

# Statewide Transitional Support Pilot Project for SSATI Young People

## Best Practice Report

In partnership with Family Access  
Network & the ALSO Foundation



© Family Access Network Inc. (2008)

This document is copyright. Apart from fair dealing for private study, research, criticism or review as described in the Copyright Act, any person or organisation wanting to reproduce material from this report must obtain written permission from the publisher.

This report was produced by Family Access Network along with project consultant Kathy Desmond as the primary author. The project was funded by the Victorian Department of Human Services through the 'Best Practice Grants for Integrated Family Violence Reform and Young People'.

For further information please contact:

Family Access Network Inc. (FAN)  
ABN: 68 473 447 026

P.O. Box 141  
Box Hill, Victoria, 3128  
Ph: 61 3 9890 2673 | Fax: 61 3 9890 9919  
Email: [fan@fan.org.au](mailto:fan@fan.org.au)

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>LIST OF ACRONYMS</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>DEFINITIONS</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>9</b>
1.1 ABOUT FAN	10
1.2 THE ALSO FOUNDATION	11
1.3 BEST PRACTICE PROJECT PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY	12
<b>2. HISTORY AND CONTEXT</b>	<b>13</b>
2.1 HISTORY OF THE ‘ALSORTS’ INITIATIVE	13
2.2 OVERVIEW OF THE VICTORIAN POLICY CONTEXT	14
<b>3. THE ‘ALSORTS’ MODEL</b>	<b>17</b>
3.1 THE PARTNERSHIP WITH ALSO	18
3.2 A WHOLE OF AGENCY RESPONSE	18
3.3 EQUITY OF ACCESS	19
3.4 INCLUSIVE, CLIENT CENTRED/RIGHTS BASED PRACTICE	20
3.5 SECTOR INTEGRATION	20
<b>4. ‘ALSORTS’ YOUNG PEOPLE</b>	<b>21</b>
4.1 IN THEIR OWN WORDS	22
<b>5. BEING SSATI ‘FRIENDLY’</b>	<b>23</b>
5.1 PORTFOLIOS	23
5.2 TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT	24
5.3 KEY LEARNINGS	24
<b>APPENDICES</b>	<b>25</b>
OVERVIEW OF FAN PROGRAMS AND SERVICES	25
SSATI YOUNG PEOPLE & HOMELESSNESS: THE ISSUES	27
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>32</b>

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project was funded by the Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS) through the 'Best Practice Grants for Integrated Family Violence Reform and Young People' initiative.

The author would like to thank the FAN staff team who provided valuable time and information about the history of the '*alsorts*' program, their learning's as a staff team and the challenges that they faced. In particular, special thanks is extended to the FAN Project Reference Group consisting of Sue Carlile, Jemmah McKie, Victoria Sobh and Rebecca Granata who met with the author every fortnight for the duration of the project and provided valuable guidance, advice, comments and feedback on all aspects of the project including the two draft reports. The dedication of the FAN Board in supporting this project is also gratefully acknowledged.

Finally, a special thanks is extended to The ALSO Foundation for their comments and feedback on the final draft report.

### FAN Staff Team:

Sue Carlile:	Manager
Jemmah McKie:	Team Leader, Homeless Support Services/Transitional Youth Support Worker
Rebecca Granata:	Transitional Youth Support Worker
Victoria Sobh:	Private Rental Brokerage Program
Jacqui Gabriel:	Children's Program – Early Years
Carol Martyn:	Coordinator of Life Skills and Volunteer Programs
Felicity Green:	Administration/Reception
Cathy Oliver:	Financial Administrator

Kathy Desmond

July 2008

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

DHS	Victorian Department of Human Services	PRBP	Private Rental Brokerage Program
EBC	East Burwood Centre	ROK	Reach Out for Kids
EMR	Eastern Metropolitan Region	SAAP	Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
FAN	Family Access Network	SSA	Same Sex Attracted
GLBTIQ	Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender Intersex Queer	SSATI	Same Sex Attracted Transgender Intersex
HASS	Homelessness Assistance Service Standards	SSAYP	Same Sex Attracted Young People
HEF	Housing Establishment Fund	SSIP	Service System Intervention Project
HSS	Homelessness Service System	THM	Transitional Housing Manager
MOSS	Merri Outreach Support Services	VHS	Victorian Homelessness Strategy
OoH	Office of Housing	WCSA	Whitehorse Counselling Services Alliance
PICYS	Perth Inner City Youth Service	YHAP	Youth Homelessness Action Plan
PRAS	Private Rental Assistance Scheme	YSAAP	Youth SAAP Service

## DEFINITIONS

### Heterosexual/Straight

People whose sexual and emotional feelings are primarily for the opposite sex.

### Homosexual/Gay/Lesbian

The term 'homosexual' is used to describe people whose sexual and emotional feelings are primarily for the same sex. Those who feel this way often identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual. In Australia, the term 'gay' refers to both men and women although it tends to be used mainly for men. The term 'lesbian' on the other hand specifically refers to women.

### Bisexual or 'Bi'

Those whose sexual and emotional feelings are for both women and men.

### Same Sex Attracted

Those who are attracted to people of their own gender. This term has been used specifically in the context of young people whose sense of sexual identity is not fixed, but who experience sexual feelings toward people of their own sex.

### Homophobia

Individual or social ignorance or fear of gay and/or lesbian people. Homophobic actions can include prejudice, discrimination, harassment and acts of violence or hatred.

### Heterosexism

The belief and assumption that everyone is heterosexual.

### Transsexual

People who are born anatomically male or female but have a profound identification with the opposite gender. Not all transsexual people see themselves as being transgender.

### Transgender

Those whose gender identity or behaviour falls outside the usual expectations of their gender. This includes people who feel that their anatomical gender is at odds with their inner sense of being 'male' or 'female'. Some transgender people feel 'be-gendered' or 'neither-gendered', challenging the idea that there can only be two genders.

### Intersex

A biological condition where a person is born with physical characteristics and/or sex chromosomes that are not exclusively male or female. An earlier term for intersex was 'hermaphrodite'.

### Queer

Queer is often referred to as a political theory, encapsulating literature, popular culture, politics and academia. Queer is often subject to change and is said to describe beyond the limits of rigid binaries that have dictated the understanding of sexuality and gender.

*(Adapted from the S.E.A. Network, 'Definitions' paper, 2008)*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

The '*alsorts*' program is a case managed transitional support initiative for same sex attracted, transgender intersex young people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The program emerged from a partnership between Family Access Network (FAN) and The ALSO Foundation, a specialist organisation that works with Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (GLBTIQ) communities. The pilot project first commenced in 2006 and has more recently expanded in 2008 to now include an additional property to the existing case management response, an outreach service as well as linkages to FAN's Life Skills and Volunteer Programs, which incorporates volunteer mentors.

While research on homelessness among young people who identify as Same Sex Attracted Transgender Intersex (SSATI) has been an area of enquiry both in Australia and abroad that has been growing in the last five to ten years, there is still a dearth of research in this field. Early findings however, indicate there is strong evidence to suggest that this target group experiences a high risk of homelessness yet are significantly under represented in homelessness agency statistics.

### History

In late 2004 ALSO identified a significant service system gap for SSATI young people who were homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Emerging from anecdotal evidence, the general view among ALSO key stakeholders was that SSATI young people were not receiving appropriate care and support from some youth crisis and housing providers. While it was acknowledged that many of these providers did not deliberately ignore the needs of SSATI young people in their services, but simply did not know how to provide appropriate support, the raw fact that many SSATI young people were unable to access the services they needed remained the overarching issue.

In late August 2005 ALSO approached FAN to enter into a formal partnership agreement for the provision of case managed services and project support for the intended SSATI transitional housing service. In February 2006 FAN and ALSO created a formal partnership to establish and provide a transitional housing and support response specifically tailored for SSATI young people. The '*alsorts*' initiative as it is now known, would become the first tailored and sustainable model for the provision of housing and support to SSATI young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness in Victoria.

### The '*alsorts*' Model

The '*alsorts*' model was specifically designed as a demonstration model from which a broader service system response could be created and shaped. Support for young people participating in the '*alsorts*' transitional housing service includes:

- Case management and the associated supports relating to income, education, health, wellbeing, substance use and other specialist referral services;
- Access to brokerage for employment/education needs and/or counselling/family reconciliation;
- Access to assistance through supported exits to independent longer-term housing options such as private rental and/or public housing as well as family reconnection;
- Access to positive role modeling through fully screened, trained and supported volunteer lead tenants and volunteer mentors, through FAN's Volunteer Program;
- Access to workshops and community activities through FAN's Life Skills Program.

There are five core components that make up the '*alsorts*' model.

### Partnership

The partnership between FAN and ALSO is a crucial component of the success of the 'alsorts' model. Such a partnership acknowledges the combined areas of specialist expertise, experience and skills that are needed in order to develop and maintain an appropriate response to SSATI young people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

### A Whole of Agency Response

A key feature of the development of the 'alsorts' model at FAN has been the commitment to ensuring that the organisation's other programs and services as well as operational systems are compatible with providing a SSATI friendly service. In practice, this meant conducting a full audit of all aspects of the organisation to assess the inclusiveness of FAN's documentation and processes. In addition, the physical appearance of the FAN office was also reviewed and subsequently improved.

