Early intervention advocacy services to prevent homelessness in Queensland

FINAL REPORT
15 July 2015
In Queensland 34% of households live in rented homes. Tenants Queensland is a specialist community legal service that provides tenancy law advice. We assist and represent renting households. Our vision is to ensure renting in Queensland is a secure and respected housing tenure and tenant’s rights are respected. We have a free statewide advice service for Queensland residential tenants including caravan park and boarding house residents.

Queensland Association of Independent Legal Services (QAILS) is the peak body for community legal centres in Queensland and its vision is for a fair and just Queensland. To achieve this, QAILS supports and develops community legal centres to provide effective, high quality services to their communities, and leads to unite its members and be a leading voice for social justice.

This project was supported by a StreetSmart donation

**STREETSMART**

ACTION AGAINST HOMELESSNESS

[www.streetsmartaustralia.org](http://www.streetsmartaustralia.org)

_Pro bono_ research support provided by

**MurphySchmidt solicitors**

TC BERNIE SCHOOL OF LAW

UQ PRO BONO CENTRE

Tenants Queensland: Penny Carr, Ron Whittington

QAILS: James Farrell, Cristy Dieckmann

Special thanks to UQ students Elizabeth Carmichael and Lucy Cuthbert for their research contribution and to their academic supervisor, Katherine Curnow.

We would like to thank the participants in the project, including community legal centre staff, tenancy advocates and specialist homelessness services, clinical health staff and other community workers, all of whom work extremely hard to support people who are at risk of becoming homeless.

Cover image: “Feed the birds, -- that's what she cries -- while overhead, her birds fill the skies...” by Sheree Zielke. Available at [https://www.flickr.com/photos/shereezielke/430055276](https://www.flickr.com/photos/shereezielke/430055276) under a Creative Commons Attribution 2.0. Full terms at [http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0).
## Contents

Executive Summary .......................................................................................................................... 1

Understanding the impact of early intervention services on homelessness ................................. 2
  Eviction as a trigger factor for homelessness ................................................................................. 2
  Costs of evictions ......................................................................................................................... 3
  Legal services can help ................................................................................................................. 4
Queensland community services cannot meet the demand ............................................................. 5

Bibliography .................................................................................................................................. 8

Appendix 1: Australian governments’ strategies ............................................................................ 13
  1 The Road Home White Paper ................................................................................................. 13
  2 *Homelessness Prevention Programs* .................................................................................... 14

Appendix 2: Australian community organisations’ strategies ........................................................ 19
  1 General Intervention Programs .............................................................................................. 19
  2 Early Intervention of Youth Homelessness .............................................................................. 19
  3 Early intervention for Victims of Domestic Violence ............................................................... 20

Appendix 3: International intervention programs ........................................................................ 23
  1 Canadian Early Intervention Programs .................................................................................... 23
  2 United Kingdom Sanctuary Schemes ....................................................................................... 23
  3 Utrecht’s Prevent Eviction Project (Netherlands) ..................................................................... 23
  4 United States’ Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP) ............ 23
Executive Summary

Despite much discussion over the years, homelessness remains at a high level in Queensland. Early intervention is commonly acknowledged as vital in tackling this issue. This research paper critically examines that common wisdom and explores the efficacy of early intervention tenancy advice services in preventing homelessness.

In this context, ‘early intervention’ is ordinarily understood to mean the provision of support services to people who are at risk of homelessness, which will enable them to sustain their existing housing and therefore prevent them from becoming homeless.

This report includes a literature review (pages 2-4), which identified key research works that discussed and analysed various strategies to prevent evictions. The review suggests that tenancy advice and assistance services do have an important role to play as an early intervention strategy in preventing people being evicted into homelessness. The literature further demonstrates that people at risk of homelessness have a variety of needs so there is a need for a suite of services including early intervention strategies (legal and non-legal) to sustain tenancies and help to minimise the costs associated with homelessness.

The Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service (TAAS) and its predecessors had existed in Queensland for around twenty-five years, but since being completely de-funded from 31 December 2013, the only specialist tenant advice service has been Tenants Queensland, a small community legal centre. The withdrawal of TAAS has resulted in less people getting access to specialist, early-intervention advice and assistance.

The final part of this report contains telephone data and results from a survey of community organisations that work with clients at risk of homelessness. The survey aimed to identify the impact of the closure of TAAS, both on them as organisations and on their clients. For detailed analysis of the survey results, see pages 5-7 of this report.

The survey results clearly indicate the benefits of having TAAS, including the following:

- 80% of organisations made at least weekly referrals to TAAS when it was in existence;
- 80% of organisations identified a significant increase in their workload in tenancy services once TAAS closed; and
- 60% of organisations identified that their clients had not achieved appropriate outcomes since the withdrawal of TAAS.

