Hanging by a Thread: Our Search for Home

A Youth Photovoice Project Report

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Cover image source: Anglicare youth service participant (Anonymous)

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Youth homelessness remains a pressing social issue. Statistics paint a concerning picture: a rate of 15.3 per 10,000 young people presenting alone to specialised homelessness services between 2021-2022 highlights the prevalence of this challenge (AHIW, 2023). The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child holds that young people have a right to express their views on matters that impact their lives, and for their views to be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity. The World Health Organisation (2012, 2020) also recognises the importance of services being youth-friendly, which they define as being accessible, acceptable and appropriate to young people. Despite this, a crucial gap exists: the lack of youth voices in research and decision-making processes in policy and practice (Waite et al., 2024). Critical areas impacting the well-being of young people, such as domestic violence interventions, child protection, youth justice, and services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youths, often fail to adequately incorporate their perspectives (Kuskoff, 2018; Stafford et al. 2021; Stambe & Meyer, 2022). Even more concerning is the near absence of youth-led initiatives in health and social care (Day et al., 2023). There is a critical need to amplify the voices of this population to ensure interventions are informed by their realities and, consequently, are more effective. Integrating the perspectives of young people experiencing homelessness is paramount in bridging this knowledge gap and fostering the development of impactful solutions.

Anglicare Southern Queensland (ASQ) provides support and empowerment for young people across Australia who experience marginalisation by offering a diverse array of services ranging from counselling and education to mental health support and assistance with homelessness. ASQ remains steadfast in its commitment to providing holistic care and support as the demand for services to support children and families continues to rise. In the fiscal year 2022-23 alone, ASQ bolstered 1,695 foster and kinship carers, facilitating 383,863 nights of care for children and young people. Additionally, ASQ dedicated over 46,000 hours to supporting women and young individuals facing homelessness, exemplifying their dedication to fostering resilient communities (ASQ, 2023).

ASQ's community services are a range of services designed as a 'wrap around support' system, addressing both their health and social needs to foster holistic wellness. ASQ's ongoing efforts are underscored by a strategic focus on co-creating inclusive, safe, and nurturing environments that enable families, youth, and children to thrive and realise their fullest potential. ASQ advocates for systemic change and provides critical crisis and medium-term accommodations and support services to young

individuals experiencing homelessness. Moreover, they extend their advocacy, accommodation, and support to those navigating the out-of-home care system and young individuals transitioning out of care. As ASQ continues to champion societal transformations and individual empowerment, they recognise the paramount importance of diverse knowledge bases and stakeholder engagement. The ongoing research endeavours, particularly centred on young people's firsthand experiences of homelessness and housing support services like ASQ's, serve as vital conduits for amplifying their voices and shaping enhanced service delivery for the betterment of our communities.

This report details a photovoice case study "Hanging by a Thread: Our search for home" that explores young people who are experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness and their understanding of 'home'. Unlike traditional methods that position participants passively, photovoice facilitates the active co-creation of knowledge from community members and researchers (Wang & Burris, 1997). In this project, photovoice was integrated into a community-based participatory action research (CBAR) methodology to support participants in telling the story they want to relay about their own lives, and include them in advocacy work to drive system change. By capturing the lived experiences of young people supported by ASQ through photography, the young people retained agency over their narratives and illuminate the complexities of their situations and the importance of feeling at home.

The purpose of this report is to document the research project, 'Hanging by a Thread: Our Search for Home', the project objectives, aims, process and findings. The research questions that underpin this report are:

1. How do young people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness use photography as a way of understanding their experiences and make meaning of 'home'?

2. How can the photographs and stories from young people inform service delivery, advocacy and the design of a youth transition facility?

1.2 The context: Youth homelessness and unstable housing in Australia

Homelessness is recognised as "one of, if not the most significant forms through which individuals are excluded socially" (Horsell, 2006, p. 213) due to its adverse impact on people's health, wellbeing and socio-economic circumstances (AIHW, 2023). The experience of homelessness for young people, either alone or with family, can significantly impact their transition to adulthood, as this developmental stage lays crucial foundations for their future health, wellbeing, social networks and ability to participate in society (AIHW, 2021; Heerde & Patton, 2020). When homeless, young people face increased risk of exploitation, exposure to violence as both victims and perpetrators, as well as alcohol and other drug (mis)use (Davies & Wood, 2018; Heerde & Patton, 2020). They also face barriers to accessing food, basic

hygiene, mental and physical health care as well as education, training and employment (Davies & Wood, 2018; Heerde & Patton, 2020). Studies suggest that when homeless, young people may have no choice but to engage in behaviours generally considered as socially unacceptable to survive, meet their needs and respond to their exclusion and vulnerability (Heerde & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2020). This can in turn compound their disadvantage, marginalisation, and stigma. Research also suggests that young people experiencing homelessness are more likely than the general population to also be involved in the child protection and/or youth justice system (AIHW, 2012).

In recognition of the detrimental impacts of homelessness on young people's current and future trajectories, they are identified as a priority cohort in Australia's National Housing and Homelessness Agreement. Despite this, those aged 12-24-years make up 23% - nearly 1 in 4 - of all people experiencing homelessness in Australia (ABS, 2023). Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander young people are overrepresented within these figures, particularly for those presenting for services unaccompanied by adults (AIHW, 2024). In 2019-20, more than half (51%) of specialist homelessness services (SHS) clients experiencing persistent homelessness, that is being homeless for more than seven months in the preceding 24-month period, were under 25 years old (AIHW, 2023). Staggeringly, nearly half (48%) of the young people aged 18-24-years who received support from SHS in 2018-20 were repeat clients (AIHW, 2023). The rates of homelessness for young people are significantly higher for those in remote and very remote areas, and in the lowest socio-economic areas (AIHW, 2021).

