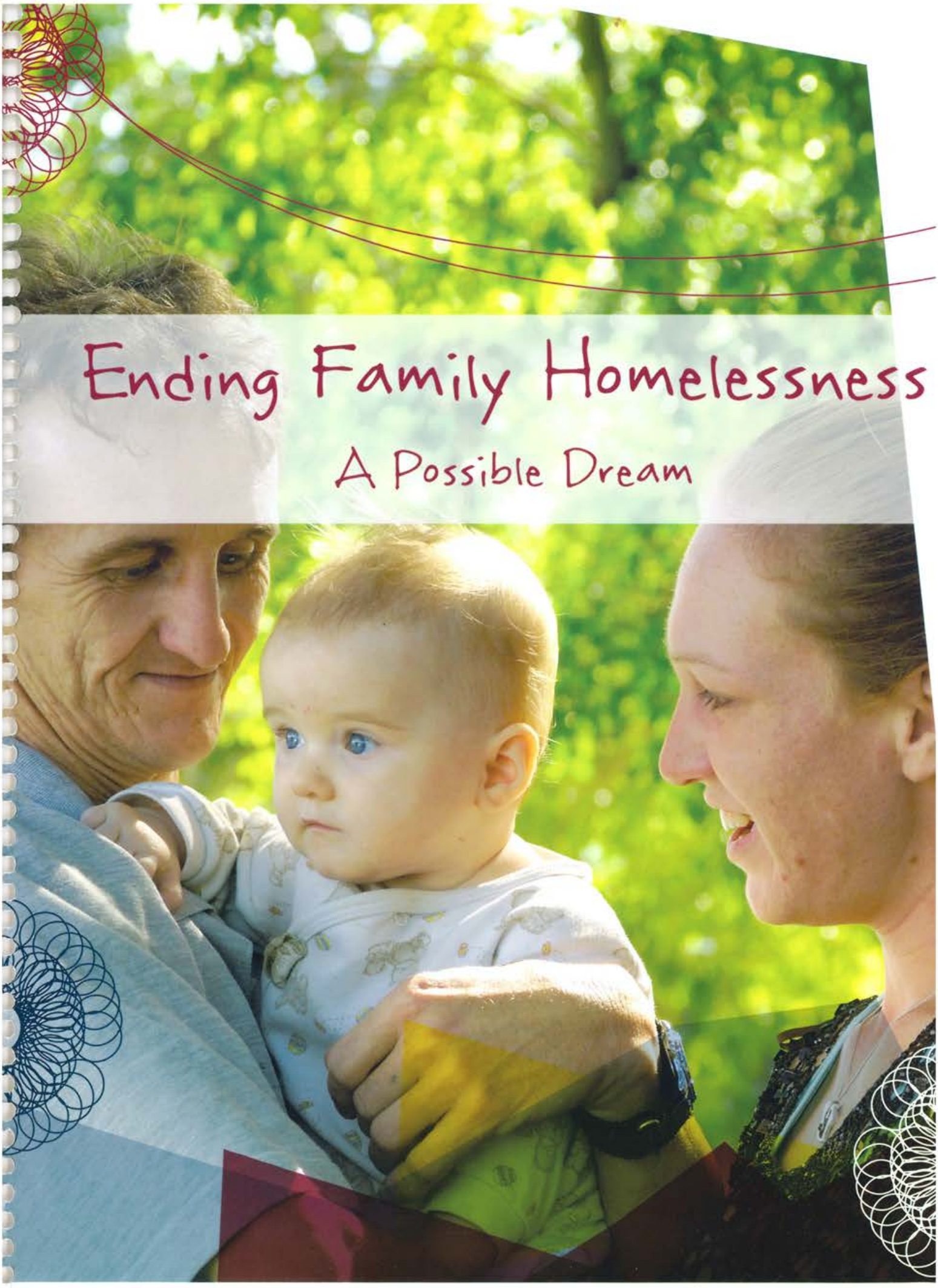


Ending Family Homelessness

A Possible Dream

Homelessness to HOME | MICAH PROJECTS INC

Ending Family Homelessness
– A Possible Dream

A toolkit for policy makers, community organisations and family support workers

Homelessness to HOME

Funded by the Australian Government under the National Homelessness Strategy.

MICAH PROJECTS INC

An Initiative of Micah Projects Inc, South Brisbane.

Overview

Homelessness to Home was funded in 2006 by the Commonwealth Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FACSIA) as a Demonstration Project under the National Homelessness Strategy.

Demonstration Projects by their nature are time-limited and resource intensive and are designed, as the name suggests, to 'demonstrate' how particular strategies and interventions can work to effect a desired outcome. In this instance, the overarching outcome being sought was to end homelessness for vulnerable families whose lives are impacted by a mix of personal and systemic factors which contribute to their experience of being homeless or caught in a cycle of homelessness. *Homelessness to Home* sought to demonstrate – through implementation, documentation and evaluation – a range and mix of service interventions which, combined, would achieve the sought after outcome of "ending family homelessness" for the participating families.

The project team was multi-disciplinary and consisted of people with skills and qualifications in social work, childhood development, adult participatory education, documentation, evaluation and tenancy management. The experience of this team is evident in the quality of the outputs and the outcome of settling families into suitable and affordable housing and working with them to sustain those arrangements.

This toolkit is a key output of the project. It represents much of the action research and policy thinking that was invested in the project. It documents how that thinking was grounded and implemented in a variety of service interventions to assist families overcome the mix of factors that contribute to their risk of homelessness.

This is not a report of the project in a traditional sense. Rather, it is the end result of a process of documentation that both led into the implementation of *Homelessness to Home* and which continued through the life of the project.

The toolkit is presented in five parts:

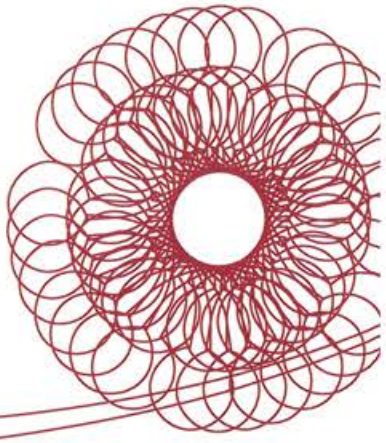
- Part 1 Laying the Foundations for Ending Family Homelessness
- Part 2 The Profile and Voice of Participating Families
- Part 3 Cultural Competency
- Part 4 Developing a Response to End Family Homelessness
- Part 5 References and Reading List.

It is important to note that what is presented here is grounded in the lives of the 46 families who participated in *Homelessness to Home*. The project was enriched and strengthened by the partnership that developed between the families and the *Homelessness to Home* project team.

It is hoped that this toolkit will be a useful resource for policymakers, agencies and practitioners in the field.

Karyn Walsh
Coordinator
Micah Projects Inc

Briannon Stevens
Team Leader
Homelessness to Home



Acknowledgements

A great many people have contributed to this National Demonstration Project. While the project team must be especially acknowledged, so too must the families who agreed to be part of this initiative. Their knowledge, experience and insights have contributed greatly throughout the project. The team and families worked together to deliver a strong, positive outcome which will hopefully add value to the existing body of knowledge in Australia about strategies to end family homelessness.

Project Team

- **Coordinator, Micah Projects Inc:** Karyn Walsh
- **Homelessness to Home Team Leader:** Briannon Stevens
- **Family Support and Advocacy:** Hannah Lewin, Alison Thorburn , Paul Mackay & Tania Schmakeit
- **Family Participation: Adult Learning Strategy:** Anne Hilton, Anna West and Katie Bennett (Shared full - time equivalent position)
- **Housing and Community Liaison:** Helen Styles
- **Documentation Support Project Worker:** Rebekah Pick

Families who contributed to this project, especially Mark and Kristine Ingham, Kylie Jerome, Kelly Sloan and other families who participated in focus groups, advocacy projects and the development of this resource.

Reflective Practice and Professional Supervision: Maureen O'Regan.

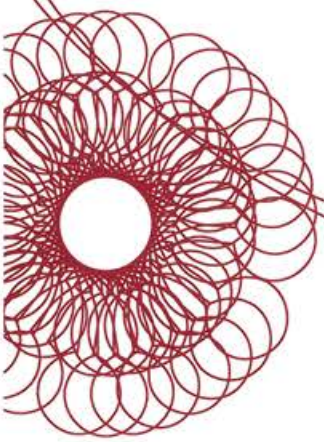
Project Evaluation: Associate Professor Karen Healy, University of Queensland, School of Social Work and Applied Human Sciences. Research Assistant: Inbal Gal.

Editorial Support and Consultation – Coralie Kingston & Nicky Miller – Micah Projects, Judith Hunter – 99 Consulting.

Brisbane Boarders Ltd - Tenancy Officers: Debbie O'Neill, Natalie Hurrell.

The *Homelessness to Home* Reference Group: Spiritus Amend Program, Brisbane Domestic Violence Advocacy Service, Kyabra Community Association, Save the Children Fund, Mater Parent Aide Project, Umpi Korumba Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Corporation for Housing, Department of Housing (Queensland), Department of Communities (Queensland), Micah Projects Inc.

Brisbane Homelessness Service Centre (BHSC)
The *Homelessness to Home* Demonstration Project was supported with the infrastructure developed through the Brisbane Homelessness Service Centre. Appreciation is due to the co-location partners based there: Brisbane Boarders Ltd, South West Brisbane Community Options Project (SWBCOP), The Big Issue, and Murrie Watch Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation. Visiting services at the BHSC are also acknowledged: QPILCH Legal Clinic, Centrelink and the Queensland Health Homelessness Health Outreach Team.



Micah Projects Inc Homelessness Teams: *Homelessness to Home* received support from other Micah Project teams based at the BHSC: Assessment and Referral Team, Street to Home Team, and Homefront Team.

International Organisations: Thanks to international organisations whose materials and practice frameworks have been adapted and used in this project, particularly, the Corporation for Supportive Housing; Common Ground, New York; Community Housing Partnership San Francisco; Child Welfare League of America and the National Alliance to End Homelessness.

Homelessness to Home implemented the research, practice and training resources of the Centre for Urban Community Services. We would like to especially acknowledge their insight, professionalism and practice tools that we found so useful in undertaking this project.

We gratefully acknowledge the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs who have funded the *Homelessness to Home* National Demonstration Project under the National Homelessness Strategy.

Part 1

Laying the Foundations for Ending Family Homelessness

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Laying the Foundations

Working with families who experience being homeless or who live with the risk of becoming homeless requires an understanding of the context in which this is occurring. It is critical that policymakers and stakeholders have an understanding of the dimensions of the issue they are responding to and, specifically, of the multiple factors that contribute to the incidence of family homelessness. It is also imperative that practice frameworks for responding to family homelessness are informed by current research and best practice in the field, drawing from national and international experience.

Policymakers and non-government organisations need to be engaged in ongoing policy discourse that is critically reflective, responsive and has clear and precise objectives. This first part of the toolkit documents the policy considerations that informed – and emerged from – the implementation of the *Homelessness to Home* project. It canvasses:

- a short account of the demography and causes of family homelessness in Australia (Section 1.1)
- the constraints facing the flagship Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) in effectively addressing the growing incidence of family homelessness in Australia (Section 1.2)
- the new and grounded policy framework that was developed by Micah Projects Inc in its endeavour to respond to the growing incidence of family homelessness based on a Continuum of Support Framework (Section 1.3)
- the adoption of a supportive housing model for *Homelessness to Home* which built upon the Continuum of Support Framework (Section 1.4)
- an exploration of the implications for policy and program development from the insights that have emerged in working with families who do not "fit" the SAAP program and require access to ongoing support and permanent housing (Section 1.5).

This toolkit raises issues and offers insights for practitioners, service providers, policy makers and program designers. The aim is to share the foundational work which informed the shape of *Homelessness to Home*. Important policy and program development issues are also explored, premised on the assumption that the overall policy objective is to end family homelessness.

1.1 Family Homelessness in Australia

Families with children are the fastest growing group among Australia's homeless. Results from the 2001 Census indicate that Australia-wide on census night there were 99,000 people who were homeless. 22,700 of these people (23%) were families with children[1]. Queensland has the highest rate per population (at 69.8 homeless people per 10,000 people) of homeless people in all the states and territories[2]. The full extent of homelessness and numbers of children who are homeless is unknown. However, in 2005-06, accompanying children received 69,500 periods of support from services funded by the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) in Australia. "Housing and accommodation services were required in 71% of the closed accompanying child support periods[3]." The most recent data available on the unmet need of children highlighted that children are more likely to be turned away from SAAP accommodation than individuals, particularly when immediate responses are required[4].

Families become homeless for a number of reasons. These do not occur in isolation, but reinforce each other. The most significant causes of family homelessness are structural factors such as access to affordable housing, poverty and unemployment.

[1] Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Social Trends 2004*, Catalogue Number 4102.0, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 2004, p4. The figure of 99,000 includes primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness. This figure does not include those who were marginally housed in caravan parks.
[2] Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Social Trends 2004*, 2004, p3.
[3] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), *Homeless people in SAAP: SAAP Data Collection annual report 2005-06*, AIHW Catalogue Number HOU 156, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 2007, p52.
[4] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 'Homeless Children in SAAP 2004-05: Summary Findings' in *Bulletin 49*, August 2006, p7.

Experiences of domestic violence, sexual assault, childhood abuse, substance misuse and mental and physical illness further compound and interact with structural causes of homelessness and have a debilitating impact on families.

Homelessness has a detrimental and negative effect on the health, physical, social and educational development and wellbeing of children[5]. The disruption and discontinuity it causes to important relationships and environment can damage and delay important developmental steps[6]. In addition, homelessness impairs parents' capacity to provide their children with support, parent consistently and meet their children's emotional needs[7].

Effective responses to family homelessness cannot ignore or deny the underlying structural causes or the impact of individual history and capabilities. Instead they must target *both* structural and individual factors, by providing families with affordable housing *and* access to services which support housing stability and improve family functioning. This is especially important when working with Indigenous families. The legacy and impact of family separation on Indigenous families, as documented in the *Bringing Them Home* report[8], still has significant impact on Indigenous families today including poverty and the lasting effect of intergenerational trauma and loss.

Likewise, the history of institutional care and removal of children from non Indigenous families has recently been documented in the *Forgotten Australians Senate Inquiry*[9]. This inquiry also acknowledged that loss, trauma and abuse of children in out of home care by church and State had led to adult life marked by homelessness and disconnection, impacting on the quality of life for many families today.

Lack of protective factors for families and children can also have a significant role in family homelessness. When protective factors – such as family support, child care support, employment opportunities, community engagement, access to mental health and substance abuse services – are available and accessible, the welfare of families and children is much greater. With the presence of protective factors, families are better placed to deal with tenancy issues and maintain their housing, which in itself is a protective and stabilizing factor, rather then spiral into housing crisis and homelessness.

1.2 The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program and Homeless Families

The major program response to homelessness in Australia is the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP). It was established in the mid-1980s to provide a coordinated State-Commonwealth response to homelessness in Australia. While SAAP is an effective response for many people experiencing homelessness, it cannot, as a sole program response, solve the problem of the growing number of families who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

Firstly, SAAP is based on a model of access to crisis and transitional housing, rather than, in the first instance, permanent housing. It is aimed at providing "transitional supported accommodation and related support services, in order to help people who are homeless to achieve the maximum possible degree of self-reliance and independence"[10]. This program model, while an adequate measure to house people who are 'sleeping rough' or escaping immediate danger and threat to their safety (e.g. in domestic violence situations), it is not an appropriate long-term solution to the growing complexity in the homeless population. A transitional housing approach to homelessness is based on the assumption that individuals and families experience a once only occasion of homelessness to be addressed by the provision of temporary housing and short-term support. Twenty years after the establishment of SAAP this cannot be assumed. Times have changed and so too has the nature and experiences of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

[5] Walsh P, *More than Just a Roof: A Study of Family Homelessness in Queensland*, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, 2003, p41.
[6] Wright-Howie, D., *Children and Homelessness in Australia: Policy and Practice Change Required*, Paper for the 4th National Homelessness Conference, 2006, p12.
[7] Walsh , *More than Just a Roof*, 2003, p44-45.
[8] Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, HREOC, Sydney, 1997.
[9] Senate Community Affairs Committee, *Forgotten Australians: A report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children*, AGPS, Canberra, 2004.
[10] *Supported Accommodation Assistance Act*, (Commonwealth), 1994, s5(2).

Further, SAAP alone will not be sufficient to address homelessness, as it assumes a level of self-reliance in the homeless population once the move from transitional housing has been made, and does not recognise the multiple issues which impact on an individual or family's ability to maintain housing. This approach weights the response to homelessness more on a strategy for accessing housing than on maintaining tenancy and linking services to respond to the individual support needs of the family or individual members.

In recent times Australian governments have embarked on significant reform agendas which have led to a shift in government policy and programs away from institutional care for children, young people, people with a disability and people with a mental illness. While laudable in many aspects, these reforms have not been without some negative and far-reaching consequences. These consequences have been documented in several reports arising from national inquiries. For example, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission report into homeless children[11] and the report of the national inquiry into the human rights of people with mental illness[12] both demonstrated the link between deinstitutionalisation and growing incidence of homeless people. Policy and program limitations have become evident in the lack of investment in community infrastructure for personal, social, health, and employment supports for people leaving institutional living. While people may have accessed accommodation initially, consistent long-term support has not materialised in proportion to demand. People therefore have become marginalised, vulnerable and disconnected – resulting in homelessness.

Statistics from SAAP[13] and service providers' experiences indicate that there are certain groups of homeless people who are unable to adequately access SAAP services. Notable amongst these groups are:

- homeless families, especially when domestic violence is not a presenting issue
- two parent families
- families with teenage sons
- males with children
- large families
- families with high and complex needs.

This was highlighted by SAAP data which demonstrates that couples with children and individuals with children are more often turned away from SAAP services[14]. For couples with children the rate of unmet need is 81% – that is, over four in every five presenting for assistance[15].

While there is no dispute about the merits of SAAP in responding to homelessness, complementary strategies are required to respond to the suite of individual and structural factors that are creating growing complexity in the homeless population. With the current changes in the accessibility and affordability of housing, as well as the complexity of unmet needs in the lives of many vulnerable families and individuals, it is timely for policy makers to look beyond the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program. The aim must be to address the urgency to link support services with permanent housing for a significantly vulnerable population who have been trapped in the crisis response for many years. The growth and complexity of family homelessness defies traditional responses. New approaches are needed. *Homelessness to Home* proposes one approach – outlined in the pages of this toolkit. This approach represents a policy objective of moving from "managing homelessness" to one of "ending homelessness".

[11] Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission *Our homeless children: report of the national inquiry into homeless children (Brian Burdekin, Chair)*, 1989, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra.
[12] Burdekin, B., Guilfoyle, M. & Hall, *D Human rights and mental illness – Report of the national inquiry into the human rights of people with mental illness, 1993*, Australian Government Publishing Service: Canberra.
[13] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Demand for SAAP Assistance by homeless people 2003-04: SAAP NDCA Report Series 9*, Feb 2006, www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/title/10191 p59.
[14] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Children Accompanying Homeless Clients 2002-2003: A report from the SAAP National Data Collection*, AIHW Cat No HOU106, Canberra, 2004.
[15] AIHW, *Demand for SAAP Assistance by homeless people 2003-04*, 2006, www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/title/10191 , p59.

1.3 Developing a New Approach to Ending Family Homelessness

From 2003, workers based at Micah Projects in South Brisbane began to notice a growing trend of families presenting among the wider homeless population. In the period 2003-04, frontline workers responded to 508 families who had accompanying children; in the following year, this number grew to 766 families. 48% of these families were Indigenous.[16] Significantly, most of these families were the traditional nuclear family type that could not easily gain access to the SAAP.

In 2002, Micah Projects joined with a number of other Queensland-based peak bodies, Church and community service organizations, the Brisbane City Council and the Queensland University of Technology to conduct a study of this growing phenomenon of family homelessness. As a frontline agency, Micah Projects was keen to test the evidence presenting in its agency data against the findings of a well-researched study which captured data from across Queensland.

The report, *More than Just a Roof*,[17] highlighted two critical issues that informed the development of *Homelessness to Home*, namely:

- it estimated that more that two thirds of the homeless families involved in the research were unable to access SAAP services
- it revealed that vulnerable families were confronted with a significant deficit in the supply of affordable housing and essential support services. This was attributable to their low socio-economic status and its impacts on individual and family development in terms of education, health and employment status.

It was evident from the report that ending family homelessness required an acknowledgement of **both personal and systemic factors**, and that existing responses were not adequate for meeting this challenge.

The report, a first in Queensland, was led by the non-government sector to investigate models of working with families in order to break the chronic cycle of homelessness by combining access to affordable housing and support.

An important initial step in this policy development process was the adoption of a Continuum of Support Framework[18]. This framework is based on the premise that ending homelessness relies upon a service system that consists of a range of service responses – from crisis to continuing support backed up with prevention and early intervention services, leading to access to generic services. This supportive housing strategy is based on the premise that wraparound support services augmenting affordable and secure housing will position families to maintain housing and come to the point of stability and self management.

This framework is presented in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 Continuum of Support Framework

One of the key elements in this policy orientation is the idea of providing housing first, followed by services to match individualized family need. It is critical to be flexible and to match services with needs. Initially, it can be as simple as paying for a removalist or hiring a mini-skip to clear up an

[16] Micah Projects Inc data
[17] *Walsh, P, More that Just a Roof*, 2003, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane
[18] Chicago Continuum of Care, 2002, *Getting Housed, Staying Housed: A Collaborative Plan to End Homelessness*

accumulation of rubbish under a house. Further down the track intensive, time-limited services are tailored to meet family need.

In early 2005, Micah Projects Inc explored the pathway of matching services with needs by holding a Family Support Roundtable with a number of other service agencies who formed a Working Group under the auspices of the Southside Homelessness Action Network (SHAN). The roundtable captured the "voice" of families and from that a number of important insights emerged:

- Families recognized their need for support, especially for family functioning, but they also sought consistency in that support and made reference to the "cut and run" syndrome that they often face when support workers start to build trust and rapport and then are moved or move on to other positions.
- Families also articulated a sense of "being judged" as inadequate and especially of not loving their children. They felt fearful of "systems" that would take their children away.
- Families wanted services to take a "holistic" view of family and not focus on individual members at the exclusion of the whole family unit.
- Families wanted social and community connection and access to employment, education and training.

Overall, the roundtable highlighted the important "relational" aspects in working with families and the importance of achieving outcomes with families. Like all human interaction, relating to people is fundamental. Families experiencing homelessness prefer consistency, a non-judgmental approach, respect for family culture and the family functioning as a unit; and responses to family aspirations to become part of the social and community fabric. Likewise whilst developing a relationship it is important to achieve small, practical outcomes with families to demonstrate that working together makes a difference. These insights contributed to the framework developed by Micah Projects in the lead-up to *Homelessness to Home* and informed its design and implementation.

Consistent with the Continuum of Support Framework and building upon it, the Demonstration Project also adopted and adapted elements of the supportive housing or service enriched housing models which have been developed to respond to homelessness in the United States Of America (USA) and implemented across the USA, the United Kingdom and South Australia. Whilst the model is applicable to a wide range of target groups, *Homelessness to Home* focused on families who are experiencing homelessness. The centrepiece of these models is rapidly housing homeless people and wrapping around them the services needed to sustain the housing.

The underlying assumptions of a supportive housing or a service enriched housing model are:

- affordable, permanent housing is necessary to end family homelessness
- prevention is a key ingredient to achieve this end
- vulnerable and at-risk homeless families are more responsive to interventions and support services *after they are in their own housing*, rather than while living in crisis or transitional housing programs
- some families require ongoing support after they are in their own housing - to prevent recurrences of homelessness, ensure ongoing stability and connections in the community, foster self-support and wellbeing and maintain safe and protective relationships as a family

- tenancy management needs to work closely with support strategies to address the risks of recurring homelessness.

Micah Projects Inc acknowledges the work of the National Alliance to End Homelessness, Washington; the Corporation for Supportive Housing, New York; Common Ground, New York; Community Housing Partnership San Francisco; the Center for Urban Community Services, New York; and the many non-profits who have implemented this model. The research, practical experience and collective wisdom of such groups have greatly informed the implementation of *Homelessness to Home*.

1.4 Policy and Program Implications for Ending Family Homelessness

Ending homelessness is a goal that the Australian community should embrace in a country of prosperity and a fair go. It is not beyond the ability of governments, service systems and the community to do whatever it takes to ensure that the most vulnerable members of our society, especially families with children, have access to affordable, permanent housing and the supports necessary to meet their specific needs and maintain their housing. *Homelessness to Home* is a starting point – but this fledgling initiative needs to be enhanced considerably.

A shift in the way in which family homelessness can be addressed effectively requires:

- re-visioning our goal away from managing homelessness to ending homelessness
- positioning prevention of homeless as a cornerstone of policy
- ensuring a rapid housing approach which facilitates access to permanent and affordable housing
- targeting support services to meet family and individual needs
- providing flexible and coordinated funding arrangements for support services
- ensuring families can pay for housing – income support and employment support must back up other support initiatives
- developing Community Action Plans which encompass a Continuum of Support Framework
- using data for planning and program management.

Securing both financial and political support for this approach is the main challenge.

Without this, it will not be possible to deliver an "ending homelessness program" which can concurrently focus on sustaining tenancies in affordable housing and provide individualized family support on an ongoing basis. For example, this Demonstration Project was hampered by the lack of accessible, affordable permanent housing at every turn, requiring workers to spend significant periods of time on accessing housing and organizing transitional arrangements. This highlighted a key structural issue in being able to address family homelessness and end it for the families. While this was both frustrating and disappointing for families, the value of family support through the process was demonstrably valuable in stabilizing their circumstances and preventing an escalation of family stress.

To access funding to provide support services to people in permanent housing would require organisations to have the opportunity to apply for support services funding for multiple needs from a coordinated package. This does not currently exist within Commonwealth or State funding programs. Currently, funding for support services, which may include, mental health services, medical care, addiction treatment, income support, training and employment, housing, and community building, are administered by separate departments with different kinds of eligibility and separate application processes. This creates immense inefficiencies and leaves people with access to services until a crisis escalates and statutory or tertiary services are required.

From a policy perspective, it is imperative to recognize that homelessness is created not simply by the individual circumstances of any individual or family but also by the management and delivery of systems which are responsible for housing, income, health, employment, education, training, children and young people's education, family and community support services.

A new coordinated approach that touches down at the local service system level would enable housing and service dollars to be available through a single application based on flexible service delivery and collaborative efforts between agencies.

The challenge to public policy is to create new, flexible arrangements for funding program implementation and evaluation to enable work to be done by community organisations, with the emphasis on ending homelessness and not simply managing people as they experience homelessness either short term or over longer periods of time. This would enable a crisis management system to have exit points for individuals and families.

Ending homelessness will not happen just by focusing on isolated case work with families. It also requires innovation, knowledge and financing of new arrangements which bring together the housing and support systems to both work on the one goal of stablising housing so that further goals in relation to social inclusion and participation can be achieved. Housing is recognized as fundamental to the wellbeing of individuals and families, and support services are integral to sustaining tenancy and building on a strong foundation with residents in their local community or neighbourhood.

Therefore, policy makers have the challenge of establishing a well grounded understanding of the resources and services available in local communities. They must also understand the operation of systems such as discharge planning from hospitals, correctional facilities, crisis services, transitional housing etc to create, manage or end homelessness.

This requires recognition that housing and support programs to address homelessness are most effective when they are developed and operated as part of an inclusive, collaborative, locally driven community planning process.

