



Commissioner for Children and Young People
Western Australia

Children who are homeless with their family: A literature review

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Background

This literature review was commissioned by the Commissioner for Children and Young People Western Australia to provide an overview of the issues affecting the wellbeing of children who are homeless with their families. It was undertaken by researchers at the Children and Youth Research Centre, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane.

Homeless families with children are emerging as the “new face of homelessness” in Australia (Barker et al., 2013, p. 22). In 2010-11, 7,900 children under 18 accompanied a parent or guardian in receiving support from a government funded specialist homelessness agency in Western Australia, representing 41% of all individuals receiving support. Of these children, three-quarters (74.4%) were under 10 years of age and 40.6% were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander status (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011a). This data likely understates the extent of child homelessness in WA as it only includes families and children who received support.

Most homeless children (81%) who accompany a parent or guardian accompany an adult female. Domestic and family violence and relationship breakdown are the major reasons women with children are homeless. Women and children are sometimes referred to as the “hidden homeless” (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011b) as they tend to be less visible than men and remain out of sight, away from areas where homeless people congregate, for fear of violence, rape or other abuse (Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2008). Women in these situations may find they are unable to care for their children and they may be forced to place them in the care of family, friends or social services (Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2008).

This review outlines the scholarly evidence in relation to the following issues.

- The causes and extent of children’s homelessness in Western Australia (and Australia), including pathways leading to family homelessness;
- The impact of homelessness on children’s near-term and long-term wellbeing;
- The service and support needs of children and families at risk of or experiencing homelessness;
- Strategic approaches and systems for providing services to children and families;
- Successful programs that are evidence-based and have been evaluated to show positive effects on children’s wellbeing (particularly programs replicated in multiple jurisdictions or applied across diverse population groups);
- Children’s own views and experiences of homelessness and support services (particularly direct consultations with children); and
- Gaps in knowledge.

This evidence may be used to inform policies and services to support the wellbeing of children who are homeless.

Method

A wide range of databases was searched including scholarly journal databases, government documents, and agency reports. The terms used included “child”, “children” and “homeless” or “homelessness”, “Australia” and “Western Australia”. The search retrieved over 200 relevant documents and this was narrowed down to around 50 most relevant, with many of those sourced from the following agencies and key journals.

- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)
- Australian Housing and Urban Renewal Initiative (AHURI)
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)
- *Early Childhood Education Journal*
- *Australian Journal of Social Issues*
- *Parity* professional journal

The first part of the review summarises the literature against each of the seven areas outlined above, while the second part (section 11) is a summary of a selection of articles referred to in the review. These articles are examples of the breadth of issues arising from the review.

Definition of homelessness

There is variation in the ways in which homelessness is defined and measured. People who are homeless include those “living rough” and in night shelters, who may be described as “roofless”; people in accommodation for the homeless or in women’s shelters and people due to be released from institutions, who may be referred to as “houseless”; people in “insecure” housing such as those living under threat of eviction or under threat of violence; and people in “inadequate” accommodation, such as those living in temporary/non-standard structures, unfit housing or extreme overcrowding (Fitzpatrick, 2012).

In Australia, a definition of homelessness was adopted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2012a) defining a person as homeless if their current living arrangement:

- is in a dwelling that is inadequate, or
- has no tenure, or if their initial tenure is short and not extendable, or
- does not allow them to have control of, and access to space for social relations.

This ABS definition includes people sleeping rough, staying temporarily with friends or relatives, using emergency accommodation and living in boarding houses.

Another definition, often cited in the literature, refers to:

- primary homelessness (people without conventional accommodation, including improvised dwellings);
- secondary homelessness (people who move frequently from one form of temporary shelter to another; includes people in supported accommodation); and
- tertiary homelessness (medium to long-term boarding house residents). (Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2008).

The definition developed for the purposes of the largest national program providing accommodation assistance in Australia, the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), is as follows:

A person is homeless if, and only if he/she has inadequate access to safe and secure housing. A person is taken to have inadequate access to safe and secure housing if the only housing to which a person has access is:

- (a) damaged or is likely to damage a person's health; or
- (b) threatens a person's safety; or
- (c) marginalises the person by failing to provide:
 - (i) adequate personal amenities; or
 - (ii) economic and social support that a home normally affords; or
 - (iii) places the person in circumstances which threaten or adversely affect the adequacy, safety, security and affordability of that housing.

(Chamberlain & MacKenzie, 2006)

There are specific considerations when defining homelessness in an Indigenous context. One of the considerations is that of spiritual homelessness when an Indigenous person is separated from their family and/or land (Birdsall-Jones & Shaw, 2008). People reported that in order to avoid being disconnected from their family they may live in crowded conditions. Similarly, if no suitable housing was available on country, people may sleep either outside or in improvised dwellings rather than move to an adequate dwelling that is not on country. Indigenous people reported that their home is more associated with a place or area, rather than with a dwelling, and the perception of home is often tied to connection to country, and/or family and community (ABS, 2014).

While a consistent definition for homeless children does not exist in Australia, in the US, the McKinney–Vento Homeless Assistance Act defines homeless children as “individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate night-time residence” (State of Washington, 2014) and the Act gives examples of children who would fall under this definition:

- Children and youth sharing housing due to loss of housing, economic hardship or a similar reason;
- Children and youth living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or camp grounds due to lack of alternative accommodations;
- Children and youth living in emergency or transitional shelters;
- Children and youth abandoned in hospitals;
- Children and youth awaiting foster care placement;
- Children and youth whose primary night-time residence is not ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation (e.g., park benches, etc.);
- Children and youth living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations;
- Migratory children and youth living in any of the above situations.

As outlined in section 9 of this review, children explain “home” in terms of their level of connectedness to family and community, and the absence of fear, instability and insecurity, rather than by their housing status (Moore et al., 2008). Their perceptions of home are mostly about places where they are free from the things they fear and from which they need protection, while having a home is about having a sense of permanency, stability and security.

The causes and extent of children’s homelessness

While it is difficult to measure the number of homeless children in Australia precisely, some indicative data is available. In 2010-11, around 80,800 children from across Australia aged 0–14 accompanied a parent or guardian in seeking assistance from a specialist homelessness agency. In 81% of cases children accompanied an adult female, followed by 14% of cases where they accompanied a couple and 5% where they accompanied a male (Eldridge et al., 2012, p. 98). This data does not include those children who were turned away due to supported accommodation not being available and, in addition, not all people who are homeless will seek homelessness assistance (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011b).

In Western Australia, an estimated 19,500 people received support from a government-funded specialist homelessness agency during 2010-2011 and 41% of

those, or 7,900, were children (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011a). Almost half of these children (46.4%) were under 5 years of age and three-quarters (74.4%) were under 10 years (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011a). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were overrepresented (40.6%) and more than half of homeless Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are living in outer regional, remote or very remote areas (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011a; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011c).

The main reason women with children are homeless is due to domestic violence, sexual assault and family breakdown (Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2012; Barker et al., 2013, Eldridge et al., 2012; Spinney & Blandy, 2011; Department of Social Services, 2008b). Other commonly reported pathways are housing shortages, as well as overcrowding and poor housing conditions, particularly in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (ABS, 2012b; Gibson & Morphett, 2011). While in the media the issue of housing stress and housing affordability is sometimes referred to as a pathway into homelessness for families, it is not the major pathway into homelessness for children (Yates, 2008; Yates et al., 2007).

Families and children in other acutely vulnerable circumstances may also be at risk of homelessness. For example, children exiting institutional care may be returned to care when tenuous accommodation arrangements are disrupted (Bromfield & Osborn, 2007; Liddell, 2005) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers exiting prison experience considerable difficulty in finding accommodation at either a government funded service or in private rental accommodation particularly when they are accompanied by young children (Liddell, 2005; Mokaraka & Scott, 2012).

The impact of homelessness on children's near term and long term wellbeing

It is widely recognised that homelessness has a detrimental effect on children's health and wellbeing that can persist beyond the period of homelessness. Babies and toddlers may have delays in physical and mental development while older children can experience high levels of stress, anxiety, loss and grief, high rates of mental health problems and behavioural disorders (Eldridge, et al., 2012). Child homelessness has also been identified as a pathway to youth homelessness and later to adult homelessness (Flatau et al., 2012; Swick, 2008). The most commonly reported impacts of homelessness on children's near and long-term wellbeing include:

- their engagement with education and learning, including preschool and school (Fantuzzo et al., 2012; Masten et al., 2012; Tobin, 2014; Wilson & Squires, 2014);

- their relationship with immediate and wider family and friends (Keys, 2009; Mallett, 2010);
- their connectedness to the community (McLaren, 2013; Moore et al., 2008).

The literature offers additional specific categories and impacts as follows:

- Health and wellbeing
 - elevated stress levels and mental health problems (Karim et al., 2006; Wilson & Squires, 2014);
 - behavioural problems (Buckner, 2008);
 - developmental delay (Hinton & Cassel, 2013);
 - poor dental health (Eldridge, et al., 2012);
 - asthma (Keys, 2009);
 - skin problems (Keys, 2009);
 - vision problems (Taylor & Edwards, 2012);
 - the more frequent the moves the greater the negative effects on children's health and wellbeing (Kirkman et al., 2010; Moore et al., 2006; Taylor & Edwards, 2012).
- Family relationships
 - the poor quality of parent-child relations and the parental role (Swick, 2008);
 - the parent-child relationship can become inverted (Keys, 2009a).
- Community connectedness
 - enforced mobility has an obvious potential to disrupt connections with relatives, friends, neighbours and others (Kirkman et al., 2010; Moore & McArthur, 2011; Moore et al., 2008);

- Education
 - detrimental effect on schooling (Hinton & Cassel, 2013; Moore & McArthur, 2011; Murphy, 2011);
 - impedes school attendance and academic achievement (Fantuzzo et al., 2012; Murphy, 2011; Tobin, 2014);
 - education is often valued by children as school may provide stability in times of insecurity and change (Moore & McArthur, 2011).

Continuity of schooling has also been identified as a significant predictor of positive wellbeing later in life (Gibson & Johnstone, 2010).

The service and support needs of children and families at risk of or experiencing homelessness

In 2008, the Australian Government in *Which way home? A new approach to homelessness* (Department of Social Services, 2008a) identified a new approach to dealing with children and families experiencing homelessness. The service and support needs of children and families were identified as follows:

- The need to align homelessness responses to domestic violence with law and justice services was identified as a basic service and support need to require the removal of perpetrators of violence from the family home, where safe and appropriate, allowing families to stay in their own home.
- Making a concerted effort to create alternative accommodation, custodial and treatment options for perpetrators, and offer family counselling and support services for victims of family violence.
- Co-locating support and accommodation services with other services such as child care centres, health clinics or recreational facilities.
- Providing flexible assistance packages that help people move back into safe and permanent housing in a timely manner.
- Changing laws and procedures that encourage courts and police to work more closely with domestic violence service providers.
- Counting children as SAAP clients and providing brokerage funds to pay for counselling, school books and uniforms so children can go to school.
- Forming partnerships between schools and family health services to identify children at risk.
- Responding early, to minimise the disruption to children's schooling and address the effects of homelessness on their ability to learn.

