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Media release

LGBTIQ homelessness program gets gong, as research finds same sex attracted twice as likely to be homeless

A homelessness program that supports homeless LGBTIQ young people is among the winners of the Victorian Homelessness Achievement Awards, presented last night at the Melbourne Town Hall as part of the Victorian Homelessness Conference.

Alsorts is delivered by the Family Access Network (FAN) and provides housing and support to same sex attracted, transgender and intersex youth, a group that are especially vulnerable to homelessness. The Alsorts program was one of two winners of the *Award for Excellence in Ending Homelessness amongst Diverse Groups*, one of seven Award categories.

The award is especially pertinent in light of research from the Gay and Lesbian Foundation of Australia released last week which shows that LGBTIQ people experience homelessness at twice the rate of the heterosexual community, and yet are the less likely to seek homeless help for fear of discrimination. Gendered dorms, heterosexist language, misgendering are all issues that the research identified as barriers preventing many queer people from engaging with homelessness services.

Jenny Smith, CEO of the Council to Homelessness Persons, presented the Award, saying “This award acknowledges the visionary leadership of Alsorts in meeting the needs of a very vulnerable group of people.”

The Council to Homeless Persons presents the **Victorian Homelessness Achievement Awards** every two years. This year’s winners include a Bendigo-based service helping vulnerable young mums and their kids, a program that helps 16-24 year olds involved in the justice system to avoid homelessness and re-offending, a partnership that increased the number of older people from CALD backgrounds accessing housing, and a homeless persons legal service.

“The Awards celebrate the exceptional efforts of individuals and organisations and also highlight the way forward to end homelessness in Victoria,” said Ms Smith.

More information on this year’s winners is below.

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The 2017 Victorian Homelessness Achievement Award winners are:

1) *Ending homelessness among children and families: Haven Home Safe - Sidney Myer Haven*
The Sidney Myer Haven in Bendigo provides wraparound support for young mums, and achieving outstanding results for highly vulnerable young people and their kids.

2) *Ending homelessness among young people: Jesuit Social Services – Next Steps program*
Next Steps helps young people aged 16-24 years who have been involved with the justice system and are experiencing, or at risk of homelessness, to reduce homelessness and reduce re-offending.



3) *Ending homelessness among adults: Justice Connect Homeless Law* Justice Connect Homeless Law provides legal and non-legal advice and services to people experiencing homelessness. They provide advocacy around the laws and regulations impacting those experiencing homelessness, including anti-begging laws and the proposed City of Melbourne bylaws banning rough sleeping.

4) *Ending homelessness among diverse groups: Tied winners:*

Family Access Network - Alsorts

FAN's Alsorts program provides statewide housing and support to same sex attracted, transgender and intersex young people experiencing homelessness.

Housing for the Aged Action Group (HAAG)

HAAG partnered with the Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria to improve access to homelessness services for older people from CALD backgrounds. The partnership resulted in the number of older people from CALD backgrounds receiving homelessness assistance increasing by 200%.

5) *Leading Homelessness Practitioner: Adam Liversage, Uniting Ballarat*

Adam is the assertive outreach worker at Uniting Ballarat. Adam has worked with the local council to dissuade them from move-on laws, and with local businesses to de-escalate their concerns about local rough sleepers.

6) *Consumer Achievement Award – awarded to an individual who has experienced homelessness: Erika Lodge*

After experiencing homelessness herself as a rough sleeper in St Kilda, Erika has committed to supporting people experiencing homelessness over the last ten years. She spreads awareness of homelessness and its causes through public speaking events, school groups and tours. She volunteers at a breakfast program, and helps people seeking homeless help to navigate services.

7) *Beth Thomson Award for Lifetime Achievement: Celia Adams*

Celia has been involved in the housing and homelessness sector for 17 years, and is currently CEO at BeyondHousing. Her tenure as CEO is marked by instituting significant reforms focused on the rights of the client. She is a widely respected advocate for the needs of those experiencing homelessness, and is described as never losing sight of her aim of improving the provision of social housing for those who need it.

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