Disabled 'Too young to be forgotten'

Inquiry into 6000 youth in aged care

Latika Bourke

Six thousand young Australians with disabilities are living in aged care homes because there is nowhere else they can call home and receive the care they need.

Nursing homes are regarded as facilities for those in the twilight of their lives. Generally, people need to be aged over 65 to access an aged care bed.

On Tuesday the Senate will begin examining youth living in aged care after a push by the little-known Senate backbencher Linda Reynolds who, upon entering the Parliament in July last year, quietly made it her mission to draw national attention to the issue by obtaining bipartisan support to hold an inquiry into it.

Senator Reynolds said she had seen the issue firsthand through family members with physical and mental disabilities and described the situation as "distressing".

"18 and in aged care, they are too young to be forgotten," she told Fairfax Media. "Many of the stories I have heard from younger people living in aged care are soul-destroying.

"Younger people living in aged care are not only surrounded by the deaf, dying and those suffering from dementia, but their life is also dictated by the routines and requirements of an elderly person. It does not need to be this way and we can do so much better than this."

The statistics and personal accounts already provided to the inquiry paint a grim picture.

Ray Jones and his wife Leona had to put their two children, Craig and Nicole, aged in their 20s into a nursing home after they were diagnosed with Kufs disease – a progressive neurological disease that results in the slow deterioration of the nervous system.

"Nursing homes are great places if you're in your 80s and on the slippery slide to meet your maker but when you are a young person it can be a living hell," Mr Jones says in a YouTube video highlighting his family's plight.

Leona Jones wrote in her submission to the Senate that they promised their children they would never put him in aged care but in the end had to "betray" Craig and Nicole because their disease was so rare it meant there was no support available.

"Our son was frustrated and angry, he was a young man living among the elderly with dementia. We actually bought him a punching bag at one stage as a way for him to channel his frustration," she wrote.

By the time Craig and Nicole could move to a shared supported accommodation house, Craig had become institutionalised and reluctant to move. He eventually followed his sister to their new home and lived there for 13 months before his death three years ago.

Leona Jones says they should never have had to consider aged care for their young children.

"I am appalled that after 12 years of having children in care there are still young people living in nursing homes. I would walk over hot coals if I could prevent this. There is no place for young people in nursing homes," Mrs Jones told the Senate.

Mitch Fifield is the minister responsible for overseeing the rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

He told Fairfax Media the NDIS will help more people with disability find "a better place to call home", "whether it be through home modifications, or personal attendant care that meets their needs".

Of homeless young people ...

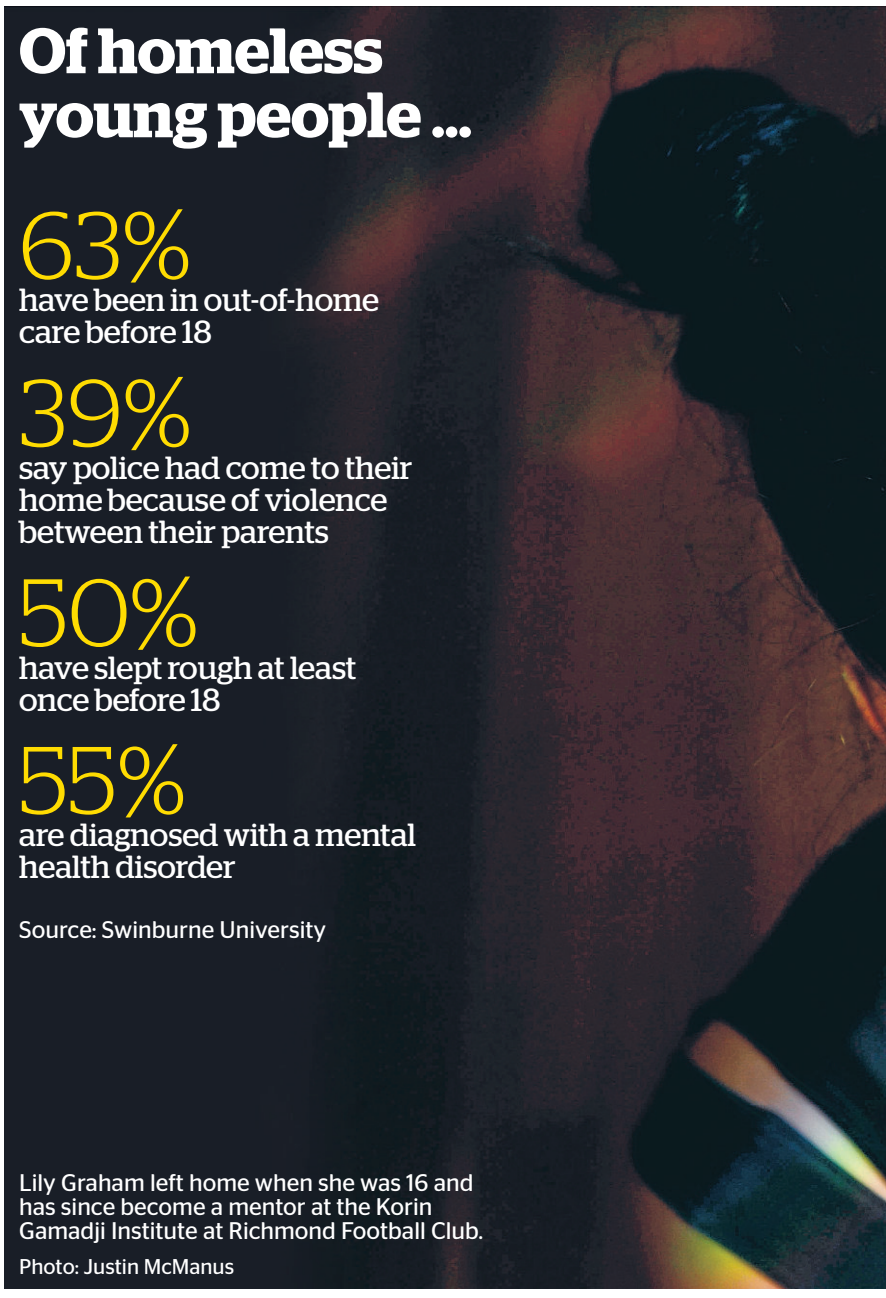
63% have been in out-of-home care before 18

