

## **Fr Riley appeals to the community to help save school for homeless youth**

Father Chris Riley, CEO and Founder of the non-denominational charity Youth Off The Streets, has recently been advised that due to development plans, Key College will need to find new premises by November 2009. Key College is the school for homeless young people near Central Station.

Youth Off The Streets are grateful to the Sydney Archdiocese who have allowed the school to operate rent free for the last 7 years. However, Father Riley is concerned about the short time frame for relocation. If suitable premises are not found quickly, the school will be at risk of closure.

Father Riley is urgently appealing to the community for assistance: *"Key College is the last stop for Sydney's homeless young people to gain an education and turn their lives around. Right now, we have 12 young students who are eager to complete their high school education. These kids are relying on us to help them get back on track. I am appealing to the community to please help us continue to provide education and opportunity for Sydney's homeless young people."*

**If Youth Off The Streets cannot find a new premises by November, this "last chance" high school is at risk of closure.** This would be an opportunity lost for the students currently working towards their School Certificate and those young people living homeless who are holding hope in the opportunity to enrol to turn their lives around in 2010.

Father Riley is seeking new premises and / or donations towards rent for new premises. Due to the transient nature of homeless young people, the main criteria for the school premises is that it is in walking distance from Central Station in Sydney's CBD.

### ***EDUCATION IS THE KEY***

For 13 years, Youth Off The Streets Key College has been proving that education is the key to breaking the cycle of poverty, addiction and abuse. Many students graduate from the college moving on to make a positive contribution by pursuing employment opportunities and tertiary education. Last year alone, three students moved into independent accommodation, one student was awarded a scholarship to study Enrolled Nursing at university, four achieved their School Certificate, two completed year 11 and two moved on to further education at TAFE.

*"These are truly remarkable results when you consider the difficulties that these young people are trying to overcome. Many have to make finding food and shelter their main priority, so to also achieve in education shows just how amazing these kids are. We can't give up on them now,"* said Father Riley.

Key College delivers more than education to the young people it helps. The teachers, youth workers and volunteers at the school are a network that provides assistance to young people so that they may reach their full potential. The Key College network assists with: housing arrangements; access to employment and further education; practical life skills; opportunities to engage with the community; legal issues; and mental, physical and dental health issues. When a student graduates from Key College, the staff and volunteers at Key continue to support the young people as they continue in their journey towards healing.

According to Father Riley, Key College is unique because: *"It is often the only thing in our student's lives that is constant and stable. Key College gives the kids a homelike environment that they can feel safe in. Our staff are often considered the closest thing to a family our students have ever experienced. We must continue to provide this service,"* he said.

**To offer property assistance, please contact Vittoria Borazio, Chief Operating Officer, PH: 0410 348 700 Email: [Vittoriab@youthoffthestreets.com.au](mailto:Vittoriab@youthoffthestreets.com.au) To donate please PH: 1800 06 22 88.**

### **Some Key College Graduate achievements:**

Shannon, now 26, believes that all young people need the opportunity to right the wrongs that have been done to them:

*“Having a bad childhood, you rely on drugs to numb the feelings of what you’ve been through. You don’t realise what you’re doing to yourself. When a young person is given the opportunity, like I was through Key, you can change your life around like there’s no tomorrow.*

*If it wasn’t for Min and Father and everyone else at Key, I probably wouldn’t be here today. Still today, if I need any help or to feel safe, I would go to Key College before I would even go to the local police station.*

*My safe haven is walking down the stairs into Key College and seeing Min and Bernie and Father Riley and feeling home, it’s like my extended family.*

*I hope they can, if not keep this place, at least get something that will keep this school going,” said Shannon.*

Shannon came to Key College at 16 years of age. He was using drugs, had quite a difficult Juvenile Justice situation and had been in Griffith Remand. Shannon spent a year at Key College while also undergoing an anger management course at Petersham Juvenile Justice. At the end of the year, Shannon breached his conditions and went back to Detention. Key College staff supported him in Detention where he really made an effort to try every program that would help him give support to his autistic son (Shannon became a father at 14), he has endeavoured to do this ever since. Shannon ended up working as a builder's labourer in Lithgow and he fathered a second child. Breaking up with his girlfriend he fought for custody of his children - who had been left with him. He has had 2 court cases, where he has been able to demonstrate he has supported his daughter and been an excellent support to her school. Now 26, Shannon supports his daughter Natasha and the pair have moved to Umina to be nearer to his son. Shannon recently welcomed another baby girl into the world. He is a dedicated parent, his life is his children. He is working as a brick layer and is living to be the best father to his children that he can be.

#### **James**

James joined Key at 17 years, he was addicted to drugs and had been in detention. Since coming to Key he has turned his life around. James graduated from Key and went on to TAFE where he completed four years of study and achieved a Diploma in Horticulture. James returns to Key to inspire current students by passing on lessons in life and gardening. James received a Youth Off The Streets scholarship to continue his studies. He is now employed full-time as a nursery hand and is hoping to start his own business. With assistance from Youth Off The Streets, James is very close to achieving his provisional drivers licence. He has succeeded in his quest to give up drugs and is also not drinking alcohol. James is looking forward to marrying his partner of 7 years.

#### **Larissa**

Larissa’s problems began when her parents separated. She was 16 years old, living in crisis accommodation and suffering drug and alcohol related issues when she came to Key College in 2008. While at Key, Larissa re-engaged with education and successfully made the transition back into mainstream education. In 2009, Larissa completed the Assistant in Nursing Certificate III at TAFE. Larissa was one of 26 students chosen from a pool of 600 applicants, to be fast tracked in an Enrolled Nursing Course by the Nurses and Midwives Board. She has recently commenced this course and is supporting herself by working at an Aged Care facility. During 2008 Larissa see-sawed from crisis to long term accommodation, she recently celebrated moving into her own flat. She now has a reasonable relationship with both her parents.

#### **Requirements for Key College School Premises: (Please note these are NEGOTIABLE)**

##### Area

- Essential: Within 5-10 minutes walking distance from Central Station
- 100+ m2
- 2 – 3 rooms with lockable storage
- 1 female and 1 male toilet.
- Usable Kitchen
- Some outdoor area
- Parking

**Father Riley, Key College staff, Shannon, James and Larissa are available for interview. For any media request, please contact: Ina Mullin - Email: [inam@youthoffthestreets.com.au](mailto:inam@youthoffthestreets.com.au) / Ph: 9330 3543 / M: 0412 377 217**

#### **Youth Off The Streets Mission:**

*Helping disconnected young people to discover greatness within, by engaging, supporting and providing opportunities to encourage and facilitate positive life choices.*

[www.youthoffthestreets.com.au](http://www.youthoffthestreets.com.au)

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