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Wodonga's Youth Foyer on track for early 2025 completion

Wodonga's Education First Youth Foyer is on track to open in less than a year, with construction well ahead of schedule.

The \$15.8 million facility at Wodonga TAFE's McKoy Street campus, began construction in October last year and is set to be completed by mid-February 2025, several months earlier than originally planned.

The Minister for Housing, the Hon. Harriet Shing, toured the facility today and expressed her enthusiasm for the project's progress and potential impact on the community.

Based on the successful Brotherhood of St Laurence model, the Education First Youth Foyer will provide a home for 40 young people experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of homelessness, part of the Victorian Government's \$50 million investment to combat youth homelessness under the \$5.3 billion Big Housing Build program. This project is a collaboration between Beyond Housing, Wodonga TAFE, Junction Support Services and Brotherhood of St Laurence.

Designed to break the cycle of homelessness, the Education First Youth Foyer program empowers young people to build secure and sustainable futures through supported housing, education, employment, training, and a wide range of support opportunities.

Beyond Housing will provide tenancy management for the Youth Foyer and Junction Support Services will manage support services provision to support the young people living within the Youth Foyer, while Wodonga TAFE, which contributed the land for the project, will also offer education and counselling services, ensuring that young residents have pathways to participate in mainstream education.

Beyond Housing CEO Celia Adams said construction of the Wodonga Education First Youth Foyer is advancing rapidly. The head contractor, Premier Building and Construction, is now advising a revised completion date of mid-February 2025, significantly ahead of schedule.

"Up to 50 different trades are working on-site, ensuring the project progresses smoothly and safely. This accelerated timeline highlights the team's efficiency and dedication to creating a supportive environment for at-risk and disadvantaged young people in Wodonga," Ms Adams said.

According to the 2021 Census, there were 543 people experiencing homelessness or living in overcrowded conditions or marginally housed in caravan parks across Wodonga and Albury.

Current data indicates that one in four are aged between 16 and 24, highlighting the critical need for targeted support and housing solutions for young people in this region.

Ms Adams said the Education First Youth Foyer is a proven model, pointing to the success of the Shepparton foyer. In the past 7.5 years, 276 young people have progressed through the program, achieving significant milestones such as home ownership and career advancement.

"The Education First Youth Foyers offer much more than just housing. They are nurturing environments that equip young people facing homelessness with the tools to secure a brighter future," she added.

Megan Hanley, CEO of Junction Support Services, emphasised the initiative's importance.

"Junction is thrilled to be a key partner in Wodonga's Education First Youth Foyer, an initiative that underscores our unwavering dedication to empowering young people and providing them with the support and resources they need to achieve brighter futures," Ms Hanley said.

"As the largest provider of homelessness support services within the region, we see first-hand the effects homelessness can have on a community and welcome the news that the Youth Foyer is due to be completed earlier than initially projected. This innovative program represents a transformative opportunity to create positive pathways for education, employment, and independent living for the youth in our community."

Wodonga TAFE CEO Phil Paterson believes this initiative will be life-changing for Wodonga's young people. "We're proud to be partnered with Beyond Housing and Junction Support Services to be delivering such an important initiative for Wodonga. This project will have such a positive and meaningful impact upon our community, supporting youth through a critical point in their lives, to then build bright and successful futures through independence, education, and employment."

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