The survey results provide compelling evidence that specialist services in this niche area are sorely missed and that clients who potentially face homelessness would be less likely than ever to be able to access the specialist help they need, when they need it, if specialist services are not funded. The results, read with the material contained in the literature review, suggest that a loss of early intervention tenancy advice is likely to increase the risk of homelessness for vulnerable people in Queensland.

Queensland needs specialist, early intervention legal and advocacy services in the area of tenancy to prevent people being evicted into homelessness.
Understanding the impact of early intervention services on homelessness

Homelessness costs the Queensland community, with a vast number of social and economic impacts. These costs are not easily quantifiable, but can include increased demand on social, medical and community services; an increase in the provision of emergency accommodation; and an increase in psychological trauma and related personal social problems for those who experience homelessness. Homelessness undoubtedly leads to greater service costs in health, mental health, criminal justice, drug and alcohol, and child and family services.¹

Effective early intervention programs targeted towards people at risk of homelessness can decrease the prevalence of homelessness and lead to a reduction in overall social and economic costs.²

Eviction as a trigger factor for homelessness

Eviction from rental properties (either from social housing properties or from the private rental market) is one trigger factor that may precipitate homelessness among high-risk individuals.³ Avoiding evictions can therefore be seen as a significant step in reducing the risk of homelessness. It can be a ‘high impact strategy’.⁴

It is important to recognise that tenants are not a homogenous group and have different levels of knowledge, and varying capacities to manage their lives independently.⁵ Experts emphasise the need for models of tenancy support that ‘respect client autonomy’; ‘separate tenancy management from housing support’; and ‘provide a holistic and timely response’,⁶ which should apply to dedicated tenancy advice and assistance services.

Appropriate responses designed to assist tenants to stay housed can help prevent the ‘revolving-door’ of repeated presentations for public housing assistance in ever-deteriorating housing crises.⁷

A 2003 South Australian study revealed that over 90% of failed tenancies were due to rental arrears.⁸ Evictions due to behavioural issues were much less common, accounting for only 3% of the studied tenancy evictions.⁹ The median length of tenancies in the sample studied was eight months, and one third of participants had experienced rental arrears in the past, indicating that these tenants could not sustain long-term tenancies without support.¹⁰

⁵ Above n 4 at 5.
⁶ Ibid 8.
⁹ Ibid.
¹⁰ Ibid.
This ‘revolving-door’ can include evictees who enter crisis accommodation until they are housed in public housing, but their pre-existing debt subsequently leads to another failed tenancy and another eviction, which perpetuates the cycle of homelessness.\(^{11}\)

The absence of affordable housing is another trigger for homelessness and also a key reason that people return to homelessness.\(^{12}\) Chronic shortages of public housing heighten the risk that a tenant who is evicted from their public housing property will be left permanently unhoused.

Finally, a recent report by Jino Distasio and Scott McCullough\(^{13}\) identifies a ‘whatever it takes’ attitude as the overarching requirement for success in maintaining tenancies for hard-to-house clients. This requires services to be involved from an early stage in any at-risk tenancy, to try to avoid problems before they arise.

**Costs of evictions**

Tenants Queensland’s 2012 report, *Avoidable Evictions… Our Next Move*, provides a considered analysis of the cost of evictions from a sample of 51 tenants who were interviewed either during or immediately after they had undergone a forced eviction.\(^{14}\) Tenants were asked to reflect on what could have been different to prevent the eviction, and identified nine preventative factors, with the top factors being:

- practices of real estate agents;
- better tenant protection;
- lessor compliance under the Act with repairs and maintenance obligations; and
- improved options for rent payment and addressing arrears.\(^{15}\)

A more recent report, *The Right to Quiet Enjoyment in Social Housing*, sought to improve dispute resolution between social housing tenants in the Hunter Valley region of NSW,\(^{16}\) and highlights a range of useful strategies to improve social housing landlords’ tenancy management. Practical strategies suggested by survey participants include: improved communication and customer service; better mental health support; and better collaboration between social housing landlords and police.\(^{17}\)

These findings are instructive in building a picture of tenants’ confusion about their legal rights and lessors’ legal responsibilities under existing legislation. The need for increased access to legal assistance to address tenants’ options whilst renting was also noted in the report.

The *Avoidable Evictions* report also categorised the key impact areas that forced eviction had on those 51 tenants interviewed. In order of impact, the tenants reported general stress,

---


\(^{13}\) Jino Distasio and Scott McCullough (2015) *Holding On!: Supporting Successful Tenancies for the Hard to House*, University of Winnipeg.


\(^{15}\) Ibid 47.


