

# Can iHelp?

TECHNO  
AT RISK



In the community services sector, people who are classified as "at risk" are experiencing life events that may cause harm to their mental and physical health and well-being. This research will examine how technology designed to inform and assist young people who are at risk of homelessness to locate and access the services they need, identifying gaps in what is available.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an analysis and evaluation of the possibility of an App to help young people at risk of homelessness. Methods for data collection include a purposeful literature review and a discussion with stakeholders. Results are presented thematically to assess who the App could assist, the accessibility of the App for young people, and how the App could overcome issues young people face when seeking services. The report finds that young people are more connected with technology and vulnerable to homelessness than previous generations. Rejection and communication issues can be overcome by producing an alternative way for young people interact with services. This report recommends the development of an App that assists young people find emergency services.

# INTRODUCTION

## BACKGROUND

Homelessness is a social and political issue with deep and intricate complexities. The modern, liquid society has developed a progressive trend of unstable housing for the young citizen (Bauman 2000). Housing is a basic human right; it creates stability, opportunity and security for the inhabitant. When basic human rights are not met there are ramifications for both the individual and society. A lack of housing can have a lasting effect on a person, especially when that person is young and still developing emotionally and mentally. The understanding of what constitutes homelessness differs between colloquial and academic discourse. The common perception that someone is homeless only if they are ‘roofless’ neglects a variety of unsafe and unstable housing situations that can deeply affect the ability to function in society. There are numerous service providers who perform a fundamental role in assisting people who become homeless, however this abundance of choice can lead to distrust and confusion. The dilemma that is created by too many options is enhanced by the uncertainty associated with being young and homeless.

## AIMS

It is the aim of this research to examine the possibility of creating a primary starting point that incorporates all available services through a mobile application and internet site (App). A secondary aim of the task is to assist Shelter SA, and consequently other organisations in South Australia, to develop their services to match the needs of their clients. Shelter SA is the peak housing body in South Australia, who advocate for housing needs and rights in the community. This research is the beginning of a plan to develop an App that will be accessible to the public to help them find appropriate assistance and, in the long term, housing. This research will provide recommendations about the feasibility of such an endeavour, as well as how it may be operated and designed to assist all stakeholders.

## METHODS

A purposeful literature review was conducted to explore statistics and insights into the viability of the proposed technological assistance. Databases used for the research included Scopus, Google Scholar and JSTOR. Search terms included the key terms of “youth”, “homeless”, “internet”, “gender”, “Aboriginal” and “mental health” to address a broad range of variables associated with homelessness. Articles were primarily restricted to Australia, although comparable societies such as USA and England were considered to provide correlative indicators and a comparison. As usage of technology has progressed rapidly over time, a five year retrospect on sources referring to online activity was implemented to maintain validity, with older sources providing trends or comparisons. Other sources not relating to internet activity since 2008 were considered. Government policies addressing homelessness, such as “The Road Home”, as well as Australia Bureau of Statistics (ABS) statistics were further utilised to provide a policy and statistical framework.

The results include informal comments, ideas and criticisms made by leading homeless care providers in South Australia. As one of the primary goals of this research is to assist Shelter SA, the findings will be presented to these organisations to assess and create interest in the broader project. The feedback from the service providers is analysed in the results section, but no representative or organisation will be identified.

Results will be presented thematically, through quantitative, qualitative and theoretical examination of the sources (Walter 2009). Firstly, how young people become homeless will be investigated using conceptual and numerical data. Secondly, findings regarding the ability of young homeless people or those at risk of homelessness to properly access and use technology for information gathering purposes will be evaluated. Lastly, results will be broken down into demographics. Each group will be analysed through statistics, their need for assistance and internet accessibility and usage. Together, the information forms a foundation of knowledge regarding young homeless people’s needs and ability to use the App.

# RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section results of the literature review will be critiqued and analysed. Literature has been sorted thematically to provide a linear process of an App's potential. The three areas are centred on who the App could help, if the App would be accessible, and how the App could help. Literature will also be related to the research question.

## WHO CAN IT HELP?

Commentary assessing who is homeless, the effects of homelessness and who is at risk of being homeless were used to determine the potential scope of an App.