In the US since the introduction of the federal US McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act in the early 1990s, research has been undertaken to identify a range of service and support needs for children who are homeless, such as basic needs including shelter, food, clothing and school supplies. Two thirds of shelters in the US provide these basic needs along with transportation to and from school (Hicks-Coolick et al., 2003). While providing basic support, most of the shelters lacked important services in the areas of medical and developmental assessments, access to education, childcare, and parent training. Forty-seven percent were found to lack onsite worker training in the characteristics and needs of homeless children (Hicks-Coolick, et al., 2003).

The following list briefly summarises the needs of children and families as identified in the literature:

1. Accommodation (whether short or long-term):
 - families with children experience more difficulty than others in obtaining accommodation (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011b; Kirkman et al., 2010a);
 - needs to be appropriate for children with sufficient bedrooms and outside space (ABS, 2012b; Hinton & Cassel, 2013);
 - needs to be close to facilities such as schools, transport and shopping (Gibson & Johnstone, 2010; Swick, 2010).
2. Basic material assistance:
 - food (Chittooran & Chittooran, 2013; Keys, 2009; Wehler et al., 2004);
 - clothes and school uniforms (Hicks-Coolick et al., 2003);
 - toys and baby goods (Kirkman et al., 2010).
3. Transport for children and their parents to and from school and appointments (Hicks-Coolick, et al., 2003; Holtzman, 2013; McCoy-Roth et al., 2012).
4. Legal assistance is required to assist with matters arising from evictions, family/domestic violence and child protection matters (Walsh & Douglas, 2008).
5. Group programs:
 - on-site or off site pre-school playgroups (Barker et al., 2013; Hinton & Cassel, 2013);

- art therapy sessions (Zammit, 2008);
 - pet programs (Kirkman, et al., 2010; Moore et al., 2008; Mudalya et al., 2014);
 - social activities (*Centacare, 2003*; Kirkman, et al., 2010; Moore & McArthur, 2011);
 - arranging camps (Kirkman et al., 2009);
 - excursions (Hodgkins et al., 2013).
6. Education and health services at kindergarten and preschool or earlier (Ammons et al., 2014; Hodgkins, et al., 2013; Swick, 2010) as well as at primary school (Barker, et al., 2013; Gibson & Johnstone, 2010; Moore et al., 2011a; Moore & McArthur, 2011; Wilson & Squires, 2014).
 7. Direct attention to children, consideration, respect and time (Gibson & Johnstone, 2010).

Strategic approaches and systems for the provision of services to children and families

The key federal government initiatives and agreements underpinning Australia's strategic approach for the provision of services to children and families include the following five dimensions:

1. *The Road Home* published by the Australian Government, Department of Social Services in 2008, establishes the strategic agenda for reducing homelessness up until 2020. The Australian Government established the goal to halve homelessness across Australia and to offer supported accommodation to all rough sleepers by 2020. Three stages of future investment are outlined as follows:
 - Turning off the Tap: Services will intervene early to prevent homelessness.
 - Improving and expanding services that aim to end homelessness: Services will be more connected, integrated and responsive to achieve sustainable housing, improve social and economic participation and end homelessness for their clients.
 - Breaking the Cycle: People who become homeless will move quickly through the crisis system into stable housing with the support they need so that homelessness does not recur (Department of Social Services, 2008b).

2. *The National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA)* established by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in 2009 aims to ensure that all Australians have access to affordable, safe and sustainable housing that contributes to social and economic participation. The NAHA is an intergovernmental agreement by COAG on federal financial relations that commenced in January 2009. The agreement initiated a whole of government approach in tackling the problem of housing affordability. The NAHA is supported by the National Partnership Agreements on Social Housing, Homelessness and Indigenous Australians living in remote areas. (COAG, 2009).

3. The *National Homelessness Research Agenda* established by the Australian Government, Department of Social Services in 2009 provides a framework for building a cohesive evidence base for preventing and responding to homelessness. It reflects the Government's strategic research priorities in the development of an evidence base to drive reforms. While many research documents are listed on the web site, the following are particularly relevant to families and children.

- The influence of unstable housing on children's wellbeing and development
- Indigenous women and the role of transactional sex in homelessness
- Supporting fathers who are homeless
- A study of crisis intervention and planned family support with vulnerable families
- Early intervention strategies to reduce the need for women and children to make repeated use of refuge and other crisis accommodation
- Responding to children in specialist homelessness services
- Coordination of services for Aboriginal homelessness in the Western Australia mid-west region
- Indigenous homelessness in regional Australia

4. The *National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness* established by COAG in 2009 focuses on the following strategies to reduce homelessness:

- prevention and early intervention to stop people becoming homeless,
- breaking the cycle of homelessness,
- improving and expanding the service response to homelessness, and

- Australian and State and Territory governments working together to implement the strategic agenda outlined in the Government's White Paper on Homelessness: *The Road Home*.

As part of the agreement, states and territories, including Western Australia agreed to deliver the following additional services for women and children:

- support for women and children experiencing domestic and family violence to stay in their present housing where it is safe to do so
- assistance for homeless people, including families with children, to stabilise their situation and to achieve sustainable housing
- outreach programs to connect rough sleepers to long-term housing and health services
- support for children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness including to maintain contact with the education system
- legal services provided to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness as a result of legal issues including family violence, tenancy or debt (COAG, 2009).

5. *The 2013-14 National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness* was established by COAG in 2013. This one-year transitional NPAH provides for the continuity of homelessness services, supporting states and territories to maintain the same level of service delivery as provided under the 2009-13 NPAH. The transitional NPAH provides Commonwealth funding, matched by jurisdictions to ensure the continued provision of homelessness services. This includes funds for capital projects to help people move out of homelessness into safe and sustainable housing. There is also Commonwealth funding for research and evaluation projects. (COAG, 2013)

At the State and Territory level, implementation plans are in place, and in Western Australia, the then Department for Child Protection developed a State Plan for 2010-2013 (Government of Western Australia, 2010). The WA Council on Homelessness was instrumental in developing the plan that focused on the three key strategies of early intervention and prevention, an integrated service system, and breaking the cycle of homelessness. An overview of the history and responses to homelessness in WA is available in the special edition of the professional journal *Parity* published in 2012.

Underpinning each of these strategies or responses to child homelessness are the concepts of integrated or "joined up" (Hodgkins et al., 2013) and "wrap around" (Walter & Petr, 2011) service provision. In most states government funding policy has ensured that structurally, domestic and family violence services are part of the

homelessness sector. While some service providers indicate they are “joined-up” and are generally working well together, other evidence suggests there is a clear divide between the homelessness and family/domestic violence service sectors that requires a cultural change (Barker et al., 2013).

One positive example from WA is the collaboration between an Aboriginal community and the Department for Child Protection and Family Support in the design and operation of a residential child care facility in the Halls Creek Aboriginal community (Hodgkins, et al., 2013). Marrying DCPFS’s statutory frameworks together with local approaches proved viable as part of an effective response to a dire situation at the time of the research. However, the report concludes that the ‘one-size fits all’ approach is unlikely to work across all Aboriginal communities.

Programs that have shown positive effects on children’s wellbeing

A major component of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH) is to support women and children to stay in their housing arrangements in situations of domestic and family violence. Instead of the women and children leaving the home, the perpetrator of violence leaves (Hartwig & Chung, 2012). In Australia, these schemes have been evaluated and found to play an important role in preventing homelessness for women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence (Spinney, 2012; Spinney & Blandy, 2011). These programs are similar to the sanctuary schemes that have become mainstream policy in the UK (Fitzpatrick, 2012) and they have also been found to be successful in multiple jurisdictions across Australia, even in those areas where they were not expected to do so well (Spinney, 2012).

Since 2010, a number of Safe at Home (SAH) initiatives and Domestic Violence Outreach (DVO) programs have been operating in Western Australia as part of the NPAH. Following are some examples:

- Keep Safe at Home program: Keeping women and children safely housed (Collins, 2012);
- Ruah Safe at Home program: Staying housed and safe (Brady, 2012);
- The NEST: A safe place to start (Nelson, 2012);
- Safe at Home: Working to prevent homelessness (Moore, 2012).

These programs are framed around early intervention and prevention and aimed at breaking the cycle of homelessness for women and children, and connecting victims and perpetrators with services providing ongoing support, counselling, advocacy and assistance (Breckenridge & Mulrone, 2007; Spinney & Blandy, 2011).

Examples from the US include the provision of services for homeless children and their families by kindergartens (Allen et al., 2007), pre-schools and primary schools (Hendricks & Barkley, 2012; Holtzman, 2013). Since the federal US McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act commenced operation in the early 1990s, schools can access funding to operate a range of services, for example, immediate enrolment of homeless children (no waiting periods) and transportation to and from school (Wilson & Squires, 2014). Ongoing program evaluation has identified barriers that continue to exist and there are lengthy waiting lists (Jozefowicz-Simbeni & Israel, 2006). The replication of these services across diverse communities is planned and amendments have recently been made to better serve homeless children (Wilson & Squires, 2014).

The supporting infrastructure necessary to implement the requirements of the McKinney-Vento Act include co-ordinators in each state and homeless liaison officers. There have been extensive evaluations of the Act including the development of a McKinney-Vento Act Implementation Scale (MVAIS) for the purpose of providing a tool for assessing perceived knowledge and awareness of implementation of the Act within schools (Canfield et al., 2012). The academic outcomes of homeless children are also measured (Hendricks, 2010). Some specific examples of MVA programs include:

- Horizons for Homeless Children that has established play centres in family shelters throughout Massachusetts in order to provide children with a dedicated area for playing. The program serves about 2,200 children each week.
- In Washington, DC, a similar program, Homeless Children's Playtime Project, offers playrooms for homeless children. Trained, screened volunteers provide weekly activities, healthy snacks, and opportunities to play and learn for hundreds of children in five emergency shelter and transitional housing programs. Homeless Children's Playtime Project served 714 children in 2010, with more than 400 of them under the age of 5. (McCoy-Roth et al., 2012).

The US has a long history of establishing an infrastructure to address child homelessness. A systems wide approach arose from the influence of Bronfenbrenner (Swick & Williams, 2006) who convinced the US government to focus on children and their families when considering homelessness. This led to the establishment of the US Headstart program in 1965 with its focus on family support services, home visits, and education for parenthood. The five ecological systems conceptualised by Bronfenbrenner are:

1. the microsystem of family, school, religious institutions, community, and peers;

2. the mesosystem referring to the interconnections between the microsystems, for example, interactions between the family and teachers;
3. the exosystem involving links between a social setting and the individual's immediate context over which they have no control;
4. the macrosystem or cultural context in which the family lives;
5. the chronosystem referring to significant life events and transitions.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach, to which much of the literature refers, recommends that children and families are best assisted with strategies addressing each of these ecosystems as follows:

1. helping families develop caring and loving microsystems;
2. assisting families in becoming more empowered in their exosystem relations;
3. nurturing families in ways they can use mesosystems to help them better respond to the specific stressors they face;
4. advocating for stronger family support strategies and policies in the macrosystem contexts in which young families live;
5. helping families learn from their personal, family, and societal, historical lives.

Children's own views and experiences of homelessness and support services

It is important to seek out children's voices to elicit their first-hand perspectives and experiences of homelessness. However, there have been few attempts to obtain views directly from the children themselves (Gibson & Johnstone, 2010; Higgins et al., 2007; Hinton & Cassel, 2013; UNICEF, 2011). A notable exception is a report commissioned in the Australian Capital Territory that reflects the view of the reference group that *"Kids should be asked about stuff that's got to do with them... They can tell you stuff you'd never think of – cos you're not a kid..."* (Moore, et al., 2011, p. 36).