Australia adopts a sociocultural definition of homelessness, which considers a lack of autonomy, tenure and adequacy as the criteria for homelessness, rather than simply the lack of a 'roof' (ABS, 2012). As such, young people experience homelessness not only when sleeping rough, but also when couch surfing or moving frequently from one form of temporary accommodation (e.g., emergency accommodation) to another, as well as when living in places below the minimum standard of a 'home' (e.g., boarding houses or caravan parks) (Mackenzie & Chamberlain, 1992). Couch surfing, often called an 'invisible' form of homelessness, is particularly concentrated within the youth population. Young people seeking support from SHS report couch surfing at a higher rate than those aged over 25-years (AIHW, 2023). Evidence suggests that young people who couch surf may be more likely to be female, report a mental health condition (AIHW, 2018) yet be less likely to use social support services (Terui & Hsieh, 2016), particularly when they identify as a member of a marginalised group (Hail-Jares, 2023) and may be de-prioritised by services compared to those sleeping rough (Moore, 2017).

The drivers of homelessness are complex and multifaceted, involving both individual and structural factors (Flatau et al., 2021). Evidence indicates that young people often enter homelessness due to ruptured family relationships characterised by high conflict, domestic and family violence as well as abuse and neglect (Gaetz et al., 2016; Kalemba et al., 2022). This is particularly true for LGBTIQA young

people whose experience of homelessness may be driven by family rejection (McCarthy & Parr, 2022). Mental health issues as well as drug and alcohol use have also been associated, directly and indirectly, with youth homelessness (Flatau et al., 2021). Young people are also significantly disadvantaged in the housing market. The current housing crisis, driven by a significant lack of affordable and social housing, disproportionately impacts young people who have fewer economic assets, lower earning capacity and higher rates of unemployment than adults (ABS, 2021; Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute [AHURI], 2023; Flatau et al., 2021). Young people reliant on Youth Allowance, particularly when disconnected from family support, are particularly disadvantaged due to the low payment rates (AHURI, 2023). Indeed, the latest Anglicare Rental Affordability Snapshot shows there is not a single property in Australia, rental or shared housing, that is affordable for someone on Youth Allowance (Anglicare, 2024). Evidence suggests that the lack of affordable housing contributes to a large proportion (51%) of young people experiencing homelessness living in severely overcrowded dwellings (ABS, 2023), which limits their privacy, autonomy and access to amenities, while increasing risk of exposure to illness, disease and violence (Brackertz et al., 2019).

High housing costs in concert with young people's lack of competitiveness in the market due to lower incomes, make it difficult for young people to move out of complex and dangerous family home environments to safer housing, instead forcing them to choose between remaining at home or leaving into homelessness (AHURI, 2023; Kalemba et al., 2022). Further, evidence increasingly shows the importance of family support, both financial and in-kind, in helping young adults to secure stable housing (AHURI, 2023) – a resource that many young people experiencing homelessness do not have (Kalemba et al., 2022). To address this, we need an increased supply of affordable housing to allow young people access to stability and safety that will support their transition to adulthood and enhance their outcomes in a variety of social, economic and wellbeing domains. The youth transition facility ASQ is developing directly addresses the lack of housing support for young people. Furthermore, ASQ plays a key role supporting young people experiencing marginalisation and advocating for improved policies to address the structural drivers of poverty and homelessness. ASQ's 'Hanging by a Thread' project is a powerful initiative that elevates young people's voices in the public sphere, informing the development of services and policies.

1.3 'Hanging by a Thread' photovoice research process

This report explores the 'Hanging by a Thread' project, which was a partnership between ASQ, the ARC Centre of Excellence for Children and Families Over the Life Course, and The University of Queensland (UQ). The project employed photovoice to delve into the experiences of young people facing or at risk of homelessness. This project underscores the critical importance of including young people's voices in both research and advocacy efforts.

Young people are a significant demographic, yet their perspectives are often absent from decision-making processes that directly impact their lives. This is particularly true for issues like homelessness, where young individuals face unique challenges. By engaging them as active participants in research and advocacy, we acknowledge their agency, lived realities, and unique perspectives. Furthermore, amplifying their voices fosters a sense of ownership and investment in solutions. By centring youth voices in initiatives like 'Hanging by a Thread', we gain valuable insights while emphasising their lived expertise and fundamental knowledge for practice and system change.

The 'Hanging by a Thread' project, spearheaded by ASQ, exemplifies the transformative potential of photovoice in illuminating the realities of youth homelessness. This project was designed to provide young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness with a platform to express their experiences, challenges, and aspirations through photography. The project was also designed to help inform the design of a fit-for-purpose transitional youth facility using a relational service model being led by ASQ. By leveraging the visual medium, ASQ sought to transcend the limitations of traditional research methods and capture the multifaceted dimensions of youth homelessness and housing instability.

The objectives of the 'Hanging by a Thread' project were threefold:

Empowerment: Empower young people to share their stories and perspectives on homelessness and the meaning of home through the medium of photography.

Understanding: Gain deeper insights into the lived experiences, challenges, and strengths of young people facing or at risk of homelessness. Understanding their sense of home and what it means to them also provides valuable insights into the development of a fit-for-purpose transitional youth facility being developed by ASQ.

Advocacy: Utilise the visual narratives captured through photovoice to advocate for policy changes, community support, and interventions to address youth homelessness effectively.

Recruitment of young people

ASQ employed a deliberate and inclusive approach to participant selection, ensuring representation from diverse backgrounds and experiences. Young individuals either experiencing or at risk of homelessness were invited to participate voluntarily in the project. The young people were being supported through two ASQ INSYNC services at Beenleigh and Cleveland, and the Intensive Bail Initiative in the Gold Coast and Logan. None of the young people were under child protection orders at the time of the study. The young people volunteered their time, were renumerated with gift vouchers for their participation in each research activity and knew they could withdraw at any time without penalty or impacting their relationship with ASQ.

The research activities included attendance at a project planning workshop, including photography training by acclaimed professional photographers, a photography period in which participants shared the work they produced on a dedicated online platform, and three consecutive analytical workshops in which the photography was discussed, photographs captioned, and an exhibition planned. We also offered a one-on-one follow-up interview to young people to provide opportunities to comment on the project processes.

In total 14 young people attended the project planning workshops conducted at the two different sites. Nine young people contributed photographs via upload to the shared online platform. Eight participants attended at least one of the two analysis workshops. We invited all contributors to attend the launch of the photographic exhibition and three young people attended. One young person was interviewed as part of the follow up about the research process. Two of the 14 young people originally recruited into the project identified as male. All of the young people were supported by ASQ via their INSYNC and Intensive Bail Initiative support services and considered to be 'mature minors'.