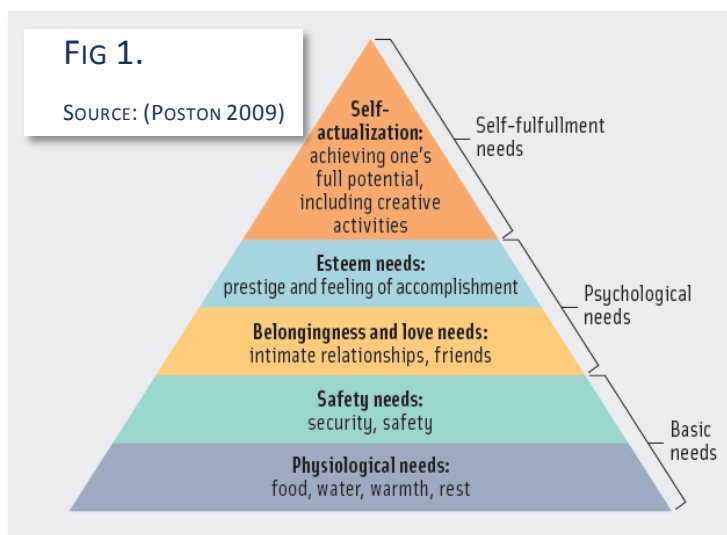
### THOSE WHO ARE HOMELESS

Affordable, safe and secure housing is a basic human right and need. Housing gives the inhabitant a platform of rights that are essential for participating in society such as privacy, safety and ownership. Without housing a person has little chance of contributing to society or developing themselves (UN-HABITAT 2009).

### Psychological Effects of Homelessness

The impact of homelessness on the individual can be explained through examining psychological theories. Maslow's theory of personality centres on the concept that a human has needs that need to be fulfilled (Maslow 1948). Fig1 outlines how the needs are categorized through a pyramid model. Maslow's theory works on a dynamic relationship between needs, based on the belief that no level of the pyramid can be achieved without the previous needs being fulfilled. As the illustration shows, safety and security form what is known as 'basic needs'. Without shelter, it is unlikely that a person will be able to fulfil the need for security and safety, resulting in an inability to achieve self-esteem and a sense of belonging. Without the possibility of reaching higher levels of needs, young people are unlikely to reach their potential academically and

psychologically. A lack of privacy can also have psychological effects on a person (Coplin 2013). Coplin likens a person without privacy to an animal in the Savanna; without a safe place to hide, animals face constant assumed threat in order to survive. Without the privacy that safe and secure housing can provide young people face issues relating to anxiety, and are limited in their ability to contribute to society and advance their self (Coplin 2013). A lack of housing can also



have lasting effects on a young person. An App which facilitates safe and appropriate housing for young homeless people could have lasting positive outcomes for the young person as well as society.

## THOSE WHO CAN BECOME HOMELESS

As well as being beneficial for young people who are currently homeless, an App could also be effective for those young people in society who face the possibility of becoming homeless.

It is important to highlight how technology can assist all young people in South Australia, not just those currently in need of emergency services. The social platform today's young people are given to progress into adulthood is in stark contrast to that of previous generations. Society has developed rapidly over the last 40 years which, according to Bauman, has eroded securities that were once essential (Bauman 2000).

Bauman's theory of liquid modernity uses scientific constructs to describe issues facing society. He identifies housing prices, employment contracts and welfare as structures, tasked with

holding society together (Bauman 2000). In previous generations, this was 'solid'. Like a block of ice, the structures were able to form a maintainable shape that was resistant and reliable. In today's tautology, those structures have melted. Recent generations transitioned to adulthood with the aid of affordable, secure housing and reliable employment contracts, whereas young people today have few guarantees. Housing is less affordable now (7:1 house cost/income ratio) than it was in 1980 (4:1) (Colic-Peisker and Johnson 2012). Rental contracts are shorter, creating fewer guarantees (Colic-Peisker and Johnson 2012). Short housing contracts and the increased casualization of the workforce suggests that little security exists (Colic-Peisker and Johnson 2012). A lack of security leaves young people vulnerable to external pressures which, like a liquid, can result in displacement. Young people living in a liquid society are more vulnerable to being displaced.

When young people do become homeless for the first time they can become very resourceful. Hodgetts conceptualizes the homeless person as a hermit, able to redesign space and place to find security in methods that may not seem obvious at first (Hodgetts 2010). Whilst the 'outside' world would not view couch surfing as a home, for the young person experiencing homelessness it can provide adequate security. The expansion of this resourcefulness from the physical to connectivity between peers can be articulated through Ball & Vincent's hot and cold knowledge concept (Ball 1998). They argue that knowledge that comes from authority, is read or is taught can be seen as cold knowledge and can often be forgotten by the intended target. Hot knowledge, however, is knowledge with legitimacy, from a source that is trusted; a person will believe something if they 'hear it on the grapevine' (Ball 1998). When a young person becomes homeless they are likely to use a range of resources to avoid homelessness. Young 'hermits' are likely to parlay 'hot' knowledge of positive or negative experiences they have had with services. The findings highlight the issues faced by young homeless people and the psychological consequences of insecure housing. All young people can be deemed at risk of homelessness. The App could have the ability to assist all young people.