A policy framework which links permanent affordable housing with support services can be useful if linked to a range of other policy positions across government as an effective intervention to break the cycles of poverty, violence, poor tenancy histories, child protection, family crisis and post release from correctional institutions.

For example, such a program can provide people with a second chance after imprisonment by:

- assisting re-entry back into the community
- preserving safe and stable families
- responding quickly to crisis
- facilitating family reunification if children have been removed
- facilitating and supporting families affected by policy changes to income support, welfare reform through linking with education and employment.

1.4.1 Funding and Measuring Outcomes - Connecting Housing and Support

A Supportive Housing Approach like that used for Homelessness to Home seeks broad outcomes that will sustain families in stable housing for the long term. A set of outcomes and related key performance indicators (KPIs) are proposed below as an example of a new government initiative for families. Such a program would build upon evidence based practices and interventions so as to enhance the delivery of more systemic and reliable interventions within a housing focused casework and adult learning approach. This model would be useful across government departments where data and evidence exist of vulnerable populations who would benefit from flexibility and integration rather than silo eligibility and disconnected multiple professional interventions.

An example of outcomes from investment could be the following with an appreciation that at any given

point in time variations exist in which outcomes take procedence.

i. **Families will access and maintain permanent, affordable housing in their community of choice**

KPI:
- Number of families offered access to social housing or affordable private rental.
- Reduction in eviction of families supported by the program.
- Number of families who are supported with tenancy management.

ii. **Family functioning is strengthened and healthy and safe relationships are promoted and supported**

KPI:
- Reduced police involvement in domestic and family violence.
- Reduced notifications and or involvement with child protection system.
- Increase number of children re-unified with families or increased contact with out of home care.
- Number of participants in adult learning and personal development opportunities.

iii. **Family members will have access to appropriate professional support and entitlements to match their individual needs**

KPI:
- Increasing access to mainstream and universal health services for each family member.
- Increased identification and linkages with specialist professional services – number of successful referrals.
- Number of parents who maintain access to income support and entitlements.

iv. **Family members will have the opportunity to develop personal, social and citizenship connections in the community and be effective partners in the delivery of human services**

KPI:
- Increase knowledge and participation in community events and opportunities.
- Number of opportunities to represent themselves within a community and political context.
- Number of participants in adult learning opportunities.
- Number of participants in playgroups or opportunities to link with others who have similar experiences and concerns.
- Level of satisfaction as a partner in delivery of services.

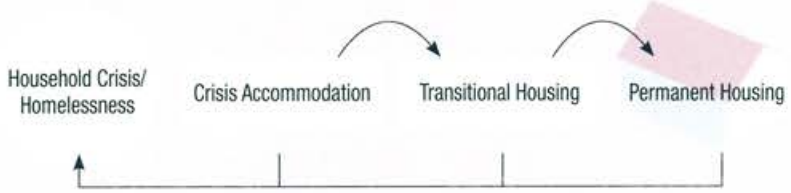
v. **Family members have access to education, training and employment to maximize economic participation**

KPI:
- Children are enrolled in age appropriate learning and educational institutions.
- Decreased periods or non enrolment or non attendance.
- Parents have opportunities for pathways into education, training and employment.
- Linkages with employment and training programs offered to the target.
- Increased uptake of training program.
- Increased numbers access employment appropriate to their capacity.
- Families have access to high quality and culturally competent human services.

1.4.2

The following diagram demonstrates the shift where new investment is required to respond to the current gap in service systems and practice frameworks.

Managing Homelessness



Ending Homelessness

Adapted from a diagram of the National Alliance to End Homelessness.

1.5 The Homelessness to Home Program Design

Based on the approach outlined above, Micah Projects developed a model for the *Homelessness to Home* project to trial a response to family homelessness within the non-government sector based on a supportive housing model.

The *Homelessness to Home* model incorporated four key components:

1) permanent, affordable housing
2) outreach, family support casework and advocacy
3) intensive coordination with property management
4) engagement with families in an adult learning strategy which focused on group work and skills development.

While the Demonstration Project was time limited and not specifically location-based, this model can effectively incorporate a fifth component of community building in and around supportive housing residences or within a community of choice.

This section describes:

- the project target group
- the staffing model used
- more detail about each of the project's key components.

1.5.1 Project Target Group

In adopting the insights of the supportive housing and service enriched model, *Homelessness to Home* particularly targeted families who:

- are not able to obtain or maintain housing, and do not live in appropriate and stable housing in the community
- would not be able to retain stable housing without ongoing support
- are experiencing homelessness, poverty, unemployment and social isolation
- have substantial barriers to housing stability that are at least episodically disabling such as chronic health conditions, mental illness, substance use issues, involvement with the criminal justice system, or other substantial barriers to housing stability (e.g. domestic violence, trauma, history of out of home placements)
- are unable to access existing SAAP services due to eligibility barriers in relation to personal characteristics, behaviours or family composition.

For the purposes of the Demonstration Project, a "family" was defined broadly and included birth families, blended families, kinship families, foster families and adoptive families.

1.5.2 Staffing

This project was designed to provide support to an identified number of families whilst in permanent affordable housing. However, due to the difficulties in accessing permanent affordable housing Family Support Workers did provide assistance to access housing and make the transition. The staffing ratio was based on supporting 35 families at any one time and designed to provide a mix of case work and group activities as key components of the program.

***Homelessness to Home* Staffing Structure**

- Team Leader
- 2 Family Support Workers
- 1 full time Adult Learning Facilitator
- An intensive property manager position was brokered to a housing provider organization and linked to the project.

As the project evolved it became evident that specialist staffing gaps existed notably:

- an Early Childhood Specialist and Youth Worker would have added specialist value to the team.
- drug and alcohol, and mental health clinical consultants would also have added value to the team.
- in-home support would facilitate family functioning, household management and mentoring for parenting skills.
- A Housing and Community Liaison position that would provide the critical link between property management and support.

Notwithstanding the constraints and desirability of specialist workers, the project design with the available staff structure maximized the spread of working hours to include 'after hours' access and seven day a week on-call coverage. This provided consistency in availability for families when crises occurred beyond normal working hours.

Benchmarking caseloads

Family Support Workers in the *Homelessness to Home* project were able to manage an intensive caseload of a maximum of 12 families per worker with provision of less intensive support to an additional 5-10 families.

The benchmarking of case load was based of the following factors:

- intensive support is required over a longer period of time to stabilize and link a family into a community
- support remains available on an ***as needed basis*** or as initiated by the family or property manager
- significant support is provide intensively to prevent a stress indicator from becoming a crisis leading to homelessness or a significant statutory intervention such as mental health, criminal justice, or child protection impacts on the family
- casework is backed up by skill development and group work activities including playgroups.

These families received regular outreach support of at least one home visit per fortnight and phone calls at least once a week. Some families, particularly those recently housed and with complex issues, required visits up to three times per week and daily phone calls until their situations stabilized.

1.5.3 The Key Components of the Project

This section outlines how the *Homelessness to Home* model incorporated four key components:

1) rapid re-housing to permanent, affordable housing
2) linking family support and tenancy outcomes through outreach, family support casework and advocacy
3) intensive coordination with property management
4) an adult learning strategy to promote social inclusion.

As noted above, in a longer-term, location-based approach, it would be useful to incorporate a fifth component of community building in and around supportive housing residences or within a community of choice.

Component 1: Rapid Re-housing to Permanent, Affordable Housing

The rapid re-housing of homeless families was the first priority of the Family Support Workers who worked closely with housing providers to achieve this objective. When families were referred to *Homelessness to Home*, workers immediately assessed a family's housing situation. Workers prioritized re-housing for those families who were homeless or in unsuitable or sub-standard housing. While moving families to permanent housing is the ideal, this was not always possible. In these situations temporary accommodation had to suffice but securing permanent housing remained the primary objective.

Rapidly re-housing families who are homeless is based on a key supportive housing principle that once families' basic housing needs are met, support services will be more effective in addressing the multiple barriers to sustaining permanent housing[19].

Component 2: Linking Family Support and Tenancy Outcomes

When families were housed, regular outreach was provided to families in their homes, with Family Support Workers targeting housing stability as their central goal. In promoting housing stability, Family Support Workers focus on helping families:

- meet their lease obligations, including paying rent
- maintain a safe and healthy living environment
- create a home
- relate to neighbours in a respectful manner and maintaining a safe and protective functioning family unit.

In order for families to maintain housing, Family Support Workers addressed factors which reduced the family's instability and enhanced their ability to meet their tenancy obligations. They also sought to link families with specialised services in their community in order to address specific destabilizing factors which put families at risk.

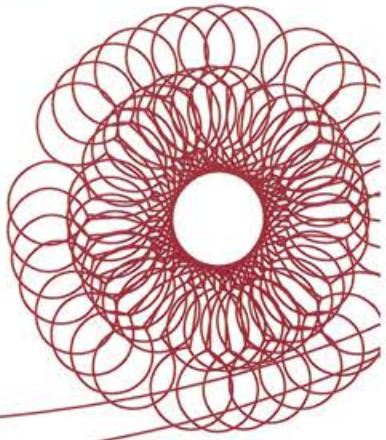
Factors which reduce families' stability include – but are not limited to – mental health, substance use, violence, relationship difficulties, budgeting, children's health and behavioural issues.

Some families require a short period of support after accessing permanent, affordable housing in order to regain stability and connect with mainstream services in their local community. However there are a number of families with multiple needs and barriers to maintaining housing who require *ongoing and consistent* support from services that can effectively engage and support families with complex needs, target housing stability, and make effective and timely referrals to specialist services. These families include those with long, repeated or generational histories of homelessness, mental health and substance use problems, disconnection from supports and distrust of support services, histories of trauma and abuse, families with young people with behavioural problems, and histories of institutional and out of home care in child protection systems.

(See section on creating a Trauma Sensitive Culture in Part 4, *Family Participation – An Adult Learning Strategy for Social Inclusion*.)

It is important to note that in advocating for ongoing and consistent support, this model is not about creating dependent relationships but rather ensuring that people understand where they can access timely and consistent support and maintain healthy interdependent relationships with appropriate formal

[19] National Alliance to End Homelessness, 'What is Housing First?', November 9, 2006, http://www.endhomelessness.org/content/general/detail/1425. (accessed 15/06/2007) p1.



and informal networks. These healthy community relationships prevent the social isolation which can feed a downward spiral leading to homelessness and displacement. The role of the Family Support Worker has a dual focus on supporting the individual family members and advocating within the systems which impact on their daily life and their ability to access the resources, services, entitlements and opportunities that exist for them in their local community. These systems include child protection, health, Centrelink, criminal justice, and education.

Component 3: Coordination with Property Management

In order to prevent family homelessness, there must be an integration of property management and support services with the aim of maintaining tenancies and addressing risk factors associated with tenancy breakdown. There needs to be a clear relationship between housing providers and the support service, facilitated by effective and timely communication between support workers and property managers. Best practice has indicated that property management and support services are best undertaken by separate organisations with a commitment to "doing what it takes" to assist people in maintaining their tenancy.[20]

If support services and property management are coordinated effectively, early signs of housing stress can be identified and addressed, and tenancies have an increased chance of success with access to casework and support from both tenancy managers and support workers.

This coordination is difficult for existing property managers and support and advocacy workers due to their workloads. This project trialled the allocation of funds to engage a part-time Intensive Tenancy Manager for identified tenants who were being housed by a community housing provider. This position was instrumental in developing a closer working relationship between the community housing provider and the support agency.

This project and additional research on the subject highlight the need for an identified position within the support team to resource both the Family Support Workers and property managers when coordination is required to sustain tenancies, prevent evictions and rapidly move families into permanent housing.

Therefore a Housing and Community Liaison position is proposed as a vital component of any Supportive Housing Team, ensuring effective communication between support workers and property managers. When this occurs, early signs of housing stress can be identified and resolved, with families having a better chance of sustaining their housing. This work is time intensive and a discrete position dedicated to it frees Family Support Workers to focus on providing support.

The liaison position provides the critical link ensuring coordination between property management and support workers. The responsibilities of such a worker would include:

- conducting research, outreach, education and public relations to build a pool of private landlords, community housing, public housing and private real estate agencies willing to rent to families
- establishing and maintaining relationships with private landlords, community housing, public housing and private real estate agencies
- providing support, advice and contacts to support workers seeking housing for families
- coordinating with Family Support Workers and property managers to ensure that accurate information is collected and shared about tenancy history, risk factors to tenancy breakdown, current housing situation and monitoring of current tenancy
- providing a single point of contact between property managers and support workers

[20] For more information on the property management aspect of supportive housing see Corporation Supportive Housing, *Family Matters: A Guide to Developing Family Supportive Housing*, CSH, New York, 2001.

- establishing and leading processes to respond to concerns raised by property managers about current tenancies, including ensuring follow-up by support staff when relevant, and conducting meetings and mediation when necessary
- collaborating with other staff to facilitate tenant education opportunities.

Component 4: Family Participation through an Adult Learning Strategy to Promote Social Inclusion

If the experience of family homelessness is to be overcome, the process from exclusion to inclusion must begin somewhere. In the implementation of Homelessness to Home, this was initiated early and proved to be an effective way of engaging families beyond the narrow focus of improving family functioning and addressing housing issues. Serge Paugam, a French sociologist, identifies the fundamental bonds which connect an individual to society as[21]:

- personal bonds
- social bonds
- citizenship bonds.

The focus of the Adult Learning Strategy is the development of skills and capacities that assist families make important connections in all areas of life, particularly in accessing mainstream services.

1.5.4 Cost Effectiveness

This demonstration project was funded at $500,000 which represented the cost of $11,014 per family or $2,450 per individual inclusive of adults and children over a 12 month period. To work with 60 families a budget of $750,000 would enable greater outcomes for children and young people and is inclusive of evaluation costs.

[21] ATD Fourth World, *Valuing Children Valuing Parents*, Report, 2004, p 28

Part 2

Profile and Voice of Participating Families, taken from the Homelessness to Home Final Evaluation Report by Healy and Gal, 2007

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Profile and Voice of Families who Participated in Homelessness to Home

Initially, 34 families were referred to the *Homelessness to Home* project. A total of 46 families were involved with the project from the period July 2006 to April 2007. In September and October 2006, a survey was administered to all current participants at that stage of the project. A total of 31 participants responded to the survey. The findings from this survey are available in more detail in the project Final Evaluation Report by Dr Karen Healy and Inbal Gal[1].

This section of the toolkit explores Healy and Gal's findings to provide some insight into the lives of vulnerable families.

The first section presents a profile of the participating families. The second section presents the perspective of participating families on their issues, needs and aspirations. The third section documents three case studies.

Summary

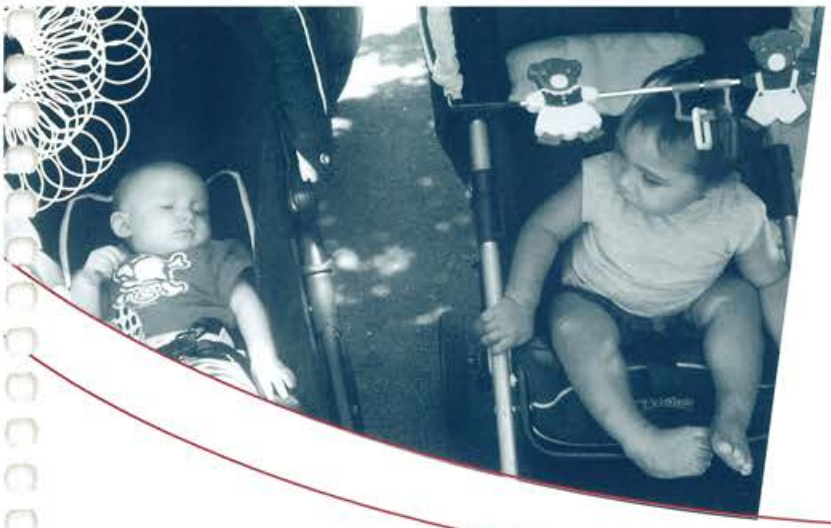
Of the 31 families who responded to the survey:

- most were single female parent households (68%)
- average age of participants was 31.1 years, with an age range from 22 to 43 years
- 48% identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- early parenthood was a characteristic of most of the families in the project.
- respondents reported low levels of educational attainment and poor employment history
- all families relied on Centrelink payments as their primary source of income and all had current debts, most to public agencies.

For these families:

- systems barriers to accessing and maintaining housing included:
  - a lack of affordable and appropriate housing stock
  - poverty
  - debt
  - tenancy blacklisting
  - discrimination
- personal barriers to accessing and maintaining housing included family violence, addiction and mental illness
- most respondents, (76%), indicated that they had contact with child protection services and over half (57%) indicated that they had a child removed from their care either permanently or temporarily
- fourteen respondents (45%) indicated that their children had experienced a period of non-enrolment for longer than two weeks in the previous two years.
- there was a high level of isolation found amongst vulnerable families
- most families felt a strong bond and commitment within their immediate family.
- most families (71%) stated that they sought to achieve stable and permanent housing over the next 12 months
- other aspirations for change included:
  - reunifying with non-custodial children
  - achieving stable schooling
  - accessing education and employment
  - improving financial stability
  - addressing health concerns.

[1] Healy K & Gal I, *Homelessness to Home: A Family Homelessness National Homelessness Demonstration Project – Evaluation Report May 2007*, FACSIA, AGPS, 2007.



2.1 Profile of Families

The majority of families were single female parent households (68%), with the average age of participants 31.1 years old and an age range from 22 to 43 years. 48% of respondents to the survey identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Early parenthood was a characteristic of most of the families in the project. The majority of participants had all had their first child whilst in their teens or early twenties, with the average age at birth of their first child being 18.52 years for females and 22.3 years for males. These figures contrast markedly with the general Australian population where the average age at first birth for women in 2005 was 30.7 years and for men was 32.9 years[2].

The family size of participants ranged from one to eight children per participant. The age range of children was broad and ranged from newborns to young adult children. Most families (87%) also reported having children who were not currently residing with them. (57% had children removed permanently or temporarily in child protection out of home care.)

Respondents to the study reported low levels of educational attainment. The average education completed was less than 10 years of formal schooling. Only four had completed grade 12. This is much lower than the general population, where approximately 60% of the population is reported to have completed at least year 11 and approximately 34% hold post-school qualifications[3]. Low educational attainment is associated with significant labour market disadvantage and is strongly correlated with poor employment prospects[4].

The employment history of the respondents was poor. Twenty-one respondents (68% of the sample) reported having paid employment since they completed their formal education (not necessarily in continuity). Most of the employment was in casual and low skill employment in fields such as cleaning, retail and the food industry. Almost one third of the respondents (10 respondents) had never had paid employment.

Variable	Number
Gender	
Female	21 (68%)
Male	10 (32%)
Age (Mean)	31.1 years
Age at first child (Mean)	
Female	18.52
Male	22.3
Cultural Identity	
ATSI	15 (48%)
Anglo-Australian	13 (42%)
Anglo-New Zealander	2 (6%)
Maori	1 (3%)
Family Composition	
Female Single Parent	15 (48%)
Male Single Parent	2 (6%)
Couples	14 (45%)
Family Size	
Max	8 children
Min	1 child
Average number children residing with the family (Mean)	3 children
Families with all children residing with them	4 (13%)
Families with children residing elsewhere	27 (87%)
Families with some children residing elsewhere	23 (74%)
Families with all children residing elsewhere	4 (13%)
Education	
Average (Mean) years in education	9.67
Minimum (*did not enter 0 into analysis)	7 or 0*
Maximum	12
Employment	
Have worked since formal education	21 (68%)
Never had paid employment	10 (32%)
Income Source	
Centrelink	31 (100%)

[2] Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Births, Australia 2005 (cat. 3301).* Canberra, ABS, 2005
[3] Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Education and Training Experience Australia, cat. 62780.* Canberra, ABS, 2005
[4] Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Education and Training Experience Australia, cat. 62780.* Canberra, ABS, 2005

2.2 The Voice of Families

2.2.1 Housing Issues[5]

At the beginning of the project the majority of families (77%) lived in community housing with the remainder living in public housing, private rental, crisis accommodation and caravan parks. Five families were homeless at the beginning of the project.

Families overall had poor tenancy histories, with the majority of families (77%) receiving a formal notice for breaching their lease in the past two years, 55% falling behind in rent payments and 51% receiving a Notice to Leave in the previous two years.

Systemic Factors
The evaluation identified a number of systemic factors which impact on families' ability to access permanent housing, and once housed, served to diminish their capacity to maintain this housing[6].

The **reduction in public and community housing stock** and the **rising costs of private rental** were significant barriers to stable housing.

> *"I was desperate and had to take a property that I couldn't afford, $360/week."*

Some family types, particularly **large families**, experienced substantial barriers to accessing appropriate housing.

Poverty and debt are significant barriers for families accessing affordable housing, and severely impede families' ability to make rental payments. All of the families in the project relied on Centrelink payments as their primary source of income. All respondents indicated that they had debts. These debts incurred substantial demands on their income outside their day to day requirements. Notably, most debts were to public agencies, particularly the Department of Housing and Centrelink, and were often the result of rent arrears to, or overpayment by, these agencies. The level of fortnightly debt varied from $15 to $500 per fortnight with the average level of demand being $108 per fortnight and the median being $72 per fortnight. These debts represent a substantial demand on these families as all were on extremely low incomes and experienced stress in meeting daily living expenses.

> *"When I lost my job, it got harder financially. I had lots of debt which was fine while I was working, but when I lost my job, I was trying to pay everything, but I got behind in my rent."*

> *"Kids were in hospital and we didn't pay the rent, we had a verbal agreement with the landlord but they went behind our backs and breached us."*

> *"Centrelink cut off payment. I couldn't catch up on rent."*

TICA tenancy database blacklisting is an immediate barrier to accessing and securing rental properties in the private rental market, as it is common practice for real estates and caravan parks to check TICA status before considering rental applications. In a competitive rental market, real estate agents will often refuse to grant rental properties to families who are TICA listed. Ten respondents (32%) indicated they were listed on the TICA database while a further five (16%) did not know whether they were listed.

Some families reported **discrimination** as a factor in difficulties they experienced in accessing or maintaining private rental accommodation.

> *"People in private rental don't want to rent to: 1) Single parents 2) Large families 3) Aboriginal families. They stereotype you. I understand but you can't stereotype people."*

Other barriers to stable housing
The evaluation identified that a range of non-housing issues, particularly family violence, drug and alcohol misuse, and mental illness, contributed significantly to vulnerability to homelessness and an inability to meet their tenancy obligations amongst the families involved with the project.

[5] Housing data is from Healy K & Gal I, *Homelessness to Home: A Family Homelessness National Homelessness Demonstration Project – Evaluation Report May 2007*, FACSIA, AGPS, 2007.
[6] Quotes and data from Healy K & Gal I, *Homelessness to Home: A Family Homelessness National Homelessness Demonstration Project – Evaluation Report May 2007*, FACSIA, AGPS, 2007.

Experiences of **family violence** were common with 48% of respondents identifying this as a significant contributor to their vulnerability to homelessness.

> *"I was constantly living in fear and I had to go to a women's refuge due to domestic violence. I lost my flat, my bond and I lost everything."*

> *"In the past, we would fight everyday, as soon as I opened my eyes, I'd go off at him. I'd get arrested all the time, put in the Watchhouse, stay for days and then they'd let me out. The police and neighbours complained to my landlord and we'd end up evicted."*

Many families involved with the project identified that **problematic drug use** impacted on their ability to keep their housing. This limited their capacity to direct their already limited resources to sustaining housing.

> *"Drug use [meant I] didn't have money for bond and rent. Hanging out [for drugs] limited my ability and capacity to maintain housing and look for housing."*

Mental health issues were also experienced as a further barrier to stable housing. Mental health, particularly depression and anxiety, was reported as an issue by 42% of respondents.

> *"At times, I get depressed. I gets in a rut. I couldn't be bothered. Rent and maintenance doesn't happen. Everything gets on top of me."*

2.2.2 Support Issues

Child Care and Schooling

With only one exception, respondents indicated that children who are currently eligible for school were enrolled. However, 45% indicated that their children had experienced a period of non-enrolment for longer than two weeks in the previous two years.

> *"One child could not go due to family violence; she was scared her dad would turn up."*

> *"[One son] refused to go to school because he was being bullied. [Another son] was suspended because of fighting. When we were homeless, they did not go to school."*

Twenty six respondents indicated that they had children under five years and of those respondents, fifteen reported that they used child care services. Those who were not using child care services indicated that their own mobility was a factor in deciding not to use services.

> *"We are moving and we will wait until they [the children] are settled."*

Child Protection

The majority of respondents, (76%), indicated that they had contact with child protection services. 13 respondents (57%) indicated that they had a child removed from their care either permanently or temporarily. Respondents' indicated that child protection services had become involved in response to a range of issues in the families' lives including homelessness, drug addiction and mental health issues.

Isolation

The majority of families reported no or little involvement in their local community. The key reasons for low community involvement were:

- a preference for non-involvement: *"I want to stick to myself"*; *"I don't make friends easily"* and *"I keep to myself, I have only lived here for a while"*
- family commitments, particularly parenting of small children limited opportunities for community involvement
- unstable housing: *"When I know where my community is and I'm resettled I'd like to get involved in things"*.

Family Strengths and Aspirations for Change[7]
Most respondents indicated that they experienced a strong bond amongst their immediate family. Many indicated that there was good communication and commitment within their immediate family:

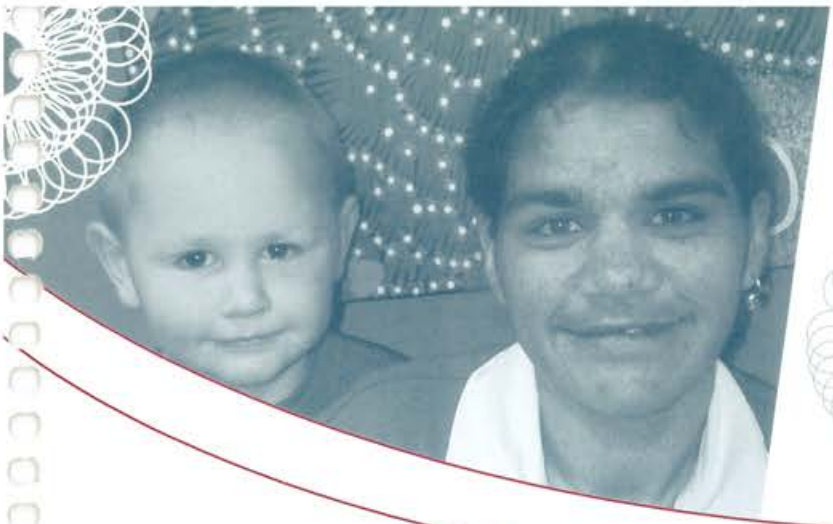
> *"We can talk to each other, communication is very good, and they tell me everything. We rally around and look after each other, if something goes wrong."*

> *"We sit and talk about problems. I let the kids have their say. We care about each other. We help others out with problems."*

We asked families to identify what they hoped to achieve from their involvement in the *Homelessness to Home* project. The majority of respondents, 71%, stated that they sought to achieve stable and permanent housing. The key aspirations identified by respondents included[8]:

- **Permanent and appropriate housing.** Respondents identified that this would enable them to create more stability for them and their family. Respondents also indicated that they wanted to create a "home". For many this desire was focused on the wish to have basic furniture. For others it involved creating a place of which they were proud. For example, one respondent stated that one of her goals was to get a job and *"buy things to make my house look nice so we can be proud to have people over"*.
- **To be reunited with non-custodial children.** This was identified as a key goal by eight respondents.
- **Achieving stable schooling and child care** arrangements for their children. Some respondents also indicated a desire to enrol themselves in further education and training.
- **Accessing employment** either part-time or full-time.
- **Improved financial stability**, particularly paying off debt, having the capacity to pay bills, and to have more money.
- **Improved communication with their partner and other family members.** Many respondents talked of improving communication with, and between, their children.
- **To purchase a car.**
- **To have 'real' friends.**
- **To address health issues**, including addressing dental problems, mental health problems, and drug addiction.