Introduction and training workshops

Two introductory workshops were held at INSYNC offices in Beenleigh (April 21, 2023) and Cleveland (May 8, 2023) to introduce aspiring young photographers to the photovoice project. These workshops aimed to equip participants with the necessary skills and knowledge about the intended purpose of the project to contribute meaningfully. Attendees included ASQ staff, UQ researchers, the young participants themselves, and professional photographers (Damien Bredberg at Beenleigh and Suzanne Smith at Cleveland).

The UQ research team facilitated the sessions, providing an overview of the photovoice methodology. Utilising a prior research project on adult homelessness, housing instability, and health (Plage et al., 2023) as a practical example, they emphasised the power of photography as a storytelling tool that transcends aesthetics. The focus was on empowering participants to use photography to express their unique perspectives on the project theme, fostering creative exploration rather than technical perfection. Through diverse photographic examples, from literal portrayals to abstract expressions, participants were encouraged to find their own visual voices.

Personal safety and ethical considerations surrounding the use of photography for storytelling were also addressed. Following an interactive Q&A session on the research and participation process, the UQ research team obtained informed consent from each young person.

The professional photographers then provided practical training, equipping participants with valuable photographic techniques and practical tips. This included hands-on practice sessions in nearby areas, allowing them to experiment with their smartphones and hone their skills with the photographers'

guidance. The young people uploaded their photographs onto a google drive at their own pace and convenience.

With newfound knowledge and skills, the young participants embarked on a photographic journey to document their daily lives, environments, and interactions. They were encouraged to exercise creative autonomy in selecting subjects and scenes that resonated with their personal experiences. The project theme was jointly decided, and the young people expressed an interest in researching what 'home looks like and feels like for them'. Each photograph served as a visual artifact to demonstrate the meaning of 'home', encapsulating emotions, challenges, and moments of resilience.

Analysis workshops

After the photography phase, participants engaged in three facilitated group discussions designed to foster a safe and supportive environment. These sessions served as a platform for participants to share their captured moments, reflect on their deeper meaning, and articulate the stories woven within each photograph. Group discussions acted as a catalyst, sparking dialogue, empathy, and mutual understanding among participants. Through the sharing of their visual narratives, participants not only validated each other's experiences but also forged meaningful connections and a sense of solidarity within the group.

The first analysis workshop took place in Cleveland on June 19th, 2023, and was attend by seven participants. With respect to the participants' wishes, the workshops were not audio-recorded; however, the research team documented key points through brief notes. During these workshops, the focus remained on empowering young people to analyse their photographs scaffolded by use of SHOWED prompting (Wang & Burris, 1997).

SHOWED is analytical guide, taking contributors through a list of questions that gradually move from description (what is happening in the photograph) towards tapping into a photograph's transformative potential (social and structural processes). In this way, SHOWED prompts photographers to make connections between personal experiences, each other and broader processes, facilitating critical questions about the wider social problems that need addressing, and crucially, providing ideas for what could be actioned to drive progressive social change. During these group sessions, we encouraged contributors to share their photographs and reflections on them first, before inviting the group to add their reflections. Photographers were supported

SHOWED

1. What is **S**hown here?

2. What is really **H**appening here?

3. How does this relate to **O**ur lives?

4. Why are things this **w**ay?

5. How could this image **E**ducate people?

6. What can be **D**one about this?

in a safe sharing environment, and the young people were respectful and engaged deeply in each other's storytelling and analyses.

The second workshop was scheduled in response to participants' appetite for further time to engage in photography and reflection. It took place on August 21st, 2023 at the Beenleigh INSYNC office and was attended by six participants. Adhering to the same established analysis framework, this second reflective workshop allowed for the exploration of additional photographs and inclusion of a new participant who contributed their own visual narrative and analysis. Additionally, this workshop provided an opportunity for the UQ researchers to inquire about emerging themes from the participants' perspective in preparation of the photographic exhibition. Notably, "belonging," "growing up," and "change" were identified as key issues resonating throughout the photographs. Participants also contributed short captions or phrases to further enrich their photographs.

Following the analysis workshops, the UQ team organised the photographs into a sequence along the above themes, drawing on the meticulous work of the young people identifying recurrent ideas and emotions. Themes such as resilience, instability, community, and hope permeated the narratives, offering rich and nuanced insights into the experiences of young people facing or at risk of homelessness. The UQ team curated a sequence for the photographs and a proposed title based on the young people's insights. During a third workshop on October 3rd, 2023, three participants, alongside a UQ researcher, reviewed the curation and proposed title, providing valuable feedback and final approval of three main themes:

- Living and feeling at home

- Struggle (life does not make sense)

- Belonging

This is when the photovoice project was also named 'Hanging by a Thread: Our Search for Home'. The 'Hanging by a Thread' exhibition was launched on October 27th, 2023 through an in-person display and also as an online gallery, accessible here.

2. PRESENTATION AND ADVOCACY: AMPLIFYING VOICES, DRIVING CHANGE

Through the visual narratives captured by the young participants, ASQ aims to raise awareness about youth homelessness, challenge stereotypes, and advocate for systemic changes and sustainable support services. By amplifying the voices of young people, ASQ and its partners catalyse conversations and actions to tackle the root causes of youth homelessness and foster more inclusive and supportive communities. Here, we discuss insights from the 'Hanging by a Thread' photovoice project.

The overarching key finding: The importance of 'home'.

The project invited young participants to reflect on their personal understanding of home. For some, the discussions highlighted the challenges they currently face, including financial insecurity, mental health struggles, and the burden of daily decision-making. The young people showed photographs of needing to collect cans to supplement their Youth Allowance that they struggle to survive on (photo: Everyday Struggles). They shared their self-care practices, which might appear unconventional but functioned as essential coping mechanisms for them (photo: Unhealthy Addiction). A common theme with the young people was the difficulty they had in making decisions. They often reported feeling 'stuck' or being at a crossroads, struggling to take the next step. The young people would report seeing alternative pathways, ones their friends are on, or which are socially acceptable, and then seeing the set of pathways available to them as limiting or leading in a less than ideal direction. For example, during an analytical work shop a young person joked that their friends are on pathways to jobs, while theirs was leading to "teenage pregnancy" (Fieldnotes, 19 June 2023). The young people reported feeling like they had limited choices available to them, and that they were stuck in a loop repeating the same poor choices, struggling to take a different route (photos: Compass, An Illusion of Choice, I've Done it Again). These discussions implicitly pointed to underlying issues and the impact of past trauma.

