

# Region's youth homelessness a community responsibility

COUNTRY towns such as Wangaratta are not immune to the youth homelessness problem that many people believe to be an inner city issue.

Catherine Jeffries (client services manager at Beyond Housing Wangaratta) told the Wangaratta Chronicle that although youth homeless numbers have remained static in recent years, with around 150 people under 25 accessing Beyond Housing's services, the shortfall in affordable housing locally was bound to make the situation more challenging.

"With the continuing high demand and competition for affordable properties, the problem is positioned to possibly expand its impact on young people," Ms Jeffries said.

"Family breakdown, family violence, or when a young person's family is forced into homelessness following a crisis, can all impact on a young person and result in homelessness.



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"And it's very difficult for young people to enter the private rental market.

"They are less likely to have a rental reference, and receive a very low income via youth allowance.

"There are also very few affordable one and two bedroom units available for rent."

Beyond Housing works closely with a range of services to support young people to find a place to live and keep it, but Ms Jeffries said all levels of government and the community need to work together to make sure young people have a safe, secure and affordable place to live.

"Without this, they are not able to engage in education, find work and feel like a valued part of the community," she said.

Ms Jeffries said we all need to support young people



**COMMUNITY RESPONSIBILITY:** Catherine Jeffries (client services manager) and Lisa Ramsay (initial assessment planner) at Beyond Housing Wangaratta believe the whole community has a role to play to ease youth homelessness.

to maintain connections with their family, engage in community activities, continue education, vocational training, provide employment opportunities and support them to secure safe affordable accommodation.

"If we raise awareness of youth homelessness within our communities, it encourages change," Ms Jeffries said.

"It is important young people get the assistance they need as soon as they need it and the support is

responsive of the young person's needs.

"Young people need clear information about what help is available and how to access it.

Anyone who is concerned about a young person who may be experiencing homeless issues can also seek help from NESAY in Wangaratta 5720 2201 or contact Beyond Housing in Wangaratta on 5722 8000 who can help provide access to homelessness services.

Information and support is also available from Department of Human Services at the Wangaratta Government Centre (which houses DHS, Centrelink and Medicare) at 25 Faithful Street from 8.30am-4.30pm. Just drop in and ask to speak to a member of the local DHS team.

You can also visit the DHS website [www.human-services.gov.au/socialwork](http://www.human-services.gov.au/socialwork) or phone 132 850 and ask to be put through to a social worker.