[7] Data and quotes from Healy K & Gal I, *Homelessness to Home: A Family Homelessness National Homelessness Demonstration Project – Evaluation Report May 2007*, FACSIA, AGPS, 2007.
[8] Quotes and data from Healy K & Gal I, *Homelessness to Home: A Family Homelessness National Homelessness Demonstration Project – Evaluation Report May 2007*, FACSIA, AGPS, 2007.



2.3 Case Studies

The following three case studies were written by Healy and Gal after interviews with the families for the project evaluation[9].

"Lisa and Brett"

"Lisa" is 28 years of age and her partner, "Brett" is 34 years old. Lisa had her first child at 21 and has two children, aged 7 and 4 years from a previous relationship. These children do not live with her. Lisa and Brett have two children, aged 17 months and 5 months, living with them. They have experienced chronic homelessness and in the year prior to joining the *Homelessness to Home* project, they lived in six motels, a 'tent city', on the streets and at various friends' homes. They report that their children were removed from them because they were homeless. They became involved with the Homelessness to Home project after a lengthy involvement with Micah Projects. They identify that the major barriers to maintaining housing for them in the past have included "being on welfare. Having our children in care sent us crazy, as we were not told where the children were, which lead to drugs and alcohol to numb the pain we felt of our kids not being around".

Homelessness to Home has assisted them to secure and maintain housing and also provided advocacy in having their children returned to them. When asked about their current living circumstances, they state: "It is like paradise, much better than before, now we have our two children living with us".

"Greta and Bill"

"Greta" is 23 years of age and her partner "Bill" is 25 years. Greta has four children – one aged 7, one aged 3 and 6 month old twins; Bill is the father of the twins. The 7 and 3 year old children have been removed from Greta and she has twice weekly contact with the children. Greta and Bill joined the Homelessness to Home project in August *2006, two months prior* to the birth of the twins. In the year prior to joining the project, they lived in an "old dirty car" for about three months and a hostel for nine months. They report that the major difficulties for them in maintaining housing have included poverty, difficulty in maintaining a clean house, and drug and alcohol issues. They continue to experience challenges in maintaining housing because of poverty and the high cost of rent and they also report it is hard to clean the house because they are busy with twin babies. Greta reports that she is "on medication" to assist her in managing the stress of "everything that is going on" and a lack of family support due to the fact that all of her extended family live in another state.

They report that *Homelessness to Home* has assisted them primarily with advocacy to Centrelink and through practical support such as assistance with food parcels, large bills and assistance through a regular additional allowance of $50 per week. Greta and Bill have also participated in the community education forums offered by Homelessness to Home on a range of topics including tenancy, self-advocacy, nutrition and health.

[9] Case studies quoted from Healy K & Gal I, *Homelessness to Home: A Family Homelessness National Homelessness Demonstration Project – Evaluation Report May 2007*, FACSIA, AGPS, 2007.

"Ivy"

"Ivy" is a 32 year old Indigenous woman who has five children aged from 5 to 14 years. Her five year old child is in the care of another family who has moved to another town, as a result, Ivy has no contact with that child. Ivy became involved with the Homelessness to Home project from the outset of the project in April 2006. Her family experienced homelessness prior to her involvement with the Homelessness to Home project. As Ivy describes it: "Before Micah, it was pretty f.... I was living with family and moving around lots. Lots of time I was living in the car, but not on the street. I always try and find a roof somewhere for the kids." Ivy has experienced a range of barriers to maintaining housing, these barriers included difficulty in maintaining the cleanliness of properties to the satisfaction of the landlord, and the misconduct of her oldest child. Ivy reported that "the last house the housing department wanted back because of complaints from other residents. My son had been in trouble there too by water bombing cars, breaking windows, and running with a gang".

Ivy reports that the *Homelessness to Home* project has supported her in a wide variety of practical support and advocacy. As she said: "Helen and Belinda [project workers] are great, they have helped me in every way. They saved me from killing me and my kids. They helped me with emotions, court cases, food, housing and with child safety." Ivy has also attended the workshops on tenancy, parenting and dealing with stress offered through the project; Ivy reports that she has learnt a lot of helpful tips through the workshops.

Part 3

Cultural Competency

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Cultural Competency

From the start, a central focus of the *Homelessness to Home* Demonstration Project was to address the special needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) families presenting at mainstream services seeking housing and support as a result of homelessness[1]. Consequently, a special focus of the project was the exploration and development of strategies to enhance cultural competency both within the project team and within Micah Projects Inc as a mainstream service working cross-culturally.

Whatever the merits or otherwise of mainstreaming social service provision, it is a distinguishing feature of the current social services system across Australia. Consequently, in order to be positioned to deliver effective services to Indigenous service users, mainstream organizations must develop the cultural competencies to do this.

This part of the toolkit has been developed in two parts.

- Firstly, it explores how mainstream services, when working with ATSI families, can embed cultural competency in organisational culture and grounded practice, thus enhancing the services they provide to this population group.
- The second part of this section outlines five components underpinning cultural competency in professional practice and service planning that emerged from the demonstration project. This section arises from reflective practice involving the twenty ATSI families who participated in the project.

"Cultural Competence is the ability of individuals and systems to respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations, and faiths or religions, in a manner that recognises, affirms, and values the worth of individuals, families, and communities, and protects and preserves the dignity of each. Cultural competence is a continuous process of learning about the cultural strengths of others and integrating their unique abilities and perspectives into our lives. Cultural competence is a vehicle used to broaden our knowledge and understanding of individuals and communities." [2]

3.1 Embedding Cultural Competency in Mainstream Services

3.1.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and the Experience of Homelessness

ATSI peoples, including families with children, are heavily over-represented in the homelessness population. Cultural competency requires workers to recognise the different needs and configurations of ATSI families and the complex interactions between:

- the historical legacy of colonisation on Indigenous people, including economic marginalization
- prevailing cultural beliefs and norms regarding the home and family
- other traditional practices and lifestyles.

These factors have wide-reaching implications for:

- the ways in which Indigenous people perceive and define 'homelessness'
- the major precipitating factors which are seen to lead Indigenous people to become homeless
- how Indigenous people experience homelessness
- the capacity of Indigenous people to 'overcome' homelessness
- the ability of Indigenous people to maintain housing and to lead full, independent and self-sufficient lives.

[1] See Micah Projects Inc National Homelessness Strategy submission
[2] Child Welfare League of America, *Standards of Excellence for Residential Services*, CWLA, Washington DC, 2004, p 96-97.

3.1.2 Implications for mainstream services – taking a proactive approach

Given the context in which Indigenous families find themselves in the homelessness services system, Micah Projects Inc has found that a number of organizational strategies arise for mainstream services which, if adopted pro-actively, will assist in addressing the specific cross-cultural needs of Indigenous families. These are:

1. linking the family with community-based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies, who are best placed to respond to families
2. if this option is not available or is inappropriate, services should, in the second instance, provide a worker from the same cultural background to work with the client
3. if neither of the above two options are feasible, then workers should be culturally proficient in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

3.1.3 Support for a proactive approach – recent research

Recent work undertaken by the Victorian Government supports this proactive approach. *A Strategic Framework for Family Services* states that:

> *... agencies (will) recognise the spiritual, cultural and social needs of Aboriginal children, young people and families and adapt service delivery accordingly*[3].

The Victorian approach specifies culturally competent service delivery responses even more explicitly by **prescribing** that these responses will[4]:

- understand the historical and contemporary context (including social, economic and health disadvantage, and the past relationship between government agencies and Indigenous people) in which Aboriginal children and families engage with government agencies, service providers and family services
- provide positive and mutually respectful engagement between Indigenous agencies, their services and mainstream services, which is reflected in organisational structures, practice and skills development
- acknowledge and recognise the value of the cultural knowledge and understanding held by Aboriginal agencies and staff, and how this positively influences engagement with Aboriginal children and families
- take a holistic approach to working with Aboriginal children and families
- recognise that connection to culture is a protective factor for Aboriginal children.

Further, in 2004, the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care consulted with ATSI parents and foster carers to find out what additional parenting information and support governments should provide to people they are working with. The key messages for mainstream family support services from this work can be summarized as[5]:

- form partnerships with Indigenous organisations and consult with the local Indigenous community
- employ Indigenous staff and ensure non-Indigenous workers receive training in cultural awareness so that Indigenous families feel safe accessing these services

[3] Office for Children, *A Strategic Framework for Family Services*, 2007, p 26.
[4] Office for Children, *A Strategic Framework for Family Services*, 2007, p 26.
[5] Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, *Indigenous Parenting Project: main report and executive summary*, SNAICC, North Fitzroy, 2004.

- focus cultural competency training on supporting workers to know and appreciate in detail the local Indigenous culture and family networks rather than the very broad aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture
- families need to feel empowered, understood and strengthened through their contact with parenting support services rather than shamed, blamed and disempowered.

In addition, effective service responses for ATSI families will[6]:

- provide support with substance abuse, healing and family to prevent child abuse, neglect and removal and to enable removed children to be returned home
- provide assistance with parenting skills. (Many Indigenous parents have had no role models of good parenting due to themselves, or their parents, being brought up in institutions, for example as part of the stolen generations, and sometimes having been subject to severe abuse and maltreatment at the hands of their carers.)

3.1.4 Working with Indigenous families – a tool for mainstream services

Given the strategies outlined above, the challenge is for mainstream services and housing and support workers to find ways in which to ground a commitment to effective cultural competency in practice and ongoing reflection. One way to do this is proposed as a type of ongoing inquiry approach, built around a series of critical questions[7].

This approach provides a type of "checklist" for workers and the families they are working with to ensure that the cultural issues outlined previously are embedded into service responses.

The questions that arise fall under four categories:

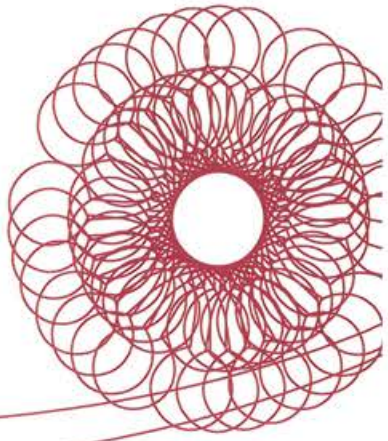
(i) Family Structure

- What is the family structure?
- What stories are emerging from the nuclear family around their beliefs and understanding of what the problem is, and how does this relate to each individual?
- What are their thoughts on the behaviour of each individual and the reasons behind this behaviour?
- What is the nature of the relationships that exist between nuclear members and extended members?
- Are they supportive or destructive?
- What are their thoughts on the behaviour of each individual and the reasons behind this behaviour?
- What is the nature of the relationship that exists between nuclear members and extended members?
- Are the relationships contributing and influencing certain types of behaviours that are creating the problem?

(ii) Extended Family

- Who else is involved in the family?
- Who are the extended members and how do they contribute to the "nuclear" group?
- Are there any elders, present or distant, who play a key role in the decision making of the nuclear group?
- Who are the spokespeople or decision makers for this group?
- Is the extended family present in the person's life or are they noticeably absent?
- Does the family have stolen generation issues i.e. do they know where they fit or who their family are?

[6] Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, *Through Young Black Eyes: A handbook to protect children from the impact of family violence and child abuse*, SNAICC, North Fitzroy, 2005.
[7] Bessarab D, 'Working with Aboriginal Families. A Cultural Approach' in Weeks W & Quinn M (eds), *Issues Facing Australian Families: Human Services Respond*, 3rd ed, Pearson Education, Sydney, 2000.



- Does the extended family want to get involved?
- Can they be called on to provide support?

(iii) Indigenous Community

- Asking questions around the family's involvement in the Indigenous community will give some indication of the position of the individual.
- Are there any families they are feuding with, or do not get on with?

(iv) Agencies

- What other agencies, government or non-government, Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, are involved in this family's day-to-day affairs?
- Are they already working with any Aboriginal agencies, or do they want an Aboriginal agency involved?

3.2 Experience from the Homelessness to Home – Towards a Framework for Cultural Competency

The implementation of the *Homelessness to Home* Demonstration Project was informed by an explicit commitment to find ways in which mainstream services can improve their service provision with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children. 15 Aboriginal and Torres Strait families were involved in the project, just under half the total number of families. From working with these families and reflecting on many of the issues that have been discussed in this chapter, Micah Projects Inc proposes five key components to foster cultural competency and appropriateness in mainstream agencies engaged with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and individuals.

The five components can be considered as key to developing an organizational framework, encompassing training, planning and resource allocation, for ensuring effective cultural competency and cultural appropriateness. The five components are:

1. Understanding history
2. Respecting cultural connection
3. Being complementary; valuing local cultural expertise
4. Complying with the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*
5. Developing a trauma-sensitive cultural response.

3.2.1 Understanding history

It is critical that an agency and workers understand the impact of colonial history on the lives of Indigenous Australians today. All workers engaged in family support need to fully appreciate that the historical context for Indigenous families is connected to the past and that Aboriginal and Islander people were systematically dispossessed of culture, their land and their children. It is critical that, as human service professionals, we inform ourselves of the past by developing knowledge and familiarity with the Human Rights and Opportunity National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Children from their Families: *Bringing them Home* (1997). This provides a critical baseline for family support workers in gaining an appreciation of the trauma and grief that has been inflicted on Indigenous people over two hundred years.

3.2.2 Respecting cultural connection

Respecting cultural connection requires an agency and workers to develop collaborative relationships with Indigenous-managed agencies and cultural community leaders and experts. It also means working with Aboriginal and Islander people who present for assistance by respecting their journey and relationships within their cultural context. Often disconnection from cultural identity, family

and support is a characteristic of many homeless families. Mainstream workers need to be able to work in ways which, over time, may assist people to reconnect.

All staff require training about the local history and culture ensuring that they understand the significance of land, the traditional owners of the land, the symbols and ceremonies, and traditions that a specific to local communities.

3.2.3 Being complementary; valuing local cultural expertise

Mainstream agencies need to have a clear understanding of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander funded agencies involved in the local community – where they exist. It is then necessary for the mainstream agency to develop protocols and referral pathways which are complementary to these culturally-specific funded agencies. It is the responsibility of all funded services to ensure the inclusion and access of Aboriginal and Islander people to the services, opportunities and resources that are available in the community. As a mainstream service provider the key components of complementary engagement in the local service system involves:

- developing formal partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander funded human service agencies
- establishing clear referral and case work protocols
- employing Indigenous staff,
- when appropriate, sharing professional development and training on cultural awareness and issues.

3.2.4 Complying with the Racial Discrimination Act 1975

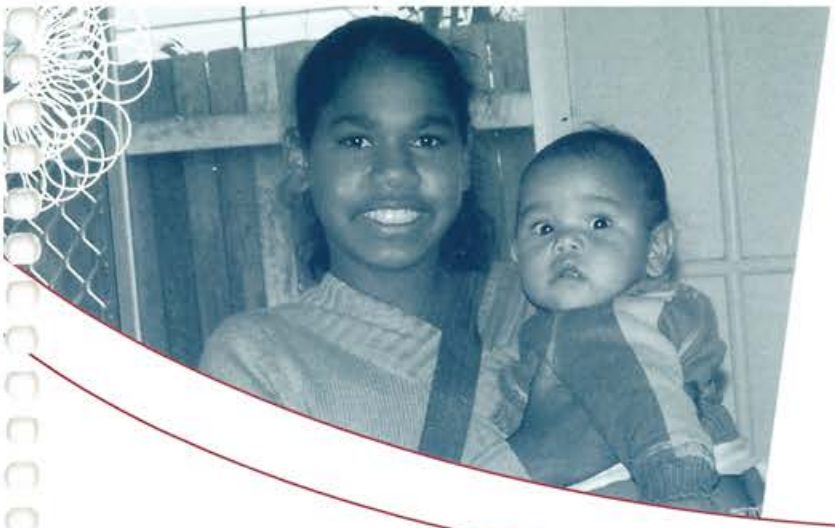
The *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* makes racial discrimination unlawful in Australia. Racial discrimination can occur in two ways. "Direct" racial discrimination occurs when someone is treated less fairly because of their race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin compared to someone of a different racial population group. "Indirect" racial discrimination can occur when a policy or rule that treats everyone in the same way has an unfair effect on people of a particular race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin and alternatively advantages others. This is also understood as institutional racism. The now defunct doctrine of terra nullius is the classic example of institutional racism in Australia's history.

In developing organisational responses, and within direct support work with families, it is critical that all policies and procedures reflect adherence to our legal responsibilities and that all staff are supported, informed and trained in being able to identify, advocate and support families when either "direct" or "indirect" discrimination prevents them from accessing their rights and entitlements as Australian citizens. Staff should also be informed, trained and supported in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family members seek redress when discrimination occurs.

3.2.5 Developing a Trauma Sensitive Cultural Response

A trauma sensitive organizational culture is one in which it is understood that most human behavioural pathology is related to overwhelming experiences of exposure to abuse, disabling losses and disrupted attachment, usually beginning in childhood[8]. Because of the confluence of historical events and multi-dimensional racial discrimination, cumulative over decades, many homeless Indigenous families and individuals are dealing with the impacts of

[8] Farragher, B and Yanosy, S, 2005, Creating a trauma-sensitive culture in residential treatment. *Therapeutic Community: The International Journal for Therapeutic and Supportive Organisations* 26 (1): 97- 113



various trauma both at a personal and family level. Indeed, this is a factor confronting the majority of homeless people.

Creating an appropriate response to the dynamics of trauma is about configuring organisational systems and process so as to proactively ensure a culture of safety. A model from the United States, referred to as the Sanctuary Model,[9] identifies four domains of safety in addressing the impacts of trauma in people's lives, described in the table below.

Table 1: Domains of Safety in a Sanctuary Model

1. Physical	Physically safe from harm
2. Psychological Safety	Ability to keep oneself safe in the world, includes self discipline, self esteem, self control, self awareness, self respect
3. Social Safety	Ability to be safe with other people in relationships and in social settings
4. Moral/Ethical Safety	Ability to maintain a set of standards, beliefs, and operating principles that are consistent, that guide behaviour, and that are grounded in respect

Creating safety in both case work and opportunities for group work and participation were key considerations throughout the *Homelessness to Home* Demonstration Project for both family members and Family Support Workers.

Addressing the impacts of trauma from the past and understanding how trauma currently impacts on the lives of family members today is a necessary component of individual case work and the group work/participatory processes which together contributed to the enhanced outcomes for families as they moved from (i) instability to stability and (ii) disconnection to connection with community, culture and family.

[9] For more information about the Sanctuary Model see the website:www.sanctuaryweb.com

Part 4.1

Tools and Resources for Practitioners and Agencies

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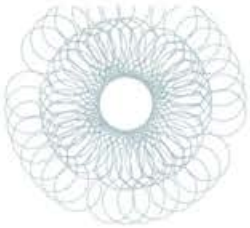
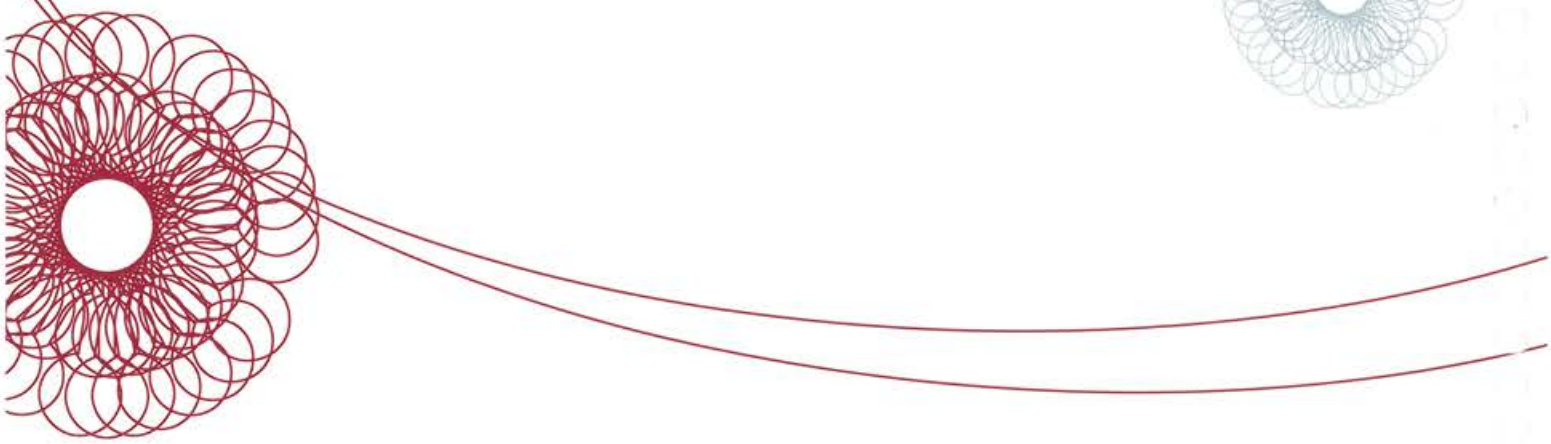




Tools and Resources for Practitioners and Agencies

Part 4 of this toolkit outlines in detail practice tools and resources which were either developed or adapted during the life of the *Homelessness to Home* Demonstration Project and used by the project team in their work with the participating families. They represent an integration of case work and an adult learning strategy for family participation which was designed to enhance social inclusion.

These tools and resources are a central part of the response to ending family homeless. In effect, they give practical shape to the policy framework around supportive housing set in a continuum of support, which is outlined in other parts of the toolkit. This part of the toolkit connects the notion of supportive housing to a practice model of service provision used in *Homelessness to Home*. It is in two sections:

Section 4.1 Family Support Worker Practice Tools and Frameworks

Section 4.2 Family Participation – an Adult Learning Strategy.

Section 4.1 provides practical suggestions, tools, and tips from Family Support Workers. It covers:

4.1.1 Models of Practice
- A. Key elements of practice
- B. Components of practice
- C. Approaches to practice

4.1.2 Tools for Family Support and Advocacy
- A. Assessment tools
- B. Tools for planning with families

4.1.3 Accessing and Sustaining Housing
- A. Overcoming barriers
- B. Maintaining tenancy
- C. Reasons for tenancy breakdown
- D. Preventing tenancy breakdown

4.1.4 Children and Young People in Family Support Work
- A. Including children and young people
- B. Children and young people's development
- C. Family, community and environmental factors
- D. Child safety.

Section 4.2 documents the Adult Learning Strategy to promote social inclusion, family engagement and participation. This strategy was a key component of the *Homelessness to Home* Demonstration Project. This section includes:

4.2.1 Engaging with families in learning settings

4.2.2 Tools and resources for skills development workshops about five topics:
- A. Forming the group
- B. Maintaining your tenancy
- C. Basic communication skills
- D. Skills, strengths and self confidence
- E. Self advocacy and goal setting.

The *Homelessness to Home* project team hope that sharing their experience and reflection about seeking ways to end family homelessness will add to and enhance current policy and practice in the field.

4.1 Family Support Worker Practice Tools and Frameworks

Working with families who experience homelessness or who are on the edge of becoming homeless requires intervention and support practices that are, in the first instance, designed to end homelessness rather than simply managing it. As the starting point for *Homelessness to Home* this principle informed the reflective practice process that guided the project's operation and the practice tools that were developed and used by the project team.

As a National Demonstration Project funded under the Australian Government's National Homelessness Strategy, it was a requirement that the project document its processes and evaluate its outcomes. Consequently, Family Support Workers documented their reflections, processes, strategies and the tools they used throughout the term of the project. These are outlined here in this section of the toolkit in the hope that this will provide a useful resource for people working in this field. It is recognized that this is a "work in progress" and subject to ongoing processes of continuous improvement. However, the resources documented here offer a rich vein of experience to be mined, adopted and adapted into real life situations.

This section is in four main parts:

Section 4.1.1 outlines a model of practice designed for the *Homelessness to Home* project for working with families experiencing homelessness.

Section 4.1.2 presents tools for support and advocacy.

Section 4.1.3 addresses the critical issue of accessing and maintaining housing as the cornerstone of ending family homelessness.

Section 4.1.4 looks at the place of children and young people in family support work.

4.1.1 Practice Framework

A. The key elements of practice in the *Homelessness to Home* project[1]

- **Housing Focus**
  The rapid re-housing of homeless families is the first priority of Family Support Workers. When families are housed, regular outreach is provided to families in their homes, with support workers *targeting housing stability as their primary goal*. In promoting housing stability, Family Support Workers focus on helping families meet their lease obligations and mitigate factors in their lives which may impact on their ability to meet these obligations, such as mental illness or disability. Workers require an understanding of the negative, exhausting and cumulative impact that homelessness has on families and their ability to make the adjustments back into sustaining a tenancy and connecting with community.

- **Working with the whole family**
  We work with the whole family – as defined by the family – including extended family and other individuals who are important to the family. It is important to involve family members often not included, such as fathers.

- **Working primarily in the family's home/ space and community**
  Meeting in the home helps workers to become acquainted with family members in their own environment and to more fully understand the family's daily life experience. It is also a critical component of remaining informed through observation and dialogue with families about their obligations, problems, needs in relation to their tenancy, for example property damage or maintenance.

[1] Child Welfare League of America, *Standards of Excellence for Services to Strengthen and Preserve Families with Children*, CWLA, Washington DC, 2003, p33-39.

- **Empowering families to take charge of their lives**
  Family Support Workers facilitate families determining their own goals, support needs and priorities, and the actions necessary to achieve goals. It is also critical to resource families with skills through new information, modeling and mentoring to maintain their obligations as tenants.

- **Building on family strengths**
  Family Support Workers recognise and appreciate family strengths and competencies, and facilitate change by engaging these strengths. All families want to have and create a home – support services can provide the resources to make their goals and aspirations become more tangible and sometimes more realistic.

- **Cultural competence**
  A culturally competent worker is able to assist families in a way that is useful to them and is respectful and compatible with their cultural strengths and needs. An understanding of the impact on intergenerational loss and displacement from culture and land is critical for all workers. (See Section 3 in this toolkit for greater explanation of cultural competency.)

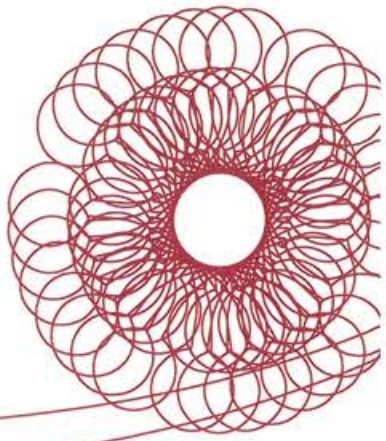
- **Participatory assessment, planning and decision making**
  Families are full partners in identifying needs, strengths, resources and issues of concern; and developing goals. Ideally, safety concerns for children or family members will be addressed, when feasible, with the family's full knowledge and participation. Barriers to participation due to individual circumstances related to health, intellect, or disability need to be considered and adjustment made by worker to maximize the participation of adults, children and young people.

- **Reciprocity, teaming and collaboration**
  The Family Support Worker needs to work towards developing a partnership role with the family. This will maximize ownership and possibility for progress so that the combined outcomes of sustaining their tenancy, maintaining their stability and functioning as a family unit or creating new arrangements can be achieved. The personal, social and economic needs of each family member require collaboration so that effective solutions can be arrived at together and achieved.

