

10



PRIME MINISTER

PRIME MINISTERIAL YOUTH HOMELESS TASKFORCE

The Government will establish a Prime Ministerial Taskforce which will oversee the development of the youth homeless pilot programme I first announced at the ACOSS National Conference in October last year.

Today I met representatives of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, the Brotherhood of St Laurence, the Salvation Army, the Wesley Central Mission and the Anglican Church of Brisbane to discuss the pilots.

The meeting was also attended by the Minister for Family Services, Mrs Moylan, who has primary responsibility for the pilot programme, as well as the Minister for Social Security, Senator Newman, and the Minister for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Senator Vanstone.

At the meeting, I reiterated the emphasis that the pilots will place on the importance of early intervention, voluntary mediation, and wherever practicable, reconciliation with family members.

Voluntary welfare agencies have a proven record in providing a wide range of services to homeless young people in a practical but compassionate way and will play a central role in implementing the pilots.

Participation in the pilot programme will be entirely voluntary. Existing income support arrangements for homeless young people will continue.

Under the pilot, young people who seek income support will be given an initial assessment by departmental officers. If they are eligible for income support and agree to participate in the pilot, they will be referred to a participating voluntary agency.

In the first six weeks of their referral, the agency will assess the young person's situation, provide counselling and mediation and, if practicable, attempt to bring about a reconciliation with his or her family.

At the end of the six week period, the voluntary agency will present a detailed report to the department, which will include an assessment of the young person's circumstances, and recommendations as to his or her ongoing eligibility for income support and the likelihood of family reconciliation.

Whilst the final decision about entitlement for ongoing income support will remain with government, the reports of the voluntary agencies will be a primary input into such decisions.

The Coalition is committed to using the pilot as a means of better coordinating and integrating youth homeless support services provided by government agencies.

The programme's active research element will also greatly assist in developing best practice support services for homeless youth in the longer term.

The membership and terms of reference of the Prime Ministerial Taskforce will be announced in the near future.

26 March 1996