\(^{17}\) Ibid, 13.
financial impacts, lasting emotional anguish, health impacts, family disruption, loss of housing quality/amenity, threat of homelessness, difficulty finding a new home, homelessness and lasting health issues as the top 10 eviction impacts.\textsuperscript{18}

In her 2003 article, Michelle Slatter identifies multiple stakeholders who ‘pay’, including landlords, insurers, governments and evicted tenants themselves.\textsuperscript{19}

- A tenant who remains in occupation until they are forcibly evicted will create significant costs for the landlord including re-letting costs, tribunal fees and cleaning and repair costs.
- Insurers also incur considerable costs as a large number of private landlords hold landlords’ insurance. The prevalence of landlords’ insurance and the number of claims lodged is gradually increasing and costing insurance companies more money.
- State and federal governments are also affected by the cost of evictions and failed tenancies because of the impact on the public housing sector and the strain on government programs in place to assist people who are homeless due to failed tenancies.
- Finally, tenants have to pay costs associated with evictions, including tribunal costs, bailiff costs and bond costs as well as the personal, social, health and welfare costs that are associated with becoming homeless. Studies both in Australia and overseas indicate, ‘how an absence of stable housing can produce lasting adverse impacts on tenants’ physical, mental and emotional health, educational prospects, behavioural development, employment opportunities and social inclusion.’

**Legal services can help**

Robert Levy argued that, ‘a right to counsel in housing matters would eliminate a major cause of homelessness by enabling tenants to assert appropriate defences to retain their homes.’\textsuperscript{20} Levy also notes that it ‘may also save taxpayers’ money which would otherwise be spent to house families which become homeless after eviction.’\textsuperscript{21} While recognising the importance of legal representation for low-income tenants to prevent evictions, Nugent and Whitely suggest that, ‘legal representation is only part of the necessary infrastructure for delivering eviction-prevention assistance’, and that ‘other reforms in service delivery may have greater impact on ending homelessness.’\textsuperscript{22}

For a review of important, non-legal services working to prevent homelessness, see the Appendices to this report.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid 55.
\textsuperscript{19} Michele Slatter, above n 8, 223.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
Queensland community services cannot meet the demand

Tenants Queensland has collated data on the relative demand for their telephone advice services, prior to and since the de-funding of TAAS on 31 December 2013. The number of calls to the TQ advice phone line, indicating whether the call was successfully answered or a busy signal was found by the caller, are shown below.

The graph clearly shows a marked increase in both the number of successful calls, but also in the number of callers who heard a busy signal and so could not obtain advice through the phone line at TQ, from the time of de-funding of TAAS.

To better understand demand and availability of services in a broader context, QAILS and Tenants Queensland devised a survey to investigate the impact of withdrawal of TAAS on other community organisations and their clients. The survey was distributed through community legal and homelessness networks in December 2014 and January 2015 and generated 48 responses.23

The survey results showed the high reliance on TAAS, with 80% of respondents confirming that they would make referrals to the TAAS service at least once per week. Referrals to Tenants Queensland from these respondents remained reasonably static before and after withdrawal of TAAS.

The survey results confirm that the withdrawal of TAAS and the resultant loss of the ability to make referrals to that service have had a significant impact on organisations that work with clients at risk of homelessness. Approximately 65% of respondents provided some tenancy services, both prior to and after the TAAS withdrawal, but 80% of those respondents reported an increased workload in the tenancy area after TAAS was withdrawn.

23 Not all respondents answered every question in the survey – figures given in this analysis are from the pool of respondents who answered that particular question rather than total respondents.
Individual responses from organisations provide valuable insight into how an increase in the demand for tenancy services impacted on other service delivery. The following are a sample of impacts reported by the respondents:

- **an increase in staffing hours to cater to extra need**
- **advice and assistance with certain matters such as bond disputes could no longer be provided - advice was now prioritised for more urgent matters such as evictions**
- **less time for other case work in areas of domestic violence, parenting orders and property settlements and for community education**
- **limiting assistance provided in tenancy matters because of inability to cope with the increased demand**
- **turning away of clients wanting advice on other matters and more time taken up seeking tenancy information and providing support and advice to clients resulting in less time to focus on other presenting issues**

The survey also sought to examine the impact the withdrawal of TAAS has had on clients. **Requested to comment on whether their clients were achieving appropriate outcomes since the withdrawal of TAAS, 60% of respondents expressed a negative view.** More detailed responses about the effects on clients included:

- **Tenants have not had the walk-in service that TAAS services have traditionally used. This was important given the short timeframes involved and the impact on a client's life (i.e. potential homelessness in the short-term).**
- **Untrained volunteers are trying to help tenants find information through the RTA but more often than not there is no advocacy and often tenants lose their housing.**
- **Without any advocacy services the most vulnerable have no voice and are unable to navigate systems alone.**
- **No specialised support for when there has been a discrepancy in their tenancy often resulting in many clients ending up homeless due to misleading information or inappropriate action by their landlord-especially in the private market.**
- **Clients unaware of their rights as tenants have been unlawfully evicted resulting in homelessness.**
- **Many clients are unable to access any tenant information regarding their rights and responsibilities so are not following appropriate processes...many people who could have salvaged a tenancy or would have made better decisions had they had correct information earlier. Many people are ending up homeless and many on TICA as they are not informed. Increase in urgent, eviction-related matters among our vulnerable client group, placing more people into the 'homeless or at risk' bracket.**
Survey respondents clearly believed that the closure of TAAS had been detrimental to their local communities. They identified not only receiving calls for help from consumers, but employees from government and non-government sectors not knowing how to assist vulnerable clients when much needed advice and information was needed on complex tenancy issues.