## CAN THEY USE IT?

For the App to be successful, young people must be able access and understand technology. Trends and commentary regarding mobile phone access, internet connectivity and potential limitations were explored to evaluate how effective the App could be.

### **DO HOMELESS YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE ACCESS TO MOBILE PHONES?**

Homeless young people have had increasing internet usage over the last decade. In 2005, less than 45% of a surveyed homeless population had ever used a computer (Redpath 2006). 2012 presents a technologically developed society, evidenced by 90% of 17 year olds having access to a mobile phone (Rickwood 2012). Rickwood explains that the mobile phone has replaced the home computer as it does not require the physical security of a house. A mobile phone, has the ability to replace the home address as online networking sights give the user a constant non-geographical point of contact. Technology has developed and become more accessible and important for young people.

### **DO HOMELESS YOUNG PEOPLE USE THEIR MOBILE PHONE FOR INTERNET ACCESS?**

The connection between young people and mobile phones has been established, but that does not necessarily mean that young people have access to the internet. Goodwin-Smith highlights the possibility that smartphones are not a feasible option for homeless young people (Goodwin-Smith and Myatt 2013). Issues of theft, damage and affordability limit a young homeless person's ability to maintain a smartphone. Current access to internet services is unsuitable for homeless people because of cost, and in some cases confidence, issues. Whilst important for highlighting possible limitations of the App's effectiveness, Goodwin-Smith's methodology must



be examined. By interviewing 15 homeless people, his results are not universally applicable in two ways. Firstly, the results found are not exclusive to young people. As the results in the current literature review have found, homeless people that are not under 24 years old did not grow up with the technology available, meaning their understanding and usage of the devices differs. Over half the results are somewhat irrelevant, as nine of the fifteen participants were aged over 24 years old. Secondly, the research focused on those who are 'roofless' or currently receiving services. This is an important section of the community that the App will reach, however the intended purpose is for all young people, as (per Bauman) they face the possibility of needing emergency assistance. Contrastingly, the author mentions the expense of data plans as a major barrier to internet connection amongst homeless people, calling for increased WiFi access at service locations. Free WiFi will help to resolve data costs, so the new free WiFi plan in the Adelaide business district would turn internet access from a limitation to a strength of the proposed app. Limitations raised by Goodwin-Smith are certainly worth considering, however there is cause to question their applicability to the results of this study.

### **ISSUES AND POSSIBILITIES REGARDING SMARTPHONE USAGE**

The quantity of mobile phone access amongst homeless young people has been established, what needs to be examined is the quality. As not all mobile devices are equal in terms of internet connectivity and interaction, the advance in smartphone access will play an important role in the apps effectiveness. At a recent ACMA Consumer Consultation Forum, Lawder expressed limitations and recommendations in terms of smart phone access for homeless people (Lawder, 2012). The main limitation raised was, despite the mobile phone's ability to remove infrastructure needs such as landline and property (discussed above), the mobile phone still requires electronic charging, which is something that can be problematic for young homeless people. However, this will only apply to young people in extreme instances of homelessness and services could assist these young people by facilitating the charging of phones. Additionally, women escaping domestic violence may face difficulties accessing data if their smartphone is on an extended contract controlled by their partner. Lawder emphasises how State Government agencies have, or are considering, using smartphones as a means of assisting citizens. The

Victorian Government is contemplating giving smartphones to ex-prisoners as a means of keeping them connected to caseworkers. In Canberra, Telstra provide 500 phone cards for distribution amongst young people. Finally, Lawder advises that disused or recycled handsets be made available to homeless people. Lawder's suggestions outline the possibility for advanced assistance for homeless young people as smartphones becomes increasingly common and cost effective.