Children define homelessness differently to adults: for them, it is not about being 'houseless' and being 'housed' does not always make children feel as though they are 'at home'. For children, being homeless is about "feeling unsafe, about being disconnected from supports and not having a sense of security or place" (Moore et al., 2011, p. 57). This view is supported by the children's reports about their experience of additional stress when in supported accommodation, sharing space with others (Hinton & Cassel, 2013; Moore et al., 2008). For Indigenous children the protection system holds additional fears (Gibson & Johnstone, 2010); for example, home is most often connected to land and extended family (Higgins et al., 2007).

The role of pet animals was also highlighted by children as important; animals were seen as family members and seemed to represent stability (Moore, et al., 2008).

Children's experiences of homelessness are "characterized by negative experiences, such as violence, loss and grief" (Moore et al., 2008, p. 38). Nevertheless, children are also able to see positive aspects to their situations, including a strengthening of family relationships. This point emphasises the importance of listening to children's voices. Children have a need to express their feelings and anxieties and want to tell their "stories relating to how their families had overcome challenges, how they had 'stuck together' and the strengths and capacities they shared" (Moore et al., 2011, p. 108).

Children identify education and the role of the school as central to assisting them to find a sense of stability (Moore & McArthur, 2011). Mobility itself imposes severe restrictions on access to education (Fantuzzo et al., 2012) and children may be reluctant to admit to homelessness, in fear of embarrassment, stigmatisation, or removal from their families (Moore & McArthur, 2011).

Gaps in knowledge

The gaps in knowledge in relation to child and family homelessness in Australia are well documented in the literature (Keys, 2009). There is considerable work to be done to improve the national and state data collections in relation to child homelessness as there is limited data and evidence to inform service delivery (Dockery et al., 2010).

There is a gendered dimension to homelessness as indicated throughout the literature (Bowpitt et al., 2011) and this could be made more explicit in discussions and future studies in relation to child homelessness.

While much work has been undertaken by the ABS in relation to understandings of homelessness, there might be some value in exploring children's perspectives of homelessness. In addition, following the lead provided by the US McKinney-Vento Act, a definition of homeless children might be useful in the Australian context.

The shortfalls and gaps in the prevailing literature are extensive as outlined by Keys (2009) including:

- An absence of children's perspectives and voices.
- Narrow fields of interest, with studies of physical and mental health, emotional wellbeing, development, behaviour and educational achievement predominating.
- A lack of evidence around good practice with few programs having been externally evaluated.

- The absence of studies that evaluate and compare the effectiveness of different housing and support approaches, for example supported transitional accommodation compared to permanent housing with or without support for families with different needs.
- A focus on individual and family deficits rather than strengths both in terms of research questions and the interpretation of data. This has resulted in a tendency for studies to conclude psychopathology over short-term adaption to difficult circumstances.
- Many children who have experienced homelessness do well but we have little evidence regarding which children do well and why this is so.
- The context and nature of homelessness experience is not taken into account. Children experiencing homelessness are not a homogeneous group but are often dealt with as such in the research. Studies often fail to describe the demographics of the children who participate and/or the nature or circumstances of their homelessness. The homogeneity of the population of children who experience homelessness often goes unaccounted for in research design, data analysis and conclusions.
- There is a limited range of methodology and methods. A traditional science perspective with a focus on measuring effects dominates the field, with the majority of studies employing quantitative methods. Other perspectives and approaches are under-represented.

Summaries of selected documents

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2014). *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples perspectives on homelessness*. Canberra, ACT: ABS.

[Download Link](#)

Aims: The aim of this study was to further develop the ABS' understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perceptions of home and homelessness and to consider how these aligned with the ABS statistical definition across Australia.

Method: Discussions were aimed at discovering the way in which home and homelessness are understood from a service provider perspective and how that might differ when compared with the elements of homelessness in the ABS statistical definition (i.e., secure tenure, adequate housing, control of, and access to space for social relations).

Findings: Homelessness for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can be defined as disconnection from country and/or disconnection from family and community. People reported that in order to avoid being disconnected from their family they might have to live in crowded conditions. Similarly, if no suitable housing were available on country, people might sleep either outside, or in improvised dwellings, rather than move to an adequate dwelling that is not on country.

The concept of usual residence used in the Australian census does not necessarily align with perceptions of 'home' for many Aboriginal and some Torres Strait Islander people. Many Aboriginal people are connected to multiple communities and as such they have multiple 'usual residences' where they feel at home, and are potentially not attached to a single dwelling for more than six months in the year. Aboriginal people reported that their home is more associated with a place or area, rather than with a dwelling, and the perception of home is often tied to connection to country, and/or family and community

These types of nuanced situations are not easily captured in official statistics. However it is recognised that there would be value in further considering these situations both in their own right, and also alongside current measures of homelessness.

Recommendations:

- The different perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can be used to help inform the interpretation of estimates of homelessness from the Census. They can also be used to assist the ABS to train staff who might interview Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people during the Census to understand conceptual differences.

- An overarching issue impacting on the estimates of homelessness is that the census data for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are likely to be underestimated. In response, a culturally appropriate set of questions has been developed for inclusion in the 2014-15 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS). The set of questions will collect data on past experiences of homelessness and the reasons for the most recent experience of homelessness, and whether assistance was sought.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2011). *Housing and homelessness services: Access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*. Canberra: AIHW

[Download Link](#)

Aims: This report provides an overview of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing and homelessness information across Australia. It aims to provide an overview of the housing issues faced by Indigenous Australians and the housing services that are provided for their assistance. It also presents a general profile of homelessness for Indigenous Australians, and the types of homelessness services they access.

Method: The report is mainly based on annual data collections from a range of specialist homelessness services that provide services to people who are homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless. In addition, data from the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) from 2008–09 have been analysed. The report cautions that this group represents only a sub-group of the total homeless population, as not all people who are homeless will access a specialist homelessness service.

Findings: The largest Indigenous client group in 2008–09 was females with children. The most commonly reported reason for seeking assistance was because of 'overcrowding'. The most frequently provided services included culturally appropriate support and health and medical services.

Across Australia, in 2008-2009, there were 18,700 accompanying children seeking assistance from SAAP, evenly split between girls and boys. Most were aged between 0–14 years (94%). Only a small proportion of accompanying children were aged between 15–17 years (6%).

The major government responses to Indigenous housing needs are mainly funded under the National partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing (NPARIH). This program aims to "facilitate significant reform in the provision of housing for Indigenous people in remote communities and to address overcrowding, homelessness, poor housing condition and severe housing shortage in remote Indigenous communities". Government responses include social housing programs,

such as Public Housing, State owned and managed Indigenous housing (SOMIH), Community Housing, Indigenous Community Housing, Private Rent Assistance, Commonwealth Rent Assistance and Home Purchase Assistance.

Recommendations:

Indigenous input into housing services is important to ensure that the services are appropriate to the needs of Indigenous Australians. Mechanisms in place in 2008–09 to encourage Indigenous input included representation on boards, negotiation tables, consultation with community members and regional stakeholders, engagement in service planning, decision-making and delivery, planning committees, community forums, workshops, and employment and training opportunities.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2011). *People turned away from government-funded specialist homelessness accommodation. 2010–11. Canberra: AIHW.*

[Download Link](#)

Aim: This national report presents data on the people turned away from government-funded specialist homelessness accommodation in 2009–10.

Method: The report addressed the following questions:

- What was the level of turnaway?
- Who was turned away?
- Why were people turned away?
- Were people referred on to other accommodation?
- Factors affecting turnaway?

The data were collected in the SAAP National Data Collection. Data are reported in terms of individual people, including those who made a valid unmet request for immediate accommodation at a government-funded specialist homelessness agency. It also includes the small number who may have received accommodation later that day.

Findings: Government-funded specialist homelessness agencies are operating to capacity and are unable to completely meet the demand for accommodation. Families with children experience more difficulty than others in obtaining accommodation with 74% of couples with children and 64% of individuals with children being turned away compared to 61% of childless couples and 51% of individuals without children.

One reason why it may be more difficult for family groups to secure accommodation

is that these groups tend to stay longer once they are accommodated. The turnover of beds, therefore, is less for family groups than for other clients.

There may be a 'hidden need' for accommodation when people who need accommodation do not request it. There is evidence to suggest that not everyone who requires such accommodation is seeking it. For example, the larger number of homeless people enumerated in the 2006 Census of Population and Housing homeless enumeration strategy, suggests there may be a significant level of hidden need for government-funded specialist homelessness accommodation.

Recommendations: Nil

Barker, J., V. Kolar, S. Mallett & M. McArthur. (2013). *What works for children experiencing homelessness and/or family/domestic violence? Part 1: Literature Synthesis.* Melbourne: Hanover Welfare Services.

[Download Link](#)

Aim: This report examines the range of interventions designed to support and improve outcomes for children affected by homelessness and/or family/domestic violence and is part one of a two part project. The stated aims are:

- To understand the purpose and intended outcomes of service and practice approaches with children and their care-givers who have experienced homelessness and/or family violence,
- To identify what types of service models are effective with this population,
- To document and disseminate information about a range of service models and practice tools as a means of improving service responses for this population, and
- To provide evidence about practice that can inform the development of effective policy and programs for this population.

Method: A total of 74 studies was reviewed, synthesising existing interventions in the homelessness and family/domestic violence sectors, identifying the key elements, mechanisms and practice tools/resources employed in effective service models and practices with children and their care-givers.

Findings: In discussing gaps in the literature, the report states that two key issues stand out. First, the research and service literature reflect a clear divide, or silos, between the homelessness and family/domestic violence service sectors. Second, the literature consistently calls for the need for cultural change in the family/domestic violence and homelessness fields, particularly in the service delivery

domains.

The review's findings show that children, especially those under 12 years, are emerging as the new face of homelessness in Australia. Domestic violence is a major cause of homelessness and children become homeless when their families do.

Effects of homelessness include:

- poor physical health, including dental and respiratory conditions;
- increased risk of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress;
- a sense of helplessness and lack of agency;
- lack of contact with other family members and friends;
- behaviour problems impacting academic performance.

The homelessness sector's strengths are identified (accommodation, support) but also a lack of approaches to meet children's and parents' emotional, social and psychological needs.

The review identifies case management as the most common response in addressing stability, safety and predictability. The needs of homeless families are rarely related simply to a need for shelter. The client populations have multiple and complex issues/problems. A 'one size fits all approach' to programs and services, therefore, cannot meet the complex needs of children who, for example, have experienced family/domestic violence.

Recommendations: The review recommends:

- Services that explicitly aim to address the needs of children need to think about creating child-friendly spaces that provide stable and safe environments with play areas appropriate for children.
- There is a need for flexibility and integration with other services in the response of the homelessness sector to related issues.
- Homeless services also need to be attentive and sensitive to trauma issues.
- Further research is needed and evaluations of programs that explicitly address the concurrent and overlapping issues of family/domestic violence and homelessness.
- There is a need for a stronger relationship between research and practice and for research to inform practice.

- There should be further development and documentation of effective, evidence-based interventions for children exposed to family/domestic violence.

