Creating Stability, Unlocking their Potential

SLH
YOUTH SERVICES

STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS
2025 TO 2028

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

St Laurence House (SLH) is proud to present its 3-year strategic plan, designed to ensure the organisation's sustainability and effectively tackle the challenges that lie ahead. The current landscape is marked by uncertainty, particularly in relation to funding, which remains a key concern across the sector.

In developing this plan, SLH has sought to balance practicality with optimism, keeping its vision and purpose at the forefront while prioritising financial viability and strengthening its capacity for marketing and fundraising. This strategic approach positions SLH to continue delivering exceptional service and care, aligning service levels with available resources and actively increasing brand recognition within the sector.

Above all, SLH's mission remains unwavering: a steadfast dedication to supporting vulnerable young people who find themselves homeless, through no fault of their own. By providing safety, stability, and support, SLH is committed to enabling every young person to thrive and achieve their full potential.

ORGANISATIONAL OVERVIEW

Key Achievements in 2022 - 2025

From 2022 to 2025, SLH remained constant in its commitment to service excellence, continuously enhancing its service model and program delivery. Regular feedback from clients, staff, and stakeholders played a pivotal role in shaping and refining our approach, ensuring we consistently moved in a positive direction.

A key structural change was implemented with the removal of the Executive Officer role, replaced by a Service Manager and Service Administrator. This adjustment, along with clearly defined classifications for permanent and casual Residential Youth Workers, provided staff with greater clarity and contributed to a more consistent service delivery. Workforce development was further strengthened by hosting two Social Work students who successfully completed 500-hour placements.

Our programs received a substantial boost through significant grants secured from the Coopers Foundation, Waratah Foundation, Sisters of Charity, and Street Smart. These funds supported initiatives in education, health, wellbeing, case management hours, and brokerage. Additionally, our pursuit of a solar panel grant underscored our commitment to sustainability and innovation, helping to reduce operational costs and enhance resource efficiency.

To improve compliance and transparency, we introduced a newly structured, comprehensive monthly operations report for the Board, ensuring clear and insightful reporting on service delivery and sector influences.

Our sector engagement remained active and impactful, with ongoing contributions to Yfoundations, ESYSN, DCJ, Homelessness NSW, YAPA, and TAFE, strengthening our presence and advocacy in key areas.

Partnerships with Headspace, SGCH and ReLove expanded our capacity to provide allied health services and essential resources to young people, reinforcing our 5-Pillars approach to deliver holistic support.

Supporter engagement was cultivated through quarterly electronic newsletters and regular website updates, fostering deeper connections and resulting in increased participation and encouragement.

Our advocacy efforts took a significant step forward in September 2024 through a meeting with Minister Rose Jackson, where we championed the SLH medium-term model, further advancing our vision for sustainable and effective service delivery.

Unachieved Goals and Challenges Identified during 2022 - 2025

During the 2022-2025 period, several goals remained unachieved, presenting both challenges and opportunities for continued growth.

One significant undertaking was the finalisation of the Trauma Informed Practice Framework, which saw substantial progress but remains incomplete. This project is now scheduled for completion as part of the 2025-2028 Strategic Plan, with an expected finalisation in the first half of the 2026 Business Operation Plan (BOP). Complementing this effort, targeted trauma-informed training for staff has yet to be fully implemented, ensuring they are equipped to align with the evolving framework. We anticipate that outcomes will be measured and recorded allowing us to further showcase our practice methodology.

Strengthening community engagement remains an ongoing priority, with further work needed to enhance and establish partnerships that support programs and activities for young people.

Similarly, efforts to develop and implement a comprehensive social media program have not yet materialised, despite its potential to expand SLH's supporter base and boost engagement.

Another key objective still in development involves modelling different levels of service delivery. By exploring potential fully supported, semi-supported, and transitional housing options, SLH aims to refine cost-effective support models that align with funding requirements. Maintaining a strong and ongoing partnership with St George Community Housing beyond 2025 is also a priority, ensuring continued collaboration and service enhancement in the transitional housing space.

Additionally, facility upgrades remain an area for improvement, with plans to liaise with PIF and Bridge Housing to renovate the back deck and pergola area, creating a more functional and welcoming space.

While these challenges reflect areas where further progress is needed, they also serve as a roadmap for strategic development in the coming years.

OUR VISION PURPOSE BELIEFS AND VALUES

The work of St Laurence House (SLH) is firmly anchored in our vision, purpose, beliefs, and values. These guiding principles form the foundation of everything we do, influencing our actions and decisions every step of the way.

As part of the preparation for the Strategic Direction 2025–2028, both the staff and Board recognised the need to refresh our vision, purpose, and beliefs. This update ensures they more accurately capture the essence of what we do and why we do it. Below, you'll find our newly refined statements.