In conclusion, the survey revealed that the loss of the TAAS had a serious impact on clients who are already very disadvantaged.
Bibliography


Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2014) Housing outcomes for groups vulnerable to homelessness. Cat. no HOU274.


Barker, Justine et al (2012) Literature Review: Effective interventions for working with young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, Department of Social Services.


Chamberlain, Chris and David MacKenzie, Youth Homelessness: Early Intervention and Prevention (Australian Centre for Equity through Education, 1998).


Council of Australian Governments (2009) National Affordable Housing Agreement.

Crane, Phil ‘Developing the Practice of Early Intervention into Youth Homelessness’ (2009) 22 (2) Parity 13.


Department of Communities and Local Government (2010) The effectiveness of schemes to enable households at risk of domestic violence to stay in their homes, Housing Research Summary No 245.


Distasio, Jino and Scott McCullough (2015) Holding On!: Supporting Successful Tenancies for the Hard to House, University of Winnipeg


Jones, Anwen et al (2010) The effectiveness of schemes to enable households at risk of domestic violence to stay in their homes, Research Report Department of Communities and Local Government.


Paddock, Mary Ann ‘Homelessness Early Intervention Services: Prevention is Better than Cure’ (2009) 22 (2) Parity 33.


Schiff, Rebecca, 'Collaborative approaches to addressing homelessness in Canada: Value and challenge in the community advisory board model' (2013) 26 (9) Parity 42.


Spinney, Angela and Sarah Blandy (2011) Homelessness prevention for women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence: innovations in policy and practice, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute Positioning Paper No 140.


Appendix 1: Australian governments’ strategies

1 The Road Home White Paper

The Australian Government 2008 White Paper on Homelessness, The Road Home, set a strategic agenda for reducing homelessness in Australia by 2020. The Road Home outlined that the overall government goal is to halve homelessness and offer supported accommodation to all rough sleepers who need it by 2020.24

1.1 Implementation

The White Paper listed three key strategies to respond to homelessness. First, ‘turning off the tap’ will ensure sufficient early intervention services to prevent homelessness at the outset. Second, ‘improving and expanding services’ will make services more connected and responsive to achieving sustainable housing, improving economic and social participation and ending homelessness for clients. Third, ‘breaking the cycle’ will ensure that people who become homeless move quickly through the crisis system and into stable housing with the support they need so that homelessness does not recur.25 The White Paper aims to engage all of the agencies that people at risk of homelessness interact with in order ensure an effective early intervention strategy. These agencies include child protection agencies, state housing authorities, criminal justice and corrective service agencies, mental health services, education, training and employment services, hospitals and Centrelink.26

1.2 Tenancy Focus

Failing tenancies are a significant factor contributing to homelessness in Australia. Social housing and boarding houses in Australia currently act as a last resort housing service and as such, people who are evicted from these services are at risk of homelessness. The implementation of successful tenancy support programs for social housing tenants is important to prevent evictions that lead to homelessness. Studies indicate that rent arrears is the main reason for eviction, common to private and public tenancies.27 These early intervention programs identify people who are in the early stages of rental arrears and provide practical support in order to intervene in the homelessness cycle.28 The Supported Housing Assistance Program (SHAP) in Western Australia is an example of an early intervention tenancy maintenance assistance service.29 SHAP operates to assist Department of Housing tenants who are at risk of losing their tenancy. There are fewer programs available that target private rental tenancies. In Queensland, the Tenancy Advice and Advocacy Service (TAAS) was operating as a free community service providing tenants with information, advice and advocacy in order to allow them to understand and exercise their rights and responsibilities in relation to residential tenancies. However, this service lost its state government funding in 2012. Tenants Queensland (previously, Tenants Union of

25 Ibid, Executive Summary, ix.
26 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
Queensland) was also operating an advice and advocacy service in Queensland, however this service has been reduced due to the reduction in state government funding.  

Another important early intervention strategy is locating homes for those exiting state care, such as being discharged from medical facilities and those released from prison. These people are at a high risk of homelessness and require long-term supported housing, education, training and employment assistance. People with severe mental health conditions require continuing case management and support. The Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative (HASI) in New South Wales is an example of an early intervention service operating to provide people with mental illnesses with accommodation and tenancy support, clinical care and rehabilitation. Another service model that appears to be operating effectively in order to assist people with mental illnesses is the Personal Helpers and Mentors Service (PHaMs). Despite these examples, the literature does indicate persistent problems and a lack of availability for post-release housing and other services for prisoners when they exit prison. The considerable work of Associate Professor Tamara Walsh in relation to prison release practice and policy in Queensland and its impact on community safety is noteworthy in this regard.