Birdsall-Jones, C. (2013). Coordination of services for Aboriginal homelessness in the Western Australian mid-west region. St Lucia, Qld: Institute for Social Science Research, University of Queensland.

[Download Link](#)

Aim: This study examines the WA response to Aboriginal homelessness in the Midwest Region of WA.

Method: A case study was undertaken in the three towns of Meekatharra, Carnarvon and Geraldton. Data were collected through a process of semi-structured interviews with key practitioners (government and non-government organisations) to investigate the nature and extent of the phenomenon, commenting on both the strengths and weaknesses of specific programs.

Findings: The authors appeal for a coordinated response to homelessness that incorporates consultative, cooperative, and culturally based structures across the region. Key concerns raised in the report related to issues affecting the wellbeing of children (generally under 13 years) including:

- child home abandonment - children (aged 4 to 15 years) who choose to leave the house and roam the streets in order to wait out the unsafe conditions at home.
- household crowding and situations in which relations from other towns stay with families who have attained a public housing lease, putting them in danger of losing their home, and
- the extent to which clear and coordinated solutions exist between agencies dealing with Aboriginal homelessness.

Rather than being homeless, children were understood to be dysfunctionally mobile. The researchers highlighted cultural breakdown and the breakdown of the family structure as negatively impacting support and the needs of children. The report concludes that the contrasting situations of Aboriginal homelessness in the WA Mid-West Region arise out of the degree to which coordination exists among the various agencies and government structures in the town and their willingness to involve the Aboriginal community in the process.

Recommendations:

- The Aboriginal community must be included as an integral part of the decision making process for any measures being decided upon to combat homelessness.
- The coordination of efforts by interested parties, including the Aboriginal community, in dealing with Aboriginal homelessness improves the effectiveness of the outcomes achieved.
- 'Silo' approaches in which agencies act independently of each other in combatting Aboriginal homelessness may in fact exacerbate the problem.

Buckner, J. C. (2008). Understanding the impact of homelessness on children: Challenges and future research directions. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 51(6), 721-736.

Aim: The aim of this publication is to summarise research findings conducted in the USA between 1987 and 2005 on the effect of homelessness on children's mental health, physical health, development status and academic achievement. It provides a conceptual framework with which to understand results from studies and identifies gaps in understanding about child homelessness.

Method: A review of empirical studies involving homeless children living with their families conducted in the USA during the past 20 years.

Findings: A synopsis of the results of each investigation is tabled in terms of how homeless children looked on the main outcome measure(s) compared to low-income housed children and children in the general population (i.e., compared to normed data). Negative effects on children's mental health, physical health, development status and academic achievement are better understood in the context of other adversities that children living in poverty frequently experience. It is hard to demarcate to what extent problems and difficulties are attributable to housing status versus other factors. Studies consistently uncovered evidence for a poverty-related impact on children whether currently homeless or living in permanent housing.

When viewed in the context of a much broader range of adversities, it is apparent that homelessness is one of many stressors that children living in poverty all too frequently encounter.

Recommendations:

- It would be useful to clarify the relative impact of a full range of negative life events and chronic strains that children living in poverty experience as a means to better target treatment resources and preventive efforts to those who are

most in need.

- More research is needed to better understand the extent to which there are subgroups of homeless children who vary in the extent to which they have significant problems across different dimensions of functioning.

Centacare. (2003). An evaluation of the Centacare homeless and parenting program initiative. [Canberra]: Dept of Family and Community Services.

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Aims: The evaluation was conducted to provided an overview of the context of the Homeless and Parenting Program Initiative (HAPPI), and to identify the trends and growth patterns of family homelessness in Australia and overseas and the documented effects of homelessness particularly on children and Indigenous families. It also charts the original goals of the program as set out in the funding agreement.

Method: The methodology selected for the review of HAPPI includes:

- desk top research of HAPPI family files including both closed and ongoing cases
- program statistics and data
- semi-structured interviews with client families based on the client questionnaire
- structured interviews with referring workers and agencies
- structured questionnaires completed by referring workers and agencies
- interviews with relevant Commonwealth and State Government Officers
- focus groups with HAPPI's Advisory Committee
- discussions with HAPPI staff
- literature review of local and international parenting programs. (p. 33).

Findings: While the program had been running for less than two years at the time of evaluation, it was shown to be successful in achieving many of its aims, with the report authors claiming that the program was filling a much needed service in an area where no other such services exist.

HAPPI is described as "a unique program providing specialist parenting advice, education and support to homeless families" (p. 4) and the first of its kind in South Australia. The program targeted the wellbeing of children aged 0-12 years with an emphasis on Indigenous families. As a mobile service, HAPPI was able to continue to work with transient families.

The evaluation expresses concern that official statistical data relating to Indigenous homelessness underrepresent the extent of the problem, pointing out that it is often hidden due to transience and accommodation that is shared and over-crowded, and exacerbated by complex and multi-dimensional needs.

HAPPI worked with children and their families to improve outcomes, offering services that included:

- specialist counselling and support to families at risk of breakdown resulting from homelessness
- parenting support and information to families
- consultation services to non-government agencies working with families in regard of parenting issues
- training and education of non-government workers in parenting and child development
- assistance in the delivery of appropriate services to Aboriginal families.

Program workers carried case-loads of approximately 20 families taking a unique approach assisting parents and children to learn to play and have fun together as well as helping parents with the serious aspects of parenting such as attachment, behavioural change, child management strategies, and emotional and physical care. The families targeted by HAPPI often received little or no support from other service agencies as they were seen as 'borderline' or not meeting service guidelines. The report authors, however, suggest "the range and complexity of the presenting problems should make these families ideal targets for a range of support services" (p. 49).

Among positive outcomes for parents and families were:

- improved skills, knowledge and understanding of parenting strategies
- increased awareness by parents of child development issues, and long-term implications of poor child health
- improved relationships between parents and children
- increased support of the needs of children
- increased access to and use of specialist support services for both parents and children
- increased support systems developed by parents
- a reduction in generational homelessness. (p. 39)

For children, positive outcomes included:

- improvement in school participation, including school attendance
- basic life skill taught to children eg hygiene, health, nutrition, grooming, conflict resolution, problem solving.

The project also resulted in improved feedback from children regarding their feelings of safety in the home environment.

A key issue that led to HAPPI being unable to meet its objectives more fully was that although it was established as an adjunct to other services, and one of a range of supports for homeless parents and children, other agencies declined to buy-in to the program to the expected level. The concept of HAPPI, however, was “almost unanimously considered to be an excellent model and service by all those who were consulted during the evaluation” (p. 48).

Recommendations: The evaluation recommended, among other matters, that:

- funding be continued and expanded for HAPPI beyond its original funding period
- the program is a model that should be emulated in other services, including its shared approach to client work across both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal clients with the Aboriginal worker working with non-Aboriginal clients and vice versa.

Flatau, P., Conroy, E., Eardley, T., Spooner, C., & Forbes, C. (2012). *Lifetime and intergenerational experiences of homelessness in Australia*. Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute.

[Download Link](#)

Aim:

To determine:

- What is the incidence and pattern of intergenerational homelessness among homeless people accessing homelessness services? Is intergenerational homelessness more common among certain homeless client groups than among others?
- What is the incidence of childhood experiences of homelessness among the cohort of clients of specialist homelessness services? Do the characteristics of homeless people who experienced homelessness as children differ from the characteristics of those who did not? What are the characteristics of the parents of those who did and did not experience homelessness?
- What is the pattern and extent of intergenerational homelessness and of lifetime experiences of homelessness among Indigenous people as compared with non-Indigenous people?

- What are the individual-level 'risk' factors associated with intergenerational homelessness? What role do parental forces play in generating future homelessness among offspring?

Method:

Stage 1: A one-off cross-sectional survey of people (the *Intergenerational Homelessness Survey*) currently experiencing homelessness, recruited through specialist homelessness services across Australia

Stage 2: Qualitative analysis using in-depth interviews with clients of services and focus groups with support staff and managers of selected agencies:

- Managers and case workers in family homelessness services in particular may have direct experience of children who experience homelessness with their parents and again as adults in the same service
- Random sampling of agencies based around the following criteria:
- State, service delivery model (e.g., crisis/short term, medium/long term, day support, outreach support); primary target group (e.g., young people, single men, women with children escaping domestic violence); secondary target group (e.g., Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples)

Findings:

- The key finding of the study is that there is a relatively high prevalence of intergenerational homelessness among the cohort of those currently receiving support from specialist homelessness services.
- Around half of all respondents have themselves been homeless and report that they have had parents who were homeless at some point in their lives.
- Given the self-report retrospective nature of the study, this is likely to be an under-estimate of the rate of intergenerational homelessness within the cohort of people examined (i.e., those that are currently receiving support from homeless agencies).
- A second key finding of this study is that the rate of intergenerational homelessness is much higher for Indigenous respondents than non-Indigenous respondents. For Indigenous participants the intergenerational homelessness rate is 69.0 per cent. This compares with an intergenerational homeless rate of 43.0 per cent among non-Indigenous participants.
- There are relatively strong links between homelessness experienced prior to the age of 18 to conflict and violence in the parental home and to parental issues surrounding problematic alcohol and drug use.

- This evidence supports the view that intergenerational homelessness is very much linked to intergenerational transmission of risk factors.

Recommendations: These findings have important implications for policy. They point to the fundamental importance of preventative and early intervention approaches in childhood and in respect of family homelessness and parental domestic violence and alcohol and drug use issues.

Gibson, C. & Johnstone, T. (2010). *Investing in our future: Children's journeys through homelessness and child protection: A scan of the literature, policy and practice*. South Australia: Australian Centre for Child Protection, University of South Australia.

[Download Link](#)

Aim: The aims of this literature review were to foster cross-disciplinary discussion amongst researchers, policy makers and practitioners from which research directions and ultimately research questions can be formulated; and to identify evidence of policies and programs that aim to support children's wellbeing so as to reduce the risk or impact of child and/or family homelessness and associated factors such as parenting capacity.

Method: The researchers used Chamberlain and Mackenzie's (2008) three-part definition of homelessness:

- Primary homelessness - those without conventional accommodation, e.g., people living on the streets or sleeping in parks;
- Secondary homelessness - those staying in emergency or transitional accommodation who would otherwise be without adequate or safe shelter; those temporarily living with other households because they have no accommodation of their own; and people staying in boarding houses on a short-term basis.
- Tertiary homelessness - those living in boarding houses on a medium to long-term basis.

Using this definition they investigated what policies and practices support children's wellbeing so as to reduce the risk or impact of child and/or family homelessness and associated factors such as parenting capacity. They paid due attention to:

- Children and families at risk of becoming homeless
- Children and families who are homeless

- Perspectives of children
- Young people leaving state care
- Young Indigenous people
- Young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

The reviewers searched peer reviewed literature and grey literature, identifying 132 peer-reviewed articles and 310 articles from the grey literature out of over 5,000 articles.