The concept of 'home' extended beyond physical shelter. Some participants described experiences of homelessness, living in foster care, or a metaphorical sense of (not) belonging or lacking a strong sense of self. In 'Prisoner of the Mind' the young person provides two images of 'home'. There is the sleeping bag when they were sleeping rough, and then their current living arrangement that might provide 'shelter' but is not a healthy or safe environment. This subsequently has an impact on their mental wellbeing. The young people were poignant and reflective in their photographs, indicating a strong sense of social justice and responsibility. For example, the photograph 'Please Return' signals a sense of abandonment, suggesting a 'home' does exist for the young person but the responsibility is on society to provide such housing. Another example is 'One Small Action Has a Big Impact' where the

waves represent the 'other' – an adult or society – that make decisions and forever reshape the beach. The beach here represents the young people, whose lives are impacted by the decisions of adults. The young people acknowledged societal expectations and the resulting tension between their inner world (including their emotional needs) and the perceived expectations of conformity and emotional regulation. This led to feelings of uncertainty and stagnation when faced with difficult choices.

The photographs told stories about the physicality of a 'home', a space where they could have their belongings and feel comfortable expressing themselves freely. One photograph for example, shows a mess being left on a table (photo: The Mess Can Wait). Unlike the strict rules of shared or transitional housing, a 'home' is a place where mess was accepted because it signalled a sense of belonging and return. The discussions revealed a broader understanding of 'home' that went beyond physical housing. Participants recognised it as a symbol for other missing elements in their lives. This was poignantly captured by the metaphor of a 'Grocery List' of desired qualities. In this photograph, the young person juxtaposed everyday survival items, such as food, with other non-material items that are also just as needed for survival and indeed thriving, "love, care, mum off drugs". 'Home' represented a feeling of belonging, stability, safety, and a secure foundation from which they could navigate the challenges of growing up. Having a home is a safe space which allows young people to make mistakes, learn from them and prepare for the responsibilities of adulthood (Ribar & Wong, 2022). Importantly, what resonates across all the photographs is the disparity between what 'home' should be, and what the young people are experiencing. Thus, they are 'Hanging by a Thread'.

The photographs, captions and some brief explanatory notes (where available) are presented on the following pages.

Everyday Struggles

10 cents. Collecting these to get a little bit of extra for things I want. The bottles look like people lined up as a depiction of society. Waiting to be knocked over in a Domino effect or as a wake up call.

Unhealthy Addiction

Smokes and vapes and (expensive) self-medication. Guilt about spending and doing something bad, but it helps me cope and get through the day.

Compass

There's more than one way to get to the same thing. This creates confusion. There is so much information on the internet that tells you how to do basic things. A compass gives the illusion of choice.

An Illusion of Choice

The lights are where my peers are supposed to be. The path is going somewhere, everyone is going on one path, and I wonder— can I go there? This path seems to stop — is it a teenage pregnancy or another roadblock? Just another brick in the floor; I walk this lonely road. We need a more supportive environment.

I've Done It Again

Footprints going in different directions, but following the wrong direction and repeating choices you know could lead you to a bad spot: I've done it again.

Prisoner of the Mind

Where I came from and where I am living now. Living in a trapped house and a trapped mind, there is alcohol and drugs. Housing isn't the only solution — the spirals and trauma continues. The person sitting in the middle, that's me.

Please Return

One Small Action Has a Big Impact

The tide brings in stuff and take things out. It is the stuff that leaves behind traces. Our actions have an effect, on yourself or other people and it never ends. The beach can be scary because the waves always knock you down. They can push you back, but they can also push you forward and help you. The shells on the beach: we experience so much trauma, and we don't want to see it again, we just want to get rid of it.
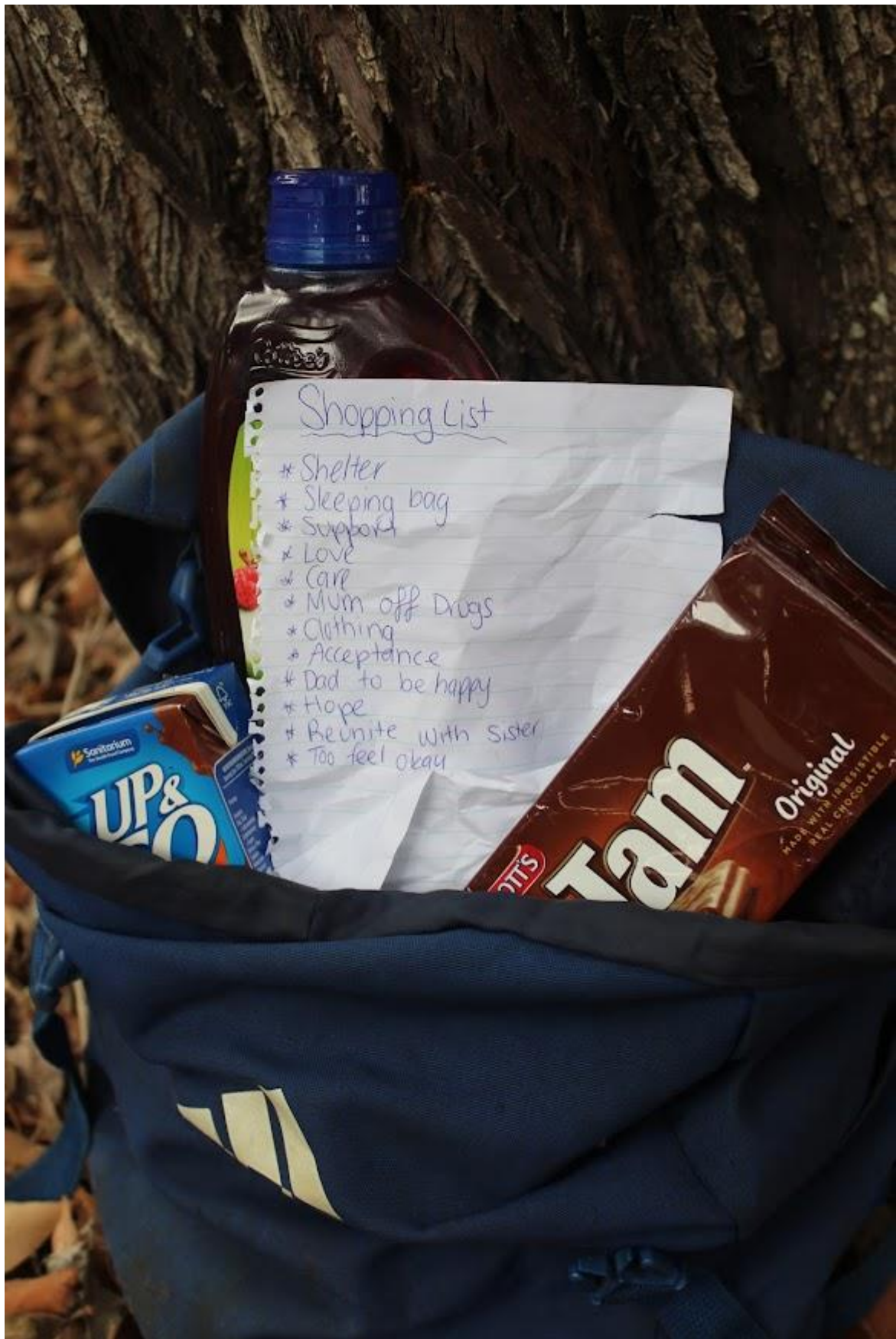
The Mess Can Wait