- **Sharing information**
  Families need information in their primary language and that takes literacy into account.

- **Giving families hope**
  Family Support Workers provide foundational relationships which assist families acknowledge their goals and dreams, as well as providing the necessary consistent and reliable contact as change occurs in the lives of the family. Workers play a critical role in ensuring that structural barriers are acknowledged as well as personal challenges. Self blame and self doubt are often debilitating to parents who fall short of their own expectations for providing a safe and healthy home with their children. Workers can demonstrate hope by working through the challenges and providing the practical and emotional supports that people need in transitioning from homelessness. We celebrate small successes with families and also give them opportunities to create structural change.

- **Increasing the capacity of families to advocate for themselves and to use community resources effectively to handle future challenges**
  Families must be assisted to develop the skills needed to obtain resources. This



C. Approaches

Through the *Homelessness to Home* Demonstration Project, the team established and documented the following approaches to important components of the work. These are summarized in the table below and described in more detail below, complete with tips from the *Homelessness to Home* workers based on their own experience.

Objective	Documented Approaches
Effective working together	• Team work • Role of lead worker • Case planning meetings • Casework and Management Information System • Case records
Effective working with families	• Engaging with families • Effective outreach • Assessments of needs and services • Setting goals and planning with families • Effective advocacy • Effective referrals
Effective caring and support for workers	• Managing workload • Supervision • Time management • Maintaining professional boundaries • Self care

C.1 Approaches to working together

Team Work

It is crucial that the lead worker is not the only person who provides support to a family. A *teamwork approach* is essential, particularly when there are domestic violence or child protection concerns, and when the family has high and complex needs.

Team work enables:

- improved assessments about families' strengths and needs
- a 'reality check' when there are domestic violence or child protection concerns
- fresh perspectives and ideas about solutions
- opportunities for modeling positive relationships
- peer support for workers
- opportunities to work with the whole family at the same time e.g. children, both parents, extended family.

Tips from Family Support Workers

- Make sure you have regular conversations with other people on your team about families so that everyone knows what's going on
- Use various forms of communication within the team – email can be really helpful
- Ask for help – don't do things on your own, especially if you have concerns about safety or feel the family's needs are too complex for you to address on your own
- Ensure that everyone on the team understands and has access to the Child and Family Action Plan for every family in the program
- Write an email report at the end of the day so that the whole team knows what you have been doing with each family
- Keep your file notes up to date, so that the rest of the team can refer to them when you're not there
- Group activities, like BBQs or Christmas Parties, are good opportunities for families to meet everyone on the team

The Role of a Lead Worker

A Lead Worker assigned to every family in a program ensures that the family receives appropriate interventions when needed, which are well planned, regularly reviewed and effectively delivered.

The lead worker:

- has an overall understanding of the family's needs and issues
- is one point of contact for service providers and families

- ensures families don't get "lost" – ensures that all families are receiving pro-active and regular support, and that workers maintain awareness and responsibility for their allocated families (rather than relying on families to seek attention or experience crisis to receive a service)
- is able to maintain a consistent and informed relationship with the family
- develops and reviews Child and Family Action Plans to make sure that the family is making progress towards goals
- ensures administrative tasks for that family are being carried out.

Case Planning Meetings

It is helpful for the entire team to meet regularly to assist with assessment, planning, modifications to Child and Family Action Plans, and to solve particular case challenges.

These meetings are essential because they:

- improve quality and accountability
- ensure all members on the team are up to date with each family
- provide a fresh perspective on particular cases and new ideas
- provide an opportunity to draw on the strengths and resources of the whole team
- facilitate problem-solving about difficult cases
- are an opportunity to review and improve Child and Family Action Plans
- provide an opportunity for joint decision making, particularly when difficult decisions need to be made e.g. reporting child protection concerns to statutory bodies
- are an opportunity to allocate new lead workers, and review case loads
- are an opportunity to refocus and prioritise.

Tips from Family Support Workers

- Make sure you prepare for case planning meetings
- Bring a laptop to meetings so you can change Child and Family Action Plans while you talk about them
- Document actions agreed at the meetings and check next week/fortnight to ensure they were done – planning is useless without follow-up
- Case Planning Meetings are a good opportunity to refocus on housing. Ask the question: Does this activity support the family to access or maintain housing?

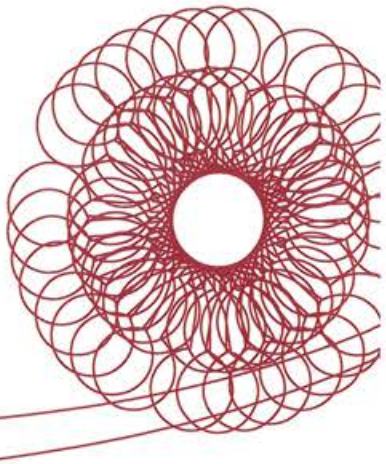
Casework and Management Information Systems[2]

- A casework and management information system assists the agency to provide the information needed to manage and deliver quality services.
- It is useful if family records maintained by the agency are concise, factually based, clearly written, and targeted to family specific issues.
- Policies and procedures are needed relating to the sharing of information obtained during the assessment and delivery of services to families and children.

Tips from Family Support Workers

- Make time at the end of every day to keep your records up to date
- If you get behind, set blocks of time aside and make yourself unavailable for any phone calls, meetings or visits.

[2] CWLA, *Services to Strengthen and Preserve Families*, 2003, p110.



Case Records

Case records will vary between services but are likely to include[3]:

Identifying information	• On the child, parents, extended family members and significant others, including emergency contacts
Referral information	• The source and reason for referral, and information provided at time of referral
Consent forms/Release of information	• Consent forms • Documentation that the family has been informed of policies regarding the reporting of child abuse and neglect and regarding release of information from their Case Record
Assessments	• Clear assessment information and reasons for significant decisions
Child and Family Action Plans	• Comprehensive support plan for every member of the family
Record of Actions Taken	• Documentation of contact between staff and family members including visits, phone calls and other interactions • Notes will reflect progress relative to service plan goals and objectives • Records include date, actions taken, signature, and title of worker
Documentation of service participation	• Summarizing attendance at activities, including group work activities and contacts with service staff • Documents community-based services used, with contact name, address, and phone number
Housing Information	• Information regarding current and previous tenancies, including tenancy breach notices
Income and Entitlements	• Current Centrelink Income Statements • Documentation of income and special needs information • Entitlements and other benefits received
Miscellaneous	• Assessments, reports and correspondence from other services • Incident reports, critical events (such as arrests), discharge summaries, important correspondence, and rent arrears notices • Information provided to statutory bodies related to the safety and wellbeing of the child and the family's ability to provide for the child

C.2 Approaches to working with families

Engaging with Families

"Engagement is a process, not an event" [4].

Engaging with families is the process where we introduce the family to the service relationship, explain our role, and try to find common ground to build on. The length of time it takes to establish a working relationship varies with each family, their circumstances, and the actions of the Family Support Worker. Gaining a family's trust takes time, and staff members may be unable to gain some families' confidence despite months of outreach efforts. However the extent to which an individual is willing to work with staff can evolve and change. Workers can try to establish an atmosphere of acceptance and trust by defining themselves in purpose and action as a listener and helper.

Effective engagement includes[5]:

- introducing yourself and how you can be helpful
- offering support and respect
- listening to each family member
- establishing the parameters of involvement with the family
- understanding the family's past experiences, current situation, concerns and strengths
- validating the participatory role of the family
- offering concrete assistance quickly
- offering honest and consistent interactions
- being reliable
- providing crisis assessment and interventions
- offering access to opportunities
- providing proactive outreach

[3] Based on Hannigan & Wagner, *Developing the "Support" in Supportive Housing*, 2003, p21.
[4] Hannigan T & Wagner S, *Developing the "Support" in Supportive Housing: A Guide to Providing Services in Housing*, Centre for Urban Community Services, New York, 2003, p17.
[5] In part taken from CWLA, *Services to Strengthen and Preserve Families*, 2003, p42.

- using repeated, predictable, non-intrusive patterns of interaction
- responding to felt needs
- respecting boundaries
- allowing people as much control as possible over interactions
- being patient and persistent
- demonstrating respect and empathy.

An excellent way to engage families is to provide concrete, practical support.

- Examples of concrete, practical support are purchasing food, providing transport, support moving to a new house, and financial assistance
- As Family Support Workers it is important to respond to families' concrete needs quickly
- Concrete support is a tangible sign of respect and empathy
- Families will trust you when you've done something for them – it demonstrates you can follow through and meet their needs.

Tips from Family Support Workers

- Interact with the whole family, including children
- Bring something along when you visit families in their homes, eg. bread and milk
- Explain clearly what your role is, how you undertake it and what you can do together with the family to reach their goals
- Focus on engagement not paperwork the first time you meet a family – for some families forms can be intimidating and impersonal
- Make contact with the family *before* they ask for support. Don't wait for them to ask you for help
- Be honest about what you can do and don't make promises you can't keep. Say you are sorry if you can't meet their needs and start working on a creative solution with the family. Work from the perspective of what you can do for the family rather than what you can't
- Be aware of families that might slip 'under the radar' and don't forget to frequently engage with them where possible to engage
- Sometimes the door doesn't open to an effective relationship with a family until the first time a crisis or "big event" occurs – if you are able to support the family and be a successful advocate in this situation you will develop trust and relationship with the family
- ***Keep trying!***
- Have a positive attitude and be upbeat and responsive. This demonstrates to families that they are worth spending time with
- Ask about and understand a family's history with other service providers –negative experiences in the past will impact on your ability to engage
- Be **consistent** and **reliable**. Make sure you schedule time to visit or call every family on your caseload within a one to two week period. This will ensure that you are regularly engaging with all families
- Have patience and be persistent, but not forceful, in trying to engage. Sometimes this means talking out the front of their house until the family is ready to invite you in. Don't give up even if they might initially appear standoffish

Effective Outreach

Family support work demands a large component of outreach work – visiting families in their environment, be that home, a caravan park or motel, a park or in the street; and going wherever it is most needed and most effective. The flexibility of this approach allows services to be provided to families who may not otherwise receive support, where they feel most comfortable. Family Support Workers work hard to see families and stay in contact, however difficult that might be.

Outreach is effective and important because Family Support Workers see and interact with families in their own environment. This is particularly important for support workers targeting housing stability.

Outreach workers can observe early risk factors for tenancy breakdown, and support the family to address these factors. Outreach workers can observe:

- the upkeep of the house and yard
- visitors in the house
- living arrangements
- property damage
- the safety of the house
- interactions between family members.

Outreach is also an excellent tool for modelling parenting and communication skills, as well as the skills needed to maintain a tenancy. Providing practical, concrete support is an important aspect of family support work, so workers can help with preparation for house inspections, cleaning dishes, mopping floors etc.

Of course, this requires care for worker safety and it is incumbent upon the employing agency to ensure that emergency safety policies and procedures are in place for workers doing outreach work.

Tips from Family Support Workers

- Initially when you meet families pre-book appointments, don't turn up at their house unannounced
- Later when you have developed rapport, ask families if they mind you coming for visits unscheduled, for example if an appointment with another family in the neighbourhood is cancelled at the last minute
- If you do visit families unannounced, ask them "is this an ok time to come in or should I call back another time?
- If families are not home, leave notes with your phone number
- Give all families your mobile number and send text messages to families – it's a great way to stay in touch
- Have access to a street directory, plan ahead so you have petrol, capsules and child restraints, take bread (find out their favourite type) and milk, take toys that are handy, take paper and pens
- Have an understanding of your local area, how to get to suburbs and quick ways to get to places
- Be aware of the shift of power when you are in a family's space and be sensitive that this is their space
- Be conscious of your safety (agencies will have their own policies and procedures) including the safety of your back and body when moving bags or furniture
- Be willing to 'get you hands dirty' but know when it is a health and safety risk
- ***There are times when it's not very glamorous!***
- Relax in the environment. Engage with the children, watch TV with the person, be part of what's happening, helping out around the house if it is appropriate to do so
- When you're doing outreach work, you have much more autonomy, so it's important you monitor your motivation
- Don't be isolated all day; make phone contact with other workers during the day and make time to catch up and debrief with your colleagues at the end of the day

Assessments of needs and services

Assessment is not an event, but an ongoing **process** where *"action and services are provided in parallel with assessment"* [6].

Overall, family assessment assists the family to identify strengths, needs and current resources that will affect its ability to maintain housing, and improve functioning and wellbeing. For the Family Support Worker, the family assessment is a process that is ongoing, beginning with the first contact with the family and continuing throughout the time the family uses the service. Assessments will need to be flexible, taking a number of forms and occurring in a number of venues, but always with the family at the centre of the assessment conversation (including extended family members and kin where identified by the family).

Families are full partners in the assessment process. Ideally, the family assessment will flow from the "need to know" – to the greatest extent possible, the family will direct the assessment by indicating

[6] Department of Health, Department of Education and Employment, Home Office, *Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families*, 2000, http://www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/doh/facn/facn.htm, accessed 24/05/2007, part 1.56.

their concerns and what kinds of supports they are seeking.

Suggested approach for assessments include:

- focus on family's strengths, needs, resources and challenges
- identify concerns that need to be addressed
- focus on solutions
- connect to outcomes, particularly **housing outcomes**
- reflect the family's culture and community

Assessment methods may include[7]:

- conversations and interactions with the family together and individually
- observing families together and their home environment
- collecting information provided by family and others
- holding or participating in family group meetings or case conferences.

The assessment is likely to cover the following areas[8]:

- the family's capacity to fulfill the lease obligations
- employment and income stability
- adult education and job training needs
- parenting and child custody
- children's educational and psychological support services
- physical health
- mental health
- substance use
- community life

Tips from Family Support Workers

- Don't get too caught up in 'getting' an assessment. Insight into the family will come with the provision of support and meeting immediate practical needs should not be overlooked because of a lack of a 'clear' picture. We can work with families without knowing their whole life story.
- Assessment usually comes in bits and pieces as people let you into different levels of their individual and family life over time as relationship and trust develop.
- Look at families' strengths and needs as a whole. Don't just focus on deficits.
- Be aware of your reactions and interactions with each person. Be genuine, empathic and non-judgemental. Remember being non judgemental does not mean not making a judgement but withholding judgement until you have the information needed.

Setting goals and planning with families

The role of Family Support Workers is to work in partnership with the family to achieve their goals. This means goals are driven by the family, related to what they want and focused toward the overall service goals of maintaining housing and improving family functioning.

SMART goals are:
Specific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable,
Realistic, and **T**ime Limited

Helping families set goals involves[9]:

- exploration and listening
- achievable steps that allow for successes
- a realistic time frame
- positive reinforcement
- a re-examination of goals that are not achieved, placing fault with the goal and not the individual.

[7] CWLA, *Services to Strengthen and Preserve Families*, 2003, p45.
[8] Shegos, E.H, *Family Matters: A Guide to Developing Family Supportive Housing*, 2001; 289-290.
[9] Hannigan & Wagner, *Developing the "support" in Supportive Housing*, 2003, p19.

The individual pace of the family will set the tone, with the guiding aim being to open up options for families and provide support where the family identifies it is needed.

Tips from the Centre for Urban Community Services[10]

- In order for the work to begin, the family and the worker must first come to some agreement about the goal of the work
- The family and support worker might have different ideas about what the central issue of supports needed is and/or what the priority for change is
- The family must feel that they are working towards getting what they want
- Remember – achieving small steps can be recognised as progress and celebrated as successes independent of long-term goals!
- Family Support Workers must be aware of their own agenda, and willing to give up the notion that we can control someone else's life. (People do not take medication or stop using drugs because we tell them they need to!)
- When working with the family in developing goals, try to present them in positive terms whenever possible. This can change the whole perspective and motivation for the tenant in achieving them. Eg. "John will not argue with his neighbour" (negative) vs. "John will develop good relationship with his neighbour" (positive).

Even though we work with many people with a mental illness, substance use, or disability, we can forget that these can cause problems in executive function, cognitive deficits and disorganised thinking. This can make it very difficult for people to organise themselves towards a goal and stay focused on it.[11]

Effective Advocacy

Effective advocacy is an essential skill for Family Support Workers supporting families in a homelessness context. Families face many structural barriers to accessing their rights and entitlements, and also require advocacy to maintain housing and access services. Advocacy includes helping families to develop skills to advocate for themselves and negotiate with service systems to obtain needed services or resources.

Tips from Family Support Workers

- Make sure you have the person's consent before you speak or act on his or her behalf
- Encourage the person for whom you are advocating to advocate for himself/herself as much as possible; don't just take over
- Make sure your own values and opinions don't interfere with your advocacy efforts
- The best interests of the family – as the family sees it – must be at the centre of all advocacy efforts
- Understand that the family member has a right to make his/her own choices. You may not necessarily agree with those choices; your role is to ensure that his or her voice is heard and considered
- Use contacts and relationships to your advantage
- Be respectful, even if you don't agree with people's positions, values, roles, policy, and legislation
- Try in person – meeting face to face can sometimes get better results. It's hard to say 'no' in person – especially to the people their decision will impact
- Be honest about what is realistic; while it's important to work towards creative solutions, it's also important not to create unrealistic expectations
- Be persistent in ringing and emailing whom you are advocating. Target your efforts to being heard
- Leave your mobile number or another easy contact number
- Know the family – know what they need and know the facts – have their file and information on hand
- Think about what you're going to say before you call
- Know who to talk to and how to pitch what you are saying in order to get the best response
- Write effective support letters – have some templates your team can work from
- If your advocacy doesn't work then ask for support from a Team Leader – use their authority
- Consider systemic issues and systemic advocacy.

[11] Center for Urban Community Services, *Case Management Services Curriculum*, 2006 p. 21 Available at http://www.cucs.org/hrc/train/pdf/CaseManagementC.pdf

Effective Referrals

There is a big difference between giving a family or individual information about a service, and making a referral to that service. A referral is when there is direct contact between you and the person to whom you're making the referral, on behalf of, or with, a family[12]. There are often many structural and personal barriers for families accessing other services. An effective referral will identify and take action to reduce those barriers.

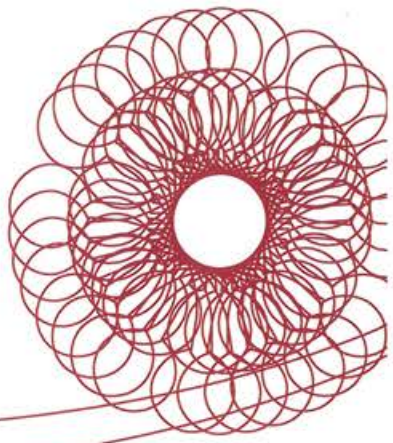
This can occur if the Family Support Worker:

- ensures the referral is appropriate, and that the service will actually be able to meet the family's needs
- provides adequate information to the family about the agency being referred to and ensure that they understand the reasons for referral
- is positive about the referral
- seeks out services that can provide outreach support, or services that are easily accessible for the family
- uses effective advocacy skills to facilitate access for families
- supports the family through the intake process and the first few times the family meets the new service
- does not force families to access services if they are not comfortable and does not withdraw your support as a consequence
- supports families to overcome barriers to accessing that service, for example transport, financial support, confidence, safety of the environment, trust and understanding of the service
- clarifies the division of responsibility following referral, and follows up with a written document outlining this
- ensures the family and the referral service are clear about roles, and the worker's level of engagement after the referral – this provides a basis for new contracting with each person about the ongoing relationship
- has regular and open communication with the referral service and ensure the service is undertaking the service they agreed to provide
- offers and provides support and consultation to the new worker – they may not have experience working with families with multiple and complex needs, so the Family Support Worker may need to provide them with advice about how to engage and work with the family effectively based on their experience.

Sometimes families are reluctant to engage with new services. Families may contact the Family Support Worker with requests and problems that the referral service should be responding to. In these instances the Family Support Worker can:

- re-clarify their role
- reinforce why they think the other service is more appropriate for responding to a particular need – e.g. they are a specialist service, or they are in their local area
- reiterate that they don't have the capacity to undertake this and that the person will get a better response from the new service. Explain why
- be proactive about ensuring the referral is effective and that the new service doing what they should do
- encourage the other support service to stay engaged and follow up.

[12] Quixley, Suzi, *Brisbane Homeless Service Centre: Staff Policy and Procedures Manual*, BHSC, Brisbane, 2006 p17.



Tips from Family Support Workers

- Ensure the family does not experience the referral as being "palmed off". Remain open to contact with the family (with clear boundaries). Often marginalised families will be using this contact as a safety mechanism
- Get the direct number and email of the worker in the new service and know who the manager and/or Team Leader is of the worker in the new service
- Remember that you don't have the ability to do or be everything for everyone – it is better to link in with local or specialist support services where they are needed or appropriate
- Don't double up on the work being undertaken by other supports.

C.2 Approaches to caring for workers

Time management

Time management is pivotal to effective family support work. Every day workers have to weigh up competing demands on their time and resources. The ability to prioritise activities and support is a difficult one, particularly in the face of an 'apparent' crisis.

It is helpful for workers to consider the following:

- Is this really a crisis situation or can the family call on other resources to assist or even wait a day or so?
- Is another family going to be unnecessarily compromised if I respond to this issue rather than a scheduled appointment?
- Am I considering responding simply because the person is in front of me or on the phone?

Suggested strategies to assist in managing time and competing needs include:

- If a family calls asking for immediate assistance, tell them you will call back in 10 minutes. In the meantime think about your day and consider what options are available. Remember you do not have to commit to everything immediately – you are a professional and you have the ability to weigh competing needs.
- Schedule time for staff meetings, documentation and planning and make sure families and team members understand you are unavailable during that time.
- Plan ahead! Schedule times for home visits as well as phone calls, follow-up and documentation for every family on your caseload within a one or two week period.
- Be clear about your role – your focus is on accessing and maintaining housing. Be upfront and direct with families if you can't do something for them.
- Give a designated time period for home visits – tell families you're going to leave and then leave.
- Keep a list of all of your families – if you don't visit them that week, call them.
- Remind families that you do have other families that you work with.
- Sometimes double booking is unavoidable – delegate activities to other available colleagues or consider other options that families can undertake themselves.
- Set deadlines for yourself.
- Leave adequate time between visits so you don't get stressed or are late.
- Make some calls whilst you are driving only using the hands free

- Make use of electronic communications.
- Your Team Leader can provide a "reality check" about what is important, particularly as it relates to high case loads, high expectations, and high and complex needs.
- Ensure that your Team Leader or members know where you are at all times and notify them of any changes

Managing Workload

In determining case loads, the service may consider[13]:

- the complexity of the needs of families
- the level of competency of each worker, including skills and experience
- the intensity of services that the agency and community considers appropriate
- the availability of other services to assist with routine case activities
- the time required for case documentation, agency activities, professional development, community outreach and administrative functions.

We recommend a maximum caseload of 12 families per Family Support Worker so that each family can receive regular outreach support of at least one home visit per fortnight and phone calls at least once a week. Some families, particularly those recently housed and with complex issues, will initially require support up to three times per week until their situations have stabilised.

When considering caseloads, Family Support Workers must also retain the capacity to respond to requests for assistance from families who have previously been supported through the program and are experiencing one-off difficulties (eg. bill payment, tenancy problems).

Supervision

Supervision is critical for effective service delivery and staff development. Supervisors are essential to provide consultation and back up to frontline workers.

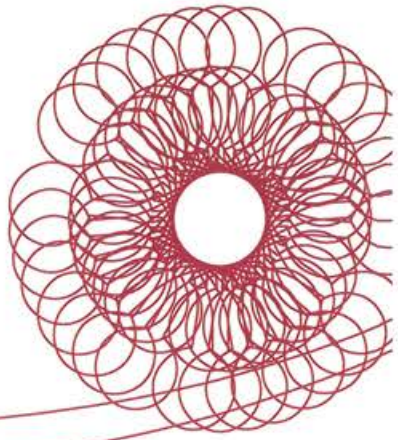
Family Support Workers require regular, individual supervision with their supervisor. Staff supervision can include:

- **education:** teaching knowledge and skills
- **support:** recognising successes and assisting with challenges
- **accountability:** ensuring that all individuals are receiving the services they need and the program is in compliance with all contractual and regulatory obligations.

Supervisors model effective, strengths-based practice in supervision by[14]:

- demonstrating respect, honesty and ethical practice
- identifying and acknowledging staff strengths
- following through on decisions and support to staff
- empowering staff to take initiative and risks
- varying supervision procedures according to the skills of staff
- providing an accepting, supportive and challenging atmosphere
- providing clear expectations and consequences
- providing constructive feedback
- modelling and teaching problem resolution
- acknowledging and rewarding successes.

[13] CWLA, *Services to Strengthen and Preserve Families*, 2003, p105.
[14] CWLA, *Services to Strengthen and Preserve Families*, 2003, p108.



In addition to regular supervision with a Team Leader or supervisor, professional supervision opportunities are very valuable for support workers. Professional supervision is a forum for workers to discuss work and case issues and to obtain advice and guidance. Professional supervision can be conducted on a one-to-one basis or as a group with the family support team. Ideally agencies can implement a combination of both.

Objectives of professional supervision:

- ensure boundaries and self-care
- improve practice
- explore scenarios and strategies in particular cases
- maintain focus on outcomes for families.

Maintaining professional boundaries

The role of Family Support Workers can often be misunderstood. When undertaking assertive outreach, there is a high risk of misunderstandings and blurring of professional boundaries. Workers need to recognise the vulnerability of families when engaging with them and establishing links. Families easily see workers as someone involved in everyday life due to the personal nature of the work. Effective engagement contributes to the blurring. Workers can be particularly at risk to the blurring of their professional boundaries when there is no or limited other services involved and they feel like they are the only one who can help the family.

Tips from Family Support Workers

- Be clear with families about your role and its limitations
- Support work is not about being friends but about engaging and building a trusting working relationship. It is about being friendly in your approach
- Outreach work can be more difficult because workers go into someone's house; don't have structured formal appointments and work outside a professional environment
- Team work is a good mechanism of balancing contact with support if roles are becoming blurred
- The different stages of support can impact on the blurring of roles and responsibilities. People don't always decipher the difference between crisis intervention and planned support and the varied responses needed
- People aren't always going to like you – workers need to understand and accept this as part of their work
- Refer to organisational barriers/structures when explaining to family members about the limitations of the role. This assists in maintaining professional boundaries without compromising the relationship
- Never agree to keeping secrets – nothing is off the record.
- Subtly remind families that you have a life outside of work – remind them that you have work hours and that you are paid for those hours
- Explain that limitations are across all families not just one family, for example limited brokerage

Self care

Burn-out can be an issue in many areas of social service work, particularly when assisting families who have high and complex needs. Services and workers need organisational and personal strategies to prevent burn-out and enhance self care.

Tips from Family Support Workers

- Workers need to recognise and accept their limitations and know when to take a break
- Work within organisational boundaries and policies – if you don't agree with them, negotiate but don't set your own rules
- Leave work at work eg. change clothes
- Write a daily reflection and a list of things to undertake the following work day before you go home
- Ensure that you make time for lunch
- Foster a supportive team environment
- Share lolly jars/treats amongst colleagues
- Ensure you get enough sleep / exercise
- Make the most of your time off and weekends
- Turn off the work phone when you are not working
- Remember that just because you don't go to work for one day or more not everything will collapse
- Take days off when needed for mental health rest
- Don't be afraid to ask colleagues for support
- Things don't get solved in a day

4.1.2 Tools for Family Support and Advocacy

A. Assessment Tools

Assessment tools assist the practitioner and family to understand the family's strengths and needs. Good assessment tools are comfortable for the family to use, and build the family's capacity to assess its own strengths, resources, needs and concerns[15].