Our Vision

To ensure that every young person can thrive and reach their full potential.

Our Purpose

To empower homeless youth by offering a supportive and nurturing environment, enabling them to overcome challenges, achieve independence, and build a brighter future.

Our Beliefs

- Young people have the right to a safe and stable environment where they can feel secure and supported.
- Healing from trauma is possible, and given the time and space young people can recover and lead fulfilling lives.
- Education is the vital key to ending youth homelessness and unlocking opportunities for a brighter future.
- Connection is essential for young people's recovery. Building meaningful relationships is crucial to their wellbeing.
- Health and wellbeing are essential for young people to face challenges and build resilience.
- Young people have the power to accomplish whatever they set their minds to when provided the opportunity.

Our Core Values

INTEGRITY

We work with honesty and transparency

EQUITY ACCESS

We treat our clients fairly and as equals, ensuring that they have access to services that they need in order to flourish

INCLUSIVENESS

We embrace the many differences our clients and staff bring into our work

EMPOWERMENT

We work towards providing clients with the tools to transform their lives

DIGNITY

We acknowledge the worth of every person

SAFETY

We work in a manner that will cause no harm, and safety is at the core of all practice

CHILD SAFE ENVIRONMENT

We will at all times uphold the National Child Safe Principals to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people

TRUST

We provide an environment of trust where human relationships are valued and respected and those we care for feel safe and valued

RESPECT

We work in a manner that encompasses empathy, consideration, communication and tolerance for each other

CLIENT CENTRED

We place our clients at the centre of the service we provide and ensure that they receive service that is specifically designed for them and has focus on their goals and aspirations. We encourage and support clients to be a part of their own decision making

Development of the Strategic Plan 2025 - 2028

The development of the 2025–2028 Strategic Direction began with an in-depth exploration of the key factors shaping our sector and influencing our work. This process was enriched by feedback gathered from clients, stakeholders, staff, and the Board during face-to-face planning sessions. These sessions included a comprehensive situational analysis and provided a platform for participants to share their perspectives and identify our top priorities.

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

Factors Impacting the Organisation

1. Economic

The statistics reveal that young people aged 13-24 are currently facing the highest rates of homelessness among all age groups (www.ahuri.edu.au). This alarming trend is significantly influenced by the ongoing housing crisis, which has limited housing options for YP and resulted in a growing number of them experiencing homelessness. The situation is further exacerbated by rental increases, which have pushed many young individuals out of the private rental market, leaving them unable to secure affordable housing. Additionally, the decreasing availability of rental vacancies has made it increasingly difficult for young people to find suitable properties.

The housing crisis has also created challenges for organisations like SLH and Community Housing Providers, as they struggle to access enough properties to meet growing demand.

These difficulties are compounded by rising living costs, which have driven up operational expenses. Current funding only covers 52% of operational costs, leaving a significant shortfall that limits the ability to address these issues effectively.

Economic pressures are also impacting fundraising efforts. With more everyday Australians facing financial struggles.

This combination of factors highlights the urgent need for solutions to address the economic barriers contributing to youth homelessness and the broader housing crisis.

2. Government Policies and Funding

There is ongoing uncertainty surrounding the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) funding and its agreements. While a potential roll-over of funding at the current level is possible, this does not address the need for longer-term financial clarity. The timing of recommissioning and planning also remains unclear, raising further concerns.

The current DCJ agreement indicated a fully supported model for 13–16-year-olds, aligning with policy requirements. For unaccompanied children aged 12-15 seeking Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS), considerations under Child Protection legislation and the Under 16's policy must shape the type of support provided.

Finally, maintaining ASES (Australian Service Excellence Standards) accreditation is a crucial prerequisite for qualifying for ongoing funding. This requirement highlights the necessity of meeting strict quality standards to ensure continued operational support from government funding sources.

3. Fundraising requirements

DCJ funding covered 52% of the operating costs for FYE 2024, leaving a $354,343 shortfall that required fundraising. Fundraising capacity for that period raised $197,845, leaving a shortfall of $156,498.

SLH were the recipient of a large bequest which supplemented the FYE 2024, with an overall surplus of $591,998.
Year on year SLH would need to raise approximately $400K to maintain the current level of service operational costs.

4. The Sector

The current DCJ contract extension to June 2026 and vague media releases raises questions about recommissioning and planning for 2026. The implications of the SLH HIF application outcomes (both successful and unsuccessful) on our ongoing funding will have a significant impact on future planning and direction.

The growing significance of medium-term models, despite the absence of clear sector guidelines, definitions, or funding frameworks, continues to highlight the challenges faced by stand-alone services like SLH in the current climate.