2 Homelessness Prevention Programs

The Australian Government provides a range of programs and services that are aimed at preventing or alleviating homelessness in Australia. The broad government response is coordinated through the National Homelessness Strategy (NHS), which is responsible for designing policy responses and government programs that focus on the prevention and amelioration of homelessness through a strategic national response. The NHS is connected to the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA), Job Services Australia (JSA), the Household Organisational Management Expenses (HOME) Advice Program the Reconnect Program and, the Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) Program.

2.1 National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA)

The National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) (previously known as the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program), is a combined Commonwealth and State initiative that aims to ensure that all Australians have access to affordable, safe and sustainable housing in order to assist them to contribute to the Australian workforce. Central to this
initiative is the operational efficiency of Australian public housing.\textsuperscript{37} This program does not have an early intervention focus and is therefore not relevant for the purpose of this report.

\textbf{2.2 Job Services Australia (JSA)}

Job Services Australia (JSA) is the Australian Government employment services system that supports job seekers.\textsuperscript{38} Two pre-employment programs that were aimed at people at risk of homelessness, the Job Placement, Employment and Training Program (JPET) and the Personal Support Program (PSP), were merged into the JSA.\textsuperscript{39} The JSA incentives include emphasising achievement outcomes for highly disadvantaged job seekers in order to decrease the number of people at risk of homelessness. The decision to merge the JPET and PSP into the JSA meant that more program places became available, increasing access to the service.\textsuperscript{40} The re-structure changed the funding model, providing more funding for the JSA service than was available for the previous programs.\textsuperscript{41} The JSA also has more flexibility to spend funds on services that are not directly job related. Employment intervention services are clearly inherently connected to homelessness early intervention in Australia because of the fact that if people at risk of homelessness can be placed into suitable employment, their risk of homelessness is reduced.

\textbf{2.3 Household Organisational Management Expenses (HOME) Advice Program}

The Household Organisational Management Expenses (HOME) Advice Program is an Australian Government early intervention program that was developed to assist families who experience a financial crisis that puts them at risk of homelessness. Often people become at risk of homelessness because of long-term unemployment, mounting debt and family violence issues.\textsuperscript{42} The rationale for the program is that prevention of homelessness through early intervention strategies is more effective than providing assistance to families who are homeless.\textsuperscript{43} The precursor to this program was the Family Homelessness Prevention Pilot (FHPP) which was the first national early intervention effort directed at homelessness prevention and which lead to the implementation of the program.\textsuperscript{44} The program has one office in each Australian jurisdiction that services that jurisdiction.

\textbf{2.3.1 Implementation}

The HOME program is intended to be a flexible early intervention program with the capability to respond to a broad range of issues that lead to housing instability for Australian families.\textsuperscript{45} The program uses holistic, strength-based, family centred practices in order to provide support to families at risk of homelessness. The program has the capacity to respond quickly and effectively to a family’s income issues through the use of dedicated Centrelink HOME Advice social workers. It aims to identify families before they become homeless and assist them to avoid homelessness through implementing sustainable changes in their lives.\textsuperscript{46} Central to the effectiveness of the program is the maintenance of partnerships between the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{40} Lisa Fowkes, “Rethinking Australia’s Employment Services” (2011) Whitlam Institute 7 http://www.whitlam.org/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/181183/Rethinking_Australias_Employment_Services.pdf
\item \textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Ibid 39.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Penny Ryan and Rosanglea Merlo for Cth Department of Family and Community Services, Family Homelessness Prevention Pilot, Final Evaluation Report (2005).
\item \textsuperscript{45} Above n 30, 35.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Ibid 17.
\end{itemize}
program, community organisations and Centrelink in order to facilitate the implementation of necessary sustainable changes.

Most of the families that enter the program are living in some form of rental accommodation and the program is able to assist them to maintain adequate housing or improved housing situations. The key measure of the effectiveness of the program is housing stability and working towards achieving sustainability in this regard. Without effective early intervention, at risk families may become homeless, which leads to the need for supported accommodation through the NAHA which is a less cost effective method of assistance.

2.3.2 Results
Between 2002 and 2007 the HOME program operated at an average funding cost of $3079 per family, while the average cost per client in the SAAP (NAHA’s predecessor) program was $3130.47 This indicates that the implementation of the HOME program did lead to a reduction in costs of this service. In the HOME Evaluation Report, the Government asserts that this program produced effective results because of its commitment to field visits and the maintenance of innovative program direction.48 However, because of the complex operating structure of the HOME program, the program experienced difficulties in effectively managing large-scale data collection.49 As a result, there is a distinct lack of available quantitative data in relation to the effectiveness of the program.