This section includes the following sample assessment forms:

A.1 Housing focused assessment tools

(i) Sample Family Housing Profile Form.

This sample form records information about the family's current housing situation. When working with families toward the goal of permanent tenancies it is crucial that workers have a clear understanding of current tenancy details such as lease terms, percentage of income spent on rent, and family housing requirements.

(ii) Sample Sustaining Tenancy Assessment

This assessment form is a checklist for developing an assessment of families' housing skills and supports, tenancy history and goals for their current tenancy. This assessment tool is a starting point for housing-focused support workers to identify risk factors for tenancy breakdown and target supports and skill development to mitigating these risk factors. The goal checklist can be used to develop the Child and Family Action Plan.

A.2 Common Assessment Framework for Children and Young People

The Common Assessment Framework (CAF) provides support services with a standardised approach to assessing a child's additional needs and deciding how those needs should be met. It is used by practitioners across children's services in England. The CAF is intended to provide "*a simple process for a holistic assessment of a child's*

[15] CWLA, Services to Strengthen and Preserve Families, 2003, p46.

needs and strengths, taking account of the role of parents, carers and environmental factors on their development"[16].

For more information and resources on the CAF go to
http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/deliveringservices/caf/ .

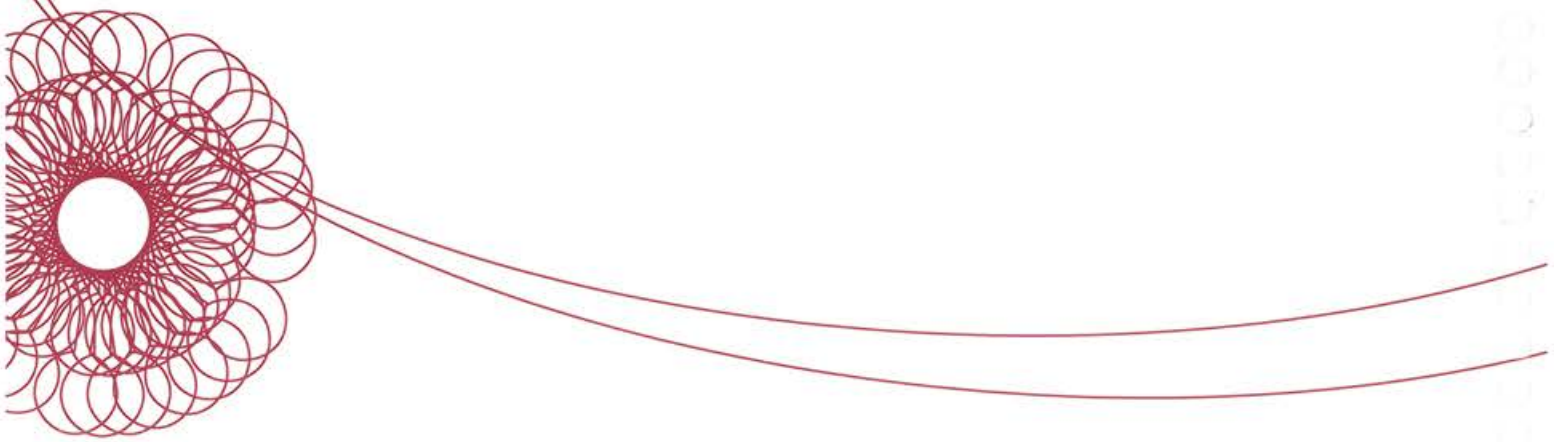
B. Tools for Planning with Families

The following tools for planning with families have been included here:

B.1 Child and Family Action Plans

It is useful to develop with families a Child and Family Action Plan which includes goals to be accomplished, interim steps for reaching each goal, which person is responsible for these steps, and timeframes for completing tasks and achieving goals. Through frequent, planned contact with the family, support workers can assist the family in achieving the goals and objectives of the Child and Family Action Plan. Ideally supports and services will be responsive to the needs, strengths and culture of the family, not based on the availability of the service.

[16] Every Child Matters, Common Assessment Framework, 2007, http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/deliveringservices/caf/, accessed 09/05/2007.



SAMPLE - Family Housing Profile Form

CURRENT ACCOMMODATION DETAILS
Address:

Dwelling Type	No. Bedrooms	Yard	Pets

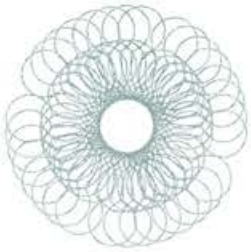
Provider	Property Manager	Contact

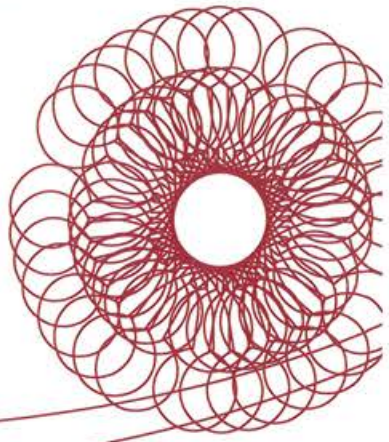
LEASE AGREEMENT			
Lease Length	Expiry Date	Inspection Frequency	Next Inspection Date

RENTAL PAYMENT ARRANGEMENTS		
Amount	Next Payment Due	Centrepay
$. per		Yes / No

HOUSING APPLICATIONS – DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING APPLICATION					
Active	Y / N	Date Lodged		Rental Application No.	
Areas					
Other Details					

Other Housing Applications	Date Lodged, Ref Number, Other Details





DEBT

TICA Listed	Details
❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Amount $ _____	

DOH Debt	Details
❑ Yes ❑ No Bond Loan $ _____ Previous Tenancy $ _____	

Repayment Plan	Details
❑ Yes ❑ No	

HOUSING REQUIREMENTS

Where would you like to live and why? E.g. Transport, School, Support Services, Family

Do you have any special requirements for your house? How many bedrooms do you need?

SAMPLE - Child and Family Action Plan

Housing Skills and Supports Checklist[17]

The following skills are necessary, in varying degrees depending upon the housing model, for living in the community. This checklist can be used by staff to assess housing support needs. Use checks to represent the level of assistance needed.

✔ = Almost never needs assistance
✔✔ = Sometimes needs assistance
✔✔✔ = Almost always needs assistance

❑❑❑ Money management skills and ability to pay rent (keep up with entitlement/benefits paperwork, cash cheques, budget)

❑❑❑ Ability to follow house rules (refrain from violence, keep noise down during hours of sleep, refrain from criminal activity, wear appropriate clothing in common spaces)

❑❑❑ Housekeeping skills (able to clean space, wash sheets, remove garbage regularly, keep out mice, cockroaches and insects, remove excess clutter, maintain plumbing [remove hairs from drain, keep large items out of toilet])

❑❑❑ Personal care skills (washing clothes, buying and using toiletries, dress appropriate to weather, bathing)

❑❑❑ Travel skills (use public transportation, follow directions)

❑❑❑ Shopping and cooking skills (able to obtain meals by buying or cooking food, store food properly)

❑❑❑ Social skills (sensitivity to and respect for the needs and rights of others, conflict management skills, ability to maintain positive relationships)

❑❑❑ Social supports (connections to family and significant others, needs for interaction or time alone, cultural need for other family to stay at times)

❑❑❑ Awareness of support needs and ability to seek and accept help

❑❑❑ Communication skills (able to make needs known, ask for clarification when not clear about what others have said)

❑❑❑ Ability to manage health, substance use, and psychiatric care (make and keep appointments, manage Medicaid or health insurance paperwork requirements, take medication as prescribed, advocate and communicate with doctors)

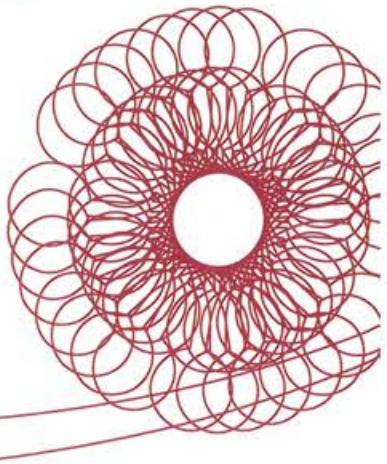
❑❑❑ Awareness of substance use, relapse patterns, and consequences of use (disruptive behaviour, deteriorated health, rent payment, inability to work, relapse triggers)

❑❑❑ Ability to pursue goals (planning, prioritizing, and accessing needed resources; problem-solving and negotiation skills)

❑❑❑ Family functioning (ability to manage children's behaviour and impacts on neighbourhood)

Comments on any of the above:

[17] Adapted from Hannigan T & Wagner S, *Developing the "support" in Supportive Housing: A Guide to Providing Services in Supportive Housing*, CUCS, Washington DC, 2003, p32-35



	Applied & Not Accepted (why)	Left Voluntarily (why)	Left Involuntarily (why)
Boarding House			
Caravan Park			
ATSI Hostel			
Crisis Accommodation Service			
Domestic Violence Refuge			
Transitional Housing			
Private Rental			
Community Housing			
Public Housing			
Other Housing (describe)			
Other Housing (describe)			

Housing Goals

What is your goal as a tenant in this housing?

_____ to consistently pay rent in full and on time

_____ to comply with the expectations of the lease and house rules

_____ to demonstrate my capacity to keep my apartment clean and orderly

_____ to communicate promptly with property management when/if there are maintenance problems in my unit

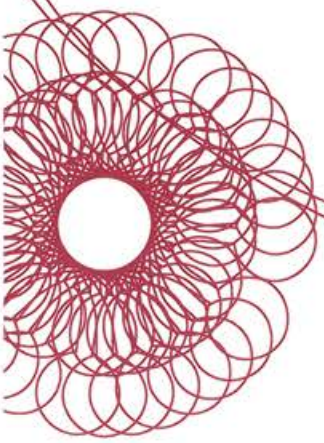
_____ to maintain a good, respectful relationship with my neighbours

_____ to teach my children how to respect our home and help in maintaining its condition

_____ to participate in regular inspections no breaches for damage or inappropriate wear and tear

_____ to create special decorating touches in my unit, such as

_____ to re-establish a positive rent history for _____months/years.



SAMPLE - Child and Family Action Plan

Name: **Key Worker:** **Date:**

GOAL	Issue / Need	Actions	Who to do	Timeframe	Result

4.1.3 Accessing and Sustaining Housing

Due to the limitations in public housing stock as well as the general squeeze in private rentals, accessing housing is the area of family support work that requires the most focus and persistence. Ideally, support workers will be working toward accessing permanent, secure housing rather than arranging transitional or temporary housing. When families move directly into permanent housing, it assists in the stability of the family and means less time is spent 'doubling up' on accessing housing, leaving more time to address some of the barriers to maintaining housing.

Debt, financial stress, poor tenancy history and discrimination are just a few of the barriers to accessing housing, These factors in conjunction with family characteristics and requirements can further inhibit the response that families and workers will receive when trying to access public, community and private rental properties. Family Support Workers need to be savvy in accessing all options for housing by:

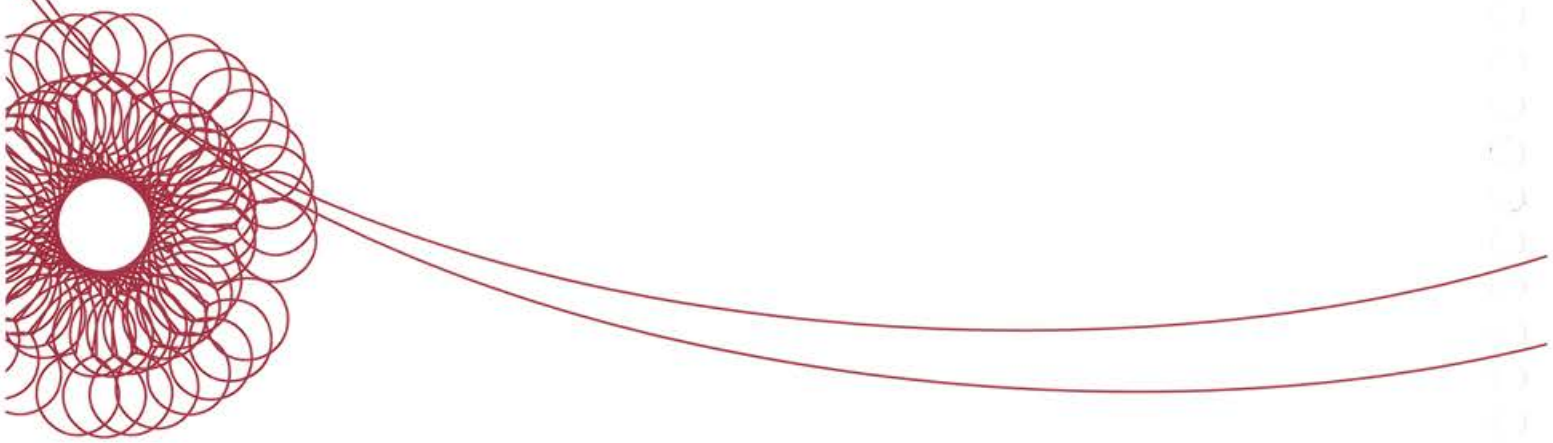
- being clear and determined in their approach to housing providers
- persistently following up with all housing options
- ensuring that they have copies of all relevant housing applications and related information.

Where possible it is worth exploring creative options in accessing housing. This might consist of the service 'partnering' the family in the payment of rent for an initial period of time, or it may consist of advocating strongly with the Department of Housing on partial debt waiver (if this is an option). Overall in accessing housing it is essential to establish links with housing providers and to maintain the best possible working relationship.

A. Overcoming Barriers

Barriers that hinder vulnerable families to access housing are:

- **Lack of affordable housing:** often Community Housing and Public Housing have long wait lists and SAAP services are full, which makes it difficult for families to secure stable housing within their means.
- **Large families:** it is very difficult to find housing for families with a large number of children as there are a limited number of four or more bedroom houses available. This can result in the family being placed in a house that is unsuitable such as a three bedroom house, in turn, causing overcrowding. Private real estate agents are reluctant to place large families in their properties as they have concerns about noise and damage to property. Also large Indigenous families often face racism in the private market.
- **Poor rental history:** for many families one of the causes of their homelessness is property damage, rent arrears or outstanding debt relating to previous rentals. Once blacklisted through TICA, families no longer have the option of accessing housing from the private rental market. Unpaid rental bonds or outstanding debt to the Department of Housing prevents families from accessing public housing and prolongs the waiting period. Often reputation of bad rental history is discussed between Community Rent Schemes which makes it difficult for a family to clear their name.
- **Lack of communication and negotiation skills:** some families lack the skills to negotiate with landlords, neighbours or departmental agencies which can result in miscommunication and more seriously the loss of a tenancy.



- **Transience:** families who are constantly moving and are in crisis are unable to update contacts and details with relevant housing providers and are unable to receive correspondence.

Tips from Family Support Workers

- Include the family in the process of accessing housing – ask where they want to live, where their supports are as well as the location of shops, schools, transport, doctors and anything else the family may need access to
- Ensure you have the express permissions (consent form and understanding) to access information from relevant bodies, such as Centrelink or housing providers, to assist in accessing housing
- Ensure that the family is continuing to update their details with housing providers
- If the family is not on the waitlist for public housing, assist the family to complete an application and arrange an appointment with the Department regarding their application. Obtain and keep copies of application and correspondence
- Look for options and eligibility requirements for priority or specific needs housing with a shorter wait list than the general public housing wait list in your state. Use all of your advocacy skills, effective support letters and lots of supporting documentation to get the family on this shorter wait list
- Know the family rental history, for example do they have any debts, are they on TICA (tenancy blacklist database)
- Ensure that the family is on the public housing waitlist – find out how long they have been on the list, if the application is active or deferred, if there are any outstanding debts and the suburbs they are waiting for. This information will also be useful in determining which community housing lists the family is eligible for. Request a copy of the application letter for your file as this will be needed when applying for community housing
- As a worker. have regular contact with the housing providers, call to see if the application has been received, if there are any upcoming vacancies for the family, ask the housing provider to call you if a house is available for the family or if any further information is needed
- Consider all community housing options and eligibility requirements. Contact relevant community housing providers and present the 'case' of the family. Ensure that the provider has all required documents and a support letter written by the Family Support Worker. In this letter state your involvement with the family, history working with the family and the situation. Send all relevant documentation to all eligible housing providers. Remind the family to call housing providers to update their details on a regular basis
- Once the family have secured a property assist the family to acquire a Department of Housing Bond Loan and if necessary a Rental Grant (while these are housing products in Queensland, they will have an equivalent in most other states and territories of Australia).

B. Maintaining Tenancy

Within the *Homelessness to Home* project, maintaining tenancy (i.e. preventing homelessness) was the core component of any family support work with families at risk of homelessness. Maintaining tenancy provides the scope to break the cycle of homelessness and disadvantage experienced by the family.

In this context, support work targets assisting families to:

- meet the obligations of their lease
- increase skills for maintaining housing and living in a community
- identify and address risk factors for tenancy breakdown
- provide advocacy to ensure their rights as a tenant are upheld.

In order to prevent homelessness, Family Support Workers need an excellent working knowledge of tenancy legislation, and a thorough understanding of the tenants' rights and responsibilities.

Family Support Workers could also benefit from assertive outreach focusing in particular on the identified and non-identified barriers to maintaining housing. In doing this, support must be targeted and

specific to the strengths, needs and requirements of each family unit and the individuals in each family. Workers can also use the opportunity provided by the provision of housing to link families in with other specialised and/or mainstream support services, particularly to address risk factors for tenancy breakdown such as drug and alcohol counselling etc.

Another important aspect of maintaining tenancy is in the development of linkages with peers and also with the surrounding community. Opportunities for family participation in activities and social occasions with their peers can assist families to feel less isolated and unique in their experiences. Moreover family member participation in mainstream activities and adult learning opportunities contributes to building skills and resilience. Linking in the surrounding community, particularly through child care and schools, also assists in the sense of certainty around the tenancy and in turn contributes to maintaining the tenancy.

Section 4.1.2 (Tools for Family Support and Advocacy) includes a Sample Housing Profile Form and Sample Sustaining Tenancy Assessment which provide a good initial assessment of families' housing skills, tenancy history, risk factors for tenancy breakdown and goals for their current tenancy.

C. Preventing Tenancy Breakdown

Tenancies can break down for a range of reasons including:

- inability to meet obligations of tenancy such as:
  - rent arrears
  - maintenance of property incl. cleaning
  - property damage
  - illegal activity
  - overcrowding
  - not respecting rights of neighbours (e.g. noise complaints)

Risk factors for tenancy breakdown include:

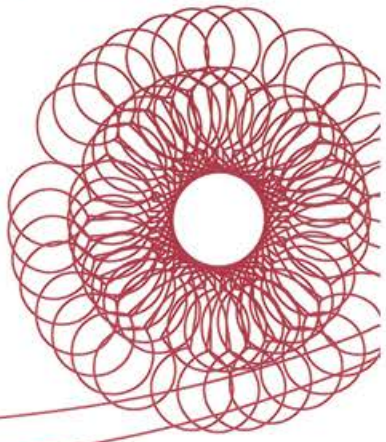
- poverty
- unemployment
- poor money management skills
- lack of housekeeping skills
- disengagement from support services, education and employment
- limited awareness of support needs and ability
- minimal social supports
- cultural need for extended family to stay at times
- limited social skills (sensitivity to and respect for the needs and rights of others, conflict management skills)
- limited communication skills (able to make needs known, ask for clarification when not clear about what others have said)
- domestic and family violence
- relationship breakdown
- inability to manage substance use, health condition or mental illness
- lack of awareness of substance use, relapse patterns, and consequences of use (disruptive behaviour, deteriorated health, rent payment, inability to work)
- difficulty managing children's behaviour and impacts on neighbourhood
- child protection orders, including ramifications of loss of child payments causing greater financial burden on rent
- fear of child protection intervention resulting in the withdrawal from social and other support[18]
- difficulty pursuing goals (planning, prioritizing, and accessing needed resources; problem-solving and negotiation skills).

[18] Walsh, *More than Just a Roof*, Brisbane, 2003, p8

Suggested strategies to prevent tenancy breakdown include:

- Conduct a Housing Skills and Supports Check to identify risk factors for tenancy breakdown and target support to address these risk factors
- At the beginning of a tenancy assist the family to set up Centrepay deductions for rent, accounts for electricity, phone, internet and gas. Through doing this the family is less likely to fall into rent arrears or get behind with bills. Talk with the family about putting money aside for lawn mowing services
- Ensure that the family knows their rights and responsibilities upon signing the lease, and continue to educate families about their rights and responsibilities while you are supporting them
- Develop good professional relationships with landlords and work collaboratively with them to negotiate and solve tenancy issues as they arise. Being able to advocate for a family to a property manager who knows the family support team and the work provided to support a family to maintain their tenancy is a huge asset
- Ensure the property manager provides you with copies of all correspondence sent to the tenant, so that you are aware early if breach notices have been issued
- Develop an agreement with property managers to alert you if they are aware of any problems with the tenancy
- Tenancy issues are best addressed as soon as the issue is brought to the attention of the family and worker to prevent escalation. For example if a noise complaint is received, work together to develop plans to minimise the noise such as turning the television and/or music down after a certain time at night
- Arrange a meeting with the family, property manager and Family Support Worker if there are any issues, to problem-solve and negotiate plans to address problems.
- Know the details of the family's tenancy – particularly when their lease expires and when their next inspection is due. Make sure you provide practical support to the family to ensure that they are prepared for their inspections
- Think outside the box, find creative solutions to tenancy problems
- Provide the family with emergency relief phone numbers to get financial assistance so they do not go into rent arrears
- If you do agree to pay a bill or rent arrears, make an agreement with the family that the next step is to set up direct debit or Centrepay for that bill. Assist with setting this up
- Use the family's existing support network – ask the family if they have someone who could help clean or mow the lawns
- Ensure that you know the family's payday so you can assist with budgeting
- Support the family to develop skills for maintaining tenancy so that future tenancies will be successful
- Enrol children in childcare and school – this relieves stress on parents and minimises noise complaints
- For families with problems with substance abuse, develop strategies for minimising the impacts of their use on their payment of rent and interactions with their neighbours
- Document all correspondence with property managers.

Ensure that family support is targeted at supporting families to meet their tenancy obligations and developing skills to maintain housing.
This is crucial!



4.1.4 Children and Young People in Family Support Work

A. Including Children and Young People[19]

Effective family support work requires the involvement of children and young people in the design and delivery of services. Children's own perspectives on their experiences are an important source of knowledge, and it is important to consult with them and consider their opinions and perspectives from the outset.

It is just as important for workers to establish rapport and respectful, trusting relationships with children and young people as it is with their parents and carers. The responsibility for effective communication with children and young people lies with the adult and it is important that you adapt your style of communication to their needs, abilities and stage of development.

Tips to include children and young people in your assessments and intervention include:

- ask children and young people and their parents and carers about their needs and include this in your assessment
- observe a child or young person's behaviour, understand its context, and notice any unexpected changes
- listen actively and respond to concerns expressed about developmental or behavioural changes
- evaluate the situation, taking into consideration the individual, their situation and development issues
- understand how to present genuine choices to young people and how to obtain consent to sharing information
- explain to the child, young person or carer what kind of information you may have to share with others
- explain what has happened or will happen next and check their understanding and where appropriate, their consent to the process
- inform, involve and help the child or young person to assess different courses of action, understand the consequences of each and, where appropriate, agree next steps
- share reasons for action with the child or young person and those caring for them
- understand the limits of confidentiality that apply to your job role. Sometimes it is necessary to go against a child or young person's expressed wishes in their best interests. Where this is the case, ensure that the child or young person understands what is happening and why.

B. Children and Young People's Development[20]

All children develop at different rates and in different ways. However it is important that Family Support Workers have a basic understanding of infants', children's and young people's development and how these changes can affect their behaviour. Parents and carers may be well placed to identify developmental and behavioural changes in their children. They might also ask you for support, information and reassurance at various stages.

Understand the context

Children's development depends on temperament, cultural influences and how adults around them behave. It is also affected by how secure they feel in their relationships with adults and the opportunities they have to socialise with other children. Support workers need to understand and take account of the effects of different parenting approaches, backgrounds and routines.

For some children and young people, delayed or disordered development may stem from underlying, potentially undiagnosed disability and is not a reflection on parenting skills.

[19] Every Child Matters, *Common Core of Skills and Knowledge for the Children's Workforce*, 2005, http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/_files/37183E5C09CCE460A81C781CC70863F0.pdf, accessed 25/05/2007.
[20] Every Child Matters, *Common Core of Skills and Knowledge*, 2005

C. Wider Family, Community and Environmental Factors

The role of extended family can be a significant source of support. Conversely they may contribute to the difficulties a family is experiencing. It is important to recognise the child or young person's position in a family or caring network, as well as a wider social context, and appreciate the diversity of these networks. Assessments must examine the strengths and issues of relationships within the wider family and community. Genograms and Ecomaps are a useful means of doing this with families.

Protective Factors and Resilience

There are a range of protective factors that impact on outcomes for at-risk children. Family workers can work with families to enhance these known protective factors. New experiences that open up opportunities can provide "turning points" for children and young people and influence resilience developing. Protective factors are outlined in the table below[21].

Individual	Family	School	Peer	Community
• Empathy • Optimism • Easy temperament • Social skills • Intelligence	• Sense of belonging • Optimism • Warm parental relationship • Good communication • Good monitoring of child • Strong family values • Other adult relationships	• Attachment to school • Opportunities to succeed • Recognition of achievement	• Friendship with positive peers • Peer acceptance	• Access to supports • Participation in community • Cultural pride

Education and Child Care

Education and child care can be essential ingredients to be wellbeing of children who have experienced homelessness and family insecurity. Education and child care can begin the process of wider social support and engagement for the whole family as well as provide time for both children and parents to spend outside the family unit. Child care programs are critical in providing parents experiencing a crisis with a break from the stresses of childrearing, and to provide at-risk children with a safe environment. Child care also has positive effects on a child's development and gives children an opportunity to develop secure attachments.

Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Centres

An essential aspect of supporting Indigenous children, young people and their families to enhance strengths and resilience is through Aboriginal and Islander specific child care centres. There are numerous examples across Australia where *"community members will teach the children about their culture through story-telling, activities, dance and language…an environment in which Indigenous parents and children have access to health and community support services that are culturally appropriate as well as a service that is able to improve educational and health standards for the families"* [22].

D. Child Safe Policies

Child safe policies include reporting and managing suspicion, allegations and discolsures of abuse or neglect of children and young parent by their parent or carers. A sample policy and guiding principles are provided here as a resource for agencies involved in family support work. This sample is Queensland-based with reference to the child safety jurisdiction in that state. In other states relevant protection and safety regimes would be applied. For sample Child Safe Procedures, contact Micah Projects Inc.

[21] Adapted from *Pathways to Prevention: Developmental and early intervention approaches to crime in Australia*, 1999

[22] Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care, *Footprints to Where We Are: A Resource Manual for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Services*, SNAICC, North Fitzroy, 2005, p69.

D.1 Sample Policy – Micah Projects Inc – Queensland

It is acknowledged that many of the children and young people who access our services have already suffered abuse or neglect, experienced homelessness or witnessed violence. We believe we have a responsibility to make our organisation child safe and child friendly by protecting children and young people from (further) neglect, physical, emotional/psychological and sexual abuse, racism, or discrimination on any grounds (culture, religion etc).

This policy should not be confused with the policy for handling of complaints. An allegation of child abuse by management, staff or others is not a complaint. It is a serious issue and possibly a crime that warrants reporting to statutory authorities.

