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Mallee Family Care urges State Government to fund Education First Youth Foyer in Mildura

The Mallee region's leading provider of family and children's services is urging the State Government to make Mildura the base for Victoria's next Education First Youth (EFY) Foyer.

EFY Foyers offer stable, affordable housing to support young people who wish to study and are unable to live at home. This could mean completing their final years of secondary schooling or undertaking an apprenticeship, TAFE or university course.

Four of the integrated learning and accommodation centres currently operate throughout Victoria, supporting vulnerable young people to participate in mainstream education, training and employment.

Mallee Family Care CEO Teresa Jayet said it was critical that the next EFY Foyer was built in Mildura.

"We know that education is key to improving social and economic outcomes. It helps individuals, families, and communities to thrive," Ms Jayet said.

"However, isolation, socio-economic disadvantage, and a critical lack of affordable housing is stopping far too many of the Mallee's young people from pursuing further studies."

Ms Jayet said a Mallee-based EFY Foyer would respond directly to these complex issues and implored the State Government to commit to funding a Mildura facility in its 2024-25 Budget.

"Education and employment outcomes are drastically worse in the Mallee compared to the rest of Victoria. But there is compelling evidence to show that innovative solutions and strategic partnerships such as EFY Foyers can help turn these statistics around."

Only 65% of VCE students in the Mallee applied for tertiary education in 2023, compared to 80% of VCE students across state, according to Victorian Curriculum of Assessment Authority figures.

2021 data also shows that 51.3% of people aged over 15 in the Mallee had attained Year 12 or higher, which is well below the state average of 68.2%.



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ABS figures show the Mallee region has the second highest unemployment rate in Victoria and rental housing affordability has declined from 80% in 2000 to 56% in 2022.

The Victorian State Government has already funded Education First Youth Foyers in the City of Hume, City of Monash, City of Greater Shepparton, City of Warrnambool, Wodonga and Wangaratta. In comparison, Mildura has:

- The lowest SEIFA index score (indicating the highest level of disadvantage);
- The lowest percentage of people whose highest educational attainment is Year 12 or higher; and
- The second-highest unemployment rate.

“Access to basic housing and an education are fundamental human rights. Mallee Family Care staunchly promotes these rights on behalf of our community through our services, programs and advocacy,” Ms Jayet said.

Mallee Family Care has called on the State Government to invest \$16.3 million for a purpose-built 40-bed student accommodation complex in central Mildura. The facility would support young people who are unable to live at home or do not have a stable place to live to achieve their education goals.

Staffed by specialist youth and social workers, EFY Foyers also provide young people with other support and skills to become independent adults. Mallee Family Care has also requested a \$2.5 million annual investment to operate Mildura’s EFY Foyer.

As well as significant social outcomes, this construction and operations for this project would create 140 jobs and inject \$20 million into the local economy.

Mallee Family Care has been supporting Northwest Victoria’s most vulnerable families and individuals for more than 40 years, through disability, mental health and wellbeing, housing, legal, financial counselling and out of home care services.

Ms Jayet said the for-purpose organisation would continue to support regional young people to thrive through Mildura’s EFY Foyer.

“This facility will provide a transformational opportunity for young people in the Mallee and respond to key social and economic challenges facing the region,” she said.

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