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Mildura partners join forces for education-first housing for at-risk young people

Mallee Family Care, SuniTAFE (Sunraysia Institute of TAFE) and the Brotherhood of St Laurence have come together to develop a proposal for an Education First Youth Foyer (EFY Foyer) in Mildura, with the dual aim of tackling youth homelessness and keeping more local young people in education and training.

The EFY Foyer is being considered for a dedicated site at the SuniTAFE Mildura campus, to house up to 40 young people at any one time. It would provide safe, stable accommodation and wrap-around support for young people aged 16–24 who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness – with education and training at the centre of the model. Residents are able to live at the EFY Foyer for a period of up to two years while studying, and then transition into independent living.

Education First Youth Foyers give young people a place to live while they study, train or work, with on-site staff, life skills development and strong links to education, employment and community. Residents sign up to a “deal” that commits them to engaging in learning and working towards independence.

Last year, the Foyer Foundation identified Mildura as one of the priority sites across Australia where hundreds of young people are experiencing homelessness and an investment-ready EFY Foyer project was required.

The Education First Youth Foyer model has a strong track record in Victoria. A longitudinal evaluation by the Brotherhood of St Laurence found that 85 per cent of Foyer participants were working or studying one year after leaving the program. The proportion living independently in their own housing increased from 7 per cent at entry to 51 per cent a year after exit.

Mallee Family Care CEO Teresa Jayet said the project had the potential to be transformational for young people across the region.

“Young people in the Mallee deserve the same opportunities as those in metropolitan areas,” Ms Jayet said.

“Too many are trying to juggle unstable housing, school or TAFE, and finding work – and something has to give. An EFY Foyer changes that by bringing housing, education and support together in one place, giving young people a safe place to live while they build the skills, qualifications and confidence they need for a strong future here in the region.”



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Under the proposal, the Mildura EFY Foyer would sit at the heart of an emerging education and employment precinct, situated within SuniTAFE's footprint and within walking distance of La Trobe University.

SuniTAFE CEO Brett Millington said the EFY Foyer aligned with SuniTAFE's commitment to supporting students and the broader community.

"SuniTAFE exists to change lives through education, but housing insecurity is one of the biggest reasons young people don't enrol or don't complete," Mr Millington said.

"We're pleased to be exploring this opportunity with Mallee Family Care and the Brotherhood of St Laurence. Having an EFY Foyer within the precinct would mean better access, better retention and better outcomes - for students and the region.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence brings extensive experience in the Education First Youth Foyer model through its involvement in existing EFY Foyers in Victoria. Mark Cox from BSL's Youth Program team said the Brotherhood was committed to supporting the Mildura proposal.

"Education First Youth Foyers have shown that when you bring housing, education and support together, you can fundamentally shift the trajectory of a young person's life. We know what it takes to make an EFY Foyer work, and we're committed to sharing that expertise with our partners in Mildura," Mr Cox said.

"Mildura has a committed community service sector, a proactive TAFE partner and a clear need on the ground. We're pleased to work alongside Mallee Family Care and SuniTAFE to explore bringing this proven model to the Mallee. This is a project the local community can really get behind and should be proud to host."

The three organisations are now working together to finalise the proposal, including a proposed design, and will engage with relevant government opportunities as the project progresses.

"This is a genuine collaboration between a local community service, a regional TAFE and a national organisation with deep experience in the EFY Foyer model," Ms Jayet said.

"We know this model works - 85 per cent of young people who've been through an EFY Foyer are working or studying a year later. We want that future for young people in the Mallee, and that's what we're working to deliver."

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