



VIDEO: Youth homelessness a pervasive problem in Hastings

By Melissa Pretorius April 7, 2014, 4 a.m.



Speaking out: The community, government and individuals must do more to help the many young people without a home in the Port Macquarie-Hastings says housing-supported Katy [Name redacted] woman.

IT wasn't the usual things that played on her mind.

While other students contemplated the course of their future, Katy Tubman was simply trying to figure out where to sleep.

A foreign pillow on a battered coach. A motel in Taree, or even a stranger's house.

The final ring of the school bell gave no solace for the then 16-year-old Port Macquarie girl, because with its sounding came the realisation of her situation.

"I had nowhere to go some of the time," she said. "I didn't know what to do, where to go next.

"That was the scariest part."

Two months after her 16th birthday Katy would become one, of what is estimated to be, 150 young homeless people in the Port Macquarie-Hastings on any given night.

Sadly, her story represents just a small insight into what remains to be a pervasive problem in the Port Macquarie-Hastings.

To raise awareness of the hidden issue, community stakeholders are joining to support the national Youth Homelessness Matters Day (YHMD) on Wednesday.

"YHMD hopes to be a sobering reminder that youth homelessness is real, is painful, is tragic and is unacceptable, but that if we come together as a community we can have a greater impact," said Peter Carnaby, the coordinator for Youth Housing Support in the Hastings.

Mr Carnaby said Katy was an example of people forced into homelessness at a young age - often at a moments notice.

Family breakdown and severe overcrowding in shelter accommodation, as a result of upward pressure on the cost of housing, are thought to be at the heart of the issue in Port Macquarie.

And, the consequences of having such a large number of the community without safe or secure accommodation is far reaching.

"For me it affected most aspects of my life," Katy said. "The stress was so overwhelming it affected my immune system, I was always sick," she said.

"I barely went to school. I spent my weekends working, so I could afford to live."

At 17, Katy was diagnosed with depression.

For three years, she battled to find somewhere to call home.

But trying to find long-term rental accommodation in Port Macquarie is a problem for even the most fortunate of young people.

"I've been in the youth refuge twice, transitional housing twice, lived in a motel for three months in Taree and lived on couches for six weeks," Katy said.

Often, her dire situation seemed impossible to overcome.

At school she felt helpless, and alone in her struggle.

But Katy's resilience and persistence to fulfil her dream of finding secure accommodation has today become a reality.

Mr Carnaby and his team managed to find the 19-year-old a home in Port Macquarie, in what he believes brings home the truth that "with good support and appropriate accommodation, young people can move forward and live their lives productively."

When the Port News met with Katy, she was on her way to a trial for a hairdressing apprenticeship in Port Macquarie.

At home, she has a couch of her own, but this one's not for sleeping on.

She has her own bed, a beautiful kitten called Prince and a small backyard to boot.

"It feels like there's a massive weight that's been lifted off my shoulders," she said. "It feels amazing."

Homeless youth are known as the 'hidden homeless', Mr Carnaby said.

Often they fill the beds of Specialist Homeless Services, shelters, or spend the night on the couch at someone's house.

At the heart of YHMD is a need to bring the issue to forefront of the community's psyche.

Homelessness is a whole of community problem, Mr Carnaby said, and it requires a whole of community solution.

It doesn't discriminate, and is not limited to a certain type of young person.

"The truth is nobody is ever prepared for becoming homeless," Katy said. "It's one of those situations you have to deal with it if it happens.

"It could happen to anyone of us at any time."

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