### Equity of Access

Equity of access refers to the opportunities and pathways that SSATI young people may need in order to access the 'alsorts' program. Access to the 'alsorts' program is based on a 'parallel pathway' approach – that is, young people may come through the 'front door' system or alternatively access the program directly from another agency via referral, by self referral or through family and friends or 'word of mouth'.

### Inclusive, Client Centred/Rights Based Practice

Being 'client centred' highlights the need to provide flexible responses to SSATI young people including outreach support, housing assistance, access to brokerage, appropriate and supported referral to specialist services and access to the range of programs and services within FAN. Client centred practice places SSATI young people at the centre of their own case plan where case managers work in collaboration and partnership with young people.

### Sector Integration

The development of the 'alsorts' model has always been premised on the notion of achieving 'integration' within the youth homelessness service system. This would ensure support and access for SSATI young people to the array of programs and services available within the system as well as expanding the system's capacity to respond more appropriately to this target group.

### **'alsorts' Young People**

Since July 2006 (program inception) to June 2008, FAN has received a total of 66 housing and/or support requests for the 'alsorts' program. Of the 66 referrals, 61% of requests have been from young males, 39% from females. The age range for all referrals is between 16-22 years of age, with the average age being 18 years.

Of the 66 requests, 16 young people who were experiencing or at risk of homelessness received a case managed response with 14 young people housed in the 'alsorts' properties (5 females including 1 transgender male to female, and 9 males). The other 2 young people opted for a support only response (1 female & 1 transgender female to male).



## Key Learnings

- Integration within the homelessness service system requires a consistent message to service providers, via networks, email postings and other industry and SSATI membership bases.
- Partnership works, but requires the recognition of resource implications for project development, monitoring, review and most importantly relationship building.
- Integration within the homelessness service system is being supported by the Inside and Out training, which could be further enhanced by internal document and process audits. Some services may require support in achieving this.
- Regardless of gender and sexual identification, they are first and foremost 'young people' requiring the comprehensive suite of case management responses and access to referral and/or brokerage pathways. Notably, the primary reason for homelessness is the same for all young people (family/relationship breakdown) although SSATI young people are considerably more vulnerable.
- Recognition that diversity in responses are necessary, for example: some young people may not wish to live in a shared house with other SSATI young people, but prefer a non specific response; sensitive allocations to support client needs especially those experiencing mental illness and or significant alcohol and other drug issues; choice in shared households gender specific or mixed; age appropriate responses. Unfortunately sole tenant responses are very rare in the THM system and even rarer for young people specifically.
- Most young people tend to exit the homelessness sector into shared living arrangements. Therefore living in a shared arrangement while receiving case managed support can enhance a young person's capacity to negotiate conflicts and learn skills relating to independent living and share housing.
- Lead Tenant Model - it's more likely that clients respond more positively between the ages of 16-18 as they have a greater need for live-in role modeling, which is important for those of a more vulnerable age.
- The learning's from the partnership between FAN and ALSO is invaluable and a rich source for research and demonstration to the broader service system.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The '*alsorts*' program is a case managed transitional support initiative for Same Sex Attracted, Transgender Intersex (SSATI) young people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The program emerged from a partnership between Family Access Network (FAN) and The ALSO Foundation, a specialist organisation that works with Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (GLBTIQ) communities. The pilot project first commenced in 2006 and has more recently expanded in 2008 to now include an additional property to the existing case management response, an outreach service as well as linkages to FAN's Life Skills and Volunteer Programs, which incorporates volunteer mentors. The '*alsorts*' program is predominately funded by The ALSO Foundation with the transitional properties managed by one of the region's Transitional Housing Managers (THM) while the case management of young people in the program as well as the recruitment, training and support of '*alsorts*' mentors and lead tenants rests with Family Access Network.

While research on homelessness among young people who identify as Same Sex Attracted Transgender Intersex (SSATI) has been an area of enquiry both in Australia and abroad that has been growing in the last five to ten years, there is still a dearth of research in this field. Early findings however, indicate there is strong evidence to suggest that this target group experiences a high risk of homelessness yet are significantly under represented in homelessness agency statistics.

In 2004 the Victorian Government's Youth Homelessness Action Plan (Stage 1 Report) identified young people with diverse gender and sexuality expression who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness, as a target group that needed a 'further developed service system response'. The Victorian Department of Human Services subsequently funded an initiative that would further explore how to enhance the responsiveness of the homelessness service system to SSATI young people. The initiative was auspiced by Merry Outreach Support Services (MOSS) and was conducted over a 12 month period in the North-West metropolitan region in 2006-2007. The main deliverable resulting from this project was the development and implementation of a specialist training program for workers in the field, which sought to improve their understanding of, and skills to respond more appropriately to, SSATI young people presenting to services.

A key recommendation emerging from the MOSS initiative was for the development and establishment of a SAAP funded SSATI service that would work in collaboration with existing homelessness services to improve sector capacity to respond to and support, homeless young people with diverse gender and sexuality expression.

While the '*alsorts*' program was already well underway when the MOSS project was conducted, FAN workers, management and Board of Governance all underwent the MOSS training program as well as instituting a range of processes and policy decisions that would further enhance their efforts in engaging with and supporting SSATI young people.

This report aims to describe and discuss FAN's development and learnings in striving to provide 'a whole of agency' response to SSATI young people within the context of the Victorian homelessness service system in the Eastern Metropolitan Region. This will include a description of the '*alsorts*' program model developed by FAN as well as the range of key activities undertaken by the organisation in order to become more responsive and effective in their work with SSATI young people.

## 1.1 About FAN

Family Access Network is a small community based youth service located in Box Hill in the Eastern Metropolitan Region of Victoria. FAN provides a range of services for young people, young families and accompanying children who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness including:

- Homeless Support Services, incorporating a Transitional Support Program, the Creating Connections Private Rental Brokerage Program (an initiative of the Youth Homelessness Action Plan stage 2), Children's Program – Early Years; Counselling and Family Mediation Services; and the 'alsorts' Program;
- Life Skills Program;
- Volunteer Program.

In addition to the above, FAN also operate an Equity Support Program which is funded entirely through community donations and enables a range of necessary and vital financial, medical, material aid and other related supports to be provided to FAN clients. During 2006-07 more than \$7,500 was distributed to clients across 114 episodes of support.

FAN is also a partner agency, along with Harrison UnitingCare, Anchor Community Care, EastCare and Wesley Homeless Services in the Integrated Youth Hub in the Eastern Metropolitan Region and delivers the Private Rental Brokerage Program in partnership with Anchor Community Care. This initiative was borne out of the core recommendations of the state government policy document 'Creating Connections' report, as part of the Youth Homelessness Action Plan 2.

First established in 1981, FAN is governed by a Board of Governance annually elected community members and is funded through SAAP as well as local government, a range of philanthropic trusts, community based organisations and private donations. Total staff capacity at FAN is approximately eight EFT, covering a team of ten staff members, including: a Manager, a Homeless Support Services team of five workers (incorporating a team leader, two transitional support services workers, a private rental brokerage worker and a dedicated children's worker), a Coordinator for the Volunteer and Life Skills Programs, an administration/reception/executive assistant, a part-time finance administrator and part-time finance officer/book keeper.

FAN's programs and services are underpinned by a strong client focused, rights-based approach that seeks to maximise positive outcomes through timely intervention and strategic responses.

The organisations early beginnings and more than 27 years of operation play an important role in the contemporary work culture and practice framework of all staff.

*The community development model, so richly embedded in the formation of the agency, has continued and contributes much to the community participation, strong volunteer and donation base that enables FAN to continue to value add to services provided.*

*(FAN Annual Report, 2005/06).*

Originally formed from the efforts of the local Box Hill community to foster an accommodation and support response to the increasing numbers of homeless young people in the area, FAN first began with a community placement service, shared private rental model and a volunteer support mentoring program. These early years of operation (pre-SAAP and the now historically significant 'Burdekin Report' in 1985) laid the groundwork for the organisations current practice base:

*The model was very successful and laid the foundation for many of the values and practice principles still held strongly at FAN around building sustainable community connections for young people and fostering the involvement of the community (FAN Annual Report, 2005/06).*

Based on the principles of community development FAN's early years service responses were innovative, grounded in the notion of promoting young people's 'connectedness' to family and community and almost entirely driven by a large team of dedicated volunteers. While more than 27 years of operation has passed since the organisations inception, along with countless service sector re-developments, changes of government (and government department names) and some significant research and learning's in the field of homelessness, the core principles which first underpinned FAN's approach to assisting homeless and at risk young people and young families remain both relevant and active today.

### Vision and Core Principles

FAN's vision is for a 'community which acknowledges and values the dignity and worth of all citizens and enables individuals to deal positively with adverse situations in their lives'. The core principles that underpin this vision are:

- Supporting young people's right to self-determination

In recognition of the needs of homeless and at risk young people, young families and accompanying children, FAN provides services that offer individual support according to their identified needs;

- Assisting young people toward independence and empowerment over their own lives

To reduce homelessness FAN supports and assists young people, young families and accompanying children who are experiencing homelessness to achieve independence and empowerment;

- Advocating for, on behalf of and with young people on the public and political stage

To undertake advocacy and develop public awareness of the issues relating to homelessness in general, underpinned by FAN's commitment to housing as a basic human right.