However and whenever it is suspected that a child or young person has been abused, or is at risk of abuse, our prime consideration will be the best interests and welfare of the child or young person. Because we are clear about the roles of the Department of Child Safety and the Queensland Police Service in responding to suspected abuse and harm[23] to a child or young person, we are committed to reporting suspicions, allegations and disclosures to the relevant statutory authorit/ies.

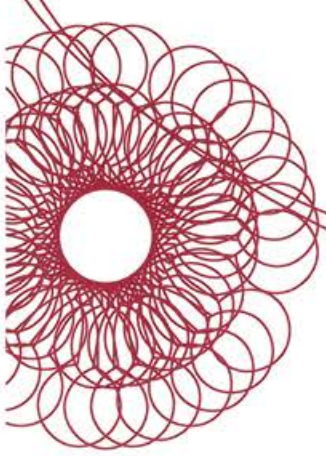
We acknowledge that the history of church-based, government and community organisations is one of less than adequate responses that did not protect children when there had been a duty to do so. This policy assures children, young people, their families and staff of our commitment to a respectful approach to children and young people's safety and other rights

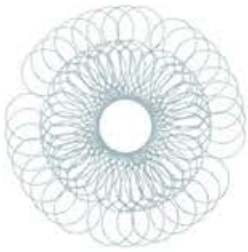
Guiding Principles

The following principles will apply in the administration of this policy:

- best interests and welfare of children and young people are paramount when we suspect or are advised of child abuse or neglect
- respect for children and young people's rights, including their right to participate in decision-making about our services and organisation, to protect themselves from abuse and neglect, for their views to be respected if they have been abused or neglected and to be supported during the response or investigation
- child centred, family focused approach in our work with people accessing our services
- collaborative and participative approach to working with parents and others accessing our services
- respect for the privacy and the confidentiality of what is discussed or disclosed, except where this conflicts with our duty of care toward children, young people or adults or where a child or young person is believed to be in danger
- modelling of acceptable behaviour by management and staff and prohibition of management or staff from using any method to discipline or influence a child's behaviour that is physically or emotionally abusive
- supporting parents to care safely for, and protect, their children including a focus on preventative or early intervention responses provided by our organisation

[23] The *Child Protection Act 1999* defines harm as any detrimental effect of a significant nature on the child's physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing. It could be caused by physical, psychological or emotional abuse or neglect or sexual abuse and exploitation.





- maintaining knowledge of, and relationships with, other community based organisations and government agencies to better support families and prevent them from entering or progressing further into more formal intensive or intrusive service systems
- respect for cultural diversity and different child rearing and parenting practices across cultures and acknowledgement that we can learn from how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities approach child rearing, child development and supporting vulnerable families and children
- commitment to contemporary, evidence based approaches to working with children and families and which inform our approach to the assessment of risks to children and young people, staff and the organisation in our engagement and work with people accessing services

Part 4.2

Tools and Resources for Practitioners and Agencies

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4.2 Family Participation - An Adult Learning Strategy to Promote Social Inclusion

This section of the Toolkit provides learnings and resources from the Adult Learning Strategy developed as a key component of the Homelessness to Home Demonstration Project.

It is in two sections:

4.2.1 Engaging with families in learning settings
4.2.2 Tools and resources used in workshops about five topics:
- A. Forming the group
- B. Maintaining your tenancy
- C. Basic communication skills
- D. Skills, strengths and self confidence
- E. Self advocacy and goal setting.

4.2.1 Engaging with Families in Learning Settings

> *"The multi-dimensionality of social exclusion has an association with social stigma. It is a process of accumulation disadvantage rather than a multi-faceted state, an obstruction of rights and opportunities, originating in external factors or subjective perceptions. Low participation in society (social, economic, cultural and political life), inadequate financial resources, felling of isolation and powerlessness, and poor social support were identified as core elements in the process of exclusion.[1]"*

The participation of families in *Homelessness to Home* was a hallmark of the project.

Consequently, an Adult Learning Strategy for Social Inclusion which was focused on the organisation of group work and skills development was a critical component in engaging with the families, all of whom had a history of homelessness and long-term socio-economic disadvantage and social exclusion.

To achieve this, the project budgeted for transport, catering, childcare and educational resources so families could participate in adult learning events. This proved to be vital in addressing existing negative social exclusion processes – taking them from social and economic exclusion to social and economic participation, consistent with the continuum of support framework articulated in this toolkit in Part 1.

If the experience of family homelessness is to be overcome it must begin somewhere. In the implementation of *Homelessness to Home*, this was initiated early engaging families beyond the narrow focus of improving family functioning and addressing housing issues. Serge Paugam, a French sociologist, identifies the fundamental bonds which connect an individual to society as[2]:

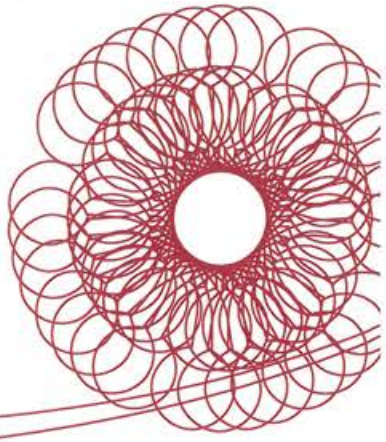
- personal bonds
- social bonds
- citizenship bonds.

In this context, the focus of the Adult Learning Strategy was the development of skills and capacities that would assist families to make important connections in all areas of life, particularly in accessing mainstream services. The learning agenda was designed to be flexible, easy to implement and relevant to the participating families.

With this in mind a series of Skills Development Workshops were developed to focus on communication skills, self-awareness and self-confidence, providing relevant information around tenancies, empowerment and goal setting.

These workshops focused on developing self-advocacy skills that would assist participants to maintain their tenancies as well as negotiate with other stakeholders to both access their entitlements

[1] European Commission, The social exclusion of families with young children, 200
[2] ATD Fourth World, *Valuing Children Valuing Parents*, Report, 2004, p 28



and access resources for their life. It must be recognized, however, that the families in the program had many and varied needs and had limited education and training opportunities. Throughout the delivery of the program it was intentional that participants would identify other educational and training needs and requests that they considered to be important in their lives. In their roles, facilitators and Family Support Workers identified different needs and how they could be addressed

Whole team discussions facilitated this information sharing which led to the development and implementation of further options and training for participants.

Example

Throughout the skill development workshops, participants often discussed their desire to enter the workforce and the barriers they experienced. The Family Support Workers also identified this as an important issue for the families. In response to this information, *Homelessness to Home* employed a specialised Job Network agency to deliver basic employment readiness training for those who were interested.

This training was separate from the skill development workshops but responded to identified needs within the family group

A. Adult Learning Strategy Aims[3]

The aim of the program was to begin with skills development focused on stabilizing a tenancy, followed by the principle that, once housing is stabilized, family members can pursue other aspirations such as:

- long-term maintenance of affordable and permanent housing
- achieving independence and the necessary skills to assume their rights and responsibilities in raising children
- increasing their participation in social and economic opportunities by building self confidence, linking to community resources, developing civic and personal capacities, including self advocacy,
- ensuring each family member is connected to service systems, community groups and personal networks to reduce social isolation and disempowerment.

Guiding principles in working with families in adult learning settings

RESPECT – acknowledge and respect the reality and experience of individuals and families.

SUPPORT – provided in agreement with individuals and families.

EMPOWER – through education and skill development.

REFERRAL – to appropriate services

B. Creating a *Trauma Sensitive Culture* as part of an adult learning environment

Families who have experienced homelessness have to contend with disadvantage, poverty and vulnerability resulting from traumatic experiences and isolation. Participants in any group work program for homeless families will be struggling with a multitude of systemic and personal issues including mental illness, substance use, history of institutionalised care, incarceration, low education and literacy levels, social isolation, child protection concerns, physical health needs, domestic and family violence, sexual assault, and unemployment.

Research demonstrates these struggles are related to overwhelming experiences of exposure to abusive power, disabling losses and disrupted attachment, usually beginning in childhood.

[3] Adapted from: ATD Fourth World, *Valuing Children Valuing Parents*, 2004, p28

Furthermore, homelessness itself has a negative, exhausting and accumulative impact on families.

A group work and skills development program for homeless families aims to create a trauma-sensitive culture where behaviour arising from these factors is understood and responded to with respect and understanding and where disclosure of trauma is responded to appropriately.

The characteristics of creating a trauma sensitive culture include[4]:

- **Culture of Nonviolence:** helping to build safety skills and a commitment to higher goals.
- **Culture of Emotional Intelligence:** helping to teach affect management skills.
- **Culture of Inquiry & Social Learning:** helping to build cognitive skills.
- **Culture of Shared Governance:** helping to create civic skills of self-control, self-discipline, and administration of healthy authority.
- **Culture of Open Communication:** helping to overcoming barriers to healthy communication, reduce acting-out, enhance self-protective and self-correcting skills, and teach healthy boundaries.
- **Culture of Social Responsibility:** helping to rebuild social connection skills, establish healthy attachment relationships.
- **Culture of Growth and Change:** helping to restore hope, meaning and purpose.

Tips from Adult Learning Facilitators

- **The facilitator sets the 'tone'** of the learning environment by modelling respect and acceptance of difference within the group
- The facilitation style used in this program needs to be **relaxed and flexible**
- Working with a diverse group of people calls for a **creative approach**
- **Develop a group agreement** about how the group wants to work together. This agreement can be used as a reference throughout the workshops
- As a facilitator, acknowledging and **naming strengths and contributions** of individual participants and the group as a whole
- Greet each participant and their children on arrival and **acknowledge the effort made to attend**. Let them know their presence is extremely important to the group
- If a **guest speaker** is invited provide them with background information on the group without breaking confidentiality. Inform the group about the guest speaker
- **Recognise that there are barriers to participation** within the group. Breaking down and overcoming these individual barriers will ensure maximum participation.
- **Recognise the value of humour**
- **Welcome late arrivals**, introduce them and succinctly update them on what they missed to allow for their full participation
- **Allow for sufficient breaks** during the workshop and inform participants at the beginning of the workshop. This caters for differing concentration levels and allows for social interaction between participants
- **Reflection cards** used at the beginning and end of the workshop encourage participants to acknowledge even a small change or achievement experienced during the workshop
- Good facilitators encourage and **allow all participants to have their say and be valued**
- **Create a visually interesting space** with displays of relevant posters and information
- **Asking the participants to take responsibility** for roles in the group can build the group sense of responsibility e.g. time keeping, scribing or preparing food
- **Make arrival time 30 minutes earlier than the starting time for the workshop**. This allows time for participants to settle their children into child minding and to have a chat before the workshop

[1] For more information about trauma sensitive culture see the website www.sanctuaryweb.com

C. Workshop practicalities – a checklist for organisers

Any program or project incorporating workshops for adult learning needs to ensure a range of items are planned and budgeted for. This checklist emerged from the work undertaken by *Homelessness to Home* as part of its adult learning strategy.

Venue
It is important groups are run in a comfortable non-threatening environment where participants feel at ease. The venue must have a kitchen, male and female toilets, and a separate safe space for the children's activities. Choose a venue accessible by public transport and not too far for participants to travel.

Invitations
Send personalised invitations to each family. Phone calls or text messages should be made the day before the workshops as a reminder and to problem-solve any possible barriers to attending.

Transport
It is difficult for families to negotiate public transport with children. Provide transport or budget for taxi vouchers if possible. Otherwise, ensure the venue is close to public transport.

Catering
Make available tea, coffee and light refreshments at all times throughout the day. Providing a healthy lunch and morning tea for both adults and children can be a great strategy to model appropriate and healthy nutrition and to encourage informal, social interactions.

Children's Activities
Aim to develop supervised children's activities for accompanying children. Qualified children's workers are essential, as is the provision of developmentally appropriate activities. Staffing ratios need to reflect legislative requirements.

Supervised children's activities are beneficial as they provide an opportunity for modelling and to talk to parents about using formal childcare services.

Incentives for participation
Providing families with incentives for participation values their time and commitment to the program. This also recognizes the contribution and leadership that many families provide to each other by not just relying on the professional input of workers. Participation incentives may consist of vouchers to major shopping centres or supermarkets, raffle prizes, hampers, beauty products, books etc.

4.2.2 Skills Development Workshops – Tools and Resources for Use

This part of the toolkit documents the skills workshops developed and run as part of *Homelessness to Home*. During the Demonstration Project a series of five workshops were designed. The topics covered were:

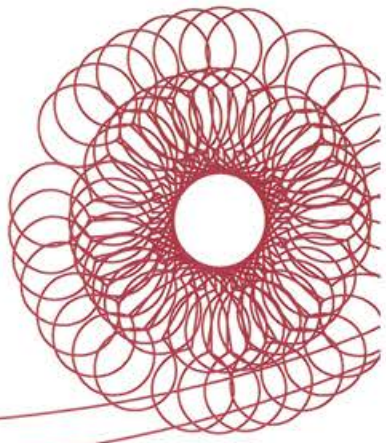
A. Forming the Group
B. Maintaining Tenancies
C. Communication Skills
D. Strength, Skills, Self Confidence and Goal Setting
E. Self Advocacy Skills.

There are many others topics that could be covered within a family homelessness program and some are listed below. With links to the appropriate guest speakers and using the overall philosophy of the program, the plans can be easily adapted to cover other topics. It is important when considering other topics to look at the complexity of the subject matter and how confronting it is. The main thing is to simplify the content. Some other suggested topics are:

- Employment, education and training
- Healthy relationships
- Basic budgeting
- General nutrition
- Health and wellbeing.

The strength of this process was in providing families participating in Homelessness to Home with an opportunity to get to know each other, share experiences and break down isolation as well as developing a broad base of practical skills. Further, as much as the families learned from facilitators and presenters, they learned from each other.

The workshop program was a process rather than a one-off isolated event. Families came together on five occasions and participated in a learning setting that was both family-friendly and trauma sensitive. This enabled a positive, cumulative effect of reinforcement and validation of their life experience.



A. Workshop 1 – Forming the Group

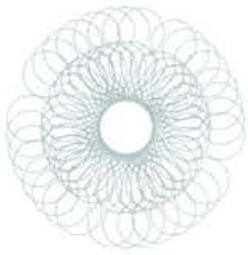
Workshop aims:

- for the participants to gain an understanding of the program
- to provide an example of setting boundaries within a group setting
- for families to meet in a social context.

Materials needed:

- Whiteboard / Butchers Paper
- Marker Pens
- 'Reflections' resource cards (emotive based).

See over for Workshop Plan.



Workshop Plan

9:30am – 10:00am	**Arrival – 30 Minutes**
10:00am – 10:45am	**Session 1** **Setting the Scene – 45 Minutes** 1. Welcome everybody and ask them to undertake Activity 1.1 – Morning Reflections *(This activity is a great way of acknowledging any emotions or feelings the participants might have on arrival and move on to the body of content).* 2. Introduce the participants to the program, what it contains e.g. topics to be covered and worker roles in the program. 3. Show the participants the Day Plan – highlighting break times. 4. Inform the participants of the purpose, expectations and limitations of the program e.g. attendance, commitment, reporting requirements, financial incentives. 5. Discuss participants part in the training, the value of their attendance in a peer sharing context and what their role within the program will be e.g. benefits/advantage of participation. 6. Discuss with the participants the way the training will be delivered and what processes will be used throughout the program e.g. brainstorming, discussion times, creative processes and guest speakers. *It is valuable for the participants to have a thorough understanding of the program, what to expect and what is expected of them.*
10:45am – 11:00am	**Break – 15 Minutes**
11:00am – 11:45am	**Session 2** **Group Agreement – 45 minutes** 1. Tell participants about the space you're in and why you're using it. Run through any house rules. 2. Ask if anyone has done any group work recently. Discuss – key points on how it was done. *For the group's first workshop, creating a thorough understanding of how people will work together is essential.* 3. Invite group members to brainstorm their 'group guide' – based on what was just discussed, plus their contributions for how they will work together during today and future workshops. (Activity 1.2) *Write the 'group guide' on butcher's paper and put it up on the wall, so it is there to refer to when.*
11:45am – 12:00pm	**Break – 15 Minutes**
12:00am – 12:45pm	**Session 3** **Getting to know you – 45 minutes** 1. To reform the group ask the participants to undertake Activity 1.3 – Fact or Fiction 2. Talk to the participants about the group and how building trust will require participants to share with each other. *Let the group know that it is up to them to decide what to share and how much they would like to share. It is also important for participants to revisit the group agreement and to acknowledge that they are now using it.* *The facilitator may lead the following discussions with their own responses, providing an opportunity to highlight how to respond.* 3. Undertake Activity 1.3 4. Continue discussions with the group, undertaking Activity 1.4 5. Discuss the importance of us all as individuals and revisit how the strengths of each individual can assist the other participants.

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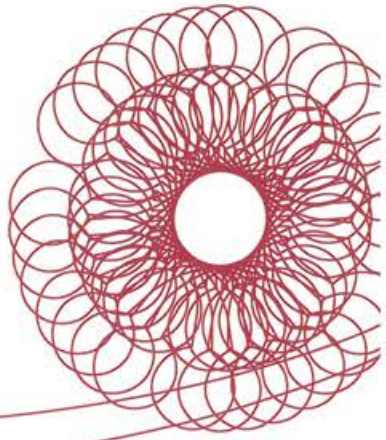


12:45am – 1:00pm	**Break**
1:00pm – 1:30pm	**Reflections and Evaluations – 30 minutes** 1. Prompt a Group Discussion about how the day went 2. Group Reflection Questions • Is this what I expected today? • Do you think this program will be helpful to you in the future? • Was it good to meet with other people in an informal setting? 3. Complete evaluation sheets. 4. Pass out the resource folders containing information sheets and explain to the participants that they will receive handout modules for each topic. 5. Provide the group with details of the next workshop, encourage ongoing attendance in the program and thank them for their participation. *Invite everyone to have some lunch and refreshments*

Workshop Activities

Activity 1.1 - Reflections

This warm up activity is designed to allow participants to share or unload some of their feelings of the morning before the workshop sessions begin.

Ask the group to consider their morning and some of the things they have had to do to get to the workshop. Ask the members of the group to go around and choose one or two of the emotion cards placed in the centre of the group – remind the group that it is ok if someone else has the card you would like to use as we will be able to swap them over. Ask the participants to now go around the circle and share with everyone the card they have chosen and why?

Activity 1.2 – Group Agreement

The Group Agreement is a set of rules all participants and workers need to abide by. There are certain topics that need to be covered in the guide including –Confidentiality, Conflict and Parenting. The participants may not cover all of these areas so it is necessary for the facilitator to introduce the topics with prompts.

Example of Prompts:

- *"What would you want to happen if conflict arises within the group…?"*
- *"We all parent differently, would it be easier if we all took care of our own children or asked a worker for assistance when needed…?"*

Example of Group Guide: (not in any particular order)

- *No Violence*
- *No Drug Use*
- *We want to hear from everyone*
- *One person speaks at a time*
- *What is said in the group stays in the group*
- *Respect everyone's right to an opinion*
- *Difference is OK*
- *is to be done by the parents*
- *We have an open door policy with the kids (where appropriate)*
- *We are responsible for ourselves*
- *Keep general discussions to break times*
- *We are in a place of learning*
- *Participation money to be given to those who contribute in all sections of the day*
- *Let one of the workers know if there is something major going on outside of the workshop, in case you have to leave abruptly.*

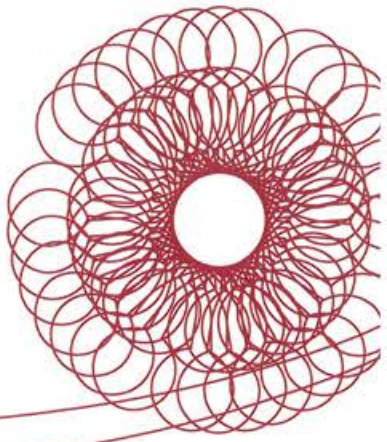
Activity 1.3 – Getting to know you
It is important participants know each other and who is in their group and to have a common understanding of "where we have all come from" and "what we are about". Ask the participants to go around the circle and answer the following questions:

- Where were you born or brought up? (your background)
- Tell us something about your family history?

Activity 1.4 – What are your strengths?
Open the discussion to the group about strengths: strengths you posses as an individual, the strengths of your family and the strengths of this group as a whole. Talk to the group about how these strengths are the building blocks for future opportunities. Identifying strengths is about building self esteem and self-confidence. Recognising the presence of existing strengths provides a foundation for developing further skills. Inform participants they will be looking at strengths throughout the training program. Ask the group to consider the previous discussion and go around the circle and answer the following:

- What is a strength you have as an individual?
- What is one strength of your family?
- What is one strength of this group here today?

Be sure to acknowledge and congratulate each individual on their responses and then acknowledge the group as a whole. Openly recognise what a challenge it can be to focus on such a valuable topic and how well they have done.



B. Workshop 2 - Maintaining your Tenancy

Workshop aims:

- to provide opportunities for skill development that will assist in maintaining tenancies.
- to provide information on tenants rights and responsibilities during tenancy.
- to facilitate peer sharing of useful strategies for maintaining tenancies.

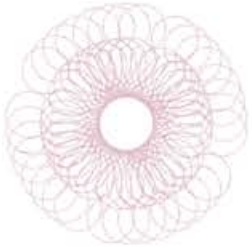
Materials needed:

- Whiteboard / Butchers Paper
- Marker Pens
- 'Reflections' resource cards (emotive based).

Background Information

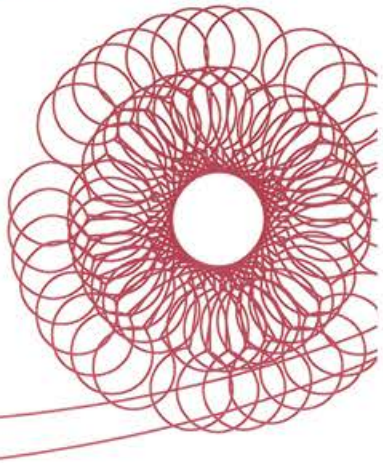
Sections in this workshop are based on state legislation and guidelines. You will need to modify all information according to the state in which the program is being delivered.

See over for Workshop Plan.



Workshop Plan

9:30am – 10:00am	**Arrival – 30 Minutes**
10:00am – 10:45am	**Session 1** **Setting the Scene – 45 Minutes** 1. Welcome everybody and ask them to undertake Activity 2.1 – Morning Reflections. 2. Introduce the participants to the topic and what the day will include. 3. Show the participants the Day Plan – highlighting break times. 4. Start a discussion with the group around experiences of maintaining a tenancy. Undertake Activity 2.2.
10:45am – 11:00am	**Break – 15 Minutes**
11:00am – 11:45am	**Session 2** **Your Lease, Our RTA – 45 Minutes** 1. Inform the participants that although we deal with individual landlords and real estate agencies on a day to day level, there are large independent statutory bodies, government departments and State legislation or laws specific to tenancy management. 2. Ask the participants if they know what the Residential Tenancies Authority (RTA) is. Provide explanation and information. 3. Does anyone know what the *Residential Tenancies Act* (QLD) 1996 is or what it means? Explain. 4. Discuss individual leases, what you need to know and what to look for if you think something is wrong. 5. Discuss option for Appeal and the Small Claims Tribunal.
11:45am – 12:00pm	**Break – 15 Minutes**
12:00pm – 12:45pm	**Session 3** **Steps to Take – 45 minutes** 1. To re-gather the group, ask the participants to undertake Activity 2.3 – Toilet Paper Surprise. 2. Ask the participants to consider the strategies, laws and government bodies that were discussed before the break. Undertake Activity 2.4. 3. Congratulate the group and move onto Activity 2.5. 4. Thank everyone for their contributions.
12:45pm – 1:00pm	**Break – 15 Minutes**
1:00pm – 1:30pm	**Reflections and Evaluations – 30 minutes** 1. Prompt a Group Discussion about how the day went 2. Ask the group to go around and answer the following questions: • Name one thing you do well to maintain your tenancy? • Name one thing you could do differently to assist in maintaining your tenancy? • What was the most important thing you learnt in today's workshop? 3. Complete evaluation sheets. 4. Hand out information sheets to the participants for their resource folders. Briefly run through each one with the group. 5. Provide the group with details of the next workshop, encourage everyone's ongoing attendance in the program and thank them for their participation and contributions. *Invite everyone to have some lunch and refreshments*



Workshop Activities

Activity 2.1 – Reflections
This warm up is designed to allow participant's to share or unload feelings relating to the morning so far before the workshop sessions begin.

Ask the group to consider their morning and some of the things they have had to do to get here. Ask members of the group to go around and choose one or two of the emotion cards placed in the centre of the group – remind the group that it is ok if someone else has the card they would like to use as we will be able to swap them over. Ask the participants to now go around the circle and share with everyone the card they have chosen and why?

Activity 2.2 –Tenancy Scenarios
The purpose of this activity is to look at common issues that may arise during tenancies and strategies that could assist in solving them. Briefly run through the 8 scenarios with the whole group. Break the group into 2-3 smaller groups and ask them to go through each scenario and brainstorm strategies that would either stop the issue from arising or strategies for overcoming the issue once it is apparent. Inform the participants that once they are done they will report back to the group and open the discussion up for any further suggestions. Ask each group to nominate a scribe and a reporter.

The overall message is that if all else fails talk to your Family Support Worker.

Scenario 1

You are living in a house rented through a private real estate agent. You have three teenage children. The oldest son has his friends over to visit most nights, and sometimes when they drink, they talk and play their music loudly. The neighbours have started yelling at your son and his friends over the fence, and at your other children when they come home from school. Last week after a loud party your neighbour complained to the real estate agent and you received a Notice to Remedy Breach. What can you do about this?

Scenario 2

You and your children live in a house rented from a Community Housing provider. Your rent is usually paid through Centrepay, however one month your Centrepay was cancelled somehow by Centrelink, and you have now missed two fortnight's rent payments. You didn't realise until your property manager sends you a Notice to Remedy Breach in the mail. You ring the Property Manager and she says that you owe them $520.00 and if you can't pay in seven days you will be taken to the Small Claims Tribunal. You have to pay back a bond loan, buy groceries, one of your children has been sick, and the childcare fees are due this week. You don't think there is any way you can come up with the whole $520. What can you do?

Scenario 3

You have lived in a house with your family for about one year. Your rent is $161 each week and you find it really hard to keep up to date with your rent because you are paying back a personal loan, and a Department of Housing loan. One of your children has a disability and gets sick often, so you have to spend money on medication. Last month he was in hospital and you had to travel every day from Inala to the Mater to see him. You couldn't pay rent for a fortnight and you asked a church for help paying but they said it was too much. You have received a Notice to Remedy Breach in the mail and you have 7 days to pay $322 rent. You know you can't pay this. What can you do?

Scenario 4

You and your family live in a community housing property. The landlord has sent you a Notice to Remedy Breach in the mail because the grass in the front and back yard is too long. You don't own a lawn mower and don't get paid until next week, what do you do?

Scenario 5

You have 2 small children and you live with them in a community housing property. Your landlord has come to do the routine inspection and found drawings and marks on the walls, mess in the kitchen and a broken window. They have failed your inspection and given you a Notice to Remedy Breach and say you need to fix the damage to the property or you will be taken to the Small Claims Tribunal. What do you do?

Scenario 6

You and your family live in a house rented from a Community Housing provider. When you took the property you felt like you had no other choices, so even though the property looked run-down you accepted the property. Now you are finding lots of things wrong with it. Whenever it rains, water comes through one of the bedroom windows, and the carpet smells. Also a couple of light switches are hanging off the wall and so you have had to tape them up so the kids can't touch them. You called your property manager twice and told him about the problems but he hasn't done anything about it. What should you do?

