Education First Youth Foyers (EFYF)
The Victorian Government has funded the development of three new Education First Youth Foyers (EFYF) in collaboration with Hanover Welfare Services (HWS) and the Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL). The first of these EFY Foyers commenced operations in June 2013 at Holmesglen TAFE Waverley campus, while the second commenced in June 2014 at Kangan TAFE Broadmeadows campus. EFYF students are young people unable to live at home and at risk of homelessness. They undertake education and training studies at EFYF to gain skills to transition to independent living and employment. EFYF students are provided housing and integrated forms of support for up to two years.

The EFYF Evaluation
For the first time in Australia, we are undertaking a comprehensive longitudinal analysis of outcomes data of students at a Youth Foyer. This evaluation is funded by the Victorian State Government together with the Brotherhood of St Laurence.

Evaluation aims
Four broad questions are key to the evaluation and inform the evaluation design:

1. What is the model?
2. Does it make a difference for young people?
3. Is the model value for money?
4. Is the model sustainable?

The evaluation research team (see diagram on page 5) will measure the effectiveness of the EFYF in achieving sustainable education, employment and housing outcomes for young people who are at risk of, or experiencing homelessness. The evaluation uses a mixed methods approach that uses surveys, in-depth, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, routine data collected as part of core service delivery, and secondary data from Commonwealth and state datasets.

The evaluation will assess the EFYF model’s fit for purpose, value for money and its potential for replication, comprising three components:

- **Process evaluation**: documentation and assessment of the EFYF model and its practice approach;
• **Outcomes evaluation**: measurement of intermediate and longer term outcomes for students in comparison with a representative sample of young people in foyers other than EFYF and young people in transitional housing; and

• **Financial evaluation**: an independent cost analysis to measure its cost effectiveness and estimate cost benefits in the long term.

**Evaluation components**

1. **Process evaluation**
   
   The process evaluation seeks to address the following questions:

   1. What are the components of the Education First Youth Foyer model?
      a) What is the contribution of the Open Talent approach to the Education First Youth Foyer model?
      b) How does the Education First Youth Foyer model compare to the standard youth homelessness model?
   
   2. To what extent is the Education First Youth Foyer model being delivered as intended?
   
   3. To what extent do the Education First Youth Foyer students engage with and participate in the Foyer model and the Open Talent approach?
   
   4. What elements of the Education First Youth Foyer model and approach do participants identify as contributing to young people’s capacity to achieve sustainable employment, education, training, housing, social participation and health outcomes?

   **Data sources.** Process evaluation questions will be answered by the following data sources: (i) routine data collection, (ii) student surveys, interviews, and focus group, and (iii) interviews with Foyer staff, TAFE staff and Foyer partners. An action research methodology will be employed so that key learnings during the implementation of the foyers can be shared between the three foyers and incorporated into their practice.

2. **Outcomes evaluation**

   The outcomes evaluation includes a comparison outcomes study of comparable cohorts of young people—those using foyers other than the EFYF and those in 'standard' transitional housing available through the current Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) program. Support providers will be approached, with the support of DHS, to participate by enabling a sample of their clients to be contacted and then engaged in the comparison outcomes study.

   The outcomes evaluation seeks to address the following questions for all three cohorts:

   1. What are the outcomes for young people in these areas:
      a) Education and training
      b) Employment
c) Housing and living skills

d) Health and wellbeing

e) Civic participation (including law and justice)

f) Social connections

2. Which EFYF students benefit most from the Foyer? Which benefit least?

3. What are the external barriers and enablers that impact on the achievement of sustainable outcomes by EFYF students?

4. How do the outcomes achieved for EFYF students compare with a like cohort of young people using homelessness services in Victoria?

**Data sources.** Outcomes evaluation research questions will be addressed by data generated from the routine data collection tools and the student surveys and interviews.

3. **Financial evaluation**

While the BSL and HWS are collecting the data, the financial evaluation will be an independent project to assess the cost effectiveness and value for money of the EFYF model. The independent consultant(s) will seek to address the following questions:

1. What are the cost effectiveness measures of costs and outcomes?
   a) What is the unit costing of delivery of the EFYF model across the three EFYF locations per accommodated student?
   b) What is the unit costing per student outcome across the three EFYF locations?

2. What are the differences in the relative performance and value for money between the 'standard' SHS form of service delivery and the EFYF approach?

3. Does EFYF merit quality assurance as a 'lapsing program'?

The full costs of provision of the EFYF model for each foyer will be measured through primary data collection from each provider as well as through DHS and DEECD. The specification for the financial evaluation is to be finalised but is expected to be undertaken in two stages. First, an interim evaluation based on cost effectiveness of the Education First Youth Foyer model using the latest data for the first two foyers (Sep 2015). Second, a final cost effectiveness analysis for the three foyers and a full cost benefit analysis of the Education First Youth Foyer model (Dec 2018).

**Data sources.** For the Financial evaluation, survey results and secondary datasets are the main source of data. Applications were made in 2014 for datasets containing unit-level data from Victoria Police, Victoria Department of Justice, Victoria Data Linkage (Department of Health), Department of Social Services (Centrelink) Magistrates' Courts, Children's Courts, and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (Specialist homelessness Services) on EFYF students as well as young people from the comparison cohort.
Sample

1. Cohort of EFYF students
The sample comprises 150 foyer students across three foyer sites, Holmesglen Foyer, Kangan Foyer and Shepparton Foyer. At the point they move into foyer, these students will be aged between 16-25 years and homeless or at risk of homelessness.

2. Comparison cohort of young people
The matched comparative sample will comprise 275 young people:
- aged between 16 and 25 years
- homeless or at risk of homelessness at baseline
- receiving or living in standard specialist homeless service (SHS)

The comparative sample will also be matched to the EFYF student sample on a number of other key variables which could include age, gender, CALD/ATSI background, past experience of homelessness, use of institutional arrangements, education level, level of complex needs, employment history, referral pathway, location and region. For the purposes of comparison, standard SHS care has been assumed to comprise two sub-groups: medium/long term transitional housing (n=39) and pre-existing foyers (n=8).

Evaluation Advisory Group (EAG)
The EAG is chaired by Dr George Argyrous, Senior Lecturer, Evidence-based Policy Making, ANZSoG and UNSW. Dr Argyrous is an expert academic representative independent of the research teams from Hanover Welfare Services and the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the service provider organisations running each of the Education First Foyers.

The EAG comprises of senior staff from external organisations including:
- Australian Institute of Health & Welfare
- Australian Institute of Family Studies
- Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
- Department of Human Services, Victoria
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Victoria
- Department of Social Services
- Anglicare Victoria
- Melbourne City Mission