Findings: The reviewers highlighted:

- At that time (2010), there were no robust Australian data to highlight children's journeys or pathways between homelessness and child protection or vice versa.
- They identified growing recognition in the Australian homelessness sector of the importance of "listening to, acknowledging and keeping the child's perspective and experience at the forefront" but acknowledged that there are few studies that focus on giving voice to or representing the experiences of homeless children and families.
- They noted only one recent Australian study asked children about their experiences of homelessness, while another gave voice to sole fathers. While there was some international literature focused on the experiences of homeless mothers, studies that include their voices are not evident.
- A key finding was consistent with reports that families fear the child protection system and that this fear is especially true for Indigenous families.
- The Australian literature particularly emphasised the benefits that education has for children experiencing homelessness, noting that schools are an important vehicle of prevention and early intervention for children experiencing homelessness because most young people have their first experience of homelessness while still at school.
- The review commented on results from a US summer program intervention for children living in shelters that were compared to those of the other children in the program to improve their reading and writing. The findings support the idea that teacher perceptions, classroom behaviour and achievement are related.

Recommendations:

- It is widely argued that close collaboration within and between service systems is needed and that children's education must be linked to service plans.
- As many children have entered care before they are five years old, their participation in quality early childhood education may be useful in promoting the mastery of cognitive and social and emotional competencies necessary for educational success.

Hinton, S. & Cassel, D. (2013). Exploring the lived experiences of homeless families with young children. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 41(6), 457-463.

Aims

- The research aimed to explore the lived experiences of young children, aged four to eight, and their families who have experienced or are currently experiencing living in a fixed, non-transient, homeless situation.
- This research sought: (1) to understand reasons families with young children become homeless; (2) to become aware of beneficial resources available to families and their perceptions of the resources; (3) and to examine the developmental effects that homeless living situations can have on young children.
- It was envisaged that the outcomes of this study were to be used to inform early childhood educators about practices as they seek to serve young children aged four to eight living homeless.

Method: Participants in this study were homeless parents with young children living in a fixed, non-transient, urban downtown shelter in the southwestern United States. The role of the researcher was that of a participant-observer, having participated in volunteer work with the children of the families living at the shelter before the research began.

The research study was a qualitative phenomenological study. Interviews took place with parents and children and observations were made of participation in the shelter's program.

Findings:

- This study took place in the US noting that "at least 3.5 million people are likely to experience homelessness during a year... more than half of this group is women and children," and 42 % of this population is reported to be under the age of 5 by the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty. Further, in 2011 U.S. cities saw on average a 6 % increase in homelessness and a 16 %

increase among families with children experiencing homelessness.

- It was noted that young children experiencing homelessness are “twice as likely to experience learning disabilities and three times as likely to experience an emotional disturbance” compared to housed children. However, the research available on homeless families with young children lacks information on how young children experience homelessness.
- Reasons for homelessness that emerged from the parent interviews included: unhappy childhoods, young pregnancies, multiple children, failure to complete schooling, drug or substance abuse, paternal abandonment, and unemployment.
- The shelter is a faith-based program that seeks to dispel the many negative and incorrect stereotypes about homeless mothers and their children while interacting with homeless families in supportive ways.
- Overall, the interviews revealed that the parents felt positively about the resources the shelter provided, ensuring their clients’ needs and goals were met. However, there were some resources lacking: resources that engage young children in learning; educational support for parents with young children.

The research highlighted that moving into the homeless shelter affected the young children, with parents describing behavioral changes such as anger and anxiety. Observations and interviews also revealed that living in the shelter affected the development of homeless children’s vocabulary. Observations showed that families struggled in understanding the basic needs of their children. The study validates the importance of educating families of young children who are homeless as well as the importance of early childhood educators developing an awareness of ways to support children in a homeless situation.

Recommendations:

If early childhood educators are going to effectively serve homeless families with young children, research is needed that brings understanding of their life situation through their perspectives.

It is vital that early childhood educators are aware that homelessness affects young children and their development.

Developmental delays, such as below average vocabulary, an inability to focus, or issues of anger and resentment towards life may be present.

Early childhood educators can play a crucial role in providing support to these young children as they transition into a public school environment. They need to be informed on the dynamics of life that lead homeless families into their current predicament, the resources that are available to these families as well as ways that an educator can be a liaison to resources, and understand the effects that homelessness can have on young children.

Further research should consider looking into the family structures of homelessness and the benefits of engaging activities for young children who are homeless.

Research should look into the differences between families with young children who are transient and those who are not and are living in a fixed location, such as a shelter.

Hodgkins, K.A., Crawford, F.R., & Budiselik, W.R. (2013). The Halls Creek way of residential child care: Protecting children is everyone's business. *Children Australia*, 38(2), 61.

Aim: Responding to public concerns in a specific community, this study aimed to document the learnings from Halls Creek, where the Aboriginal community worked with the Department of Child Protection (DPC) in a remote area of Western Australia to establish and sustain a childcare residential unit, Yurag-Man-Gu Taam-Purru, for Aboriginal children at risk of homelessness, neglect and poverty.

Method: This study is an Aboriginal ethnographic case study where local historical knowledge was sought from the community, through the media, and through the researcher's political and government engagement in the child protection issues of Halls Creek. In depth interviews were conducted with four local Aboriginal people and four non-Aboriginal people employed by DPC at that time. All were involved in the development and running of Yurag-Man-Gu Taam-Purru. While the study was limited by time and the small number of people interviewed, all reported on the importance of healing the past, strengthening the capacity of parents, and adopting collaborative and community responsibility for protecting children.

Findings: The four strategies identified as fundamental to success at Halls Creek include: (i) a commitment to recruiting local staff; (ii) maintaining links to culture; (iii) staying connected to family; and (iv) staff are learning too. The study details how these strategies were implemented in practice.

- The value placed on the strategy *to recruit local staff* was, in practice, often difficult but had positive outcomes. Primarily, it upheld the kinship and community connections between the children, staff and families.
- Participants acknowledged *the importance of children maintaining cultural connections* not only as the child's right, but also the community's. This was achieved by:
 - Employing local staff.
 - Permitting, supporting and encouraging parents/family to fulfil the carer role.
 - Including parents and other family members on bush excursions and cultural activities.
 - Utilising the Halls Creek Language Centre for the children to learn traditional language and to engage with community elders.

- Celebrating and embracing the children’s cultural identity by participating in National Aborigines and Islander Observance Committee (NAIDOC) week celebrations.
- The children accompany staff on hunting trips and help prepare bush tucker.
- Participating in traditional ‘smoking’ ceremonies to promote spiritual, social and emotional wellbeing.
- *Staying connected to families.* This was a challenge on the ground because the open-door policy of the residential care setting contradicted the DCP’s policies of children not being permitted extensive contact with family on residential care premises. Yurag-Man-Gu Taam-Purru staff demonstrated the open-door policy could be implemented without compromising the safety of the children, caregivers and staff.
- Staff at Yurag-Man-Gu Tamm-Purra and in DCP are *expected to be active learners* in the quest to provide the best possible care for children. The focus in Halls Creek was on moving beyond dichotomising Aboriginal and professional child protection cultures. All involved were expected to be both learners and teachers.

Recommendations: The authors recognise that it would be naïve to conclude child and family welfare problems at Halls Creek have been resolved because of the initiatives described in this study. Problems at Halls Creek and in many other communities have arisen for many reasons. Marrying DCP’s statutory frameworks together with local approaches was viable as part of an effective response to a dire situation at the time of the research. It is important to recognise that the ‘one-size fits all’ approach will not work across diverse communities.

Yurag-Man-Gu Taam-Purru arose from community lobbying, a media campaign, politicians’ voices, practitioners’ knowledge and the community’s ownership of its children. This was a case of a response being initiated, implemented and evaluated at a local level, according to the community’s needs and culture. It is up to others to consider whether this story from Halls Creek is useful. Guiding principles might be abstracted as:

- Support, resources and funding from the relevant government agency.
- Integration of community values, knowledge and skills.
- Long-term engagement and consultation between key stakeholders.
- Careful translation and negotiation of meaning, knowledge and solutions between the local and state level.
- Local management and ownership.

Keys, D. (2009). *Children and homelessness: Literature review*. Blackburn, VIC: The Salvation Army Australia Southern Territory.

[Download Link](#)

Aim: This review aimed to draw upon the existing literature as at 2009 to gain an informed understanding of Australian children's experience of homelessness. The review provides a comprehensive overview of the qualitative literature in relation to children's understandings and experience of homelessness, with reference to findings from the perspectives of parents and workers. The review also explores the effects of homelessness based on quantitative and qualitative findings.

Method: The scope of the literature is wide and includes studies that measure the effects of homelessness on children and identifies the needs of children and families at risk of or experiencing homelessness. A wide range of literature is drawn upon addressing particular themes rather than a systematic approach involving database analyses. While focusing on Australian research literature, Indigenous children are not included, neither are the effects of violence and trauma on children nor service models and practice. The authors note the importance and relevance of research in these fields and that an understanding of the conceptions, experience and effects of homelessness on Indigenous children is a matter of great urgency.

Findings: The review identified a number of shortfalls and gaps in the prevailing literature including:

- An absence of children's perspectives and voices
- Narrow fields of interest, with studies of physical and mental health, emotional wellbeing, development, behaviour and educational achievement predominating.
- Gaps in knowledge in relation to children's understandings of 'home' and 'homelessness', the experience of homelessness for children from Indigenous and CALD backgrounds, hunger and nutrition, the impact of gender on experience and effects, children's experiences in homelessness services, and changes to relationships with (including separation from) fathers, friends, siblings, and extended family such as grandparents. For example, there is no research on the effect on relationships and individual wellbeing when siblings are separated or on children's relationships with fathers who have perpetrated violence after reunification post refuge or emergency accommodation.
- A lack of evidence around good practice and few programs have been externally evaluated.

- The absence of studies that evaluate and compare the effectiveness of different housing and support approaches, for example, supported transitional accommodation compared to permanent housing with or without support for families with different needs.
- A focus on individual and family deficits rather than strengths both in terms of research questions and the interpretation of data. This has resulted in a tendency for studies to conclude psychopathology over short-term adaption to difficult circumstances.
- Many children who have experienced homelessness do well but there is little evidence regarding which children do well and why this is so.
- The context and nature of homelessness experience is not taken into account. Children experiencing homelessness are not a homogeneous group but are often dealt with as such in the research. Studies often fail to describe the demographics of the children who participate and/or the nature or circumstances of their homelessness. Without this information there is a risk that findings will be inappropriately generalised to all homeless children. The heterogeneity of the population of children who experience homelessness often goes unaccounted for in research design, data analysis and conclusions. In particular, many studies fail to account for:
 - Timing of homelessness;
 - Age and developmental stage;
 - Causes and triggers of homelessness;
 - Context of homelessness: Level of social support, parental health and wellbeing;
 - Nature of homelessness: Type of accommodation, time homeless, number and frequency of moves;
 - Cultural difference; and
 - Family configuration: Including changes to family configuration associated with homelessness.
- There is a limited range of methodology and methods. A traditional science perspective with a focus on measuring effects dominates the field, with the majority of studies employing quantitative methods. Other perspectives and approaches are under-represented. For example, there is a noticeable lack of ethnographic approaches. There is a preponderance of cross-sectional studies over longitudinal studies, so it cannot be determined whether the identified

effects are long lasting or which contextual changes, including changes to policy or service responses, may influence outcomes.

Recommendations: Future studies would benefit from giving recognition to the importance of hearing directly from children as active participants in research. Given the continuing emphasis on quantitative research about health and developmental progress, much of the engagement with children has been through the administration of scales and standardised tests. Future studies should give children an opportunity to give expression to their own experiences and understandings of homelessness.

