-report Final.pdf

Housing First: Permanent Supportive Housing

An introduction and analysis to permanent supportive housing provided by the Council to Homeless Persons

http://chp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/FINAL-180606-Housing-First-2018-6-June.pdf

The changing geography of homelessness: a spatial analysis from 2001 to 2016

This study examined the changing geography of homelessness. It outlines the extent to which homelessness has become more spatially concentrated over time; where it has risen and fallen; and the importance that housing affordability, poverty and labour market opportunities play in reshaping its distribution.

https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/313

What works for children experiencing homelessness and/or family/domestic violence?

This report examines the range of interventions designed to support and improve outcomes for children affected by homelessness and/or family/domestic violence.

https://www.acu.edu.au/-/media/feature/pagecontent/richtext/about-acu/institutes-academies-and-

<u>centres/icps/_docs/part1_literaturesynthesis_march2013.pdf?la=en&hash=BD2594BD402017</u> <u>EF7C5FC13C6DC4C6AA</u>

'How to' Guides



Fundraising

Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission

https://www.acnc.gov.au/tools/topic-guides/fundraising

Petition Writing

Legislative Assembly - Parliament of Australia

https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/assembly/petitions

Volunteering

Volunteering Australia

https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/resources/australian-curriculum/