### Mission Statement

*Family Access Network will provide support to young people who are experiencing homelessness and those at risk of homelessness in the form of:*

- *Access to accommodation and support options including therapeutic interventions for both young people and accompanying children.*
- *Development of resources for young people, children and staff.*
- *Provide social skill development opportunities for at risk young people and accompanying children.*
- *Engage in high quality research while conducting in-house research on best practice and innovation.*

## 1.2 The ALSO Foundation

The ALSO Foundation is a philanthropic specialist organisation that works to enhance the lives of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (GLBTIQ) communities. First established in 1980 it is now the largest broadly focused organisation of its type in Australia playing a key role in the early establishment of what is now known as the Victorian AIDS Council. ALSO is governed by a Board of Management elected each year by the general membership at the Annual General Meeting.

### Vision

*The ALSO vision is the creation and celebration of a diverse, strong, safe and inclusive GLBTIQ community that contributes to and is respected by broader communities*

The Foundation provides a broad range of programs and services to the GLBTIQ community covering:

- Advocacy for equitable access to services, opportunities and the rights of GLBTIQ people;
- Special projects such as the Same Sex Domestic Violence Project, the Diversity Reference Group, the Homophobic Harassment Campaign, the Sexual Health Championships project and the Australian GLBTIQ Multicultural conference;
- Partnerships that strengthen and seek support for the GLBTIQ community, including Gay Lesbian Health Victoria, The Victorian AIDS Council, Victoria Police, Transgender Victoria, Victorian Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby, The Anti-Violence Project and The City of Melbourne;
- Special grants to support innovative projects and/or services that are of particular benefit to the GLBTIQ community;
- Seniors services, including the 'About Time – GLBT Seniors Also Matter' initiative and the ALSO Seniors Project Advisory Committee;
- Regional services, including the Rural Network, the Sunraysia GLBTIQ Network and the bBent Ballarat Social Group; and
- Youth Services such as the 'alsorts' Transitional Housing Service, 'Minus 18' dance party, the Youth Action Plan, the ALSORTS Sexuality Awareness Resource, a Youth Workshop at the 1<sup>st</sup> Asia Pacific Out Games, GLBTIQ Human rights conference and the 'We're Here' resource for childcare workers.

### 1.3 Best Practice Project Purpose and Methodology

The overall purpose of the SSATI Best Practice Project was to document, describe and articulate the unique 'alsorts' model with a specific focus on how it may apply across the broader youth homelessness service sector. The practice wisdom that has emerged from the implementation of the 'alsorts' program forms an important evidence base that will enhance the wider application of inclusive practice. In addition to documenting the 'alsorts' model the project also aims to increase referral pathways and encourage the collaboration of partnerships to ensure that an inclusive and 'best practice' approach to providing support services to SSATI young people is adopted more broadly throughout the service system.

#### Objectives

- To consolidate the comprehensive work undertaken by FAN in collaboration and partnership with ALSO in the design of the model, including all aspects of the implementation, application and promotion of the 'alsorts' initiative.
- To investigate and describe the role of the Creating Connections (YHAP 2) Integrated Youth Hub model in the context of providing an tailored response to SSATI young people.

#### Deliverables

- Design a draft methodology (in consultation with the reference group) including detailed steps and milestones to ensure that the project deliverables are achieved and timelines met.
- Documentation of the 'alsorts' model including a description of the program's referral, intake, exit points and support activities
- Identification of core links between the 'alsorts' program and the broader youth homeless service system

- Description of the broad outcomes of the program, in particular, how the program supports participating SSATI young people in their transition to independent living
- Investigation and analysis of key emerging themes and learning's
- Design and development of a final publishable report.

## 2. HISTORY AND CONTEXT

### 2.1 History of the 'alsorts' Initiative

In late 2004 ALSO identified a significant service system gap for SSATI young people who were homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Emerging from anecdotal evidence, the general view among ALSO key stakeholders was that SSATI young people were not receiving appropriate care and support from some youth crisis and housing providers. While it was acknowledged that many of these providers did not deliberately ignore the needs of SSATI young people in their services, but simply did not know how to provide appropriate support, the raw fact that many SSATI young people were unable to access the services they needed remained the overarching issue.

By November 2004 the CEO of ALSO drafted a 'Concept Paper' on the issue for the Board of Management to consider. The result was for ALSO to host a meeting for managers and workers within the youth service sector to discuss and explore ways in which ALSO may assist in leading a response for improving the sectors capacity to appropriately support homeless or at risk SSATI young people. The meeting was held in January 2005 and identified five core directions:

- That SSATI young people were not being identified and holistically cared for by an alarming number of youth crisis and housing support services;
- That ALSO is in a position to play a key role in responding to this need;
- That ALSO may be in a position to resource a youth specific transitional support housing service for SSATI young people;
- That, in doing so, the concept of partnerships will be an important factor for creating awareness and change across the youth services sector; and
- That the Concept Panel would assist ALSO in progress the achievements of these directions.

The Concept Panel continued to meet to further the directions that had been identified and agreed upon early in 2005. In May 2005 the ALSO Board of Management approved a resolution to establish a transitional housing service that specifically targeted SSATI young people.

#### The Partnership

In late August 2005 ALSO approached FAN to enter into a formal partnership agreement for the provision of case managed services and project support for the intended SSATI transitional housing service. In February 2006 FAN and ALSO created a formal partnership to establish and provide a transitional housing and support response specifically tailored for SSATI young people. The 'alsorts' initiative as it is now known, would become the first tailored and sustainable model for the provision of housing and support to at risk and homeless SSATI young people in Victoria.

*A partnership with FAN would provide ALSO with the expertise, agency and funding links of a well established non-religious youth service agency. Of most importance, this partnership would be beneficial to our future clients through providing them with quality care and support structures and personnel to draw from...FAN has all of the relevant management and client assessment and support procedures in*

*place. They are linked in with other service providers and...have been very proactive in supporting the ALSO youth house project (ALSO, 2005b).*

The 'alsorts' model was specifically designed as a demonstration model from which a broader service system response could be created and shaped. Support for young people participating in the 'alsorts' transitional housing service includes:

- Case management and the associated supports relating to income, education, health, wellbeing, substance use and other specialist referral services;
- Access to brokerage for employment/education needs and/or counselling/family reconciliation supports;
- Access to assistance through supported exits to independent longer-term housing options such as private rental and/or public housing as well as family reconnection;
- Access to positive role modeling through fully screened, trained and supported volunteer lead tenants and volunteer mentors, through FAN's Volunteer Program;
- Access to workshops and community activities through FAN's Life Skills Program.

The partnership between FAN and ALSO for this initiative has provided valuable learning's and insight into the development of a sustainable and effective model specifically targeting SSATI young people.

### The Property

The original property for the 'alsorts' model was owned by the West Hawthorn Uniting Church who subsequently leased the house to ALSO for the purpose of the SSATI initiative. While the house formed part of a bequest by an anonymous donor to the Uniting Church it needed significant renovation to bring it to the standard required for the project. ALSO promoted the need for equipment, furnishings and other in-kind support for the upgrade of the property which resulted in a significant response from the ALSO membership as well as the broader community. Following considerable upgrade to the property the 'alsorts' house was officially launched in October 2006 and operated from the Uniting Church property for approximately 12 months.

In October 2007 the 'alsorts' house transferred to its current location - a THM property sourced and supported by EastCare, one of the Eastern Regions Transitional Housing Managers funded through DHS Office of Housing (OoH). This was an important step in the identified objective of the 'alsorts' model to become aligned and integrated within the housing and homelessness sector.

## 2.2 Overview of the Victorian Policy Context

The Victorian Homelessness Strategy (VHS) is the state governments key policy direction that guides the provision of homelessness services throughout Victoria, including those targeting at risk and homeless young people, families and women and children who are experiencing family and domestic violence. The VHS first began in 2000, with the broad aim to deliver a comprehensive and coordinated response to meeting the needs of people experiencing homelessness by developing a preventative and early intervention response to addressing homelessness as well as improving current responses. In 2002 the VHS Final Report 'Directions for Change' was released and identified the key areas where service system changes were needed as well as a set of proposed directions to achieve the necessary reforms.

### The Youth Homelessness Action Plan: First Stage Report

An important part of the VHS has been the development and implementation of the 'Youth Homelessness Action Plans' (YHAP). The 'YHAP First Stage' report was released in February 2004 and formed a core strategic direction



of the VHS through which the need to develop and implement new service models for specific client groups within the homelessness sector was identified. The aim of the YHAP was to investigate ways of 'working towards a more integrated and holistic service response' for homeless and/or at risk young people. The First Stage Report identified a total of 67 actions which were grouped under four main areas for improvement:

1. Developing preventative approaches;
2. Strengthening pathways to independence;
3. Developing the homelessness service system; and
4. Responding effectively to client needs.

Same Sex Attracted Young People (SSAYP) who are experiencing homelessness or at-risk of becoming homeless were identified in the First Stage Report as a client group that required 'a further developed service system response';

*Consultation with same-sex attracted young people (SSAYP) has indicated that young people require a supportive environment in which to disclose issues about their sexuality. Young people perceive some youth services to be discriminatory towards them, including being refused access to services on the basis of the accommodation being unsafe for them. Young people also report that workers have at times asked them to behave discreetly in relation to their sexuality in order not to attract negative attention from other residents. Agencies providing shared accommodation may have difficulty providing a safe environment for SSAYP where other residents/tenants may not accept their sexuality. The requirement to provide a safe environment for all young people means that further practice development is needed to ensure that SSAYP can be safely and appropriately accommodated in the service system. Issues around accommodation of transgender young people in single sex accommodation or in services where bedrooms are segregated by gender are complex, and agencies have indicated that they need support to resolve some of the issues raised (YHAP First Stage Report, 2004).*

### **Creating Connections: Youth Homelessness Action Plan Stage 2, 2006-2010**

The 'Creating Connections: Youth Homelessness Action Plan Stage 2' report was released in October 2006, some two and a half years after the YHAP 1. While YHAP 1 primarily aimed to respond to the most immediate and pressing issues and gaps in the youth homeless service sector as well as trialing a range of new service models, the YHAP 2 'Creating Connections' focused on addressing longer-term systemic strategies for change and improvement. These included four new directions along with ten new actions that are to be implemented over the life of the Action Plan (i.e. 2006-2010).