It is crucial for the sector to prioritise strategies that address public perception and elevate awareness of homeless young people, therefore SLH must actively collaborate with the peak bodies to advocate for positive change.

5. Demographics

The shift in age groups seeking support at SLH over the years highlights the impact of the housing crisis on presenting demographics and shows the impact of the requirements for the under 16's cohort against the Under 16's policy framework.

Young people presenting to SLH from a broad cultural background underscores the importance of understanding broader cultural considerations for those seeking assistance.

We have seen a significant increase in female referrals which has seen the service support a majority of female clients for this period.

6. Community Partnerships

The growth of SLH's service model and outcomes underscores the vital role of community partnerships in enhancing allied health, education, sporting, and recreational initiatives. Additionally, these partnerships create valuable opportunities to collaborate on fundraising efforts, further strengthening our impact.

7. The SLH Service Model

The SLH 5-Pillars of support model emphasise key supports for improving outcomes for homeless young people. These include ensuring safety and stability, fostering education and employment opportunities, addressing physical and mental health needs, providing ongoing workshops to develop independent living skills, and enhancing social and community connections that empower young people.

The current service model is the most effective to date, featuring workshops specifically designed to build independent living skills. It is supported by a team of professional and dedicated staff who are committed to helping young people achieve their full potential.

However, despite its success, the cost of sustaining this model exceeds the available funding, posing significant challenges to its continuation.

Strengths

The organisation is guided by robust governance and detailed policies and procedures, complemented by skilled, dedicated, and stable staff who deliver high-quality support.

Programs and services reflect an effective model of care, with strong partnerships established with ReLove, Coopers, Waratah and Sisters of Charity alongside solid relationships with founding parishes CCSL and SJKS.

Financial reporting over the past two years has been thorough, providing clear guidance, and the Annual Report has received positive feedback for its quality and information.

The Governor as Patron and the upcoming 50-year anniversary in 2026 further enhance the organisation's profile.

Residents and young people consistently offer positive feedback, with satisfaction scores ranging from 9.2 to 9.4 out of 10.

Community support remains strong through events, fundraising efforts, and a quarterly newsletter that boosts visibility. Parish backing continues to be a vital asset.

Outcomes for young people are impactful, and our low exit rate highlights success with the service model. The homelike environment with recent renovations and new furniture has been a highlight for young people. Multiple feedback channels for young people including house meetings, surveys, and QR codes have developed communication and improvements.

In-house programs such as Thrive (living skills), Compass (brokerage), and Aspire (educational initiatives) demonstrate positive outcomes for young people, reinforced by increased resources from successful grant applications, such as "Help More" for expanded case management support.

Weaknesses

The organisation faces several challenges. Its donor base is primarily concentrated within CCSL and SJKS.

The Board lacks expertise in critical areas like marketing, communications, fundraising, and sector-specific knowledge, which limits its capacity to address pressing issues.

The reliance on fundraising at such a high percentage level (50%) is difficult to sustain and unpredictable. Moreover, there's a need to improve communication about the organisation's activities, the funding shortfall, and outreach beyond the parishes.

Succession planning is crucial, both at the senior operations level and for Board office bearers.

The organisation lacks connections with local, state, and federal politicians.

Although information on the website supports referrals, it needs updating to remain effective.

The organisation struggles in securing another property amid the current rental crisis.

Operating as a stand-alone, fully supported service comes with high costs, and limited funds restrict upgrades to essential resources like the van and technology.

Opportunities

There is potential to enhance branding and marketing capabilities, alongside increasing SLH presence on social media platforms through a purpose-driven strategy that includes risk assessment.

Corporate sponsorship opportunities, both large and small, can be explored to diversify funding sources.

Revenue-raising efforts remain focused on fundraising, securing bequests, grant applications, and other funding options, including the HIF Grant.

A realistic, measurable, and well-resourced fundraising strategy to broaden the donor base beyond CCSL and SJKS, with campaigns to attract younger donors, such as through YHMD25.

The scalable 3-House model to be developed with detailed costings and options.

Contract negotiations, including recommissioning and planning, are a priority.

SLH to target specific skills for the Board, such as marketing, communications, fundraising, and sector-specific expertise, while also increasing Board engagement and participation.

Opportunities to be the lead on a merger with another SHS provider in the South Sydney area or establish a partnership with the St Laurence Centre offer significant potential. These initiatives could enhance operational efficiency through economies of scale, create broader outreach possibilities, and potentially attract higher levels of funding.

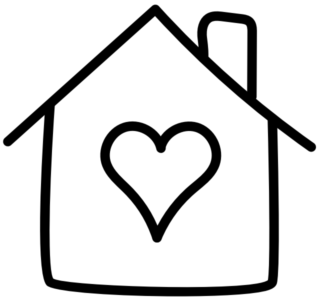
Advocacy efforts include lobbying MPs and collaborating within the sector to define and secure funding for the medium-term model and improve sector-wide funding.

