

***Project i* Research Update 6 February, 2001**

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Recruitment

The research has been progressing very well since the last research update of November 2000. The support of agencies and services working with homeless young people has been fantastic. We have over forty services involved in assisting us to recruit research participants. We are presently negotiating with another twenty services, not including schools. Our initial strategy has been to elicit the support and participation of the more specialist youth 'homeless' welfare agencies, such as housing, refuges, outreach and referral services.

As of the 18th of January, the Project has conducted 120 interviews ? 15 of them have been with newly homeless young people and 105 with experienced homeless young people of which the vast majority of them being between the ages of 17 and 20. We are now focusing our recruitment strategy to concentrate on recruiting newly homeless young people and experienced homeless young people between 12 and 16 years. In doing so, we are now also seeking the assistance of any service that has contact with homeless young people. The challenge now is to recruit newly homeless who are not yet having, and may never have, contact with specialist 'homeless' services. This will be achieved in four ways. Firstly, we will continue to recruit from the existing services. Many of these are starting to see the benefits to young people participating in the research, either by way of the young people being paid (makes the service look good) or in response to the issues that surface during the interview. That is, a few services have reported that some of the more intensive interview questions have prompted the participants to begin to deal with issues that they have as yet been unable to attend. Consequently, services which have been holding back referring newly homeless young people to us until they saw these types of benefits are now less cautious to refer them. Given the generally delicate nature of their work with newly homeless young people, we fully expected that services would initially begin by referring experienced homeless until they had 'tested the water'. From the Project's point of view, this has been advantageous as the interviewers have been able to refine their role before interviewing young people coming to terms with the extreme trauma of the initial stages of homelessness before their street survival skills and social networks have been developed.

Secondly, we are now directing our efforts at involving the types of agencies that have greater contact with newly homeless young people, including family mediation services, Reconnect, Centrelink, and local government youth and family services. The difficulty in this strategy is that many of these agencies are also working with the young people's families and may not wish to jeopardise familial mediation by involving the young people 'homeless' research. Thirdly, although we have yet to receive formal permission from the Department of Education, negotiations for permission to recruit young people directly from schools through Student Welfare Coordinators are progressing well. Fourthly, in order to obtain our sample size of newly homeless young people we need to undertake outreach style recruiting from shopping centres and other spaces that homeless young people hang out, such as central Melbourne, St Kilda, Footscray and railway stations.

Mandatory reporting of child abuse

As part of gaining ethics permission to undertake the research from the Victorian Department of Human Services, *Project i* must report child physical or sexual abuse, and serious suicidal or homicidal threats. Initially, the project had hoped to deal with any cases of suspected abuse by involving the young persons youth/welfare worker in the reporting but, because of confidentiality issues and the fact that the service sector is not yet legally bound to mandatory report, we realise that we must proceed with notifying Protective Services of any reporting issues that may arise through the course of the research. Young people participating in the research are made fully aware of our mandatory reporting obligations when they sign the informed consent/assent forms before the interview begins.

Los Angeles team visits Melbourne

Four members of the Los Angeles team visited Melbourne in mid January 2001 for a week of Project meetings. It was fantastic to sit down to face-to-face discussions about the research and to share the highlights and problems experienced so far. It was interesting to find that both the Melbourne and the Los Angeles teams are recruiting newly and experienced homeless young people at roughly the same ratio. One of the main purposes of the visit was to also discuss what would be in the follow up interviews of the newly homeless young people. Both teams were particularly mindful of the need to reduce the length of the interview. Whereas the baseline (first) interview was 70 pages long the 3 month follow up interview will be 40 pages. It was shortened because many of the initial questions need only be asked once, such as the background and familial questions. And some questions will only need to be asked every couple of surveys rather than every time, for instance some of the service utilisation questions.

As the Los Angeles part of the research is about 3 months ahead of the Melbourne component, they have had time to undertake some preliminary data analysis. It was particularly helpful to gain some understanding of the types of questions in which the responses have been clustered together and those which have produced a roughly even response. Given that many questions have multiple answers (e.g. 'never', 'rarely', 'sometimes', 'most of the time', 'always'), the questions that have clustered responses (e.g. 'never' or 'always') will be able to have the answering options narrowed down (e.g. to 'never' or 'always'), this will reduce the time it takes to administer the survey and hence reduce the annoyance factor to the participants.