

ASIST training has been shown to improve suicide related attitudes and knowledge.<sup>67, 94</sup> One promising study on a crisis hotline had compared ASIST trained counsellors with non-ASIST trained counsellors and concluded that people who rang the crisis line and spoke with an ASIST trained counsellor seemed less suicidal and depressive and demonstrated greater feelings of hope.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, the ASIST trained counsellors had longer call times and increased disclosure from callers indicating an increased connection between caller and counsellor. Exploring reasons for living was linked with more positive caller outcomes and this approach interconnects with CBT in that it encourages people to think of reasons to live as a method of overcoming stressful states of being.<sup>95</sup> Although the findings of this study are encouraging, results may not be applicable across different settings.

The ASIST approach aligns with the understanding that many people who have suicidal urges, including young homeless people, often choose not to access mental health services.<sup>31, 96</sup> Young homeless people are often very independent as they have had negative experiences with relying on people in the past.<sup>97</sup> A result of this independence may be that they try to manage suicidal thoughts or behaviours themselves. This highlights the pivotal role that Youth Workers have in identifying young people at risk of suicide and referring them to appropriate and timely support.

There are a number of suicide prevention training opportunities available in Western Australia. Each of these programs vary depending on approach, duration, delivery style, cultural approach and the experience of the trainer.<sup>55</sup> For a list of suicide prevention training currently available in Western Australia please see [www.yacwa.org.au/youthworkertoolkit/suicide-prevention](http://www.yacwa.org.au/youthworkertoolkit/suicide-prevention).

### **Box 7:** **Skills-based Training on Risk Management (STORM)**

STORM is a suicide prevention training package that focuses on building risk assessment and risk management skills for those directly working with those at risk of suicide.<sup>98</sup> It is similar to ASIST in that it is skills based, utilises role play and has been shown to be effective in increasing suicide related skills and knowledge.<sup>99</sup> While ASIST training is widely disseminated in Australia and has a greater evidence base, STORM training may also be beneficial to Youth Service Providers as it offers a specific module which respond specifically to suicide in children and young adults.

For an overview of ASIST and STORM read *The use and impact of Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) in Scotland: An Evaluation* available at [www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/05/19160110/00](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/05/19160110/00)

## **11.0 Meeting the service needs of young homeless people**

*Young people need to know that there is at least one player in the game that they can rely on to uphold their interests.<sup>83</sup>*

Creating lasting positive relationships between Youth Service Providers and young homeless people at risk of suicide is a major factor in suicide prevention efforts. Young people who are homeless are a particularly difficult group to engage with. This is due to a myriad of reasons including unpredictable living arrangements and the absence of trust in both people and services.<sup>77, 100</sup> To be able to successfully engage this group it is important that services employ approaches that encourage and support positive and lasting relationships.

Table 3.0 outlines key principles of practice to consider when working with young homeless people. These principles were identified in a review by Barker et al<sup>77</sup>. It is important to note that the evidence base for these factors is often from studies on young people, not specifically homeless young people.

**Table 3.0** Principles of practice for working with young homeless people

## Strategy

## Background

### Positive relationships

Developing and maintaining respect, a sense of connection and trust between service staff and young people is seen as essential from the perspective of both young people and service providers.<sup>46, 47, 101, 102</sup> Services where staff were caring, friendly and supported young people to think positively and develop their skill base were perceived as attractive by young people.<sup>101, 102</sup>

### Collaboration

Young homeless people have needs that extend over a number of areas including housing, welfare, employment and mental health. When service delivery is fragmented and geographically dispersed this can be frustrating for young people as they experience service access difficulties and are often required to repeat their story.<sup>102</sup> A lack of collaboration results in inefficiency in the form of duplication and misunderstandings surrounding accountability and responsibility.<sup>30</sup>

### Strengths-based

Young homeless people demonstrate strength through the personal skills required to survive on a daily basis.<sup>50</sup> Taking a strengths-based approach requires service providers to recognise and support a young person's individual strengths as well as the strengths located within their environment.<sup>77</sup> A strengths-based approach facilitates the development of resilience within a young person and allows them to take control of their lives.<sup>77</sup> When interventions aimed at young people have taken a strengths-based approach it has had a positive impact on outcomes.<sup>103</sup>

### Participation and inclusion

It is important to acknowledge a young person's autonomy and address the issues that they perceive as important.<sup>77, 103</sup> To encourage participation and positive outcomes, services can provide young people with opportunities that are relevant and meaningful and are delivered in a way that is acceptable.<sup>77</sup>

### Individually responsive and flexible

Services that are flexible and individually responsive reflect the diverse needs and backgrounds of homeless young people.<sup>77</sup> Flexibility can be achieved through the provision of outreach services,<sup>104</sup> flexible opening hours,<sup>46</sup> meeting times that suit the young person<sup>105</sup> and through individual case management.<sup>77</sup>

### Capacity building

Capacity building can be addressed from both an individual and community perspective. Capacity building in individuals reflects the need to foster the development of personal skills and attributes such as resilience.<sup>77</sup> From a community perspective, capacity building can reflect the need to build up the capabilities of the service provider workforce to better meet the needs of young people.<sup>77</sup>

### Continuity of care

Often young homeless people are involved with services for many years and engage with multiple services throughout this time.<sup>77</sup> Providing continuity of care ensures that they do not slip through the gaps when transitioning between services.<sup>77</sup> This means addressing longer term care, treatment and support where required.<sup>30, 77</sup>

### Sustainable

The provision of long term support is an important aspect of care for young vulnerable people due to the complex and often long-term nature of their service needs.<sup>106</sup> Barker et al<sup>77</sup> identified a number of factors that can increase the sustainability of a service. These include;

- ➔ Development of community based services
- ➔ Development partnerships and methods of service coordination between services
- ➔ Inclusion of young people in decision making processes
- ➔ Work force development
- ➔ Evaluation of effectiveness of services

For a guide on principles of practice for working with homeless young people read Research to Practice Series Issue 1: Interventions and practice principles for supporting young people who are homeless  
[www.acu.edu.au/about\\_acu/faculties,\\_institutes\\_and\\_centres/centres/institute\\_of\\_child\\_protection\\_studies/our\\_work/practice\\_series](http://www.acu.edu.au/about_acu/faculties,_institutes_and_centres/centres/institute_of_child_protection_studies/our_work/practice_series)