Scenario 7

You live in a two bedroom unit that you rent off a private real estate agent. Last month your sister, her partner and their three children arrived late at night saying they had nowhere to stay. You haven't heard from them in a couple of years, and your sister has caused some troubles for you in the past, but the kids are little and you can't have them sleeping in the car. You say they can stay a week, but they don't leave. They say they're applying for real estate, but they keep getting knocked back, and they can't afford to stay in a hotel. Somehow your real estate agent has found out and gives you a Notice to Remedy Breach because there are too many people living on the premises. What can you do?

Scenario 8

You live with your family in a house rented through a Community Housing provider. You've been there for 6 months with no problem. However, lately things have been really busy in your life, the kids have been settling into a new school and you and your partner have been having a few problems. The housework has really got on top of you, and the kids don't help much and they have left all of their toys and rubbish in the yard. Your eldest son threw a ball through one of the windows, and the carpet has been stained from orange juice. Next week you have a property inspection and you feel really overwhelmed. You don't think you're going to pass the inspection. What should you do?

Activity 2.3 – Toilet Paper Surprise

Pass a roll of toilet paper around the circle with each participant taking some sheets. Tell the group it doesn't matter how many. Once everyone has some, ask the group to go around the circle and for each individual piece of paper they took, they will have to tell us something positive that we wouldn't know about them.

For example:

- In primary school I was ...
- I won an award for ...
- I played footy for ...

Activity 2.4 – Steps to Take

Ask the group to brainstorm a "steps to take list" around common issues arising in tenancy. Ask them to consider the smallest actions through to complaints process and the tribunal. If the group is having trouble, you can ask them to consider what list they wish they had been given as a new tenant so they knew all basic information needed to assist in maintaining tenancies.

Example list:

- Notify you Family Support Worker
- Talk to your landlord
- Try to negotiate
- Contact QTAAS or tenancy advice service
- RTA mediation
- Small Claims Tribunal

Activity 2.5 – 10 Things

The facilitator needs to introduce the 10 Things Activity and ask the group to brainstorm their thoughts on a list of ten simple things they could do to generally keep their landlord happy and assist them in maintaining their tenancies. Document on butchers' paper.

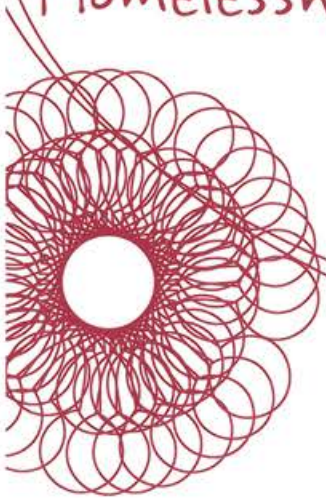
Example list:

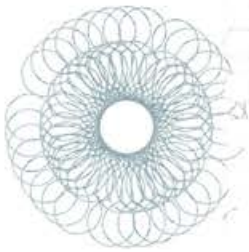
10 Things to keep a landlord happy…

- Pay the rent as agreed.
- Respect the Lease Agreement.
- Keep property tidy.
- Keep house clean.
- Do not damage the property.
- Report any damage.
- Respect neighbours rights.
- No illegal activities.
- Maintain a respectful relationship.
- Communicate any problems.

Congratulate the group. Now ask if it was an ideal world what would be a list of ten things that could be given to their property manager that would assist them to be better landlords. Encourage all of the participants to contribute to the list. Document on butchers' paper.

The following workshop outline has been adapted from the Residential Tenancies Authority www.rta.qld.gov.au.





What's in a Tenancy Agreement?

All tenancy agreements are individual for each property and each person, however there are some standard guidelines that they must follow.

There are two types of tenancy agreements:

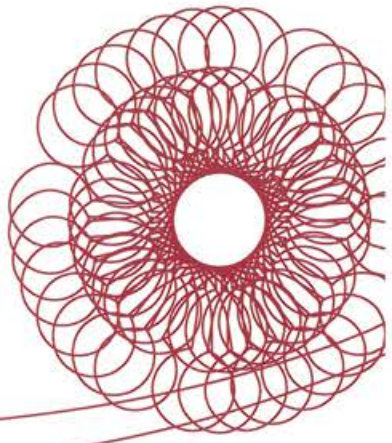
1) Fixed term agreement:
   – where a tenant agrees to rent a property for a fixed period of time (e.g. 6 months or other agreed time).

2) Periodic Agreement:
   – when a tenant lives there for an indefinite period.

A written agreement is required (even if renting to family or a friend). It is the landlords' responsibility to organise the agreement and give a copy to the tenant before they move in.

This agreement must include:

- The set of standard 'terms' (details about what the tenant and landlord can and can't do);
- The name and address of the tenant, the agent (if there is one) and the landlord;
- The dates when the agreement starts and ends (or state the periodic agreement);
- Details about how the tenant should pay the rent and how much rent is to be paid; and
- Any special 'terms' (special terms in the agreement must not conflict with the standard terms or the law).



Tenant's Responsibilities

The tenant must:

Pay the rent on time.

- Paid in advance
- Weekly/fortnightly/monthly – as stated in your tenancy agreement

Abide by the terms of the tenancy agreement -

- Make sure you understand your agreement

Keep the place reasonably clean during your tenancy.

- Leaving the premises as it was found

Prevent damage to the premises.

- Prevent purposeful damage
- Report maintenance issue to prevent further damage

Use the premises for legal purposes only:

- Do not use the premises for illegal activity
- Do not engage in illegal activity on the premises

Respect neighbours rights.

- Allow quiet enjoyment of their property
- Maintain neighbours privacy
- Maintain respectful relationship with neighbours

Seek approval for a change in the tenants or number of tenants.

- For ANY changes to the people living in the premises.

Tenant's Rights

The Real Estate / Landlord must:

Provide premises that are fit to live in:

- Clean when you move in
- Free of insects/pests
- No holes in walls etc

Provide reasonable security:

- Locks in good working order and maintained by the lessor
- A key to each lock
- Knowledge that no previous tenant could have keys

Provide a vacant possession:

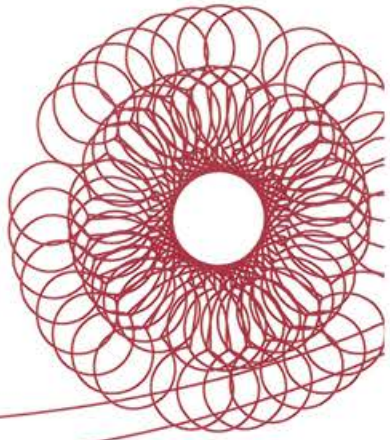
- No-one's belongings should be there
- No one should have to come and collect belongings

Allow quiet enjoyment of the premises once tenants move in:

- Enters premises in accordance with RTA guidelines (Form 9 Entry Notice
- Maintains privacy of the tenant

Maintain the property:

- If something breaks through general wear and tear – it gets fixed
- Provides adequate access to services eg. wiring is ok for electricity to be turned on.



What are Tenant Databases?

Tenant Databases are run by private companies. They collect, hold and give out information about tenants who real estate agents, landlords and park operators say are 'bad tenants'.

In Queensland, the main tenant database is TICA. You might have heard of a TICA listing, which means your name and details are recorded on the TICA Default Tenancy Control System.

In Queensland, a tenant can only be listed after the tenancy has ended due to an amount owing, objectionable behaviour or repeated breaches of their tenancy agreement.

How do I find out if I'm listed & what can I do about a listing?

Talk to your nearest QTAAS – Queensland Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service – who can give you advice how to find out if you are listed. If you call TICA directly it is very expensive – Calls are charged at $5.45 per minute and higher from a mobile or pay phone.

If you disagree with what has been recorded, in some circumstances you can have your listing removed or changed. However the process can be difficult so it is best to get advice and support.

Talk to your nearest QTAAS!

When something goes wrong – let your Landlord know!

If something goes wrong during your tenancy the best thing to do is let your landlord know by phone, in person or in writing. Writing is the best option as it formalises the request to your landlord. If you need assistance with this you can ask your support worker. It could be a simple maintenance request or an issue with the landlord.

Dispute Resolution Request (Form 16)
If you have a dispute with a landlord you can lodge a form 16 with the RTA to both notify them that there is a dispute and ask for help when resolving the problem.

The RTA can assist you in resolving the problem in a variety of different ways. It could be as easy as making a few phone calls or organising a phone hook up with everyone involved, including a dispute resolution officer who acts as a mediator.

If the dispute can't be resolved then the RTA will issue a Notice of Unresolved Dispute. This notice allows an application for a hearing in the Small Claims Tribunal to be made. This can be done on behalf of the landlord or tenant.

Tenant Advice & Advocacy Services (TAAS) for advocacy
If something goes wrong it's always a good idea to contact your local TAAS service for some advice. The TAAS workers can let you know what your rights are and discuss some possible solutions.

(Each State in Australia has tenancy advice services)

Payment of Rent

The tenant and the landlord should agree on how, where and how often the rent will be paid. This needs to be included in the tenancy agreement. Once this agreement is made it cannot be changed for the length of the agreement unless both the tenant and the landlord agree.

Centrepay is an option with Centrelink where rent is paid direct from a fortnightly payment.

- Keep a record of rent paid on a rent statement from your housing provider.

Direct debit from a bank account.

- Keep a record from your bank statements or from a rent statement.

Most housing providers require tenants to pay their rent in advance.

- For example you may pay the rent every second Friday so that you can live in the premises for the next 2 weeks.

The tenant normally pays the rent before they move in.

Rent in advance is not part of the normal Rental Bond.

The landlord cannot ask you to pay more than one month in advance.

Adapted from information by the Residential Tenancies Authority www.rta.qld.gov.au.

C. Workshop 3 - Basic Communication Skills

Workshop aims:

- to provide a basic understanding of communication skills.
- to develop strategies for effective communication.

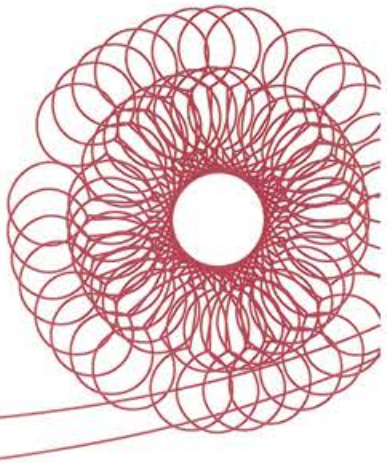
Materials needed:

- Whiteboard / Butchers Paper
- Marker Pens
- 'Reflections' resource cards (emotive based).

Background Information

It will be helpful to have a basic understanding of communication principles and strategies. Guest speaker (optional).

See over for Workshop Plan.



Workshop Plan

9:30am – 10:00am	**Arrival – 30 Minutes**
10.00am- 10.45am	**Session 1** **Listening Skills – 45 minutes** 1. Welcome everybody and undertake Activity 3.1 – Morning Reflections. 2. Explain to the participants the topic of the day and what areas of the topic will be covered. 3. Show the participants the Day Plan – highlighting break times. 4. Revisit the group agreement by reading with the group and ask the participants if there is anything else they would like to add. 5. Provide a brief outline of communication skills. 6. Undertake Activity 3.2 – Chinese Whispers. 7. The guest speaker needs to cover the topic of Active Listening and introduce Activity 3.3 – Three Things.
10.45am- 11.00am	**Break – 15 minutes**
11.00am- 11.45am	**Session 2** **Sending effective messages – 45 minutes** 1. Undertake Activity 3.4 – "10 Questions". 2. Guest Speaker to cover the area of noise interference and how when we send a message is not necessarily the way it is received. Ask the participants to brainstorm some of the things that may cause interference when listening. *Document participant's responses on butchers' paper.* 3. Go on to discuss with the group strategies for sending effective messages, covering areas including body language and eye contact. Ask the group to go around the circle and say one way they could use active listening in their day to day life. 4. Continue going around the circle asking how can we send effective messages. 5. Draw the session to an end and thank each of the participants for their contributions.
11.45am- 12.00pm	**Break – 15 minutes**

continued over

12.00pm- 12.45pm	**Session 3** **Assertive V's Aggressive – 45 minutes**

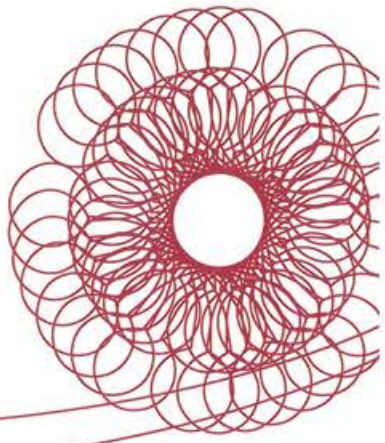
1. The guest speaker needs to bring the group together and begin a dialogue with the group about Assertive vs Aggressive Communication styles.
2. Discuss with the group that no matter how well you communicate, sometimes the other person may not hear you or is distracted from listening. The facilitator needs to discuss with the group that conflict doesn't solve situations, rather it often leads to an escalation of the conflict. Ask the participants to recognise and brainstorm a list of signs that a situation is escalating and can lead to an aggressive response. For example:
   - Physical effects – feeling tense, altered breathing or changing body language.
   - Emotional Effects – altering your mood, negative thoughts, and manic responses.

   Continue the discussion and brainstorm strategies for effectively dealing with these feelings e.g. counting to ten, deep breathing or to revisit discussions at another time.
3. Discuss with the group that these feeling we notice are vital and can be a good indicator for when they might need to walk away or ask to speak to some one else. Ask participants to brainstorm where you might need to ask for someone else's help or to walk away and who you could ask for that help. E.g. Centrelink staff, landlord, community organisation.
4. Introduce the idea of a small role play .
5. The facilitator introduces the idea of revisiting Chinese whispers. The facilitator then starts the game. If the participants respond well to this challenge add a harder/longer sentence.

12:45pm – 1:00pm	**Break – 15 Minutes**
1:00pm – 1:30pm	**Reflections and Evaluations – 30 minutes**

1. Prompt a Group Discussion about how the day went.
2. Ask the group to go around and answer the following questions:
   - Name one thing you do well as a communicator?
   - Name one thing that you could change to be a better communicator?
   - Name one thing you do well when listening?
   - Name one thing you could do better when listening?
3. Complete evaluation sheets.
4. Ask the participants to take out their resource folders and handout the Communications Module.
5. Provide the group with the details of the next workshop, encourage everyone's ongoing attendance in the program and thank them for their attendance and contributions.

Invite everyone to have some lunch and refreshments



Workshop Activities

Activity 3.1 – Reflections

This warm up is designed to allow participant's to share or unload some of their feelings of the morning so far before the workshop sessions begin.

Ask members of the group to go around and choose one or two of the emotion cards placed in the centre of the group – remind the group it is ok if someone else has the card they would like to use as they will be able to swap them over. Ask the participants to go around the circle and share with everyone the card they have chosen and why?

Activity 3.2 – Whispers

Inform the participants they are going to play Chinese Whispers. The facilitator can start the game by whispering a sentence to the person beside them. Once the sentence has made it around the circle, the facilitator asks the group what the sentence was. Refer to the way that passing on information can get lost in the delivery.

Activity 3.3 – Three Things

Ask participants to break into pairs and tell each other three things about themselves. Ask the group to re-form and ask each participant to go around and share what they learned about their partner. The facilitator needs to positively acknowledge each participants response.

Activity 3.4 – 10 Questions

Ask the participants to listen to the following made up scenario. Once you have read the Scenario ask the participants to answer the following questions. See how many people actually answer correctly.

Scenario

A conference was held on 10th May at the Convention Centre in Brisbane. This conference addressed the issues confronting people experiencing homelessness. The conference ran for 2 days and there was a total of 10 guest speakers. 2 speakers were flown in from Ireland and America to talk about projects and responses to homelessness in their countries.

The Minister for Housing addressed the audience giving a detailed account of current government policies and future plans and developments for public housing. He was quoted as saying over the next five years, six new housing developments would be undertaken in South East Queensland. Proposed areas for these developments Sunshine Coast, Beenleigh, Pine Rivers, Caboolture, Sunnybank and Ipswich. These complexes would cater for the needs of low income families and accommodation would be allocated on a priority basis.

The conference was attended by 230 people including service providers, Government ministers, bureaucrats and people experiencing homelessness. It provided an opportunity for homeless people to present their stories and the barriers they encountered trying to secure appropriate accommodation.

Questions for the Scenario:

- When was the conference held?
- Where was the conference held?
- From what countries did the guest speakers come?
- How many people attended the conference?
- Who addressed the audience about government policies?
- What was the 5 year plan put forward by the Minister?
- Where are the new developments going to be built?

Aggressive Communication

Aggressive Communication only acknowledges "my rights"

Aggressive statements do allow for the release of emotion, but are often followed by feelings of guilt and regret.

These types of statements often lead to an escalation of the conflict, with neither party happy with the end result.

The formula for an aggressive statement is:

You have ruined (caused/done/made) .....!

For example:

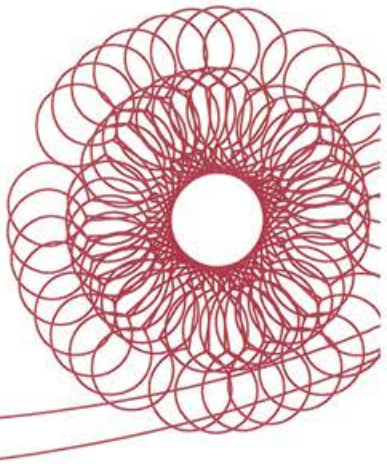
You have ***ruined my chances for renting in the future!***

These workshop handouts have been adapted in parts from:

Emilian Mihaila, *Communication Styles* http://mypsychologist.com/Documents/COMMUNICATION%20STYLES.doc accessed 22.06.07;

Learn Customer Service Online, Definitions, http://www.learncustomerserviceonline.com/Preview/ActiveListeningCS/02ALdefined.htm, accessed 22.06.07;

Ethnic Disability Advocacy Centre, *Let Me Speak*, www.edac.org.au/letmespeak/letmespeak.html, accessed 21/06/07.



Assertive Communication

Assertive communication acknowledges
"my rights" and "your rights".

Assertive statements allow the expression of strong feelings,
without devaluing or intimidating others.

While assertiveness might not always "work",
it is the approach that is most likely to leave both parties
feeling satisfied with the outcome.

The formula for an assertive statement is:

I understand that you (think / believe) .....
And that you then ..... (action).

However, I feel (think / believe / value) .....
And suggest ..... (action)

For example:

I understand that you feel ***angry***
And that you then ***yell at me***,

However I feel ***we never reach a conclusion***
And suggest ***we talk about it calmly***.

"Active" Listening

What is Active Listening?

Active listening is used to provide
verbal and non-verbal feedback to the speaker
about your understanding of what is
being communicated.

Some examples of where it might be used ...

Active listening is commonly used during conversations
between two or more parties where there
is an exchange of ideas
or the expectation of a response.

Active Listening requires the practice and
development of skills combining the use of
eyes, ears and heart.

"Passive" Listening

What is Passive Listening?

Passive listening is used when
no feedback or response
is intended or needed to be given.

When is it used?

You use passive listening when
listening to the radio
or watching television
or 'hearing' someone vent!

Benefits of Passive Listening ...

Receiving information when not actively engaged in a process.

"Passive" Communication

Passive communication allows
for one person to dominate a situation which
leaves the other person with feelings of not
having a voice and not having
been heard.

This type of communication can
set up a pattern of "giving in"
which can also lead to feelings of resentment.

Communication skills and self confidence - playing the game

Having good self confidence helps you in the self-advocacy process, it gives you courage to try new things and believe in yourself even when you make mistakes. It helps you know that you can make positive decisions for yourself and create the change you would like.

Along with having self confidence you need a basic understanding of communication. One aspect of communication that is important is assertive behaviour. Being assertive allows you to get your needs heard while taking into consideration other peoples rights and feelings.

In order to behave in an assertive way, you must state your requests clearly and listen to and respect the other persons' response – even if it is not what you want to hear!

Assertive listening is also an important part of self-advocacy because it lets the other person know that you are interested in what they have to say and that you understand what is being said. You can let the other person know you are listening by repeating back what you have heard or asking appropriate questions when you need to.

Don't ever be afraid to ask questions if you're not sure about something. It is important that you understand what is happening and are informed of every aspect relating to the problem/issue.

D. Workshop 4 - Skills Strengths, Self-Confidence & Goal Setting

Workshop aims:

- to facilitate a process where participants identify and acknowledge their many and varied skills and roles.
- to recognise how these skills can be developed and utilised in self-advocacy and achieving future goals.
- Using this knowledge to develop a sense of self worth and self-confidence.

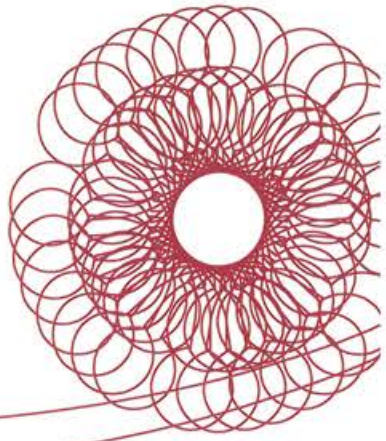
Materials needed:

- Whiteboard / Butchers Paper
- Marker Pens
- 'Reflections' resource cards (emotive based).
- 'Views from the Verandah' – strength based cards.

Background Information

It will be helpful to have a basic understanding of communication principles and strategies. Guest speaker (optional).

See over for Workshop Plan.

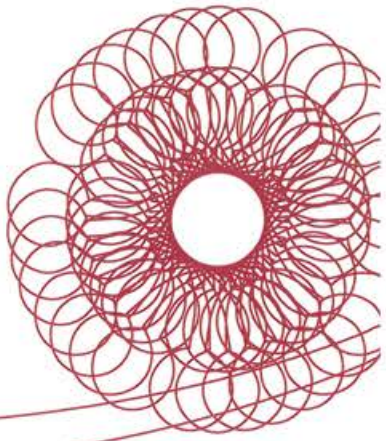


Workshop Plan

9:30am – 10:00am	**Arrival – 30 Minutes**
10.00am- 10.45am	**Session 1** **Setting the scene – 5 Minutes** **Skills – 40 Minutes** 1. Welcome participants and undertake Activity 4.1 – Morning Reflections. 2. Welcome the Participants to the venue and introduce the topic of the day and what areas of the topic will be covered. 3. Show the participants the Day Plan – highlighting break times. 4. Initiate a conversation with the group around tasks that we all perform as individuals. Introduce Activity 4.2 – "My Outline". Brainstorm with the group some of the roles that we perform. Ask participants to fill out their sheet. *Be aware of the literacy levels amongst the group and modify exercise accordingly.* 5. Ask the participants to go around the group and report some of the roles that they have. *Document participant responses on a large outline.* 6. Ask the group to consider what skills are needed and what roles they "take on" whilst performing them. Brainstorm with the group around the different skills/roles they use for each of the tasks. *Encourage group members by proving examples of tasks. Write participants responses on butcher's paper then ask them to fill out there own sheet.* Ask the group to go around and reflect: • One thing that you do well from the list? • Where did you learn that from? • What skills they would like to build in their children? • What would you do to build that in them? *When finished ask the participant to place their names on the sheets and stick them up on the walls* 7. Ask the group to re-gather and go around the group reflecting on how they feel when they see such a large amount of roles and skills listed and to give a one word response on how that makes them feel.
10.45am- 11.00am	**Break – 15 minutes**
11.00am- 11.45am	**Session 2** **Setting the scene – 5 Minutes** 1. Ask the participants to partake in Activity 4.3 – Animal Characteristics. 2. Ask the group to consider some of the individual strengths and characteristics that they have. Ask the group to consider the following: •1 The different day to day tasks that we perform … •2 The different places that they have lived … 3. Ask the group about characteristics that provide them with strength. Ask the participants to undertake Activity 4.4 – Mirror of Strengths. 4. Ask the participants to select two or three cards from the laid out cards that mean something to them. Ask the group to go around and share with the group their reason for choosing particular cards and why they speak to them. *The facilitator needs to prompt the group to be as crazy as they like and provide examples – always remembering to thank the participants for their contributions.*

continued over

11.45am-12.00pm	**Break – 15 minutes**
12.00pm-12.45pm	**Session 3** **Goal Setting – 45 minutes** 1. The facilitator to engage in a discussion with the group about what goals are? Why we set them and the benefits of doing so? 2. Discuss with the group the different types of goals – short term and long term and the benefits of setting both. Ask the group to brainstorm what type of goals would fit into each category. 3. Following on from the previous discussion, the facilitator needs to introduce the topic of whether our goals are realistic or unrealistic. Be sure to remind the participants that goals that may be unrealistic could rely on lengthening the time frame. 4. Discuss with the group around where we have come from, where we are now and where we would like to be. Introduce Activity 4.5 – Butterfly Flight – show a large example and brainstorm with the participants. 5. Ask the participants to take one thing from the future side (previous activity) and break into pairs to have a discussion around what steps they need to take or what tasks they need to perform to reach that goal. 6. Ask participants to report back on the goals and steps needed for their partner from your discussions – utilising listening and communication skills from the previous workshop. 7. The facilitator needs to introduce the idea of how others see your strengths. Ask the participants to consider that if a newspaper article was written about you – What would you want it to say? What would it be about? Ask the group to consider this for a few moments. Go around the room and ask the participants to share what these things would be ... 8. *NB: It can be a wonderful affirmation for the scribe to document each participant's response and for the team to develop small newspaper articles and send them to the participants at a later date.*
12:45pm – 1:00pm	**Break – 15 minutes**
1:00pm – 1:30pm	**Reflections and Evaluations – 30 minutes** 1. The facilitator needs to prompt a discussion amongst the group about how they thought the day went. 2. Complete evaluation sheets. 3. Ask the participants to take out their resource folders and handout the Skills, Strengths and Self-Confidence Module. 4. Provide the group with the details of the next workshop, encourage ongoing attendance in the program and thank them for their participation. *Invite everyone to have some lunch and refreshments*



Workshop Activities

Activity 4.1 – Reflections
This warm up is designed for participants to share or unload some of their feelings from the morning, prior to the workshop commencing.

Ask the group to consider some of the things they have had to do to get here this morning. Ask the members of the group to go around and choose one or two of the emotion cards placed around the group – remind the group that it is ok if someone else has the card they would like to use as they will be able to swap them over. Ask the participants to now go around the circle and share with everyone the card they have chosen and why?

Activity 4.2 – My Outline
The "my outline" activity is designed to connect the tasks we perform daily with the skills we have.

The facilitator can ask the group to consider the many roles that we have in our lives. Ask the group to consider that within each of the roles there are individual tasks that we must perform. The facilitator needs to hand out the people outlines and ask the participants to imagine that it is an outline of them. Return to session plan and continue with brainstorm activities.

Discussion prompts could include:

- What are some of your everyday tasks?
- What are some of the tasks that you perform occasionally? e.g. When renting a property? When someone is sick?

Activity 4.3 – The Animal Game
The Animal Game is a light-hearted way to get the group re-formed and stimulated. Tell the group not to take this activity too seriously! Ask the participants to write down the names of three animals they each like, leaving room beside each name. Next, ask participants to write down three qualities they like about each animal i.e. "You like them because they are _____". Then tell the group that the animals are irrelevant, as this is a 'personal reflection'!

The first list of qualities is how they see themselves, the second are how others see them, and the third is how they 'really' are! Have a laugh!

Activity 4.4 – Mirror of Strengths
This activity recognises the journey of an individual and the strengths developed on that journey. Hand out mirror outlines and ask participants to consider some of the journeys they have been on and name the strengths they used. Write down their individual strengths on the mirror.