#### YHAP 2 Key Directions

1. A strong focus on early intervention and interdependence;
2. Tailored accommodation and housing support options for each individual homeless young person;
3. Greater access to complementary services for homeless young people with complex needs; and
4. Enhanced youth homelessness service capacity.

#### YHAP 2 Key Actions

- Create 'Integrated Youth Hubs'
- Link new accommodation to the youth transitions hubs
- Link homeless young people to the private rental market
- Intensive case management support for homeless young people with high and complex needs



- Implement a youth focused housing placement initiative
- Strengthen the 24-hour response for youth refuge services
- Continue *Youth Homelessness Action Plan first stage* themes
- Strengthen cross-government responses
- Introduce new practice approaches
- Develop the service system.

### Integrated Youth Hubs

One of the major initiatives emerging from the Creating Connections report has been the development and implementation of the Integrated Youth Hub model in each DHS region. This new service model was designed to address a range of core service gaps across the sector and provide a 'link' for young people between the support provided in crisis accommodation and that needed for independent living.

*The suite of services provided at each hub will include individualised programs in living and life skills, access to employment, education and training opportunities, access to specialist service responses and reconnection with significant others and the broader community.*

*(Creating Connections: YHAP Stage 2, 2006)*

The 'Hub' model aims to provide a more intensive response to homeless or at risk young people through the development of a 'living and learning culture' that would 'assist young people to make a supported transition through important life stages'. The 'Hub' model is primarily intended for young people within the 15-25 year age group who require extra support to sustain independent living. However, there is an additional focus of the program on young people aged 21 or under who need to further develop appropriate skills to maintain affordable long-term housing. Same Sex Attracted, Transgender Intersex (SSATI) young people were identified as a key target group for the Youth Transition Hub model:

*Those who are eligible for the program will come from a variety of backgrounds and include young people from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds; young parents; Indigenous young people; and same sex attracted and transgender young people.*

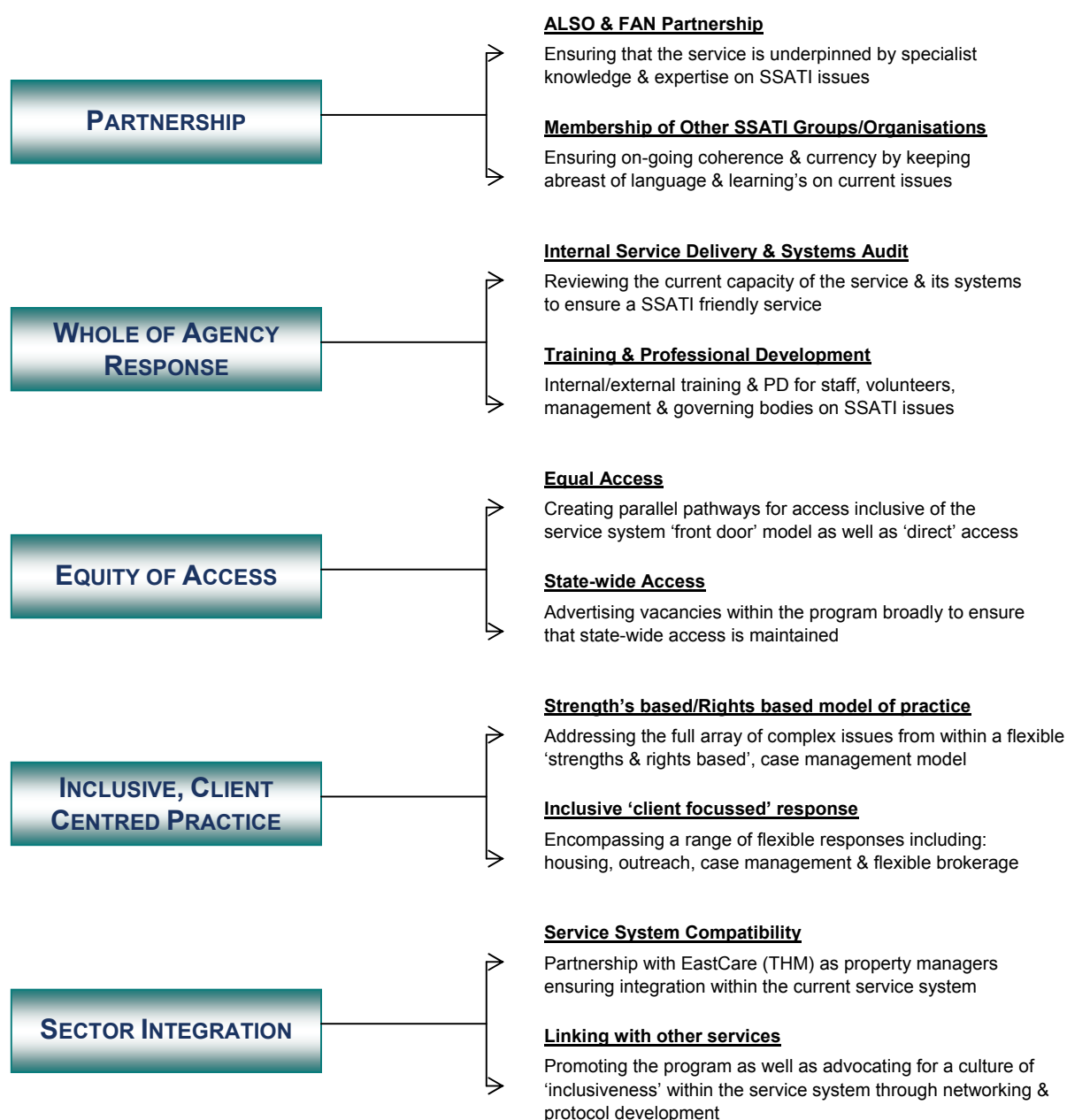
*(Creating Connections: YHAP Stage 2, 2006)*

FAN is one of five partners in the Eastern Metropolitan Region (EMR) Creating Connections YHAP2 Integrated Youth Hub along with UnitingCare Harrison, EastCare, Wesley Homeless Services and Anchor Community Care. While FAN's 'alsorts' initiative is not a formal component of the EMR consortium, it is inextricably linked with the overall aim of the Youth Hub policy directions noted above.

### 3. THE 'ALSORTS' MODEL

There are five core components that make up the 'alsorts' model. These are: a key focus on *partnership* with The ALSO Foundation which provides the vital presence, profile and credibility within the GLBTIQ community; a clearly articulated '*whole of agency*' response to providing SSATI friendly services; a commitment to providing real *access opportunities* for SSATI young people; using an *inclusive and client centred/rights based* practice approach including the use of flexible brokerage funds; and ensuring that the service is *integrated* into current service sector practice. Figure 1 (below) outlines these components.

**Figure 1: The FAN 'alsorts' program model**



### 3.1 The Partnership with ALSO

The partnership between FAN and ALSO is a crucial component of the success of the '*alsorts*' model. Such a partnership acknowledges the combined areas of specialist expertise, experience and skills that are needed in order to develop and maintain an appropriate response to SSATI young people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Importantly, the partnership with ALSO provides the credibility and integrity to the project that the GLBTIQ community require in order to 'trust' such a service while FAN's involvement ensures that the model remains relevant to the service system in which it operates.

A significant result of this partnership has been the involvement of one of the region's THM providers that now manages the properties. FAN's established networks and relationships within the sector along with their existing interagency process with EastCare directly led to linking the '*alsorts*' program with EastCare. This move further integrating the program within the homelessness and housing services sector in a sustainable manner.

In this way the partnership now extends to three key stakeholders: FAN as the provider of case managed support services to SSATI young people, ALSO as the instigator ensuring the on-going coherence and currency of the program to SSATI young people's needs and EastCare as the Transitional Housing Manager for the '*alsorts*' properties.

### 3.2 A Whole of Agency Response

A key feature of the development of the '*alsorts*' model at FAN has been the commitment to ensuring that the organisation's other programs and services as well as operational systems are compatible with providing a SSATI friendly service. In practice, this meant conducting a full audit of all aspects of the organisation to assess the inclusiveness of FAN's documentation and processes – from data collection, to intake and assessment processes, to the knowledge and skills of staff and volunteers to the training and professional development needs of the organisation's governing body. In addition, the physical appearance of the FAN office was also reviewed and subsequently improved through displaying posters, brochures and other relevant material, to ensure that it presented a welcoming, supportive and inclusive atmosphere.

Staff at FAN viewed the development of the '*alsorts*' program as an opportunity to further extend and improve their knowledge, skills and expertise in the delivery of services. FAN volunteers, lead tenants and mentors also participated in the training program as did The FAN Board of Governance to improve their knowledge of the issues facing SSATI young people and to subsequently ensure that the organisation would reflect these new learning's in its own processes.

