

# **How does Youth Rezolutions' "Rez Skills" Program aim to combat homelessness?**

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## **Abstract:**

The aim of this research paper is to show the criticality of Youth Rezolutions' "Rez Skills" Program in working towards addressing and reducing homelessness in New South Wales (NSW). Youth Rezolutions is an organisation servicing the Local Government Areas (LGAs) of The Hills, Parramatta, Cumberland, and Blacktown, in Sydney's West and North-West. The organisation works specifically with young people between 16-25 years of age and is classified as a Specialist Homelessness Service (SHS).

Youth Rezolutions Rez Skills program is one branch of its service that aims to reduce homelessness by providing young people with a range of credentials and qualifications that allows for them to be 'job ready'. Thus, the program itself focuses on reducing homelessness and the risk of homelessness by increasing a young person's chances of employment. Additionally, some of the Rez Skill courses, like Kids CPR, is beneficial for not only obtaining employment, but can also equip young people (and young parents) with the skills and confidence to assist their loved ones in crisis.

**Keywords:** Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS), Registered Training Providers (RTOs), Young People (those aged between 16-25 years), Living Skills Approach.

## **Literature Review:**

Research shows that young people in Australia are disproportionately overrepresented in homelessness statistics, which is highly likely to be an underestimation of the actual numbers of young people experiencing homelessness (Pearl, Harry & Brophy 2022; Loosemore, Bridgemore, Russel & Alkilani 2021). A survey undertaken by *Mission Australia* between 2020-2021, found that one in twenty survey participants had experienced homelessness; this was an increase from pre COVID-19 pandemic statistics, where one in twenty-five participants had experienced homelessness (Mission Australia 2021). Whilst on a case-by-case basis there would be a myriad of reasons why this increase occurred (for example: domestic and family violence), it is undoubted that the economic impact of

government restrictions on businesses and the subsequent 'letting go' of employees has also contributed to this increase. As recognised in research undertaken by *Youth Action* (2022), young people during the pandemic 'bore the brunt' of labour market shortages in NSW as many of the industries in which they work-retail and hospitality- experienced significant job losses. Furthermore, *Youth Action* found that the statistics were worse for women and those living in remote areas, with limited data available on how this period also impacted upon those who a part of the LGBTIQ+ community, First Nations people and people with a disability (Littleton & Campbell 2022; Churchill 2020). Finally, as acknowledged by Dhakal, Connell, and Burgess (2018), young people are a unique group in the labour market and one that often experiences high levels of discrimination due to their age and higher rates of unemployment particularly as they transition from and between schooling, further training/education, and different jobs at multiple times into adulthood.

Youth Rezolutions' Rez Skills program seeks to address the issue of youth homelessness by allowing young people to upskill and participate in the labour market, thereby decreasing the risk of homelessness. By partnering with Registered Training Providers (RTOs), the organisation enables all young people in the LGA's it services to complete qualifications like White Card training for construction work, a forklift driving course, First Aid and CPR for children, referee, and sport coaching courses along with other job ready training; free of charge. This type of skills-based training is heavily supported by the available research that purports that one of the main ways young people can combat homelessness is through education and skill training (Pearl, Harry & Brophy 2022), as this is considered a pre-cursor to employment. By providing skill training opportunities, Youth Rez is clearly operating from Sen and Nassbaum's empowerment framework (cited in Stein & Mackenzie 2017), focusing on an individual's freedoms and capabilities in terms of employment to address the homelessness problem, and providing training to young people, where training opportunities may not have otherwise been available to them (Pearl, Harry & Brophy 2022).

Further, programs like Rez Skills, has long-term cumulative effects because assisting a young person with employment not only reduces their risk of homelessness in the now, but has also been found to reverse scarring effects, reducing unemployment and homelessness later in life (Dhakal, Connell & Burgess 2018). In addition to reducing homelessness, it is well documented that the residual effect of employment is also the lessening of other future health and social issues (Buddelmyer & Herault 2020). This long-term impact of the program

dually meets the organisations' living skills approach to working with young people, where in addition to providing certified training opportunities case workers can work with young people in building capacity and interpersonal skills to foster independent living (Ravindra 2012); by providing skill training for employment Youth Rezolutions provides a mechanism by which this aim can be achieved.

Conclusively, there is an inextricable link between youth unemployment and youth homelessness. Through the Rez Skills program, Youth Rezolutions can bridge the gap between job readiness and training, which in turn fosters employment and a decrease in an individual's chances of experiencing or becoming homeless. Through the continuous refinement and changes to the courses on offer, Youth Rez will be able to successfully match skills and courses to areas of need in the job market (Waugh & Cirecelli 2021), enhancing the future success of the program by creating employment opportunities for young people experiencing hardship.

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