2.4 Reconnect Program

The Reconnect program provides early intervention assistance to young people aged between 12 and 18 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. It is common for teenagers to ‘run away’ from their family home without the permission of their parents. In some cases, this will be a one-off occurrence, however in others there are serious underlying family problems, which, if left unresolved, result in young people moving out of home prematurely.50 The program is designed to encourage young people to reconnect with their family, education, training and employment.51 The Reconnect program aims to use community based intervention services to assist young people and stabilize their living situations. The service provides counselling, group work, mediation and practical support to families of young people at risk of homelessness.

2.4.1 Implementation

Participatory action research (PAR) is a key component of the Reconnect program. In order for the program’s early intervention approach to be successful, all of the services need to respond to the needs of the participants by using a reflective and improvement-orientated approach to service delivery. This involves reflecting on the effectiveness of assistance, creating a plan, implementing the plan and observing the results.52 PAR involves the participation of the people who are affected by the issue, in this case young people at risk of homelessness, in asking and answering questions about their situation in order to improve it. This is an effective method of early intervention because it allows those most affected by a

48 Above n 30, 44.
49 Ibid 42.
situation to take a central part in improving the situation.\textsuperscript{53} The focus that the Reconnect program has on PAR, has allowed it to be a valuable early intervention program for young people at risk of homelessness, as it enables them to have a sense of control over their living situation while simultaneously providing structure and guidance.

The Reconnect program is based on the assumption that early intervention into youth homelessness involves addressing a myriad of factors that affect young persons’ relationships with various institutions which are necessary to allow them to sustain stable living situations.\textsuperscript{54} PAR provides the framework and tools that the Reconnect program effectively uses in order to develop responsive and contextually relevant early intervention strategies for homeless youth.\textsuperscript{55} Allowing young people to identify issues, and then develop and implement strategies to address those issues while having a support system is central to the Reconnect Program’s operational goals. The Reconnect program also engages with other services in a collaborative process of inquiry in order to facilitate the connection of youth with these services.\textsuperscript{56}

\textbf{2.4.2 Results}

Reconnect costs approximately $4,120 per participant in highly accessible areas.\textsuperscript{57} In 2011-12, data showed that there was a 71.89\% reduction in the risk of homelessness for clients at the end of support and that 52\% of cases were concluded in less than 3 months.\textsuperscript{58} This indicates that the program is effective.

\textbf{2.5 Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS) Program}

The Specialist Homelessness Services Program (SHS) is a Commonwealth and State funded program, which provides funding to a range of support and accommodation services that assist people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.\textsuperscript{59} The services provided include case management support, outreach, advocacy, practical assistance and supported accommodation services as well as the provision of linkages to other services related to health and housing.

\textbf{2.5.1 Implementation}

The SHS program has four target client groups, these are, clients who have experienced domestic and family violence, young people, clients with current mental health issues and clients with problematic drug and/or alcohol use.\textsuperscript{50} These client groups are known to be vulnerable to homelessness. Between 1 July 2011 and 31 December 2013, the SHS Program provided support to over 400,000 people.\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{54} Above n 39, 7.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid 7.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid 9.
\textsuperscript{57} Department of Families, Housing Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2013) \textit{Phase 2 evaluation: Departmental review of the Reconnect program}.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid 19.
\textsuperscript{60} Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2014) \textit{Housing outcomes for groups vulnerable to homelessness}. Cat. no HOU274, 10.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid vii.
2.5.2 Results

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), of the 23,990 women involved in the SHS program who began support while in housing, only 13% were unable to sustain housing at the end of the support period.\(^\text{62}\)

75,929 young clients (aged 15-24) presented to SHS programs seeking assistance during the period between 2011 and 2013.\(^\text{63}\) At the start of support, 56% of young people were homeless rather than at risk of homelessness.\(^\text{64}\) During the period of the SHS study, 44% of young people started living in some form of housing however 17% of these people were unsuccessful in sustaining tenancies.

45% of people who were identified as having a current mental health issue began SHS support while housed, of these, 8% were unable to sustain housing.\(^\text{65}\)

During the reported period, 32% of people who presented with drug and/or alcohol issues began SHS support while housed.\(^\text{66}\) Of these, 27% of people were unable to sustain housing.\(^\text{67}\) Those who became homeless were most likely to be young males.\(^\text{68}\)

\(^\text{62}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{63}\) Ibid 14.
\(^\text{64}\) Ibid 16.
\(^\text{65}\) Ibid 21.
\(^\text{66}\) Ibid 26.
\(^\text{67}\) Ibid.
\(^\text{68}\) Ibid.
Appendix 2: Australian community organisations’ strategies