Activity 4.5 – Butterfly Flight
The "Butterfly Flight" exercise is designed to provide the participants with a vessel for personal reflection. The facilitator can continue discussions around goals and reaffirm that we achieve goals everyday without realising it.

Ask the participants to consider the following questions:

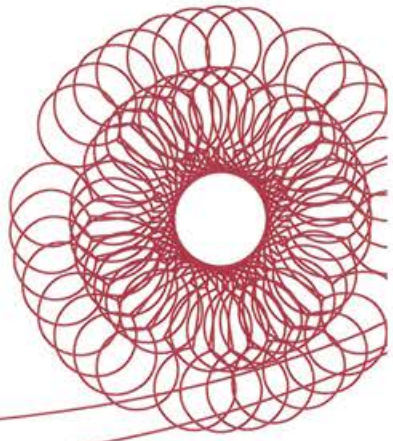
- where they have come from?
- where are they now?
- and where they would like to be in the future?.

This could include people around you, the place that you live, education, employment or generally the things that are important to you.

Hand out the butterfly outline and ask the group to take some time in filling it out and thinking in particular about where they would like to be in the short term future. Ask the group to select one of their goals for the short term and to think about what are some small steps that can be taken to achieve that goal e.g. to save for that big TV – sticking to

a budget next fortnight; or to get fit and healthy – going for a short walk everyday.

Re-gather the group and ask participants to share what goal they are going to focus on in the short term.



Practical Self Confidence

When you need to boost your self confidence or self esteem, find 3 things that make you feel good. These could be memories of good times, a piece of music, a holiday souvenir, or a person's face – use photos if it helps. Practise thinking about them and bringing them to mind.

Developing self confidence that lasts – because of the way emotions 'attach' themselves to memories, you will quickly train yourself to feel good when you want.

If you're saying things to yourself like "You're no good at anything" then rest assured, you're wrong. Everyone can compose a sentence, get successfully to the shop and eat without choking.

Don't let yourself make sweeping statements about yourself – in the long run it is this sort of thing that can really damage your self image.

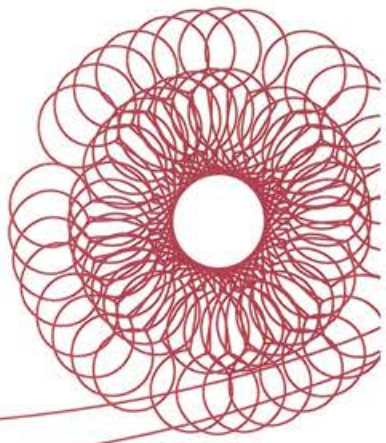
These workshop handouts have been adapted from Perera Karl, *More.Selfesteem.com: helping you build your self esteem and confidence*, www.more-selfesteem.com/ accessed 22/06/07.

What works to improve your self esteem?

- Write a list of positives about yourself – put this in a place where you will see it and read it everyday
- Ask yourself at the end of each day what you have done today that makes you feel proud (big or small)
- Compliment others more often, it will make you feel good to make others feel good
- Practice being assertive

Remember ...

- You have the right to have your own feelings
- You don't have to live up to anyone else's standards or expectations
- Most people are unsure of themselves in some way, the important thing is to not let this rule your life
- Believe in yourself



What is Self Esteem?

Self esteem is the opinion you have of yourself. It is based on your attitude to the following:

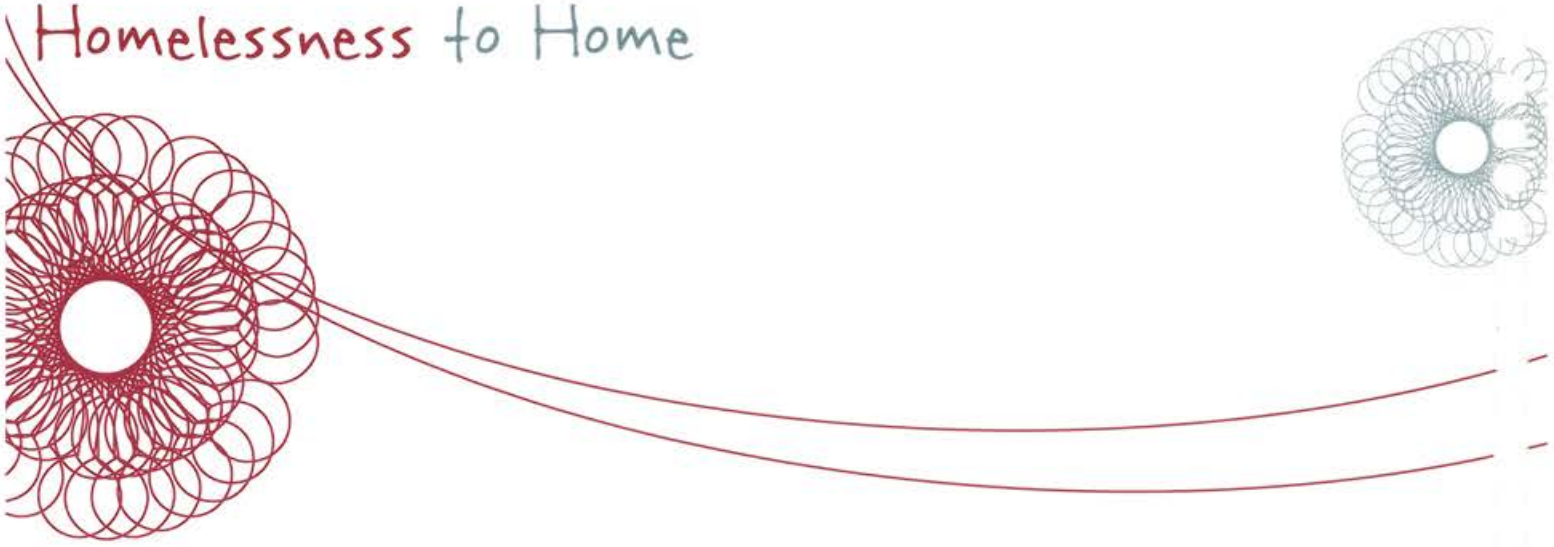
- Your value as a person
- The job you do
- Your achievements
- How you think others see you
- Your purpose in life
- Your place in the world
- Your potential for success
- Your strengths and weaknesses
- Your social status and how you relate to others
- Your independence or ability to stand on your own feet.

You may be able to add a few other important factors that have not been included here.

What is Low Self Esteem?

Low self esteem results from you having a poor self image caused by your attitude to one or more of the above. Example: you do not value the job you do highly or you feel you have no purpose in your life.

Building self esteem is not just about thinking good of yourself, it's about not thinking bad for no reason!



Positive Affirmations

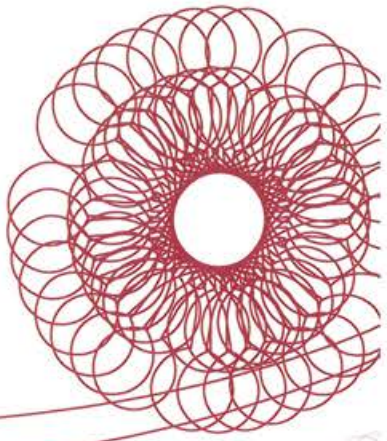
Feed your mind with positive affirmations. They can overcome persistent negative thoughts and help to promote a healthy state of mind.

Affirmations combat negative baggage in your brain. Without realising it you tell yourself negative things constantly. The result is a destructive belief system which holds you back and prevents you succeeding. One very effective way to change this belief system so that it becomes helpful to you is to replace misguided negative messages with new positive ones.

The following affirmations are something which may be helpful for you. You can also develop others of your own. The power they have to alter your life will make itself felt if you repeat them DAILY and when you are thinking negatively. Try to focus on one affirmation and consider what it means to you in your life.

Tell yourself:

- *I deserve to be happy and successful*
- *I have the power to change myself*
- *I can forgive and understand others and their motives*
- *I can make my own choices and decisions*
- *I am free to choose my life and to give priority to my desires*
- *I can choose happiness whenever I wish no matter what my circumstances*
- *I am flexible and open to change in every aspect of my life*
- *I act with confidence having a general plan and accept plans are open to alteration*
- *It is enough to have done my best*
- *I deserve to be loved*



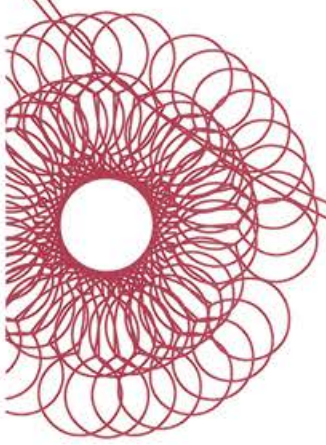
Future Possibilities

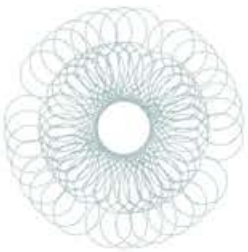
We all have a lot to manage in our lives and we are generally very busy people. Setting goals for the little things, the middle size things and even the big things can help.

Goals don't only have to be about the formal topics like education or employment; they can be about all sorts of aspects of our lives.

You can set goals for fun activities you'd like to do, like sky diving or indulging in a haircut every three months or even having just an hour of peace and quiet in the evening – just for something that you would like to do.

It is important that when you start to set goals that they are achievable in a reasonable time frame. The time frame for your goals is for you to decide, though working with the short-term is a great start.





Step By Step

There are different parts to each goal that you set for yourself and there are different steps that will need to be taken for you to achieve those goals. You will need to consider all aspects of your current situation and look at what could be helpful to you or what could get in the way of you achieving this particular goal…

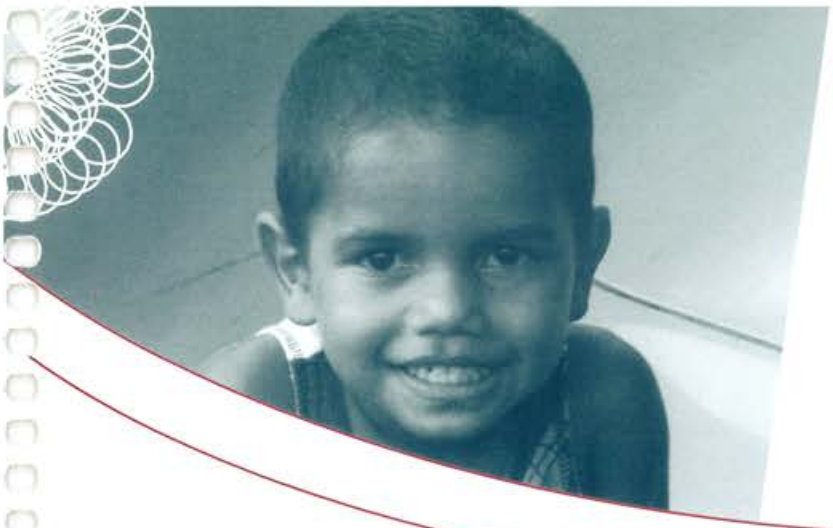
Remember that everything about your goals is up to you!

The steps you take can be as little as YOU choose,

and done in a time frame that YOU choose.

"On the path to our goals
If we want to get from point A to point Z,
The surest way to get there
is to first go to point B, then C, then D.
Skipping a single step,
Even though it's quick
Doesn't get us to where we want to be!"

Adapted from Perera Karl, *More.Selfesteem.com: helping you build your self esteem and confidence*, www.more-selfesteem.com/, accessed 22/06/07.



E. Workshop 5 - Self-Advocacy Skills

Workshop aims:

- to provide a basic understanding of self advocacy skills.
- to develop strategies for effective self advocacy

Materials needed:

- Whiteboard / Butchers Paper
- Marker Pens
- 'Reflections' resource cards (emotive based).

Background Information

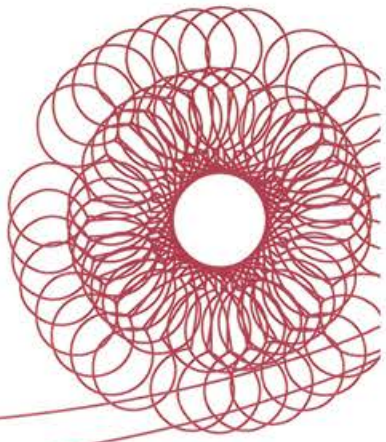
It will be helpful to have a basic understanding of communication principles and strategies. Guest speaker (optional).

See over for Workshop Plan.

Workshop Plan

9:30am – 10:00am	**Arrival**
10.00am- 10.45am	**Session 1** **Setting the scene – 45 Minutes** 1. Undertake Activity 5.1 – Morning Reflections. *It can be a good idea to remind participants this is the last day of the training program.* 2. Ask the group if they know what self-advocacy is. Open up to the group. Then give definition. 3. Ask the group to go around and state where and how it is useful. 4. Introduce the Guest Speaker – Peer Leader – Personal journey of Self Advocacy to speak of outcomes achieved and trials to overcome. 5. Once the guest speaker has finished ask the group the following questions: •1 What did she/he do to produce the positive outcomes? •2 What skills did she/he acquire/develop to enable this? •3 What worked for them and what didn't work for them? •4 What does she/he wish she/he knew when she/he started?
10.45am- 11.00am	**Break – 15 minutes**
11.00am- 11.45am	**Session 2** **Self Advocacy Essentials – 45 minutes** 1. Undertake Activity 5.2 – Bugs. 2. What skills do you have to use in self advocacy? Ask each participant to brainstorm the skills they currently have and the skills they would like to build on or to acquire. 3. Discuss the benefits of knowing your rights and responsibilities in self-advocacy and the benefits of having current and correct information. Open up to the group. 4. Explain to the group how to identify helpers who can provide correct and current information. 5. Ask the group what they think the difference is between self-confident, assertive behaviour and aggressive behaviour. Ask the group which do they think will work best in self advocacy? Why? *The key to effective self-advocacy is perseverance! It can take a long time but don't give up!!*
11.45am- 12.00pm	**Break – 15 minutes**
12.00pm- 12.45pm	**Session 3** **Steps to Take – 45 minutes** 1. Explain to the group what a preparation checklist is and show the example. [see attachment 1]. 2. Give a scenario to the group and work through the large example checklist with the group, explaining each step and why we need to do it. 3. Ask the participants to break into 3 groups – make sure a worker is in each group- give the groups different strategies to prepare a checklist for. 4. Ask the group to report back on their checklist to the larger groups
12:45pm – 1:00pm	**Break – 15 minutes**

continued over



1:00pm – 1:30pm **Reflections and Evaluations – 30 minutes**

1. Prompt a group discussion about how the day went.
2. Ask the group to answer the following questions:
   - What is one thing that you have learnt today about self advocacy?
   - Identify one skill you have learnt that would be useful in the process of self advocacy?
   - Identify a skill that will assist self advocacy.
   - Name one thing that you could do differently to assist in maintaining your tenancy?
   - What was the most important thing that you learnt in today's workshop?
3. Hand out evaluation sheets and ask participants to complete.
4. Hand out information sheets to the participants for their resource folders. Briefly run through each one with the group.
5. Undertake whole of program evaluation and discussions focusing on positive personal changes since attending the program.
6. Congratulate and presentation of Program Certificates.

Invite everyone to have some lunch and refreshments.

Workshop Activities

Activity 5.1 – Reflections

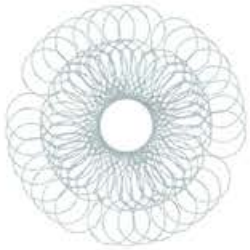
Ask the group to consider their morning and some of the things they have had to do to get here. Ask the members of the group to go around and choose one or two of the emotion cards – remind the group that it is ok if someone else has the card they would like to use as they will be able to swap them over. Ask the participants to now go around the circle and share with everyone the card they have chosen and why?

Activity 5.2 – Bugs

Hand out blank paper to the participants and ask everyone to draw what they hear:

- Draw a bug (beetle) that has:
- two eyes on top of its body,
- two wings, one on the left and one on the right,
- spots on each wing
- stingers on the bottom of the wings
- a big smiling mouth
- and antennae on top of its head.

Ask the participants to show their bugs. Ask the group to reflect on how everyone hears the same information very differently – this can be seen visually in the drawings of the bugs and what our individual interpretations were of the directions.



What is Self-Advocacy?

- Self-advocacy is the ability to speak up for yourself and your family and to speak up about the things that are important for you and your family.
- To undertake self-advocacy, means that you need to be able to ask people for what you need and want, and to be able to tell people about your thoughts and feelings.
- To be able to self-advocate effectively you will need to know your rights and responsibilities in the particular situation. Knowing these will allow you to speak up for yourself more easily.
- An important and hard part of self-advocacy is the ability to share your thoughts and feelings and remain calm when things don't go to plan.
- The goal for self-advocacy and 'playing the game' is for YOU to decide what you want and to then make a plan to get it!
- Perseverance is the key – never ever give up!

These workshop handouts have been adapted from Ethnic Disability Advocacy Centre, *Let Me Speak*, www.edac.org.au/letmespeak/letmespeak.html, accessed 21/06/07.

How can advocacy help me?

It is important to know about self-advocacy skill as it helps you **decide what you want** in a situation and what is possible for you to expect out of a situation.

Using a self-advocacy planning strategy can help you to **see the 'big picture'**, so you are able to see all the options.

Having a plan helps you to undertake the process of self-advocacy with a realistic view of the process.

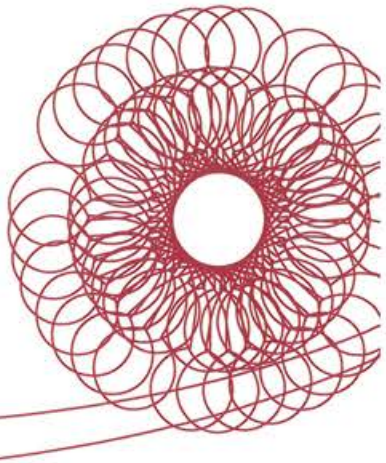
When you use self-advocacy skills **you have more control** of yourself and the outcome of the situation.

Self-advocacy can help you **speak up for yourself** in a variety of places. For example: Centrelink, Dept. housing or even at your children's school.

Self-advocacy helps to empower you, to speak up for yourself and make decisions about your life.

The skills I need ...

- Confidence
- Feeling good about myself
- Being informed
- Know my rights
- Know my responsibilities
- Decision making skills
- Goal setting skills
- Identify 'helpers'
- Problem solving
- Negotiation
- Perseverance
- Patience



Different ways to self-advocate ...

There are many different ways you can undertake self-advocacy. If one thing doesn't work then try another. Sometimes you will have to try all of the options to see a resolution and sometimes you will need to do the same thing over and over again until you get noticed and get a response.

You could try any of the following:

Letters:

- Writing letters is an easier way to communicate with the party if the issue or problem is hard for you to talk about.

Phone calls:

- You can call another party depending on the issue or if you have trouble getting to see them in person.
- Sometimes a phone call is the only option.

In person:

- Depending on what step you are trying to achieve, visiting in person can be a great option.
- Remember to stay calm if things don't go how you expect.

Going to the top of the food chain:

- When dealing with large agencies like Centrelink or Dept. of Housing – remember that you can ask for another case worker or to see the manager if you don't like the response you have received.

Local members:

- If all else fails, contact your local member of parliament – repeatedly if necessary – they can usually help in a variety of ways.

Just remember that whatever course of action you take, make sure you keep a record – in a little notebook or in your diary – make sure you document the date, what you did and what response you get. You never know if or when you might need to show your efforts!!!

How to set goals for advocacy!

It is often easier to tackle a large problem if you break it up into small steps and try to solve one step at a time.

You may be able to complete some steps yourself and some steps will need the assistance of your 'helper/s' or others in the community.

After you have a clear understanding of what it is that you want to achieve and you've thought about the different ways that you could try and solve the situation, choose one, and then break it up into all the tasks that you will need to do.

When you look at all of these tasks it can often seem huge and like you will never get to the end of them, but a key thing about successful self-advocacy is to have perseverance and not give up.

Be realistic when setting goals around self-advocacy. Each problem you have will need a different time frame. Some problems you want to resolve are really quite simple and therefore require less time, and others that are more difficult could take along time to resolve.

Remember: Don't give up!!!

Who can help me?

Having a support network is a valuable thing when undertaking the self-advocacy process. 'Helper/s' can assist you to problem solve, support you in a visit or meetings or could just listen when things don't quite go to plan.

The role of being a 'helper' can seem like a large one – and you may feel most people don't have much spare time. To choose who can help you, you need to be realistic with yourself as to what you are looking for in a support person – is it a phone call once a week or is it going to meetings regularly or is it a flexible relationship, negotiated as you go through the process.

Most importantly when choosing 'helpers': you need to ask them if they would be willing to help. You need to be honest and realistic with them and with your expectations of them. You need to be willing to continue your search if they can't.

You cannot make someone be your 'helper' and you cannot make your 'helpers' undertake tasks that they are not comfortable with or that are illegal.

How will you identify your "helper/s"?

When thinking of people who could take on the role of your 'helper/s', ask yourself the following questions:

- *What is my connection to this person? Is it personal or professional?*
- *What would be this person's strength as a 'helper'?*
- *Could this person meet my needs?*
- *Do I trust this person – and know they want what is best for me?*
- *Is it realistic to ask them – do they have there own issues to deal with?*
- *Could this cause conflict between us or others?*

How to get the most from your 'helpers'

- Tell your helper honestly what you Need, Think and Feel.
- Commitment: know the level of commitment needed from you and your helper.
- Expectations: talk about and have realistic expectations of your helper – they are only human!
- Communication: how can I get them to understand what I want – do I need to think of another way to explain it?
- Listening: do I understand what they are saying to me – if not then ask.
- Conflict resolution: know how to stay calm when there are disagreements with your 'helper' – maybe take a break and have a discussion later.
- Teamwork: how can we work well to get what I want – what strengths and skill do we both have?
- Negotiation: be open to new options and discussions about what can be done to make both parties happy in the situation – is there room for compromise?
- Stress management: how can we both relax in the situation when things get too much – how often do you acknowledge all the achievements along the way? Take the time to sit and reflect on the positives!

Rights and Responsibilities in Advocacy

What are Rights?

Rights refer to the way that people SHOULD be treated. There are human rights which is your basic right to be treated fairly and with respect and then there are rights that specifically apply to certain situations, rules and processes. To make sure that your rights are protected, organisations and government departments have rules and regulations they must work within.

What are Responsibilities?

With rights automatically comes responsibility. Responsibilities state how you should act in order to have your rights protected. If these responsibilities are not met by you then there is no way to ensure that your rights in the situation are protected.

Why should I know my rights and responsibilities?

It is important to know what your rights and responsibilities are before you start self-advocacy. You might ask for something to be changed that cannot be changed, or ask for something to change the wrong way; get angry or upset.

It is also a good idea to know what your rights and responsibilities are so you know when you are being treated unfairly and need to speak up for yourself.

What to do if something goes wrong

Often on the journey of self-advocacy things don't go to plan, the important thing to remember is to stay calm and persevere.

If you get anxious or over stressed, try to calm yourself down by:

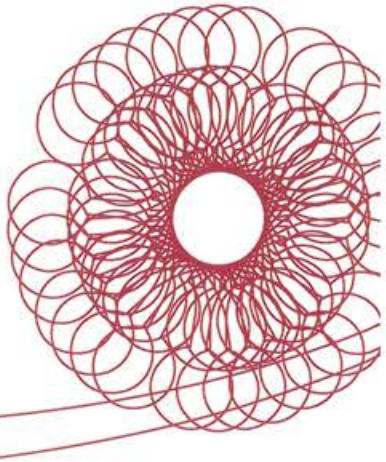
- counting to ten slowly
- taking three deep breaths
- taking a break

If you get angry:

- take three deep breaths
- think of something you like or that makes you happy
- think calm thoughts to yourself or positive sayings that you know
- walk away and take a break
- reschedule for another day when you would like to try again

If something does go wrong, like you have an argument, you are asked to leave, you are banned from a service or the police are called – the self-advocacy gets much harder.

The first thing you need to do is **Acknowledge** the behaviour. You then need to **Apologise** to the person. You will have to have a discussion with the person to **Resolve the Problem** and if that doesn't work then **Take a Break** and try again another day or maybe write a letter.



Understanding the problem

Often when undertaking the task of self-advocacy there are so many things that you would like to speak up about but if you try to do them all at once you might get confused, overwhelmed or sidetracked by the situation.

Depending on the situation, your self-advocacy may involve many steps you need to take to reach your goal. To understand the problem look at the situation:

- what exactly don't you like about it?
- what exactly would you like to change?

Once you have answered these questions you will have a better understanding of the problem and know which advocacy path to follow.

Some other questions that may help you gain some understanding are listed below:

- How do I feel when this happens?
  - Do I get angry?
  - Do I get upset?
- Why do I feel like that?
  - Are my rights being protected?
  - Is it unfair?
- What or who is causing the problem?
  - Is it me?
  - Is it somebody else?
- When does the problem happen?
  - Does it happen when I am alone?
  - Does it happen when other people are around?
- Where does the problem happen most?
  - Does it happen in lots of places?
  - Does it happen in one place?

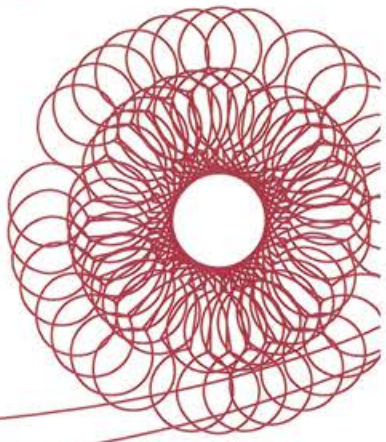
Who else could help?

It is important to know who else could help you on your self-advocacy journey. There are many people who could help but it's often hard to know who is best to help you with particular situations.

You could talk with your 'helper/s' to think of all the other people or agencies that might be able to help or might be able to provide information on your rights, responsibilities, the situation itself or the complaints process if you need it.

Listed below are some prompting questions to help you find out who else could help:

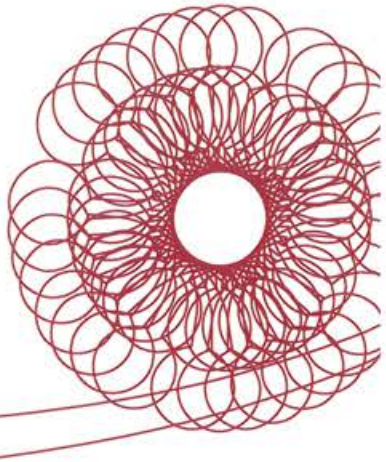
- Who is the person/agency/department I need to speak up to?
- Is there already a complaints/grievance process I could follow?
- Who has information about this problem that could help me?
- Who could give me information about my rights?
- Who could give me information about my responsibilities?



Self-Advocacy Preparation Checklist

What is the problem?
What don't you like about the problem?
What would you like to change?
What are my rights in this situation?
Are my rights being protected in this situation?
What are my responsibilities in this situation?
What do I need to do to make sure my rights are protected?
Are there any policies or procedures that relate to this situation?
Is there an existing complaints procedure?
What do I want to achieve from the self-advocacy process?
Are there many steps to achieve this?
What do I need to do first?
How exactly will I go about it? e.g. letters, phone calls
Who could be my helper/support person?
Who else could help from the wider community?
Where could I get information or advice from?
Do I need any documentation to support what I'm saying?
Do I need identification papers/cards?
What skills do I need to undertake this self advocacy?
What skills would I like to have?
Who could help me learn these skills?
What can I do if something goes wrong?
Who could I talk to if something goes wrong?

Notes



Part 5

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