The audit process involved identifying areas of practice and organisational systems that were 'exclusive' rather than 'inclusive' of SSATI young people and their issues. For example, the review of FAN's intake and assessment processes highlighted the need to amend associated pro-forma's and assessment/data templates to include more information about gender and sexuality diversity. The set up in the reception area was also evaluated for its ability to create an environment that would assist SSATI young people to feel more comfortable and to promote the organisations commitment to valuing diversity. Staff underwent training and professional development to enhance their skills in engaging with and conducting assessments with SSATI young clients as well as heightening their knowledge on external support groups and referral points to SSATI specific organisations and services.

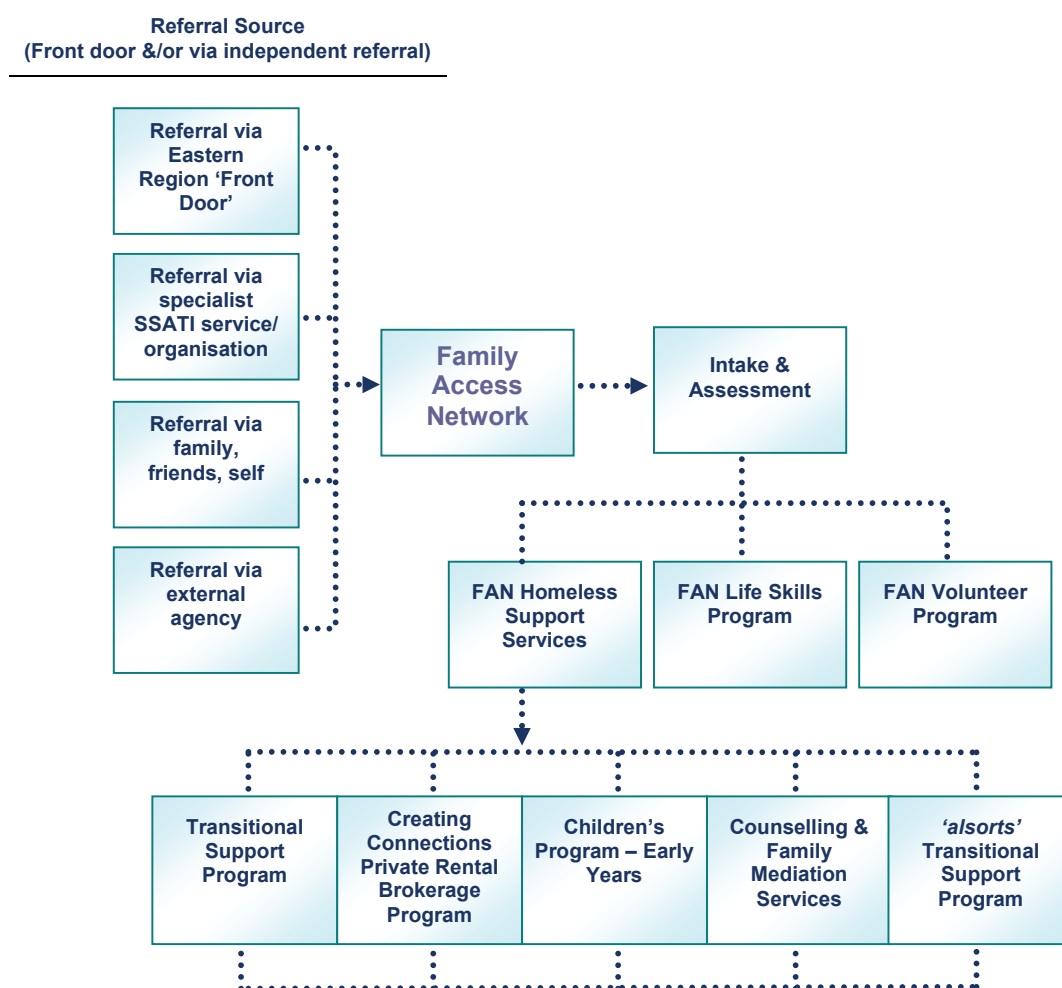
### 3.3 Equity of Access

Equity of access refers to the opportunities and pathways that SSATI young people may need in order to access the *'alsorts'* program. While the front door model is part of the current service system there is also recognition within the sector that access for some, more marginalised target groups of young people remains difficult and the 'front door' approach is not always effective.

Subsequently, access to the *'alsorts'* program is based on a 'parallel pathway' approach – that is, young people may come through the 'front door' system or alternatively access the program directly from another agency via referral, by self referral or through family and friends or 'word of mouth'.

In addition, the program has no geographic boundaries within Victoria so it is accessible state-wide. FAN openly advertises vacancies within the program broadly throughout the sector, through current networks as well as SSATI specialist services/organisations.

**Figure 1: Referral Pathways into *'alsorts'***



### 3.4 Inclusive, Client Centred/Rights Based Practice

FAN's approach to service delivery to young people is built around a client-focused, rights-based approach. It underpins all aspects of the provision of programs and services at FAN and is focused on working with young people from within a 'human rights' framework. This emphasises young people's right to equity of opportunities in education and employment, access to support where and when needed, the right to appropriate and supported accommodation, the right to feel safe and accepted and the right to grow and develop healthy relationships.

Being 'client centred' highlights the need to provide flexible responses to SSATI young people including outreach support, housing assistance, access to brokerage, appropriate and supported referral to specialist services and access to the range of programs and services within FAN. Client centred practice places SSATI young people at the centre of their own case plan where case managers work in collaboration and partnership with young people. In addition, this approach also encompasses a focus on young people's strengths, resilience and independence acknowledging their ability to make positive choices in their lives.

### 3.5 Sector Integration

The development of the '*alsorts*' model has always been premised on the notion of achieving 'integration' within the youth homelessness service system. This would ensure support and access for SSATI young people to the array of programs and services available within the system as well as expanding the system's capacity to respond more appropriately to this target group. This was seen as an important component of the model from its inception and both ALSO and FAN have been committed to achieving this goal.

While the first step was the initial partnership between ALSO and FAN as a specialist youth homelessness service, the participation of EastCare later in the programs development as the THM provider was a significant accomplishment toward realising the integrated model.

Since the early days of FAN's involvement in the development of the '*alsorts*' program, a range of opportunities to support, advocate and promote the '*alsorts*' program have been implemented. For example:

- Presentation to the National Homelessness Conference in Sydney March 2006.
- Presentation/s to the Eastern Homelessness Network in relation to FAN's reviewed SSATI processes, internal and external training, agency audit and partnership with The ALSO Foundation. This served two purposes, to promote the program and to encourage a similar process for the review of practices in other homeless services, regardless of target group ages or presenting circumstances.
- Presentation to the Victorian State-wide Homeless Services Practitioners Forum (July 2006).
- Contribution to overall sector reform through membership of key regional and state committee's and groups.
- Contribution of expertise and experience to a number of regional and state-wide consultations and reports including: The Front Door Intake Trial as well as the YHAP 1 Evaluation.
- Submission and evidence provided to the National Youth Homeless Inquiry in 2007.
- Recruitment of Dr Lynne Hillier (a well known researcher and advocate of SSATI young people's rights) to the FAN Board of Governance.
- Involvement in a range of service specific, state-wide, National and international research projects that provide on-going opportunities to promote the issues relating to SSATI young people both within the research framework as well as across a range of service system/types.

## 4. 'ALSORTS' YOUNG PEOPLE

Since July 2006 (program inception) to June 2008, FAN has received a total of 66 housing and/or support requests for the 'alsorts' program. Of the 66 referrals, 61% of requests have been from young males, 39% from females. The age range for all referrals is between 16-22 years of age, with the average age being 18 years.

Of the 66 requests, 16 young people who were experiencing or at risk of homelessness received a case managed response with 14 young people housed in the 'alsorts' properties (5 females including 1 transgender male to female, and 9 males). The other 2 young people opted for a support only response (1 female & 1 transgender female to male).

Of the 50 remaining requests for assistance more than one third (19 or 38%) could not be offered housing within the 'alsorts' properties as the program was operating at maximum capacity at the time of the referral. A further eight young people also could not be housed due to a delay in the property being ready for operation. In total, unmet demand for the 'alsorts' service equals more than half of requests received for assistance (54%). For the other 23 referrals, nine did not attend their assessment appointment, seven decided to remain in their current accommodation, four were assessed as not suitable for the housing model as they presented as couples, two found alternative housing and one was outside the age target for the program.

For those young people assisted through the 'alsorts' program, the main reason for seeking assistance was due to family and/or relationship breakdown (62.5%), followed by time out from family, eviction, and gay/lesbian/trans issues (12.5%). Of the 16 young people supported, six are currently still engaged in case managed support.

Young people accessed the 'alsorts' program from various referral points. Nine young people were previously residing in a youth refuge service, two self referred, and one each originated from the Front Doors service, Knox City Council, in shared accommodation, a THM, and a juvenile justice facility respectively. Young people received a range of services and support including (but not limited to):

- advice, information and referral
- accommodation and assistance to obtain and maintain independent housing
- advocacy, assistance with employment, education and training
- assistance in accessing recreational activities
- family/relationship support
- living skills and personal development
- referral to specialist services including counselling, drug and alcohol support and intervention, family violence services
- financial assistance, financial counselling and material aid

The 10 clients that have exited the alsorts program moved into a positive housing situation; six young people exited into boarding/share house arrangements with friends (two of which were assisted through FAN's Private Rental Brokerage Program), two have secured private rental (supported through HEF), and one returned to their family while another left without providing any further information.