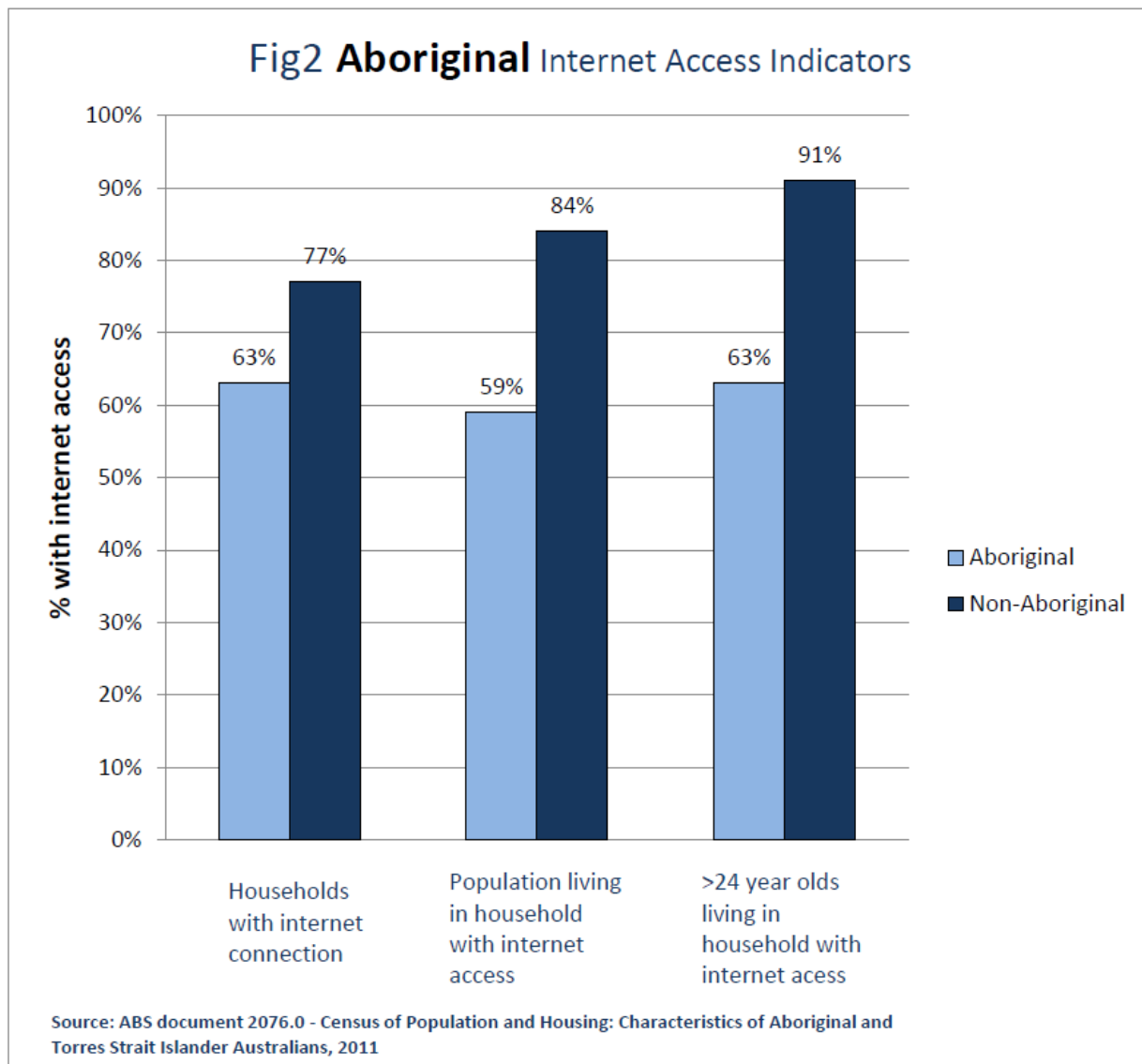
## **DO HOMELESS YOUNG PEOPLE KNOW HOW TO USE THE INTERNET?**

The capability of homeless young people to effectively use the internet to gather information has progressed recently. Redpath's study showed that in 2006, 19% of those surveyed had used the internet for information, and 33% had accessed an email (Redpath 2006). The internet is now used by all socio- economic classes for information and communication, demonstrated by a study in 2013 that showed 75% of homeless young people in Australia have a social networking account (Rosanna E. Guadagno 2013). The author of the latter study believes that social networking is more complex than a normal email service as there is additional information to process. A progression in the ability to use and understand online services by homeless young people could assist the technology in assisting homeless young people.

## **HOW CAN INTERNET USAGE BUILD YOUNG PEOPLE'S RELATIONSHIPS?**

Interconnectedness amongst young people is changing the way they gain information and create relationships. Through the development of new methods of establishing communication with young people, service providers are being presented with new ways of monitoring progress with clients (Rice, Lee et al. 2011). Rice outlines the possibility of technology to create a source of social protection for those in need. Although he discusses the link in terms of family and not for services, it is still applicable. Rice believes that new methods of assistance will soon be possible as a result of the changing ways in which people communicate. He also explains that there is

need for additional research regarding how young homeless people acquire information. The foundation of this claim is that trends regarding information technology access are growing so rapidly that it is increasingly difficult to understand and predict how young adolescents will use it to find what they need. There is a possible link between interconnectedness and security, however further research is required to address this issue.