1 General Intervention Programs

Community early intervention services typically act as a referral service, where support to maintain tenancy or accommodation is provided by fostering links with relevant community services, in order to encourage clients to address issues that may lead to homelessness. For many adults, these issues are usually poverty and accumulating debt.⁶⁹

1.1 Implementation

Implementation of these programs is region-specific, allowing the participants to be active members of their communities. In multiple boroughs of the Brisbane area, the Lions Keys to Early Intervention in Homelessness Service operates to provide information to people at risk of homelessness and refer participants to health services, Centrelink, tenancy advice and financial counselling services.⁷⁰ A case manager provides ongoing monitoring of the participants in order to effectively implement this service. Another program using case management is Homebase in Sydney, which is designed to solve immediate problems that could result in loss of housing.⁷¹ Other programs, such as the Red Cross Homelessness Early Intervention Service in Toowoomba, do not assume primary responsibility for finding accommodation for people, instead providing one-off tenancy advice.⁷² Overall, there are a range of general intervention programs run by community organisations that aim to provide various early intervention services to assist people at risk of homelessness.

1.2 Results

Homebase services provided by Jewish House reduced the number of households who applied for shelter by 50%.⁷³ Due to the smaller, localized quality of these programs, there are few records of results of other programs.

2 Early Intervention of Youth Homelessness

Early intervention programs for youth at risk of homelessness typically focus on family reconciliation as a process to ultimately reduce homelessness; the Reconnect Program is an example of this. Other programs for young people aim to prepare participants for independent life by providing living skills training such as cooking, budgeting and home maintenance, assisting in finding education and training opportunities, and providing basic tenancy advice.⁷⁴

2.1 Implementation

Youth programs rely on the screening of students undertaken by schools to identify youth who are at risk of homelessness. The Geelong Project, run by Time for Youth, places particular emphasis on creating a community of schools and youth services that are capable of preventing vulnerable young people from becoming homeless. The aim is for schools to

---

⁷³ Above n 68, 50.
monitor students for warning signs that allude to a risk of homelessness.\textsuperscript{75} Central to this process is the participation of schools in programs where students are surveyed in order to identify whether there are any issues in their homes.

Programs such as the Red Cross Youth Homelessness and Reintegration Service and South West Sydney Youth Hub Project are examples of programs that aim to adequately prepare young people to live independently by teaching them various practical life skills.\textsuperscript{76} These programs employ case management and are more flexible in their processes, with timeframes and outcomes depending on the requirements of the participant.

Another approach adopted as a youth homelessness minimization strategy is the provision of full day workshops educating young people on finding a home, applying for a rental property, moving in and dealing with the ongoing expenses of independent living.\textsuperscript{77} This approach was provided to at-risk youth identified by local schools in Perth and youth workers through the Roofs for Youths program, organised by the Youth Affairs Council of Western Australia.

2.2 Results

The Geelong Project costs on average $3653 per participant. Out of all young people who have completed the program, 86.2\% remained at home or returned home after couch surfing or living out of home for a period.\textsuperscript{78}

The South West Sydney Youth Hub Project maintained long-term accommodation for 82\% of participants. As a result of the flexible approach of these programs, in depth figures about their effectiveness are difficult to quantify.\textsuperscript{79}

A pilot of the Roofs for Youths program between June 2002 and September 2003 established that 100\% of participants found the information from the workshop useful in their future lives.\textsuperscript{80}

3 Early intervention for Victims of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is the most prevalent risk factor involved in causing women and children to become homeless.\textsuperscript{81} The White Paper promoted the expansion of programs that allow victims of domestic violence to remain in their home, once the perpetrator has been removed.\textsuperscript{82} Initiatives that attempt to ensure that women and children involved in domestic violence are able to remain safely in their homes, in an attempt to prevent homelessness, are widespread across Australia and overseas. These programs involve implementing security upgrades for the homes of women at risk and collaborating with police in order to improve responses to breaches of protection orders.

\textsuperscript{75} David Mackenzie and Monica Thielking (2013) \textit{The Geelong Project: A community of schools and youth services model for early intervention – Final report} Swinburne Institute for Social Research Swinburne University, 31.
\textsuperscript{77} Above n 46.
\textsuperscript{79} Edwina Deakin, \textit{Final Evaluation Report South West Sydney Youth Hub Project} (March 2013) Housing NSW (NSW Department of Family and Community Services), 33.
\textsuperscript{80} Above n 33, 13.
\textsuperscript{82} Above n 1, 33.
3.1 Implementation

The existence of an agreement between the police service and prevention programs is a defining feature of early intervention services for women and children at risk of homelessness. Many programs, with the support of the police, implement guidelines and training programs that assist women to gain skills in dealing with perpetrators of domestic violence in order to increase their likelihood of remaining in their homes. Police responding to domestic violence can inform victims of their option to remain in their home and can refer them to available early intervention services. Active support from the police, combined with the support of the courts, facilitates the pro-arrest and pro-prosecution response to domestic violence typically promoted by these programs. Programs that assist women in domestic violence situations are a key element of homelessness early intervention because of the number of women who are affected by domestic violence and the impact that it has on their living situations.