## 4.1 In their Own Words

*'My experiences in the alsorts transitional household have been pretty insightful. There are lots of activities and open opportunities that Family Access Network have arranged and organised that are really helpful. If it wasn't for them and this opportunity I would still be in the exact dead end that I was heading in a year ago. The workers are amazing and they have helped me to manage my finances better and get counselling through the Drummond St Relationship Centre, FRMP and other resources. I am now enrolled in a graphic design course and along with a house mate will be starring in a documentary through Skys and Headspace about issues regarding homophobia which will be shown at the St Kilda Film Festival and the Melbourne Queer Film Festival'*

*'The most important thing about the alsorts property is the feeling of safety. Other transitional houses doesn't always feel like a safe environment, and that's what is different about the alsorts house is that sexuality doesn't matter so you can be who you truly are - and not afraid to express that'*

*'I found the staff to be very helpful in finding me accommodation and setting me up with this'*

*'I think that being in the alsorts house is a good safety net. I can be myself in the house which makes things a lot easier when you can do that - you don't have to change yourself. We have a common bonding in the alsorts property, and we can have friends and partners over and feel comfortable and not judged'*

## 5. BEING SSATI 'FRIENDLY'

### 5.1 Portfolio's

The portfolio system at FAN involves an annual planning day process where staff dedicates time and effort to identify potential portfolio priority areas for enhancing FAN's service response for the following year. The analysis is based on client trends emerging from workers interpretation of the statistical data collected over the previous year on client needs, presenting and underlying issues and known service sector responses and/or gaps. Identified areas must be aligned with the strategic directions of FAN as set by the Board in the overall 3-5 year strategic planning process.

The portfolio planning process also measures, reviews and reflects on the achievements and challenges identified by the staff team in the previous year. The overall goal of this process is to clearly define and collectively decide on the identified priority areas that will lead the portfolio system for the next twelve months. In some cases this process often results in workers 'teaming' up to deliver work in common areas. Upon agreement of a final priority portfolio list workers will nominate their area of preference – some naturally follow desired areas that will enhance skills while others will look to how particular portfolio areas will further compliment and add value to their current role at FAN. Self directed staff teams emerge to work on their portfolio areas as defined by the group and report back periodically to the full staff team during the year.

The FAN SSATI Portfolio provides a framework for staff to reflect on contemporary practice. The key objectives of the Portfolio include:

- monitoring the data in relation to FAN's response to SSATI young people and identify emerging trends;
- Monitoring the 'alsorts' household mix and further developing the model in consultation with 'alsorts' program clients;
- Maintaining an up to date training calendar for staff as well as appropriate policies, procedures and program resources;
- Identifying contemporary research literature on SSATI and homelessness as well as 'best practice'
- Identifying and developing responses to highlight and promote the 'alsorts' program and further seeking broader sector application
- Strengthening links with the SSATI community through membership of key networks such as the Rainbow Network, the S.E.A. Network and Midsumma
- Maintaining the responsiveness of FAN to SSATI young people including the office environment and identifying available resources
- Monitoring referral pathways and vacancy rates of the 'alsorts' program



## 5.2 Training and Professional Development

All staff, volunteers and board members at FAN were provided with internal training to ensure that all key stakeholders involved at FAN were aware of the issues facing SSATI young people. FAN is indebted to Daniel Whithaus for the two sessions he facilitated, one specifically tailored to support workers, conducted over a full day and another held in the evening for volunteers and board members.

As noted earlier, a comprehensive organisational audit was also undertaken to ensure that FAN offered an inclusive environment for SSATI young people. This audit involved a review of the appropriateness of FAN's documents and forms, intake/assessment processes and information/resources displayed in the office and waiting area.

In addition to the auditing process the FAN Manager organised a visit with Meredith Turnbull at Twenty10, an SSATI SAAP funded youth homelessness organisation in New South Wales. The visit provided the FAN Manager with the opportunity to learn from an established service and involved a thorough overview of the Twenty10 model, the history, viewing the housing and programs offered and sharing common ground and resources about youth related program development.

## 5.3 Key Learnings

- Integration within the homelessness service system requires a consistent message to service providers, via networks, email postings and other industry and SSATI membership bases.
- Partnership works, but requires the recognition of resource implications for project development, monitoring, review and most importantly relationship building.
- Integration within the homelessness service system is being supported by the Inside and Out training, which could be further enhanced by internal document and process audits. Some services may require support in achieving this.
- Regardless of gender and sexual identification, they are first and foremost 'young people' requiring the comprehensive suite of case management responses and access to referral and/or brokerage pathways. Notably, the primary reason for homelessness is the same for all young people (family/relationship breakdown) although SSATI young people are considerably more vulnerable.
- Recognition that diversity in responses are necessary, for example: some young people may not wish to live in a shared house with other SSATI young people, but prefer a non specific response; sensitive allocations to support client needs especially those experiencing mental illness and or significant alcohol and other drug issues; choice in shared households gender specific or mixed; age appropriate responses. Unfortunately sole tenant responses are very rare in the THM system and even rarer for young people specifically.
- Most young people tend to exit the homelessness sector into shared living arrangements. Therefore living in a shared arrangement while receiving case managed support can enhance a young person's capacity to negotiate conflicts and learn skills relating to independent living and share housing.
- Lead Tenant Model - it's more likely that clients respond more positively between the ages of 16-18 as they have a greater need for live-in role modelling, which is important for those of a more vulnerable age.
- The learning's from the partnership between FAN and ALSO is invaluable and a rich source for research and demonstration to the broader service system.

## APPENDICES

### Overview of FAN Programs and Services

FAN provides a range of responses for young people, young families and children experiencing or at risk of homelessness. FAN's service structure includes:

- Homeless Support Services, incorporating a Transitional Support Program, the Creating Connections Private Rental Brokerage Program (an initiative of the Youth Homelessness Action Plan stage 2), Children's Program – Early Years; Counselling and Family Mediation Services; and the '*alsorts*' Program;
- Life Skills Program;
- Volunteer Program.

#### Homeless Support Services

FAN's Homeless Support Services encompasses a client focused, case management framework for providing support and assistance to young people who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of becoming homeless, across three key program areas. These are described in more detail below.

##### Transitional Support

Funded by the Office of Housing (DHS) via SAAP, the Transitional Support Program provides case managed transitional support to young people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness between the ages of 15-25 years. The client group consists of single young people, same sex attracted, transgender intersex young people, young pregnant and parenting women, young families and accompanying children. FAN's case managed responses to homeless and at risk young people first commenced in 1981, however, FAN has been in receipt of recurrent SAAP funding since its inception in 1985 and for a number of years successfully managed properties through the Youth Housing Program. FAN has also managed the Housing Establishment Fund (HEF) since it first began. FAN accesses a range of properties through Transitional Housing Managers, notably Community Housing (Vic) Ltd and EastCare, to support the varying housing requirements of young people in shared tenancies, lead tenant properties, shared pregnant/parent household as well as a range of properties for young families. In addition, FAN has access to a property provided by the Orcadia Foundation to facilitate a supported transition into a longer-term housing model for young families exiting into private rental.

##### Private Rental Brokerage Program

As part of FAN's Homeless Support Services and in response to the 'Creating Connections Youth Homelessness Action Plan Stage 2 (YHAP2) funding, FAN established a Private Rental Brokerage Program (PRBP) in 2007 to assist and equip young homeless people to access and maintain private rental accommodation as a long-term option. FAN's PRBP provides services across the Cities of Whitehorse, Boroondara, Monash and Manningham. The Program provides an individualised response for young people who are currently within the transitional housing service system, including brokerage, rental and housing packages, workshops and supporting pathways into the private rental market. The PRB Program also oversees the Housing Establishment Fund across the same local government areas. The program was originally modeled on two of FAN's previous initiatives and now encompasses a range of partnership activities with Anchor Community Care which has expanded the model across the seven local government areas of the Eastern Region.

### Children's Program – Early Years

The Children's Program – Early Years has been in operation since 2006 and is funded through the Alfred Felton Charitable Bequest and various donations. The program provides the means to offer an on-site children's worker and resources to develop an integrated children's program including brokerage and equipment for accompanying children, secondary consultations to workers and individual and group work support and resources to young parents. The scope for the program is to ensure FAN's services, office site/s, equipment, policies, procedures and interagency processes are informed by a commitment to child-centered practices and philosophy. The program was further reviewed and expanded to a full time position in 2007 and now offers a case managed response to young families, therapeutic interventions for children and partnership projects in the sector.

### Counselling and Family Mediation Services

FAN is in partnership with Reach Out for Kids (ROK) and East Burwood Centre (EBC) to provide the young counselling and family mediation component within the Whitehorse Counselling Services Alliance (WCSA). The WCSA provides a suite of counselling and support services that assist the individual or whole family as an integrated unit. FAN's focus is to support and address the needs of young people and their families, young families and accompanying children and same sex attracted young people. An onsite counselor is available to assist with early intervention programs and workshops for young children, young people and families to develop skills and strategies to resolve and prevent personal difficulties from reaching crisis point.

### **Life Skills Program**

The Life Skills Program is funded through The William Buckland Foundation, the City of Whitehorse, the Rotary Club of Box Hill, The Lord Mayors Fund and various smaller community and philanthropic grants. The program offers a variety of workshop based activities for at risk young people to learn new skills in a personal development framework.