## **WILL IT BE ACCESSIBLE FOR YOUNG ABORIGINAL PEOPLE?**

Whilst the internet is becoming increasingly accessible, it still struggles to reach Aboriginal communities, especially those in rural areas. Fig 2 shows ABS statistics relating to the accessibility of internet for Aboriginal people compared to the rest of society (ABS 2011). From the data it can be seen that Aboriginal households, and consequently they are disadvantaged in terms of ability to access information. ABS findings further indicate that only 11% of Aboriginal people use mobile phones as their primary internet access device, with 85% using broadband (ABS 2011). Positives can be taken when breaking the demographic into age brackets, as the table shows young Aboriginal people (>24 years old) have greater access than the rest of society. In the government document “The Road Home”, it is highlighted that 71% of rural homeless service requests are made by Aboriginal people (2008) and 68% of all service inquiries are made rurally (Cwlth 2008). A concentration of Aboriginal service seekers clearly exists beyond the limitations of metropolitan infrastructure. Young rural Aboriginal people may be less served by the App.

## **MAINTAINING THE USER**

If mobile phones become a valuable tool in accessing services, their value will increase, which can have additional consequences for their effectiveness. A study in the USA concluded that when homeless people have something of value, they are likely to either sell it for money to provide other immediate needs, or give it altruistically to another member of their community (Woelfer and Hendry 2011). The methodology of providing 12 young people with iPods and analysing their usage and retention showed that only two participants kept the device for 12 months. Instead of giving young people a device they are unlikely to keep, the App is designed to create a method of communication with the user, therefore sharing, selling and pawning of phones could be a significant limitation. Further, there was expressed willingness to sell the iPod to buy a cheaper form of music player as it performed the same task. By doing so, the participant gained money and maintained the function (a music player). A mobile phone may be downgraded in a similar way. However the use of an iPod instead of an iPhone (or any smartphone) is a key element that may discount the relevance of this research. An iPod has only

one function (playing music) as opposed to a mobile, which can be used to connect to the internet or contact landlines.. For this reason, it is arguable that a mobile phone would be of more importance to a young homeless person, and not be so freely sold. Additionally, the sample size of 12 people may be too small to draw generalisations from the findings. The app's effectiveness could be limited by the user's ability to retain their mobile phone for an extended period of time.

## **CAN THE APP BE EFFECTIVE WITHOUT HIGH HOMELESS INTERNET CONNECTIVITY?**

The App could also be a useful tool to assist service providers, regardless of their internet connectivity or permission to access social media at services in the workplace. Westbrook explains that two thirds of directors in care giving organisations desire a means of assisting clients do their own information seeking (Westbrook 2013). She identifies the important role information technology can play in assisting the organisations communicate with young people. If a young homeless person is turned away from a service and does not have a mobile phone to access the app, the organisation could use the App to assist the person find appropriate care. Results indicate that an App would benefit the services by creating an opportunity to collaborate resources. The results in this section identify a growth in internet usage and understanding amongst young people. The findings indicate that the App could be an accessible tool for young people seeking services.

## **HOW WILL IT HELP**

As the research has established that the App could be appropriate and accessible to many young people, it is important to evaluate *how* it could help young people. The App could be a useful way of overcoming rejection and communication issues young people face when seeking a service.

## REJECTION

One of the key ways technology could assist young people is by helping them to avoid rejection by services. Studies show that 66% of young people are turned away when they approach Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) organisations for help (Clark 2012). Clark explains that if a young person is turned away on their first attempt they are far less likely to approach the services again. Anecdotally, a worker from a South Australian organisation stated that rejection leads to a lack of trust and that young people are likely to resort to other forms of unstable accommodation such as couch surfing and not attempt to seek assistance again. The effects of rejection can be assessed through psychological concepts. Classical conditioning explains that it is vital for young people to have immediate positive experiences when they seek assistance. Positive and negative associations gained from experience have lasting effects on future actions (Staats and Staats 1958). Additionally, the ABC (Affective, Behaviour and Cognition) model of behaviour describes how attitudes can lead to actions (Martin, Watson et al. 2000). The theory explains that attitudes, behaviours and beliefs form and cause each other; I did not like the service, I will not go to the service, the service is bad. Many young people seeking services do not get the immediate positive response they require. The two most common reasons mentioned by South Australian organisations were capacity and exclusion. Capacity is a result of the service's inability to accommodate all service seekers. Exclusion stems from failing to meet the eligibility criteria of specialized services. As certain demographics are over represented or underserved, organisations often specify criteria based on gender, age or culture which can then lead to exclusion. Technology that identifies relevant *and* available services could reduce the number of young people being turned away, resulting in a positive psychological response.

## COMMUNICATION

'Young homeless people' is a very broad category, and it is important to assess issues with service providers in relation to specific needs of certain demographics. Mental and Physical

health issues, culture and language can create barriers that hinder a person's ability to communicate effectively with services, but can be overcome with innovation, as discussed in the next section.

### MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

A new method of access to services that does not require face to face interaction has several benefits for young homeless people with mental health issues. A recent Federal Government publication identifies one group as having a “dual diagnosis” because of the difficulty of defining the cause of the individual's issues (Commonwealth Department of Health 2005). The dynamic relationship between homelessness and mental health is a potential cause for optimism; if one can create the other, defeating one can have a similar consequence (Commonwealth Department of Health 2005). A new method of reaching dual diagnosis young people is needed to break through issues of trust and seclusion. Technology provides an innovative way of approaching vulnerable people in need of assistance. The above **government paper** (Commonwealth Department of Health 2005) also describes dual diagnosis young people as the hardest to treat because of financial and social limitations centred on seclusion, distrust and substance abuse. A US study outlines how traditional organisations can harm their own effectiveness (Ferguson 2012). Those with mental health issues create metaphorical personal walls as a means of distancing themselves from the outside world. When a service breaks through these walls in an attempt to help it can be experienced as an unwanted intrusion. A separate study in the USA shows that face-to-face relationships can be problematic for homeless adolescents, as they are a risk factor for both anxiety and depression (Rice, Ray et al. 2012). It was also identified that young homeless people contacted relatives through technology as a means of protecting themselves from negative emotions. A new method of interaction with young people may not only eliminate negative outcomes such as anxiety, but has positive consequences such as protection.

Rick Wood explains that the more choices a person is faced with, the greater the distrust of those choices (Rickwood 2012). The App could serve to defeat the issues of intrusion and distrust. Too

much choice can also create deeper levels of despair (Salecl 2002). As Salecl explains, if a person is not sure they are making the correct choice, they will presume they have wasted the potential of the other possibilities. Technology could defeat emotional limitations of current services through its ability to be accessed in the users own time and space, only as a result of being willingly downloaded and eliminating the uncertainty of choice. By allowing the service into the phone the user is welcoming the user into the personal space; a positive contrast to traditional methods. Instead of many services providing one means, there is now one means of accessing many services. The App would aspire to change the relationship between services and dual diagnosis young people.

### PHYSICAL AND SENSORIAL DISABILITIES

The App could help people who are limited in their ability to communicate with others. Physical and sensorial disabilities account for 64% of the homeless population in Australia (ABS 2012). Similar to dual diagnosis, young homeless people and disabled young people face confidence issues when asking for help. A young disabled homeless person's problems can be heightened by an inability to communicate face to face as a result of hearing, speaking or sight restrictions. Research shows that when an individual cannot communicate freely in a society they are more likely to use information technology to do so (Mesch 2012). Giving young people the ability to read at their own speed reduces the anxiety of human interaction (Mesch 2012). It is the innovative step of removing personal interaction that could help reach young homeless disabled people.

### REFUGEES

The development of an App could help organisations reach young refugees. Refugees face significant hardships when finding housing upon arrival (RCA 2013). Unlike other young homeless people, a young refugee does not have an existing family nucleus or local knowledge that allows them to resourcefully find temporary security (RCA 2013). Access to services is therefore paramount for minority groups as they are prone to misinformation, distrust and



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feelings of helplessness. Technology can provide an effective way to communicate with refugees as a means of helping them get the help they may need. Research in Israel confirms that minority groups are likely to gain information online because of language barriers (Mesch 2012). If the App is well marketed and allows for translation, young refugees will be able to view available services. The App therefore might eliminate misinformation and attempt to resolve distrust in their new community.

## CARE LEAVERS

Institutional care leavers are a group of young homeless people who need immediate help if they have nowhere to live. When a young person leaves care, they lose the security some other young people take for granted. ABS reports show that in the 1960's only 10% of Australians aged 20-29 lived with their parents whereas today over a third of that age group live at home (ABS 2009). These figures reflect a lack of affordable housing options and an increased reliance on family assistance in an expensive society. The disparity between institutional care leavers and other young homeless people's security networks therefore creates a need for immediacy of service response to avoid unwanted housing outcomes. The App could provide this immediacy and contribute to creating a security network. The results highlight a need to overcome rejection and communication issues young people face when seeking emergency services. Further, the literature indicates ways in which an App can be an innovative way to solve these problems.

## MARKETING THE APP TO YOUNG PEOPLE

The ability to successfully market the App could be central to its effectiveness. Minimal literature was found that identified how to target advertising to young homeless people, so strategies regarding tobacco companies were examined. Tobacco companies have been down-scaling their target consumer group to low socio-economic people (Apollonio 2005). Despite the known risks to health, young people associate cigarettes with positive outcomes because of social benefits achieved (Lawrence 2010). This can be explained through the 'hot' knowledge concept; Health warnings are cold, as they read or taught. The association between smoking and being cool is a fact in their minds because it is conveyed by sources deemed credible, such as their peers, which creates 'hot knowledge' (Ball 1998). The App could use this theoretical foundation to form a successful marketing strategy. If young people are informed of the App merely via text and teaching, they may not warm to it quickly. However if time and effort is taken to ensure that the App is immediately effective, it can become a part of the hot knowledge 'grapevine'. This can cause the App to be legitimized in the minds of young people. By becoming legitimized in the community, the App can save money on marketing costs.