McCoy-Roth, M., Mackintosh, B.B., & Murphey, D. (2012). When the bough breaks: The effects of homelessness on young children. *Child Trends: Early Childhood Highlights, 1(1), 1-11.*

Aim: This US review discusses the implications of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act on the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness in US public schools. The report aims to highlight the effects of homelessness on young children, and notes several policies and practices that could help mitigate negative outcomes.

Method: Citing 36 US government reports and scholarly articles, this review discusses the implementation of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. The review discusses the literature that is directly relevant to the implementation of programs under this legislation.

Findings: The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act in part addresses the education of children and youth and provides federal funding to states to address the problems encountered when enrolling in and attending public schools, including early childhood education programs for pre-school-aged homeless children (e.g. public preschool, Head Start, Even Start). Homeless children are deemed immediately and automatically eligible for Head Start and other early education programs, even if documentation (e.g., immunisation records) cannot be readily provided.

Some innovative program examples are:

- Horizons for Homeless Children that has established play centres in family shelters throughout Massachusetts in order to provide children with a dedicated area for playing. The program serves about 2,200 children each week.
- In Washington, DC, a similar program, Homeless Children's Playtime Project, offers playrooms for homeless children. Trained, screened volunteers provide weekly activities, healthy snacks, and opportunities to play and learn for hundreds of children in five emergency shelter and transitional housing

programs. Homeless Children's Playtime Project served 714 children in 2010, with more than 400 of them under the age of 5.

There have been, however, some problems with implementation of the Act because programs use different definitions of homelessness to determine whether children are eligible or not. In response, the definition has since been revised to include unaccompanied youth, and families with children and youth who are defined as homeless under other federal statutes. Individual federal agencies have taken positive steps to create this common data standard and improve coordination across agencies.

Other barriers are related to how programs and policies are structured and their interaction with the constraints of being homeless. Children in homeless families may be denied enrolment for lacking immunisation and birth certificates, or other documentation (e.g., proof of residence) typically required. Given the high rates of mobility among homeless families, children on waiting lists often move prior to obtaining services. In addition, homeless families often need transportation, which may be unavailable or unreliable, in order for their young children to attend preschool programs

In addition to the limited availability of public preschool programs, there are additional barriers to enrolment in preschool programs such as Head Start. Some of these are related to familial constraints. For example, parents may not have time or resources to locate and enrol their children in early childhood programs, while others fear that their children will be removed from their care, if their homeless status becomes known.

Recommendations: Moving homeless families back into permanent housing as quickly as possible. Until this can be arranged, the following measures are recommended:

- Child care and preschool programs should consider prioritising homeless children during enrolment, similar to the Head Start approach.
- Reduce barriers to enrolling young homeless children in early learning programs.
- Policies, procedures, and regulations should be reviewed to identify barriers young homeless children have in accessing (and remaining enrolled in) early care and learning programs. In some cases, definitions may prevent service, in other cases, the need for a complete set of paperwork may prevent enrolment.
- Review federal regulations that may delay children's entry until immunisation and other records have been submitted.
- Improve coordination of programs serving young homeless children. With improved coordination across different programs serving young homeless

children, more children could gain access to existing services. For example, many child care programs serving young homeless children (birth-5 years) are offered by non-profit agencies and the private sector, while others are offered through the public school system or Head Start. Private and public programs have differing requirements which may impede entry to or transfer from one type of program to another.

- Transitional housing programs, including shelters, should provide services that support the physical and social-emotional needs of young homeless children. One way is to ensure that adequate mental health supports exist for children as well as their parents. For example, a large study found that in one network of transitional housing for children and their families, few had licensed mental health professionals with little experience working with children.
- Shelters should consider incorporating play-based strategies to support the healthy development of their youngest clients.
- Programs that can provide reliable transportation for young children and their families could increase participation. According to a report by the Department of Education, transportation was the most frequently reported barrier to participation in public preschool programs.
- In addition, providing services in the communities in which these families reside, whenever possible, would help improve access for homeless families with young children.

Moore, T. & McArthur, M. (2011). 'Good for kids': Children who have been homeless talk about school. *Australian Journal of Education*, 55(2), 147.

Aims: The report details a project commissioned in 2006 in the ACT that aimed to develop an understanding of how children experience, perceive and are affected by their family's homelessness, to identify what the system needs to know in order to achieve better outcomes for homeless families.

Method: The researchers focused particularly on young people's periods of family homelessness as well as exploring times when they had slept rough, lived in temporary or unstable accommodation or within refuges. In seeking the views of children, they acknowledged the belief of their reference group that "Kids should be asked about stuff that's got to do with them... They can tell you stuff you'd never think of – cos you're not a kid..." (p. 36).

The research consisted of a literature review and a qualitative empirical study carried out in Canberra, ACT, exploring how children perceive and experience homelessness. Children were directly engaged in the research through semi-structured interviews, art activities and group discussions. Two-thirds of the 25 participating children were

under 14, recruited through homelessness and family support networks, children's services and youth centres, and included eight participants "of Aboriginal decent".

The researchers acknowledge a limitation of the sample in the non-participation of children who were not currently supported by relevant organisations, those whose workers believed would be unable or unwilling to participate, and those whose parents were reluctant for their children to be involved. A sample group of parents, care workers and teachers was also interviewed for the study.

Findings: The report outlines the extent of family homelessness in Australia and describes the pathways into homelessness. From the literature review undertaken for this project, the authors identified commonly shared experiences of children who accompany their families into homelessness in Australia and how they try to manage cumulative stressors and multiple loss and grief issues, due to domestic and family violence, high levels of transience and mobility, extended periods of homelessness, and living on a day-to-day basis in a range of inappropriate, overcrowded and often unsafe temporary and emergency housing.

In examining the reasons for homelessness, the researchers asked the children about their understandings. One 7-year old girl typified the responses, saying:

"My Mum and my Dad had a big fight and me and my sister we got a bit upset and we started running and I went to hide. And then Dad came and got [my sister] and Mummy put me in the car, and [my sister] jumped out the window and Mum caught her. And then we got to go to Mummy's place, but I thought Dad was a bit upset, and I got a bit upset, but we didn't go back to where Daddy was".

For the children, homelessness was not about being 'houseless', and being 'housed' did not always make children feel as though they were 'at home'. Instead, being homeless "was about feeling unsafe, about being disconnected from supports and not having a sense of security or place" (p. 57). It became quite clear to the researchers that children experience their homelessness quite differently to adults and to each other, and that children in similar circumstances often felt the effects of homelessness in different ways.

Many of the children and young people who had stayed in a refuge reflected that they felt afraid and uncomfortable during their stay. For many, this was because strangers who were in crisis constantly confronted them:

I didn't feel safe. There was this boy there who said that he wanted to be my boyfriend and he would always hang around me. He said he wanted to be the boyfriend for all the girls who were living here. I was 7 and he was like 17. It was creepy (Girl, aged 12).

We stayed in the same room otherwise we wouldn't 've been able to get to sleep because we were too afraid. I think we were there for a few weeks (Boy, aged 10)

The importance of listening to children's voices was stressed as they reported a need to express their feelings and anxieties during their periods of homelessness; children also wanted to tell their stories relating to how their families had overcome challenges, how they had 'stuck together' and the strengths and capacities they shared. Further, voicing their opinions made them feel validated and important, as one 11-year old participant explained:

At [one refuge], the workers would talk to the kids as well as the parents but at others they didn't. It was good when they talked to you – treated you like a person. If they just ignored you it made you feel weird.

The participants, however, felt that children would only approach adults who they deemed 'safe' and who would believe their stories "and help them deal with issues in a way that was respectful of them and their families". The research also resulted in a children and young person's handbook, *"No place but home"*, a compilation of stories, artwork and photos from homeless children.

Recommendations:

The authors recommend that "workers in accommodation, health and child protection services and in schools need to be aware that when working with families experiencing homelessness:

- it is vital to connect with children and young people in their own right and acknowledge their stories;
- children and young people need information about the events and processes affecting their lives, delivered in a sensitive way;
- children often experience problems at school, with their health, and making and retaining friends;
- high priority should be given to supporting parents to deal with the issues contributing to their homelessness;
- knowledge of other relevant services and supports should be strong and up-to-date;
- support for the young person must be sustained beyond the crisis period and preferably provided through continuing contact;
- safe, secure and stable accommodation must be made available as early as in the homelessness cycle as possible;
- a family's strengths and achievements should ALWAYS be recognised.

Moore, T., McArthur, M. & Noble-Carr, D. (2008). Stuff you'd never think of: Children talk about homelessness and how they'd like to be supported. *Family Matters*, (78), 36-43.

Aims: The principal aim of the article was to report on a research project that explored children's experiences of family homelessness and what "homelessness" meant to them. Missing from the debate is a discussion about how children themselves understand homelessness and what implications these understandings have on how we respond to family homelessness and homeless children.

Method: Part of a broader project, the article focuses on issues related to schools, identified in a qualitative study carried out in Canberra, ACT, exploring how children perceive and experience homelessness. Children were directly engaged in the research through semi-structured interviews, art activities and group discussions. Two-thirds of the 25 participating children were under 14, recruited through homelessness and family support networks, children's services and youth centres, and included eight participants "of Aboriginal descent". As part of the methodology, children were asked to identify what it meant to be "home", what makes "a house a home" and what it meant to be "homeless".

Findings:

- Unlike traditional understandings of homelessness, for these children it was determined more by their level of connectedness to family and community, and the absence of fear, instability and insecurity, rather than by their housing status. The authors report that many of the children did not perceive themselves as being homeless, even while living on the streets, in temporary accommodation or in unsuitable dwellings, primarily because they trusted their parents and felt protected by them.
- Having family around also helped children feel safer during stressful periods. As such, having a home was more than having a house. Their perceptions of 'home' were mostly about places where they were free from the things that they feared and from which they needed protection, while "having a home" was about having a sense of permanency, stability and security. However, the children appeared to value routine and a sense of predictability, believing that having routine helped them and their families feel more comfortable.
- In relation to living in supported accommodation, one of the most common issues that children raised was having to share their space with others: Some of the children recalled times when they had met new friends and where they felt somehow connected to other families experiencing similar challenges to them but, overwhelmingly, children reported that living with other families was a stressful experience.

- Having a pet appeared to symbolise having a home and offering a sense of permanency and stability. When asked to draw their families, many of the children identified their pets as being members of their families:

[In my family, there's] my five fish, my pet Speedy, my pet Max, and Flick and, um, I'm sure there's another one—no that's all of them. [Do you have any people in your family?] Oh yeah—my brother, two sisters and my mum. (Boy, aged 9).

- Their pets were also “friends to them when they felt alone” and cheered them up when they were sad: “If you have an animal you can talk to the animal and they will always just listen and not say things like ‘you're ugly’ and stuff” (Boy, aged 11). Many children recalled the sadness they felt when they had to leave their pets behind, but were excited about being able to have animals when their families found somewhere stable to live. “Home”, for many children, was a place where they could have pets.

Recommendations: While not making specific recommendations, the authors note that children's involvement in research such as this contributes essential knowledge for services so that they can fully appreciate and respond to children's felt and expressed needs. To reduce children's levels of anxiety and fear while homeless, the authors emphasise the need to respond not only to children's actual needs, but also to their felt needs—their need to feel safe, the need to be provided with appropriate information so that things are more predictable and that fears are alleviated, and their need for a sense of connectedness to peers and the broader community—not only while they are homeless but, just as critically, after they are “housed”. Only then can children feel as though they are finally “home”.