### **Volunteer Program**

The Volunteer Program has been in operation since FAN's inception some 26 years ago. The program continues to evolve in response to the changing needs of the young people who come to FAN for assistance. Volunteer opportunities and achievements at FAN are diverse, offering mentoring, lead tenants, child play supervisors as well as volunteer support to the Young Mum's, Life Skills and Peer Leadership groups. The contribution of volunteers to the development and on-going operation of programs and services at FAN is highly valued. In 2007-08 FAN implemented a mentor scheme where volunteer support teams are matched with THM properties, including the 'alsorts' properties.

In addition to the above, FAN also operate an Equity Support Program which is funded entirely through community donations and enables a range of necessary and vital financial, medical, material aid and other related supports to be provided to FAN clients.

## SSATI Young People & Homelessness: The Issues

While there is a dearth of research into the needs of 'same sex attracted' young people and homelessness in Australia there is even less literature available on young people with diverse gender and sexuality expression. It is important to note here that all but one of the research reports cited in this chapter targeted 'same sex attracted' young people rather than the broader issue of young people with diverse gender and sexuality expression. The latter includes young people who identify as bisexual, transgender, intersex as well as encompassing other forms of diversity in gender and sexuality expression. The only research noted in this chapter that encompasses the full diversity of gender and sexuality expression for young homeless people is that of the PICYS 'Closets of YSAAP' (2002).

The first Australian study into SSAYP and homelessness, 'As Long as I've got my Doona' (Irwin et al.) was conducted in 1995 in NSW with the purpose of developing policies and practices that addressed the housing needs of SSAYP. The findings noted that there were significant gaps in service provision, including a scarcity of appropriate accommodation, lack of supported housing and a need to increase youth homelessness organisations' awareness and acceptance of the issues facing SSAYP presenting to services (Irwin et al., 1995; PICYS, 2002)

The Perth Inner City Youth Service (PICYS) 'Closets of YSAAP' research report (2002) highlighted the issue of SSATI young people's access to youth accommodation services. The authors noted that more than half of the service providers that participated in the study had rarely provided accommodation services to SSATI young people.

*Coupled with the findings from young people that they rarely revealed their sexual identity, despite their confusion or need for assistance demonstrates that young people with diverse sexuality and gender expression are isolated from services and falling in the gap in service provision (PICYS, 2002)*

Other research on SSAYP (i.e. Hillier et al., 2005) has found that risk factors are also higher for these young people. For example, they are more likely to be sexually active at a younger age than their heterosexual counterparts, are more likely to contract an STI and are at a greater risk of suicide and self harm. The PICYS (2002) research noted:

*Young people who may have diverse sexuality and gender expression can face enormous challenges and stigma coming to terms with their sexual orientation or gender identity. These can include, lower self-esteem, isolation, poor employment prospects, problematic substance use, sex work, sexual risk behaviours, poverty, ill health, depression and suicide...[they] have to contend with the difficulties in gaining access to secure accommodation, as with all young people, but often have to deal with discrimination in relation to homophobic and heterosexist attitudes and responses. It is these responses that further isolate and marginalise young people and place them in the disproportionate high risk of homelessness (PICYS, 2002).*

Overall contemporary research argues that there is an increased risk of homelessness for SSAYP young people without any other contributing factors. The PICYS (2002) report noted that this can place young people into two categories - first, that their homelessness or risk of homelessness is a direct result of their sexuality and second, that their sexuality is a contributing and complicating factor.

In 2006 Merri Outreach Support Services (MOSS) released their final report titled 'I have a gay friend, it's fine'. The project formed part of the 'Service System Intervention' initiative headed by the Victorian Government Department of Human Services and responded to the need outlined in the YHAP First Stage Report for further investigation into the issue of SSAYP within the youth homelessness service system. The main deliverable emerging from the

MOSS project was the design, development and delivery of a comprehensive training program for SAAP workers in the North West metropolitan region that focused on service delivery to SSAYP.

A core aim of the MOSS training was to improve the regions capacity to respond to and support SSAYP more effectively. Emerging as a key recommendation from the MOSS report was the need to develop alternative models of service delivery that would further develop the service system capacity to respond and support SSAYP who are experiencing homelessness or at-risk of homelessness:

*MOSS believes that there is merit in a program like the SSAYP-SSIP operating in an ongoing capacity, particularly one with a mandate to work to develop sector capacity to respond to and support SSAYP...It would be important however that such a program works in partnership with the HSS to ensure the barriers to access are minimised as opposed to becoming another entry point into the HSS (SSAYP-SSIP, MOSS 2006).*

The 2006 MOSS report provided some key learning's on the issue of SSAYP's access to the youth homelessness service system in Victoria. While the main deliverable of the MOSS project was a comprehensive training program for workers in the sector, the findings that emerged from the consultation phases of the project provided a critical insight into current perceptions about service delivery to SSATI young people presenting at youth homelessness services. In particular the final MOSS report noted:

*This project highlighted some concerns in sector attitude, approach and practice that are problematic for the housing experiences of SSAYP in the North-West...The biggest issue is what can only be described as complacency...The level of apathy experienced by the current project is not encouraging for future initiatives...*

In point, the authors were referring to the lack of interest from some sector agencies to prioritise the issue of SSATI young people within their service:

*...too often workers were either not interested, 'too busy' or felt that they were experts and had done it all before in relation to SSAYP issues.*

The MOSS report also made note that SSAYP were underrepresented in participating agency data, however as noted earlier, contemporary research has found that this target group is overrepresented in homelessness statistics.

### Homophobia and Heterosexism

Homophobic and heterosexist attitudes from residents and workers in youth accommodation services have been identified as core issues that prevent SSATI young people from accessing services or alternatively, instigate their early departure from these services. In the PICYS (2002) research all the young people interviewed stated that their greatest fear in staying in youth accommodation services was the threat of other residents. Furthermore, 80% of these young people also spoke of experiences where workers had ignored or 'turned a blind eye' to homophobic abuse perpetrated by other residents. Interestingly, the young people who participated in the PICYS research also noted that they received more support from mainstream services than they did from their youth specific accommodation service.

*A holistic, non-threatening and supportive environment was encountered rather than the barriers experienced at YSAAP accommodation services such as staff not addressing homophobia with residents; assumptions of heterosexuality; [and] lack of understanding and/or awareness of psychosocial issues pertaining to 'at risk' homeless young people with diverse sexuality and gender expression...*

Another interesting issue to emerge specifically from the PICYS research was the choice of some SSATI young people to remain homeless on the street 'sleeping rough', in preference to staying at a youth specific or other crisis accommodation service.

*The choice to sleep on the streets for some young people provided a 'safer' alternative than staying at some YSAAP services. Some of the young people interviewed reported a sense of 'community' or 'family'. Sixty percent of the young people had spent more time on the streets than sleeping at a YSAAP service. The reasons stated for this include: freedom; lack of awareness of service; reputation of YSAAP service unknown; clients in a YSAAP service are threatening; perceived streets to be safer; [and] sense of 'family on the streets'*

The trend for young people to perceive 'the street' as a safer option than staying in a crisis accommodation service reflects how barriers to service access can impact on young people who are particularly marginalized within the homelessness service sector. In point, this issue is becoming increasingly evident for highly marginalized groups of young people. For example, a study on homeless young women in 2004 also highlighted their preference of 'sleeping rough' rather than accessing mixed gender youth accommodation services. The major issue for these young women was dealing with threatening and intimidating behaviour from young male residents and the lack of support from refuge workers in respect to issues of gender and violence (Desmond, 2004). These young women stated that while 'the street' was not 'safe', they felt more in control of their immediate environment and subsequently their ability to escape or avoid potentially dangerous situations.

*Being forced to take up less-than-adequate accommodation options was another issue highlighted as problematic by the young women...one young woman had been offered youth refuge accommodation in a mixed-gender house. She refused the offer as she had stayed at the refuge in the past, had been sexually harassed and did not consider it to be safe (Desmond 2004)*

In a 1995 research report conducted for Twenty 10, an organisation which provides medium and long-term housing services to SSAYP, the authors identified the need for increased training of teachers and service providers to enable them to respond more appropriately to the needs of homeless and at risk SSAYP. The final report 'As Long as I've got my Doona' found that most of the young people interviewed had experienced discrimination, including harassment by workers and abusive behaviour by other residents. The Twenty 10 research along with the UK report 'Hidden in Plain Sight' (O'Connor et al 2001) noted that SSAYP felt unsafe in disclosing their sexuality within a mixed gender environment with most preferring to access a gay or gender specific service.

The experience of homophobic bullying from other residents in crisis accommodation as well as heterosexist assumptions and lack of support by workers not only forces SSATI young people to leave support services prematurely but also contributes to young people's reluctance to access these services in the future. The combined impact effectively drives the issue back into the shadows of the 'hidden' homelessness population.

### **Matching SSATI Young People in Youth Accommodation Services**

The Victorian based MOSS (2006) research investigated a range of issues relating to SSAYP and their access to the homelessness service system. Interviews were carried out with both young people as well as youth SAAP service providers. While some of the percentages in the MOSS research need to be considered with care (as they are reflective of small numbers of respondents) the overall findings are consistent with the other research discussed in this report.