## RESPONSE FROM SOUTH AUSTRALIAN ORGANISATIONS

Shelter SA held two discussions with staff from homeless service providers, youth peak bodies and local and State Government agencies to share this research and seek their input.

### EXPECTATIONS

Participants highlighted the importance of providing immediate positive responses for young people seeking assistance. The group discussed the dissonance between the short-term goals of young people and long-term goals of organisations. Young people, it was outlined, expect their issues to be solved immediately and unrealistically, whilst organisations understand it is as a process that takes time. Participants expressed that by developing an interactive database and by providing a condensed list of relevant services, young homeless people could identify the specific assistance available to them. If the recommended service had a brief summary of what the person could expect from the assistance, it could help defeat issues of unrealistic expectations.

### REACHING YOUNG PEOPLE

Participants talked about the importance of creating positive relationships with young people. Participants agreed with the findings relating to the negative consequences of young people being turned away from services. Also confirming previous findings, it was stated by some participants that food vouchers and bus tickets can provide this immediate positive response. Alternatively, with no immediate positive outcomes, a young person is unlikely to return. Instead, it is likely that young people may then turn to their resources such as couch surfing. The young person then becomes one of the 'hidden homeless'. The App could be a device that organisations give as an immediate positive response it may be seen as a reward (therefore a positive) and increase its effectiveness, whilst assisting organisations draw young people back to the service.

## **CREATION AND DESIGN OF THE APP**

A key issue raised in the discussion was the language that will be used in the app. Participants said that young people do not see homelessness as a reality that is a future or current possibility. By labelling the users as homeless, the App could limit its reach. The App will need to be deliberately constructed to avoid unwanted reactions based on language.

Ideas regarding the design of the App centred on the users' willingness to provide personal details. Members referenced a current mental health App (Head Space) that creates a 'level up' platform to engage the user. The feature engages the user by developing a simple plot that is navigated by the sharing of information. The relationship between different levels and winning drawings upon a young person's desire to 'win', allowing the App to gain the desired data. The element of achievement provides the vital element of immediate positive associations.

Simplicity was also deemed a desirable option, similar to current apps that identify restaurants, where the user can identify a service and find reviews, ratings and can save 'favourites'. By using feedback from previous users, hot knowledge could be created to give services credibility. The creation of the App will need to be deliberately constructed to avoid unrealistic expectations and negative language, whilst engaging the user with a dynamic interface.

South Australian Organisations highlighted the need for positivity and understanding when dealing with young people. The discussion revealed ideas and support for the App's construction.

# DISCUSSION

## LIMITATIONS

The limitations of this research which may affect validity and reliability are acknowledged. Firstly, despite the methodology of a purposeful literature review, the depth of knowledge in any given area can be vast and it is uncertain if all possible material was covered. The research period did not allow for the entirety of available literature to be incorporated in the findings. Secondly the lack of academic material relating to homelessness and internet connectivity limits the reliability of findings. Government publications (such as the ABS) were included as little previous research, especially Australian, covered the field. The time frame of the research prevented formally including stakeholders because of the ethics process. It would be beneficial to methodically gather primary data from organisations and young people in relation to issues raised in the results to measure their validity in progressing this research.

## RESULTS ANALYSIS

### CROSS-REFERENCING THE LITERATURE

The data shows that the term ‘at risk’ has no subjective limits within modern society as all young people face an inevitable leap into adulthood (Bauman 2000). Because many young people do not plan for homelessness, when they are displaced they lack direction. High turn away rates from services indicate that many homeless young people are turning to the wrong service. The results of this research also indicate young people can lack the confidence to communicate with a service face-to-face. Mobile and internet access data highlights an unprecedented rise in technological communication amongst young people. High turn away rates pose the problem, and increased technology access could be a solution. Results established that young people can become homeless anytime and are likely not prepared. Turn away rates were also highlighted as a major issue. It can be inferred that the moment between needing a service and finding a service is where the App can have a large positive outcome. If a

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person who has no plan can be given direction they can avoid falling off the grid and living a ‘hermit’ life. Findings can be combined to highlight to exact moment the App could have a positive effect.