Living in a share house there are rules you have to follow. The living areas are not just for you. In your own home, you don't have to worry about the mess. You have your own rules. This is your home. You don't have to leave or be moved on. You will be back here again later, and the mess can wait until then for you to clean it up.

Grocery Shopping

Clean Mattress

Going between residential homes, the beds were ugly and uncomfortable. We take for granted the comfort of a soft bed. One that is done up nicely, in a nice room. It changes how you feel.
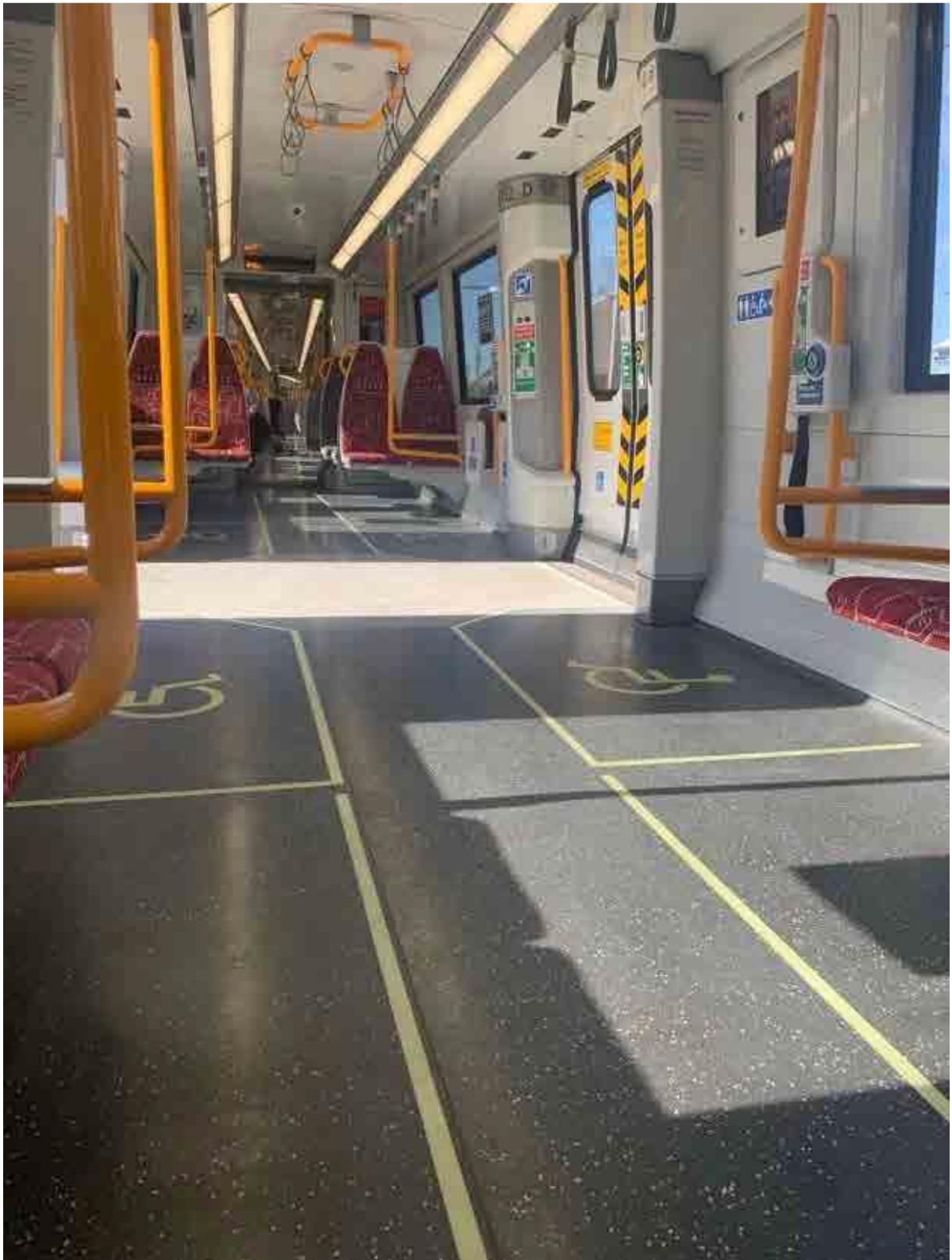
Moments of affection