Moore, T. & McArthur, M. (2011). 'Good for kids': Children who have been homeless talk about school. *Australian Journal of Education*, 55(2), 147.

Aim: The article reports on a research project that aimed to inform service systems about children's perceptions and experiences of homelessness. The project sought to explore and understand “the unique perspectives of children and young people who had accompanied their parents during periods of homelessness” (p. 150). Following an overview of the extent of homelessness among children and what is known about its impact on their schooling, the article presents the findings of a study that explored the experiences of homelessness as they relate to schooling with a group of children and young people. This includes their views and advice about what schools can do to assist other children who are homeless.

Method: Part of a broader project, the article focuses on issues related to schools,

identified in a qualitative study carried out in Canberra, ACT, exploring how children perceive and experience homelessness. Children were directly engaged in the research through semi-structured interviews, art activities and group discussions. Two-thirds of the 25 participating children were under 14, recruited through homelessness and family support networks, children's services and youth centres, and included eight participants "of Aboriginal descent".

Findings:

- Children who are homeless and experiencing a high degree of family mobility can find some sense of stability in the school situation. At the same time, however, that mobility imposes severe restrictions on access to education for such children.
- Children reported experiences of homelessness that were characterised by high levels of family separation, exposure to violence, poor health outcomes, feelings of stress, anxiety, loss and grief, and social isolation, as well as the difficulties in attending and achieving at school and making and keeping friends.
- They identified a complex range of factors that led to their families becoming homeless but the authors stress that the children also reported that, during periods of homelessness, they felt connected and supported by their families, and that their parents mitigated some of the negative effects of being homeless.

Recommendations: The article presents general rather than specific recommendations for schools to consider, regarding it as essential that schools find effective strategies to assist in supporting children to engage in schooling and recognising the impact that unstable housing has on children's lives.

Schools can help to provide children with a sense of security and predictability for homeless children and policies need be implemented to respond to the long-term impacts of homelessness including specific school programs to alleviate the effects associated with homelessness, such as social, language and emotional developmental difficulties that children may experience.

Early recognition of relevant issues and support for parents is recommended, acknowledging that schools have a key role to play in building partnerships with health and welfare services, enabling early connection with services to assist families.

A school's response to children commencing as new students appears to make a difference to their experience of the change. The article notes that commonly used strategies such as 'buddying' and supporting children to engage with sporting and other co-curricular activities can be effective in ensuring that children are able to establish themselves in their new school.

While children may be reluctant to admit to homelessness, in fear of embarrassment, stigmatisation, or removal from their families, they would like their schools to identify and support them through the provision of a welcoming atmosphere, an understanding teacher and concrete strategies for responding to their situations. As one 12-year old male said:

It was kind-of good that she [my teacher] knew, because I wasn't working very good because I was doing other thing. If she didn't know, she would make me work and get angry and things.

The authors felt that teachers should be able to recognise the signs: "Teachers would know that someone was homeless because they wouldn't have a school bag or a lunch box or a hat" (Boy, aged 6); "If they're sitting in the corner and have got no friends" (Girl, aged 14); "You can tell by the way they're looking at other kids" (Boy, aged 7); and "Someone will usually tell the teacher that there's someone that's sad" (Girl, aged 6).

Spinney, A. (2012) *Home and safe? Policy and practice innovations to prevent women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence from becoming homeless*, Final Report No.196. Melbourne: Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute.

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Aims: This report sets out the opportunities and challenges of preventing women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence from having to leave their homes.

Method: The report is based on analysis from a critical review of the literature, primary research in English and Australian case study locales, and information obtained from research workshops in five states.

Findings:

- Staying Home/Leaving Violence homelessness prevention schemes have started to be developed in a piecemeal fashion in Australia in recent years, while Sanctuary Schemes in the UK have become mainstream policy.
- Women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence have few options: to remain in the family home with the perpetrator, to remain in the home with the perpetrator removed, to leave the home until the perpetrator is removed, or to leave the home permanently.
- Women who are undergoing the stress of a relationship break-up following domestic and family violence need to have a choice as to whether it is best for

them and their children to remain in the family home or to start again somewhere else.

- Women cannot easily exercise their right to remain in their homes unless there is an understanding in the community and from professionals and policy-makers about what constitutes domestic and family violence and how it can impact on women and children, and that the historical and current links between domestic and family violence and women's and children's homelessness and the reasons for them are accepted and understood.
- This report identifies how legislation, judicial practices, practical and emotional support services, affordability issues, and integrated domestic and family violence programs can influence women's decisions to remain in their homes following the removal of a violent partner, their confidence in their ability to do so safely, and their actual safety. It provides guidance on policies implemented here and in England and provides advice on how they could be implemented Australia-wide.

Recommendations:

- Integrative approaches such as SHLV-type schemes have an important role to play in preventing homelessness for women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence, and that this is true for women living in very different situations in very different areas of Australia, including those previously thought not to be suitable.
- Australia should move to the provision of homelessness prevention schemes that are as extensive as the current provision of refuge and crisis accommodation.
- Schemes should use non-restrictive eligibility practices, should include an element of social marketing, and should provide both practical and emotional support for clients.

Swick, K. J. (2010). Responding to the voices of homeless preschool children and their families. *Early Childhood Education Journal* 38(4), 299-304.

Aim: This article reviewed the importance of listening to the voices of homeless preschool children, their parents, and the professionals who work with them, to better understand the needs of homeless children and families and to design more effective programs to support independence.

Method: The article commented on a review of 20 publications, dating from 1988 to 2008, including five authored or co-authored by the researcher and all US related.

Findings: Homeless families with very young children are one of the fastest growing segments of homelessness. The voices of homeless mothers can help in targeting key needs of their preschool children that might otherwise be missed. The

author asserts that children's perspectives should be fundamental to an understanding of how to best support them as it is in the voices of the children that we gain a special sensitivity to what it is like to be homeless during the preschool years. We can also gain insight into their many talents.

As well as children's and parents' voices, three critical elements exist in the voices of professionals who relate to homeless children and their families:

1. a systemic understanding of the issues and stressors that comprise the lives of very young homeless children and their families;
2. an empathic perspective towards each child and family and their unique situation;
3. an empowerment-based set of strategies that help to support and link homeless children and families to needed resources, services, and supportive people.

Caring professionals can nurture and guide children and families toward resolving stressors early in their lives and thus prevent long term dysfunction. They can also act to gain community involvement in addressing the issue of homelessness.

Strategies that empower homeless preschool children and their families are noted. These strategies include: quality preschool care, therapeutic practices that empower the entire family, case management schemes that provide support to homeless children and families, and societal changes that empower the family. Critical roles that early childhood education professionals can carry out in this empowerment process are delineated and discussed.

Examples of successful strategies recommended include *The Nurturing Center* in Columbia, USA, which includes various therapies for families and young children, comprehensive family services to prevent abuse and neglect, community awareness, and research.

A major barrier for homeless parents as they seek education and employment is a lack of early childhood care for their young children. *The Children's Garden* program seeks to remove the barrier of a lack of child care for families by offering a setting for young children that nurtures a sense of belonging and well being. Since 1990, the Children's Garden has sought to help families meet basic needs through creative support and referral efforts, including working closely with local adult education programs, health, food, and social services groups. Children receive special resources like their own pillows and a special place to put their personal items. Nutrition needs are met daily through regular meals while staff assist parents with meeting any health, medical, or social services needs.

Recommendations: Swick noted the need for:

- supportive helpers who are caring and responsive;
- adequate and affordable housing, emergency rental and housing assistance;
- access to high quality child care so parents can work or take advantage of job training and education;
- access to educational opportunities, including parent education;
- transportation to job sites and for accessing needed educational, health, and social services;
- design of support strategies that empower them to take more initiative in their lives;
- hearing the voices of children and parents and including their ideas in planning;
- creating a community centered approach to ending homelessness among families, collaboration with agencies like social services, health groups, and various support groups to foster a preventive approach;
- creation of caring family centers in the early years of life so families can link up to and gain the skills for using all the community resources needed for healthy family functioning.

Case management strategies can engage families in developing long term goals and approaches for reaching desirable goals. The key is helping parents and children develop important socio-educational skills through strategies such as the Nurturing Centre and the Children's Garden.

Swick, K. J. (2008). The dynamics of violence and homelessness among young families. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 36(1), 81-85.

Aims: This US review of the literature explores the role and impact of violence in the lives of homeless families with young children with a view to exploring what can be done to empower them.

Method: Citing 40 highly regarded authors, this review is based primarily on US literature that focuses on the impact of violence on homeless families.

Findings: Homeless women with young children often have a history of violence; having experienced violence themselves as children resulting in an intergenerational cycle of violence. Mothers who are treated violently tend to have more aggressive relations with their children. Children who witness abuse in the family report more tension and anxiety.

The nature of chronic violence changes the brain and the manner in which people function. Instead of pursuing healthy patterns of functioning, families beset by chronic violence become enmeshed in abusive and degrading patterns of relations. This situation is confounded by homelessness where isolation is further increased

and the stress of living in very close housing increases family arguments. The negative and anti-social behaviors generated in this abusive pattern may cause child behavior problems that eventually shadow their entire development and learning.

Recommendations:

- Establish working conditions that encourage family caring with support resources such as leave time, flex-time, and affordable child care.
- Keep young families connected to quality child care, social supports, medical and health care, and related emotional support.
- Increase family wellbeing by giving parents and children skills in nurturing relationships.
- Schools and shelters can offer life skills activities to strengthen networking and community linkages; for example, by providing after school tutoring and mentoring programs.
- The research shows that consistent nurturing relations with a significant adult is the key factor in promoting homeless children's life success. Thus early childhood programs should provide mentoring and parent-child interaction time learning opportunities.
- There is a need to enhance the educational and work skills of parents in high-risk situations like homelessness. Increased economic stability positively influences parent functioning and strengthens the overall sense of family well being.
- There is also a need to increase children's educational power. It is a key to helping them envision and develop a new life orientation.

Swick, K. J., & Williams, R. (2006). An analysis of Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological perspective for early childhood educators: Implications for working with families experiencing stress. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 33(5), 371-378.

Aims: This article explores the key elements of Bronfenbrenner's systems approach to provide an insightful lens for understanding and supporting homeless families with children.

Method: This is a literature review citing 40 scholarly authors.

Findings: Bronfenbrenner was highly influential in bringing a systems wide approach to homelessness interventions and convinced the US government to focus on children and their families. This led to the establishment of the US Headstart

program in 1965 with its focus on family support services, home visits, and education for parenthood. There are many different levels of environmental influences that can affect a child's development, starting from people and institutions immediately surrounding the individual to nation-wide cultural forces. He also constructed the principle of "do no harm". The five systems described are:

1. The microsystem of family, school, religious institutions, community, and peers.
2. The mesosystem referring to the interconnections between the microsystems, for example, interactions between the family and teachers,
3. The exosystem involving links between a social setting and the individual's immediate context over which they have no control.
4. The macrosystem or cultural context in which the family lives.
5. The chronosystem referring to significant life events and transitions.

