

WHY YOUNG PEOPLE MAKE UP 40% OF HOMELESSNESS May 2026

Kate Mills, CEO Property Industry Foundation

In his introduction Geoff McWilliam commented that the Property Industry Foundation was formed 30 years ago when the building and construction industries realised they would more effectively support the community if they worked together. Kate Mills has been CEO of this successful Foundation for the past 8 years.

Kate commenced her presentation with a video featuring 3 young people experiencing homelessness in different forms, but all at risk from living in unsafe and insecure accommodation.

First Nations people, while 3% of the nation's population, are one third of the youth homeless population.

Kate then spoke of the Foundation's focus, as a social purpose development partner, on building/renovating houses and apartments that are then operated by front line charity partners like The Salvation Army who have the necessary operational expertise. The Foundation also seeks longer-term solutions.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that 46,000 young people (under 25) are homeless every night in Australia. Family and domestic violence, a housing crisis, or a family or relationship breakdown are the main causes. Some young people don't recognise they are homeless - they see the way they live in an insecure, unsafe or impermanent environment as being normal.

Young homeless people are more likely to be female (65%), aged 18-24 years (76%) and not enrolled in any form of education or training (74%).

One in every two of the 40,000 young people (15-24 years) seeking refuge for a night are turned away because of a lack of beds. But affordable, stable housing is fundamental to their economic, psychological and physical wellbeing.

There are no rental opportunities for people on Australia's Youth Allowance of \$677.20/fortnight

Homeless numbers are increasing and there is a risk that the current level of homelessness will be seen as acceptable. It is higher in the 19-24-year age bracket reflecting the absence of the support traditionally provided by school and family. The Foundation gives particular emphasis to the 16-18 age bracket, so the young people are better prepared when these support structures fall away.

Kate commented that young people could be better off remaining connected with their family while the family gets support to function better. It is nearly always better to take steps, say via a social worker, to make a better family, including better parenting, than to remove a young person from having contact with their family.

In response to the argument "They should go to school or get some training" she commented that it is very hard to go to school or apply for a job if your clothes are not clean and you haven't had a shower!

Points arising from Q & A included:

- Finland's low level of homelessness is credited to the country's "housing first" policy i.e. focus on providing housing including to those who in the past would have been denied because of a drinking problem. Australia needs more public housing to stop people becoming homeless in the first place.

- Given that the current Youth Allowance is not enough to allow a young person to pay the rent needed to justify building a residential property, the Federal Government has just announced a Youth Housing Supplement to address this gap.
- The Foundation has recently adopted a model where it does the work and meets the cost of achieving DA status for projects that the government can then fund.
- The Foundation is advised by the operator on apartment design. It will depend on the age and situation of the intended tenants ie the design for single 16 year olds will be different (more shared facilities) to that for young mothers with one or more children (more privacy).

Neil Martin reflected on his past discussions with homeless people and conveyed our thanks to Kate for her excellent presentation.

Alan Locke