There are moments for connection, moments of affection. Doesn't have to be another person. But we all need this.
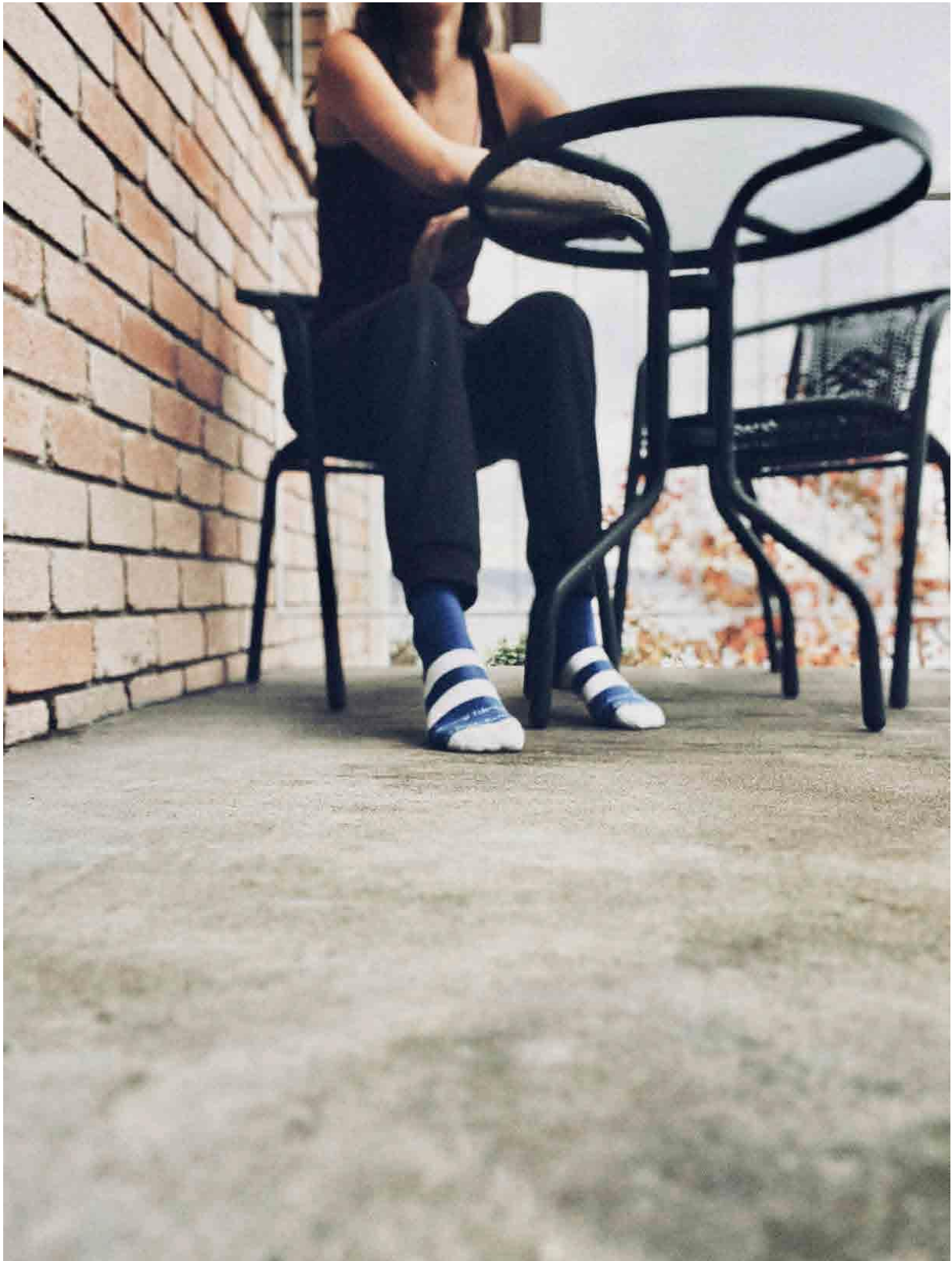
New Age Society

Home

Sitting With My Thoughts

I've been staying in so many places with bricks like this. Social housing uses these bricks. In a home, I can sit and reflect. I can take the time to consider what I want to do next. I can plan for the future.

Leading to Nowhere

The road isn't really full; there is a silence about it. Driving is a strategy to cope and make space for calmness.

Past the Tipping Point

The bucket is full and represents emotion and the overflow of emotion. Sometimes we cannot express those emotions. It shows clean and ironed jeans that represent people around you expecting you to know how to act accordingly. You can't see how full the bucket is, really only the surface like an iceberg. You don't see what is underneath. You have to show calmness, not what is happening underneath. It is hard for me to express emotions. Anger is a way to express the pain; need a healthy outlet. How about subsidised rage rooms?
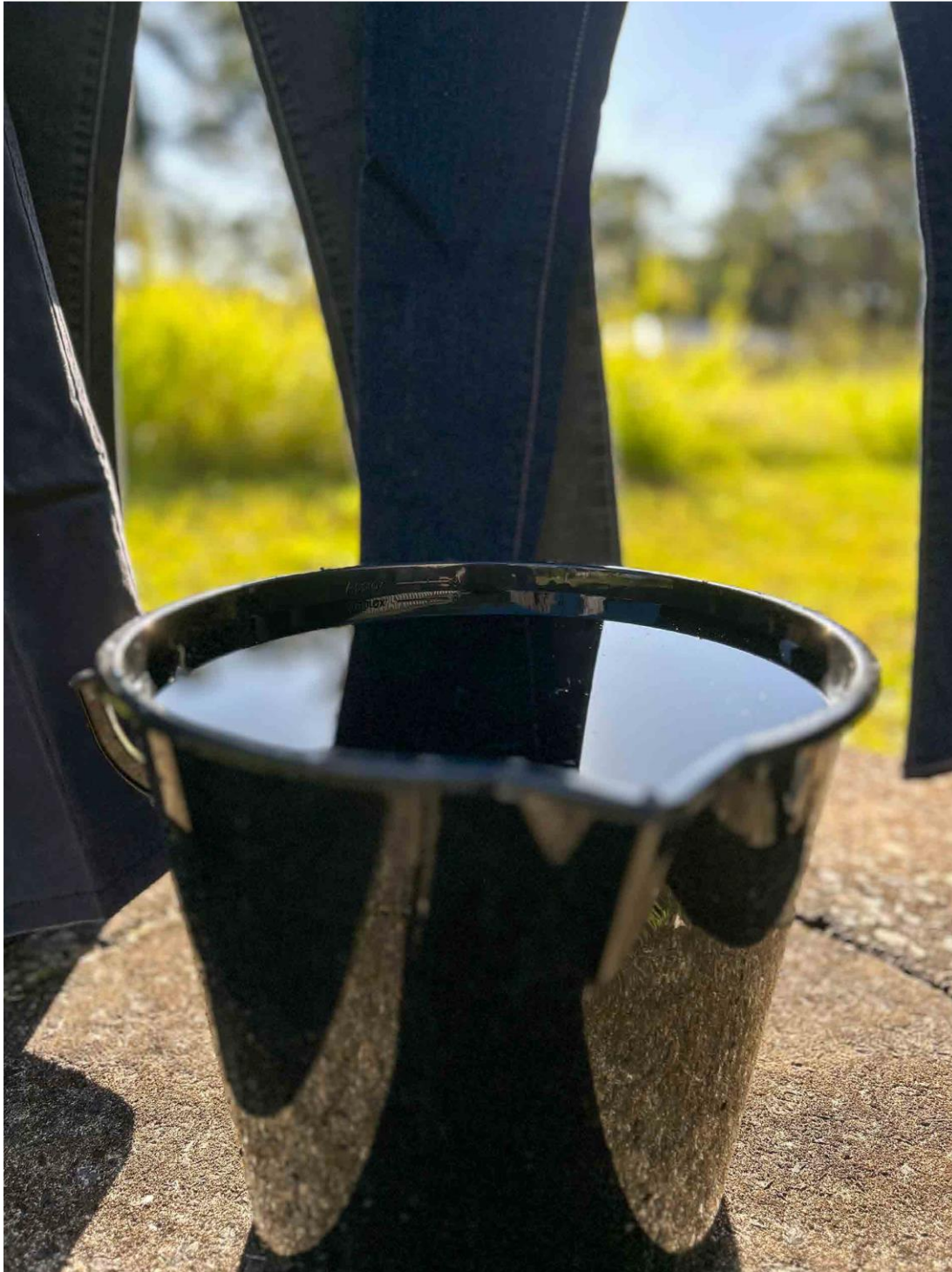
Fuel the Bad Wolf