It is important to identify the difference in App access between young people, and young homeless people. A young person, as identified by Bauman, faces possible displacement in their path to adulthood, but will be competent in accessing the App through a mobile via the internet (Bauman 2000). On the grounds of the findings, a young homeless person may not necessarily have the ability to connect to the internet. However it was stated that young people are resourceful in finding securities. If the App is successful, it may create ‘hot knowledge’ which will gain legitimacy among ‘hermits’. The App would become sought after, and the likelihood of the young homeless person interacted with someone in their support network, via friends, family or a service, may find and benefit from the app. The collection of theories outlined in the findings illustrates how an App could assist all young people regardless of current housing situation.

Organisation feedback and results regarding dual diagnosis homelessness identified that language will be one of the key issues when developing the app. During discussion groups it was made very clear that young people do not see themselves as homeless; they do not wish to associate themselves with the stereotypes that have associated with homelessness. If terms such as ‘homeless’ were used in the app, there is a likelihood young people will disassociate themselves. In addition, positivity will play a key role in maintaining the user’s interest. The research highlighted the need for good experiences, and the consequences of negativity. If the App was carefully constructed to provoke positive emotions, it could increase the use. Finally, it was found that language serves as a barrier for young homeless people from non-English speaking backgrounds. Therefore in the most practical sense, the App would benefit from a translation element. Equally, through use of icons and maps, the use of language in the App could be minimalized, assisting not only those who read other languages, but those who struggle to read at all. Language will play a key part in ensuring the App is accessible and effective across all desired users.

## THE POTENTIAL OF AN APP TO ASSIST SERVICE PROVIDERS

The App aims has the possibility to help the organisations as well as young homeless people in the following ways:

- Feedback could allow the services to analyse how their service is being received by users, and identify possibilities to increase their effectiveness.
- By collecting information that identifies the user's age, gender and race the App could identify who the homeless population is. Additionally Input of a location would allow the organisations to trace areas of need. The data created by this dynamic map would benefit organisations as a research tool and evidence when applying for funding.
- If the App is able to perform its purpose effectively, organisations will not need to turn away as many young people. This will be a result of users recognizing where appropriate and available services are. Additionally, the App will reduce turn aways in inner-city services, as those looking for assistance in the suburbs can locate local organisations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the rapidly growing movement towards mobile phone internet usage, trends indicating continuing rises in internet usage, the nature of the issues facing young people accessing services and with all limitations duly considered, the capacity for an App to have a positive effect on young people is cause for optimism. The results in this paper indicate that the development of a carefully and deliberately constructed App would be a worthwhile venture.

- The App must be deliberately constructed to avoid invoking negative stigmas via the use of negative language. Facilitating positive usage and responses will be pivotal to the apps success.
- Hot knowledge must be utilized throughout the creation process of the app. This includes a clever marketing strategy and a feedback option on the app, in order to give the App a sense of legitimacy for the user.

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- The App would benefit from very simple language. Where possible, icons should be used instead of text for navigation. This would assist those with mental or physical health problems, as well as those with less competent English Skills. Additionally, a translation feature could be added.
- The App should be targeted to all young people, not just those who are currently homeless. Not only will this increase the reach of the app, it will also help a group of citizens who are experiencing a significant lack of security. Additionally, if the App can reach the wider community, family and friends of young people in danger can provide informed assistance, increasingly hot knowledge.
- As expressed by Goodwin-Smith, young homeless people may
- be better served by a computer program. A computer interface similar to the App should also be developed.
- The data collected from the App should be stored for further research into effectiveness of services and the internet access of young homeless people.
- It is recommended that young homeless people be consulted throughout the construction of the app.

## FURTHER RESEARCH

Gaps identified in the literature that would be appropriate to address in the future include:

- How young people, especially Aboriginal people, gain knowledge in an emergency. This could be an important field of research as it would directly affect how services would conduct their programs.
- An investigation into the effectiveness of similar services would be a way to evaluate the relationship between young homeless people and their ability to gain information regarding the internet
- In depth field research into why young homeless people are being turned away from services could be of high importance to society.
- As Rice explains, understanding how young people create security networks using connectivity would allow social researchers to better understand how technological advances are affecting young people's relationships.



## Can iHelp – Technological Assistance for Young People at Risk of Homelessness

- Very little research was found in regards to effective marketing strategies for homeless people. Research in this field would allow services to understand how to maximise their efforts effectiveness.
- Understanding positives and negatives in the relationship between the young homeless person and the service, with significance placed on the journey of the homeless person after a turn away, and the evolution into the young 'hermit' would help services effectively design their assistance.

## CONCLUSION

Society has changed, and it has melted the solid structures we once took for granted. Today's complex modern society has created dynamic issues such as insecurity and uncertainty as inherent aspects of our day to day lives, whilst creating equally complex opportunities to solve such problems; none more so than the accessibility and mobility of information amongst young people. Used effectively, the internet can be used to facilitate long term housing success.

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