Recommendations: Five recommendations, embedded in the Bronfenbrenner approach, are identified as fundamental to providing assistance to homeless children. These include:

- Helping families develop caring and loving microsystems. Many homeless families report that the bonding rituals they established early in family life serve them well under the stress of being homeless.
- Assisting families in becoming more empowered in their exosystem relations by keeping parents informed about what their children do during their daily activities.
- Nurturing in families ways they can use mesosystems to help them better respond to the specific stressors they face, for example, a mother dealing with an alcoholic husband may find a "support group" of others experiencing the same stress very helpful.
- Advocating for stronger family support strategies and policies in the macrosystem contexts in which young families live.
- Helping families learn from their personal, family, societal, and historical lives. We can engage families in practical assessments of how they can better use their local resources to empower the family.

Taylor, M., & Edwards, B. (2012). *The influence of unstable housing on children's wellbeing and development: Evidence from a national longitudinal study.* n.p.: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

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Aims: Using data from *Growing Up in Australia: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children* (LSAC), the authors examine the association between residential mobility, unstable housing tenure and housing stress on children's cognitive development and learning, and social emotional functioning.

Method: Using both LSAC and ABS data the authors constructed tenure statistics to allow comparison of dimensions of housing. This study used data from the third wave of LSAC, collected in 2008. At that time, the B cohort was aged 4-5 years, the same age the K cohort had been in 2004, and the K cohort was aged 8-9 years. Combining both cohorts provides a large sample of children who had been 4-5 years and under in 2004 and who were surveyed approximately every two years between 2004 and 2008.

Findings: It was possible to document changes in tenure and costs of housing for the LSAC cohorts. The study found large differences in children's developmental outcomes, depending on their housing tenure.

For LSAC families, on average, there were minimal changes in housing tenure between 2004 and 2008. There were stark differences in the type of housing tenure of separated families (where one biological parent is living elsewhere) compared to couple families. Housing mobility was also much higher in separated families. In terms of housing stress, 33% of separated families were in housing stress, whereas only 9% of couple families were in this category.

There were some very large differences in children's developmental outcomes for type of tenure, housing stress and residential mobility. Children in couple families who were living in public housing had lower levels of receptive vocabulary and higher rates of emotional or behavioural problems than children living in families who owned or were paying off their own home. Surprisingly, residential mobility was not associated with children's receptive vocabulary or their emotional or behavioural problems.

Recommendations: It is important to better understand family dynamics and how environmental changes in the home can impact on the wellbeing of a family.

Wilson, A.B., & Squires, J. (2014). Young children and families experiencing homelessness. *Infants & Young Children, 27(3), 259.*

Aim: This US study aims to identify barriers that continue to exist for homeless children and families in accessing services and supports despite the requirements for the education of homeless children under the US McKinney-Vento Act. In addition, the study identifies recommendations for future practice.

Method: The authors reviewed around 50 US government reports and scholarly journal articles.

Findings: With more than 1.5 million children estimated to experience homelessness in the US each year, immediate steps must be taken at a national or macrosystem level to promote an increase in awareness of the existing McKinney-Vento legislation. This level of homelessness bypasses that seen during the Great Depression, and there is a desperate need to continue to advocate on behalf of homeless children on a larger societal level.

There is a lack of public preschool places and lengthy waitlists for programs such as Head Start, examination of the successes documented by alternative existing service delivery models is needed while also considering opportunities for replication across diverse communities.

Recommendations: It is essential that gaps in existing laws and procedures are recognised and that priority and access to quality early care and educational programs are granted to preschoolers, regardless of existing waitlists, or lack of public programs. Solutions will require work across systems, people, and communities but will yield significant improvements for increasing areas for improvement in the law specifically for preschool children must be identified. Whereas the law provides protections for school continuity for older school-aged children, these protections often do not extend to preschool children because of the lack of state-funded public preschools.

The law needs to be amended to ensure that states reserve enrolment slots in Head Start and Early Head Start for children who are homeless as a first step. Second, including incentive payments to private preschools that provide services for children/families who are homeless. Third, as states expand their public prekindergarten services, assuring that these state programs have dedicated slots for children experiencing homelessness and that service providers across agencies and families are notified of existing services is a needed revision or amendment to the law. Finally, future reauthorizations of the McKinney-Vento legislation should include preschool-aged children who are homeless.

Yates, J. et al. (2007). *Housing affordability: A 21st century problem national research venture 3: Housing affordability for lower income Australians*. n.p.: Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute.

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Aims: This study aims to provide evidence on the extent of housing affordability problems in Australia with the following 3 aims:

1. To provide evidence on the extent of housing affordability problems in Australia.
2. To identify the size of the potential problem
3. To identify the types of households potentially at risk of having an affordability problem because of the burdens that their high housing costs imposed on their incomes.

Method: The analysis was conducted using the following methods:

- The first step consisted of using census data to identify locations (described by postcodes) where there was a concentration of types of households identified as having high housing costs in relation to their incomes and, therefore, at risk of facing problems as a result of poor housing affordability.
- The second step involved a quantitative survey, which targeted households in a number of these locations. This was designed to provide a richer analysis of households at risk than was possible from secondary data. It was also designed to identify some of the problems faced by those with a housing affordability problem.
- The third step involved a qualitative survey of households selected from those targeted from the customised survey based. This used data from focus groups and interviews to generate a more in-depth analysis of how the problems they face affect their everyday lives, to give an indication of why affordability problems are important.

Findings: The major conclusions of the three-year research program are as follows:

- Housing affordability is a large and widespread problem.
- Housing affordability is a structural problem.
- Causes of affordability problems are complex and diverse. Major driving factors can be found both within the housing system and beyond it.

- Housing affordability problems are predicted to increase in the first half of the 21st century as a result of anticipated demographic and housing market changes.
- Affordability problems have specific spatial and cyclical dimensions.
- Households most at risk of facing the multiple problems that arise from a lack of affordable housing are lower-income households in the private rental market.
- Housing markets have failed to provide an adequate supply of affordable housing for lower-income households.
- Individual households experience and address housing affordability problems in different ways.
- While housing provides shelter, it also influences a raft of non-shelter outcomes for individual households, such as workforce participation, access to jobs and services, family stability and educational attainment.
- Declining affordability has implications for economic performance and labour market efficiency, social cohesion and polarisation of cities, environmental considerations and the creation and distribution of wealth through home ownership.

Recommendations: A set of four key strategies that would be capable of addressing a core goal of improving housing affordability can be distilled from the discussion of policy principles and illustrative policy options above. Successful application of these combined strategies could be expected to result in significant economic, social and environmental benefits for individual households, for governments and for society, in the short and long term because of the significant and far-reaching implications of the affordability of housing.

First, concerted action to drive down costs and prices in metropolitan and regional housing markets prone to house price inflation, especially through reducing impediments to housing supply, improving the efficiency of the residential development process and reforming those tax settings that can adversely affect the price of housing in particular market contexts, either by stimulating demand or by adding to costs.

Second, existing or additional demand side assistance programs (such as FHOG, CRA and other forms of financial assistance to individual households) can be used to secure better access to those parts of the housing market that are more affordable for lower-income renters and struggling home buyers in particular circumstances, where their effectiveness can be demonstrated. Importantly, however, the qualitative research findings highlight the appropriateness of developing flexible

housing assistance policies that will be more responsive to the diversity of circumstances and aspirations of individual households in, or at risk of, housing stress.

Third, a national policy, funding and delivery framework designed to secure substantial private investment in an additional supply of well-located affordable housing for rent and for sale is essential in order to stimulate provision at the affordable end of the private market and to redress the decline in social housing provision.

Finally, changes to the social housing system are required, to secure the viability of this existing source of low-cost housing and to better integrate existing service providers and assets into an expanding sector of affordable housing. In particular, reform should be oriented towards overcoming the current residualisation of this sector and towards increasing housing and other options and, where needed, the mobility of those lower-income households (such as people with complex needs, single parents, older people and Indigenous households) who rely most on social housing.

Yates, J. (2008). Policy forum: Housing affordability: What are the policy issues? Australia's housing affordability crisis. *The Australian Economic Review*, 41(2), 200-214.

Aim: This paper draws on work undertaken as a part of a three-year collaborative research program funded by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) to examine the nature and causes of Australia's housing affordability problem

Method: This report examines the broad trends in housing market outcomes that have contributed to the levels of housing stress currently observed in Australia and highlights the implications of these affordability outcomes.

Findings: Over the past few years, the so-called housing affordability crisis has regularly dominated media headlines in Australia, particularly as rising house prices have pushed access to home ownership out of reach for many and increases in interest rates have created repayment problems for those who have taken on significant amounts of housing debt. Affordability concerns were reinforced by the release of census data in mid-2007 that showed more than 1.2 million households in housing stress (generally interpreted by the media as paying 30 per cent or more of household income in meeting housing costs).

A key observation is that the media tendency to define affordability problems by high or increasing housing cost ratios for purchasers is largely misplaced. Most home purchasers have relatively high incomes and are not forced into the undesirable trade-offs that lower income households face when their housing costs increase.

There are significantly more renters than purchasers in housing stress and the incidence of housing stress is significantly greater among private renters. Many of these households face the prospect of never being able to gain access to the economic and social advantages provided by home ownership. A strategic rental housing policy framework is essential to foster adequate and stable levels of investment in rental housing.

Recommendations: In broad terms, affordability problems emerge when housing costs increase faster than household incomes. Increases in house prices, interest rates and rents over the last few years provide a clear indication of why housing affordability has persisted as headline news. This suggests that the most effective long run solutions to housing affordability problems lie in addressing the underlying determinants of demand and supply. With continued pressures from increased population growth and real per household incomes, demand is likely to be reduced only by reducing the attractiveness of housing as an investment asset.

Zammit, M. (2008). Children in homelessness: A model that works. *Parity, 21(8), 33-34.*

Aims: The aim of the *Resilient Kids* program is to advocate and address the needs of children up to the age of 18 accompanied by families who have experienced homelessness and/ or family violence. The program provides secondary consultation to workers in SAAP funded services, facilitating training, community development, research, and direct service provision.

The program aims to provide a broad range of activities using of creative arts to address the social, emotional and physical needs of children. Within the broader program, *Cool Kids* is a therapeutic group run for primary school age children that have experienced homelessness and/or family violence. The group is activity based and uses creative arts therapy.

Method: This is one of the few practitioner reports in Australia that documents the value of creative arts in assisting homeless children.

Findings: Zammit suggests the system to support homeless people does not recognise children as clients in their own right and their needs are seen as secondary to those of their parents. The Victorian program, *Resilient Kids*, advocates "on behalf of the needs of 'accompanying' children and using early intervention and a range of therapeutic techniques to best work with this silenced client group" (p. 33).

The program also offers camps at beachside locations to help the "kids to be kids and create happy memories" (p. 34). The author states that often getting children to

go on camps can be difficult as they may feel anxious or they may feel they need to protect or take care of a parent and other siblings. Through camps the children often build up their confidence and make friends.

Resilient Kids works as it uses a holistic approach with a range of therapeutic groups, counselling, recreational and social components to meet the needs of accompanying children. This model offers flexibility, a range of skills and innovative programs. Using creative arts therapy is a non-threatening way to help children explore and find the language to talk about their own experiences. The benefit of the model is in giving children a safe space to feel a sense of belonging, while addressing emotional, physical and social needs.

Recommendations:

While the article made no specific recommendations, the *Resilient Kids* and *Cool Kids* programs are presented as models to emulate across the sector.

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