We consume these energy drinks just to get through. It's like an addiction, something you have to have so you can function. It is like a missing chemical that you need to keep going. I relied on this to get through school while also having a job. It fills in a gap, but it has consequences. But it can also speed you up, make the flashbacks worse, when you need to slow down. You can also crash afterwards. It is the monster in my life, and it fuels the bad wolf.

Blinded by the Light

It is about light and contrast. I imagine myself sitting under it.

Grounded

Left to Wander

I didn't have anywhere to sleep on this night. I was walking around the streets with my partner trying to think of what to do next. This is what it feels like, being left to wander with no place to rest.

A Reflection

Living without things, walking around at night. This is somewhere I have slept. The lights symbolise helping me to keep going. The city is a big place with opportunities to progress but also to get into trouble. The reflection shows, this is not the real world, no one wants to be in this (our) reality. We are all evolving together, we are all under construction but there are two different worlds here — they are clashing but also together.
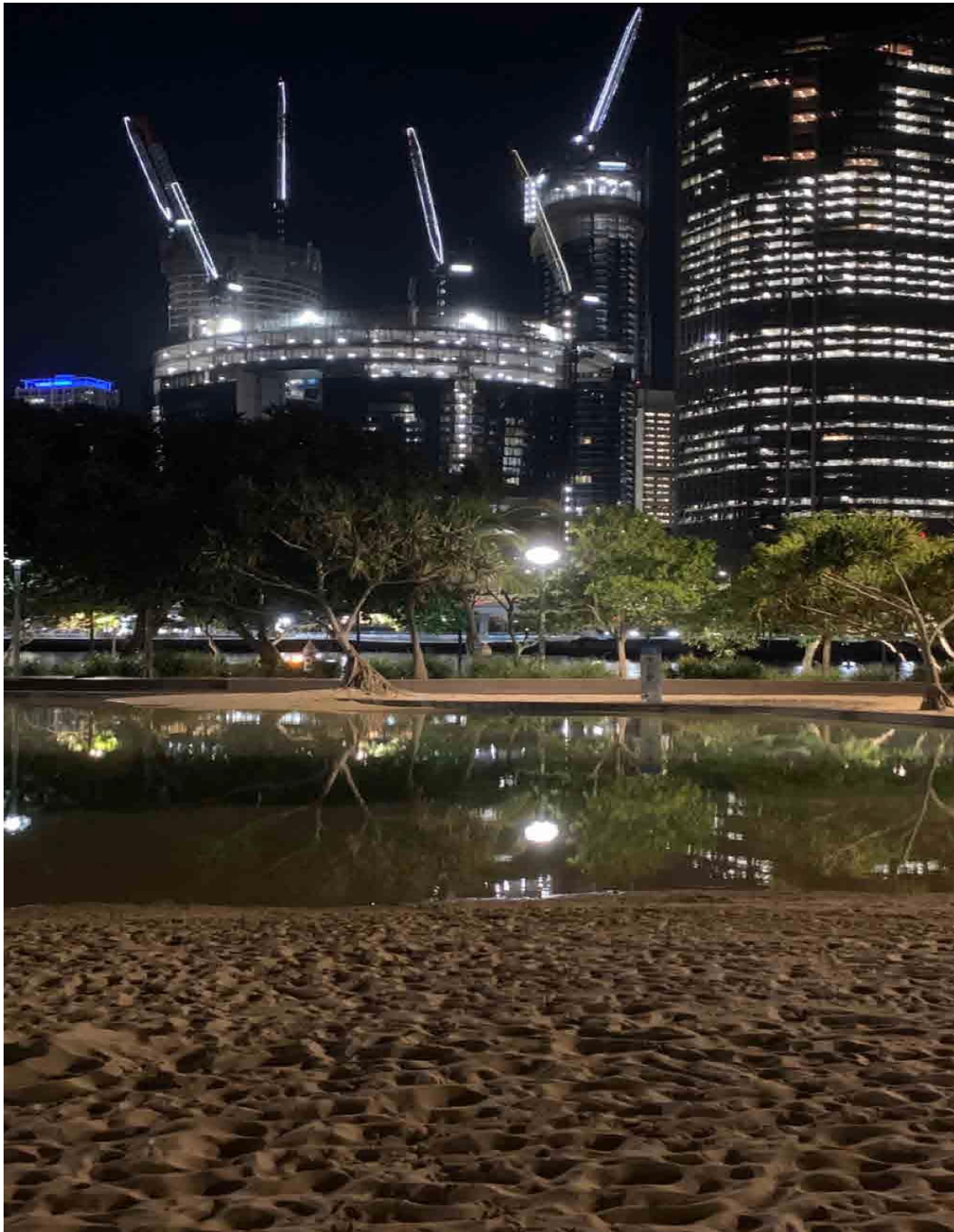
3. IMPACT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Impact