The Family Violence Intervention Program in the ACT aims to increase the successful prosecution of domestic violence related charges through the inter-service sharing of continuous data collection, case management and monitoring. This program is one of the few where Legal Aid is an active participant in the program; however most early intervention services for victims of domestic violence refer participants to Legal Aid if necessary. A factor that a number of programs have identified as being a barrier to early intervention legal services is that many participants in the domestic violence prevention programs are involved in asset-rich relationships, leading to them being ineligible for Legal Aid, but because of their safety concerns, having no access to their assets. The Eastern Domestic Violence Outreach Service in Victoria and the Domestic Violence Assistance Program in Beenleigh, as well as many other programs across Australia employ dedicated domestic violence support workers in the courts to assist women with applications for protection orders.

Additionally, the Staying Home Leaving Violence initiative in NSW emphasised community awareness of homelessness and domestic violence in their approach, advertising on flyers, and local radio, television and newspapers. There are eighteen Staying Home Leaving Violence services throughout NSW.

3.2 Results

The majority of clients (59%) had a positive outcome from the Bega branch of the Staying Home Leaving Violence program. A positive outcome was defined as being able to stay safely in their homes in the long term, for an extended period or being able to stay safely in the area. Benefits reported by agency respondents included: cost savings, a reduction in

---

85 Ibid, 7.
86 Ibid, 5.
87 Angela Spinney (2012) Home and Safe? Policy and practice innovations to prevent women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence from becoming homeless, AHURI Final Report No. 196 Melbourne: Australanian Housing and Urban Research Institute, 32.
88 Above n 42, 14.
90 Above n 49.
92 Above n 62.
homelessness caused by domestic violence, and a reduction in repeat incidences of domestic violence. The program was originally located in a refuge and clients expressed some discomfort with this location, so the service moved to a more anonymous office.\textsuperscript{93}

The Family Violence Intervention Program measured success according to the amount of intervention by the police and outcomes of arrest in domestic violence incidents. The number of incidents attended by police increased 91\%, Director of Public Prosecutions prosecuted four times more family violence related offences, and between April 2000 and June 2001 and 835 police officer days were saved from attending court on family violence matters.\textsuperscript{94}

\textsuperscript{93} Above n 62.

Appendix 3: International intervention programs

The following programs are examples of early intervention programs in countries outside Australia.

1 Canadian Early Intervention Programs

In 2006, the Canadian Government implemented the Homelessness Partnering Strategy. This is a community-based program aimed at preventing and reducing homelessness by providing services in 61 designated communities across Canada. These communities identify their own unique priorities in reducing homelessness and create a comprehensive plan, involving officials from different levels of government, community stakeholders, charity organisations and private organisations. The strategy has broad directions that all communities must follow, including the ‘housing first’ approach, which reduces the pressure on emergency accommodation. The Canadian government is to provide the program with $600 million dollars between 2014 and 2019.

2 United Kingdom Sanctuary Schemes

Sanctuary Schemes has allowed domestic violence survivors to remain in their homes, rather than accessing temporary accommodation. Collaboration between multiple agencies including housing providers, specialist domestic violence services and the police, work to create a ‘sanctuary’ in the home and provide support for victims. Security measures such as new locks, bolts, alarms, and solid doors are installed and ongoing services through peer support groups, structured group activities, and ‘floating support’ provided to recipients in their own homes are available. In Nottingham, a 2007 evaluation showed that each installation of a Sanctuary, to prevent homelessness, resulted in an approximate saving of £2631.88 to the local housing authority.

3 Utrecht’s Prevent Eviction Project (Netherlands)

Care providers, social workers, the police and housing corporations make up a ‘signalling network’ which recommends people at risk of eviction to the Prevent Eviction Project. The program involves ambulatory outreach support from social workers in addressing the barriers to tenancy, including setting hygiene targets and providing participants with debt guidance. In 2011, more than 80% of the 123 eviction cases reported were subsequently prevented through participating in the project.

4 United States’ Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP)

The Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act passed in 2009, creating the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP). Communities were awarded grants to be used to prevent homelessness through four specified activities: (1) financial assistance; (2) housing relocation and stabilization.

---

98 Above n 68, 5.
services; (3) data collection and evaluation; and (4) administrative costs. For example, The City of San Antonio recognised that the financial literacy and self-sufficiency of its citizens was a priority in preventing homelessness. The local government collaborated with multiple non-government organisations to provide six hours of group financial education to participants over several months, as well as providing case-management of the budgeting of participants. The program served approximately 1.15 million people in just over two years and overall, approximately 87.7% of program participants exited to permanent housing. HPRP came to an end in 2012.

---