One of the major challenges identified by service providers in the MOSS research was accommodating SSAYP in shared mixed gender housing situations (i.e. refuge). More than 90% of service providers in this study noted that the real or potential threat of homophobic behaviour from other residents was the key challenge. Just under 30%



of providers also stated that homophobic attitudes from staff (or heterosexist attitudes by the service as a whole) was another barrier to housing SSAYP. One participant noted that housing SSA young couples as well as those who identify as transgender presented further difficulties in terms of assuring their safety if accommodated within a mixed gender environment. In addition, providers were also asked about whether or not they are comfortable discussing the topic of sexual identity with young people. While two-thirds (67%) of participants stated that they were comfortable with such discussion 11% of these stated that they would only discuss such issues if the young person breached the topic first. The remaining 33% of respondents either did not answer the question or did not indicate a suitable response.

A key issue for most service providers in housing SSATI young people within mainstream youth crisis and transitional accommodation is their ability/capacity to ensure the physical and emotional safety of these young people (in being vulnerable to homophobic abuse) as well as that of other residents. In some cases, anecdotal evidence suggests that SSATI young people are unable to access vacancies due to this real or perceived risk.

However, while this issue is certainly a reality for many service providers it is more symptomatic in essence than causal. The underpinning cause is intolerance of diversity and discrimination based on gender/sexual identity or expression. If the same rationale were to be applied to other young people then those who are from non-English speaking backgrounds, who have a disability, who have a mental health issue, who have substance abuse issues, who have worked in the sex industry or who are single parents are all candidates to receive the same assessment. Although each of these groups of young people present unique issues to service providers they are no longer considered as 'viable' reasons to refuse or limit access to accommodation options. The expectation is for service providers to address issues of discrimination, harassment or other forms of intolerance within their organisation and to respond to such instances with clients in an appropriate and timely manner:

*The commonly stated expectations of services by SSAYP do not present extraordinary standards in that they requested access to accurate information and an appropriate referral if necessary, that the service be available and accessible to them and that the staff are friendly, welcoming, non-judgmental and helpful...(Trinity Outreach Services 2005 cited in MOSS 2006).*

### Characteristics of SSATI Friendly Youth Services

The MOSS (2006) report highlighted the issue that addressing the needs of SSAYP within the homelessness service sector encompassed a range of strategies and approaches. While one of the key recommendations emerging from the research was for the development of a SAAP funded SSAYP specific accommodation service it was also noted that this alone will not adequately 'fill the gap'. The need for all youth services to become more SSATI friendly underpinned the bulk of the MOSS recommendations. Similarly, the PICYS (2006) research also recommended a range of activities that would promote services to seek out and develop more user friendly approaches and strategies for responding to the needs of SSATI young people:

*There are a number of factors, which lead a young person to access YSAAP and promote safe and secure accommodation. These include: -*

*Workers who were sensitive, understanding and aware of the issues that may exist for a homeless young person who identifies with diverse sexuality and gender expression (often workers who identified with diverse sexuality and gender expression themselves);*

*Addressing heterosexist attitudes from other residents;*

*Resources prominently displayed promoting sexuality and gender diversity;*

*Privacy.*

*Interviews with YSAAP agencies revealed that young people with diverse sexuality and gender expression rarely accessed their services. This is with the exception of a small number of youth specific SAAP services that provided the above factors (PICYS 2002).*

Participants involved in the MOSS (2006) research identified the follow activities that agencies could undertake in further developing a SSAYP friendly service:

- Implementation of an agency-wide audit to assess the current capacity/ability of the service in providing SSAYP friendly services and to identify improvements that could be actioned;
- Training in SSAYP issues for all staff;
- Review of intake assessment processes and procedures to identify areas for improvements;
- Open and visible display of SSAYP posters, information, pamphlets etc.
- Immediate and consistent challenging of homophobic behaviour by young people, colleagues and peers.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

The ALSO Foundation (2005a) 'Same Sex Attracted & Transgender Youth – Transitional Housing Service Project Overview'; ALSO Care & Benevolent Society Inc., September.

The ALSO Foundation (2005b) 'Internal Memorandum'; ALSO Foundation Board of Management, December.

The ALSO Foundation (2006a) 'The ALSO Foundation & Family Access Network Memorandum of Understanding'; February.

ALSO Care Benevolent Society Inc (2006) '*alsorts*' Youth Housing Services Agreement'; ALSO Care & Benevolent Society Inc. & Family Access Network Inc., legal paper by Mallesons Stephen Jaques; September.

Family Access Network (2007) 'Family Access Network Strategic Plan 2007-2010'; Family Access Network.

Family Access Network (2005) 'Lead Tenant Manual'; Family Access Network.

Carlile, S (2007) 'Report on the '*alsorts*' Project – Public Document'; Family Access Network; September.

Desmond, K (2007) 'Creating a Culture of Quality – CQI & Implementing the new Victorian Homeless Assistance Service [Industry] Standards'; Family Access Network, December.

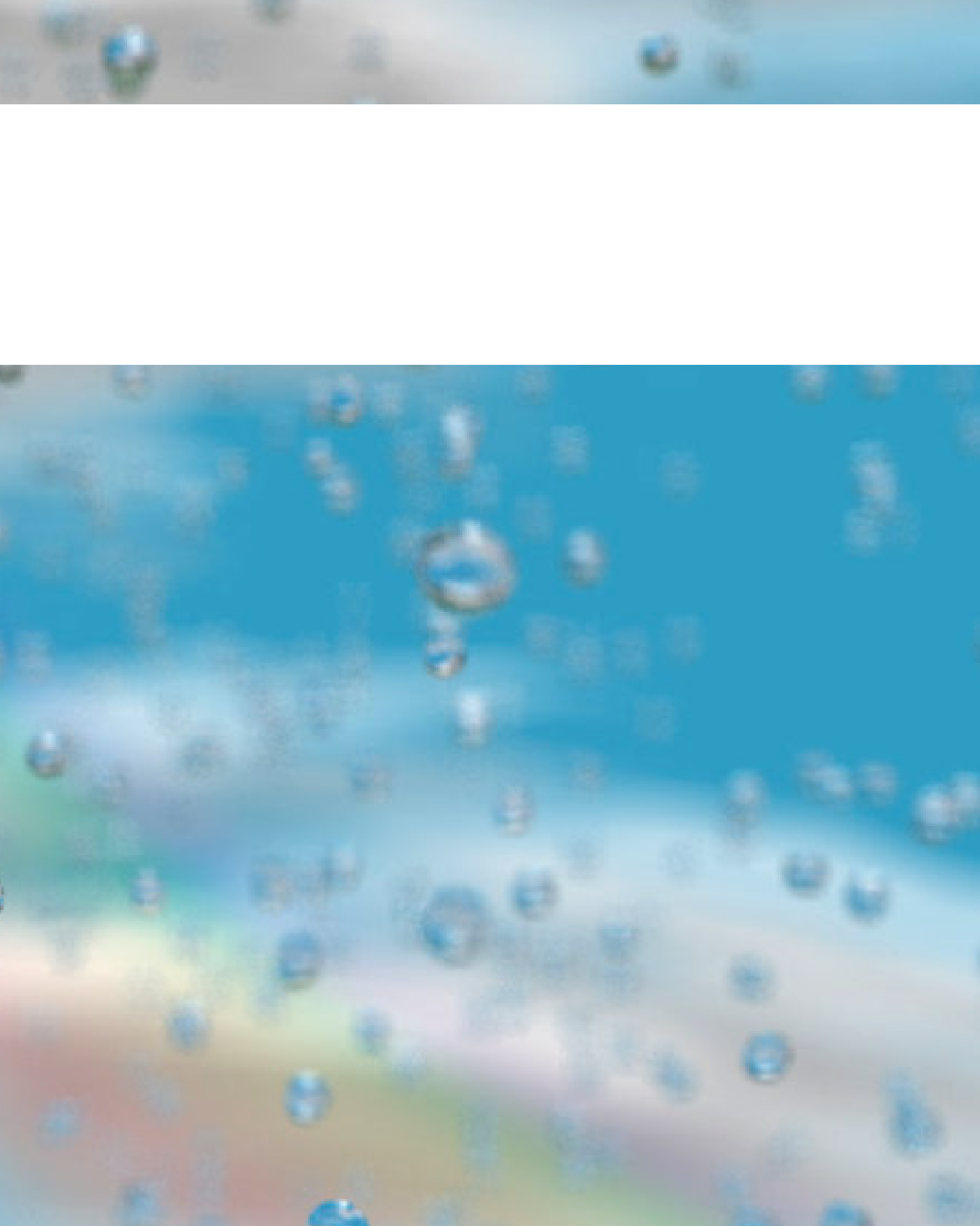
Irwin, Jude, Winter, Barbel, Gregoric, Mel & Watts, Simon (1995) 'As Long As I've Got My Doona: A Report on Lesbian and Gay Youth Homelessness' (extract); The Australian Center for Lesbian and Gay Research, University of Sydney, Sydney.

Hillier, Lynne, Dempsey, Deborah and Harrison, Lyn (2000) 'Having Their Say: A Study of Same Sex Attracted Young People in Australia'; in Michael Crowhurst & Mic Emslie (ed), Young People and Sexualities: Experience, Perspectives and Service Provision, Youth Research Center, Melbourne.

O'Conner, William & Molloy, Donna (2001) 'Hidden in Plain Sight: Homelessness Amongst Lesbian and Gay Youth'; Stonewall Housing, London.







Family Access Network  
[www.fan.org.au](http://www.fan.org.au)