The 'Hanging by a Thread' project yielded significant impact and outcomes on multiple levels:

Empowerment: Participants reported feeling empowered and validated through their participation in the project, citing the opportunity to share their stories and perspectives. The interview participant explained they wanted to be involved the project because "it was a good opportunity to showcase a homeless youth's perspective". The young person enjoyed "getting everyone's points of views and perspectives". The young person described their process, that they would think about what photo they wanted to take and then, "I saw something that had some really good meaning behind and then I just tried to get a good angle from where I was sitting or where I was laying". When asked about how they felt to know their photographs are on display to the public, the participant said, "I'm pretty proud of myself, knowing I got my story across". The young people were engaged with the project, took photography as a serious creative and introspective endeavour which is evidenced by the level of sophistication in their photographs (see Section 2).

Awareness and Advocacy: The project continues to generate awareness and empathy within the broader community about the complex realities of youth homelessness. The visual narratives captured through photovoice served as powerful advocacy tools. The photographs are currently being displayed in the foyer of Duncan Street, a large commercial building that is the location of the Anglicare Southern Queensland Office and other organisations. Duncan Street is in Fortitude Valley and the exhibition is open to the public. The UQ research team also assisted the ASQ Research and Advocacy team to explain the research to their fundraising base. The photographs will continue to be used to raise awareness and funding for the building of a new youth transition facility. The display of photographs has been well received by the public. A respondent to a survey at the launch exhibition demonstrated an appreciation of the deliberate effort by the ASQ and the research team to ensure young people could use their voice: "It was great to see artwork generates by the youth themselves, and from the type of depictions presented it felt they were given the freedom to point out also to portrait also potential controversial aspects of their lives. Well done!"

Community Building: The project fostered a sense of community, solidarity, and mutual support among participants, who found strength and resilience in sharing their experiences with others facing similar

challenges. The young people saw value in being involved in the group project as a pleasurable activity, one describing the experience as "cool, I enjoyed it" in the follow-up interview.

3.2 Recommendations

Drawing from the research done with the young people there are several key recommendations that can be made:

1. **The importance of listening to young people's voices**

The young people's photographs highlight how the smallest, simple things can impart a huge amount of influence in their lives. The young people remind the audience that their lives have been shaped by forces outside of their control and yet they are trying their best to craft a meaningful life. Carving out safe spaces for young people to articulate their inner world and lived expertise is vital to reshaping services and policy that supports young people to thrive and have a better tomorrow.

2. **Stable and affordable housing is central to supporting young people**

For young people to do well, stay in education, and live healthy lives that are meaningful for them, on their terms, they need the stability and security provided through safe and affordable housing. There is a critical undersupply of emergency housing, transitional housing, and affordable housing for young people and young adults.

3. **Continue recognition of young people's needs through support work**

The photographs from the young people highlight their daily struggles and how past traumas and struggles impact decisions and obligations to get through the day. The photographs remind workers to take a trauma and harm-minimisation informed approach and to remain curious about the 'bad choices' that young people may make to provide person-centred support.

4. **The importance of support for transition to adulthood**

Adolescence and emerging adulthood are key transition periods that set the trajectory for people's long-term health, wellbeing, education, and employment as well as social and relational outcomes. Homelessness can significantly disrupt young people's transitions to adulthood. Young people need relationships with trusted adults who can support them to "achieve power over their lives, including building relationships, and, through relationships gain... access to resources, knowledge, and decision-making" skills to successfully navigate adulthood (Ellem et al., 2013, p. 166).

5. **ASQ should continue to build the capacity of the Research and Advocacy team to employ innovative and creative methods that prioritise end-users' voices as co-researchers.**

The insights gleaned from these discussions with young people offer valuable guidance in designing a new transitional youth facility. Recommendations based on the research findings for design a youth transition facility are as follows:

- **Supporting Mental and Physical Well-being:** The significant presence of mental health challenges and the importance of self-care practices highlight the need for dedicated mental health resources within the facility. These could include on-site counselling, access to telehealth services, and designated quiet spaces for relaxation. Additionally, the facility should promote healthy living by providing nutritional meals, opportunities for physical activity, and educational workshops on self-care strategies.

- **Trauma-Informed Design:** The participants' experiences of homelessness, foster care, and trauma necessitate a trauma-informed design. This means creating a safe and predictable environment with consistent routines, clear communication channels, and staff trained in trauma sensitivity. Privacy needs should be addressed through individual living spaces or well-defined personal areas within shared rooms.

- **Fostering a Sense of Belonging:** The discussions revealed a deep desire for belonging and stability. The facility design should promote a sense of community through communal gathering spaces, shared kitchens where residents can cook together, and opportunities for social interaction. Additionally, fostering a sense of ownership by involving residents in decision-making processes around house rules and activities can contribute to a stronger sense of belonging.

- **Empowerment Through Choice:** Young participants expressed feelings of uncertainty and the burden of complex choices. The facility can empower residents by providing opportunities to make choices, for example, regarding room décor, meal schedules, or participation in activities. This fosters a sense of agency and control, contributing to their overall development.

- **A Space for Self-Expression:** The concept of 'home' as a place to express oneself freely suggests that the facility design should allow for personalisation. This might include dedicated bulletin boards for self-expression, flexible furniture arrangements in common areas, or designated creative spaces for artistic pursuits.

4. CONCLUSION

The 'Hanging by a Thread' project exemplifies the transformative potential of photovoice in amplifying marginalised voices, fostering empowerment, and driving social change. By centring the perspectives of young people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, ASQ facilitated a process of self-expression, community-building, and advocacy that transcended traditional research approaches. Moving forward, initiatives like 'Hanging by a Thread' serve as a poignant reminder of the importance of listening to and valuing the lived experiences of young people in efforts to create more inclusive, equitable, and compassionate societies.

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