39% say police had come to their home because of violence between their parents

50% have slept rough at least once before 18

55% are diagnosed with a mental health disorder

Source: Swinburne University



Lily Graham left home when she was 16 and has since become a mentor at the Korin Gamadji Institute at Richmond Football Club.

Photo: Justin McManus

Cafe diners dived when stolen ute mounted

Adam Cooper

The man who sent diners diving when he mounted a car onto a Carlton North footpath was seen smiling as he left the scene and after he punched a policeman, a court has been told.

About 60 diners and pedestrians narrowly avoided injury when Idris Aden Hassan drove a stolen ute 120 metres along a Rathdowne Street footpath about 11.30am on June 28 last year.

Hassan was seen by a motorist to "line up" a row of tables outside the Paragon Cafe, the County Court heard on Monday, and drive through them, before he continued down the street, circled back and smashed into the cafe's front window.

There was no suggestion Hassan had a vendetta against the cafe's owners, the court was told.

Prosecutor Stephen Devlin said two women seated at a table near the window were injured when they dived as the ute smashed into the cafe. CCTV footage played to court shows another woman jump out of the way just before the impact.

The footage also shows Hassan calmly walk away from the scene after the crash.

Mr Devlin said witnesses saw Hassan looking "completely wired" and "white-eyed" after the smash, and that he had an "amused but also confrontational" look on his face.

An off-duty detective chased the driver across Lygon Street and into the Melbourne General Cemetery, the court heard, and suffered a broken nose when Hassan twice punched him in the face after the officer had grabbed his leg.

Mr Devlin said the detective saw Hassan smile at him after he was assaulted.

The court was told Hassan was seen hiding behind tombstones and a pile of wood chips before he was arrested by police.

Defence lawyer Dermot Dann said Hassan was schizophrenic, wasn't using anti-psychotic medication and was abusing illicit drugs at the time, and had no excuse for his offending.

"He just cannot explain why he behaved in the way that he did," Mr Dann said.

Hassan, 27, pleaded guilty to reckless conduct endangering life, intentionally causing injury and two charges of recklessly causing injury. He also pleaded guilty to theft, having stolen a ute – left with the key in the ignition – from a Norlane service station the previous day, and a charge of armed robbery.

On June 17 last year, the court was told, Hassan used a dog food can to threaten an attendant in a Fitzroy convenience store to give him cash. At one point he struck the attendant in the face with the 1.2-kilogram can.

All the offending occurred while Hassan was on bail, after he was charged in April last year with grabbing a mother of three in a sleeper hold when he entered the woman's Footscray home.

Judge Jane Campton expressed concern bail had been granted after that incident. Mr Dann said his client was likely to plead guilty next month to that offence.

Mr Devlin said witnesses repor-

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