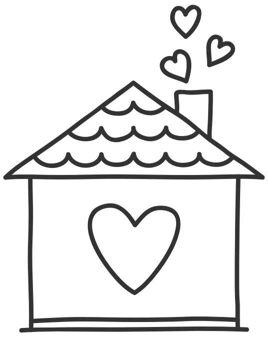
SLH sees embedding trauma-informed practices through staff and Board training and ensuring professional clinical supervision as an opportunity to further improve the service and consistency.

The potential to increase Service Administrator's hours to include a fundraising component, if funding permits.

Sustainability efforts such as implementing solar and air conditioning solutions.

Impact reporting in conjunction with the outcome's framework with data collection and measurement plans to be put in place.





Threats

One potential threat is the complexity of contract renegotiations, coupled with the uncertainty of timing of recommissioning and planning.

Parishioners may not always be aware of being specific around bequests intended for SLH, as these are often made to the church more generally.

The skillset of the Board currently lacks expertise in areas such as marketing, communications, fundraising, and sector-specific experience.

Failure to achieve ASES re-accreditation by July 2025 could result in defunding.

Operating as a small, stand-alone service presents challenges, including a lack of clarity around funding sources. There is also a risk of over-extending resources and taking on more than can be managed effectively.

The current donor base has an older age demographic, and donor fatigue is an issue, particularly with four major fundraising events targeting the same group each year. Furthermore, there is insufficient clarity regarding the role staff are expected to play in fundraising. When staff are involved in fundraising, it can detract from their core role of providing care and protection for young people.

STRATEGIC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

1 Deliver Quality Services: provide impactful, lasting support for young people

1.1. Implement practices that align with relevant national and industry standards to ensure high-quality, compliant, and safe services for young people.

1.2. Develop practices that are grounded in trauma-informed principles and supported by evidence base methods.

1.3. Run programs designed to build young people's life skills, improve their mental health and well-being, and support them in achieving their educational and case management goals.

1.4. Increase staff expertise and develop their skills through targeted learning and development opportunities.

1.5. Strengthen stakeholder connections to build relationships and better support young people.

1.6. Build partnerships with local organisations to enhance service delivery.

1.7. Ensure the service is culturally sensitive and inclusive, meeting the diverse needs of young people.

1.8. Regularly evaluate the impact of our service to ensure that they are meeting their intended goals.

1.9. Seek feedback from young people about the program and services provided and use this feedback to make continuous improvements.

1.10. Use data to identify trends, measure outcomes, refine programs, and provide meaningful impact statements.

2 Ensure Financial Viability: maintain a stable and sustainable foundation

2.1. Increase current efforts to raise revenue and explore new opportunities to achieve long-term financial stability.

2.2. Develop an effective fundraising strategy that defines clear objectives and directs the organisation's fundraising initiatives.

2.3. Advocate to secure sustainable funding for the fully supported medium-term housing model while reporting on its impact and outcomes.

2.4. Ensure service delivery is better aligned with government funding.

2.5. Enhance organisational sustainability through robust financial management and planning.

2.6. Secure funding to assist with the costs or marketing, branding and fundraising activities.

2.7. Develop partnerships and work in collaboration with other service providers to share resources and reduce costs.

2.8. Reduce operating costs while maintaining service quality and effectiveness.

2.9. Secure grants that will ensure sustainable funding for service programs and activities.

3 Enhance Branding and Marketing: strengthen our brand and increase awareness through effective marketing

3.1. Build a strong brand identity through clear vision and purpose statements that resonate with supporters.

3.2. Use consistent messaging, visual and tone across all platforms to build recognition.

3.3. Build strong relationships with our donors and supporters by sharing news activities and upcoming events.

3.4. Create engaging, high-quality content for our audience to be used on different platforms.

3.5. Use data to demonstrate our impact and strengthen our marketing and branding efforts.

3.6. Highlight the stories, achievements, and voices of young people in our marketing efforts.

3.7. Use data analysis to design better campaigns and track performance to improve digital strategies.

3.8. Develop a strategy to expand our supporter base.

4 Expand Access to Safe Housing: increase the availability of safe housing options for homeless youth

4.1. Secure funding to enhance and expand case management services so we can support more young people in our transitional housing program.

4.2. Strengthen partnerships with community housing providers and not-for-profit organisations to broaden housing options for young people.

4.3. Secure funding and resources to build or acquire additional housing to accommodate more young people.

4.4. Advocate and lobby for appropriate funding for specialist homelessness services and greater access to affordable housing options.

4.5. Explore options for cost-effective housing models to increase the availability of safe and affordable housing for homeless youth.