

**Media Release**  
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## **SMH Opinion Article – Wayside Response**

'Break the cycle: downhill slide for homeless is rapid'<sup>1</sup> (10.04.08) appears to entreat the public to reassess their assumptions about homeless young people, yet it raises in me a significant level of concern.

Having worked as a youth worker since 2001 and from my current position as the Programs Manager with The Wayside Chapel I am regularly met by people who are well informed regarding young people, crime rates, substance use and violence. I am not attempting to deny these facts, however this piece tells us the most valuable lesson we can learn is not to judge and then informs us that these young people will threaten the safety of our cars, our property and our children. Reinforcing these negative stereotypes can not be the most effective way of increasing community awareness, securing support, or of reintroducing these young people to a society from which they are so disenfranchised.

Young people living on or about the streets are just that, young people. We as a community should not judge them on the basis of opinion pieces and stereotypes. While some young people do in fact come from broken homes in low income areas some come from private schools and wealthier suburbs. We need to recognise that as a community of individuals they are as diverse a group as any other. We need to know that the slide into homelessness can happen to any of us.

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*The Wayside Chapel is a well known Sydney Icon that provides unconditional love, care and support for people on and around the streets of Kings Cross. It has a long history of being at the forefront of social justice issues. Wayside pioneered Australia's first 24 hour crisis centre, the first Drug Referral Centre, co-founded the Aboriginal Affairs Foundation and started Life Education Australia. In the 60's and 70's it was also considered a first-class arts establishment.*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.smh.com.au/news/opinion/downhill-slide-for-homeless-is-rapid/2008/04/09/1207420478927.html>